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Cultural Acculturation among Transmigration Communities in Indonesia: Implications for Local Integration and National Identity Formation

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Abstract

This study examines how cultural acculturation among transmigration communities contributes to local integration and national identity formation in Indonesia. Although transmigration has long been discussed as a demographic and development policy, its cultural consequences require a more integrated analytical explanation. Using an integrative qualitative literature review, this article synthesizes previous studies on transmigration, intercultural communication, religious-cultural integration, artistic expression, economic adaptation, and local community relations. The analysis identifies five interrelated mechanisms of acculturation: mutual cultural adaptation, negotiation of social boundaries, mediation through religion and performing arts, economic interaction and entrepreneurial learning, and institutional support through education and public policy. The findings show that transmigration-based acculturation is neither a linear process of assimilation nor a simple preservation of ethnic identity. Instead, it is a dynamic process through which migrant and local communities selectively adopt, reinterpret, and institutionalize cultural practices. The study contributes to migration and cultural studies by proposing an integrative framework for understanding acculturation as a mechanism for strengthening Indonesia's plural national culture while also acknowledging potential tensions, conflicts, and policy challenges.

Keywords: Acculturation; Transmigration Community; Local Integration; National Culture; Cultural Identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as a multicultural and archipelagic nation in which ethnic, linguistic, religious, and regional diversity forms an essential basis of social life. Within this context, transmigration has not only functioned as a population redistribution program but has also produced long-term cultural encounters between migrant communities and local populations. These encounters have shaped everyday practices, social relations, economic adaptation, religious expression, and collective understandings of Indonesian national culture.

Historically, transmigration was designed to address demographic imbalance, regional development, and resource distribution. However, the program also generated complex socio-cultural consequences. Migrant communities brought languages, rituals, religious practices, agricultural knowledge, trading habits, and social norms from their regions of origin. Local communities, at the same time, responded through acceptance, negotiation, selective adaptation, and, in some cases, resistance. The meeting of these cultural systems created an acculturation process that continues to influence social cohesion and identity formation in many regions of Indonesia.

Previous studies have examined various dimensions of transmigration-related acculturation. Dewi and Riyanto (2022), for example, discuss assimilation and acculturation in wedding processions among transmigrant communities in Bumi Minangkabau. Putra (2017) analyzes the acculturation process between Paser communities and Javanese transmigrants in East Kalimantan. Karlina et al. (2021) explore intercultural communication patterns between transmigrant and local communities, while Sholehah (2021) examines workplace cultural acculturation among Madurese employees in West Kotawaringin. These studies reveal that acculturation occurs across domestic, ceremonial, communicative, economic, and occupational spaces.

Other studies emphasize religion, art, and entrepreneurship as important cultural mediators. Kohar and Hasan (2018) highlight the integration of Islamic culture among transmigrant communities in West Sumatra. Pangastuti (2021) shows how performing arts, particularly karawitan and dance, become spaces for cultural exchange in Lampung. Fitri et al. (2022) demonstrate that the Javanese transmigrant trading concept can be adapted as a source of entrepreneurial character education in Tanah Mandar. These findings suggest that acculturation is not confined to symbolic culture but is embedded in daily social practice and economic life.

Despite this growing body of literature, the existing discussion remains fragmented. Many

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studies focus on specific local cases, but fewer studies synthesize how these cases collectively contribute to an understanding of national cultural development. There is also limited conceptual integration between acculturation theory, migration studies, intercultural communication, and national identity formation. As a result, the broader implications of transmigration-based acculturation for Indonesian national culture remain insufficiently theorized.

This article addresses this gap by developing an integrative literature-based analysis of cultural acculturation among transmigration communities in Indonesia. The study is guided by three questions: first, what are the dominant mechanisms through which transmigrant and local communities engage in cultural acculturation? Second, how do social, religious, artistic, economic, and institutional domains mediate this process? Third, what are the implications of transmigration-based acculturation for local integration and national identity formation?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Acculturation is generally understood as the process of cultural change that occurs when groups with different cultural backgrounds come into continuous contact. Early definitions emphasized changes in the cultural patterns of either or both groups involved in contact (Redfield et al., 1936). Later developments in acculturation theory emphasized that cultural contact may produce different outcomes, including integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 1997, 2005). These outcomes depend on the extent to which minority and majority groups maintain their cultural identities while engaging in broader social relations.

In the Indonesian transmigration context, acculturation should not be viewed as the simple absorption of migrant culture into local culture or the replacement of local culture by migrant culture. Rather, it is more accurately interpreted as a negotiated and relational process. Migrants and local communities continuously evaluate which cultural practices are acceptable, useful, compatible, or contested. This process is shaped by power relations, demographic composition, religion, economic dependence, public policy, educational institutions, and everyday communication.

The concept of national culture is also dynamic. National culture is not a fixed inheritance but a continuously negotiated symbolic field that draws from local traditions, shared civic values, and national narratives. Hall (1990) argues that cultural identity is formed through both continuity and difference. In multicultural societies, national identity emerges not by eliminating cultural differences but by organizing diversity into a shared framework of belonging. This perspective is particularly relevant to Indonesia, where the national motto Bhinneka Tunggal Ika provides an

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ideological foundation for unity in diversity.

Based on these theoretical insights, this study conceptualizes transmigration-based acculturation as a multi-level process involving micro-level everyday interaction, meso-level community institutions, and macro-level national policy. At the micro level, acculturation occurs through language use, marriage, neighborhood relations, religious ceremonies, trade, and work. At the meso level, it is mediated by schools, religious institutions, cultural organizations, markets, and village governance. At the macro level, it is influenced by development policy, citizenship discourse, and national cultural narratives.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies an integrative qualitative literature review approach. An integrative review is appropriate because the objective of the article is not to measure the magnitude of a single variable but to synthesize conceptual and empirical insights from diverse studies on transmigration, acculturation, local integration, and national culture. This approach allows the researcher to compare findings across different regions and identify recurring mechanisms that explain the broader cultural implications of transmigration.

The literature was selected purposively from academic journal articles, seminar proceedings, theses, dissertations, and theoretical works relevant to the topics of acculturation, transmigration communities, intercultural communication, cultural identity, and national cultural development in Indonesia. The main empirical sources include studies by Dewi and Riyanto (2022), Putra (2017), Karlina et al. (2021), Sholehah (2021), Pangastuti (2021), Fitri et al. (2022), Paramika (2024), Andrian (2020), Kohar and Hasan (2018), and Nurhaini et al. (2019). These sources were complemented by international theoretical literature on acculturation, migration, multicultural citizenship, and cultural identity.

The inclusion criteria were: (1) studies addressing interaction between transmigrant and local communities; (2) studies focusing on cultural, religious, communicative, artistic, educational, or economic aspects of acculturation; (3) studies located in the Indonesian context; and (4) studies offering empirical or conceptual relevance to national cultural development. Sources that only discussed transmigration from a demographic or administrative perspective without cultural analysis were not prioritized.

Data analysis was conducted through thematic synthesis. First, the selected literature was read to identify key claims, research contexts, and cultural domains. Second, recurrent patterns were coded into thematic categories such as mutual adaptation, conflict and negotiation, religious

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integration, artistic mediation, economic adaptation, and institutional support. Third, the themes were interpreted using acculturation theory and cultural identity theory to construct an integrative explanation of how transmigration-based acculturation contributes to national identity formation.

Table 1. Thematic Synthesis of Selected Literature

Theme	Supporting literature	Analytical synthesis	Implication
Mutual cultural adaptation	Putra (2017); Nurhaini et al. (2019)	Transmigrant and local communities selectively adopt cultural practices through daily contact.	Acculturation works as reciprocal adaptation, not one-way assimilation.
Conflict and negotiation	Dewi & Riyanto (2022)	Marriage rituals and customary practices may produce tension when cultural norms differ.	Dialogue and local mediation are required to prevent cultural friction.
Religious-cultural integration	Kohar & Hasan (2018); Andrian (2020)	Religion can become a bridge for social integration while also shaping cultural boundaries.	Religious institutions can support inclusive identity formation.
Artistic and symbolic mediation	Pangastuti (2021)	Performing arts provide a space for shared expression and cultural appreciation.	Art can strengthen recognition of cultural diversity.
Economic and educational adaptation	Sholehah (2021); Fitri et al. (2022)	Workplace culture, trading practices, and entrepreneurship education connect cultural values to livelihood strategies.	Economic collaboration can transform acculturation into social capital.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Acculturation as Reciprocal Adaptation

The reviewed literature indicates that transmigration-based acculturation is best understood as reciprocal adaptation. Transmigrant communities do not merely transfer their

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culture into destination areas; they also adapt to local norms, social expectations, ecological conditions, and institutional arrangements. Local communities, in turn, do not passively receive migrant culture but negotiate which elements can be accepted, modified, or resisted. This reciprocal process is evident in studies of Paser and Javanese communities, where everyday interaction gradually creates shared practices without necessarily eliminating ethnic distinctions (Putra, 2017).

This finding challenges a narrow assimilationist interpretation of transmigration. Assimilation implies that one group eventually loses its cultural characteristics and becomes absorbed into another. In many transmigration settings, however, cultural boundaries remain visible while interaction becomes more cooperative. Migrant and local groups may retain distinct languages, rituals, or kinship practices, but they also develop shared economic routines, neighborhood cooperation, and community ceremonies. Therefore, integration is a more suitable concept than assimilation for explaining the Indonesian transmigration experience.

2. Social Boundaries, Conflict, and Cultural Negotiation

Acculturation does not always occur harmoniously. Cultural contact may create tension, especially when ritual obligations, marriage practices, land use, religious norms, or customary authority are interpreted differently by migrant and local communities. Dewi and Riyanto (2022) show that wedding processions in Bumi Minangkabau involve both assimilation and conflict. This indicates that cultural ceremonies are not merely symbolic events; they are also arenas where identity, authority, and social recognition are negotiated.

From an acculturation theory perspective, conflict is not necessarily evidence of failed integration. Instead, conflict often reveals that cultural groups are actively negotiating the terms of coexistence. The key issue is whether these tensions are mediated through inclusive dialogue, customary institutions, religious leaders, village governance, or educational spaces. Without mediation, cultural differences may harden into social distance. With proper mediation, however, difference can become a basis for mutual recognition and the strengthening of local social cohesion.

3. Religion, Art, and Cultural Mediation

Religion plays a central role in many transmigration communities. In several contexts, shared Islamic practices provide a bridge for communication and solidarity between migrants and local residents. Kohar and Hasan (2018) demonstrate that Islam among transmigrant communities

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in West Sumatra functions not only as a religious identity but also as a cultural framework through which integration is negotiated. Religion can therefore support acculturation when it emphasizes shared ethical values, social responsibility, and mutual respect.

Art also functions as an important medium of acculturation. Pangastuti's (2021) study of karawitan and Bala dance in Lampung illustrates that performing arts enable communities to exchange cultural meanings in non-confrontational ways. Artistic performance provides a shared space where local and migrant identities can be expressed, appreciated, and reinterpreted. In this sense, art serves as both a cultural archive and a dialogical medium. It allows communities to preserve difference while simultaneously creating new hybrid forms of collective expression.

4. Economic Interaction and Entrepreneurial Learning

Economic interaction is another significant mechanism of acculturation. Transmigrant communities often bring agricultural, trading, or occupational practices that influence local livelihood strategies. Sholehah (2021) shows that workplace culture among Madurese employees affects patterns of social and economic interaction in West Kotawaringin. Fitri et al. (2022) further demonstrate that the Javanese transmigrant trading concept in Tanah Mandar can be adapted as a source of entrepreneurial character education.

These studies suggest that acculturation is not only a cultural-symbolic process but also an economic one. Markets, workplaces, agricultural activities, and trading networks create spaces for routine interaction. Through these spaces, communities learn practical values such as discipline, cooperation, trust, negotiation, and adaptability. Economic collaboration can transform cultural difference into social capital, especially when migrant and local communities recognize mutual benefit in shared livelihood development.

5. Institutional Support, Education, and Public Policy

The acculturation process is strongly influenced by institutions and public policy. Schools, village governments, religious institutions, cultural organizations, and local development programs can either facilitate or hinder intercultural integration. When institutions promote inclusive participation, cultural diversity can become a resource for community development. When institutions ignore local cultural sensitivities, acculturation may be perceived as domination, displacement, or cultural erosion.

Education is particularly important because it shapes how younger generations understand cultural diversity. Curriculum, character education, local history, and community-

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based learning can help students appreciate both migrant and local cultural contributions. This is consistent with the argument that national identity in a multicultural society should not be built through cultural uniformity but through the recognition and ethical management of diversity. Therefore, education can become a strategic instrument for transforming acculturation into civic integration.

6. Implications for National Cultural Identity

The overall synthesis shows that transmigration-based acculturation contributes to national cultural identity by connecting local diversity with shared national belonging. National culture is strengthened not when local cultures disappear, but when different cultural communities are able to coexist, interact, and contribute to a broader collective narrative. In Indonesia, this process resonates with the principle of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, which recognizes diversity as the basis of unity rather than as an obstacle to national cohesion.

However, the contribution of acculturation to national culture is not automatic. It depends on the quality of intercultural communication, fairness of policy implementation, sensitivity to local traditions, and availability of inclusive institutional spaces. If acculturation is managed through domination, it may generate cultural resistance. If it is managed through recognition, participation, and dialogue, it can strengthen both local integration and national identity formation. Thus, transmigration should be analyzed not only as a demographic policy but also as a long-term cultural process that shapes the meaning of Indonesian citizenship.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that cultural acculturation among transmigration communities in Indonesia is a complex, reciprocal, and multi-dimensional process. It occurs through everyday interaction, marriage, religious practice, artistic expression, economic cooperation, workplace relations, education, and public policy. The process cannot be reduced to simple assimilation because transmigrant and local communities often maintain distinct identities while simultaneously developing shared practices and social networks.

The main contribution of this article is the development of an integrative understanding of transmigration-based acculturation as a mechanism of local integration and national identity formation. The analysis identifies five key mechanisms: mutual adaptation, negotiation of social boundaries, mediation through religion and art, economic interaction and entrepreneurial learning, and institutional support. These mechanisms show that national culture is not a static

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cultural product but a dynamic field formed through continuous interaction among diverse communities.

The practical implication is that government, educational institutions, and local stakeholders need to manage acculturation through participatory and culturally sensitive approaches. Policies should protect the cultural rights of local communities while also supporting the social inclusion of transmigrant communities. Intercultural dialogue, local wisdom-based education, community arts, religious moderation, and economic collaboration can serve as strategic instruments for strengthening social cohesion.

This study is limited by its reliance on literature review rather than primary fieldwork. Future research should conduct comparative ethnographic studies across different transmigration regions in Indonesia to examine how acculturation varies according to ethnicity, religion, economic structure, land relations, and regional policy. Quantitative or mixed-method studies may also be developed to measure the relationship between acculturation, social cohesion, and national identity among transmigrant and local communities.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research should move beyond single-case descriptions and develop comparative models of transmigration-based acculturation across regions. Studies in Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, and Papua may reveal different patterns of interaction depending on local demographic composition, customary institutions, religious configuration, and development history. Such comparative work would help explain why acculturation in some regions strengthens cooperation while in other regions it produces tension or social distance.

Further studies should also examine the role of younger generations, digital media, and local education in reshaping cultural identity. Social media has expanded the space of cultural interaction beyond direct face-to-face contact. Young people from transmigrant and local backgrounds may construct hybrid identities through schools, digital platforms, peer networks, and creative cultural practices. Understanding these new forms of acculturation is important for designing inclusive cultural policy and strengthening Indonesia's plural national identity in the digital era.

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