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Coping with Culture Shock: Communication Patterns of Non-PMDG Students at UNIDA Gontor

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the phenomenon of culture shock experienced by Non-KMI (Kulliyatul Mu›allimin Al-Islamiyah) students at Darussalam Gontor University (UNIDA Gontor). Non-KMI students, who come from non-Islamic boarding school backgrounds, face great challenges in adapting to an Islamic boarding school-based campus environment, where Arabic and English are used as the main languages, and high discipline is an integral part of campus life. Using an exploratory qualitative approach, this research explores the adaptation experiences of Non-KMI students by focusing on emotional, behavioral and cognitive aspects. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation related to academic and social life on campus. The research results showed that non-KMI students experienced culture shock in the form of anxiety, confusion, and changes in perception of the dominant cultural values at UNIDA Gontor. Behavioral aspects also include difficulties in adapting to congregational worship procedures and the use of Arabic in daily communication. This research identified several factors that cause culture shock, such as differences in communication patterns, lifestyle, and lack of social support from the surrounding environment. However, through effective communication strategies, such as building intercultural communication skills and increasing social interaction, Non-KMI students can adapt better to campus culture. This research provides practical insights to support the adaptation process of Non-KMI students in Islamic boarding school-based educational environments and offers suggestions for strengthening cultural orientation and cross-cultural interaction programs at universities.

Keywords: *Communication Patterns; Cultural Adaptation; Intercultural Communication*

Mengatasi Gegar Budaya: Pola Komunikasi Mahasiswa Non-PMDG di UNIDA Gontor

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis fenomena gegar budaya yang dialami oleh mahasiswa Non-KMI (Kulliyatul Mu'allimin Al-Islamiyah) di Universitas Darussalam Gontor (UNIDA Gontor). Mahasiswa Non-KMI, yang berasal dari latar belakang non-pondok pesantren Darussalam Gontor, menghadapi tantangan besar dalam beradaptasi dengan lingkungan kampus yang berbasis pesantren, di mana bahasa Arab dan Inggris digunakan sebagai bahasa utama, serta kedisiplinan tinggi menjadi bagian integral dari kehidupan kampus. Menggunakan pendekatan

kualitatif eksploratif, penelitian ini menggali pengalaman adaptasi mahasiswa Non-KMI dengan fokus pada aspek emosional, perilaku, dan kognitif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi terkait kehidupan akademik dan sosial di kampus. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa Non-KMI mengalami gegar budaya dalam bentuk kecemasan, kebingungan, dan perubahan persepsi terhadap nilai budaya yang dominan di UNIDA Gontor. Aspek perilaku juga mencakup kesulitan dalam beradaptasi dengan tata cara ibadah berjamaah dan penggunaan bahasa Arab dalam komunikasi sehari-hari.

Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi beberapa faktor penyebab gegar budaya, seperti perbedaan pola komunikasi, gaya hidup, serta kurangnya dukungan sosial dari lingkungan sekitar. Meskipun demikian, melalui strategi komunikasi efektif, seperti membangun keterampilan komunikasi antarbudaya dan peningkatan interaksi sosial, mahasiswa Non-KMI dapat beradaptasi lebih baik dengan budaya kampus. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan praktis untuk mendukung proses adaptasi mahasiswa Non-KMI di lingkungan pendidikan berbasis pesantren dan menawarkan saran untuk memperkuat program orientasi budaya dan interaksi lintas budaya di universitas.

Kata Kunci: *Adaptasi Budaya; Komunikasi Antar Budaya; Pola Komunikasi.*

INTRODUCTION

Continuing your education to university as a student is one of the reasons and goals to seek new experiences, learn and also for career purposes. Education is a top priority for every individual because we can gain knowledge that we can apply in everyday life. Education can also support a person›s success, where the more knowledge we gain, the more enriched the knowledge we have. There are many reasons to make Indonesia a country for continuing education to a higher level, such as cultural diversity, customs, arts, and so on. Apart from that, education in Indonesia also has advantages that are no less than other countries. Higher education in Indonesia takes the form of academies, institutes, polytechnics, high schools and universities spread across big cities. In Indonesia, there are many state and private universities that support the mixing of students from different communication and cultural perspectives in one university (Winarso, 2020).

Darussalam Gontor University is widely known as the only private Islamic educational institution in Indonesia that from the start has adopted Arabic and English as media of teaching and communication, with students writing their papers and dissertations in these languages. Apart from that, UNIDA Gontor has also adopted a total dormitory system, where mosques, dormitories, lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, sports fields, lecturer houses, and other facilities are located on campus on a daily basis, thereby creating an environment that is conducive to learning and intensive interaction between students and lecturers.

This dormitory system significantly promises to instill Islamic values such as brotherhood, sincerity, simplicity, tolerance, a spirit of independence, leadership, and others. However, interaction effectiveness is not easily achieved due to inhibiting factors, for example the generalization of attitudes, beliefs or opinions about people from different groups (Non-KMI Students).

Non-KMI students come from outside Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. They are a new family in the Gontory family.

They need to take written and oral exams which are different from KMI students who are in fact final KMI students who continue their service at UNIDA Gontor. So, to build a harmonious relationship between two different cultures, communication is very important.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review in this research includes theories that are relevant to the research theme, especially related to culture shock (*culture shock*) and communication patterns. Colleen Ward (Ward, 2001) explains that culture shock is an active process experienced by individuals when facing the dynamics of a foreign environment. This process involves affective, behavioral and cognitive aspects. The discomfort felt can take the form of emotional tension due to differences in culture, language and social norms.

Intercultural communication theory is also relevant in understanding student communication patterns. According to Ting-Toomey (1985), in facial negotiation theory (*Face Negotiation Theory*), each individual in a different culture will always try to negotiate their "face". Effective communication patterns require an understanding of the values and symbols of different cultures, so as to reduce communication barriers.

In addition, Laswell›s (1948) communication theory explains five main elements in the communication process: communicator, message, channel, communicant, and effect. This theory is relevant for analyzing how messages are conveyed in different cultural contexts. Communication channel elements, such as verbal and nonverbal language, are key in bridging cultural differences.

Nonverbal communication also plays an important role in the cultural adaptation process. According to Colleen Ward (2020), nonverbal communication includes elements such as facial expressions, eye contact, and body language that can help individuals understand new cultural norms. This is crucial for students who have to adapt to different academic and social environments.

In the context of culture shock, Purwasito (2015) emphasizes the importance of social support as an adaptation strategy. Social support helps individuals overcome emotional stress that arises from cultural differences. In addition, effective interpersonal communication can strengthen social relationships and facilitate the process of integration into a new culture.

Thus, this literature review provides a strong theoretical basis for understanding the phenomenon of culture shock and intercultural communication patterns. These theories will be used to analyze research data and provide insight into effective ways to face cultural challenges at Darussalam Gontor University.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory type. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the complex phenomenon of culture shock among non-KMI students at Darussalam Gontor University. This research aims to understand communication patterns and adaptation processes that occur in intercultural

interactions in the campus academic and social environment.

The research subjects were non-KMI students who had studied for more than one year at Darussalam Gontor University. Research objects include communication patterns, interactions and adaptation strategies used by students in facing the challenges of culture shock.

The research was conducted in the even semester of the 2023/2024 academic year, located at Darussalam Gontor University, Ponorogo, East Java. The academic environment, dormitories and student social interaction spaces are the main focus of observation.

The main research instruments are in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide to explore students› experiences, perceptions and views on the phenomenon of culture shock. Observations are carried out directly in academic and social activities to understand the dynamics of intercultural interactions.

The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique, with the criteria being non-KMI students who actively interact in the campus academic and social environment. Researchers chose 10 students from two different classes to get diverse perspectives regarding their adaptation experiences.

Data was collected through interviews, observation and documentation. Interviews were conducted directly and recorded using a voice recorder with the informant›s consent. Observations are carried out by recording student behavior, communication patterns and interactions

in various situations. Documentation in the form of academic notes, photos and other relevant documents is also used to support data analysis.

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman›s interactive approach, which includes three main stages: data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Analysis was carried out iteratively to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings. The validity of the data was tested through triangulation of data sources and member checking, where the findings were confirmed with the informants to ensure they matched their experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
CULTURE SHOCK

This research reveals that non-KMI students at Darussalam Gontor University (UNIDA) experience significant challenges of culture shock. Based on Ward›s concept (2001: p.), culture shock involves emotional, behavioral and cognitive aspects. Non-KMI students face difficulties adapting to the Islamic boarding school-oriented campus culture, including the use of Arabic and English, strict discipline, and different social norms.

Emotional aspects include anxiety, confusion, and longing for family. Many students feel lost due to the significant differences between their home culture and their new environment. In the behavioral aspect, students often have difficulty adapting to existing traditions, language and social interaction procedures. Mistakes in understanding social norms often trigger misunderstandings with KMI students. Cognitively, Non-KMI students

feel pressured due to differences in cultural values, which sometimes affect their social interactions.

Factors that cause culture shock in non-KMI students include differences in communication patterns, such as the use of language and non-verbal signals, as well as a lack of social support from the campus environment. Non-KMI students often feel isolated due to limited cross-cultural communication. The negative impacts of culture shock include stress, social isolation, and decreased motivation to learn. However, if managed well, these experiences can strengthen their interpersonal skills and cultural understanding.

Table 2. Stages of Adaptation for Non-KMI Students at Darussalam Gontor University

Adaptation Stages	Description	Results Achieved
1.Initial Orientation	Students face confusion and lack of confidence in a new environment.	Initial adjustment to the campus environment, although still feeling anxious and confused.
2.Gradual Adjustment	Involves language learning (Arabic and English), participation in social activities, and acceptance of new values.	Begin to understand Islamic boarding school culture, be active in social activities, and improve language skills.
3.Full Integration	Characterized by academic progress, social independence, and the formation of a new identity that integrates the culture of origin with Islamic boarding school values.	Students are able to adapt academically and socially, and have a unified identity.

Source: Compiled based on research data at Darussalam Gontor University, 2024.

The adaptation process for Non-KMI students at Darussalam Gontor University takes place in three main stages: initial orientation, gradual adjustment, and full integration. In the first stage, viz **initial orientation**, students experience confusion and lack of confidence. This is caused by significant cultural differences between their home environment and the Islamic boarding school culture on campus. Students at this stage often feel unsure about dealing with strict new rules, a structured dormitory environment, and the use of Arabic and English as the main media of academic communication. Feelings of anxiety and isolation often appear, indicating that this stage is a crucial moment that requires support from the surrounding environment to help them adapt.

The second stage, viz **gradual adjustment**, becomes a period where students begin to look for ways to overcome the challenges they face. At this stage, they begin to study Arabic and English more intensively, which are key to understanding academic material and communicating with fellow students and lecturers. In addition, students began to participate in

various social activities on campus, such as religious activities, sports, and student organizations. This involvement gives them the opportunity to build social relationships and understand the new values that exist in the Islamic boarding school environment. Acceptance of the norms and traditions that exist on campus is an important step in their adjustment process.

The last stage is **full integration**, which is characterized by the student›s ability to adapt thoroughly, both in academic and social aspects. At this stage, students show significant progress in academic achievement, such as increased learning achievement and the ability to write papers in Arabic or English. They also become more socially independent, able to manage their own activities, and establish harmonious relationships with other students, including those from different cultural backgrounds. The new identity formed at this stage is the result of integrating their culture of origin with the Islamic boarding school values adopted at Darussalam Gontor University.

These three stages reflect a complex but important adaptation journey for Non-KMI students. With social support from friends and orientation programs from the university, students are able to overcome existing challenges and make this experience an opportunity for personal development, both intellectually and emotionally. This process also shows the importance of structured adaptation strategies, including language learning and active social interaction, to achieve successful integration in a multicultural environment such as Darussalam Gontor University.

COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

Communication patterns play a key role in adaptation. Primary communication through direct interaction and secondary communication using online media helps bridge cultural differences (Denzin and Y. Lincoln., n.d.). Students who successfully build interpersonal relationships show better adaptation progress. According to Lasswell›s communication theory, components such as messages, channels, and communication are very important in supporting effective communication in UNIDA›s multicultural environment.

Intercultural interaction is also a challenge, especially in understanding the religious values, discipline and communication procedures of KMI students. Ting-Toomey›s Face Negotiation Theory explains how Non-KMI students negotiate their identities in a dominant cultural environment. However, these interactions provide opportunities for students to develop tolerance, cultural understanding, and better communication skills.

With social support, orientation programs, and guidance from the university, Non-KMI students can overcome the challenges of culture shock and turn this experience into an opportunity for personal growth and successful integration in UNIDA›s academic and social environment.

Non-KMI students find it difficult to understand Arabic and English which are used as the main communication media on campus. In the adaptation process, they develop communication strategies by utilizing body language and help from more advanced friends. One informant stated that, "At first, I found it very difficult to communicate using Arabic, but I started

to understand little by little by asking friends and lecturers."

Other challenges include a highly structured boarding system and strict disciplinary rules. For example, students are required to follow a strictly scheduled schedule of religious and academic activities. This causes psychological pressure for some non-KMI students who are not used to a high level of discipline. Informants also noted that social interactions with KMI students were often hampered due to cultural differences and habits.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that non-KMI students at Darussalam Gontor University face significant challenges in the form of culture shock, especially related to differences in culture, language and social norms. These students need time to adapt to a new environment that is very different from their origin, especially in aspects of verbal and nonverbal communication. The strategies they use, including primary and secondary communication patterns, as well as social support from the surrounding environment, help overcome these challenges. The research results show that effective communication patterns, accompanied by gradual cultural adaptation, are the key to students› success in integrating themselves into the campus environment. These findings support the cultural adaptation theory which emphasizes the importance of affective, behavioral and cognitive processes in overcoming culture shock.

As a suggestion, the university could improve orientation programs and language training for new students, especially non-KMI students, to help them in the initial adaptation process. Apart from that, increasing the frequency and quality of social activities between KMI and non-KMI students is expected to accelerate the cultural integration process. Universities are also advised to provide cultural and communication counseling services that can help students manage adaptation stress and build better relationships in the campus environment.

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