

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION OF MIGRANT STUDENTS WITHIN THE ACADEMIC CULTURE OF ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji negosiasi identitas mahasiswa perantau dalam budaya akademik perguruan tinggi Islam. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana mahasiswa perantau memaknai perbedaan budaya dan akademik, menegosiasikan identitas, serta membangun rasa memiliki dalam lingkungan perguruan tinggi yang baru. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi alami, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan pimpinan fakultas, ketua program studi, serta mahasiswa perantau pada dua perguruan tinggi Islam Al-Washliyah di Medan. Data dianalisis secara interaktif melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan atau verifikasi, dengan didukung triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa negosiasi identitas berlangsung melalui interaksi antara latar belakang budaya mahasiswa, nilai-nilai institusi, tuntutan akademik, dan hubungan sosial. Pengalaman sebelumnya dengan tradisi pendidikan Al-Washliyah mempermudah integrasi mahasiswa ke dalam lingkungan akademik. Jaringan teman sebaya, mahasiswa senior, dosen, dukungan keluarga, dan komunikasi digital juga berkontribusi signifikan terhadap rasa memiliki secara akademik. Mahasiswa menegosiasikan perbedaan budaya melalui fleksibilitas komunikasi, keterbukaan, partisipasi dalam kegiatan kampus, serta keterlibatan dalam lingkungan sosial yang beragam. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa mahasiswa perantau membangun identitas berlapis dengan mempertahankan kesinambungan budaya sekaligus memperoleh kompetensi akademik dan sosial baru dalam lingkungan perguruan tinggi Islam.

Kata Kunci: Negosiasi Identitas, Mahasiswa Perantau, Pendidikan Tinggi Islam

Abstract

This study examines the identity negotiation of migrant students within the academic culture of Islamic higher education. The study aims to explore how migrant students interpret cultural and academic differences, negotiate their identities, and develop a sense of belonging within a new university environment. A qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, natural observation, and documentation involving faculty leaders, heads of study programs, and migrant students at two Al-Washliyah Islamic higher education institutions in Medan. Data were analyzed interactively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification, supported by source and technique triangulation. The findings indicate that identity negotiation occurs through the interaction between students' cultural backgrounds, institutional values, academic expectations, and social relationships. Previous familiarity with Al-Washliyah educational traditions facilitates students' integration into the academic environment. Peer networks, senior students, lecturers, family support, and digital communication also contribute significantly to academic belonging. Students negotiate cultural differences through communicative flexibility, openness, participation in campus activities, and engagement with diverse social environments. The study concludes that migrant students construct layered identities by maintaining cultural continuity while acquiring new academic and social competencies within Islamic higher education.

Keywords: Identity Negotiation, Migrant Students, Islamic Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

The decision to pursue higher education away from one's place of origin exposes students to a new social, cultural, and academic environment. Migrant students encounter differences in norms, language, social interaction, learning habits, institutional expectations, and patterns of academic engagement that may differ from those internalized in their home communities (Ramadhani, 2025). Therefore, educational migration should not merely be understood as geographical mobility or a process of adapting to a new environment. It represents a transformative experience in which students continuously interpret, maintain, modify, and negotiate aspects of their personal and cultural identities within new social settings. International scholarship similarly demonstrates that students studying outside their familiar cultural environments engage in complex processes of identity reconstruction and negotiation rather than simply replacing their previous identities with those of the host environment (Bond, 2019; Gu, 2021; Sung, 2019).

This perspective is particularly important in higher education because academic culture constitutes a distinctive social environment with its own norms, values, communication patterns, and expectations. Academic culture encompasses not only learning activities but also intellectual openness, critical thinking, academic ethics, patterns of interaction between lecturers and students, and participation in scholarly communities (Zhafira et al., 2024). For migrant students, entering such an environment requires more than cognitive adjustment. They must determine how their previous cultural experiences can coexist with new academic expectations. Sung (2019) found that international students' linguistic resources and language ideologies significantly shape the ways in which they negotiate desirable identities and participate in academic and social contexts. Likewise, Bond (2019) demonstrates that international students may perform and express multiple intersecting identities as they navigate unfamiliar linguistic and cultural environments. These findings suggest that academic participation is closely connected to how students perceive and reconstruct their identities.

The issue becomes more distinctive in Islamic higher education, where academic culture is intertwined with religious values, ethical conduct, communal relationships, and institutional traditions. Students are expected not only to demonstrate intellectual competence but also to engage in patterns of behavior that reflect religious and moral principles. For migrant students originating from different regions, this environment can create opportunities as well as challenges in negotiating identity. Differences in language, cultural practices, communication styles, religious traditions, and academic habits may require students to reinterpret aspects of their identities while maintaining continuity with their cultural backgrounds. The process is therefore better understood as an active negotiation between personal identity, cultural heritage, and institutional expectations rather than as one-way adaptation.

Previous Indonesian studies have demonstrated that migrant students frequently experience cultural and social challenges when entering a new environment. Patawari (2020), through a phenomenological study, found that communication competence is an important component of cultural adaptation among migrant students, while cultural characteristics from

students' places of origin may continue to influence their interactions within the host environment. Similarly, Prayoga and Handoyo (2023) identified culture shock associated with differences in social relationships, environmental conditions, and everyday practices among migrant students in Surabaya. Mafruh and Suryandari (2025) further emphasize the importance of intercultural communication in supporting migrant students' adaptation within multicultural higher education environments. In the context of Medan, Syalwa and Azhar (2025) found that migrant students employ accommodative communication, social networking, and participation in campus activities to manage culture shock. Barade (2025) similarly demonstrates that cultural adaptation is associated with students' learning difficulties, particularly in relation to academic norms, language, social interaction, and new learning habits.

Although these studies provide important insights, most tend to frame the experience of migrant students through the concepts of adaptation, culture shock, communication strategies, or social support. Such approaches are valuable, but they may place excessive emphasis on the extent to which students successfully adjust themselves to the host environment. The concept of identity negotiation offers a broader analytical perspective by positioning students as active agents in constructing meaning from their experiences. Sung (2023), for example, demonstrates that international students negotiate both their identities as "non-local" students and their national identities through interactions with local communities and broader international contexts. The study emphasizes that students' experiences are heterogeneous and shaped by their capacity to exercise agency in reconstructing identity. Similarly, Gu (2021) shows that migrant university students actively construct and negotiate identities through linguistic and sociocultural resources in multilingual environments. Zhao and de B'beri (2022) further demonstrate that identity negotiation may continue beyond the immediate adaptation process because students develop multilayered identities in response to changing cultural contexts.

The importance of social relationships also cannot be separated from identity negotiation. Students' relationships with peers, lecturers, organizations, and members of the host community provide spaces through which they receive recognition, support, and opportunities to participate. Shu et al. (2020) found that social support from friends, family, institutions, and significant others is associated with different dimensions of international student adjustment, including school-related adjustment. Cura and Negiş Işık (2016) similarly reported that acculturative stress negatively relates to academic adjustment, whereas perceived social support positively contributes to academic adjustment. More recent evidence strengthens this argument: Sari et al. (2026), through a systematic review and meta-analysis of 13 studies involving 6,233 international students, found a significant positive relationship between social support and academic adjustment. Thus, social relationships are not merely supplementary resources but constitute an important context in which students develop academic belonging and negotiate their identities.

The significance of belonging is also evident in international higher education research. Cena et al. (2021) demonstrate that intercultural and academic experiences contribute to

international students' sense of belonging within university environments. More recent research conceptualizes belonging as a relational, temporal, spatial, and emotional process rather than as a fixed psychological condition (Zhao, 2026). This perspective is relevant to migrant students in Indonesia because belonging may emerge through everyday interactions, participation in academic activities, communication with peers, and recognition of students' cultural backgrounds.

Medan provides a meaningful context for examining this phenomenon because its higher education environment brings together students from diverse geographical, linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds. Islamic higher education institutions in the city consequently function not only as educational spaces but also as sites where cultural identities encounter institutional values and academic expectations. Existing research concerning migrant students in Medan has primarily emphasized communication strategies and culture shock (Syalwa & Azhar, 2025), while research concerning academic ethics has emphasized the importance of maintaining ethical standards within higher education (Zhafira et al., 2024). The intersection between these issues—namely, how migrant students negotiate cultural identity while participating in the academic culture of Islamic higher education—remains insufficiently explored.

This study therefore focuses on the identity negotiation of migrant students within the academic culture of Islamic higher education. It seeks to understand how migrant students interpret differences between their cultural backgrounds and the academic environment, how they negotiate their identities through academic and social interactions, and how communication, social support, and institutional culture shape their sense of belonging. The novelty of this study lies in shifting the analytical focus from adaptation as a one-directional process toward identity negotiation as an active, relational, and context-dependent process. By examining migrant students within Islamic higher education, the study also contributes a context that remains comparatively underrepresented in international discussions of student mobility and identity. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to scholarship on identity, intercultural interaction, and student mobility, while providing practical implications for developing more inclusive, culturally responsive, and ethically grounded academic environments in Islamic higher education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of migrant students in negotiating their identities within the academic culture of Islamic higher education. A phenomenological approach was selected because the study focuses on understanding how individuals experience, interpret, and assign meaning to particular social and academic phenomena based on their subjective experiences (Nasir et al., 2023). In this context, the phenomenon examined was not merely students' ability to adapt to a new academic environment, but the ways in which migrant students experienced differences in cultural background, academic norms, communication patterns, social relationships, and institutional expectations, and subsequently negotiated their identities within these circumstances.

The study employed a naturalistic research setting in which the phenomenon was examined within the participants' ordinary academic and social environments. Natural observation was used to enable the researcher to observe participants' behaviors, interactions, communication patterns, and participation in academic activities without artificially manipulating the research setting (Pariddudin & Fadhli, 2022). The research was conducted in an Islamic higher education environment in Medan involving migrant students who had moved from their regions of origin to pursue higher education. Participants were selected purposively based on predetermined criteria, namely students who originated from outside Medan, had experienced the process of studying away from their home regions, and were actively participating in academic and social activities on campus. This selection was intended to ensure that participants possessed direct experiences relevant to the phenomenon under investigation.

The data consisted of primary and secondary sources (Wahyuning, 2021). Primary data were obtained directly from migrant students through in-depth interviews and participant observation. Interviews focused on students' experiences before and after entering the university environment, their perceptions of academic culture, experiences of cultural differences, communication with lecturers and peers, social support, challenges encountered, and strategies used to negotiate their identities. Participant observation was conducted to complement interview data by examining naturally occurring interactions and participation in academic and social activities. Secondary data were obtained from relevant institutional documents, academic regulations, student activity records, and other documents that could provide contextual information about the academic culture of the institution.

Data collection was conducted in a natural setting through three complementary techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (Sidiq & Choiri, 2019). The researcher served as the primary research instrument, while interview guidelines, observation notes, and documentation protocols functioned as supporting instruments. The use of multiple data collection techniques enabled methodological triangulation and facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences.

Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Nuriyati et al., 2022). During data reduction, interview transcripts, observation records, and documents were systematically selected, coded, categorized, and organized according to emerging themes related to identity negotiation, academic culture, intercultural interaction, social support, and belonging. The reduced data were then presented thematically to identify relationships and patterns among participants' experiences. Conclusions were subsequently developed through continuous comparison and interpretation of the data and were verified throughout the research process. Data credibility was strengthened through triangulation of sources and techniques, member checking, and repeated examination of field notes and interview findings. Through this methodological procedure, the study sought to produce an in-depth and contextual understanding of how migrant students negotiate their identities within the academic culture of Islamic higher education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Identity Negotiation through Academic and Institutional Culture

The findings indicate that migrant students at the Faculty of Islamic Studies of Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah Medan and Universitas Al-Washliyah Medan do not experience the academic environment merely as a new setting to which they must adapt. Rather, the academic environment becomes a space in which students negotiate their existing identities with institutional values, academic expectations, and patterns of social interaction. Interviews with faculty leaders, heads of study programs, and migrant students reveal that students' decisions to study at Al-Washliyah institutions are strongly influenced by the reputation, historical presence, and social legitimacy of Al-Washliyah within their regions of origin. This finding indicates that students arrive at the university with an initial cultural and institutional familiarity, particularly among those who previously attended Al-Washliyah schools or educational institutions. Consequently, the transition into higher education does not always constitute a radical cultural rupture, because some students have already internalized aspects of Al-Washliyah identity before entering university.

The reputation of Al-Washliyah functions as an important symbolic resource in the identity formation of migrant students. The decision to study at an Al-Washliyah university is not solely based on geographical or economic considerations but is also associated with perceptions of institutional quality, academic reputation, religious orientation, and opportunities for future employment. The findings from the Faculty of Islamic Studies at Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah show that institutional reputation and accreditation influence the decision-making process of prospective students and their families. This indicates that institutional identity becomes part of students' educational identity even before they physically enter the university. Once enrolled, students are required to position themselves within the academic culture of the institution while maintaining cultural experiences acquired from their home regions.

This finding is consistent with the broader concept of identity negotiation, in which individuals continuously construct and reconstruct their identities through interaction with social environments. Sung (2021) demonstrates that students studying across cultural boundaries negotiate their identities through language, social interaction, and the norms of academic and social contexts. Identity negotiation is therefore not a one-time process that occurs when students first arrive at the host institution. Instead, it develops continuously as students participate in classroom activities, communicate with lecturers, interact with peers, and become involved in institutional activities. The present findings show a similar pattern, although the context differs because the participants are domestic migrant students studying within Islamic higher education.

The relatively rapid adjustment experienced by some students can also be explained by the continuity between their previous educational experiences and the academic culture of Al-Washliyah. The heads of the Islamic Education study programs explained that many students came from Al-Washliyah schools in their respective regions. As a result, they were already familiar with certain institutional values, religious practices, forms of interaction, and educational expectations. This continuity reduces the cultural distance between the students' previous environment and their university environment. In this case, identity negotiation does not require students to completely

abandon their previous identities; instead, their existing identities provide cultural capital that facilitates participation in the new academic environment.

However, the findings also demonstrate that familiarity with institutional values does not eliminate the need for negotiation. Students still encounter differences in learning patterns, academic demands, communication styles, and social environments. Patawari (2020) emphasizes that migrant students bring cultural characteristics from their places of origin into the host environment and that these characteristics may function either as supporting resources or as obstacles in intercultural interaction. Therefore, the relatively smooth adjustment observed among students at the Al-Washliyah institutions should not be interpreted as evidence that cultural differences disappear. Rather, it demonstrates that students develop mechanisms for reconciling their existing identities with the academic culture of the institution.

The findings consequently suggest that the academic culture of Al-Washliyah operates as both a framework of integration and a medium of identity negotiation. Students are not simply expected to conform to institutional norms; they participate in reproducing the culture through their daily interactions. Their willingness to understand institutional expectations, communicate with senior students, consult lecturers, and seek information independently through digital media illustrates an active process of constructing academic competence. This process strengthens students' sense of belonging while simultaneously allowing them to maintain connections with their cultural backgrounds. Thus, the academic culture of Islamic higher education becomes a relational space where institutional identity and migrant student identity intersect and develop together.

Social Networks, Communication, and the Construction of Academic Belonging

The second major finding concerns the importance of social relationships and communication in facilitating migrant students' integration into the academic environment. Interviews demonstrate that students employ different strategies to establish relationships after arriving in Medan. Some seek guidance from senior students, while others use social media and digital networks to obtain information about academic procedures, campus activities, and social expectations. Students in the Sharia Business Management program, for example, form study and social groups based on regional origins. These groups provide an initial social environment in which students can develop friendships, exchange information, and gradually understand the academic culture of the university.

This finding demonstrates that social networks constitute an important mechanism through which identity negotiation takes place. A migrant student who initially feels unfamiliar with the academic environment can use peer relationships as a source of information and emotional security. Senior students function as informal cultural mediators because they possess knowledge about institutional practices that may not always be explicitly communicated through formal university regulations. Through everyday conversations, students learn how to interact with lecturers, participate in academic activities, complete administrative procedures, and respond to the social expectations of

campus life. Therefore, adaptation is not solely an individual process but is mediated through interpersonal relationships.

The importance of communication is particularly evident when students encounter linguistic and cultural differences. Students living in boarding houses may share their daily environment with individuals from different ethnic and regional backgrounds. Differences in dialect, pronunciation, food preferences, social habits, and religious practices require students to develop communicative flexibility. Some students attempt to understand local expressions and imitate certain aspects of the local dialect. Such practices should not be interpreted simply as linguistic imitation but as a form of communicative accommodation through which students attempt to reduce social distance and establish mutual understanding.

Patawari (2020) found that communication competence is a key factor in the cultural adaptation of migrant students and that differences in language and cultural characteristics can either facilitate or hinder interaction with the host environment. The present findings reinforce this argument by demonstrating that migrant students actively employ communication as a means of entering new social networks. Similarly, Syalwa and Azhar (2025), in their study of migrant students in Medan, found that students employed accommodative communication, participation in campus activities, social support networks, and social media to manage culture shock. This similarity is important because it indicates that communication is not merely an instrument for transmitting information but also a mechanism for building belonging.

The role of communication becomes even more significant when viewed through the perspective of identity negotiation. Sung (2021) demonstrates that language and linguistic competence influence how students construct desirable identities and participate in academic and social contexts. In the context of the present study, students' attempts to understand local language patterns, communicate with peers from different regions, and participate in campus activities indicate that they are continuously negotiating how they want to be perceived within the new environment. They do not necessarily abandon their regional identities; instead, they develop communicative strategies that allow them to participate in a broader social community.

Social support from family also plays a significant role in this process. Although students live far from their parents and close friends, emotional communication continues through mobile phones and digital communication platforms. Parents' prayers, encouragement, and emotional support provide psychological resources that help students manage the challenges of living independently. This finding illustrates that migration does not necessarily mean disconnection from the home community. Instead, students develop a form of translocal sociality in which relationships with family members remain active despite geographical distance.

The importance of social support is strongly supported by recent international research. Sari et al. (2026), through a systematic review and meta-analysis involving 13 quantitative studies and 6,233 international students, found a significant relationship between social support and academic adjustment. This finding strengthens the interpretation that the social relationships experienced by migrant students in the present study are not peripheral to their academic lives. Peer networks, senior

students, lecturers, family members, and local communities collectively create a social infrastructure that supports academic participation.

Accordingly, the findings indicate that academic belonging is constructed through interaction rather than simply provided by the institution. Students begin to feel that the university is a “second home” when they establish meaningful relationships, receive recognition, and are able to participate without feeling culturally excluded. The strong sense of kinship described by leaders at Universitas Al-Washliyah Medan therefore represents more than a social advantage; it is an important mechanism through which migrant students negotiate their identities and transform an unfamiliar academic environment into a meaningful social space.

Cultural Differences, Internal–External Challenges, and Strategies of Identity Negotiation

The third major finding demonstrates that migrant students’ identity negotiation is influenced by the interaction between internal challenges and external cultural conditions. Internally, students must manage feelings associated with separation from family, friends, and familiar environments. Externally, they encounter differences in language, food, social practices, communication styles, and patterns of interaction with peers and surrounding communities. These two dimensions are interconnected because emotional conditions influence how students interpret their new environment, while the social environment can either strengthen or reduce feelings of uncertainty and isolation (Qorib and Lubis 2023).

The findings show that students generally recognize that the period required to become comfortable in a new environment varies according to individual background and previous experiences. Students who have previously encountered cultural diversity tend to possess greater readiness to interact with people from different backgrounds. Conversely, students who have lived primarily within relatively homogeneous communities may require a longer period to understand unfamiliar social norms. This finding reinforces the view that cultural adaptation is not uniform and cannot be measured simply through the length of time students have spent in the host environment (Lubis et al. 2022).

The boarding-house environment represents one of the most important external spaces in this process. Unlike the family environment, where students previously interacted within relatively stable cultural patterns, boarding houses often bring together students from different ethnic, linguistic, and regional backgrounds. This heterogeneity creates both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, differences in dialect, food preferences, communication styles, and daily habits may generate misunderstanding. On the other hand, continuous interaction provides students with opportunities to develop intercultural competence. Through everyday encounters, students learn to recognize differences, regulate their own responses, and develop strategies for maintaining harmonious relationships.

The students’ willingness to learn local language expressions and adjust their communication style represents one of the most visible forms of identity negotiation. Communication accommodation allows students to reduce interpersonal distance while preserving their broader cultural identity. The purpose is not necessarily to become identical to members of the host

community but to establish sufficient mutual understanding to participate effectively in social and academic life. Syalwa and Azhar (2025) similarly found that migrant students in Medan use accommodative communication and active participation in social activities as strategies for managing cultural differences. This finding is highly relevant to the present study because it demonstrates that the communication strategies identified among students at Al-Washliyah institutions form part of a broader pattern of intercultural adaptation among migrant students in Medan.

Another important strategy is openness toward cultural differences. The students' recognition that Indonesia consists of diverse ethnic and cultural communities encourages them to avoid ethnocentric attitudes. This openness is important because ethnocentrism may transform cultural difference into social distance and eventually create conflict. Conversely, an attitude of acceptance allows differences to become resources for learning. From the perspective of identity negotiation, openness does not mean the loss of one's original identity. Rather, it represents the ability to maintain one's identity while recognizing the legitimacy of other identities.

The findings also show that students employ problem-solving strategies to deal with academic and social difficulties. Consultation with senior students, participation in student organizations, interaction with peers from similar regions, communication with family, and the use of digital media constitute practical mechanisms for reducing uncertainty. These strategies indicate that students possess agency in managing their transition. This point is important because it challenges an overly deterministic interpretation of migrant students as vulnerable individuals who merely receive support from institutions and communities. Although support is important, students actively select and combine available resources according to their particular circumstances (Lubis, Irwanto, and Harahap 2019).

The role of institutional culture further strengthens this process. Both Al-Washliyah universities provide an environment in which migrant students can develop social connections through religious and academic activities. The shared Al-Washliyah identity creates an institutional common ground that can reduce cultural distance among students from different regions. This common identity is particularly significant within Islamic higher education because religious values, academic expectations, and social relationships are interconnected. The institution therefore functions not only as a place for formal learning but also as a cultural space where students construct shared meanings.

The findings ultimately indicate that identity negotiation among migrant students occurs through a continuous process of balancing continuity and change. Students retain connections with their families, regional cultures, languages, and previous educational experiences while simultaneously acquiring new communication practices, academic habits, and social competencies. Rather than replacing one identity with another, they develop layered identities that enable them to function in multiple social contexts. This interpretation is consistent with Sung's (2021) finding that identity negotiation is influenced by language competence, contextual expectations, and students' agency in mobilizing their cultural and linguistic resources.

Thus, the experience of migrant students at the two Al-Washliyah institutions should not be reduced to the question of whether they are able to "adapt" or not. The more significant finding is

that students actively construct a position between their original cultural identity and the academic culture of the host institution. Family support provides emotional continuity, peer networks provide social integration, communication facilitates intercultural understanding, while institutional values provide a shared framework for belonging. The resulting identity is therefore dynamic and relational. It develops through everyday encounters and enables migrant students to participate in Islamic higher education without necessarily relinquishing the cultural identities they brought from their regions of origin.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the identity negotiation of migrant students within the academic culture of Islamic higher education is a dynamic and relational process rather than a simple form of adaptation to a new environment. The findings indicate that students negotiate their identities through continuous interaction between their cultural backgrounds, academic experiences, institutional values, and social relationships. The Al-Washliyah academic environment provides a relatively supportive context because many migrant students are already familiar with Al-Washliyah's educational and religious traditions from their previous educational experiences. This cultural continuity facilitates their integration while allowing them to maintain connections with their regional identities. Social networks also play an important role in strengthening students' academic belonging. Relationships with peers, senior students, lecturers, family members, and local communities provide emotional, informational, and academic support. Communication becomes a central mechanism through which students understand cultural differences, develop interpersonal relationships, and participate more confidently in academic activities. Meanwhile, differences in language, habits, food preferences, and social practices require students to develop openness, flexibility, and intercultural communication skills. Overall, migrant students do not simply abandon their original identities to conform to the host environment. Instead, they construct layered identities by combining cultural continuity with new academic and social experiences. This process demonstrates that inclusive academic cultures in Islamic higher education can transform cultural diversity into a resource for learning, social integration, and identity development.

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