



Responses of New Students from Outside Java to Cultural Adaptation and Habits in Yogyakarta: A Case Study of New Students at UNRIYO

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Abstract. This study aims to determine and understand the responses of UNRIYO's new students, class of 2024, from outside Java to cultural adaptation and habits in Yogyakarta. The combination of students from various cultural backgrounds in one place is not a new phenomenon in Indonesia. Overseas students often experience difficulties adapting to a new place, such as learning difficulties, sleep disturbances, homesickness, and decreased appetite, which can affect their social life. This study used a qualitative approach with direct interviews as the data collection instrument. The research population was students of UNRIYO class of 2024, with a sample of 5 students from outside Java. The results showed that the majority of respondents experienced significant challenges in cultural adaptation in Yogyakarta. The main challenges include differences in habits and social norms, difficulties in understanding and using the Javanese language. Some students experienced culture shock, feeling lonely, depressed, inferior, and difficulty interacting socially at the beginning of the lecture period. Nevertheless, students showed efforts to adapt, but this adaptation has not fully created a deep understanding of local culture and complete social integration. This phenomenon is closely related to the role of the younger generation in the context of social mobility. As part of the young age group, students are in an important transitional phase where they pursue better opportunities through higher education. The move from their home region to Java, especially Yogyakarta, is not only a geographical move, but also a form of aspirational mobility, namely to improve social status. However, the success of this mobility is largely determined by the ability to adapt culturally. Without effective adaptation, students may experience barriers in accessing academic and social opportunities. Therefore, cultural adaptation among the younger generation is not only a personal challenge, but also a structural factor that affects their success in achieving vertical social mobility in Indonesia's pluralistic society.

Keywords: Cultural Adaptation, Culture Shock, New Students, Yogyakarta

INTRODUCTION

Yogyakarta is known as Indonesia's Education City which has a conducive and comfortable climate as a destination for everyone continuing education to Higher Education. Students coming from various regions in Indonesia cause high social and cultural dynamics in Yogyakarta. These students form cultural diversity and multicultural nuances appear both in the campus environment and the atmosphere in their living environment. Yogyakarta, especially the campus of Universitas Respati Yogyakarta (UNRIYO), can be said to be a miniature of Indonesia because there are a number of students with various cultural backgrounds with various characteristics that reflect the cultural distinctiveness of the country.

New students who first migrate to a new area have the potential to experience culture shock, which is a condition experienced by someone in dealing with a new atmosphere, such as a new environment and

culture [1]. Experience of a culture shock usually occurs at the beginning of their stay in a new place or in a new environment. Students who experience culture shock will feel tense when entering an area that is may be totally different from their own home culture. They will see that the culture from their region is better than the new culture they are currently experiencing. Students are also usually more sensitive if someone mentions their native culture.

Cultural adaptation is an important process that individuals must go through when entering a different social and cultural environment. [2], explains that cultural adaptation includes two main aspects, namely psychological adaptation related to the emotional well-being of individuals, and sociocultural adaptation related to the ability of individuals to live daily life in a new culture. In the context of new students who come from outside Java and study in Yogyakarta, cultural adaptation becomes an important aspect of their early life in the academic and social environment. Yogyakarta is widely known as a cultural city as well as a student city. This city has a distinctive cultural environment with Javanese values such as *unggah-ungguh* (manners), tolerance, and a spirit of togetherness that may not be familiar or different from the values in the students' home areas [3]. That is why students who come from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds can feel both challenges and richness in the adaptation process.

In line with this, the concept of youth and social mobility also becomes an important lens in understanding student adaptation. Social mobility, particularly in its vertical form, refers to the movement of individuals or groups within the social hierarchy, often linked to education, employment, and cultural capital. Young people who migrate to pursue higher education, like new students at UNRIYO, are engaging in a form of aspirational mobility seeking better future outcomes through academic and social achievement. According to Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* and *cultural capital*, students carry with them values, dispositions, and prior experiences that may either align or conflict with the dominant cultural norms of their new environment [4]. These students must negotiate new social expectations and often reconstruct their identity in response to the cultural codes of Yogyakarta. This adaptive process reflects not only cultural adjustment but also a form of social positioning, as students attempt to align themselves with academic success and social belonging in a context that may differ significantly from their place of origin [5]. Thus, cultural adaptation is intertwined with youth mobility as a transformative stage in their personal and social development.

New students who come from outside Java often experience difficulties in understanding local norms and values, such as language ethics, how to dress, and manners in social interactions. The symptoms experienced by overseas students are usually a sense of missing their closest people, a sense of wanting to return to their hometowns, and experiencing fear of themselves due to cultural differences. This may have an impact on the psychological condition of students. A more significant impact is on their mental health, such as feeling stressed by the daily life they have to adjust to. Students will experience difficulty in learning, difficulty sleeping, feeling homesick, and their appetite will decrease, so culture shock affects their social life.

New environmental conditions are the beginning of their adjustment to cultural differences [6]. This adjustment aims so that they do not experience stress or pressure on the cultural differences they are currently experiencing. Many students fail in this regard. This is because students have different abilities in making self-adjustments. For students who succeed in adjusting themselves, then they will get their own pleasure, and vice versa if students experience failure in adjusting then they will feel sadness which can affect their mental health, including in their daily activities. Therefore, students must often communicate with the surrounding environment, because with communication, all the activities they do will run well.

The adaptation process for students outside Java includes various aspects, ranging from differences in language, food, daily habits, to patterns of social interaction. In a study conducted by [7], it was stated that students from Sumatra and Kalimantan often experience culture shock in the early semester due to differences in social norms and communication styles with local students. The study also mentioned that support from peers and campus orientation programs were helpful in reducing pressure during the adjustment period. The challenges in this adaptation process not only have an impact on social life, but can also affect academic performance. Research conducted by [8] found that students who experience difficulties in adapting socially tend to feel isolated and less active in campus activities, which ultimately hinders their personal and intellectual development. Therefore, the role of universities in providing programs that are inclusive and sensitive to cultural diversity is very important.

This study aims to determine and understand how new UNRIYO students respond to the cultural adaptation process they experience living in Yogyakarta. This research is expected to provide an empirical picture of the challenges and adaptation strategies carried out by new students, as well as a consideration for the campus in creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Based on the background described above, researchers were interested in conducting research related to how new UNRIYO students

from outside Java respond to cultural adaptation and habits in Yogyakarta. The purpose of this study is to find out and understand the cultural adaptation process of the new UNRIYO students while living and undergoing lectures in Yogyakarta.

METHODS

This study seeks to determine the responses of several new UNRIYO students from outside Java regarding to cultural adaptation and habits in Yogyakarta. The data collected in Yogyakarta from June 20, 2025 to July 1, 2025. The research sample is UNRIYO new students especially class 2024 in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Economic, A qualitative approach was used in this study, involving 5 students as respondents providing information. The data collection technique was conducted through interviews. The respondents answered several questions related to the research topic. All the interview questions were based on the following three main questions:

1. Did you experience culture shock? If yes, what is it like?
2. What is the local custom/culture in Yogyakarta that the mostly different from yours?
3. How did you adapt to the new custom/culture?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results, all respondents stated that cultural adaptation in Yogyakarta is a significant challenge for new students. Their responses revealed three main reasons. First, there is a cultural difference between their hometowns and the culture in Yogyakarta, especially in terms of daily habits and social interaction styles. Second, there is difficulty in understanding and using the Javanese language, which is often used in everyday life. Third, many students experienced culture shock when they first interacted with the local community in Yogyakarta. This phenomenon becomes even more relevant when viewed from the perspective of young people who are undergoing a period of identity transition and social integration. For most migrant students, pursuing higher education in Yogyakarta is part of their efforts to achieve social mobility, where education is seen as a strategic path to improve their social and economic status [9]. However, this process of mobility does not only involve academic aspects but also requires them to adapt to a new social and cultural environment. In this context, cultural adaptation becomes not only a personal challenge, but also a structural issue that affects how young people integrate into new social environments. Generational factors, such as openness to new experiences, digital literacy, and peer group dynamics, play a significant role in determining their success in dealing with cultural differences [10]. Additionally, the success of adaptation is greatly influenced by the presence of support systems, both from educational institutions and the local community [11].

A. Cultural Differences

Most new students stated that the culture in Yogyakarta is very different from that of their hometowns, especially for those from outside the island of Java. Many students noted that the local people of Yogyakarta are known for being polite and speaking in a gentle manner, whereas those from outside Java are used to a more direct and expressive way of speaking. This difference sometimes made social interactions feel awkward or uncomfortable at first. Some students also highlighted everyday customs and norms in Yogyakarta—such as speaking in a soft tone, showing respect to elders, and dressing modestly in certain areas—which were unfamiliar to them. These aspects made the adaptation process slower and required time to observe and adjust.

Some statements from the respondents:

“I was shocked at first. People in Yogyakarta speak very politely and gently, unlike in my hometown where people tend to speak in a loud and somewhat harsh manner.” (R5, Personal Interview, June 2025)

“Yogyakarta still holds strong to Javanese royal traditions. In the beginning, I was often afraid to speak because my way of speaking sounded very loud and a bit harsh, and I was worried people here would see me as impolite.” (R3, Personal Interview, June 2025)

B. Communication Difficulties and Feeling Left Behind

New students also experienced adaptation challenges due to language barriers, particularly in understanding and using the Javanese language, which is commonly spoken by the people of Yogyakarta

in daily life. Although most formal communication still uses Bahasa Indonesia, in everyday conversations, many locals feel more comfortable using Javanese, both in academic and social contexts. Some new students found it difficult to interact because they did not understand the language used by their peers and the surrounding community. This made them feel isolated, and some even avoided conversations for fear of not being able to respond appropriately. They felt that the use of local languages without adjustment for newcomers made the adaptation process more difficult. Some students also admitted to experiencing culture shock, especially when they couldn't understand the meaning of Javanese expressions that frequently appeared in campus interactions, boarding house environments, and the broader community.

Some statements from the respondents:

"Sometimes I get confused when my friends at the boarding house and even the landlady speak in Javanese. I can only smile because I don't understand." (R4, Personal Interview, June 2025)

"In class, sometimes the lecturer mixes in Javanese. I don't understand what the lecturer means." (R2, Personal Interview, June 2025)

C. Culture Shock and Psychological Impact

In addition to language barriers and differences in habits, many new students also experienced culture shock when they first lived in Yogyakarta. They felt that the new environment was very different from what they had previously known—ranging from food and lifestyle to ways of social interaction. This had an impact on their psychological well-being, such as feelings of discomfort, insecurity, stress, and even loneliness. Some students felt isolated because they could not immediately adjust to the local culture. They admitted that it took quite a long time to start feeling comfortable, and some even felt the need for support from friends or community members from their hometowns to help them cope. The differences in values, norms, and social expectations in Yogyakarta compared to their regions of origin also posed major challenges during the adaptation process. Some students mentioned having difficulty adjusting to the local food in Yogyakarta, which tends to be sweet—very different from the savory or spicy food they were used to. As a result, they experienced a loss of appetite and decreased interest in eating, which affected their mood and enthusiasm for academic activities.

Some statements from the respondents:

"At first, it felt like I was completely alone here. Everything was new and different. The food was also really sweet, and I wasn't used to it, so I had trouble eating." (R3, Personal Interview, June 2025)

"The environment is really quiet, but that actually made me feel lonely at first and miss home. I missed my mom's cooking, which is spicy and savory." (R4, Personal Interview, June 2025)

D. Cultural Adaptation Does Not Automatically Lead to Social Integration

Although new students have gone through the process of adapting to the local culture in Yogyakarta, the reality is that not all of them immediately feel integrated into the new social environment. Many students stated that even though they were becoming accustomed to the local customs and culture, there was still a gap between them and the local community. Some felt accepted, but others admitted they still felt like "outsiders." This shows that cultural adaptation does not automatically guarantee full social integration. New students need more than just time; they also need open spaces for interaction, inclusive communities, and support from the campus environment in order to truly feel like a part of Yogyakarta's society. The lack of cross-cultural discussion spaces, limited activities that bring new students together with the local community, and stereotypes about newcomers also serve as barriers to the integration process.

Some statements from the respondents:

"Even though I've started to understand how to interact here, I still sometimes feel like a newcomer who's not really part of the environment." (R1, Personal Interview, June 2025)

"I've adapted, yes, but to be truly accepted and blended into the environment—it's not quite there yet." (R2, Personal Interview, June 2025)

CONCLUSION

This study presents various responses from first-year UNRIYO students in 2025 regarding the process of cultural adaptation in Yogyakarta. Based on interview results and field findings, the majority of respondents stated that the adaptation process is not easy and is full of challenges, especially for students from outside the island of Java. Respondents revealed that the main challenges lie in differences in habits, social norms, the use of the Javanese language in daily life, and local foods that differ from those in their hometowns. Many of them experienced culture shock, felt lonely, and even struggled with social

interactions during the early stages of their university life. Nevertheless, most students also demonstrated efforts to gradually adapt in order to adjust to the new environment. However, this adaptation process has not fully led to a deep understanding of the local culture. Some students still feel like “outsiders” in the Yogyakarta environment and do not yet truly feel like part of the local community. This process of cultural adaptation cannot be separated from the issues of social mobility and the role of the younger generation. As young people who have moved from one region to another, such as to the city of Yogyakarta to pursue higher education, these students view such relocation as a strategic step toward achieving better social mobility, where education serves as the primary pathway for improving social and economic. However, the success of this mobility heavily depends on their ability to adapt culturally. Without effective adaptation, they risk experiencing social isolation, academic difficulties, and failure to reap the benefits of such mobility. Therefore, adaptation is not only an individual process, but also a structural challenge for young people in facing a new socio-cultural environment. Factors such as openness to new experiences, the influence of peer networks, and digital literacy also shape how they respond to cultural differences [12]. The availability and effectiveness of support whether from peer groups, orientation programs, or institutional guidance are crucial to the success of their cultural integration process [13]. This indicates the need for support from campus institutions, the local community, and student groups to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for new students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This research is expected to serve as a reference for campus authorities and other researchers who wish to explore the cultural adaptation of new students, particularly in the context of Yogyakarta, a city known for its rich culture and traditions. It is also hoped that similar studies will be conducted on a broader scale, taking into account more variables and respondents.

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