

Culture Shock Experienced by Students from Maluku at Makassar

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Abstract: Culture shock is a condition where individuals feel shocked, confused, anxious, and restless when moving from their home area to a culturally distinct environment. This phenomenon can cause challenges in intercultural communication. This study explores the factors and impacts of culture shock experienced by students from Maluku studying in Makassar. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study draws on primary and secondary data from five student informants through interviews, observations, and documentation. Key findings reveal that language, food, and environmental factors contribute to culture shock, while impacts are categorized into positive (e.g., adaptation, cultural learning) and negative (e.g., anxiety, loss of appetite) outcomes. These findings imply that students need better preparation for transitioning into new cultural contexts.

Keywords: Adaptation, culture shock, intercultural communication, Maluku students

INTRODUCTION

Culture shock occurs when individuals face confusion, anxiety, and unease in a new cultural environment. It often affects those who relocate for long periods, especially students adjusting to educational settings in different cultural contexts. Littlejohn as presented in Suryandari (2012) describes culture shock as a phenomenon experienced during transitions between cultures, marked by challenges in communication, values, and daily practices. The reasons are that different cultures may have different conventions, including in research papers (Arsyad & Adila, 2018; Warsidi et al., 2024), application letters (Warsidi, 2022), etc.

Cultural differences can hinder communication, fostering feelings of alienation and anxiety (Indrianie, 2012). This can lead to significant adaptation challenges for students pursuing education outside their home regions. For instance, Maluku students in Makassar often struggle with language barriers, distinct food preferences, and environmental safety concerns. This research seeks to address the gap in understanding the specific experiences of Maluku students in Makassar, aiming to provide insights for improving cultural adaptation strategies for students in similar situations.

Indonesia's diverse cultural landscape presents unique opportunities and challenges for interregional students. Maluku, known for its rich traditions and cultural heritage, differs significantly from Makassar, a bustling urban hub in South Sulawesi. These contrasts create a fertile ground for studying the dynamics of culture shock. Culture shock has been widely



studied in the context of international students, yet the experiences of interregional students within a multicultural country like Indonesia remain underexplored. Understanding the nuances of these experiences can provide valuable insights into the adaptation processes and strategies required to mitigate culture shock's adverse effects. Additionally, Furnham (2020) argue that culture shock involves not only psychological disorientation but also sociocultural adaptation, which requires learning and navigating new norms. In this regard, emphasizing the adaptation involving cognitive restructuring is essential for students encountering unfamiliar environments. However, studies that emphasize on cultural shock in Indonesian students, particularly from Maluku has received no scholarly attention, and thus, this study intends to analyze factors affecting cultural shocks and the impact behind the cultural shocks in students from Maluku contexts.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to uncover the underlying factors and impacts of culture shock among Maluku students. According Warsidi (2021, 2023), qualitative research is suited for exploring language and social studies, including complex social phenomena. In this regard, five students from Maluku were selected as informants using purposive sampling, ensuring diverse experiences were captured.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through interview, observation, and documentation. In this regard, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather detailed personal experiences. Questions focused on adaptation challenges, coping mechanisms, and cultural perceptions. Then, observations were conducted on identifying behavioral adaptation patterns in real-life settings, including interactions in classrooms and social gatherings. Last, documentation were conducted through analyzing relevant materials such as academic reports, social media interactions, and cultural events were analyzed to triangulate findings.

Theoretical Framework

A theory of cultural adaptation (Oberg, 1960), which outlines the phases of honeymoon, frustration, adjustment, and acceptance, provided the analytical framework for understanding the students' experiences. This framework has been widely used in cross-cultural studies and remains relevant in explaining the emotional and cognitive transitions individuals undergo in new cultural contexts.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Factors Contributing to Culture Shock:

1. **Language Barriers:** Language serves as the primary medium of communication and social integration. Maluku students reported difficulty in communication as

Makassar locals predominantly use their regional language. Although Indonesian serves as a national bridge, dialectical nuances posed challenges. One informant shared, “The local dialect made it difficult to understand even simple interactions, making me feel isolated.” This highlights the need for language adaptability as a critical component of cultural adaptation.

2. **Food Preferences:** Food represents a significant cultural marker. Maluku students struggled to adjust to the distinct culinary styles of Makassar. Many reported a decline in appetite, weight loss, and allergies due to unfamiliar spices and preparation methods. One student mentioned, “I miss the flavors of home; even though I’ve tried local food, it’s not the same.” Consequently, some students opted to cook their meals as a coping mechanism, reflecting a blend of old and new cultural practices.
3. **Environmental Differences:** The urban environment of Makassar contrasts sharply with the familiar surroundings of Maluku. Safety concerns, particularly regarding criminal incidents, were frequently cited. Informants expressed apprehension about venturing out alone, which limited their social interactions and exploration of the city.

Impacts of Culture Shock:

This cultural shock has two kinds of impacts: negative and positive impacts. The negative impacts included psychological stress, such as anxiety and feelings of alienation, physical health issues such as loss of appetite and fatigue, and social withdrawal and limited participation in community activities. Then, the positive impacts include the development of resilience through learning local languages and customs, enhanced problem-solving skills by adapting to new environments, and cultural enrichment through exposure to diverse traditions and practices.

Maluku students employed various strategies to cope with culture shock, including seeking support from fellow students and local communities, participating in cultural exchange programs to bridge understanding, and gradually immersing themselves in local traditions while retaining their cultural identity. These findings align with Ruben and Stewart (1984) on cultural dissonance and adaptation. However, this study provides a localized perspective on interregional dynamics within Indonesia, contributing to the broader discourse on cultural adaptation. In this regard, cultural intelligence (CQ) plays a critical role in overcoming culture shock. Students with higher CQ tend to navigate cultural differences more effectively. Furthermore, Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2018) highlights the importance of mindfulness in intercultural communication, emphasizing that self-awareness and

adaptability can mitigate misunderstandings. Cultural shock is not happened only in the life of direct communication, but it may also happened in various cultural contexts, such as in writing application letters (Warsidi, 2022), research papers (Warsidi et al., 2024; Warsidi et al., 2023), and professional practices (Bhatia, 2014, 2016). Besides, cultural shocks may happen because of three reasons: different cultures, economic problems, social problems (Simanjuntak & Fitriana, 2020), and academics (Bai & Wang, 2024).

Using Oberg's theoretical framework (Oberg, 1960), this study identified that most students progressed through the four adaptation phases. First, honeymoon phase is initial excitement about new opportunities and experiences. Next, frustration phase is challenges such as communication difficulties, homesickness, and cultural misunderstandings. Third, adjustment phase is developing coping mechanisms, such as creating routines and forming social networks. Last, acceptance phase is achieving a sense of balance and integration within the new environment. This finding means that students need to adjust their regular activities through these four phases to minimize their cultural shocks during the new coming in new situation and different cultures.

This finding, thus, recommends four important stages to minimize cultural shock. First is pre-departure training. In this regard, universities can organize cultural orientation sessions for students, providing basic knowledge about the destination's culture, language, and environment. Second is conducting mentorship programs. For example, pairing new students with locals can facilitate smoother cultural and social integration. Third is making cultural exchange activities. For example, encouraging participation in local festivals and events can foster mutual understanding and appreciation. Last is making health and wellness support by providing mental health counseling and dietary guidance with the physical impacts of culture shock.

The personal experiences of the Maluku students highlight unique perspectives. One student shared, "When I first arrived, I was overwhelmed by the fast pace of life in Makassar. It felt like everything moved so quickly compared to the slower rhythm back home." Another expressed gratitude for the support system among fellow Maluku students: "We formed a small community, and it made a huge difference in feeling less alone." These anecdotes underscore the importance of community and shared experiences in navigating cultural transitions.

CONCLUSION

The adaptation process for Maluku students highlights varied challenges across cultural adaptation phases. Language, food, and environmental factors emerged as primary contributors to culture shock. While negative impacts included reduced appetite and environmental apprehensions, students also exhibited positive outcomes, such as cultural learning and self-empowerment.

These findings underscore the need for tailored orientation programs and support systems to facilitate smoother transitions for students. Universities should consider implementing cultural sensitivity workshops and mentorship programs to address these challenges effectively.

Further studies could explore: Comparative analyses of culture shock among students from different regions within Indonesia. The role of digital tools in easing cultural transitions for students. Longitudinal studies to track adaptation over extended periods. Case studies examining successful adaptation stories as models for replication.

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