

**InterCultural Communication : An Analysis of Indonesian Exchange
Student's Experiences at Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia**



FINAL THESIS

Submitted to Fulfil the Requirements for Obtaining a bachelor's degree in Communication
Studies at the Department of Communication Sciences

Universitas Islam Indonesia

Research by:

**FIELLAH MUTTAQIYYAH
21321212**

**Department of Communication Sciences
Universitas Islam Indonesia
2025**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	i
LIST OF FIGURES	iii
LETTER OF AGREEMENT	iv
STATEMENT OF ETHICAL CLEARANCE	v
STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC ETHICS	vi
MOTTO	vii
FOREWORD	viii
ABSTRACT	x
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
A. Background	1
B. Research Questions	7
C. Research Purposes	8
D. Research Benefits	8
E. Study Literature	9
1. Previous Research	9
2. Theoretical Framework	13
a. Intercultural Communication	13
b. Verbal Intercultural Communication	14
c. Nonverbal Intercultural Communication	15
d. Media as a Tool for Intercultural Communication	15
e. Intercultural Communication Competence	15
f. Intercultural Communication Between Nations	17
g. Personal, Academic, and Social Challenges	18
F. Research Method	19
1. Research Design	19
2. Research Setting	20
3. Data and Sources of Data	20

4. Data Collection Technique	21
5. Data Analysis Technique	22
CHAPTER II OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH OBJECT	24
A. Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM): A Comprehensive Overview	24
B. Facilities at Universiti Utara Malaysia	30
1. Student Residential Halls (Inapan Siswa)	30
2. Main Halls	32
3. Museums and Galleries	34
4. Libraries	34
5. Research Facilities and Institutes	35
C. Vision of University Utara Malaysia	35
D. Mission of University Utara Malaysia	36
E. Research Object	36
CHAPTER III FINDING AND DISCUSSION	38
A. Findings	38
1. Intercultural Communication	38
2. Verbal and Non-verbal Intercultural Communication	40
3. Media as a Tools for Intercultural Communication	42
4. Communication Challenges	43
5. Differences in Communication Styles	44
6. Challenges in Academic and Social Integration	45
7. Personal Growth and Transformation	45
8. Adaptation Strategies	46
B. DISCUSSION	47
1. Intercultural Communication in Universiti Utara Malaysia	47
2. Verbal and NonVerbal Intercultural Communication	48
3. Media as a Tool for Intercultural Communication	49
4. Communication Challenges and Differences in Communication Styles	49
5. Educational and Sociocultural Challenges	50
6. Personal Challenges and Transformation	51

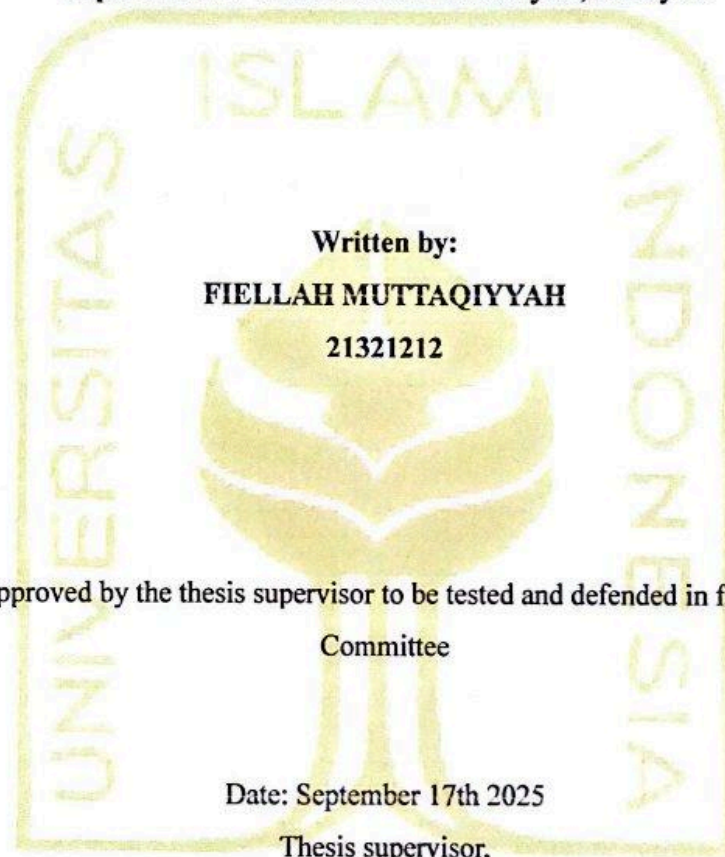
CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION	53
A. Summary	53
B. Recommendations	55
REFERENCES	56
APPENDIX	59

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. 1 Group Discussion at Library with locals	6
Figure 1. 2 Digital Media Class at UUM	6
Figure 1. 3 The illustration of data analysis model by Miles and Huberman	22
Figure 2. 1 Universiti Utara Malaysia	24
Figure 2. 2 Inside campus of Universiti Utara Malaysia	26
Figure 2. 3 Educational Activity at Universiti Utara Malaysia	27
Figure 2. 4 Class at Universiti Utara Malaysia	28
Figure 2. 5 Digital Media Class at Universiti Utara Malaysia	29
Figure 2. 6 Bus as facilitation at Universiti Utara Malaysia	31
Figure 2. 7 Dewan Mu'adzam Shah (Grand Hall) at Universiti Utara Malaysia	33
Figure 2. 8 Outside of Dewan Mu'adzam Shah (Grand Hall) at Universiti Utara Malaysia	33
Figure 2. 9 Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad Gallery (housed in the new wing of the Sultanah Bahiyah Library)	34
Figure 2. 10 The Sultanah Bahiyah Library	35
Figure 2. 11 Inside of Sultanah Bahiyah Library	35
Figure 3. 1 Exchange student gathering with the buddies	38
Figure 3. 2 Student exchange orientation at Universiti Utara Malaysia	39
Figure 3. 3 Deepavali with local students at Universiti Utara Malaysia	40
Figure 3. 4 Exchange student's Whatsapp Group	42
Figure 3. 5 Exchange student's Whatsapp Group	43
Figure 3. 6 Exchange student club activity	47

**LETTER OF AGREEMENT
UNDERGRADUATE THESIS**

**InterCultural Communication : An Analysis of Indonesian Exchange Student's
Experiences at Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia**



**Written by:
FIELLAH MUTTAQIYYAH
21321212**

It has been approved by the thesis supervisor to be tested and defended in front of the thesis
Committee

Date: September 17th 2025

Thesis supervisor,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Masduki", is written over the watermark of the Universitas Islam Indonesia logo.

Prof. Dr. rer. soc. Masduki S.Ag., M. Si.

NIDN 0511047202

**STATEMENT OF ETHICAL CLEARANCE
UNDERGRADUATE THESIS**

**InterCultural Communication : An Analysis of Indonesian Exchange Student's
Experiences at Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia**

**Written by:
FIELLAH MUTTAQIYYAH
21321212**

It has defended and has been validated by the Thesis Committee of Communication
Science Department in Faculty of Socio-Cultural Science of Universitas Islam Indonesia

Date: September 18th, 2025

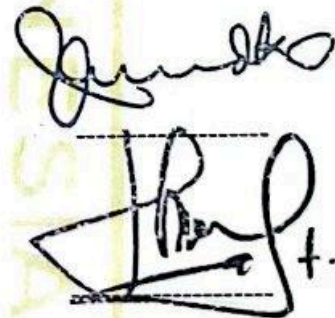
Thesis Committee:

1 1. Head of Committee: Prof. Dr. rer. soc Masduki, S.Ag., M.Si.

1 NIDN: 0511047202

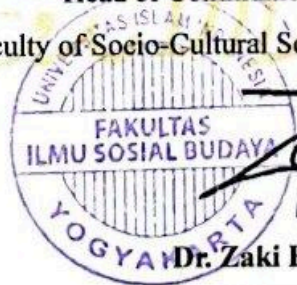
2. Members : Dr. Herman Felani, S.S., M.A.

2 NIDN : 0521128202



Knowing,

Head of Communication Science Department in
Faculty of Socio-Cultural Science of Universitas Islam Indonesia



Dr. Zaki Habibi, M.Comms.

NIDN : 0517078101

STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC ETHICS

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Signing below, I:

Name : **FIELLAH MUTTAQIYYAH**

Student Number : **21321212**

Through this letter I stated that:

1. During the process of accomplishing this thesis research, researcher did not perform academic frauds in any kind of form, such as plagiarism, involving others in making the thesis, or any kind of violations which are contradicting the academic ethics highly upheld by Islamic University of Indonesia.
2. Therefore, this thesis is a pure form of my scientific work as a student and a researcher, and not involving other people/parties.
3. Should be there any occasion, after I graduate from the Communication Science Department in Faculty of Psychology and Socio-Cultural Science of Islamic University of Indonesia, which states that this thesis has strong evidence of being a plagiarism work of conducting academic frauds, I will be responsible for all the consequences and academic sanctions that has been set by the Islamic University of Indonesia.

Hence this statement is truly sincere

Yogyakarta, January 1st, 2025



(Handwritten signature)
(Fiellah Muttaqiyah)

MOTTO

“Urip Iku Urup”

Dedication

I dedicate this work to:

Myself, my mother, my father, and everybody who has ever been by my side to support me.

FOREWORD

Assalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb

Alhamdulillah, The “Intercultural Communication: An Analysis of Indonesian Exchange Student’s Experiences at Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia,” an undergraduate thesis by Fiellah Muttaqiyah is finished. I thank Allah SWT for His infinite blessings, guidance, and grace, which have enabled the researcher to successfully finish this thesis. The Prophet Muhammad SAW, the perfect role model in Islam, is always honored with salawat and greetings.

Finishing this undergraduate thesis is challenging but with Allah SWT's help and the support of many people, I was able to complete it. I want to thank those who supported, prayed, and helped me. Firstly, my family, my big family, especially my father Taufiq Jamzuri and my mother Hindun, thanks for the infinite support, pray and never stop trying their best to provide her child all they needed. To my little sister, Filzah Labibah, let’s give our best.

My sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. rer. soc. Masduki S.Ag., M.Si., my thesis supervisor, for his excellent guidance, valuable suggestions, motivation, and unwavering support in helping me complete this thesis. Additionally, thanks go to Mr. Hermal Felani, my DPA, has been a guiding presence throughout my academic journey, from the very first day of college until now.

I am grateful to the respondents, organizations, and institutions that contributed valuable data and insights, enabling me to carry out this research. My appreciation also extends to my colleagues, and friends, whose encouragement and patience allowed me to stay focused and motivated, and who have been by my side to support me.

Last but not least, I wanna thank me, I wanna thank me for believing in me, I wanna thank me for doing all this hard work, I wanna thank me for having no days off, I wanna thank me for never quitting, I wanna thank me for always being a giver, and trying to give more than I receive, I wanna thank me for trying to do more right than wrong, I wanna thank me for just being me at all times.

Thank You.

Yogyakarta, January 1st 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'F' followed by a cursive 'i' and 'l' that extends into a long, sweeping horizontal line.

Fiellah Muttaqiyah

ABSTRACT

This research explores the intercultural communication experiences of Indonesian exchange students at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). With the increasing number of Indonesian students studying abroad, understanding the challenges and strategies for effective intercultural communication is essential. Using qualitative research methods, including observations and in-depth interviews with six Indonesian exchange students, this study identifies key communication forms, challenges, and adaptation strategies. Findings reveal that students use a mix of verbal and non-verbal communication, with language differences presenting both obstacles and opportunities. Digital media platforms, including WhatsApp, Telegram, Zoom, and Webex, play a pivotal role in sustaining connections and enabling communications. Despite initial difficulties in academic, social, and personal adaptation, students develop intercultural competence through engagement with diverse peers. Importantly, the findings support Deardorff's model of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) "ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes", showing that students enhanced their knowledge of local norms, developed skills to navigate diverse communication styles, strengthened attitudes of openness and empathy, and demonstrated behaviors of appropriate intercultural interaction. The study provides valuable insights for future exchange students, educational institutions, and policymakers seeking to enhance student exchange programs.

***Keywords:* Intercultural Communication, Indonesian Exchange Students, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Cultural Adaptation.**

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman komunikasi antarbudaya mahasiswa pertukaran asal Indonesia di Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). Dengan semakin meningkatnya jumlah mahasiswa Indonesia yang belajar di luar negeri, memahami tantangan dan strategi untuk komunikasi antarbudaya yang efektif menjadi hal yang penting. Menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif, termasuk observasi dan wawancara mendalam dengan enam mahasiswa pertukaran dari Indonesia, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi bentuk-bentuk komunikasi utama, tantangan, dan strategi adaptasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa menggunakan kombinasi komunikasi verbal dan nonverbal, dengan perbedaan bahasa yang menjadi hambatan sekaligus peluang. Platform media digital, termasuk WhatsApp, Telegram, Zoom, dan Webex, memainkan peran penting dalam mempertahankan koneksi dan memfasilitasi komunikasi. Meskipun menghadapi kesulitan awal dalam adaptasi akademik, sosial, dan personal, mahasiswa berhasil mengembangkan kompetensi antar budaya melalui interaksi dengan teman-teman dari latar belakang yang beragam. Temuan ini mendukung model Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) dari Deardorff, yaitu "kemampuan untuk berkomunikasi secara efektif dan tepat dalam situasi antar budaya berdasarkan pengetahuan, keterampilan, dan sikap antarbudaya seseorang", dengan menunjukkan bahwa

mahasiswa meningkatkan pengetahuan tentang norma lokal, mengembangkan keterampilan untuk menavigasi gaya komunikasi yang beragam, memperkuat sikap keterbukaan dan empati, serta memperlihatkan perilaku interaksi antarbudaya yang tepat. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan berharga bagi mahasiswa pertukaran di masa depan, institusi pendidikan, dan pembuat kebijakan yang ingin meningkatkan kualitas program pertukaran mahasiswa.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi Antarbudaya, Mahasiswa Pertukaran Indonesia, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Adaptasi Budaya.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Many Indonesian students aspire to pursue their education overseas, drawn by the prospect of engaging with diverse cultures. These opportunities enable engagement with individuals from various cultural backgrounds, as participants from different parts of the world are involved in exchange programs. Today, numerous opportunities are available for students to study abroad, including exchange programs and government funded scholarships. Many countries have fostered academic collaborations between educational institutions to promote international learning experiences. The IISMA program, organized by Kemendikbudristek, provides a popular avenue for students to temporarily experience education abroad during one semester. According to Kompas.com (March, 19 2024), from the Kemendikburistek website, a total of 15.211 undergraduate and diploma students were officially registered as prospective participants and 3.330 students were selected as IISMA participants in 2024. The number of students eager to study abroad remains consistently high year after year. For some, the appeal lies in seeking superior educational programs and innovative learning environments not readily found domestically.

According to UNESCO, the number of Indonesian citizens studying abroad is 53,604 people. Australia is the top choice with 13,880 students, followed by Malaysia with 8,440 students, and the United States 7,984 people. Malaysia is the second highest country Indonesian students choose to study. Many Indonesian students are keen to study in Malaysia for several reasons. According to Medcom.id (July, 17 2021) Malaysia shares cultural similarities with Indonesia, making students feel more at home compared to other countries. In terms of food and also atmosphere, Malaysia closely resembles Indonesia compared to other countries. Beside this, studying abroad, particularly in Malaysia, provides opportunities for students to broaden their international horizons and expand their networks. Interacting with friends from diverse countries enhances language proficiency

and exposes individuals to different cultures and ideas, which they can later bring back to Indonesia.

From Kompasiana.com (December 05, 2023), when people from different cultures talk, it's called intercultural communication. Sometimes, language and body language differences can cause misunderstandings. Stereotypes, biases, and ethnocentrism—the belief that one's own culture is superior—can also influence interactions. Different cultures have different body language, which can lead to misunderstandings. Nervousness when communicating with individuals from other cultures may hinder effective interaction. Assuming similarities among individuals and forming hasty judgments can impede deeper mutual understanding. Steward L. Tubbs described intercultural communication as an interaction that takes place between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, including differences in race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. These differences influence how individuals perceive the world, interpret messages, and express themselves. For example, people from various racial or ethnic groups may have unique traditions, languages, or communication styles, while socio-economic status can affect access to education, language proficiency, and communication tools. Understanding these differences is critical for effective communication, as it helps bridge gaps, reduce misunderstandings, and foster mutual respect in cross-cultural interactions. As Allwood (year) noted, intercultural communication—interaction between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds—remains a cornerstone of human coexistence. Verbal and nonverbal cues are understood differently depending on one's culture, beliefs, values, and experiences.

Individuals are often advised to exercise caution in their communication to avoid unintentionally offending others. At times, careless remarks may result in significant challenges, including potential legal ramifications. Such occurrences typically arise due to insufficient understanding of cultural differences. In some places, speaking directly or being rude may seem normal, however, when interacting with individuals from different cultures, this can lead to confusion or hurt feelings. Understanding intercultural communication can be complex, chaotic, and sometimes conflicting. Consequently,

achieving a comprehensive understanding or analysis of intercultural communication can be challenging. According to Richard G. Jones Jr., author of *Communication in the Real World: An Introduction to Communication Studies*, a person's motivation for engaging with individuals from other cultures must first be considered. If an individual lacks the motivation to engage with people from diverse cultures, then the aspects of intercultural communication discussed later become insignificant. Conversely, individuals with genuine curiosity who actively engage with diverse cultures to gain self-awareness and understanding of others establish a strong foundation for developing with different cultures to gain insight into themselves and others, then they have a solid basis to develop further relevant competencies, attitudes, and skills. To foster positive relationships with others, students must possess the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts.

According to Chen and Starosta (as cited in Moulita, 2019), intercultural communication competence (ICC) refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various situations, blending different cultural identities as needed. Not everyone possesses an inherent understanding of new cultures; however, individuals must familiarize themselves with the cultural norms of a host country to enhance their communication effectiveness. Effective communication is unattainable without effort to understand each point of view and each culture. Interactions among individuals, particularly those from different countries, are inherently diverse due to variations in behavior, religion, and cultural practices. Individuals must adapt to new people and unfamiliar cultural environments.

Many agreed on the definition of intercultural competence, as described by Deardoff as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Patel et al., 2011). These conceptual models outline key elements essential for successfully navigating intercultural interactions:

- a. Knowledge: This entails awareness of one's own cultural background, understanding different linguistic and communicative conventions across cultures, possessing specific knowledge about particular cultural groups, and having a general comprehension of cultural, societal, and individual interactions.
- b. Skills: These skills include effective listening to individuals from other cultures, skillful interaction with them, adaptation to diverse cultural environments, and comprehension of linguistic and sociolinguistic nuances. Additional competencies involve managing communication breakdowns, mediating intercultural exchanges, gathering cultural with others, considering multiple perspectives, maintaining cognitive flexibility, and critically evaluating cultural perspectives, practices, and products.
- c. Attitudes: These attitudes encompass respect for other cultures, curiosity about them, eagerness to learn, openness to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, willingness to withhold judgment, tolerance for ambiguity, and appreciation of cultural diversity.
- d. Behaviors: These entail behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately in intercultural encounters, demonstrating flexibility in cultural and communicative behaviors, and having an action-oriented mindset focused on enhancing societal well-being, particularly by addressing prejudice, discrimination, and conflict (Kojour, 2016).

Although Indonesia and Malaysia are often considered *serumpun*—sharing linguistic, cultural, and historical ties—the experience of studying in Malaysia presents unique challenges for Indonesian students. While similarities in language and religion can initially create a sense of comfort, these very similarities may lead to underestimating the depth of cultural differences. Subtle variations in vocabulary between Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia can cause confusion or misinterpretation, particularly in academic and formal settings. Moreover, differences in classroom norms, gender dynamics, and social etiquette may create moments of discomfort or misunderstanding.

Yusup (2023), in the *Ilomata International Journal of Social Science*, notes that even when students share a common national language, intercultural communication challenges persist because the influence of local dialects and linguistic nuances remains very strong. What may appear to be the same vocabulary can carry different meanings or connotations, leading to subtle misunderstandings that disrupt smooth interaction. For example, words that are considered neutral in Indonesia may sound overly formal or even impolite in Malaysia, leading to unintentional offense. This highlights that language barriers in intercultural contexts are not limited to entirely foreign languages but also include *intra-linguistic* differences — where the same language functions differently depending on cultural and regional context. For Indonesian students in Malaysia, this means that communication requires more than just linguistic familiarity; it demands heightened sensitivity to context, tone, and cultural semantics to avoid misinterpretation.

As Rahmadya Putra Nugraha's "*The Adaptation Process of Intercultural Communication of Mercu Buana University Students in Student Exchange Program*" suggests, adapting to a host culture involves more than overcoming language barriers; it requires navigating unspoken expectations and local customs. This complexity makes Malaysia a uniquely important context for research. The cultural closeness highlights micro-level differences that can significantly influence adaptation, offering a distinct opportunity to examine how intercultural communication competence develops when students are confronted with both familiarity and difference.

Indonesian students studying in Malaysia often experience culture shock. According to mepnews.id (January 26, 2023), Hanz experienced culture shock during the initial days of his arrival in Malaysia. Encountering a completely unfamiliar environment made immediate adaptation challenging. Adaptation requires time, particularly in adjusting to differences in time zones, daily schedules, academic expectations, and institutional regulations. As a migrant, Hanz recognized the importance of respecting the local population and cultural norms. Adjusting to life in another country or adapting to a new cultural environment poses significant challenges for many individuals, particularly during

the initial phases. Language often plays a key role in intercultural communication, as it is central to interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

According to (January 9, 2020), several factors contribute to Universiti Utara Malaysia being chosen by Indonesian students. At Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), students interact with a diverse international student body, enriching their learning experience. As one of the leading universities, UUM academic programs at all levels, from bachelor's to doctoral degrees, for international students. UUM's ranking as one of the world's best universities in the QS World University inclusion among the world's top universities in the QS World University Rankings highlights its exceptional academic environment. Affordable tuition fees, coupled with the lush campus environment in Sintok, Kedah, make UUM an attractive choice for students. Moreover, UUM provides facilities such as accommodation, transportation services, health centers, and sports amenities for both local and international students across all academic levels. Indonesian students at UUM can also join the Indonesian Student Association (PPI) to expand international networking opportunities. All of these create a diverse and supportive learning environment at UUM. Studying in a new cultural environment can provide students with an enriching and rewarding experience. However, this experience may also present challenges, particularly in adjusting to unfamiliar academic, social, and personal settings. According to Yolanda (2010), Indonesian students at UUM encounter various difficulties throughout their academic journey due to these factors. Indonesian students encounter challenges in their academic, social, and personal aspects while studying abroad.



1. What communication methods do Indonesian exchange students use to interact with students and staff at Universiti Utara Malaysia?
2. How do Indonesian exchange students address challenges in intercultural communication during their studies?
3. What adaptation strategies do Indonesian exchange students employ to successfully navigate academic, social, and personal challenges during their exchange program?

C. Research Purposes

Based on the research questions outlined above, the objectives are as follows:

1. Identify the communication methods employed by Indonesian exchange students used during their study.
2. Examine the challenges of intercultural communication encountered by Indonesian exchange students.
3. To analyze the adaptation strategies used by Indonesian exchange students to overcome challenges and successfully integrate into the host environment.

D. Research Benefits

This research on intercultural communication among exchange students aims to yield findings that benefit both researchers and stakeholders.

a. Academic Benefits

This research will increase knowledge in the field of intercultural communication, especially about how international exchange students adapt to new cultures. This study will be a useful resource for future research on cultural adaptation and intercultural interaction in the higher education context. They also provide information about the challenges faced and how effective intercultural communication strategies supported exchange students with their adaptation to new environments.

b. Practical Benefits

The results of this research may help to provide information to educational policymakers on improving student exchange programs between Indonesia and Malaysia, emphasizing the areas that merit more attention (for example, support for emotional well-being support and language support). Universities may be able to formulate more effective strategies for managing cultural diversity on their campuses, Encourage more intercultural understanding, and create a harmonious learning atmosphere for every student. Moreover, the results can help educational institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia by providing empirical information on benefit and challenges of student exchange programs. The research will highlight practical ways for both nations to improve their student exchange programs.

E. Study Literature

1. Previous Research

Komunikasi Antarbudaya Mahasiswa Asing Hambatan dan Faktor Keberhasilan Komunikasi Mahasiswa Patani Thailand Dalam Aktivitas Akademik di UIN Sunan Kalijaga (Fikri, 2019)

As a requirement in completing an undergraduate study in Communication Science, the research was submitted to the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Yogyakarta.

This research examines the communication difficulties and contributing factors to successful interaction amongst Patani Thai students and their local students attending UIN Sunan Kalijaga conducted in the set of universities academic environment. It is concerned not just with barriers to effective communication but enablers of effective communication with the interaction that communication can enhance intercultural communication values for international and local students at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. The methods used in this research are quantitative research methods and descriptive, and data collection techniques such as interviews and document analysis. The findings from the research indicate that Patani students at UIN Sunan Kalijaga face communication barriers in the context of

language, culture, perception, and motivation. In contrast, success factors include personal and situational elements that enable Patani students to navigate the academic environment successfully. The study highlights the importance of understanding and addressing these barriers and success factors in intercultural communication among students from diverse backgrounds.

This research differs from the proposed study in several aspects. Firstly, while this study focuses solely on academic activities, the proposed research will delve into academic, social, and personal factors. Secondly, the subjects of this research are Patani Thailand students studying at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Indonesia, whereas my research will center on Indonesian students participating in an exchange program at Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Strategi Komunikasi Antarbudaya Mahasiswa Etnis Melayu Kuansing Dalam Menghadapi *Culture Shock* di Fakultas Dakwah dan Komunikasi UIN Suska Riau (Apriadi, 2024)

This research was submitted to the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University Riau as part of the requirements for completing the Bachelor's Program in Communication Science study program.

The research examined the Intercultural Communication Strategies employed by Kuansing Malay Ethnic Students experiencing Culture Shock at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, Uin Suska Riau. The study aimed to explore how these students address culture shock using communication strategies. The research focused on understanding and addressing the challenges faced by Kuansing Malay ethnic students in adapting to a new cultural environment. The research identified four adaptation processes that migrant students go through when facing culture shock: the honeymoon phase, crisis phase, recovery phase, and adjustment phase. These findings enhance the understanding of how Kuansing Malay ethnic students manage culture shock at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, Uin Suska Riau.

The primary distinction between this study and the proposed research lies in the focus area. This study centers on exploring the culture shock experienced by students, while the proposed research will examine their intercultural communication experiences. Furthermore, this study focuses on Malaysian students studying in Indonesia, while the proposed research will involve Indonesian students studying in Malaysia.

Komunikasi Antar Budaya di Kalangan Mahasiswa (Studi Deskriptif Kualitatif Pada Strategi Komunikasi Akomodasi Mahasiswa Suku Mandar Dengan Mahasiswa Suku Jawa Di Berbagai Universitas Di Yogyakarta) (Irpan, 2019)

This research was submitted to the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Yogyakarta as part of the requirements to complete the Bachelor's Program in Communication Science study program.

The research examines the challenges faced by Mandar students from West Sulawesi in adapting to the cultural differences and behaviors of Javanese students at universities in Yogyakarta. The study focuses on intercultural communication dynamics, specifically how Mandar students manage interactions with their Javanese peers. Through in-depth interviews, the study investigates how Mandar students apply communication accommodation theory to adapt their behavior in response to the cultural nuances of the Javanese students. The findings indicate that Mandar students demonstrate both convergence and divergence in their communication styles, underscoring the intricate interplay of cultural factors in intercultural communication within Yogyakarta's university setting.

The primary distinction between this research and the proposed study conduct lies in the research location. While this research focuses on students studying in Yogyakarta, the proposed study will examine Indonesian students participating in exchange programs at Universiti Utara Malaysia. Despite this difference, both studies are related as they employ qualitative methods, particularly in-depth interviews, for gathering information.

Verbal and Non Verbal in Intercultural Communication by Foreign Students at IAIN Surakarta (Jabar, 2020)

This research was submitted to the Faculty of Language and Culture at IAIN Surakarta as part of the requirements to complete a bachelor's degree in English Literature. The study explores verbal and non-verbal communication styles and their role in intercultural adaptation among foreign students from Thailand and the Philippines at IAIN Surakarta. It highlights challenges and adaptive mechanisms these students utilize to navigate a different cultural environment. The study employs a qualitative methodology, using descriptive approaches such as interviews with six foreign students. Based on Stella Ting-Toomey's framework, the study identifies verbal styles such as high/low context, direct/indirect communication, and self-enhancement/effacement. It also examines non-verbal communication categories like emblems, illustrators, and adaptors, along with antecedent factors influencing adaptation. The findings reveal that cultural differences in communication styles often lead to misunderstandings, particularly around language and social norms. However, shared religious practices, supportive host interactions, and adaptive personal traits significantly aid the adjustment process.

This research shares similarities and differences with the proposed study. Both utilize qualitative research methods, including interviews, to gather in-depth data about intercultural interactions but this research focuses primarily on verbal and non-verbal communication styles and their role in adaptation whereas the proposed study will encompass academic, social, and personal factors in addition to communication challenges.

Pola Komunikasi Antarbudaya (Studi Mahasiswa Malaysia di UIN Raden Fatah Palembang) (Yanti, 2019)

This research was submitted to the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang as one of the requirements to complete the Bachelor's Program for the Communication Science study program.

The research examines the communication patterns between Malaysian students and local students at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. Utilizing the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory, the study explores how cultural differences and similarities influence communication behaviors. The study employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing interviews and observation techniques to collect data. The findings reveal that communication between Malaysian and local students often occurs based on necessity rather than voluntary interaction. Language differences, cultural perceptions, and anxiety significantly impact these interactions. However, adaptive communication strategies and shared cultural elements within the Malay ethnic group help alleviate some challenges. The research concludes that effective intercultural communication relies on managing uncertainty and anxiety while fostering mutual adaptation.

This research differs from the proposed study in several aspects. Firstly, this study focuses exclusively on communication patterns related to cultural differences and similarities, whereas the proposed research will also examine the role of media and the challenges associated with intercultural communication. Secondly, the subjects of this research are Malaysian students at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, Indonesia, while the proposed research will center on Indonesian students participating in an exchange program at Universiti Utara Malaysia.

2. Theoretical Framework

a. Intercultural Communication

According to Hall (1950) Culture examines the role of media and the challenges associated with. Culture and communication are closely connected and influence each other. Culture shapes how people talk, behave, and understand messages, including the language and gestures they use. Communication, in turn, helps share and preserve culture through conversations, stories, and media. It can also change culture by introducing new ideas or ways of thinking. This relationship shows that communication reflects a culture while also helping it grow and adapt over time.

In the 1950s, Hall, often referred to as the "father of intercultural communication," began investigating this field. He introduced the term in his book "The Silent Language." Hall (1959) stated in *The Silent Language* that Intercultural communication involves the exchange of information and meaning between individuals or groups from diverse cultural backgrounds. It encompasses both verbal and non-verbal communication processes, as well as the negotiation of cultural differences and the creation of shared understanding. As the world has grown increasingly interconnected and interdependent, intercultural communication has grown increasingly interconnected and interdependent (Nameni & Dowlatabadi, 2018). Intercultural communication is an unavoidable aspect of daily life, as individuals frequently interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This shift underscores the importance of understanding and effectively navigating cultural differences.

Deardorff, (2006) explains Intercultural communication in terms of the attitudes, skills and knowledge needed for effective communication with people from different backgrounds. The intercultural communicator needs the ability to understand and value various cultural viewpoints, as well as being open to self-reflection and appreciate a range of cultural perspectives, and be willing to reflect on their own beliefs and learn from cross-cultural experiences. According to Martin and Nakayama, (2010), intercultural communication is the interaction between people or groups from different cultural backgrounds where norms, values, beliefs, and practices are communicated and demonstrated. It requires interpreting both verbal and non-verbal signals within their cultural contexts, alongside showing sensitivity, empathy, and flexibility to ensure effective communication. Meanwhile, Joseph A. DeVito (2011) defines intercultural communication as the exchange between individuals who differ in cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors.

As they pointed out in Chapter 1, Intercultural communication is a key aspect of dealing with the challenges that arise when individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds interact. Intercultural communication refers to the complexities of “not only

conveying information and meaning, but also valuing and understanding different perspectives from a variety of cultural positions, and one must be able to reflect on one's self, and adapt". Increasingly, with the need for able intercultural communication skills, we are called to facilitate mutual understanding and empathy when seeking common ground across cultures.

Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory (1988) provides a valuable lens to understand how students manage conflict and maintain social harmony. The theory posits that people from collectivist cultures (such as Indonesia and Malaysia) tend to adopt face-saving or face-giving strategies to avoid open confrontation and preserve group harmony. This insight enriches the interpretation of students' adaptation strategies, such as avoiding direct disagreement with lecturers or peers, using humor to defuse tension, and relying on peer mediation in group work conflicts.

b. Verbal Intercultural Communication

Verbal communication in a cross-cultural situation includes both language itself (choosing appropriate vocabulary structure of sentence and grammar, to convey messages. According to Gudykunst and Kim (2003), successful verbal communication demands thorough grasp of both the language itself and the cultural subtleties of those involved. Misunderstandings frequently arise due to culturally-specific differences in meaning and language use, as highlighted (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003).

c. Nonverbal Intercultural Communication

Nonverbal communication, such as gestures, facial expressions, body movements, and eye contact, often carries more meaning than spoken words. Hall (1976) emphasized that these nonverbal signals are strongly influenced by cultural norms and can greatly affect how messages are understood. For example, a smile or a nod in one culture may mean something different in another culture, causing misunderstanding or miscommunication at times (Hall, 1976). For instance, while Indonesia and Malaysia share many cultural similarities, some students reported moments of confusion regarding gestures or

expectations for appropriate dress. Students sometimes needed to adjust their clothing choices to align with the more conservative dress codes observed on campus, especially during formal university events.

d. Media as a Tool for Intercultural Communication

Martin and Nakayama (2017), describe the role of media such as television, movies, and social media that bridge cultural divides by exposing an audience to different cultural traditions and orientations, which aids in creating a more collaborative society around the globe. Media representation of cultures is crucial in shaping the result of cultural identity and intercultural communication. This is emphasized by Hall (1997) where he states “the media provide all of us with representations of culture that shape our understanding of a culture and construct our ideas about culture. A fair, open, and accurate representation of a culture can facilitate respect and provide rationale for reducing stereotypes. A misrepresented or biased portrayal of a culture can lead to greater cultural friction and misinterpretation.”

Digital media play a dual role in facilitating and complicating intercultural communication. WhatsApp, Instagram, and other social media platforms provide spaces for Indonesian students to coordinate group activities, share information, and maintain emotional support networks. However, these platforms can also become sites of misunderstanding. Several participants reported that misinterpretations sometimes arose from the text that is usually used by Malaysians but not very common in Indonesia , which could be perceived differently.

e. Intercultural Communication Competence

Holmes and O'Neill (2012) emphasise the ancillary role of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in facilitating cooperation on a global scale. They argue that ICC equips individuals with the ability to engage effectively with people from various cultural backgrounds, thereby encouraging cooperation and mutual effort across cultures. The authors highlight the need to develop important ICC skills, such as awareness of culture,

empathy, and flexibility, to continue to successfully negotiate cultural differences and offer transitional spaces of interactivity between individuals across nations. Chen (2014) similarly argues that intercultural communication, through the experiences of international students adapting to new context, spurs cultural understanding and empathy. Chen makes the case that meaningful interaction between international and local students are helpful in supporting international students in adapting and interrogating their processes of adjustment.

Wiseman and Koester (2009) examined the effects of intercultural communication competence (ICC) to promote personal growth through transformative learning experiences. They argue that individuals who experience intercultural communication will be taken out of their cultural comfort zones and re-evaluate their own assumptions and views and build a new perspective. By encountering diverse individuals, culturally occurring encounters will nurture deeper self-awareness, empathy, as well as increased flexibility, all of which will contribute to meaningful individual development. Wiseman and Koester highlight the facts that intercultural communication can promote meaningful individual transformation by nurturing open-mindedness, cultural awareness, and deeper insight into self and others. Essentially, Deardorff (2006) portrayed intercultural competence as a way in which we can deal with conflict and work towards peace. Deardorff argued that intercultural competence gives the individual the tools to navigate cultural differences, tensions, and create mutual understanding in different contexts. Deardorff argued it was important to help develop intercultural competence in students in order to promote positive interaction between relatively paired groups and help foster a more inclusive and cohesive campus climate.

The definition of intercultural competence that has gained the most support and acceptance is the definition provided by Deardorff as the "ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Patel et al., 2011). A number of conceptual frameworks have focused on the

essential components required to interact with others successfully in an intercultural context as follows:

- a. Knowledge: Knowledge involves not only knowing one's own cultural identity, but also differences regarding language use and communication styles across cultures, particular characteristics of cultural groups, and a broader knowledge of the interaction of culture, society, and individual behavior.
- b. Skills: Skills involve the ability to listen carefully to individuals from different cultures, interact successfully in intercultural situations, adjust interacting across potentially diverse cultural contexts, and understand both linguistic and sociolinguistic nuances. Skills also involve managing communication situations that impede communication, facilitating intercultural dialogue, researching cultural backgrounds, interpreting and comparing across cultures, exhibiting purity, recognizing multiple perspectives, taking a cognitive flexible position, and considering cultural beliefs, behaviors, and expressions.
- c. Attitudes involve being compassionate towards other cultures, a sense of curiosity and a desire to learn, being open to a wide range of people from different cultural contexts, delaying a judgement, accepting uncertainty, and appreciating and valuing cultural diversity.
- d. Behaviors: These behaviors involve effective and appropriate communication in intercultural encounters and flexibility in cultural and communicative practices. They also reflect an action-oriented mindset aimed at enhancing societal well-being by addressing prejudice, discrimination, and conflict (Kojour, 2016).

f. Intercultural Communication Between Nations

Communication between nations is the process of exchanging information, ideas, and messages between individuals, groups, or organizations from different countries and cultures. One of the important elements in international communication is language and translation. Language is a major tool in communication, and language differences can be an

obstacle. Therefore, translation and interpretation are essential to ensure the message is properly understood by all parties (Crystal, 2003). Culture also plays a significant role in communication between nations. Every country has a unique culture that influences its way of communication. Understanding other cultures helps avoid misunderstandings and build better relationships (Hofstede, 1991).

g. Personal, Academic, and Social Challenges

According to Yolanda (2010), citing Everets and Sodjakusuma (1996), Indonesian students pursuing studies abroad often face personal challenges such as loneliness, homesickness, and difficulties adapting to the local cuisine. Personal challenges in intercultural communication include individual biases, stereotypes, and ethnocentrism which serve as barriers to effective communication (Hall, 1959, Deardorff, 2006). Additionally, a lack of self-awareness and cultural sensitivity can result in misunderstandings and conflicts during cross-cultural interactions (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). To overcome the barriers, individuals must engage in self-reflection, challenge assumptions, and cultivate cultural empathy and adaptability (DeVito, 2011).

Barriers to effective intercultural communication include language, educational systems, and styles of communication (Nameni & Dowlatabadi, 2018). A lack of exposure to different cultural perspectives in educational contexts are likely to limit students in the understanding of cultural differences and their appreciation of these differences (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). In short, it is important to support cross-cultural awareness and inclusivity, to advocate for the inclusion of intercultural perspectives in the educational sector as well as provide support for learning language and developing intercultural competency (Deardorff, 2006).

Social problematic issues related to intercultural communication such as prejudice, discrimination, and inequities are barriers to social cohesion and intergroup relationship-building (DeVito, 2011). Equally, cultural misunderstandings and miscommunication can escalate as conflicts internally and externally leading to tensions

affecting the social cohesions in diverse communities (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Given these circumstances, it is imperative to raise and facilitate cultural competency while encouraging and responding to intercultural dialogue and collaboration to mediate social divides between cultures (Deardorff, 2006, Nameni & Dowlatabadi, 2018).

Studying abroad leads Indonesian students to undergo various personal transformations. According to Yolanda (2010), citing Everets and Sodjakusumah (1996), many Indonesian students experience significant personal growth while living and studying abroad. This includes greater autonomy, deeper self-awareness, increased open-mindedness, enhanced independence, and stronger determination. These transformations contribute to an increase in students' self-confidence and bring about changes in their self-discipline, habits, punctuality, intercultural awareness, thought processes, and perspectives on Indonesia. Such changes can significantly impact their readjustment process upon returning home.

F. Research Method

1. Research Design

This study employs a descriptive research design using a qualitative method. Descriptive studies are used because research describes in more detail natural study processes that seek an in-depth understanding of social phenomena in their natural context. The aim is to document students' experiences as they navigate adapting to a new environment, beginning with their initial arrival.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the qualitative method involves collecting data via field notes, interviews, and documents, followed by data reduction through coding and summarization. Data is displayed using visual tools like charts and graphs, and conclusions are drawn and verified by identifying and validating patterns and themes.

Qualitative research utilized various methods to explore human phenomena, including biographies, case studies, historical analysis, analytical discussions, ethnography, theory-based approaches, and phenomenology. This research style uses qualitative

descriptions to explain human experiences and investigate specific cases by examining a few examples to gather insights. This approach does not aim to test a specific hypothesis but rather to describe the actual state of variables, conditions, or phenomena. While qualitative descriptive studies differ from other qualitative designs, they may share certain characteristics or nuances with other approaches.

2. Research Setting

The research was held at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) located at Sintok, Kedah. UUM was selected for the research project because of its large international student body, with a relatively large population of Indonesian exchange students. UUM provided the most culturally diverse backdrop for examining intercultural dialogue since the institution provides endless opportunities for observing interactions between students from different cultural backgrounds. In addition to UUM's diverse student body the university was chosen for its extensive university support services and commitment to international student programming which permitted this researcher to investigate how Indonesian students integrate as both academic and social members of a multicultural context.

Moreover, reworded: UUM's global commitment to encouraging understanding and cooperation with other nations further legitimized the research site. UUM's ongoing initiatives to foster a global learning environment provided a real-time opportunity to study the application of intercultural communication theory. The facilities and resources available to international students at UUM ensured that this research reflected a wide-range of experiences and perspectives. The backdrop provided a rich canvas to conduct extensive research into the challenges and opportunities experienced by Indonesian exchange students, which informed the researcher's perceptions about the nuances and complexities surrounding intercultural communication.

3. Data and Sources of Data

As described by Miles and Huberman (1997) qualitative methods can involve collecting primary data through field notes, interviews of observations, as well as secondary data from different sources such as documents and archival records. Once data is collected, the

information is reduced by coding and summarizing, data is displayed and reduced using visual aids, and the data is analyzed to discover and authenticate patterns and themes in accordance with solid conclusions. Qualitative data were considered primary and secondary data for the purpose of the study. This researcher examines how individuals communicate with one another. The source of the data refers to the specific context from which the data are gathered. In this study, Indonesian exchange students at Universiti Utara Malaysia are categorized as the primary source of data. Secondary data is derived from library materials in the form of books, various relevant references, as well as journals and articles from the Internet related to the object of research.

4. Data Collection Technique

The technique for collecting data refers to the method through which researchers gather their information. In this study, the researcher employs observations and interviews with informants as the primary method, documentation as the secondary method of data collection.

a. Observation

In this study, observations involve researchers immersing themselves directly in the research setting. Researchers do not merely observe from a distance but actively engage with participants to analyze patterns of intercultural communication. Observation is a research method that involves direct engagement in the situation or context where the studied phenomenon. By engaging directly, researchers can gather in-depth data about the behavior, interaction, and social context of the subject of research (Creswell, 2014). In this research, the researcher conducted at Universiti Utara Malaysia for 6 months and online observations over two months via social media platforms used by Indonesian exchange students.

b. Interview

Interviews are conducted in a flexible and humanistic manner, with well-structured questions and a friendly atmosphere. Building openness and a good connection with informants is crucial, allowing both parties to feel comfortable. However, if informants consider something private, the researcher respects their boundaries.

Before conducting in-depth interviews, researchers prepare a list of questions as a guideline. Using this data collection technique, the researcher will interview six Indonesian exchange students who have been residing at Universiti Utara Malaysia for six months.

c. Documentation

In carrying out the data collection process, researchers use various sources of documentation such as books, journals, the internet, and photos. These sources are critical for validating and interpreting the data collected during the research.

5. Data Analysis Technique

After collecting the data, the researcher employs a content analysis technique to examine how participants articulate their thoughts, emotions, and perspectives. In line with Miles and Huberman's approach (1994), the analysis involves three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification of findings.

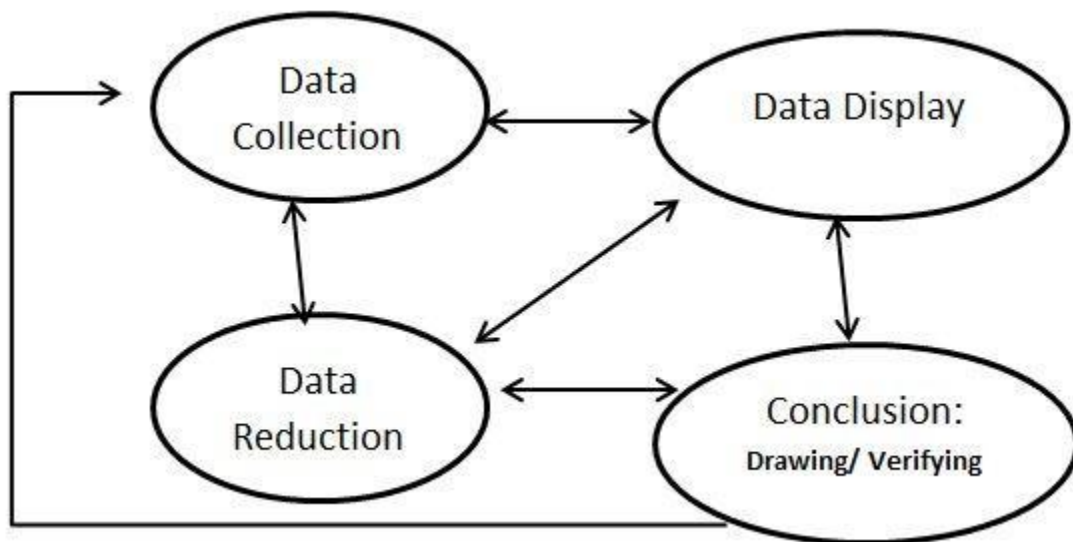


Figure 1. 3 The illustration of data analysis model by Miles and Huberman
(Source: The capture at Research gate)

a. Data Collection

This step involves collecting all the observations, interviews, and other information gathered during the research process. Currently, the data have been collected but are still raw, not suitable for evaluation or conclusions.

b. Data Reduction

The first phase of data analysis is often termed data reduction. Data reduction refers to the process of somehow refining, organizing and focusing all of the information that has been collected so that the researcher can make adaptations and ascertain conclusions relevant to the area of study. Qualitative data can be reduced, summarized, paraphrased, and distilled into overarching patterns. The researcher involves the participants where possible by conducting multiple interviews as a means of collecting thorough detailed data while preparing to later conduct data reduction. After the data is gathered, organized, and recorded by the researcher, it is then systematically summarized in a way that creates a final product that allows for the researcher to make relevant conclusions to the area of study.

c. Data Display

Data displaying is organizing works that provide categorization and understanding of data, usually with some arrangements. By drawing on Miles and Huberman's (1994) work, data display in qualitative research is about arranging and categorizing information in a way that makes analysis possible. This includes methods such as arranging data into patterns or themes and mapping out the connections or relationships among data to help interpret and provide conclusions. In this part, the researcher is presenting data in short writes, graphs, and tables, relationships between categories, etc.

d. Conclusion

In qualitative research, the conclusion aims to address the research problem, which is often temporary and continues to evolve as the researcher engages in fieldwork. Based on the reduced and presented data, the researcher formulates conclusions supported by strong evidence. These conclusions address the initial research questions and objectives. If certain aspects remain unresolved, the researcher

revisits the field to fill these gaps. Ultimately, conclusions resolve the research problem, thereby completing the data analysis proces.

CHAPTER II

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH OBJECT

A. Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM): A Comprehensive Overview



Universiti Utara Malaysia, known as UUM, is a public university focused on management studies. It is based in Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia, with an additional branch campus in Kuala Lumpur. Surrounded by lush greenery in a peaceful rural area, its main campus is often called "The University in a Green Forest." Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) was established with the primary goal of advancing and strengthening management education in

Malaysia. The university offers a wide range of academic programs aimed at equipping students with a solid foundation of knowledge and skills in fields such as management, accounting, economics, information technology, public administration, human resources, entrepreneurship, finance and banking, law, marketing, technology management, communication, social work, multimedia, education, decision science, international relations, business administration, tourism, muamalat administration, development management, logistics and transportation, hospitality, risk and insurance, media technology, agribusiness, business mathematics, industrial statistics, and counseling. UUM plays a significant part in driving socio-economic development in the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia. With its modern infrastructure, state-of-the-art facilities, and diverse pool of international expertise, the university is well-positioned to support and contribute to various socio-economic initiatives in the region.

The story of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) began with the launch of Malaysia's "Sixth University Project" in August 1983, under the guidance of the Ministry of Education. The project received Cabinet approval on 19 October 1983, paving the way for the establishment of the country's sixth public university. On 15 February 1984, UUM officially opened its temporary office in Jitra, Kedah. Just a few months later, in June 1984, the university moved to its interim campus at Darul Aman in Jitra, marking the completion of the project's first phase. This 62-acre campus in Bandar Darulaman was ideally located just 18 kilometers from Alor Setar and 4.8 kilometers from Jitra. The relocation also marked the start of UUM's very first academic year.



Plans for a permanent campus were simultaneously set into motion, resulting in the creation of the Sintok Campus. Built on a sprawling 1,061-hectare site in Sintok, Kubang Pasu, the campus is located 48 kilometers north of Alor Setar and 10 kilometers east of Changlun, near the Malaysia-Thai border. Once a tin mining site, this area was transformed into a picturesque setting, surrounded by lush tropical forests and rolling hills, with the Sungai Sintok and Sungai Badak rivers meandering through the campus.

The Sintok Campus officially opened its doors on 15 September 1990 and was later inaugurated on 17 February 2004 by the Royal Chancellor, His Royal Highness Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah. Developed at a cost of MYR580 million, the campus is home to landmark facilities, including the Sultanah Bahiyah Library, Sultan Sallehudin

Chancellery, Sultan Badlishah Mosque, Mu'adzam Shah Hall, Tan Sri Othman Hall, the Sports Complex, Varsity Mall, Budi Siswa building, the Convention Complex, and numerous academic buildings housing UUM's colleges.



To further enrich the campus environment, UUM set aside 107 hectares of its forest to create public amenities and promote edu-tourism. Facilities such as picnic areas, a deer farm, an 18-hole golf course, a go-kart track, and shooting and archery ranges enhance the

university's unique appeal. In January 2008, UUM revamped its academic structure, consolidating 13 faculties into three primary colleges:

1. UUM College of Business (COB)
2. UUM College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)
3. UUM College of Law, Government, and International Studies (COLGIS).

UUM achieved a significant milestone in 2016 by securing AACSB accreditation, a prestigious recognition held by less than 5% of business schools worldwide. This accreditation affirms the excellence of its business and accounting programs, an achievement UUM has consistently maintained. Recognizing the need to extend its reach beyond the northern region, UUM established its first branch campus, UUM Kuala Lumpur (UUMKL), in 2017. Located near Kampung Baru and Chow Kit Road, UUMKL specializes in postgraduate programs across various fields, supported by resident faculty members, adjunct professors, and collaboration with UUM's main campus.





Figure 2. 5 Digital Media Class at Universiti Utara Malaysia

The objectives of Universiti Utara Malaysia are encapsulated in three key pillars that drive its mission and vision:

1. To Establish a Centre of Excellence for Management Education. UUM aims to be recognized as a leading institution in the realm of management education, providing exceptional academic programs and fostering a culture of innovation, critical thinking, and leadership. The university is committed to producing highly competent graduates who are not only equipped with theoretical knowledge but also practical skills that prepare them to excel in the global workforce. By maintaining high academic standards and continuously enhancing its curriculum, UUM aspires to set the benchmark for management education in Malaysia and beyond.
2. To Become the Leading Referral Hub for Management Scholarship and Practice. As a premier institution, UUM seeks to be a trusted source for knowledge and expertise in management, offering valuable insights and solutions to both academia and the professional world. The university actively encourages innovative research, organizes insightful conferences, and supports partnerships with international

collaborators to enhance management practices. This approach helps UUM maintain its role as a key institution for tracking challenges and influencing the evolution of management fields.

3. UUM wants to be a leading center of excellence for management studies by developing a central resource repository to cultivate the growth of management knowledge. Drawn from modern experiences and extensive research capabilities, as well as from the extensive network of practitioners and researchers, UUM provides excellent academic and real-world tools to support learning, creativity, and academic and applied research. In developing an exhilarating environment for learning and creativity, UUM encourages students, researchers, and the professions to grow the disciplines within management science and contribute substantially in the world.

B. Facilities at Universiti Utara Malaysia

1. Student Residential Halls (Inapan Siswa)

Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) offers student housing across 17 halls, with 15 situated within the campus area (including 2 in the Kachi zone) and 2 located off campus. These halls are categorized into four groups labeled: A, B, C, and D, which are informally named after the bus routes servicing them. Most of the residences come with necessary amenities such as food courts, lounges for students, and laundry facilities.

Within the residential halls, the Petronas and TM Student Residential Halls are specifically designed to accommodate students with disabilities, providing rooms that have been specially adapted to meet their needs. The residential halls are administered by the Student Development and Leadership Committee (Jawatankuasa Pembangunan dan Kepimpinan Siswa or JKPS). For off-campus accommodations, including Persisiran Sintok and Taman Universiti, a dedicated secretariat fulfills the same responsibilities as JKPS.



Figure 2. 6 Bus as facilitation at Universiti Utara Malaysia

Certain residential halls also allocate specific blocks for students enrolled in particular courses. For instance, two blocks in the TNB Student Residential Hall are reserved for Foundation in Management students due to their proximity to key facilities.

List of Student Residential Halls:

1. Tradewinds Student Residential Hall
2. Proton Student Residential Hall
3. TNB Student Residential Hall
4. Malaysia Airlines Student Residential Hall

5. Petronas Student Residential Hall
6. Bank Islam Student Residential Hall (formerly EON, later Grantt Student Residential Hall until 2024)
7. BSN Student Residential Hall (formerly Perwaja Student Residential Hall)
8. MISC Student Residential Hall
9. Sime Darby Student Residential Hall
10. TM Student Residential Hall
11. Yayasan Al-Bukhary Student Residential Hall (reserved for National Golf Academy and PALAPES students)
12. Bank Muamalat Student Residential Hall (reserved for National Golf Academy and PALAPES students)
13. Bank Rakyat Student Residential Hall
14. SME Bank Student Residential Hall
15. Maybank Student Residential Hall (previously known as university apartments, now houses international students)
16. Sisiran Naib Canselor (on-campus, similar to Sisiran Sintok and Taman Universiti)
17. Sisiran Sintok and Taman Universiti (off-campus, primarily for university staff)

2. Main Halls

1. Dewan Mu'adzam Shah (Grand Hall)
2. Dewan Tan Sri Othman
3. Panggung Eksperimen (Experimental Theatre)
4. Dewan Kachi



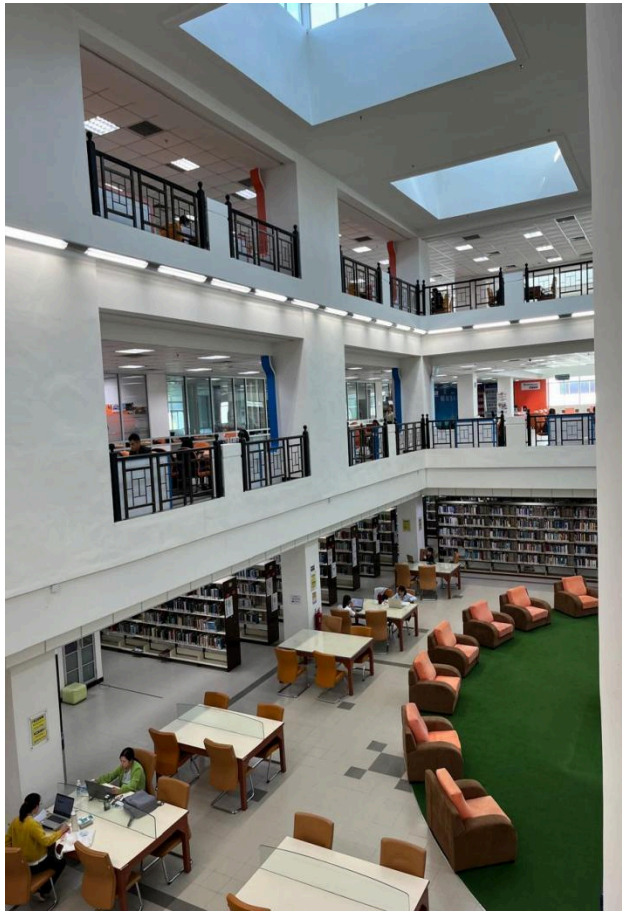
3. Museums and Galleries



1. UUM Management Museum
2. Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad Gallery (housed in the new wing of the Sultanah Bahiyah Library)

4. Libraries

1. Sultanah Bahiyah Library
2. Sultan Badlishah Mosque Library



5. Research Facilities and Institutes

1. Tun Dr. Mahathir Institute of Thinking
2. Economical and Financial Policy Institute (ECoFI)

3. Institute of Quality Management
4. Institute for Advanced and Smart Digital Opportunities (IASDO)
5. PERMAI Independent Living Centre (ILC) under the Malaysian Department of Social Welfare

C. Vision of University Utara Malaysia

To Be An Eminent Management University

D. Mission of University Utara Malaysia

We educate leaders with holistic characteristics to serve the global community
UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL GOAL - SS

E. Research Object

Description of Indonesian Student Informants who participated in the Student Exchange Program at Universiti Utara Malaysia

1. The first informant, Adji Prasetyo. Originally from Jakarta, Indonesia, 26 years old, and currently continuing his education as an exchange student in Universiti Utara Malaysia for one semester in his 7th semester at Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof.Dr.Hamka. The informant has already been an exchange student since October 2024.
2. The second informant, Mohammad Aji Bayu Samudera. 22 years old, originally from Kudus, Indonesia. The informant is continuing their education as an exchange student at School of Creative Industry Management and Performing Arts, Universiti Utara Malaysia. Just like the first informant, the second informant has also been at Universiti Utara Malaysia since October 2024.
3. The third informant, Ahmad Rayhaan Yusri. Originally from Jakarta, Indonesia, 21 years old, and currently continuing his education as an exchange student in Universiti Utara Malaysia for one semester in his 7th semester at Universitas

Muhammadiyah Prof.Dr.Hamka. The informant has already been an exchange student since October 2024.

4. The fourth informant, Sri Rahmawati. 22 years old, originally from Kudus, Indonesia. The informant is continuing their education as an exchange student at School of Creative Industry Management and Performing Arts, Universiti Utara Malaysia. Just like the first informant, the second informant has also been at Universiti Utara Malaysia since October 2024.
5. The fifth informant, Najwa Fazzahra Bakary. Originally from Lombok, Indonesia, 20 years old, and currently continuing her education as an exchange student in Universiti Utara Malaysia for one semester in his 5th semester at Mataram University . The informant has already been an exchange student since October 2024.
6. The sixth informant, Baiq Septia Rizkia Putri. Originally from Lombok, Indonesia, 21 years old, and currently continuing her education as an exchange student in Universiti Utara Malaysia for one semester in his 7th semester at Mataram University . The informant has already been an exchange student since October 2024.

No	Name	Nationality	Home University	Exchange Program Period
1.	Adji Prasetyo	Indonesia	UHAMKA	2024
2.	Mohammad Aji Bayu Samudra	Indonesia	UII	2024
3.	Ahmad Rayhaan Yusri	Indonesia	UHAMKA	2024
4.	Sri Rahmawati	Indonesia	UII	2024
5.	Najwa Fazzahra Bakary	Indonesia	UNRAM	2024
6.	Baiq Septia Rizkia Putri	Indonesia	UNRAM	2024

CHAPTER III

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the researcher presents research findings and discussion. In this study, the researcher presents the answer to the problem formulation that is contained in the first chapter.

The problem formulation are :

- 1) What are some of the forms Indonesian exchange students used to interact with students and staff at Universiti Utara Malaysia?
- 2) How do Indonesian exchange students overcome challenges to intercultural communication during their studies?

A. Findings

The research findings address the previously formulated problem statements. The data, gathered through observations and in-depth interviews, offer insights into the intercultural communication experiences of exchange students at Universiti Utara Malaysia. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with six Indonesian exchange students to explore their intercultural communication activities in greater detail.

1. Intercultural Communication



Figure 3. 5EQ Figure_3. 1* at RALVC of Exchange student gathering with the buddies

Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) is a melting pot of diverse cultures and international networks, offering students a rich and globalized educational experience. Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) has established itself as a hub of international collaboration, particularly with Indonesian universities. This strategic partnership has been a significant factor in attracting Indonesian students to pursue their studies at UUM. Among the six interviewees, five highlighted that their decision to choose UUM was influenced by the collaborative agreements between their home universities in Indonesia and UUM.



Indonesian students participating in the exchange program at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) expressed a variety of motivations for their decision. Many cited the established partnerships or collaborations between their home universities and UUM as a major influence. These partnerships often facilitated easier application processes and provided financial support, making the exchange more accessible. Students also highlighted their aspirations to expand their international networks and gain exposure to diverse academic

and cultural experiences. For some, UUM's alignment with their academic interests and the practical benefits of credit transferability made it an attractive option. Additionally, the opportunity to engage with peers from various cultural backgrounds and build connections for future professional endeavors emerged as a key motivator. Besides Indonesia, Universiti Utara Malaysia also maintains connections with other countries around the world.



Figure 3. 3 Deepavali with local students at Universiti Utara Malaysia

“It is a new experience at a university outside Indonesia, and additionally, the connections here are not only with Malaysians but also with people from other countries such as China, Japan, France, Palestine, Brunei, and so on.”

(Interview with Adji Prasetyo, November 22, 2024)

2. Verbal and Non-verbal Intercultural Communication

For Indonesian exchange students at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), language plays a crucial role in their communication. Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia share many similarities as Malay-based languages but one student noted that although some parts of the languages are the same, other aspects differ enough to create moments of confusion. This is

especially true for words that carry different meanings in both languages, leading to occasional misunderstandings.

English becomes a valuable tool for communication in these situations. Many Indonesian students initially rely on English, especially when interacting with UUM staff and local peers. Over time, as they adjust to the linguistic and cultural differences, they may mix English with Malay to navigate social and academic interactions more effectively. This bilingual approach provides flexibility and facilitates mutual understanding.

“The first time, I used English first, and maybe to adjust, you know, Malay and Indonesian aren't really that different, but there are a few words that might have very different meanings in Indonesian.”

(Interview with Ahmad Rayhaan Yusri, November 23, 2024)

Non-verbal communication also played a critical role in overcoming language barriers and cultural differences. Students observed distinct non-verbal cues, such as hand gestures, facial expressions, and body language, that varied between the two cultures. For instance, touching the head, a gesture often considered disrespectful in Indonesia, was seen as acceptable in Malaysia. This cultural distinction required Indonesian students to adjust their interpretation and usage of such gestures in daily interactions. Furthermore, the formal dress codes at UUM, exemplified by the common wearing of Baju Kurung, were a significant non-verbal element reflecting the local culture. Unlike the casual attire often acceptable in Indonesian universities, the emphasis on professional and traditional clothing at UUM signified respect and adherence to societal norms. For Indonesian students, this meant not only adapting their wardrobes but also aligning with the broader expectations of formality and presentation.

“Here, they are very, very formal in their clothing. Very different from us. They are indeed required to dress formally. Then for the Muslims, the women mostly wear ‘baju kurung’, their traditional attire.”

(Interview with Baiq Septia Rizkia Putri, December 4, 2024)

3. Media as a Tools for Intercultural Communication

The students employed a range of communication methods during their time at UUM. Face-to-face interactions were the primary mode, especially in academic settings such as classes and group discussions. Besides that, students also interact with online applications for group communication and updates, particularly in academic and administrative contexts. Students relied on these platforms to coordinate group projects, share lecture materials, and stay informed about campus activities.



Figure 3. SEQ Figure_3. 1 ARABIC 4 Exchange student's Whatsapp Group*

(Source: Screenshot)

Social media, including Instagram and Facebook, also served as informal channels for building relationships with peers, both local and international. For academic purposes, Webex was commonly used during online sessions, especially when in-person meetings were disrupted by external events like floods.

Despite the use of social media, the student said that social media causes more misunderstandings compared to face-to-face interaction. There are several words that they usually use for the conversation on social media but it is not common for Indonesian students. They got confused and interpreted differently so it causes a language barrier when they communicate on their social media.

“Maybe if he talks to us in a chat or face-to-face, we can understand them, but they can't understand what we are saying.”

(Interview with Adji Prasetyo, December 4, 2024)

Students also reported confusion over words and symbols that are shared between Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia but carry different meanings, particularly in digital communication.

“So usually in chatting, we use X as a substitute for ‘nya,’ right? Well, Malaysians often use X in their chats or statuses too. But it turns out that X means ‘tak’ and I just realized that ‘X boleh’ actually means ‘tak boleh.’”

(Interview with Najwa Fazzahra Bakary, December 2, 2024)

From a linguistic perspective, this misunderstanding is not merely lexical but semiotic. In Indonesian digital culture, the symbol “X” is commonly used as shorthand for “nya,” a

possessive or pronominal suffix (e.g., rumahx = rumahnya). In Malaysian online usage, however, “X” is borrowed from English, where it stands for “no” or “not,” and is equivalent to the Malay word “tak.” This creates a semantic reversal of what Indonesian students read as a neutral possessive marker actually signals negation in Malaysian context.

Such differences demonstrate that intercultural competence requires not only knowledge of spoken language but also awareness of digital literacy practices. Misinterpretations like this can significantly alter the intended meaning of messages, sometimes causing confusion or even offense. This finding supports Deardorff’s (2006) emphasis on developing contextual knowledge and interpretive skills to accurately decode meaning across settings. It also reflects the idea that language learning in intercultural contexts is pragmatic and adaptive, extending beyond grammar and vocabulary into the digital sphere.

4. Communication Challenges

Language barriers emerged as a significant challenge for the students. Although the Malay language shares many similarities with Indonesian, variations in usage, slang, and accents often led to misunderstandings. This was particularly evident in group discussions and academic activities, where precise communication was essential. Additionally, the preference of some Chinese Malaysians to communicate in Mandarin rather than Malay or English added complexity to interactions. Cultural misunderstandings, such as differences in verbal expressions and hand gestures, also occasionally created challenges.



Figure 3. SEQ Figure_3. U ARABIC 5 Exchange student's Whatsapp Group*

(Source: Screenshot)

For example, terms like *jemput* (which means ‘invite’ in Malaysia but ‘pick up’ in Indonesia) sometimes led to confusion. And also when they communicate online through social media, language also makes them confused because there are many different types of typing that are different. Confusion over words that are shared between Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia but carry different meanings. This misunderstanding goes beyond simple vocabulary differences, it highlights how shared language can still conceal pragmatic and cultural differences in meaning-making. From an intercultural communication perspective, this illustrates that competence involves more than lexical similarity, it requires pragmatic awareness and the ability to infer intended meaning from context (Deardorff, 2006).

5. Differences in Communication Styles

The communication styles of Malaysian students and staff differed from those in Indonesia in several ways. Formality was a key distinction, with Malaysian students adhering to stricter dress codes and decorum in academic settings. This contrasted with the more casual approach commonly seen in Indonesian universities.

Additionally, Malaysian students were perceived as more individualistic, often refraining from casual socializing after classes.

“After class, people might be busy with their own things, so they are not as friendly and caring as Indonesians.”

(Interview with Mohammad Aji Bayu Samudra, November 23, 2024)

This was a stark contrast to the communal and collaborative culture prevalent in Indonesia. On the other hand, Malaysian professors were described as approachable and flexible, fostering an environment of open communication and mutual respect.

6. Challenges in Academic and Social Integration

Academic and social integration posed distinct challenges for Indonesian exchange students. On the academic front, students had to navigate a structured and unfamiliar assignment system, which required significant adjustment. Unlike their home universities, UUM often provided students with detailed assignment schedules at the start of the semester, demanding early planning and discipline. Group assignments further revealed cultural and linguistic disparities, where misunderstandings in communication could hinder collaboration. These challenges, however, offered an opportunity for students to develop cross-cultural teamwork skills and learn new approaches to problem-solving.

“During the group work, there was a group assignment, and I saw in the group that they were discussing in full Malay and even mixing it with their own slang. Maybe if it's the formal Malay, I would understand, but if it's mixed with slang, I get confused.”

(Interview with Ahmad Rayhaan Yusri, November 23, 2024)

Social integration was another prominent hurdle. Many Indonesian students found local Malaysian students to be more individualistic, often engaging minimally in post-class socialization. This differed greatly from the collective culture they were accustomed to in Indonesia, where forming bonds outside the classroom was common. As a result, Indonesian students learned more from their international classmates, building bonds and support through common experiences while adjusting to life at UUM.

7. Personal Growth and Transformation

Despite facing various difficulties, the exchange program at UUM played a crucial role in fostering significant personal development among Indonesian students. The university's organized academic setting helped instill discipline and punctuality, prompting students to carefully organize their time and meet deadlines. This adjustment from a more relaxed system in Indonesia represented a notable change in their study routines.

Moreover, the experience encouraged students to become more self-reliant, handling everyday responsibilities independently in a foreign environment without the immediate support they were used to at home. This self-sufficiency also helped build resilience when dealing with academic challenges, cultural differences, and feelings of homesickness. Furthermore, interacting with people from diverse cultures at UUM expanded their perspectives, enhancing their intercultural skills. Students expressed increased confidence in connecting with individuals from various backgrounds, a valuable asset for both their future careers and personal growth. Overall, these changes highlighted how the exchange program contributed to developing globally aware and flexible individuals.

Being part of UUM's multicultural community proved to be a life changing opportunity for the students. Engaging with classmates from various ethnicities and countries, such as Chinese, Indian, and other international exchange students, helped expand their outlook. Many students shared that they became more open to new ideas and adaptable, developing a greater respect for cultural diversity and global interaction. This mix of backgrounds not only enriched their learning journey but also provided their social skills and awareness of different cultures.

8. Adaptation Strategies



Figure 3. SEQ Figure_3. * ARABIC 6 Exchange student club activity

To navigate communication barriers and adjust to life at UUM, Indonesian students used several approaches. A key method involved actively acquiring Malay slang and understanding cultural subtleties to better connect with others. Tools like Google Translate were frequently used to navigate unfamiliar terms during academic and social interactions. Social integration efforts included joining clubs, participating in theater groups, and engaging in cultural activities, which helped students build rapport with local peers. (Interview with Sri Rahmawati, November 25, 2024)

“I also joined the theater, which is one of the ways I adjust by meeting people who are also interested in it. So that's it, if not, I would join a club and also engage with other international communities.”

(Interview with Sri Rahmawati, November 25, 2024)

Students also developed a strong sense of independence and resilience, often managing academic and personal challenges.

B. DISCUSSION

This study's findings are interpreted through Deardorff's (2006) Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) model, which consists of four interrelated dimensions: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors. Organizing the discussion under these components clarifies how Indonesian students developed ICC during their exchange at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) and highlights this study's theoretical contribution.

1. Knowledge

Students expanded their linguistic and cultural knowledge by encountering misunderstandings over shared words (e.g., *jemput* meaning "invite" in Malay vs. "pick up" in Indonesian) and digital symbols such as "X" meaning *tak* (no). These findings confirm Deardorff's idea that ICC requires contextual learning rather than assuming automatic similarity in "serumpun" settings. They also illustrate that even culturally close contexts demand active knowledge-building to avoid pragmatic misunderstandings.

Students also gained cultural knowledge, such as learning about the baju kurung, traditional Malaysian attire commonly worn on campus. At first, many students perceived baju kurung as formal wear suitable only for special occasions, but through observation and participation, they came to understand its role as a symbol of everyday modesty and professionalism. This learning process expanded their understanding of Malaysian social expectations and informed their decisions to adopt more formal dress codes for certain events.

Additionally, students became aware of Malaysian attitudes toward money and financial interactions. Several participants observed that Malaysian friends were careful and sometimes strict in managing shared expenses, such as splitting food bills. This knowledge helped Indonesian students adjust their own approach to money-related interactions,

ensuring fairness and avoiding misunderstandings in group settings. Recognizing these financial norms reflects the acquisition of pragmatic cultural knowledge that is critical for building trust and maintaining harmony in social relationships.

2. Skills

The findings show students actively developed interpretive skills by clarifying meaning, rephrasing questions, and slowing their speech to be better understood. They switched strategically between Bahasa Malaysia, Bahasa Indonesia, and English, using English as a bridge language in multicultural settings.

Students also demonstrated negotiation and problem-solving skills when resolving misunderstandings for example, clarifying confusing WhatsApp messages in person to avoid escalation. The heavy reliance on WhatsApp and Telegram illustrates the importance of digital competence in modern ICC. While these platforms provided safe spaces for asking questions and coordinating activities, students reported that more misunderstandings occurred in group chats than face-to-face, often because tone and intent were difficult to interpret without nonverbal cues. This supports Martin & Nakayama's (2017) argument that digital communication requires extra interpretive flexibility and adds to Deardorff's framework by showing that ICC skills now extend to mediated communication environments.

3. Attitudes

The success of students' adaptation was strongly tied to their attitudinal orientation. They displayed openness and curiosity by laughing off misunderstandings, asking for clarification, and gradually introducing Malay phrases to show respect for local norms. This aligns with Deardorff's emphasis on attitudes as the core of ICC and demonstrates the importance of cultural humility. Humor and indirect strategies were often used to preserve harmony, which supports Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory that emphasizes face-saving behaviors in collectivist cultures. Students also showed empathy toward Malaysian peers, recognizing that mutual understanding required effort from both sides.

These attitudes transformed moments of confusion into opportunities for learning, helping students build trust and deeper relationships.

4. Behaviour

The final dimension of ICC is the observable outcome — effective and appropriate interaction. Students demonstrated behavioral adaptation by changing their clothing choices (e.g., wearing baju kurung or long sleeves for formal events), adjusting their classroom participation style to show respect, and joining cultural clubs and campus events. These actions reflect Deardorff's concept of external outcomes, where internal learning is expressed through appropriate behavior in the host culture. At the same time, the study found that overreliance on online chats sometimes delayed conflict resolution and reduced opportunities for richer face-to-face communication. This finding suggests that Deardorff's model could be expanded to explicitly include digital etiquette and mediated behavioral competence, recognizing that online communication is now a primary site for intercultural interaction.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

A. Summary

From the findings of this study regarding Indonesian exchange students' intercultural communication experiences at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), the researcher draws the conclusion that intercultural communication is necessary for exchange students to be effective in an environment where diversity is prominent in higher education. Indonesian students utilized many ways, in regard to both verbal and non-verbal communication as well as digital media tools, to engage with their peers while facing challenges. While the students initially faced challenges such as language barriers and cultural adjustments, they demonstrated evidence of significant adaptability and development through their active involvement. The study was able to answer its two research questions satisfactorily.

The study explained how UUM's Indonesian students communicated across cultures. In terms of the first research question, the students only communicated verbally, in an intercultural context, in both Bahasa Malaysia and English. This means they were able to navigate academic and social situations. While verbal communication is important in building connections, the international students also used non-verbal cues like gestures and paid attention to the dress code, which both depicted respect and developed some mutual understanding in this multicultural campus. Additionally, they communicated on digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and social media. This was important in building the multicultural environment, since the international students used a variety of methods to effectively communicate, connect, and adapt, including organizing group work and intercultural exchange. Overall, these combined aspects of communication enabled students to create clear connections with fellow students and staff in adapting to the cultural environment.

Answering the second research question, the data in this study indicated Indonesian students were adaptable and proactive in differing situations to overcome their

communication barriers. Students were not deterred by language levels and employed various strategies to bridge their language differences using bilingual communication, where they included Malay terms, utilized digital resources to develop collaborative tools, clear-up, and/or clarify misunderstandings. Other effective strategies for social integration included participation in cultural events, involvement in student organizations and formal groups, and asking local students for support. Although the interventions resolved the students' immediate communication issues, they also contributed to personal development, which fostered opportunities to learn skills promoting independence, open-mindedness, and resilience. Similar to findings from Everets and Sodjakusuma (1996), the study's overseas study experience contributed to self-confidence, intercultural sensitivity, and a global mindset, empowering students to be effective in different cultural settings.

B. Research Limitations

While this study provides valuable insight into Indonesian exchange students' experiences with intercultural communication at UUM, there are a few limitations that should be acknowledged that will impact the scope and generability of the findings.

The cultural focus of the study is limited to Indonesian exchange students and their experiences at the university. While this has provided useful perspectives, studying only the exchange students' perspectives limits understanding the intercultural communication experiences from different lenses of local Malaysian students and other international students could have provided a charted overview of the mosaic cultural exchanges that took place at UMM.

Then the study is conducted with a limited contextual background. Although the research thoroughly explores the academic environment of UUM and the social environment it cannot be limited to one single university. The investigation fails to look into even larger contextual issues such as national policies on international education or the historical and political phenomena of Indonesia and Malaysia. These could have added to richer analysis of the intercultural barriers and challenges and experiences of the students.

And due to time constraints, the findings are only a short snapshot of the exchange period. Conducting the research with a longitudinal study design could have provided more insight into how intercultural communication skills develop over time and which of these experiences continues to influence the students' personal development and career development.

C. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, three major recommendations are proposed to enhance the intercultural experience of Indonesian students at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) and similar exchange programs.

The first recommendation is to implement a structured pre-departure and arrival orientation that prepares students for linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges. Many students assumed that studying in Malaysia would be easy due to the perceived "serumpun" connection, yet misunderstandings over words such as jemput and digital shorthand like "X boleh," differences in classroom etiquette, and unfamiliar dress expectations caused discomfort. To address this, pre-departure workshops should introduce key linguistic differences, explain common online communication conventions, and provide practical guidance about campus norms, including the significance of attire such as baju kurung. Upon arrival, an interactive orientation should allow students to practice Malay phrases, role-play classroom scenarios, and learn directly from senior students. This dual approach would reduce culture shock, build confidence, and equip students with the knowledge needed for smooth interaction from the start.

The second recommendation is to establish a buddy or mentorship program pairing Indonesian students with Malaysian or international peers. Peer support emerged as one of the most effective strategies for helping students adjust socially, learn slang, and clarify group chat misunderstandings. A structured buddy system would provide a reliable point of

contact for asking questions, practicing language skills in a low-pressure setting, and receiving guidance on unspoken norms such as sharing expenses or navigating campus facilities. Monthly meet-ups and simple mentorship training would make the program mutually beneficial, strengthening students' intercultural skills and attitudes while also enhancing Malaysian students' own intercultural competence.

The third recommendation is to create intercultural dialogue and reflection spaces where students can share experiences, process misunderstandings, and learn from one another. Monthly dialogue circles could address common communication challenges and encourage co-created solutions. Short digital etiquette workshops would help students interpret online messages more accurately and balance online coordination with face-to-face clarification. Near the end of the program, a reflection seminar could allow students to share adaptation strategies and build a knowledge base for future cohorts. These spaces would nurture openness, empathy, and mutual understanding, ensuring that intercultural competence is continuously developed throughout the exchange experience.

And the recommendation for future studies should expand the sample size to involve a larger and more diverse group of participants. This research focused on a limited number of Indonesian students, which, while offering rich qualitative insights, may not capture the full variety of experiences across different demographics, faculties, or exchange program formats. Including students from different regions of Indonesia, as well as those from other countries participating in UUM's exchange programs, would help researchers identify patterns and differences that may be shaped by cultural background, language proficiency, or prior international exposure. A larger sample size would also increase the generalizability of findings and provide a broader picture of intercultural engagement.

Second, future research should include multiple perspectives by gathering data not only from Indonesian exchange students but also from local Malaysian students, other international students, and university staff. Including the voices of Malaysian students would reveal how they perceive and respond to communication challenges, while data from

lecturers and administrators could shed light on institutional efforts to support exchange students. This multi-perspective approach would make it possible to understand intercultural communication as a two-way process and identify gaps or mismatches in expectations between students and the host environment. Such an approach could also highlight areas where universities could intervene to improve integration and mutual understanding among all stakeholders.

Third, longitudinal studies should be considered to track the development of intercultural communication competence over time. This study captured students' experiences during a single semester, but ICC is an evolving process that can change significantly before, during, and after an exchange program. Longitudinal research could examine how students prepare before departure, how their competence grows as they face real life challenges, and whether the skills and attitudes they return home. Such studies would contribute to a deeper theoretical understanding of ICC as a dynamic process rather than a fixed outcome, and could inform program design to maximize students' growth at every stage of their journey.

REFERENCES

- Apriadi. (2024) Strategi Komunikasi Antarbudaya Mahasiswa Etnis Melayu Kuansing Dalam Menghadapi *Culture Shock* di Fakultas Dakwah dan Komunikasi UIN Suska Riau. UIN Suska Riau.
- Ayuningtyas F (2023). Keserumpunan Budaya Melayu: Adaptasi Mahasiswa Indonesia di Malaysia (sindonews.com)
- Azlan, A. A., Kee, C. P., & Abdullah, M. Y. (2018). University students' perceptions on inter-ethnic Unity among Malaysians: Situational recognition, social self-construal and situational complexity. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication* ,34 (4), 134–153. <https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2018-3404-08>
- Chen, G. M. (2014). The impact of intercultural communication between international students and local students on the former's acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 38, 97-111.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dandy Y (2023) Kesalahpahaman di Dalam Komunikasi Antar Budaya. Kesalahpahaman di Dalam Komunikasi Antar Budaya Halaman 2 - Kompasiana.com
- DeVito, J. A. (2011). *The Interpersonal Communication Book* (13th ed.). Pearson.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2006). The Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization at Institutions of Higher Education in the United States. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241–266.
- Detiknews (2024). Untuk Indonesia Maju, Pertukaran Pemuda Indonesia - Malaysia | Detik News Indonesia
- Fikri. (2019). Komunikasi Antarbudaya Mahasiswa Asing Hambatan dan Faktor Keberhasilan Komunikasi Mahasiswa Patani Thailand Dalam Aktivitas Akademik di UIN Sunan Kalijaga. UIN Sunan Kalijaga.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (2003). *Communicating with Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communication*. McGraw-Hill.

- Hall, E. T. (1959). *The Silent Language*. Anchor Books. Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. Anchor Book.
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. McGraw-Hill.
- Holmes, P., & O'Neill, G. (2012). Developing and assessing intercultural communicative competence: A guide for language teachers and teacher educators. *Language Teaching*, 45(2), 216-2
- Idros N A (2023) UUM jadi pilihan pelajar Indonesia. [UUM jadi pilihan pelajar Indonesia - Kosmo Digital](#)
- Irpan. (2019). *Komunikasi Antar Budaya di Kalangan Mahasiswa (Studi Deskriptif Kualitatif Pada Strategi Komunikasi Akomodasi Mahasiswa Suku Mandar Dengan Mahasiswa Suku Jawa Di Berbagai Universitas Di Yogyakarta)*. UIN Sunan Kalijaga.
- Jabar, D.A. (2020). *Verbal and Nonverbal Intercultural Communication by Foreign Students at IAIN Surakarta*. IAIN Surakarta. [Skripsi Dikri Abdul Jabar_163211016.pdf](#)
(iain-surakarta.ac.id)
- Kojour, M. K. (2016). Intercultural Communicative Competence: A Brief Review of Current Thinking and Literature. *International Journal of English Language and Translation Studies*, 04(04), 12–20.
- Mashabi S (2024), Pecah Rekor, Pendaftar Beasiswa IISMA 2024 Capai 15.211 Orang. Pecah Rekor, Pendaftar Beasiswa IISMA 2024 Capai 15.211 Orang (kompas.com)
[Indonesia: tertiary students abroad by country of destination 2024 | Statista](#)
- Martin, J. N., & Nakayama, T. K. (2010). *Intercultural communication in contexts* (5th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Mepnews.id (2023). Sempat Kena Culture Shock di Malaysia. [Sempat Kena Cultural Shock di Malaysia - MEPNEWS.ID](#)
- Nameni, M. A., & Dowlatabadi, H. (2018). Intercultural communication challenges: A case study of Iranian EFL learners. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 7(2), 29-42.

- Patel, F., Li, M., & Sooknanan, P. (2011). Intercultural communication: Building a global community. In *Intercultural Communication: Building a Global Community* (Issue January 2011). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446270318>
- Putra I P (2021) Ini Alasan Malaysia Menarik Jadi Tujuan Studi Pelajar Indonesia. [Ini Alasan Malaysia Menarik Jadi Tujuan Studi Pelajar Indonesia \(medcom.id\)](#)
- Putri, A. D. L. (2024). [Pengalaman Student Exchange di Universitas Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah | kumparan.com](#)
- Putri E R (2020) 7 Alasan Universiti Utara Malaysia Patut Jadi Pilihan Studi Kamu, Jom! . [7 Alasan Universiti Utara Malaysia Patut Jadi Pilihan Studi Kamu, Jom! \(idntimes.com\)](#)
- Rahim A (2015) Bahasa Indonesia-Malaysia, Serumpun tapi Berbeda. [Bahasa Indonesia-Malaysia, Serumpun tapi Berbeda - Kompasiana.com](#)
- Wiseman, R. L., & Koester, J. (2009). Intercultural communication competence and transformational learning. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 33(1), 23-3
- Yanti. (2019) Pola Komunikasi Antarbudaya (Studi Mahasiswa Malaysia di UIN Raden Fatah Palembang). UIN Raden Fatah Palembang.
- Yolanda, A. (2010) (Everets and Sodjakusumah (1996)). Cross Cultural Adaptation Among Indonesian Students Studying in Universiti Utara Malaysia. Universiti Utara Malaysia.
- Yusup, E., and Gemiharto, I(2022).Analysis of Intercultural Communication in Implementation of Independent Student Exchange Program.Ilomata International Journal of Social Science

APPENDIX

List of Interview Questions

1. Why did you choose UUM to study as an exchange student?
2. What was your first experience communicating with local students and staff at UUM?
3. How do you typically communicate with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., face-to-face, email, social media, or other platforms)
4. What media do you communicate with the local people?
5. Can you describe the main differences you noticed in communication styles between Indonesian and Malaysian students/staff?
6. Have you ever encountered a difference in hand gesture symbols between your culture and UUM culture?
7. What challenges did you face while communicating with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., language barriers, cultural misunderstandings)
8. Do you face academic, social, and personal problems during the exchange program?
9. Can you explain the most challenging of those problems?
10. What was the first step you took to adjust to the communication culture at UUM?
11. Can you provide an example of a situation where cultural differences created difficulties in communication?
12. How did you handle it?
13. How does the communication you experience in Malaysia compare to other cross-cultural interactions (if ever)?
14. Is there a change in yourself before and after you live in a new environment (UUM)?

Transcript of Interviews

Adji Prasetyo

Teknik Informatika, Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof.Dr.Hamka, Jakarta.

1. Why did you choose UUM to study as an exchange student?

The first reason is that it is a new experience at a university outside Indonesia, and additionally, the connections here are not only with Malaysians but also with people from other countries such as China, Japan, France, Palestine, Brunei, and so on. The second reason is that I chose it because it is good for the future. Like maybe getting connections with people from abroad, and also getting to know Malaysians to expand connections in the work field or other areas of experience.

2. What was your first experience communicating with local students and staff at UUM?

It's not much different from Indonesian. Maybe some parts are the same, but some are different and it's not difficult because it's still Malay. So the first experience wasn't hard or as complicated as we thought, just like that.

3. How do you typically communicate with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., face-to-face, email, social media, or other platforms)

For communication, coincidentally, the classes here in this program are at SOC, School of Computing. We are fully offline, rarely have online classes, not even one. So we communicate face-to-face. And for the lecturers, the language is mixed, sometimes Malay, sometimes English. If, for example, communication on social media, we use a class group chat.

4. What media do you communicate with the local people?

We use WhatsApp and group chat on Telegram, that's all we use.

5. Can you describe the main differences you noticed in communication styles between Indonesian and Malaysian students/staff?

Yes, maybe it's the way they speak with an accent. They also don't understand much about Indonesian, so if we speak in Indonesian, they find it hard to understand. Maybe we can understand it in English.

6. Have you ever encountered a difference in hand gesture symbols between your culture and UUM culture?

There might be many symbols, for example, language. If we are in a public restroom, it usually says "bathroom" or "toilet," but here it says "tandas." That's different, in my opinion. Decisively. From there, it started to become different, various symbols and things like that, there are many differences.

7. What challenges did you face while communicating with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., language barriers, cultural misunderstandings)

Maybe if he talks to us in a chat or face-to-face, we can understand them, but they can't understand what we are saying. There is a slight difference in language on social media for chatting on WhatsApp or Telegram, one example is when we say "no" or "enggak," they use "X." So "none" means "X dah." That's why if they speak, we understand, but if we speak, they only understand a little. Some of them might not understand. That's all.

8. Do you face academic, social, and personal problems during the exchange program?

There aren't really any academic challenges. Because the learning system is the same. Social challenges here also blend with others, not like those who are very introverted and just stay silent. So, socially, we socialize with anyone, like friends, as I mentioned earlier, adding relationships, making new friends, and gaining experiences.

9. Can you explain the most challenging of those problems?

Maybe the challenging part this time, you could say, is missing the country. But for the challenge, maybe because in Indonesia there is still a hybrid system, either online or offline. But in SOIS, there isn't, so it's fully offline.

10. What was the first step you took to adjust to the communication culture at UUM?

The first step is to adjust, we just interact with local students. Coincidentally, there are still many local students at my lodging, so maybe we say hello to the local

students, and then the second step we might go out to the food court to eat or something like that with them to adjust.

11. Can you provide an example of a situation where cultural differences created difficulties in communication?

The differences in culture and communication don't seem to be felt yet because this is also a neighboring country, predominantly Muslim, and it's quite similar to Indonesia. It's just that coincidentally, Kedah is different from Jakarta. Maybe it's because of the social hierarchy, perhaps.

12. How did you handle it?

13. How does the communication you experience in Malaysia compare to other cross-cultural interactions (if ever)?

Coincidentally, I had the chance to go to Thailand yesterday, and Thailand still has some Malays too, right? Their way of communication is different from in Kedah, if in Thailand, they might go straight to the point.

14. Is there a change in yourself before and after you live in a new environment (UUM)?

Maybe because in Indonesia we still live with our parents, so meals are still provided, but here the change is that we are more independent, more mature perhaps, and also more disciplined. Here, because we live alone, we have to manage our time, manage our money, and so on.

Mohammad Aji Bayu Samudra

Ilmu Komunikasi IP, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta.

Exchange student at Universiti Utara Malaysia, School of Creative Industry and Performing Arts.

1. Why did you choose UUM to study as an exchange student?

Actually, based on my own reference, I would prefer to participate in IISMA and try out Monash University. But, it seems that in my class, IP has already collaborated with SCIMPA UUM.

2. What was your first experience communicating with local students and staff at UUM?

Actually, when it comes to communicating directly with local students or staff, there seems to be a language barrier. Maybe it's also because I come from Java, not from the Malay ethnic group. So for me, it might be difficult to blend in and understand what they are saying. So, there needs to be an adaptation to the environment and especially the language. Which I think is a crucial thing, it really needs to be learned. That's how it is.

3. How do you typically communicate with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., face-to-face, email, social media, or other platforms)

Most of the time, it's face to face because we also have classes, so sometimes we discuss. From the four courses I am taking here, three of them mostly use English and one course is entirely in Malay for the lectures. My challenge might be when there are group assignments, having to communicate in WhatsApp groups, which is difficult. And for that one subject that is fully in Malay, from start to finish,

sometimes I have to ask my friend next to me what the lecturer said, like that. Also in group assignments, it's really the hardest to understand.

4. What media do you communicate with the local people?

Whatsapp group

5. Can you describe the main differences you noticed in communication styles between Indonesian and Malaysian students/staff?

In my opinion, it's friendlier in Indonesia than here. Because of my experience, sometimes after class, people might be busy with their own things, so they are not as friendly and caring as Indonesians. Not asking each other or making small talk after class.

6. Have you ever encountered a difference in hand gesture symbols between your culture and UUM culture?

In my experience, here, most classes require formal attire. For guys, it's formal clothes, ties, and formal shoes. For girls, it's usually traditional dresses. In Indonesia, it's usually casual clothes for both guys and girls. Here, there are strict rules, and you really have to follow them.

7. What challenges did you face while communicating with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., language barriers, cultural misunderstandings)

Communication in WhatsApp groups to discuss assignments, because that becomes my boundary for not being active in the WhatsApp group, you know. Sometimes I'm also looking for something, actually I listen and try to understand but it's really hard to understand, sometimes I get it, sometimes I don't. So far, my struggle has been in the WhatsApp group and sometimes also when talking face-to-face, there are a few words that I don't understand, but I know what they mean. So sometimes I understand fully, sometimes just partially.

8. Do you face academic, social, and personal problems during the exchange program?

In terms of socializing, I feel it's difficult here to mingle with the local students, honestly because I often socialize more with international students. So, it's mostly with other exchange program students. To blend in with the local students is very, very difficult because from my previous experience participating in organizations or

other events with local students, they seem to keep a distance from us. For me personally, maybe it's just that it's hard to communicate with them, and the other issue might be food.

9. Can you explain the most challenging of those problems?

In my opinion, the most challenging part is the social aspect. Because personally, I really want to blend in with them. I want to have relationships with local students. I've tried to socialize with them too. But you know, we have boundaries, right?

10. What was the first step you took to adjust to the communication culture at UUM?

Actually, it was my own initiative, like trying to get closer and also learning Malay languages. In my opinion, if people find similarities with someone, that's why they become close. My steps are like trying to do what they do too, so it's like observing what they usually use when they joke around. Yeah, mostly it's about learning the language, like getting closer and trying to join in on their jokes with their group.

11. Can you provide an example of a situation where cultural differences created difficulties in communication?

Because it's mixed here, there are first-year students and final-year students, so maybe the first-year students can still have a meal together, but the others find it difficult because, in my opinion, usually when socializing, there are a lot of jokes that bring people closer together. Our jokes are different because they come from different languages, so sometimes some people understand their jokes, sometimes they don't, something like that.

12. How did you handle it?

13. How does the communication you experience in Malaysia compare to other cross-cultural interactions (if ever)?

I was in Thailand for just a short while, so I didn't really get to feel the differences much. If it's me, maybe because here I'm close to the student action from Japan, so almost every day I hang out with the Japanese kids. Well, that's where the difference really stands out with the Japanese people, like wanting to get closer, wanting to reach out first, and we seem to connect better, at least from my perspective, we connect more with the Japanese people than with the local students. Because first of

all, they don't hesitate to greet first, and maybe because we have the same goal, being student exchange participants, we have a lot of free time, and we are on the same wavelength. So, yeah, I'm closer to the Japanese people than to the local students.

14. Is there a change in yourself before and after you live in a new environment (UUM)?

I've experienced a lot, sis, like it really changed me personally. For example, because in Indonesia we might be known for our culture of being late, from the beginning, it was hard and awkward for me to be late here because the culture is more punctual. So, during the medical check-up yesterday, I had to be on time and really prepared, and the classes also made me be on time. It turns out to be enjoyable not to follow the old culture. So, I have developed a new habit here, which is being on time. Then I make better use of my free time here, right? Because I'm taking 4 courses, I spend more time studying in the library. Then exercising too, even though not every day, but it has become a routine, which is something I didn't do when I was studying in Jogja. For other personal changes, maybe I feel challenged, like this is something I never imagined in my life. So it's like this is one step closer for me to reach my dream, right? So it's like there's a new spark within myself. So I have to be able to create new achievements in my life.

Ahmad Rayhaan Yusri

Teknik Informatika, Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof.Dr.Hamka, Jakarta.

1. Why did you choose UUM to study as an exchange student?

Because of the inter-campus cooperation program. So, it's really just because of the cooperation, I can't choose which campus.

2. What was your first experience communicating with local students and staff at UUM?

The first time, I used English first, and maybe to adjust, you know, Malay and Indonesian aren't really that different, but there are a few words that might have very different meanings in Indonesian.

3. How do you typically communicate with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., face-to-face, email, social media, or other platforms)

If it's online, it's rare because the lecturer prefers offline. And for the language itself, sometimes there are some staff who might not speak English, so whether I like it or not, I have to learn Malay. But thank God, my Malay has improved quite a bit, I can understand a little bit now.

4. What media do you communicate with the local people?

For online classes, the application used is Webex, we don't use Zoom or Google Meet here.

5. Can you describe the main differences you noticed in communication styles between Indonesian and Malaysian students/staff?

In terms of communication style, Malay language is often mixed with English. Whereas we Indonesians use full Indonesian, Malaysians always mix their language

with English. For example, a bicycle is called "basikal" here. Many mix it with English like that, a striking difference.

6. Have you ever encountered a difference in hand gesture symbols between your culture and UUM culture?

Yes, for example, Indian people wear their traditional clothing and their characteristic feature is their forehead, which is marked with round white and red paintings.

7. What challenges did you face while communicating with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., language barriers, cultural misunderstandings)

Language challenges with Chinese people (Malay & migrants) who sometimes cannot speak English. Malaysian Chinese seem either reluctant or unable to speak Malay or English. Even during orientation, there was a translator, first speaking in English and then translating into Chinese. They also, when in class, speak in Chinese; it's like they either can't or don't want to speak in English or Malay.

8. Do you face academic, social, and personal problems during the exchange program?

Honestly, the professors here are better compared to my university, not the entire university in Indonesia. Well, here I took 5 courses, and only 2 of them have mid exams, and it turns out the exams here are paper-based, just like back in high school when we had paper exams, sitting separately. If at my campus (UHAMKA) it's online, it's probably quite different, right? For the social aspect, at first, it was a bit difficult for me to talk to the Malays, it really needed to be resolved, but now it's fine, I'm starting to understand.

9. Can you explain the most challenging of those problems?

As an exchange student, clearly academic.

10. What was the first step you took to adjust to the communication culture at UUM?

I sometimes solve it by using Google Translate in class, for example, if there's a sentence I don't know or a word I can't understand, I just translate it, whether it's Malay or English. I once mentioned that maybe in Indonesia it's a common language, but here it's considered rude, so I don't want to talk about it.

11. Can you provide an example of a situation where cultural differences created difficulties in communication?

During the group work, there was a group assignment, and I saw in the group that they were discussing in full Malay and even mixing it with their own slang. Maybe if it's the formal Malay, I would understand, but if it's mixed with slang, I get confused.

12. How did you handle it?

I translated from Malay to Indonesian, then I communicated in the group using English, and it turns out they still want to communicate in English.

13. How does the communication you experience in Malaysia compare to other cross-cultural interactions (if ever)?

14. Is there a change in yourself before and after you live in a new environment (UUM)?

The first one is probably obvious, right? Whether it's studying more diligently due to the demands of assignments, exams, and other tasks, it really is quite tough. So, studying really has to be more extra. If I study languages, I gain new knowledge about Malay and English. And maybe I have a few Japanese friends, so here I also learn Japanese. Maybe learning about the geography of Malaysia too, which I previously just found out that they are like a combination of different kingdoms. And also the change in speaking style, if I'm still with Indonesians, I still speak Indonesian, but once I know, oh this is Malay. I immediately switch to autopilot and start speaking Malay, but with my own accent.

Sri Rahma

Ilmu Komunikasi IP, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta.

Exchange student at Universiti Utara Malaysia, School of Creative Industry and Performing Arts.

1. Why did you choose UUM to study as an exchange student?

The first reason is that the program from the Home University Communication Studies program has an MOU with SCIMPA, and it happens to align with my interests, so conversion issues are easy. The second reason is that the courses I take can mostly still be converted because this is an International Credit Transfer or mobility exchange, which needs to be transferred to courses at the home university, and the courses match, so SCIMPA is the choice.

2. What was your first experience communicating with local students and staff at UUM?

For the first few weeks, the first few months, it was still okay, still manageable to adapt because the people here can also speak English, and the way to socialize with local people can still be developed. So for communication, sometimes it's bilingual, mixing English and Malay, and there are some language differences, sometimes because even though Malay is similar to Indonesian, there are still differences. But so far, using English for communication has been safe.

3. How do you typically communicate with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., face-to-face, email, social media, or other platforms)

For example, with the staff, in the academic field, our classes happen to be fully in English because we have classes for international students, including those from Japan, China, and France. So, for this batch, we use English entirely. As for communication outside of academics with friends, since we already know each other through the P2A program, we are familiar with some local friends at SCIMPA. Therefore, communication outside of social media and face-to-face interactions is going smoothly. Moreover, because we have a group for mobility at SCIMPA, there are Japanese students and several students from Indonesia besides UiI. We also have a group, so communication is not only through direct meetings, but we are also always monitored via WhatsApp. Because sometimes we are asked for updates. For example, during this semester break, we are asked, how is your semester break? Then in the early weeks, we are still often updated. So it's not just face-to-face, but also through the WhatsApp group platform.

4. What media do you communicate with the local people?

We mostly use WhatsApp, then Telegram for groups, and there are other apps too.

5. Can you describe the main differences you noticed in communication styles between Indonesian and Malaysian students/staff?

When it comes to face-to-face conversations, it's really different between Indonesia and UUM in Malaysia. Let me give you an example, maybe, in terms of what, maybe I can give you an example. For instance, if someone says, "saya jemput kamu ya untuk datang ke agenda ini," they say it like that in Indonesia, we interpret "jemput" as being picked up, but it turns out what they mean by "jemput" is "invited." So, in terms of language, it's really very different, and maybe also in terms of tone. If it's online, there are also many differences. Even though Malaysia and Indonesia are somewhat similar, we still sometimes need to understand what it actually means. Online, it's also different; we learn many new words that we didn't know before. For example, if we have a group assignment, we sometimes face language barriers. If they use Malay. And here, the people are diverse, not just from

Kedah, but also from Kelantan, from Perak, and so on. Well, they are all different from each other. So, like there are people from Java, from East Java. Their dialects also differ from each other in terms of accent.

6. Have you ever encountered a difference in hand gesture symbols between your culture and UUM culture?

If touching the head is not allowed in Indonesia, but in Malaysia, it's still acceptable. Then the dress code on campus is very different from Indonesia. In Indonesia, we can still wear casual clothes, wear jeans, but here it's at least smart casual, and jeans are not allowed. Most locals also wear baju kurung, and it's actually recommended to wear baju kurung. Even the Chinese locals follow this, even though they don't wear hijab, but they still have to dress modestly. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, wearing jeans is still allowed, but here it is not permitted.

7. What challenges did you face while communicating with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., language barriers, cultural misunderstandings)

Yes, sometimes it's a language barrier. Even though they speak English, sometimes because their accent is different, we have a hard time catching what they mean, like needing to repeat it twice. Moreover, when they use Malay, sometimes we feel like we need to ask for clarification again.

8. Do you face academic, social, and personal problems during the exchange program?

From an academic perspective, it can be said that the curriculum is indeed different from that at the home university. That's what I felt because, coincidentally, in this exchange program, we are allowed to take cross-disciplinary courses. Well, then I took a course outside of SCIMPA, at the School of Management of Technology. That was the academic challenge I felt because it involved learning something new, which is not in the field of communication or the creative industry, and I was learning about technology management. It requires extra effort to read the modules first or find references before entering the class, making it more challenging. Then, regarding social interactions in the first three weeks, what I felt was that engaging with local people here is not as easy as I imagined. It turns out it's really hard to approach them; we have to be brave enough to approach them first, to start a

conversation because here it's different from Indonesia. For example, after class, we can still chat casually, invite them to the cafeteria, but here they seem to have their own affairs. So far, after class, they just disperse; there's no casual chatting to invite them to eat or anything. Maybe they have their own classes or other agendas, so individualism is quite evident. If it's a personal challenge, the most difficult part is engaging with the local people. Because that's what requires extra effort for us to get close to them first.

9. Can you explain the most challenging of those problems?

Social problem

10. What was the first step you took to adjust to the communication culture at UUM?

Well, after those first two months, I immediately took the initiative. I think I should join a club or maybe hang out with Indonesian students, but I also need to blend in. The first thing is initiative. So we have buddies from CAAC, from the National Office here. So we have something like, not every month, but we have picnics together with buddies, which can really help with adjusting. Exactly, because this way we get closer to other international students. And secondly, coincidentally, I also joined the theater, which is one of the ways I adjust by meeting people who are also interested in it. So that's it, if not, I would join a club and also engage with other international communities.

11. Can you provide an example of a situation where cultural differences created difficulties in communication?

Examples, right? Oh yeah, Malaysia has Indian ethnic groups too, so I have a friend who is actually Tamil Indian. Well, at that time, I happened to join him during the De Pavali celebration. It was quite a struggle because at his house, they communicated entirely in Indian Tamil. And fortunately, we could still communicate with her child because he speaks English. So we still can communicate, if we want to talk to his mother or sister, they can still speak English quite well. He acts as an intermediary, named Kisha, so if we want to chat, his mother can also use Malay quite well. But there, I felt like a real minority because basically, I was there for about 4-5 days at his place, and during the De Pavali

celebration, when we visited his relatives, they spoke in Indian. I just sat there, confused, not understanding what they were talking about.

12. How did you handle it?

I communicate with them in English.

13. How does the communication you experience in Malaysia compare to other cross-cultural interactions (if ever)?

Thailand is very different from Malaysia. In Malaysia, it's still okay because they can still use Malay or English, and they still understand even if they can't speak English fluently, but they understand when we speak English. Whereas in Thailand, they can't speak English and don't understand English. That's what I experienced during my time in Songkhla, Thailand.

14. Is there a change in yourself before and after you live in a new environment (UUM)?

The thing I highlight the most from a cultural perspective is that it really opened my mind, like in Indonesia, especially at UII, where everyone is Muslim and wears hijab, whereas here we are diverse with people from China, India, and even international students from Europe. It made me more open-minded, more able to appreciate the many differences in race and culture, which is not something to be mocked, so I became more open and more understanding that the world is indeed diverse. And it turns out that appreciating it means learning new things about their culture, which also makes me much more aware of the importance of intercultural communication.

Najwa Fazzahra Bakary

Ilmu Komunikasi Universitas Mataram, Lombok, Indonesia.

1. Why did you choose UUM to study as an exchange student?

Okay, so actually I didn't choose UUM out of my own desire, but because at my home university, Universitas Mataram, there has been a collaboration since the previous year for a one-semester mobility program. That's where I started to get interested because part of the costs are covered. It's one of the opportunities to study abroad, so after I researched UBM more deeply, I also started to get interested in joining this program because I saw a lot of activities that I might not get at my home university.

2. What was your first experience communicating with local students and staff at UUM?

It's unique, a new experience, especially since at first I thought it wouldn't be much of a problem, because Malay and Indonesian are still similar, right? At the beginning, I thought it would be like that and we could still understand each other, but I admit there is still a language barrier when I talk to local students and staff at UUM. However, we both try to understand each other using Malay, maybe I try or they try to understand in Indonesian, and it can also be done through English. I feel

helped by the similarities, even though there are also many differences, that's how it feels.

3. How do you typically communicate with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., face-to-face, email, social media, or other platforms)

For daily activities, usually face-to-face interactions during teaching and learning in the classroom or if there are administrative needs or matters related to local staff, it is also usually face-to-face. But for social media used here, it is similar to Indonesia, like Instagram and WhatsApp. However, I mostly use WhatsApp here to interact with local staff and UUM students because WhatsApp is really the center of all information and the medium for daily chatting. So whatever the information is, about Inasis, dormitories, PPI, or lectures, I get all of it through WhatsApp groups.

4. What media do you communicate with the local people?

WhatsApp, Instagram, Webex, like right now there happens to be a flood in Malaysia, so those who went back to their hometowns are having a hard time returning, and we are having online classes here, so we usually use Webex, and I just recently got the experience of using Webex.

5. Can you describe the main differences you noticed in communication styles between Indonesian and Malaysian students/staff?

I feel that the most significant difference in communication styles here, in Malaysia, and in Indonesia is from the lecturers, which I realize are very different for the lecturers. Here they are more open and position themselves as more welcoming, so even though they are teachers, experienced individuals, and our lecturers, they don't close themselves off or make themselves seem intimidating. They are more open and sometimes even invite private chats if anything comes up. And I feel more flexible to ask questions and don't feel scared, don't feel hesitant. And that's what really amazed me about the professors here. They are not just teachers, but they also provide us with some kind of facilities or create a sense of being more connected and closer compared to my experience with professors in Indonesia, where it might be a bit difficult to chat personally or things like that. I feel that the professors here are really great. As for the students, in my experience here, they are not too different

from those in Indonesia. But I feel that they are indeed a bit more individualistic or a bit harder to approach. So, as an outsider, I have to put in more effort to get close to them, and it feels like I have to approach them first in terms of communication.

6. Have you ever encountered a difference in hand gesture symbols between your culture and UUM culture?

Dress style, I feel at UUM, especially since their campus is very managerial, like office outfits. The locals here also dress very neatly and are very well-prepared, and I feel like, Wow, they really wear traditional clothes and truly wear office attire from top to bottom, all of it is very polished. I found that difference quite amusing too. So usually in chatting, we use X as a substitute for "nya," right? Well, Malaysians often use X in their chats or statuses too. But it turns out that X means "tak" and I just realized that "X boleh" actually means "takboleh".

7. What challenges did you face while communicating with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., language barriers, cultural misunderstandings)

If the challenge is about the language barrier. That still remains one of the communication barriers I experience, for example, when I'm outside the classroom, shopping at the cafeteria or wherever, I often order the wrong food or drinks because they have so many terms for food and drinks like "kopi o," "kopi ais," and sometimes I also forget at the beginning, so I often order the wrong food and drinks, like "how did I order this." for interactions with students, there is also a language barrier and maybe with the lecturers in class, because I am a communication student and I also take media communication courses, and the communication lecturers are always up to date about the culture in Malaysia. As an international student who is not Malaysian, I also have to keep up, and sometimes they discuss things that I don't know, which is also one of the obstacles, so I can't keep up sometimes, like when they are discussing something.

8. Do you face academic, social, and personal problems during the exchange program?
There's something here, just recently. Especially the personal ones. So, my phone fell into the toilet, it fell into the campus toilet. It really fell into the toilet. And I

will answer that in the next question. As for academic challenges, I don't know about UII, but at Universitas Mataram, I usually get assignments suddenly, not really suddenly, like being informed by the lecturer, for example, in the middle of a semester, so in the third week, we have an assignment. Whereas here, everything is really organized from the beginning, so we are already informed about the assignments we will be working on. I think that's one of the academic challenges because from the start, it has been laid out, these are the assignments we will do, and I have to keep up with those assignments. I think that's one of the differences in assignment styles between my home university and UUM. socially, as I mentioned earlier, I also feel it's a bit difficult to get closer to the locals here, my Malaysian friends. So I feel like they are a bit hard to approach, so sometimes I have to be more active, like asking questions or maybe wanting to get some information, or wanting to build friendships, I think that's mostly it, and some people I meet, they are a bit harder to approach than when I was in Indonesia. Okay, now moving on to the next question on a personal level.

9. Can you explain the most challenging of those problems?

Yes, that was when my phone fell. So because it fell in the toilet and went straight down, really deep because the pipe was big, I couldn't retrieve it anymore. I went straight to the information center and asked for help, but I had a bad experience there because I tried to explain that I had an accident, my phone fell, and I needed assistance. Their response was quite unpleasant; one person at the front desk said, "Sorry, we're on break." So, I waited in the lobby, really holding back tears. When they were back from their break, I immediately said, "Can you help me or tell me who I can contact because my phone fell and all my information and data are on it?" They just said, "It's already too late." Their response was quite disappointing, as if it was really beyond saving. So, I was like, okay, okay, while crying at that time. That was one of the most challenging moments here, especially in a foreign country.

10. What was the first step you took to adjust to the communication culture at UUM?

So because I've been mentioning the language barrier, I'm also trying to adapt here by daring to speak Malay instead of English for them. So besides being able to

communicate in English, I'm also learning Malay with them. Maybe at first I was afraid of being judged or making mistakes, but as time went by, I thought, why not just try it and learn at the same time, rather than going back to Indonesia without being able to learn directly using Malay.

11. Can you provide an example of a situation where cultural differences created difficulties in communication?

Cultural differences, I think, during the teaching and learning activities. Most of my lecturers are from the communication studies department, and they often give references to popular media around Malaysia. So, in class, it's usually just me and my friend from Indonesia, who is also an international student. The teaching and learning activities are usually conducted in Malay, and sometimes I feel like the lecturers speak really fast. I had difficulty understanding at that time, especially about the discussions and references related to Malaysian culture that I might not know, so I had to Google during class to figure out what they were talking about while laughing. Like, "Oh, it's about this." So, it seems like the difficulty lies in the cultural differences and the topics they discuss, so I have to keep up continuously, especially since I'm the only international student there, along with my one other friend. They use Malay in their teaching and learning activities.

12. How did you handle it?

I tried googling it. I keep up with what's currently popular here. Because the courses I take are always related to the latest trends. About media technology, about what's new in the media. So I'm learning again about Malaysian pop culture. About what's hot, what's being talked about here. So that I can also understand what they are talking about in class, and I might even be able to guess, like, oh this is hot, it will definitely be discussed in class next week, and it turns out to be true, so that's one of the things I'm trying to delve deeper into, what is currently being discussed in Malaysia.

13. How does the communication you experience in Malaysia compare to other cross-cultural interactions (if ever)?

So, I had the opportunity to go to Thailand yesterday, and most of the people I met there, even in Bangkok, the center, I still found it difficult to interact using English because most of them were not very proficient, not as proficient as in Malaysia where it's used daily. So, cross-cultural interactions in Malaysia are still quite manageable for me, and I can still communicate, and the obstacles aren't as big as when I was in Thailand. It's also because the language is somewhat similar to Indonesian and Malay, so I can kind of guess the language better than in Thailand, so I feel more capable.

14. Is there a change in yourself before and after you live in a new environment (UUM)?

Yes, one of them is that I am more on time and more organized, structured because especially since we are at UUM, which is very far from the center and if we want to go to Canglun, a closer city, we have to take a shuttle or a bus first. For example, in Lombok, if I want to go out somewhere, I just use my personal vehicle, and that's not possible here because I don't have one. So for everything, I have to organize it beforehand, I prepare it first, I know the timing. And in Malaysia, I also encountered cultural differences; they never run late at all, which is very different from Indonesia where running late is common. So, if I have an appointment with a Malaysian friend for a group project, for example, if it's at 7, they are already at the location at 7 sharp. This means I have to be on time and really prepare, like knowing when the bus arrives, when I should get ready, and when I should shower. It seems more organized.

Baiq Septia Rizkia Putri

Ilmu Komunikasi, Universitas Mataram Lombok, Indonesia.

1. Why did you choose UUM to study as an exchange student?

Actually, there is no choice, because the campus has already conducted recruitment for student exchange to UUM.

2. What was your first experience communicating with local students and staff at UUM?

Fortunately, the students here are friendly and very approachable. If we ask them something, they are willing to help. And the professors here are different from Indonesian professors, who expect us to be polite and structured when we chat or

contact them, following a specific template. But here, the professors are just welcoming. we just greet them with "Hi miss" and they won't mind.

3. How do you typically communicate with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., face-to-face, email, social media, or other platforms)

Online, it's pretty much the same as in Indonesia, we have course groups, we communicate via WhatsApp like that, because recently there has been flooding, here we use something called Webex. It's roughly the same as the Zoom online application.

4. What media do you communicate with the local people?

WhatsApp and Webex.

5. Can you describe the main differences you noticed in communication styles between Indonesian and Malaysian students/staff?

The difference in communication styles, as I mentioned earlier, here really depends on the age; there are different types depending on the lecturer. In Indonesia, there are lecturers who are strict about our language in social media chats and everything, but here it's really relaxed. Even in the group, we can still joke around, send funny stickers, weird ones, all sorts of things. Something like that. So it's like there are no boundaries between professors and students. Like that. With the students, when talking online, it's the same. But when talking offline, face-to-face, it can still be a bit difficult to understand, because honestly, they speak very quickly compared to us.

6. Have you ever encountered a difference in hand gesture symbols between your culture and UUM culture?

The way they dress is very obvious, right? Here, they are very, very formal in their clothing. Very different from us. They are indeed required to dress formally. Then for the Muslims, the women mostly wear "baju kurung", their traditional attire.

7. What challenges did you face while communicating with local students and staff at UUM? (e.g., language barriers, cultural misunderstandings)

If it's with students, there's a language barrier. I mean, we understand Malay and we can speak English too, but neither of us is fluent. Sometimes the difficulty is that we have to repeat a word multiple times, maybe due to different slang, pronunciation, and so on. So we have to repeat the word several times so they understand what we mean. And like I said earlier, they speak very, very quickly. Sometimes we have to, I mean, they have to repeat it again, explain it like we do, ask for help. We mostly experience it like that. And sometimes we are seen as Malays too, suddenly they speak Malay, even though we understand some of the words, sometimes we still mistranslate it. We still have to ask them to repeat the sentence, you know, to understand it easily.

8. Do you face academic, social, and personal problems during the exchange program? From the academic side, recently we got an assignment that requires us to interview someone we consider a role model. because we are in Malaysia and maybe our role model is not in Malaysia, so we have difficulty reaching out to the source. I really want to interview local people, which shouldn't be difficult, but since I don't know anyone here yet to make them a role model, it's still not possible. Then for the others, it goes back to the language barrier, right? In their class, they sometimes explain in English. So we can understand, but when using Malay, we can also understand but not fully. Then the examples given, examples that are relevant to the material, sometimes we don't catch them because the examples given are not relatable to us. Because they are discussing social issues, for example, in the Malaysian context, we are left out of it, so that's how it is. Okay, that's the academic side. In terms of social aspects, from what I've observed, people here seem to be quite individualistic, in my opinion. After class, there are no activities, so it's a bit difficult to blend in with them because there are no opportunities for interaction except during class. Only when we get group assignments can we talk more intensively, but after that, there are no other activities. As for personal challenges, the difference in food is very noticeable. I mean, we are both Asian, and the food is somewhat similar, but the taste is clearly very different. Then, the weather here is also quite difficult to adapt to. When I first arrived, I immediately got jet lag and

everything. What I noticed is that it is extremely hot here, so you have to carry an umbrella everywhere. Even in the hottest parts of Indonesia, I never carried an umbrella, but here, if you don't have one, you will definitely get sunburned. That's about it.

9. Can you explain the most challenging of those problems?

It's academic because if there are relevant issues, during class you have to immediately start searching for everything, like, what are we discussing now. So it's a bit hard to understand and discuss with them.

10. What was the first step you took to adjust to the communication culture at UUM?

Because from the beginning, the culture at UUM was actually the first thing I noticed. The first thing I prepared a lot from home was formal attire, as they say they are very strict about clothing, so I prepared formal clothes to avoid violating the established rules. The overall communication culture is more about reaching out to them frequently, like if you wait for them to reach out first, the message might be a bit off, so whether you like it or not, we have to keep reaching out to them first, so you can't be shy or anything, you really have to be willing to approach them first.

11. Can you provide an example of a situation where cultural differences created difficulties in communication?

During group work, maybe because there isn't actually a specific culture. Maybe it's just a difference in thinking.

12. How did you handle it?

So, during the group work, it was a bit difficult to come to a consensus, so one of us had to give in. We looked for a way to find a middle ground.

13. How does the communication you experience in Malaysia compare to other cross-cultural interactions (if ever)?

Honestly, compared to Bangkok, Malaysia is way better. I mean, in Malaysia, we can still really understand it even if we don't fully understand their language, but in Thailand, even English is very difficult to understand because of the accent differences. So, we can easily understand Malaysian if you want to learn more about it.

14. Is there a change in yourself before and after you live in a new environment (UUM)?

The biggest change I felt at UUM is that all the assignments for one semester are given to us from the beginning, from the first meeting. So the change I felt is that I can prepare more time to work on those assignments from the start. So, in Indonesia, the assignments are given maybe a week before the deadline, so we prepare them just by going over the material a little bit before the assignments are done. Here, we can go over the material from the beginning, and we can really prepare the assignments more thoroughly like that.