



## CULTURE SHOCK PHENOMENON IN NORTH SUMATERA STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATION SCIENCE STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

*The phenomenon of culture shock poses significant challenges for Communication Studies students at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU) as they navigate a diverse educational environment. This study carefully examines students' experiences in managing complex cultural differences within the campus setting. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, we thoroughly investigate the factors influencing culture shock, such as differences in language, social norms, and cultural values. In-depth interviews with Communication Studies students from outside North Sumatra provide valuable insights into their adaptation to a new environment. Our research definitively identifies a range of students' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to culture shock, including stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation. Students often struggle with difficulties in understanding and communicating local social norms and customs that differ from their own. However, our findings highlight the resilience of many students who, through peer support and their own adaptive strategies, are able to adjust effectively to their new environment.*

**Keywords:** Culture Shock, Adaptation, University Student.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Culture shock is a significant issue faced by students in higher education, particularly those who move to a new cultural environment for their studies (Pacheco, 2020; Raja et al., 2023). Adjusting to a new cultural setting can be challenging and overwhelming, leading to a variety of psychological and social difficulties (Mohammadian et al., 2021; Neville et al., 2021). In North Sumatra State Islamic University, students of Communication Science often experience culture shock due

to the diverse cultural backgrounds they encounter. According to a recent survey conducted among these students, over 60% reported feeling disoriented and stressed during their initial months at the university (Son et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2022). This highlights the pressing need to address the culture shock phenomenon to enhance the well-being and academic performance of students (Almukdad & Karadag, 2024; Ayub et al., 2024).

Literature on culture shock suggests that it is a common experience among individuals who enter a new cultural environment (Asteria et al., 2021; Sahin, 2018). Various studies have documented the stages of culture shock and its impact on mental health and social integration (Ramirez et al., 2023; Viskovich & Pakenham, 2020). According to Oberg (1960), culture shock involves stages such as honeymoon, frustration, adjustment, and adaptation. Further research by Thomas et al (2021) indicates that unresolved culture shock can lead to long-term psychological distress and impede academic success (Mulyaningrum & Asih, 2020). These findings underscore the importance of understanding and mitigating culture shock among university students (Almukdad & Karadag, 2024; Bai & Wang, 2024).

The existing literature provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the culture shock phenomenon and its implications for student populations (Raja et al., 2023).

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the culture shock phenomenon among Communication Science students at North Sumatra State Islamic University. Understanding the specific experiences and challenges faced by these students can inform the development of effective support mechanisms. This research aims to identify the key factors contributing to culture shock, the stages students go through, and the coping strategies they employ. By examining these aspects, the study seeks to provide actionable insights for university administrators and policymakers. Ultimately, the goal is to enhance the academic and social experiences of Communication Science students by addressing the culture shock phenomenon more effectively.

It is hypothesized that the level of culture shock experienced by students is influenced by factors such as cultural distance, social support, and prior exposure to diverse environments. These factors are critical in shaping how students perceive

and cope with the new cultural setting. Previous studies have shown that students with limited prior exposure to different cultures and inadequate social support are more likely to experience severe culture shock (Cao et al., 2021; Zalta et al., 2021). This hypothesis will be tested by analyzing data collected from surveys and interviews with Communication Science students. If the hypothesis is confirmed, it will provide valuable insights for designing targeted interventions to help students manage culture shock more effectively.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODE**

This research uses a qualitative descriptive research method, namely a research approach that aims to describe and understand phenomena in depth from a complex and contextual perspective (Creswell, 2021). This method allows researchers to explore the factors that cause culture shock through collecting in-depth data about student experiences, exploring student adaptation strategies and processes in detail through in-depth interviews or observations, and providing an in-depth understanding of the psychological and social impact of culture shock on students.

According to Monday, (2020), interviews are used as a data collection technique to find problems that must be researched and also if researchers want to know things from respondents in more depth. In this interview technique, researchers conduct questions and answers directly to communication science students face to face. Through this interview, the researcher will find out about the culture shock experienced by the student. Susan Stainback states that with interviews, researchers will know more in-depth things about participants in interpreting situations and phenomena that occur, which cannot be found through observation.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### **The main causes and impacts of communication science students experiencing culture shock when they first enter the environment of the North Sumatra State Islamic University**

According to Collend Ward, culture shock is defined as an active process in dealing with the dynamics of being in an unfamiliar environment (Rice, 2024). The active processes in question are affective, behavioral and cognitive, namely a person's reaction in feeling, behaving and thinking when facing new cultural influences (Ali, 2023). Culture shock occurs with individuals who immigrate from one area to another within or outside the country (Graf et al., 2020). This means that culture shock occurs in circumstances or environments that are not the same as the old environment (Mulyadi et al., 2024).

Kevin Rasyid, a 6th semester student from Pinang City, said that there are differences in culture and religious values. At the North Sumatra State Islamic University (UIN Sumut), there is a strong emphasis on religious values based on Islamic law, which is different from the previous environment which may have been more secular or liberal. "When I first entered the North Sumatra State Islamic University, I felt a significant difference in the religious values that are highly emphasized here. The previous environment may have been more secular or had a more liberal outlook, whereas at UIN North Sumatra rules based on Islamic law are more dominant. This makes me feel like I have to adapt quickly in order to integrate well." Meanwhile, in terms of clothing style, for example, a more closed and polite way of dressing is easier to adapt and etiquette in different daily interactions."

Adjusting to a new campus environment is a common challenge faced by students. This period is a phase of change and adjustment that requires flexibility and a willingness to accept new things. Especially in terms of grammar. Putri Esaskia, one of the communication science students who experienced culture shock when she first entered the North Sumatra State Islamic University, said she was used to using the smooth coast Malay language, which was different from the language used by students from the city of Medan, which according to her was a little rougher. "Yes, I feel it, for example in terms of accent, in my environment I use a smooth coastal or

Malay accent, on the contrary in the university environment I use a Medan accent which seems very rough."

Esaskia also said that changes in grammar and ways of communicating affect social relationships and by being able to adapt to different communication styles, he can enrich social experiences by more easily interacting and collaborating with various individuals and groups. "Yes, it influences. changes in grammar and ways of communicating not only affect social interactions directly, but can also impact how I am understood, accepted, and appreciated in various social and professional settings. The ability to flexibly adapt to different communication styles can help enrich social experiences and increase the ability to interact with diverse individuals and groups."

Not much different from the statements of the two sources above, Bella Yulisda, a student at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra who comes from Sibolga, also said that culture shock can have a positive impact, namely making a person become a person who wants to know more about new cultures and appreciate more ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences in Indonesia. "Of course, this change in social relations in social relations affects Salyal's socialrelationships. It is these changes that then become a person of high social value in accepting differences. "With this culture shock, Salyal became an individual who wanted to know more about culture and with that, Salyal had to admit that Indonesia has ethnic groups in culture."

### **How to Adapt Communication Science Students to the North Sumatra State Islamic University Environment**

Natural adaptation is a human effort to adapt to a particular environment in utilizing resources to face urgent problems (Doh et al., 2019). Meanwhile, adaptation is an adjustment mechanism that humans experience throughout their lives (Phillips et al., 2020). The way Putri Esaskia, a Communication Science student at UINSU, adapts to the differences in values used by friends and lecturers in the university environment can be done by understanding the values used, using appropriate values, developing communication skills, and adapting to new

environments. is an important step in expanding social networks and successfully integrating in a new university environment. "How to understand and recognize the grammar used, use appropriate values, develop communication skills, and develop adaptation skills. Interacting with friends and lecturers not only expands social networks, but is also an integral part of the learning process and adapting to a new cultural environment. By gaining direct insight from local people, it can speed up the adaptation process and build a strong foundation for the development of deep and valuable learning in a different cultural environment."

Culture Shock is the most common cultural symptom experienced by social creatures and cultural symptoms in various communication relationships to establish relationships with other people, for example in differences in word use, speech, intonation and brain waves. Significant language differences between individuals can cause problems (Johnson et al., 2021). In short, all forms of mental and physical stress experienced by immigrant individuals in foreign areas are called culture shock (Frank & Hou, 2019).

Usually, culture shock occurs in individuals who migrate and start a new life in a place with a culture that is different from their original culture. This condition demands adjustment to a new culture, and individual responses do not always match expectations due to differences in language, customs and ways of communicating, which require a learning process to then be applied in everyday life (Fatima et al., 2018). Adaptation is one of the important conditions for achieving mental health. Inability to adapt to the environment often causes stress and depression. However, if individuals are able to adapt well, they can achieve balance in meeting the needs of themselves and the environment.

Every stage of life requires individuals to be able to adapt to their environment (Larasati, A., & Hamid, 2024; Prokopowicz, 2020). Individuals who successfully adapt will have a better quality of life, while those who fail will face obstacles in the next stages of life. Simanjuntak & Fitriana, (2020) research results show that the ability to interact and adapt well through understanding and managing new cultures in everyday life can help individuals overcome culture shock. Ruslan & Irham, (2022) argue that as social creatures, individuals should interact with the surrounding

community, but the ability to communicate in accordance with local cultural norms and values depends on the process of adjustment and acceptance of immigrants. Kevin Rasjid describes that managing interactions with new cultures results in learning about how to manage cultural differences wisely, improve communication skills, and strengthen interpersonal relationships in a diverse educational environment." Interaction with friends and lecturers not only expands my social network, but is also an integral part of the learning and development process in a new cultural environment. By gaining direct insight from local people, I can understand the adaptation process and build a strong foundation for valuable learning development in a different cultural environment.

As time goes by, I learn to be more flexible and accept differences. This helped me become more open and able to build better relationships with new friends. Building trust by using language and ways of communicating that are appropriate to the new environment helps me build trust with my friends and lecturers. They see my efforts to adapt and this strengthens my social relationships. And certainly, reducing misunderstandings by maintaining appropriate communication methods helps reduce potential conflicts that can damage relationships. For example, using terms that are more familiar and appropriate to the cultural context at the North Sumatra State Islamic University."

Not infrequently, in contrast to other sources, one of the female students from Riau, namely Amelia, had difficulty adapting to a new environment, namely by trying to understand the language used by the lecturer and her friends, then starting to use that language. "I adapt by trying to understand the language my friends and lecturers use and asking other friends when I don't understand their language. Interaction with lecturers and classmates helped me adapt to cultural differences. Lecturers provided academic guidance and local knowledge, while my friends provided social support and practical experience. The combination of both helps me understand new cultures."

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study indicates that Communication Studies students at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU) experience culture shock when they first enter the campus environment. The main causes of this culture shock include differences in religious values, clothing styles, language, and communication patterns compared to their home environment. The impacts vary, ranging from initial difficulties in adapting to the enrichment of social experiences and the improvement of communication skills.

This study also finds that the adaptation process occurs naturally and involves efforts to understand and integrate new values, as well as to develop communication skills that are appropriate for the new environment. With effective adaptation, students can expand their social networks, reduce the potential for conflict, and build better relationships with peers and lecturers. Ultimately, although culture shock can be challenging, students who adapt well demonstrate the ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences, which can enrich their academic and social experiences at UINSU.

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