

Communication Barriers and Adaptation Process of Students from Pekanbaru: A Case Study at Telkom University

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Abstract

This study investigates the communication barriers and adaptation process experienced by students from Pekanbaru at Telkom University, Bandung. Guided by intercultural communication theory, communication barrier theory, and adaptation process theory, this research explores how linguistic, cultural, and psychological differences impact their integration in a multicultural academic setting. Using a qualitative case study method, data were gathered from in-depth interviews with 11 student informants and one expert. The results show that Pekanbaru students face linguistic difficulties due to unfamiliar dialects, cultural mismatches in communication style, and psychological barriers like low confidence and anxiety. However, through cultural learning, social engagement, and psychological adjustment, they gradually adapt to the campus environment. This study highlights the need for culturally responsive institutional support to foster inclusive educational experiences.

Keywords: intercultural communication, communication barriers, adaptation process

I. INTRODUCTION

Student mobility between regions in the context of higher education in Indonesia is increasing. One notable phenomenon is the migration of students from Pekanbaru to major cities such as Bandung, including Telkom University. This movement brings potential for intellectual and personal growth, but also significant challenges in terms of communication and cultural adaptation. Students from Pekanbaru with a Minang-Malay cultural background tend to use a polite and indirect communication style. When faced with the more relaxed and direct communication culture in Bandung, this often leads to cultural clashes that create communication barriers.

These communication barriers include differences in accent, language structure, and nonverbal expressions, particularly in the use of local dialects such as Sundanese. Students also experience psychological pressure in the form of feelings of inferiority and concerns about being misunderstood. These barriers not only impact social life but also affect academic performance and participation in class discussions. When students are unable to adapt their communication style, they often choose to remain silent or withdraw from the campus social environment.

Self-adjustment or the adaptation process is crucial in overcoming these communication barriers. Adaptation is achieved through three main methods: cultural learning, social engagement, and psychological adjustment. Students learn to understand local communication norms, build social relationships through student organizations, and manage psychological stress through peer support. However, this adaptation process is not always easy, especially without adequate institutional support from the university.

Based on an initial survey of 40 students from Pekanbaru at Telkom University, more than 60% stated that language and cultural differences were the main challenges in their adaptation process. Additionally, more than half of the respondents acknowledged experiencing culture shock, which impacted their confidence in communication. These findings indicate that cross-cultural communication is not only a challenge between nations but also relevant within Indonesia's multicultural domestic context.

Therefore, this study aims to uncover the communication barriers faced by students from Pekanbaru at Telkom University, as well as the adaptation strategies they employ. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by students from different cultural backgrounds, as well as offer practical recommendations for creating a more inclusive and culturally responsive campus environment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication refers to the process of exchanging messages between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. According to (N. Martin & K. Nakayama, 2010), differences in values, norms, language, and communication styles can create challenges in interactions. In the context of students in Pekanbaru, barriers arise due to the mismatch between their polite and indirect communication style and the dominant direct and casual communication style in Bandung. Therefore, intercultural communication competencies such as empathy, cultural awareness, and flexibility are crucial in supporting the adaptation process.

B. Communication Barriers

Communication barriers are obstacles to effective message exchange, whether linguistic, cultural, or psychological. (Panocová, 2020) explains that these barriers often take the form of misunderstandings due to accents, different communication styles, and fear of being misinterpreted. Students in Pekanbaru frequently encounter difficulties in understanding local expressions or using terms that are common in the Bandung area, which affects their participation in academic and social activities.

C. Adaptation Process

(Levy, 2020) views adaptation as a dynamic process that includes behavioral change, emotional management, and cognitive flexibility. The three main strategies used by students in Pekanbaru are: (1) cultural learning through observation and interaction, (2) social involvement in campus organizations and social circles, and (3) psychological adjustment through peer support and resilience development.

D. Student Culture in Pekanbaru

The culture of students in Pekanbaru is influenced by Minangkabau, Malay, and Batak values. The Minangkabau tradition of *merantau* emphasizes the importance of seeking knowledge outside one's region, but the communication style remains polite and non-confrontational. This collective nature often clashes with the individualistic norms of the Bandung academic environment, which demands openness and active participation.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a constructivist paradigm based on the view that reality is subjective and shaped through social interaction. This paradigm allows researchers to understand the experiences of Pekanbaru students from their own perspective, particularly in interpreting communication barriers and adaptation strategies in the Telkom University environment.

The research method used is a qualitative method with a case study approach. This approach was chosen because it can deeply explore the phenomenon of intercultural communication experienced by a group of students in a specific context, namely students from Pekanbaru who are studying at Telkom University, Bandung. The case study allows researchers to explore the interaction between cultural backgrounds, campus social dynamics, and individual responses to adaptation challenges.

The research subjects consisted of 11 active students from Pekanbaru who had completed at least one year of study at Telkom University, as well as one expert in intercultural communication. Informants were selected purposively, considering diversity in terms of academic year, gender, and organizational experience. The research focused on communication barriers and adaptation processes during their academic and social campus life.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, both face-to-face and online via Zoom. Additionally, the researcher observed student interactions in classrooms and organizational activities to capture

communication dynamics that may not be fully revealed in interviews. Documentation such as transcripts, pre-survey forms, and interview recordings were also used to strengthen data validity.

Data analysis techniques employed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, involving data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was tested using source and method triangulation techniques, including comparing interview results with observations and expert informant opinions. This step ensured that the findings reflected the reality experienced by the informants within the campus context.

Overall, this approach enables researchers to understand the complexity of communication barriers and adaptation strategies from the contextual perspective of Pekanbaru students. By focusing on subjective experiences and social interactions in a multicultural campus environment, this study provides an in-depth understanding of the challenges and potential solutions for higher education institutions in building a more inclusive environment.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals that students from Pekanbaru at Telkom University face various communication barriers stemming from linguistic, cultural, and psychological differences. The dominant linguistic barrier is the difficulty in understanding local dialects such as Sundanese and Bandung-specific slang terms. This leads to misunderstandings in everyday conversations and makes students feel less confident in interacting, especially in academic contexts such as class discussions or presentations.

In addition to language barriers, differences in communication styles also pose a challenge. The Pekanbaru culture, which tends to be polite, indirect, and focused on maintaining group harmony, often conflicts with the more open, relaxed, and individualistic communication culture in Bandung. These differences cause Pekanbaru students to feel awkward, misunderstood, and even avoid interacting with local students out of fear of not being accepted or being seen as different.

Psychologically, Pekanbaru students experience emotional stress such as shame, anxiety, and inferiority. Some informants admitted to being afraid of speaking incorrectly or being embarrassed because of their different accents. This sense of alienation causes some students to withdraw from social interactions and only interact within circles of fellow students from the same region. This, of course, hinders the social integration process on campus.

Nevertheless, most informants demonstrated good adaptability. They learned to understand local culture through daily interactions, joining student organizations, and forming friendships across regions. Cultural learning occurred informally, such as observing classmates' speaking styles, participating in campus activities, or seeking help from close friends to understand local terms.

Social involvement also plays an important role in the adaptation process. Some informants are active in campus organizations, such as the Student Association and DPM, which allows them to build relationships with students from various regions. Through this involvement, they learn to adjust their communication style without losing their own cultural identity. Additionally, support from fellow students from Pekanbaru is an important factor in building a sense of security and emotional support.

From these findings, it is evident that the adaptation process for Pekanbaru students is not merely about language adjustment but also involves changes in attitude, thinking patterns, and emotional management. Adaptation is not a linear process but a dynamic one influenced by social interaction, personal readiness, and environmental support. Therefore, institutional support such as cross-cultural orientation programs, communication training, and psychological counseling is essential to facilitate a more inclusive and effective adaptation process.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

This study concludes that students from Pekanbaru at Telkom University face complex communication barriers, including linguistic, cultural, and psychological differences. These barriers interfere with their academic and social participation and cause feelings of alienation. However, through cultural learning, social engagement, and psychological adjustment, most students are able to develop effective adaptation strategies. This adaptation process demonstrates that cross-cultural communication is not only influenced by language proficiency but also by mental readiness and adequate social support.

B. Recommendation

Based on the findings, it is recommended that universities, particularly Telkom University, develop Based on these findings, the author recommends that the university provide a more comprehensive cultural orientation program for students from outside the region. Intercultural communication training, peer mentoring, and counseling services need to be integrated into the campus support system. Additionally, it is important for local students and student organizations to create an open and inclusive environment that embraces cultural diversity. With strong institutional support and a welcoming social environment, students from diverse cultural backgrounds will have greater opportunities to thrive academically and personally.

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