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A Phenomenography Study: Interpersonal Communication of Migrant Students in Surabaya in Overcoming Homesickness

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ABSTRACT

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenographic method, which focuses on the diversity of understanding and meaning structures that each individual has regarding the same phenomenon. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with five informants who were migrant students from diverse cultural and regional backgrounds. The results of the study revealed three main concepts of interpersonal communication in overcoming homesickness: (1) maintaining emotional closeness with family; (2) as a tool for social and cultural adaptation in a new environment; (3) negotiating cultural identity in the face of differences in communication patterns. This study concludes that interpersonal communication cannot be separated from the homesickness experience of migrant students. These findings indicate that interpersonal communication is not only a means of expressing emotions, but also an active strategy that shapes individual comfort and resilience in a new environment.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode fenomenografi, yang berfokus pada keragaman pemahaman dan struktur makna yang dimiliki setiap individu terkait fenomena yang sama. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan lima informan mahasiswa perantau dari latar belakang budaya dan daerah yang beragam. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan tiga konsepsi utama komunikasi interpersonal dalam mengatasi homesickness: (1) menjaga kedekatan emosional dengan keluarga; (2) sebagai alat untuk adaptasi sosial dan budaya di lingkungan baru; (3) melakukan negosiasi identitas budaya dalam menghadapi perbedaan pola komunikasi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa komunikasi interpersonal tidak dapat dipisahkan dari pengalaman homesickness mahasiswa perantau. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi interpersonal bukan hanya sarana untuk mengekspresikan emosi, tetapi juga strategi aktif yang membentuk kenyamanan dan ketahanan individu di lingkungan baru.

INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization and higher mobility, many students decide to migrate to other cities in pursuit of better educational opportunities. This phenomenon, commonly known as migration, often involves individuals leaving their hometowns to live independently in a new environment (Hediati & Nawangsari, 2020). Surabaya, one of the major cities in Indonesia, has become a popular destination for university students due to its vast educational facilities, home to 70 universities including 6 public and 64 private institutions (BPS Jawa Timur, 2024).

University life signifies a major transitional period for young adults, encompassing more than academic pursuit. It is a time when students begin living independently, making critical life decisions, managing finances, and developing social networks. However for migrants students, this transition often comes with added challenges: being separated from family, adapting to a new cultural environment and managing unfamiliar academic and social expectations. According to Nasir (2011), migrant students face multiple adaptation-related challenges, including adjusting to new academic systems and social surroundings. Setiani (2023) also notes that common adjustment barriers include managing emotional responses coping with unfamiliar weather, understanding local customs, and dealing with solitude due to the absence of familiar support systems. The experience of studying away from home can be both transformative and challenging. Migrant students are expected to adapt quickly to their new surroundings, manage their own lives independently, and build new social networks. However, such transitions are not always smooth.

Students are often faced with emotional, psychological, and social stress, particularly those stemming from unfamiliarity with new cultural norms. One of the most common emotional responses to these changes is homesickness, a deep longing for home and family, which can disrupt the student's ability to adapt and thrive in their academic journey (Stroebe et al., 2015, in Ummah, 2023). Mozafarinia and Tavafian (2014) in Mariska (2018) assert that homesickness can lead to various negative effects, such as reduced academic performance, social withdrawal, and increased stress or frustration. These challenges may become even more severe when students are simultaneously experiencing culture shock. Culture shock is the discomfort experienced when someone is exposed to drastically different cultural envvironments (Hanafianto & Izzah, 2023). For migrant students, culture shock often manifests through differences in communication style, social norms, and daily routines.

The process of adaptation among migrant students cannot be separated from the role of interpersonal communication. According to DeVito (2016), interpersonal communication is the verbal and non-verbal interaction between two or more individualism allowing for mutual exchange and emotional connection. Effective interpersonal communication enables students to build meaningful relationships, seek emotional

support, and reduce feelings of isolation. In multicultural settings such as Surabaya, where students come from various regions with diverse cultural backgrounds, communication plays a pivotal role in overcoming barriers posed by differences in language, norms and values.

This study focuses on how interpersonal communication functions as a strategy for migrant students in Surabaya to cope with homesickness and culture shock. Several informants in this study, such as MKI from Makassar, DC from Samarinda, and AK from Jayapura, experienced cultural dissonance due to differences in language and social behavior. Through active peer interaction and frequent communication with their families via phone calls, they gradually adapted to their new environment. Other informants, like JS from Tuban and RS from Denpasar, had distinct experiences. JS experienced emotional homesickness initially and overcame it by building relationships with peers, while RS struggled more due to strong emotional dependence on family but did not report experiencing culture shock. RS coped by maintaining regular communication with family and integrating into student communities. These varied experiences highlight that interpersonal communication is more than just a medium of information exchange, it becomes a dynamic tool for emotional regulation, identity negotiation, and cultural adaptation. Homesickness, while often framed as a psychological issue, is deeply intertwined with the communication practices and social support. As previous research has indicated, students often manage their emotional distress by connecting with family and peers (Rumaisa, 2023; Ningrum & Intansari, 2023). This study differs by emphasizing the nuanced ways communication is used as an adaptive strategy, rather than just a reactive coping.

To explore this further, this study adopts a qualitative approach using the phenomenographic method developed by Marton (1986). Phenomenography is designed to identify and describe the qualitatively different ways individuals experience or understand a particular phenomenon, in this case ‘homesickness’. Rather than focusing solely on the intensity or cause of homesickness, the study seeks to uncover the variation in migrant students’ experiences, especially how they make sense of and respond to homesickness through interpersonal communication. By examining diverse student backgrounds and cultural origins, this research aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of communication in the context of emotional and cultural adaptation in higher education.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach with a phenomenographic method to explore how migrant students in Surabaya experience and understand interpersonal communication in coping with homesickness. Accirdung to Marton (1986), phenomenography is designed to reveal the different ways individuals experience, perceive and igve meaning to a particular phenomenon. The paradigm of this study is constructivist

interpretive, as the research seeks to interpret the subjective meanings that emerge form the students' lived experiences in adapting to new environments. The research type is descriptive qualitative, emphasizing depth over generalizability.

Data collection

Data collection was conducted using two methods: non-participant observation and in-depth interviews, In the observation process, the researcher did not participate directly in the students' daily lives but instead focused on how participants expressed their emotions and experiences during interviews. The in-depth interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of the participants' stories. Each interview was recorder, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized using initials to ensure confidentiality.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using the phenomenographic data analysis model adapted from Priyowidodo et al. (2022). The process includes the following stages: (1) data familiarization, transcribing and reading through interviews data multiple times, (2) identifying meaning units, grouping similar expressions and insights, (3) structural and meaning analysis, identifying how each participant conceptualizes homesickness and the role of communication, (4) variation analysis, comparing differences and similarities among participants' experiences, (5) outcome space mapping; constructing categories of description that represent the range of student experiences in using interpersonal communication to cope with homesickness.

Participants

The participants in this study are five migrant students currently enrolled at universities in Surabaya. The students were selected based on the following criteria: (1) they are originally from outside Surabaya, (2) they are aged between 18 and 22 years old, (3) they have experienced homesickness, (4) they are willing to share their experiences through in-depth interviews. The five informants come from diverse regions in Indonesia: (1) MKI from Makassar, (2) DC from Samarinda, (3) JS from Tuban, (4) AK from Jayapura, (5) RS from Denpasar.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that interpersonal communication plays a significant role in how migrant students in Surabaya cope with homesickness. Through the phenomenographic approach, the researcher identified three major conceptions of how communication is utilized by students from diverse cultural backgrounds to manage emotional and social challenges. These conceptions emerged from in depth interviews with five informants–MKI, DC, JS, AK, and RS–each of whom brought unique experiences shaped by their origin, personal resilience, and adaptation strategies.

Interpretation of Experiences by MKI informants

MKI informants are students from Makassar who are currently in their second semester of an accounting program at a university in Surabaya. MKI began their time away from home in the middle of 2024 during the first semester and has shown strong signs of homesickness from the start. Homesickness does not arise solely due to physical distance from their hometown but rather from discomfort in social and cultural communication in their new environment. The homesickness experienced by MKI is closely linked to the experience of culture shock, which refers to a form of cultural disorientation characterized by feelings of confusion, frustration, or awkwardness when someone is in a culture different from their own (Oberg, 1960; Lubis, 2015). As a student from Makassar, MKI revealed that differences in communication styles, including intonation, speaking style, and emotional expression, made him feel out of place in unfamiliar social settings. The form of culture shock he experienced was very specific, namely the differences in verbal and nonverbal communication culture between the people of Makassar and Surabaya. In his home culture, MKI was accustomed to a straightforward and expressive style of speech, whereas in Surabaya he felt that the communication style used by his friends and lecturers was more subtle, leading to confusion in responding to certain social situations.

Ward et al. (in Amalia, 2020) explain that one dimension of culture shock is cognitive, which is the difficulty in understanding new cultural codes and how to adjust perceptions and ways of thinking to the changing reality. This slows down his adaptation process because MKI finds it difficult to understand how to communicate appropriately in the Surabaya cultural context. “Sometimes when I'm working or relaxing with friends, I get a little confused if they speak with a Surabaya dialect.” (MKI) MKI does not directly communicate feelings of longing for family explicitly but chooses to rebuild emotional comfort through spending time with siblings, such as playing games together or sharing light-hearted stories. “When I feel homesick, I usually don't tell anyone, but I look for my younger siblings to play with and talk to, or I talk to my parents about my daily life here.” (MKI)

According to DeVito (2016), interpersonal communication not only serves to convey information but also to create and maintain personal relationships through meaningful verbal and nonverbal messages. MKI's interpersonal communication is emotionally indirect but strategically effective in creating a sense of “home.” MKI interprets interpersonal communication not merely as a means of sharing feelings but as a way to rebuild emotional connections lost due to distance and cultural differences. MKI's awareness of observing local communication styles and gradually adapting to them is an important aspect of their interpretation of the experience of being away from home.

Interpretation of Experiences by DC informants

DC is a student from Samarinda who has been studying in Surabaya since 2022 and is currently in his sixth semester. DC admits to experiencing homesickness at the beginning of his time away from home, which was mainly triggered by culture shock in communication. DC perceives the communication style of Surabaya's society as generally harsher or "cruder" compared to the norms in his hometown. "When I feel homesick, I usually don't tell anyone, but I usually look for my younger sibling to play with and talk to, or talk to my parents about my daily life here. The first time I experienced culture shock was probably when I first arrived here, because of the way people speak here. They use language that is perhaps a little harsh. But it's just something you get used to. So at first, it might be a bit shocking to hear them talk like that. But it turns out that's just how it is." (DC) This reaction aligns with the affective and cognitive dimensions of culture shock as described by Ward et al. (in Amalia, 2020), namely feelings of discomfort and shifts in perspective due to cultural differences in communication.

On the other hand, DC also felt homesickness as described by Stroebe et al. (2015) in Ummah (2023), which is a deep longing for home, family, and the routines he had been accustomed to. This indicates that DC faced two challenges simultaneously: the loss of emotional comfort due to being far from home, and difficulty adapting to the communication culture in the new environment. In facing this situation, DC did not choose to distance themselves from the social environment but instead sought to build new social connections through interpersonal communication. They joined campus organizations to interact more frequently with peers from diverse backgrounds. Through these friendships, DC learned to understand local communication styles and gradually began to adapt. He realized that communication is not just about speaking, but also about adapting the way one speaks, understanding others' expressions, and knowing when and how to express opinions. This demonstrates that DC began to apply culturally adaptive interpersonal communication, as described by DeVito (2016), which involves the conscious exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages, taking into account the social and cultural context. DC also maintains regular communication with his family in Samarinda, especially in the evenings via video calls. "If it's possible, with family it's usually in the evening. Usually a video call." (DC)

He views communication with his family as a way to maintain emotional stability, while communication with friends in the campus organization is seen as a means to grow and adapt. In this case, the interpersonal communication that DC engages in has two main roles: as an emotional bridge to overcome feelings of longing and loneliness, and as a tool to build social relationships and understand the new environment. DC not only sends messages but also creates space for feedback, discussion, and mutual understanding with the people around him. This reflects the core of interpersonal

communication according to DeVito, which involves a reciprocal relationship, occurs consciously, and forms meaningful social bonds.

DC's interpretation of the homesickness experience indicates that he views it not as a weakness but as a motivation to learn and grow socially. He considers the discomfort that arises at the beginning of his journey to be normal and something that can be overcome by building healthy interpersonal relationships. From a phenomenographic perspective, DC interprets the phenomenon of homesickness as a process of rediscovering the feeling of "home" through new people, rather than simply waiting for that comfort to come on its own.

Interpretation of Experiences by JS informants

Informant JS is a student from Tuban City who has been living in Surabaya since 2021 and is currently in his eighth semester. Although he comes from the same province as his campus, East Java, JS still experiences severe homesickness, especially at the beginning of his studies. This shows that even a relatively short geographical distance does not guarantee freedom from longing for home and family. In JS's case, what is most felt is not the significant cultural differences, but the loss of emotional closeness and togetherness with family, which previously formed a large part of his daily routine.

The homesickness experienced by JS was greatly influenced by the strong emotional bond with his mother, who had always been the closest person and a confidant for everything. When facing academic pressure, stress, or negative emotions, JS was accustomed to sharing his feelings with his mother. However, due to personal circumstances, JS could no longer rely on this routine of communication. "I used to tell my mom everything, but now I can't anymore. So, I just deal with it. When I feel homesick, I can only cry because I'm too proud to tell my family that I miss them." (JS) This is where interpersonal communication becomes a unique challenge, as JS feels he has lost the safe space to freely express his emotions. According to DeVito (2016), interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in building emotional relationships and maintaining an individual's psychological balance. In this case, JS demonstrates that meaningful interpersonal communication does not only occur through frequency or duration, but rather through the quality of closeness and mutual understanding. JS experiences a void due to the loss of a communication pattern that has been established since childhood. He is not immediately able to transfer his habits to others and needs time to open up to his friends in Surabaya.

JS's process of interpreting homesickness also shows elements of culture shock in an implicit psychological form. Although culturally not too different, JS experienced culture shock when he began interacting with friends from various regions, especially from Eastern Indonesia. "There is no culture shock among Javanese people and Javanese friends. But if, for instance, some friends happen to be from the east, they also bring their culture here. That's when you

sometimes think, oh, that's how life is there. Their language is good. I understand how they speak, but I can't speak like that. But I want to be able to. Now, when they speak, I understand." (JS) This condition aligns with the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of culture shock according to Ward et al. (in Amalia, 2020), where individuals feel the need to relearn how to read social situations, speaking styles, and appropriate nonverbal responses.

However, over time, JS began to find a form of interpersonal communication that suited his comfort level. He built a deeper friendship with one of his friends, who now serves as a confidant and someone to share experiences with. JS views this friend as an extension of the support system he previously received from his mother and family. Here, interpersonal communication plays a crucial role as a tool for emotional recovery. In the process, JS is not only a recipient of attention but also begins to open up to listen and provide support. This relationship is reciprocal and deep, reflecting the core of interpersonal communication according to DeVito, which is a two-way relationship that unfolds over time and creates emotional bonding.

Interpretation of Experiences by AK informants

AK is one of the female students from Jayapura City who is currently in her second semester in the PG-PAUD study program at a university in Surabaya. Her experience of moving away from home began in 2024, and since her first semester, she has experienced quite strong homesickness, especially in the form of culture shock and difficulties in social adaptation. AK comes from Papua, a region with norms, languages, and communication styles that are quite different from those of East Java society. This made her feel alienated, awkward, and unable to blend in with her new academic environment. In an interview, AK mentioned that she felt disconnected when interacting with others. "V: Do you have any funny or interesting experiences, or difficult experiences, related to cultural differences in communication? AK: For example, something funny... you know libraries, right? The head librarian is always on guard. When he speaks in Javanese, I get confused. Then he walks away and stays silent." (AK) The differences in language and communication style made her feel like an outsider, even though the people around her were not unkind. This illustrates the dimension of adaptation difficulties (Stroebe et al, 2002) in her homesickness experience. When AK felt uncomfortable, it triggered negative emotions and caused him to withdraw socially.

In dealing with homesickness, AK did not immediately use extroverted or open interpersonal communication, but rather did so gradually. Initially, he only relied on virtual communication such as video calls to contact his spiritual parents and family. However, after some time, AK began to try to build relationships with dormitory friends and gradually open up. He started participating in casual conversations, chatting in the cafeteria, and

eventually formed a circle of friends that made him feel more accepted.

AK views interpersonal communication as a process that requires time and a sense of safety first. He did not immediately confide or express his longing but built connections through casual conversations and social presence. This aligns with DeVito's (2016) concept of interpersonal communication, where communication is two-way, occurs consciously, and involves emotional bonding. In AK's case, interpersonal communication is not just about sharing messages but about building a sense of belonging and being valued. AK also mentioned that scrolling through social media is one way to "escape" reality temporarily and reduce homesickness. This can be seen as a way to cope with homesickness while still maintaining connections with his former identity.

Interpretation of Experiences by RS informants

Informant RS is a student from Denpasar, Bali, who has been living in Surabaya since 2021 and is currently in his eighth semester. Despite having spent several years away from home, RS still clearly remembers how his early days in Surabaya were filled with severe homesickness, especially due to the loss of his family's warmth. Unlike some other informants, RS stated that he did not experience culture shock in the form of confusion regarding communication culture. According to him, the communication style of people in Surabaya is relatively not too different from what he experienced in Bali. However, homesickness still emerged intensely, indicating that this phenomenon is not only triggered by cultural differences but also by the loss of close emotional relationships and social routines that have been ingrained since childhood. "RS: The main factor is being far away from my family and home. Previously, I was used to being together all the time. Now, I'm only with my sister. V: Oh, just the two of you? You must miss the atmosphere at home? RS: The main thing is definitely family activities. We used to get together often. For example, for dinner or something like that. And home-cooked meals too." (RS)

At home, RS was accustomed to sharing stories, joking around, and enjoying leisure time with his family. When away from home, all these habits suddenly disappear, leaving him feeling lonely, as explained in Stroebe et al. (2002) theory of homesickness dimensions, which describes the condition where an individual feels alienated from their new environment and experiences negative thoughts due to the absence of the social intimacy they are accustomed to at home. RS experiences the dimensions of longing for home, thinking about home, and loneliness simultaneously. He often feels that the atmosphere at home is much more comfortable than his new residence in Surabaya. To cope with this, RS chooses to keep himself busy and seek comfort through digital communication with his family, such as phone calls or video calls. This communication becomes a very personal and emotional form of

interpersonal communication. He feels that just hearing his mother's voice calms his mind.

Interpersonal Communication as a Means of Maintaining Emotional Closeness

The first concept is interpersonal communication as a means of maintaining emotional closeness, which is most clearly seen in the experiences of informants JS and RS. For them, homesickness is interpreted as a loss of emotional closeness with family, especially with their mothers, who were previously their main source of support and comfort. In this context, interpersonal communication is used as a safe and intimate form of emotional release, which is only done with people who are considered to understand them emotionally the most. Communication is selective, personal, and directed not at building new relationships, but at maintaining the comfort that existed before moving away. In this case, interpersonal communication functions as a psychological balancing tool that protects individuals from loneliness and emotional emptiness in a new environment. This function aligns with Stroebe's (2002) dimensions of missing home and thinking about home, and reflects the aspect of close relationships in interpersonal communication according to DeVito (2016), namely relationships that are long-lasting, meaningful, and emotional.

Interpersonal Communication as a Tool for Social and Cultural Adaptation

The second concept is interpersonal communication as a tool for social and cultural adaptation, as reflected in the experiences of informants DC and AK. They did not interpret homesickness solely as longing for home but as a response to the challenge of building new comfort in a foreign social environment. DC and AK actively opened themselves up, joined organizations, and formed new friendships. This understanding aligns with DeVito's (2016) view that interpersonal communication also serves to build relationships and facilitate adaptation, and is closely related to the cognitive and behavioral aspects of culture shock according to Ward et al.

Interpersonal Communication as a Strategy for Cultural Negotiation

The third concept is interpersonal communication as a cultural negotiation strategy, as experienced by informant MKI. He faced pressure not because he lacked relationships, but due to the mismatch between his personal communication style and the communication norms in Surabaya. In this case, homesickness is understood as a form of fatigue in communicating in a way that is "different from oneself." However, instead of completely withdrawing, MKI continued to actively communicate with the surrounding environment, but with a cautious strategy, namely using proper and correct Indonesian to maintain a safe distance in interactions. Interpersonal communication for MKI serves as a means of protecting identity, not as a medium for emotional release or a social

bridge. He uses communication to remain socially engaged without feeling a loss of self. From DeVito's theoretical perspective, this indicates that interpersonal communication can also function as self-presentation and as a form of passive adaptation to avoid perceived cultural conflicts. Outcome space In the phenomenographic framework, the outcome space serves as a conceptual mapping of the variations in how individuals understand and respond to a phenomenon—in this case, how migrant students in Surabaya experience and utilize interpersonal communication to overcome homesickness. Through in-depth analysis, three interrelated conceptions were identified: interpersonal communication as a means of maintaining emotional closeness, interpersonal communication as a tool for social and cultural adaptation, and interpersonal communication as a strategy for cultural negotiation. These conceptions represent qualitatively different ways of experiencing the same phenomenon and are positioned within a structure that reflects increasing complexity and communicative agency.

At the most foundational level, interpersonal communication is understood as a means of maintaining emotional closeness. Students in this category rely on communication primarily to preserve their emotional bonds with family and close friends. Homesickness, in this stage, is experienced as an emotional rupture, often characterized by sadness, loneliness, and a strong longing for home. In response, communication serves to re-establish a sense of emotional safety and belonging. Through regular phone calls or video chats, students recreate the emotional intimacy they had in their home environments. This form of communication is primarily affective in nature and functions as a coping mechanism during the early stages of cultural transition.

The second conception highlights interpersonal communication as a tool for social and cultural adaptation. Once students begin to achieve emotional stability, their communication shifts from being inward and family-oriented to outward and socially focused. Here, communication is used actively to navigate unfamiliar cultural norms, language differences, and social expectations. It becomes instrumental in helping students integrate into academic, peer, and community settings. Through daily interactions, students learn how to adjust their verbal and nonverbal behavior, interpret social cues, and build relationships with others in their new environment. This level reflects an increase in social participation and the development of intercultural competence. Communication is now viewed not only as an emotional support system but as a key facilitator of learning and social integration.

At the highest level of abstraction, interpersonal communication is perceived as a strategy for cultural negotiation. In this conception, students are no longer merely adjusting to their environment; they are consciously negotiating their identity within it. Communication becomes a site for asserting one’s

cultural background while engaging with those of others. Instead of fully assimilating, students selectively retain aspects of their original cultural identity and communicate them intentionally in interactions with peers. This negotiation is both personal and relational—students make decisions about when to conform, when to explain, and when to challenge the dominant cultural norms. Communication here is agentic, reflective, and dialogic, enabling students to maintain self-integrity while fostering mutual understanding.

These three conceptions form a coherent and progressive outcome space. The first category emphasizes emotional survival, the second centers on social learning and adaptation, and the third highlights identity assertion and cultural agency. While this progression suggests a developmental sequence, students may move fluidly between these categories depending on their context and lived experiences. However, taken together, they reveal how interpersonal communication evolves from a means of maintaining inner stability to a dynamic strategy for external engagement and cultural dialogue. This outcome space affirms the centrality of communication in the experience of homesickness and shows that it is not merely a tool for expressing emotion or exchanging information, but a fundamental process through which migrant students construct belonging, navigate difference, and assert identity in unfamiliar environments

CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore the variations in how migrant students in Surabaya utilize interpersonal communication to cope with homesickness. Employing a phenomenographic approach, the research identified three central conceptions that shape the students' experiences: (1) interpersonal communication as a means to maintain emotional closeness with family; (2) interpersonal communication as a tool for social and cultural adaptation; and (3) interpersonal communication as a strategy for negotiating cultural identity.

Each of these conceptions highlights a unique function of communication in the migration context. Emotional closeness reflects the affective need for support and connection during transitional periods. Social and cultural adaptation underscores the functional role of communication in learning and integrating into a new environment. Finally, cultural identity negotiation illuminates the complex and agentic process through which students affirm who they are while adapting to others. The findings reinforce the idea that communication is not a static tool, but a dynamic process that evolves with the individual's emotional state, social context, and cultural background. These insights emphasize that communication should be viewed not only in terms of its content and channel, but also through the lens of human experience—how individuals feel, adjust, and define themselves through interaction.

In practical terms, the research suggests that universities and student support services should develop programs that address not only academic orientation but also emotional and intercultural adjustment. Peer mentoring, intercultural dialogue forums, and access to safe communication spaces can facilitate smoother transitions and foster students' well-being.

Although this study offers rich insights, it is limited by its sample size and focus on internal migrant students within Indonesia. Future research could expand by exploring international student populations, including comparisons between different cultural groups, or examining longitudinal changes in communication strategies over time. Ultimately, this study contributes to the field of communication studies by emphasizing the importance of personal meaning, cultural complexity, and relational dynamics in interpersonal communication. In doing so, it opens new avenues for research on how communication supports resilience, belonging, and identity among individuals navigating change.

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