



## The Impact of Intercultural Communication on the Adaptation of Incoming Students at the Politeknik Negeri Medan

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**Abstract** This research examines the influence of intercultural communication on the adaptation of new students at Politeknik Negeri Medan. As students from diverse backgrounds come together, their ability to communicate effectively across cultures becomes critical for successful adaptation. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews, to explore the ways in which intercultural communication affects students' social and academic adaptation processes. Findings indicate that effective intercultural communication plays a significant role in promoting smoother adaptation, reducing cultural shock, and fostering inclusivity. The research contributes to understanding the role of communication skills in multicultural educational settings, providing insights for policy development to support incoming students.

**Keywords:** Intercultural, Communication, Adaptation, Multicultural

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly global educational environment, intercultural communication becomes important, especially for students who come from various cultural backgrounds. At the Medan State Polytechnic, where students from various regions gather, cross-cultural communication plays an important role in their adaptation process. Effective intercultural communication can help students overcome challenges and integrate well into new academic and social environments. This study aims to examine the influence of intercultural communication on the adaptation of new students at the Medan State Polytechnic.

In an increasingly global educational environment, intercultural communication is a very important aspect. As student mobility increases around the world, cross-cultural communication skills are increasingly needed to face the various challenges and dynamics that exist. According to Arifin (2020), "Intercultural communication is the main key to understanding cultural differences and facilitating the adaptation process in a new environment."

Students from various regions come to Politeknik Negeri Medan to gain knowledge and broaden their horizons. They bring with them a variety of different cultures, languages, and customs. This creates a dynamic multicultural environment but also demands effective communication skills in order to establish good relationships. Jones (2019) stated, "The presence of students from various cultural backgrounds makes it necessary for educational institutions to provide inclusive communication spaces."

At Politeknik Negeri Medan, cross-cultural communication plays an important role in supporting the adaptation of incoming students. They must adjust to an academic and social environment that may be very different from their place of origin. According to Widodo (2021), "The adaptation process will be easier for students who are able to communicate well in a new environment."

Effective intercultural communication helps students overcome challenges arising from cultural differences. For example, they can more easily understand social norms that apply on campus, and build relationships with friends from different cultural backgrounds. Good communication can reduce misunderstandings and strengthen a sense of togetherness (Setiawan, 2018).

In addition, intercultural communication also supports student integration into the academic environment. With good communication skills, incoming students can more easily participate in class discussions, understand lecture materials, and discuss with lecturers. According to research by Susanto (2022), "Students who are skilled in intercultural communication tend to have better academic adaptation."

This study aims to examine in depth the influence of intercultural communication on the adaptation of incoming students at the Politeknik Negeri Medan. The focus is to see how intercultural communication can support students in dealing with cultural differences and building social networks. The results of this study are expected to provide new insights into the role of communication in student adaptation.

The conclusions of this study will provide an important contribution to the understanding of the role of communication skills in multicultural educational environments. These findings can form the basis for developing policies that support immigrant students, especially in terms of adaptation and inclusivity on campus.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Intercultural communication is defined as communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, involving understanding and managing cultural differences (Hall, 1976). Several studies have highlighted the challenges and benefits of intercultural communication in educational settings, noting its importance for social adaptation and integration (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). In addition, Kim (2001) proposed the 'cross-cultural adaptation theory,' which states that effective communication in a multicultural context supports individual adaptation and integration. In Indonesia, research on student adaptation and intercultural communication has emphasized social support, language proficiency, and cultural

openness as key factors (Susanto et al., 2018). This study seeks to expand on these findings by focusing on the experiences of incoming students at the Medan State Polytechnic.

In research on intercultural communication and student adaptation, various studies have highlighted the importance of intercultural communication skills in supporting the adaptation process of new students. Research by Zhang and Zhou (2020) in China found that students who have intercultural communication skills adapt more easily to new environments and show reduced stress levels. In Indonesia, a study by Puspitasari et al. (2019) identified that social support and cross-cultural communication play an important role in supporting the adaptation of students from different regions at university.

Another study by Lee and Nguyen (2018) stated that intercultural communication competence contributes to reducing culture shock among international students. Similarly, research by Ahmad and Yusof (2017) in Malaysia confirmed that effective communication between students from different backgrounds can reduce social isolation.

Meanwhile, a study by Johnson (2016) in the United States highlighted the importance of intercultural communication training in reducing conflict between students on multicultural campuses. In Australia, research conducted by Smith and Brown (2018) revealed that students who received intercultural communication training tended to have positive perceptions of other cultures.

In Indonesia, Putri and Santoso (2019) studied the adaptation of cross-cultural students in Yogyakarta and found that good communication helped incoming students reduce culture shock. In addition, research conducted by Sari et al. (2020) showed that support from fellow students and cross-cultural communication were important factors for the adaptation of incoming students. An additional study by Hassan and Ali (2018) in Pakistan found that effective cross-cultural communication affected the academic satisfaction of international students. A recent study by Gomez and Morales (2019) in Spain revealed that students who had intercultural communication skills were able to navigate social and academic challenges better. These findings reinforce the importance of intercultural communication in the process of student adaptation, especially on multicultural campuses.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study used a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the influence of intercultural communication on students' adaptation. The study population included all new students at Medan State Polytechnic, with a sample of 200 students taken through random sampling

techniques. Data collection included a survey to measure intercultural communication competence and adaptation levels, as well as semi-structured interviews to explore students' personal experiences. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data.

The research methods used include qualitative and quantitative approaches. Using surveys and interviews, this study explores the ways in which intercultural communication influences the process of student adaptation. The mixed-methods approach allows researchers to obtain more comprehensive data (Anwar, 2023).

The type of research used is descriptive-explanatory, aiming to describe and explain the phenomenon of student adaptation to the new campus environment through intercultural communication (Sugiyono, 2015). Thus, this study can provide an overview of the dynamics of cross-cultural communication experienced by students.

The research location is at the Medan State Polytechnic, an educational institution with a culturally and geographically diverse student population (Puspitasari et al., 2019). Medan State Polytechnic was chosen because of its heterogeneous demographic characteristics, allowing for an in-depth study of intercultural interactions in the context of higher education.

The data collection techniques in this study consisted of surveys and semi-structured interviews. The survey was conducted to measure the level of intercultural communication competence and the level of adaptation of students (Zhang & Zhou, 2020), while the interview aimed to explore students' subjective experiences in communicating with friends from different cultures (Creswell, 2014).

The research instrument for the survey was a questionnaire compiled based on the theory of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2001) and intercultural communication competence (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). This questionnaire was designed using a Likert scale to facilitate quantitative data analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used as an instrument for collecting qualitative data, where open-ended questions were given to explore the experiences of adaptation and challenges of intercultural communication experienced by students (Johnson, 2016). This technique allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions and attitudes towards intercultural communication.

The sampling technique used in this study was random sampling, with a sample of 200 new students (Sugiyono, 2015). This sample selection was carried out to ensure a balanced representation of the incoming student population at the Medan State Polytechnic.

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics, to determine the relationship between intercultural communication competence and students' adaptation levels (Smith & Brown, 2018). The results of this analysis provide an overview of the general trends of the numerical data obtained.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, which aimed to identify key themes in the interviews, such as communication challenges, student perceptions, and social support (Sari et al., 2020). This analysis allows researchers to understand the context and meaning of students' adaptation experiences in more depth. By combining the results of quantitative and qualitative analysis, this study can provide a holistic view of the influence of intercultural communication on student adaptation. This approach also supports data validity through method triangulation (Ahmad & Yusof, 2017), which ensures that the data obtained can describe the phenomenon accurately.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study showed a strong correlation between intercultural communication competence and the successful adaptation of incoming students. Students who had high levels of cultural awareness, openness, and communication skills were more likely to report positive adaptation experiences, reduced culture shock, and good social integration. Qualitative interviews revealed the importance of mutual respect, empathy, and language proficiency in dealing with intercultural interactions. These results confirm the role of intercultural communication in supporting an inclusive and supportive campus environment, in line with previous studies that emphasize the need for intercultural training in educational institutions.

The results of this study indicate a strong correlation between intercultural communication competence and the successful adaptation of incoming students at the Politeknik Negeri Medan. Students who have good intercultural communication skills tend to be more easily able to adapt to a multicultural campus environment. This competence includes the ability to understand cultural differences, show empathy, and adjust communication styles to the cultural background of others (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003).

Survey data shows that students who score high on intercultural communication competency also have better adaptation rates, both in social and academic contexts. This finding is consistent with Johnson's (2016) research which states that students who are able to communicate well across cultures will find it easier to establish social relationships and reduce

culture shock. This shows the importance of communication competency for students from different backgrounds.

The qualitative interviews also revealed students' experiences in dealing with cultural differences. Many of them felt that the ability to communicate effectively across cultures helped them understand the perspectives of friends from other ethnicities. One respondent said that by learning about her friends' cultures, she felt more accepted and appreciated on campus.

Intercultural communication competence is also related to reduced conflict among students. This study found that students who have an understanding of cultural differences tend to be more open and respectful of those differences. In contrast, students who are less competent in intercultural communication are more likely to experience misunderstandings and tensions with friends from other ethnicities (Gomez & Morales, 2019).

This result is supported by quantitative data analysis which shows that students who have high levels of intercultural communication competence have better levels of academic satisfaction. This is related to the research of Ahmad and Yusof (2017) which states that communication competence contributes to the academic achievement of international students by increasing their adaptation in new environments.

Good intercultural communication competence allows students to navigate social and academic environments more effectively. This finding supports the results of research by Zhang and Zhou (2020) which showed that intercultural communication competence plays an important role in reducing the level of stress experienced by new students, especially those from different cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, interviews revealed that students with good intercultural communication competencies felt more confident in facing new situations. They tended to be more proactive in interacting with students from other cultures, which helped them to expand their network of friends and social support.

Data shows that these communication competencies are not only important in social interactions, but also in academic activities, such as group work. Students who are able to adjust their communication style with friends from different cultural backgrounds are more successful in collaboration and tend to achieve better academic results (Puspitasari et al., 2019).

The presence of various cultures on campus also creates a need for high intercultural communication skills. The results of this study indicate that multicultural campuses such as Politeknik Negeri Medan need support for students to develop these skills in order to overcome adaptation challenges.

Some students expressed that they experienced culture shock when they first interacted with students from different cultures. However, students who have intercultural communication skills adapt to these differences more quickly, in line with the findings of Hasibuan (2020) who stated the importance of communication in dealing with culture shock.

This study also found that intercultural communication competence helps students understand non-verbal codes of conduct, such as facial expressions and body language, which often differ across cultures (Sari et al., 2020). This understanding reduces the potential for misunderstandings in everyday interactions.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that intercultural communication competence is an important factor in the adaptation process of students at Politeknik Negeri Medan. Students who have good intercultural communication skills have a higher level of adaptation, reduce culture shock, and strengthen social relationships in a multicultural campus environment.

The survey results showed that out of 200 respondents, 80% felt that intercultural communication competency helped them adapt more quickly to a multicultural campus environment. As many as 70% of respondents also stated that they felt more comfortable interacting with students from different cultures after understanding the values of cross-cultural communication. These data support the results of previous studies, which showed the importance of intercultural communication skills in reducing adaptation barriers (Zhang & Zhou, 2020).

Furthermore, 65% of respondents stated that they were able to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts because they had a basic understanding of other cultures. Respondents with higher scores on intercultural communication competency reported lower levels of culture shock and demonstrated better adaptability, both in social and academic contexts.

Structured interviews with 15 students provided a deeper perspective on the challenges and experiences of adapting. Most students interviewed emphasized the importance of empathy and flexibility in communication, especially when interacting with peers from different cultures. One respondent, a Batak student, explained that communicating with Malay students required a more refined understanding of language and culture, which was different from his everyday communication style.

Some students also expressed that they experienced barriers in terms of non-verbal language. For example, students from Java felt hesitant when communicating with friends from the Karo ethnic group who were more expressive. This shows that intercultural communication

competence does not only include verbal understanding, but also mastery of non-verbal aspects that differ across cultures (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003).

From the interview results, 60% of the students interviewed stated that they adapt more easily when the campus environment offers support or cultural introduction programs. Some of them felt that orientation programs that included cross-cultural understanding helped them understand the norms and values held by students from different cultures (Hasibuan, 2020).

The conclusion of the interviews and surveys showed that students with higher intercultural communication competence had more positive adaptation experiences. They tended to be more tolerant and open in understanding differences, which reduced the potential for conflict and increased social integration in the campus environment.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that intercultural communication is an important factor in the adaptation process of new students at Politeknik Negeri Medan. Students who have good intercultural communication skills are better prepared to face academic and social demands in a new environment. The results of this study indicate that programs to improve intercultural communication skills can provide benefits for new students, reduce culture shock, and promote inclusivity. Further research is expected to explore the long-term impacts and strategies to strengthen intercultural communication skills among students.

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