

Cultural Adaptation of Regional Postgraduate Students at Makassar State University: A Study of Social and Academic Interaction

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the factors that facilitate the cultural adaptation of out-of-town postgraduate students in terms of social and academic interactions at Makassar State University. Out-of-town students often face various challenges, such as cultural differences, more complex learning systems, and limitations in building social networks. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The results of the study indicate that social support from peers, lecturers, and the campus community are the main factors that help students adjust to a new environment. Intercultural communication skills, participation in student organizations, and the use of technology, especially social media and online discussion groups, also contribute to accelerating the process of student adaptation. The main strategies implemented by students in adapting include building academic independence, developing communication skills, and utilizing digital resources to support the learning process and social interactions.

Keywords: Cultural adaptation; out-of-town students; social interaction; academic; adaptation strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education has a strategic role in creating quality and competitive human resources. Universities not only function as centers for the development of science, but also as a place to

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form students' character and social skills. In postgraduate education, students are faced with more complex academic challenges and demands to be independent in learning and conducting scientific research. In Indonesia, many students choose to continue their studies outside their home region or even abroad in order to gain broader academic experience and improve their competence (Yu & Wright, 2024) . Makassar State University (UNM) is one of the universities that is in great demand by students from various regions. Postgraduate students who come from outside the region or are known as out-of-town students certainly face various challenges, especially in the form of cultural adaptation.

adaptation of out-of-town postgraduate students at Makassar State University cannot be separated from various contemporary social issues that affect their social and academic interactions. One of the main issues is the increasing cultural diversity on campus, which is a sign of a change in the social climate. Because of this diversity, students who want to work with friends from different backgrounds need to have good cultural adaptation skills (Ardi & Az Zahra, 2024) . According to (Bella et al., 2023) , the success of cultural adaptation in terms of students' social and academic interactions is supported by the campus community, especially lecturers and fellow students, which are of course very important in helping out-of-town students adapt to life at Makassar State University. Therefore, the ability of out-of-town postgraduate students to successfully adapt to a new culture in their social and academic interactions depends on their understanding of contemporary social issues.

According to (Prayoga & Handoyo, 2023) , one of the strategies used by migrants to adapt to circumstances, customs, and culture in a new environment is cultural adaptation. The process of cultural adaptation will occur if a person shows the ability to change their behavior patterns and character to suit the new environment in which they live (Aneta, 2023) . This adaptation includes various aspects, ranging from adjustments to the social environment, differences in cultural habits, differences in social interactions to academic patterns that may be different from their previous experiences (Susanti et al., 2024) . Social interactions can be relationships between individuals, groups, or between groups and individuals. Social interactions include dynamic social relationships, many social activities that lead to interaction but in this case, the interaction is mostly focused on local students and migrant students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds and make each other uncomfortable due to cultural differences (Ariani, 2024) . Therefore, migrant students need to adjust to the new environment, build friendship networks, and understand the norms and culture that apply in the local community. In the theory of symbolic interaction by Herbert Mead explains how humans communicate and interact using symbols that



are given meaning. These symbols can be in the form of language, gestures, signs or behavior that are understood by the communication participants. Meanwhile, in the academic aspect, students are required to understand a more independent learning system, adapt to more complex research methods, and interact with lecturers and fellow students from various cultural backgrounds. If they are unable to adapt well, students from other regions can experience difficulties in living their academic and social lives (Bibi & Hamida, 2024) .

In this study, there is one research gap that needs to be studied in more depth. Where many students experience obstacles in interacting with their surroundings due to differences in culture, language, and social norms that are different from their area of origin. In addition, in terms of academics, students from other regions often face challenges in adapting to learning methods that require more independence, stricter evaluation systems, and limited access to inadequate academic facilities. The lack of an effective support system from institutions in helping students from other regions adapt further widens this gap, making them vulnerable to academic and social stress that can impact their academic achievement and psychological well-being. This study is reinforced by several previous studies which reveal that students from other regions often experience difficulties in adapting to new situations, both in social and academic aspects. This is in line with research conducted by (Warmasen et al., 2023) entitled " Adaptation of Papuan Students in Banjarmasin" which states that students who study outside their area of origin tend to experience difficulties or find it difficult to adapt in building social networks and face communication barriers due to cultural differences. Another study was also conducted by (Nuzulunni'mah, 2024) with the title "Communication Strategies for Migrant Students Experiencing *Culture Shock* at Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah State Islamic University of Tulungagung" which stated that migrant students experience language limitations which make it difficult for them to interact in their daily lives and make it difficult to adapt.

However, several studies have highlighted the challenges of adaptation of out-of-town students. Most of them still focus on psychological and social aspects, while aspects of social and academic interaction and the role of educational institutions in supporting this adaptation have not been widely studied. A study conducted by (Nugroho & Mareza, 2023) entitled " *Culture Shock* of Out-of-town Students as a Minority Group" stated that out-of-town students often experience higher social and academic pressure than local students, but have not collaborated with factors that can facilitate the adaptation process. Several previous studies, such as that conducted by (Nola et al., 2020) entitled "Adaptation Strategies of Undiksha Students from Jakarta in Social Life in Singaraja City", have discussed the factors that influence the adaptation of out-of-town



students in the academic environment. However, this study is still limited to certain universities and has not specifically examined how out-of-town postgraduate students at Makassar State University face this challenge. Therefore, further research is needed to deeply understand the cultural adaptation strategies of out-of-town postgraduate students at Makassar State University in the study of social and academic interaction.

In understanding the adaptation process of out-of-town postgraduate students at Makassar State University, this research is divided into three problem formulations, namely: (1) what factors can facilitate the adaptation of out-of-town postgraduate students in terms of their social and academic interactions? (2) what strategies are implemented by out-of-town postgraduate students to adjust to the social and academic environment at Makassar State University?

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of understanding in depth the cultural adaptation process of out-of-town postgraduate students at Makassar State University, especially in terms of social and academic interactions. The qualitative method was chosen because it is able to provide an in-depth and holistic picture of the phenomenon being studied (Sugiyono, 2020) . This design was chosen because it is able to describe in detail and in depth the phenomenon of cultural adaptation of out-of-town postgraduate students, including factors that influence the adaptation process, obstacles faced, and strategies used to adjust to the new environment (Nola et al., 2020) . The sample in this study were out-of-town postgraduate students at Makassar State University who came from various regions in Indonesia. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, where researchers selected informants based on certain criteria, such as duration of stay in Makassar, cultural background, and social and academic adaptation experiences (Firmansyah & Dede, 2022) . The data collection technique in this study was through *in-depth interviews* which aimed to explore the experiences, perceptions, and adaptation strategies of out-of-town students at Makassar State University (Susanti et al., 2024) . Then it was carried out by observation, where researchers were directly involved in the daily activities of out-of-town students to understand the dynamics of their social and academic interactions (Hasanah, 2017) . And with documentation, where researchers collected data from relevant documents (Nuzulunni'mah, 2024) . Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques (Byrne, 2022) . To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study used data triangulation techniques. Triangulation is



carried out by combining data from various sources, such as interview results, observations, and documentation (Mullany & Stockwell, 2021) . This allows researchers to verify the accuracy of the data obtained from various perspectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting the interview results and their discussion, it is necessary to understand that cultural adaptation for out-of-town students is a process of adjusting to a new social and academic environment. One of the challenges faced by out-of-town students is the difference in language, customs, culture, and education system compared to their home region (Patawari, 2020) . These challenges often cause culture shock that can affect students' social and academic achievements. The following is a presentation of the research results based on observations and processing of interview data that have been conducted:

Factors that facilitate the adaptation of postgraduate students living away from home in terms of social and academic interactions

One of the most important factors that helps students adapt from other regions is social support. Social support from friends, lecturers, and the local community can help students feel more comfortable in a new environment by reducing stress related to acculturation. Strong communication skills are essential for productive and harmonious interactions, especially in terms of understanding local cultural norms. In addition, because active participation in student organizations and the local community encourages social networks and awareness of local ways of life, this speeds up the adaptation process for students (Suhartono, 2024) . Students who have social support are less likely to experience acculturation stress, which makes it easier for them to adapt to a new environment (Kristiana et al., 2022) . In addition, good intercultural communication skills can facilitate social adaptation. Based on the results of interviews with respondents, who said that;

“In my opinion, the most helpful factor in building social interactions with classmates or the surrounding environment is an open attitude and curiosity. As someone who is in a new area, I try to always listen and understand others, and appreciate the differences in culture and customs that exist. In addition, I also participate in various social activities or study groups which are certainly very effective in strengthening relationships. By showing interest in the things they are interested in, as well as sharing experiences and stories, I feel I can build good



relationships and adapt more easily to the new environment.”

Based on the results of interviews with respondents, it shows that the main factors that facilitate the adaptation of out-of-town postgraduate students at Makassar State University in social interactions are social support, communication skills, involvement in campus organizations, and understanding of local culture. Students who have a wide network of friends and receive guidance from lecturers and friends tend to adapt more easily to their social environment. Respondents said that interactions with local students helped them understand the prevailing social norms and adapt to the dynamics of campus life. In addition, involvement in student organizations allows them to more actively participate in social activities that accelerate the process of cultural adaptation.

In the interview, the respondent also stated that openness and curiosity play an important role in building social interactions with other students. He also emphasized that participation in social activities and study groups makes it easier for him to establish closer relationships with his surroundings. This is in line with research (Suhartono, 2024) , which states that out-of-town students who are active in social organizations adapt more quickly to new environments than those who tend to isolate themselves. In addition, another factor found in the interview results is the role of communication in building good social relationships. Students who have good intercultural communication skills find it easier to understand cultural differences and adapt to social norms that apply in the academic environment. In his statement (Kristiana et al., 2022) , emphasized that effective communication can reduce acculturation stress and increase the success of social adaptation of international students. In addition, language barriers are also a factor that influences the social interactions of out-of-town students. The inability to understand or use the local language can hinder communication and cause feelings of isolation. Based on the results of interviews with respondents, who said that;

“There are local dialects that are too fast with many affixes and different intonations of stress that sometimes make it difficult for me to understand the information given, especially messages in text form. I try to ask friends who I trust can explain the meaning correctly.”

Based on the results of interviews with respondents who revealed that the main challenge in social interaction is language differences that cause misunderstandings in communication. Fast local dialects and the use of certain affixes make it difficult to understand conversations, especially in informal communication. To overcome this, he tried to ask friends who could explain the meaning more precisely. This is in line with the theory of intercultural communication which states



that language barriers can hinder social interaction, but can be overcome with effective communication adaptation (Utami, 2020) . Language differences are often a significant challenge in intercultural communication. Not only does it include differences in vocabulary, but it also involves aspects of accent, speech rate, and understanding of different cultural contexts. This can cause obstacles in conveying messages and potential misunderstandings (Pratama, 2020) . In addition, differences in cultural values, norms, and perceptions can exacerbate communication barriers, potentially leading to misunderstandings and conflicts. Thus, language differences in intercultural communication require special attention and effective strategies to ensure smooth communication and better understanding between individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Khotimah et al., 2024) .

In addition to cultural adaptation in terms of social interaction, academic adaptation of overseas postgraduate students is also a factor that can help students in cultural adaptation activities. Where the factor that can facilitate the process is social support, research shows that strong social support can improve students' ability to adapt in facing challenges in a new environment. Based on the results of interviews with respondents who said that;

"The role of lecturers is very important in helping me adapt to an academic system that is different from my previous experiences. Lecturers at the master's level provide clear direction about academic expectations, such as academic writing standards, research, and deeper critical thinking. They also often provide constructive feedback that really helps me understand my strengths and areas that need improvement. In addition, lecturers also often provide opportunities for students to ask questions and seek clarification on material that is not well understood. This makes it very easy for me to adjust to higher academic demands and speeds up my adaptation process."

Based on the results of interviews with respondents, it was revealed that lecturers play a very important role in helping postgraduate students from Makassar State University adjust to academic demands that are different from their previous experiences. Lecturers not only act as teachers, but also as mentors who provide clear direction regarding academic expectations, writing standards, research, and the development of critical thinking skills. The role of lecturers as academic mentors includes assisting students in preparing study plans, choosing courses, and providing guidance in preparing final assignments or theses and dissertations. This guidance is very important to ensure that students can complete their studies well and on time. Thus, the active and supportive role of lecturers is very important in facilitating the adaptation of academic



culture of postgraduate students from Makassar, helping them navigate the new academic system, and achieving success in their studies. This study is in line with research (Yu & Wright, 2024) which states that effective communication between international students and lecturers is a major factor in accelerating the academic adaptation process. Lecturer guidance not only improves academic understanding but also provides clarity about academic expectations and deeper critical thinking. This study is supported by research (Bella et al., 2023) which states that migrant students who actively participate in academic and social activities have a better level of adaptation. The role of lecturers as academic mentors is very helpful in preparing students to face higher academic challenges at the postgraduate level.

Strategies implemented by out-of-town postgraduate students to adapt to the social and academic environment

Out-of-town postgraduate students implement various strategies to adapt to new social and academic environments. One of the main strategies is to build independence in managing daily life and facing academic challenges more independently. Develop communication skills by learning the local language or dialect to facilitate social interactions and avoid cultural misunderstandings. Building a social network is also an important step in adaptation, where out-of-town students seek support from friends, academic communities, and campus organizations to expand social relationships and obtain useful information for their academic lives. Participation in campus activities and student organizations helps them understand social norms in the new environment and increases a sense of togetherness with local students (Yu & Wright, 2024). Based on the results of interviews with respondents who said that;

“To build relationships with classmates and other students from different cultural backgrounds, I start with an open and curious attitude. I try to listen to their stories and learn about their cultures, both through informal conversations and by participating in campus activities involving students from different backgrounds. I also always try to respect differences and adjust the way I interact, for example by paying attention to cultural norms that are different from my home area, such as how to speak or how to respect others.”

Based on the results of interviews with respondents, it was revealed that openness and curiosity play an important role in this adaptation process. By being open, postgraduate students from Makassar State University show a willingness to understand and accept cultural differences, which can enrich their experiences and facilitate social integration. Curiosity drives them to learn



about other cultures, both through informal conversations and participation in campus activities involving students from various backgrounds. This is a strategy implemented by postgraduate students from other cultures who often face challenges in adjusting to new social and academic environments. This approach is in line with the concept of acculturation, where individuals adopt attitudes, principles, and habits from other cultures to achieve better adaptation (Robina et al., 2024) . In addition, another strategy used to adapt to the social and academic environment is the application of good technology. Technology plays a significant role in helping postgraduate students adjust to new social and academic environments. In terms of social interaction, information and communication technology allows students to stay connected with family and friends in their hometowns through social media platforms and instant messaging applications, thereby reducing feelings of longing and isolation. In addition, technology facilitates introduction and interaction with other students from different cultures through online forums, discussion groups, and virtual communities, which help them understand local social and cultural norms. In the academic context, technology provides access to digital learning resources, such as e-books, e-journals, and e-learning platforms, which enable students to study independently and flexibly (Simamora et al., 2023) . Technology also supports academic collaboration through video conferencing tools and co-working platforms, allowing students to participate in group projects and class discussions without geographical barriers. Based on the results of interviews with respondents who said that;

“The role of technology, especially social media and online discussion groups, has been very influential in helping me adjust to my new social and academic environment. Social media gives me the opportunity to connect with classmates, campus organizations, and local communities before I actually meet them in person. This makes it easier for me to learn more about campus activities, social events, and other things that are happening around me. Through this platform, I can easily discuss lecture materials, share adaptation tips, and get social support from friends who are also going through the adaptation process. This technology allows me to stay connected to my new social environment even though I am still in the adaptation stage, and makes me feel more accepted and helped in interacting.”

Based on the results of interviews with respondents, it was revealed that the use of technology, especially social media and online discussion groups, plays an important role in helping students who are away from home adjust to their new social and academic environment.



Through social media, students can connect with classmates, campus organizations, and local communities before meeting in person, making it easier for them to get to know campus activities and social events around them. This platform also allows discussions about lecture materials, sharing adaptation tips, and getting social support from friends who are also going through the adaptation process. Thus, technology helps students stay connected to their new social environment, making them feel more accepted and helped in interacting. This study is in line with the findings of (Rabaani & Indriyani, 2023) which state that there is a significant relationship between the use of social media and students' academic achievement, where social media facilitates access to academic information and communication with fellow students. This study is also supported by research (Fikri et al., 2021) which states that social media can increase students' academic productivity by providing a platform for discussion and collaboration. In addition, social media also plays a role in increasing students' social interactions, helping them build networks and adapt to new social environments. Overall, technology, especially social media and online discussion groups, can be an effective strategy for out-of-town postgraduate students at Makassar State University in adjusting to new social and academic environments, as long as it is used wisely and in balance.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study revealed that the cultural adaptation of out-of-town postgraduate students at Makassar State University is influenced by various factors in terms of social and academic interaction. Social support from peers, lecturers, and the campus community is the main factor that makes it easier for students to adapt to a new environment. Students who have good intercultural communication skills tend to adapt more easily to cultural differences and prevailing social norms. In addition, involvement in student organizations and campus social activities contributes to increased social interaction and building a wide network of friends. In terms of academics, out-of-town postgraduate students face challenges in adjusting to a more independent learning system and more complex academic demands. The role of lecturers in providing direction, constructive feedback, and opportunities for discussion greatly helps students understand the expected academic standards. Technology, especially social media and online discussion platforms, is also an effective strategy in accelerating students' adaptation to the academic and social environment. The use of this technology helps students to obtain academic information, communicate with peers, and keep up with developments on campus and the local community. Although there are various factors supporting adaptation, out-of-town postgraduate



students also face obstacles, such as language differences, different social norms, and higher academic pressure. However, with the right strategies, such as building communication skills, seeking social support, utilizing technology, and being open to cultural diversity, students can speed up their adaptation process in a new environment.

Based on the findings of this study, there are several suggestions that can be given to out-of-town students, educational institutions, and campus communities. Out-of-town postgraduate students are advised to be active in seeking social support, both from peers and lecturers, and to participate in campus organizations to better understand the academic and social culture in the new environment. For educational institutions, universities can improve orientation programs for out-of-town students by providing more intensive academic and social assistance. This program can include intercultural communication skills training, discussion sessions with senior students, and the provision of academic and psychological counseling services that can help out-of-town students cope with academic and social pressures. In addition, the campus community, including local lecturers and students, is expected to be more open and inclusive towards out-of-town students. Increasing interaction and collaboration between local students and out-of-town students in various academic and social activities will strengthen the sense of togetherness and accelerate their cultural adaptation process. With joint efforts from students, institutions, and campus communities, the adaptation process of out-of-town postgraduate students can run more effectively and support their academic success and social well-being.

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