ANALYSIS OF CULTURE SHOCK IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION OF LOCAL AND IMMORTAL STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF NORTH SUMATRA

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis fenomena *culture shock* dalam komunikasi lintas budaya antara mahasiswa lokal dan pendatang di Fakultas Ilmu Sosial Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara. Menggunakan teori komunikasi antar budaya dan konsep *culture shock* dari Oberg, penelitian ini menerapkan pendekatan kualitatif etnografi dengan paradigma konstruktivis. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi, serta divalidasi menggunakan triangulasi sumber. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa lokal mengalami kesulitan memahami logat dan istilah daerah mahasiswa pendatang, sedangkan mahasiswa pendatang menghadapi ketidaknyamanan berkomunikasi dan rasa minder dalam interaksi awal. Melalui keterlibatan dalam organisasi kampus dan aktivitas akademik, mahasiswa pendatang berhasil beradaptasi, sementara mahasiswa lokal menunjukkan sikap keterbukaan terhadap keberagaman budaya. Kesimpulan penelitian menegaskan bahwa interaksi lintas budaya di kampus menunjukkan perkembangan ke arah hubungan sosial yang lebih inklusif, meskipun masih diperlukan upaya institusional untuk memperkuat program-program lintas budaya secara sistematis guna mengoptimalkan integrasi sosial mahasiswa dari berbagai latar belakang.

Kata Kunci: *Culture Shock, Komunikasi, Lintas Budaya, Integrasi, Sosial*

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of culture shock in cross-cultural communication between local and immigrant students at the Faculty of Social Sciences, State Islamic University of North Sumatra. Using the theory of intercultural communication and the concept of culture shock from Oberg, this study applies a qualitative ethnographic approach with a constructivist paradigm. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, and validated using source triangulation. The results of the study indicate that local students have difficulty understanding the accent and regional terms of immigrant students, while immigrant students face discomfort in communicating and feelings of inferiority in initial interactions. Through involvement in campus organizations and academic activities, immigrant students successfully adapt, while local students show an attitude of openness to cultural diversity. The conclusion of the study confirms that cross-cultural interactions on campus show developments towards more inclusive social relations, although institutional efforts are still needed to systematically strengthen cross-cultural programs in order to optimize the social integration of students from various backgrounds.

Keywords: Culture Shock, Cross Cultural Communication, Social Integration

INTRODUCTION

        North Sumatra is one of the provinces in Indonesia known for its ethnic diversity. Based on the 2010 Population Census, the Batak ethnic group dominates with a proportion of 44.75%, followed by the Javanese ethnic group 33.4%, Nias 6.36%, Malay 5.86%, Chinese 2.71%, Minangkabau 2.66%, Aceh 0.97%, and others 3.29%. This diversity presents a variety of cultures, languages, and traditions that are unique to each ethnic group. This condition is a complex background for social life in various sectors, including higher education such as at the Faculty of Social Sciences, State Islamic University of North Sumatra, where students from various ethnic backgrounds gather and interact in a multicultural academic environment (Fauzan et al., 2023).

Ethnic identity in North Sumatra represents differences in values, norms, and cultural expressions that are unique to each group (Khoeriyah et al., 2022). For example, the Batak tribe is known for its clan kinship system and oral tradition, the Malays for their maritime culture, the Nias for their megalithic culture, the Minangkabau for their matrilineal system, and the Chinese and Javanese for their strong social and traditional characteristics. Each identity carries a unique meaning to the concept of social relations, communication, and interaction. When students from various ethnicities are brought together in one academic space, these differences often give rise to their own dynamics in building effective interpersonal relationships (Ritonga et al., 2023). The phenomenon of culture shock is quite significant to note. Culture shock arises due to differences in language, customs, mindsets, and values adopted by each group (Kristiani & Setyo Utami, 2020). Local and immigrant students often experience culture shock when adapting to new social norms. For example, differences in communication style, perceptions of authority, and daily habits can be a source of discomfort that leads to misunderstandings, minor conflicts, and even social isolation. This shows that cross-cultural communication in the campus environment is not only about exchanging information, but also about how to understand and manage these differences sensitively and constructively (Sikumbang et al., 2024).

By understanding the challenges of culture shock, educational institutions, including faculties, need to intervene through intercultural dialogue programs, effective cross-cultural communication training, and inclusive approaches in academic and non-academic activities (Vidyarini, 2018). This strategy aims to reduce social distance between students from different ethnicities, build solidarity, and create a harmonious and productive learning environment. Cultural adaptation skills are important capital in forming new social commodities that are more cohesive and competitive at the regional and national levels (Indainanto et a;l., 2023). The presence of students from diverse backgrounds provides opportunities to build dynamic, creative, and innovative cross-cultural interactions. However, without proper management, this diversity can actually become a source of tension and social exclusion. Therefore, research on the experience of culture shock in cross-cultural communication in the campus

environment can provide an important contribution in formulating a more adaptive and transformative diversity management strategy (Jamali et al., 2023).

Ethnic diversity and culture shock experiences at the Faculty of Social Sciences, UIN North Sumatra should not be viewed as obstacles, but as opportunities to enrich students' social capacities (Sakinah Nur Rokhmah & Hung Chiao, 2022). With a constructive approach based on cross-cultural understanding, higher education can become a driving force for the formation of a harmonious multicultural society. The urgency of this study analyzes the phenomenon of culture shock that occurs among students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, State Islamic University of North Sumatra. Studying culture shock in the interaction of local and immigrant students at the Faculty of Social Sciences, UIN North Sumatra is a strategic step to strengthen social competence, accelerate multicultural integration, and create an inclusive and resilient educational environment to the dynamics of diversity (Putra Tri Rezeki et al., 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various previous studies have discussed the issue of cross-cultural communication, especially in the context of higher education, with varying focuses. Research conducted by Budiarti and Yuliani (2020) examined the adaptation strategies of Papuan students in dealing with culture shock at the University of Bengkulu (Budiarti & Yuliani, 2020). Using a qualitative case study approach, this study describes how Papuan students face obstacles in intercultural communication and the various adaptation strategies they use. The focus of this study is on the individual experiences of immigrant students. Unlike this study, the author's study broadens the scope by involving not only immigrant students, but also local students, and examines the dynamics of cross-cultural communication that occurs at the institutional level, especially in the Faculty of Social Sciences, State Islamic University of North Sumatra. Mufidah and Fadilah (2022) in their research used a phenomenological approach to explore the adjustment experiences of Merdeka Belajar exchange program students in dealing with culture shock (Mufidah & Fadilah, 2022). Their main focus is the emotional and social aspects experienced by students during the adaptation process in a new environment.

Although there are similarities in discussing the phenomenon of culture shock, this study is more oriented towards the personal experiences of students in exchange programs, while the author's study focuses on cross-cultural communication patterns that occur between local and immigrant students in one institution in a more structural and systemic manner. Solihat's (2018) research is also relevant in the context of cross-cultural communication, by examining the communication and cultural adaptation of foreign students at the Indonesian Computer University (UNIKOM) Bandung (Solihat, 2018). Through a descriptive qualitative approach, this study highlights language barriers, communication styles, and cultural integration efforts made by international students. The similarity of this study with the author's research lies in the focus on intercultural communication adaptation. However, the main difference is that Solihat examines the international context with foreign students as the subject, while the author's study emphasizes cultural interaction at the national level, namely between local and immigrant students from various regions in Indonesia.

Research by Syaipudin and colleagues (2022) conducted at UINSU highlights the role of intercultural communication in overcoming miscommunication between students. Using a qualitative approach, this study focuses on interactions between Communication Science students in dealing with cultural differences. Although it is in the same institutional environment as the author's study, this study is more directed at students' efforts to manage miscommunication. The author's study expands this perspective by examining the phenomenon of culture shock in more depth and analyzing how these dynamics affect cross-cultural communication between local and immigrant students, considering the faculty context as a space for social and cultural interaction (Syaipudin et al., 2022).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with an ethnographic method to explore in depth the culture shock experiences experienced by local and immigrant students in cross-cultural communication at the Faculty of Social Sciences, State Islamic University of North Sumatra (Creswell, 2020). The ethnographic approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand social reality based on the perspective of the research subject

through direct involvement in the social setting being studied. The paradigm used is constructivism, which holds that social meaning is formed through interactions between individuals and is influenced by their respective cultural backgrounds. Thus, this study places students' subjective experiences as the center of analysis. The primary data sources in this study were local and immigrant students from various regions in North Sumatra who actively interacted in the Faculty of Social Sciences, UINSU. The selection of informants was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, considering variations in ethnic background, area of origin, and their level of involvement in cross-cultural activities on campus. Meanwhile, secondary data sources were obtained through literature studies from academic books, scientific journals, mass media reportage articles, and institutional documents relevant to the theme of cross-cultural communication and culture shock.

Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews with selected students to explore their narrative experiences in dealing with cultural differences, participant observation of social interactions in the campus environment (Safrizal, 2018). The data obtained were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana techniques, which include the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions repeatedly to find patterns of meaning in the culture shock experience. Data validity testing is carried out through source triangulation, namely by comparing data from interviews, observations, This triangulation aims to increase the credibility of the findings, reduce the subjective bias of researchers, and ensure that the research results truly represent the dynamics of student interactions in the context of cultural diversity at the Faculty of Social Sciences, UINSU.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

Social interactions between local and immigrant students form complex dynamics that are not always harmonious (Salsabilla et al., 2024). Differences in cultural backgrounds, habits, and values often create social distances that are difficult to bridge. In many cases, local students tend to build exclusive groups that maintain their identity, while immigrant students struggle to find a space to be accepted. This situation shows that

social integration in an academic environment is not just about meeting in one space, but about opening up to differences. Tensions also arise when stereotypes and prejudices dominate the perceptions of both parties. Local students sometimes think that immigrant students cannot adapt to an environment that is already dominated by local students, while immigrants feel they have to adapt to standards that are not necessarily in accordance with their background. Instead of building solidarity based on shared academic goals, primordial identities are more often a source of fragmentation. The inability to manage this prejudice weakens the collective spirit that should be the foundation of the educational community.

In this dynamic, there are also positive efforts from some students to bridge differences (Sujana, 2021). Cross-cultural discussions, collaboration on academic projects, and healthy social interactions between local and immigrant students. Despite often facing challenges, this movement shows that the will to unite amidst diversity still exists. However, this effort requires moral support and courage to fight against standardized social norms. The researcher has conducted interviews with local and immigrant students as the results of the interviews are in the following tabulation:

Category	Region of Origin	Findings
Local Student	Medan	Enjoys interacting with non-local students to learn about new cultures; faces challenges with differences in dialect.
Local Student	Medan	Actively socializes with students from other regions; finds communication style differences interesting.
Local Student	Medan	Initially hesitant due to different speaking styles, but finds non-local students to be adaptive.
Local Student	Medan	No major issues, but sometimes struggles to understand regional terms used by non-local students.
Local Student	Medan	Hopes the university organizes more cross-regional activities to enhance interaction.

Non-local Student	Padangsidimpuan	Feels somewhat accepted but initially awkward due to differences in dialect and speaking habits.
Non-local Student	Sibolga	Experienced culture shock at first, but eventually adapted and feels comfortable.
Non-local Student	Rantau Perapat	Once felt overlooked for not understanding Medan culture well, but has now adapted.
Non-local Student	North Labuhanbatu	Felt insecure at first, but managed to build good communication through campus organizations.
Non-local Student	Batubara	Experienced a slight gap, but it was overcome through classroom activities and group discussions.

Table 1. Results of Data Findings with Local Medan Students and Immigrant Students

Local students in Medan are generally open to the presence of new students. The majority of local informants stated that interactions with students from other regions provide new experiences in understanding different cultures. However, they acknowledge the challenges in terms of differences in accents and regional terms that sometimes hinder smooth communication. This confirms that cultural awareness already exists, but efforts are still needed to improve intercultural communication competency. New students from various regions such as Padangsidimpuan, Sibolga, Rantau Perapat, North Labuhanbatu, Batubara, described initial experiences in the form of discomfort such as culture shock and feelings of inferiority. Differences in accent and speaking style are the main factors that cause awkwardness in the initial stages of interaction. However, over time, almost all new students are able to adapt to the campus social environment, either through organizational activities, class discussions, or informal interactions.

Both local and new students show a desire to strengthen cross-cultural relations. Local students hope that the campus will provide more formal and informal interaction spaces that combine various cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, new students find that joint activities such as

classes and organizations are an effective means of building more equal and comfortable relationships. This indicates that cross-cultural communication is not only formed naturally, but also needs to be systematically facilitated by the campus. From the cross-cultural social dynamics that have been analyzed, it can be seen that students' efforts to increase solidarity and harmony, although there are still pros and cons between local and immigrant students, can still be overcome through healthy social interactions and moral support between fellow students in a very supportive environment (Humaizi et al., 2024).

Culture Shock Phenomenon: Social Reality of Social Science Faculty Students in Cross-Cultural

The adaptation process of students of the Faculty of Social Sciences in facing a cross-cultural environment is often marked by a complex culture shock phenomenon. The entry of individuals into a social space full of differences in values, norms, and social practices causes significant social pressure. The initial reaction, which is generally in the form of confusion and discomfort, shows how cultural clashes are not a linear or simple process. In this context, culture shock is a real indicator of the tension between old social constructions and the new realities faced by students (Mawalia & Sanityastuti, 2020). The triggers for culture shock symptoms in students' lives are very diverse, ranging from differences in communication styles, value systems, to social expectations of individual roles. Students who are accustomed to a homogeneous social system often have difficulty interacting with diverse environments. The inability to interpret new social codes leads to misunderstandings that worsen social isolation (Azzahra & Setiawan, 2022; Halimatusa'diah, 2021).

The phenomenon of culture shock shows how social meanings are continuously negotiated in a cross-cultural context. Students are not only passive recipients of new cultures, but also active actors who interpret, accept, or reject the values they encounter. However, the imbalance of cultural power in certain social environments often puts students from minority backgrounds in a position of oppression. This power system complicates adaptation efforts, even causing rejection. Higher education institutions are very important in managing this phenomenon constructively. Without a real cultural inclusion policy, students will

continue to face the burden of adaptation individually. Cross-cultural forum activities can be a concrete step in minimizing culture shock. This effort requires social awareness that diversity is not just rhetoric, but an objective condition that must be integrated into all aspects of campus life.

The long-term implications of this phenomenon not only occur in the individual experiences of students, but also on the quality of social life in the future. Students who fail to overcome culture shock are at risk of experiencing social inequality that hinders their potential contribution to society. Conversely, those who succeed in getting through this phase have the opportunity to become agents of change who are more adaptive, tolerant, and critical of social dynamics (Susrianto Indra Putra, 2021). After analyzing the culture shock phenomenon that occurred in the environment of the Faculty of Social Sciences, UINSU, the researcher tabulated the results of the analysis of the phenomenon and its indicators as in the following tabulation:

No	Phenomenon	Indicator
1	Difficulty understanding dialects and regional terms	Local students face challenges understanding the speech of non-local students who use specific dialects or regional expressions.
2	Initial discomfort in communication	Non-local students feel awkward interacting due to differences in speaking styles and communication culture.
3	Insecurity in social interactions	Non-local students feel unconfident when joining campus activities upon their initial arrival.
4	Culture shock in a new environment	Non-local students experience confusion, mild stress, or surprise toward local customs and culture.
5	Adaptation through campus organizations and activities	Non-local students begin adjusting by joining organizations and participating actively in classes or discussions.
6	Feeling accepted by local students	After an adaptation period, non-local students feel well socially accepted by local peers.

7	Communication style differences as learning opportunities	Local students gain new experiences and view communication differences as something interesting.
8	Lack of cross-cultural activities on campus	Local students hope for more programs that bring together students from diverse regions.
9	Initial interactions marked by hesitation	Local students feel hesitant or awkward during early interactions with non-local students.
10	Social gaps can be overcome	Non-local students who initially felt cultural distance managed to overcome it through academic and non-academic activities.

The initial dynamics of interaction between local and new students are dominated by language and communication barriers. Difficulty in understanding accents and the use of certain regional terms are initial obstacles that slow down the process of getting to know each other. Local students, despite sharing the same national language, face challenges in interpreting the meaning of new students' speech, showing that language is not just a matter of words, but also cultural context.

Discomfort in communicating is the next indicator that strengthens the fact that communication culture also determines the success of social interaction. New students, who are accustomed to the communication norms of their home region, feel awkward when faced with new interaction styles. This phenomenon indicates that cultural transition tests an individual's social flexibility, where successful adaptation does not solely depend on speaking ability, but also sensitivity to local cultural expressions.

In addition, feelings of inferiority during the initial interaction indicate that new students find it difficult to adapt to a new environment. New students experience social pressure that makes them less confident in being actively involved in campus activities. This emphasizes that social acceptance does not happen automatically, but must be built through repeated interaction experiences that can foster a sense of emotional security for all parties involved. The experience of culture shock experienced by new students is a further manifestation of this cultural tension. Confusion, mild stress, and shock to new norms and customs

indicate that cultural differences not only disrupt surface interactions but also shake the foundations of personal identity. This experience reflects the process of identity negotiation experienced by each individual in a new social context, and can be a critical point towards the success or failure of adaptation.

Adaptation of incoming students through participation in campus organizations and activities is a positive response to this challenge. Involvement in academic and social activities opens up opportunities to build new social networks and accelerates the process of internalizing local culture. This emphasizes the importance of collective activities as a means of reducing social distance and building a sense of belonging in a pluralistic campus community. The sense of acceptance that incoming students finally feel indicates that although there was initial cultural resistance, the social process allows for acceptance to form (Musenyente & Wamanga, 2023). Local students, in the process of ongoing interaction, seem to begin to see incoming students no longer as foreign "others" but as part of the same community. This awareness not only encourages social inclusion but also enriches collective experiences with new values from various cultural backgrounds. However, the lack of cross-cultural programs on campus reveals structural weaknesses that hinder the optimization of social integration. The local students' expectation for more bridging programs shows that individual spontaneous initiatives alone are not enough to create a healthy multicultural environment. Systematic institutional interventions are needed so that initial gaps can be addressed more quickly and effectively, strengthening the contribution of culture as social capital in building a dynamic and inclusive campus life.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the dynamics of cross-cultural communication between local and immigrant students at the Faculty of Social Sciences, State Islamic University of North Sumatra are inseparable from the complex challenges of culture shock. Difficulty understanding accents, initial discomfort, feelings of inferiority, and experiences of culture shock are dominant phenomena in the early stages of interaction. However, through active adaptation such as involvement in campus organizations and activities, immigrant students are able to overcome these obstacles, while

local students show increasing openness to diversity. This confirms that the success of cross-cultural interaction does not only depend on individual efforts, but is also influenced by the support of an inclusive campus social environment. The results of the study highlight the importance of the role of institutions in building systematic cross-cultural interaction spaces to strengthen social solidarity. Although spontaneous efforts between students have shown positive results, the lack of structured cross-cultural programs is still an obstacle that must be overcome immediately. This conclusion emphasizes that in order to create a multicultural and globally competitive higher education environment, adaptive, empathetic communication strategies are needed, as well as the integration of local and universal values in all aspects of student academic and social development.

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