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## Communication Strategies of Sumatran Students in Facing Culture Shock at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta

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**Abstract:** This research discusses the communication strategies of students from Sumatra in facing culture shock at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University Yogyakarta. Differences in culture, language, and social norms between their hometown and the new environment often cause confusion and anxiety for migrant students. This study uses a qualitative method, with primary data from interviews and observations, and secondary data from supporting documents. The results show that the students adaptation process goes through four main stages: the honeymoon phase (feeling excited and happy in the new environment), the culture shock phase, the recovery phase (starting to open up, understand the culture, and build relationships), and the adjustment phase (being able to accept and feel comfortable with the local culture). The communication strategies used by the students include choosing the right messages according to the Javanese cultural context, adjusting their communication style to be more polite, and joining communities as a form of social support. In addition, the study found that culture shock affects three aspects: affective (emotions) such as confusion, anxiety, and sadness, behavioral, such as efforts to learn local habits and cognitive, such as changes in thinking patterns caused by differences in language and values. Even though it was full of challenges, Sumatra students were able to develop effective communication strategies, which helped them adapt and live their academic and social life better in Yogyakarta

**Keywords:** Communication Strategy, Culture Shock, UIN Sunan Kalijaga

### INTRODUCTION

Communication is essential to human relationships. From the moment humans are born, they are inseparable from communication. Communication is a fundamental human activity that makes us interdependent on one another in our daily lives. Through communication, humans obtain and share information, ideas, or opinions from other communicants to achieve shared meaning. Humans, consciously or unconsciously, constantly communicate in everyday life.

Every human being who lives needs interaction with other people and also adapts to their environment even though they have different cultural backgrounds, because humans are social creatures. What happens when humans migrate to a new area and where the local culture and norms are different, of course this becomes a challenge for humans to need time in the process

of adjusting to the new culture. Of course this event will be experienced by migrants, migrating is an activity of traveling out of their area to settle or only temporarily in a new place. Migrant students are students who live in an area they have never lived in. They live in an environment they have never visited before so they do not know about the customs and habits in that environment therefore they must adapt to the surrounding community.

There are various factors such as anxiety, still missing home and also because of loneliness. In addition, there are also differences in traditions, culture, norms, even languages that certainly cannot be applied in new areas of migrants, this is called culture shock. The relationship between culture and communication is two things that cannot be separated, where each culture has a different way of communicating with each other. Culture as a way of life as a whole of a society will be seen continuously from generation to generation through communication. The theory that will be applied in this case is related to culture, the culture shock faced is using the theory of cultural adaptation, namely the U-curve model, one illustration of the first stage of cross-cultural adjustment which until now has been widely used for several studies.

Meanwhile, the communication process carried out by anyone cannot be separated from their main culture. In every communication, a person will be influenced by values, beliefs, the social organization he enters, his view of the world, his perception of himself and other people who are part of his culture.

In order for communication to be effective and run smoothly, a communication strategy is needed. Communication strategy according to Effendy states that strategy is essentially planning and management to achieve a goal, but to achieve that goal, the strategy does not function as a roadmap that only shows the direction, but must show how the operational tactics are.<sup>4</sup> In communication between students, the communication strategy in question shows which plans/plans so that the message conveyed can reach the interlocutor. With the rapid development of the times, many students have left their hometowns to study in other regions that have superior universities. One of the universities that is a favorite destination for students from various regions, including Sumatra, is the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University of Yogyakarta. As students, they face the challenge of adapting to an academic and social environment that may be different from their lives in their hometowns. Many of them continue their studies in big cities such as Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Bandung, or Surabaya to get a better education, expand their networks, and gain life experience outside their hometowns.

Yogyakarta is one of the largest student cities in Indonesia, a major destination for many students from across the archipelago, including those from Sumatra. Students from Sumatra who study in Yogyakarta, particularly at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, inevitably experience a culture shock at first, making it somewhat difficult for them to survive and adapt to a foreign territory. They must adapt to Javanese culture, which undoubtedly has unique characteristics such as customs, a more refined and polite communication style, and different social norms compared to their home regions.

## **METHOD**

Research methods are the procedures and schemes used in a study. The research method used in this study is qualitative, allowing for planned, scientific, neutral, and valuable research. Research methods serve as strategies for collecting data and finding solutions to problems.

Based on the facts, the research method is also a technique used to conduct research.<sup>5</sup> In this research process, the primary data source/main source is used, information is collected using written notes or can also be recorded via video/audio, as well as taking photos.<sup>6</sup> Secondary data is additional data in research in the form of documents, both written and photographic. Secondary data is obtained through activity documentation, interview results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The adaptation process of Sumatran students in facing culture shock

#### Adaptation

Adaptation is defined as the way living things adjust to the environment in which they live. This adaptation is necessary for living things on Earth because each environment has its own characteristics. When someone is far from home, far from the place they have always considered "home," far from the environment where they grew up, and far from the habits they have always practiced, that person will inevitably learn new things to survive, whether they are aware of it or not. When someone is away from their comfort zone for an extended period, for example, to college, there will be a transfer of values that we usually call adaptation.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, adaptation itself refers to an individual's efforts to adjust to new social, cultural, and academic conditions in order to function optimally. In the context of students, this adaptation process plays a crucial role in reducing the negative impact of culture shock, which can disrupt psychological well-being and academic achievement.

Ruben & Steward argue that adapting to a culture is a matter of socialization and persuasion. It involves learning appropriate personal representations, idea maps, rules, and images of the relationships, groups, organizations, and societies of which we are members.

Based on the explanation above, the author will discuss the adaptation process of Sumatran students in dealing with culture shock. This can be studied using the U-shaped model of cultural adaptation theory, which encompasses several stages: the honeymoon phase, culture shock phase, recovery phase, and adjustment phase.

#### Honeymoon Phase

The honeymoon phase is characterized by feelings of fascination, enthusiasm, happiness, and a positive connection with those around them. The honeymoon phase can also be described as the experience of being a visitor. It can also be said that students who are away from home still enjoy and are happy with their new environment and are still enthusiastic about exploring new things, especially in learning the language of their surroundings, namely Javanese.<sup>10</sup> From the results of the interviews conducted, the informant recounted what he felt when he first came to Java.

*"When I first arrived in Java, I had mixed feelings, both enthusiastic and a little anxious. Enthusiasm because it was a new experience that I was really looking forward to, being able to study at a big university like UIN and getting to know a different Javanese culture. But there was also a little anxiety because I had to adjust to a new environment and be far from my family."* This means that everyone who is going to migrate to a place will definitely feel euphoric because it is their first experience and certainly difficult to forget. However, behind that euphoria, there is a little anxiety that accompanies it.

#### Culture Shock Phase

During this phase, individuals will experience stress and anxiety. This psychological depression occurs because expectations brought from their previous environment do not align with the reality experienced in the new environment or misunderstandings that arise as outsiders in a new region. Migrants experiencing culture shock are vulnerable to the negative impacts of culture shock, such as forming stereotypes (negative images) of the new culture and even developing ethnocentric attitudes.

#### Recovery Phase

In the recovery or healing phase, the individual has made his or her way into the new environment, has begun to make new friends, and has begun to master the new language and culture. This phase also demonstrates a willingness to open up to new cultures, adapt, and

understand them, as well as the ability to accept others from that new culture, both verbally and nonverbally.

For example, first-year students are willing to adapt to the dynamic and active learning process in the classroom. Meanwhile, second-year students then adapt to understand the new culture by prioritizing learning activities. Finally, third-year students adjust by realizing that differences in academic values are simply cultural differences.<sup>11</sup> The interviewee said that: *"I started to learn more about the local culture, like observing what their habits are, often asking friends, and trying to be more patient in communicating. I also joined a student community from Sumatra for emotional support, bro."*

### **Adjustment Phase**

The adjustment phase is the stage where individuals begin to enjoy and accept the new environment or culture, although they still experience some tension and anxiety. During the adjustment phase, the individual integrates their existing knowledge and skills.

The interviewee said that: *"It was difficult at first, but after living here for a while, I can say that I have started to feel like I have truly accepted this new environment. Before, I felt a bit anxious and had difficulty adapting, but now, everything has started to feel more comfortable."* From the interview, it is clear that everyone, especially students who are just about to set foot in a new environment, experience culture shock, but all of that can be overcome little by little, learning to adapt well.

### **Communication strategy**

Strategy is essentially planning and management to achieve a goal. Communication has an important role in various environments, one of which is education.<sup>12</sup> It can be concluded that communication strategy is an effort or plan that is carried out effectively to facilitate communication in order to create ideas to achieve a certain goal. Communication as a process of conveying a message in the form of symbols or codes from one party to another with the effect of changing attitudes or actions.<sup>13</sup> Communication strategy according to Onong is a mixture. A communication planning expert, Middleton, made a definition by stating that communication strategy is the best combination of all communication elements starting from communicators, messages, channels (media) recipients to influences (effects) designed to achieve optimal communication goals.

This communication strategy also includes several things:

### **Message selection**

Selecting the right message is key to a successful communication strategy. The message must be clear, relevant to the audience, and aligned with the communication objective. Effective message selection involves several stages, starting from identifying the communication objective, understanding the audience, to crafting an interesting and attention-grabbing message. From the results of an interview with one of the Sumatran students, regarding communication strategies related to message selection, he said: "As for message selection, I would probably look at the conditions first, as Javanese people are known for their gentleness and politeness, so maybe later I will adjust to that." Message selection is also one of the right steps or strategies when we are in a new environment. Because no matter what, we don't know what kind of environment we will be living in during college, it would be good at the beginning to try to blend in while observing.

### **Communication Style**

Communication style is the steps taken by a communicator to convey a message to a recipient. The messages conveyed by communicators have varying styles and characteristics. Differences in communication style can be seen in education, culture, family environment,

experience, and so on. Choosing an ineffective communication style can hinder the communication process. Communication style consists of a set of behaviors used to elicit feedback or specific responses in specific situations. To understand communication style, each individual must create and maintain their own unique communication style.

From the interview conducted regarding the communication style, the source said that: *"Since the first time I came, I realized that the communication style here is a little different from where I come from. For that reason, I definitely try to adapt myself by speaking more politely and respectfully, because no matter what, I will be studying here in Java, so whether I like it or not, I have to learn how the people here communicate."*

From the interview, it was seen that there was a significant difference in communication style, where Javanese was softer, while Sumatran was louder and sometimes there were one or two words in Sumatra that were normal but in Javanese had a different meaning.

### **The impact of culture shock on Sumatran students**

According to Bochner, culture shock is an individual's reaction to a new, unfamiliar environment, which causes an initial reaction of anxiety due to the loss of familiar signs from their previous environment.<sup>15</sup> Impact is the result or effect that arises as a result of a particular event, action, or condition. In a social, psychological, or cultural context, impact can be positive or negative, depending on how the individual or group responds to the change or stimulus.

Culture shock occurs when a person feels stressed and surprised when faced with a new environment and culture. Someone experiencing culture shock typically feels anxious, confused, and frustrated because they lose the signs, symbols, and social interactions they are familiar with from their home culture. People experiencing culture shock tend to feel anxious and uncomfortable. Culture shock is a condition where individuals who have migrated often experience shock and even stress when faced with a new environment and culture. Every human being, as an individual, naturally has a different cultural background, so it's not surprising that there are often inconsistencies with others, whether in speech, language, values, appearance, and so on.

This forces individuals to undergo a challenging adaptation process, as they must adjust to new norms and customs that may be very different from those they are familiar with. This adaptation process requires time and effort to better understand, accept, and integrate into the new environment and culture.

It is important for individuals experiencing culture shock to seek social support, such as from peers or communities with similar cultural backgrounds, and to develop a deeper understanding of the new culture. This can reduce anxiety and confusion and make adjustments easier. Furthermore, openness to new experiences and tolerance are key to navigating these difficult times, ultimately allowing individuals to feel comfortable and even enjoy the cultural diversity they encounter.

If someone has difficulty adjusting to a new environment, the impact can be felt, including excessive worry about their health. They also tend to have difficulty concentrating, become more irritable, and often feel sad for no apparent reason. Mood swings and emotional instability often occur because they are trapped in a state of high anxiety.<sup>16</sup>

Due to the presence of culture shock, Ward explains that culture shock is divided into three aspects, known as the ABCs of culture shock: Affective, Behavioral, and Cognitive.

#### **Affective (emotional)**

This aspect relates to positive and negative feelings and emotions. Individuals will experience several things, including confusion, anxiety, excessive suspicion, and sadness when living in a new place with a different culture.

Regarding this affective aspect, the interviewee stated: "Of course, I feel confused, especially when the culture is different from ours. But I try not to push myself too hard, like I

have to adapt quickly and feel comfortable. I'm adapting slowly, like I'm getting to know the local customs and paying attention to their habits. But sometimes, I feel anxious and afraid because I don't understand what they're saying." Naturally, when we move away from home, especially to a place that is 360 degrees different from our own, we automatically feel confused, anxious, and afraid. This is partly because we haven't yet fully understood the culture. However, over time, we begin to accept the differences.

### **Behavior**

Behavior is also related to cultural learning. This is the learning process undertaken by individuals who migrate to acquire social knowledge and cultural skills in a new environment. Students who migrate or find themselves in a new cultural environment learn not only through imitation but also through understanding norms and cultural structures and contributing to the formation of cultural expectations.

Regarding this, the source stated, *"Personally, to learn about local culture, I usually start with everyday life, like observing. Sometimes, when I go to a food stall, the man is Javanese, so I often ask questions about local customs and how they interact on a daily basis. So I learn naturally, just like in everyday life."*

This means that for those who have moved away from home, especially students, it's not only important to study academic matters but also to understand and be sensitive to the culture of the place where they live. Everyone has their own way of understanding and learning how to integrate into the social environment.

### **Cognitive (changes in thought patterns due to differences in language and values)**

This aspect is the result of affective and behavioral processes, which are shifts in perception that occur within individuals as they identify ethnicity and values resulting from cultural contact. This involves changes in several things previously considered valid. Individuals will develop negative perspectives and experience difficulties interacting with new environments due to language differences.

Regarding this cognitive aspect, the interviewee stated: "Yes, to be honest, at first I did have difficulties interacting, especially because of the language differences. Initially, I felt very anxious and frustrated because I often couldn't convey my intentions clearly, or even felt blocked when trying to communicate. Of course, this would affect my feelings emotionally, as I felt less confident and sometimes uncomfortable in a new environment."

It cannot be denied that again and again language differences become a unity that is somewhat difficult to face, but as time goes by, it should no longer be a significant obstacle because every problem will find a solution, and so it is with this language, the simple solution is that we have to learn the language even if it is not perfect, at least there is an effort so that misunderstandings do not occur.

### **Sumatran Students**

Students are a group within society with status due to their ties to higher education. Students who choose to emigrate primarily aim to obtain a better quality education, which is not available in their home region. Without a strong commitment, achieving this higher quality will be more difficult.

Students who emigrate certainly have greater responsibility for their actions. This is because, in the environment of emigration, there are changes in lifestyle, culture, language, and the conditions of their living environment, as well as the demands of independent living. While away from home, students face differences in various aspects of life, including differences in lifestyle, customs, language, and social interactions. Therefore, students must be able to adapt to an unfamiliar environment. In a new place, when faced with any situation or condition, a student is required to be able to handle it alone. This is because the situation in a new place is

different. The opportunity to depend on others is very minimal, and the fulfillment of one's life needs must be handled alone.

This is also the case for Sumatran students who come from the Indonesian island of Sumatra to continue their education at universities outside the island. Sumatra itself is one of the largest islands in Indonesia, with numerous provinces, such as Aceh, North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Riau, Bengkulu, Jambi, Lampung, and South Sumatra. Sumatran students generally have diverse cultural, traditional, and linguistic backgrounds, according to their ethnicity and region of origin in Sumatra. Some of the major ethnic groups on the island of Sumatra include Malay, Batak, Minangkabau, Acehnese, and others, each with its own unique cultural characteristics and traditions.

The academic and social environment may differ from their lives in their hometowns. Several regions are preferred by students from various regions in Indonesia to continue their studies at the tertiary level. These regions are known for having complete lecture facilities and infrastructure, supported by a conducive learning environment and capable of producing high-achieving competitiveness among universities.<sup>21</sup> The presence of Sumatran students in Jogja also enriches the cultural diversity and campus life. They usually bring with them the culture and traditions of their hometowns, which provides a different nuance to social and academic life in Yogyakarta. Some challenges that Sumatran students may face in Jogja include adapting to a different environment, both in terms of culture, language, and lifestyle. Under these conditions, Sumatran students are required to adapt quickly and be able to step out of their comfort zones. Amid these challenges, students also have the opportunity to form extensive social networks and learn tolerance. Ultimately, this experience not only enriches insight but also forms a resilient character and is ready to compete in the professional world.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, we can see the experiences of Sumatran students at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in dealing with culture shock and the communication strategies they use to adapt. While initially challenging, they gradually become accustomed to it. During this adaptation process, Sumatran students go through three main stages:

The Honeymoon Phase, characterized by enthusiasm, euphoria, and a little anxiety in facing new experiences. The Culture Shock Phase, when students begin to open up, understand Javanese culture, and join communities for emotional support. The Adjustment Phase, which is the stage of full acceptance of the new culture, despite lingering tensions. This process demonstrates that adaptation is not an instantaneous process, but rather a gradual process of learning until students feel comfortable and integrated into their new environment.

The communication strategies employed by the students included: selecting messages appropriate to the audience's character (for example, adapting to a more refined and polite Javanese style of speech). Adapting their communication style, from their typically louder speech to a more polite one, to conform to local norms. These strategies enabled them to reduce misunderstandings, facilitate communication, and build better social relationships.

The impact of culture shock on students can be seen in three main aspects: Affective (emotional): confusion, anxiety, and even suspicion. Behavioral (behavioral): the need to learn a new culture, interact, and adjust daily habits. Cognitive (changes in mindset due to differences in language and values): changes in perception and difficulties interacting, especially due to language differences. Emotionally, they feel anxious and confused due to cultural differences. Behaviorally, they make efforts to learn about new social and cultural norms, while cognitively, they begin to change their perceptions of the culture and strive to adapt.

This means that this study shows that although culture shock can be challenging, with appropriate communication strategies and an adaptive attitude, students can overcome these obstacles and adapt to new academic and social environments. Students from Sumatra bring cultural diversity that enriches the social and academic dynamics in Yogyakarta. Although they

face significant challenges in terms of language, customs, and lifestyle, their presence also creates a space for intercultural learning.

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