

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Student migration for higher education has become an increasingly prevalent phenomenon in Indonesia, with many students relocating from their home regions to pursue academic opportunities in major cities. According to (N. Martin & K. Nakayama, 2010), a notable number of students from Sumatra, particularly Pekanbaru, are choosing to study in urban academic centers like Bandung. This form of internal educational mobility brings both opportunity and challenge. While it opens doors for intellectual and personal growth, it simultaneously exposes students to intercultural complexities that may hinder their academic and social adaptation. Pekanbaru students at Telkom University, for example, often face significant communication barriers, including difficulty understanding local dialects, adjusting to different verbal tones and vocabularies, and navigating social expectations in a culturally plural campus environment. These barriers have been shown to negatively affect both academic achievement and psychosocial adjustment, often manifesting as a sense of isolation and marginalization (Halualani, 2019).

The focus on Pekanbaru students in this study is motivated by their distinct cultural-linguistic background and the communication dissonance they often encounter in Bandung. Pekanbaru, rooted in Minang-Malay heritage, upholds an indirect and respectful communication style, contrasting with Bandung's relatively direct and informal interaction norms (Panocova, 2022). While the Minangkabau philosophy of *Merantau* encourages youth to leave their hometowns in pursuit of knowledge and experience, this tradition does not inherently equip students with the intercultural communication competence required to thrive in diverse academic settings (Levy, 2020). Consequently, despite their cultural predisposition to migrate, Pekanbaru students frequently struggle to adapt to linguistic and social expectations that differ greatly from their own.

Linguistic-related barriers are particularly central to the adaptation process. Differences in accent, diction, and local expressions can frequently result in misinterpretations, which in turn inhibit collaboration in academic contexts and reduce peer engagement. As noted by (Rifky Ardhana & Nurhayati, 2024) in their study

“Communication Barriers and Adjustment Strategies of Foreign Students: A Case Study at Telkom University,” linguistic barriers including assumptions of similarity, unclear language, and misinterpretation of non-verbal cues were found to significantly impede the ability of individuals to integrate and participate meaningfully in educational and social activities. Their findings highlight how differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, or conversational norms can erode speakers’ self-confidence and limit active involvement in group discussions.

Moreover, these linguistic challenges are often compounded by deeper cultural values. Students from Pekanbaru who generally come from collectivist backgrounds that emphasize group harmony, indirect communication, and respect may struggle to engage with the more individualistic, direct, and informal communication styles prevalent in Bandung’s academic culture (Fatimah & Hikmah Perkasa, 2024). This mismatch often results in reduced classroom participation, challenges in team collaboration, and limited social integration.

In addition, students from Pekanbaru often bring with them a strong sense of cultural rootedness, while serving as a source of identity and resilience it also hinders open adaptation to new social norms. (Akila & Esfandari, 2024) observed, the distinctiveness of their dialect and speech patterns may lead to communication breakdowns in both academic and informal settings. Inability to fully interpret or utilize the local linguistic nuances of Bandung can reduce the effectiveness of participation in class discussions, collaborative assignments, and everyday peer engagement. These findings underscore the critical need for institutions like Telkom University to provide structured intercultural orientation and support programs to facilitate smoother transitions and reduce the socio-linguistic burden borne by students from culturally distinct regions such as Pekanbaru.

To gain an empirical understanding of these challenges, a preliminary survey was used by Google Form and conducted among 40 Pekanbaru students currently enrolled at Telkom University. The findings revealed that to gain an initial understanding of the communication barriers experienced by students from Pekanbaru at Telkom University, the researchers conducted a preliminary survey using Google Forms. The survey was completed by 40 active students from Pekanbaru who are currently studying at Telkom University. The survey consisted of five main questions designed to explore the

students' subjective experiences of communication challenges in an intercultural context on campus. The results of this survey revealed several important patterns that form the basis for the development of the research focus.

The first question in the survey was: "What communication difficulties do you frequently encounter while acclimating to the Telkom University environment?" A total of 60% of respondents stated that they often experience difficulties due to differences in language, accent, and culture. This percentage was calculated by dividing the number of respondents who answered "language, accent, and cultural differences" (24 people) by the total number of respondents (40 people), then multiplying by 100. This indicates that most students face significant linguistic challenges when navigating the communication realities in Bandung.

The second question was: "How do cultural and linguistic disparities between Pekanbaru and Bandung influence your communication methods?" The most common answer was that their accents, dress styles, and communication styles were influenced by these cultural and linguistic differences. As many as 70% of respondents (28 out of 40 people) stated that cultural and linguistic disparities significantly shape the way they communicate. This indicates that communication barriers are not limited to verbal aspects but also include visual and behavioral elements that reflect cultural identity.

The third question focused on social interaction on campus: "What obstacles do you encounter when interacting on campus with friends, instructors, or staff?" The dominant responses were lack of confidence, language barriers, and cultural differences, with 50% of respondents (20 people) admitting to difficulties in establishing effective communication with fellow students, lecturers, or campus staff. These results indicate that communication barriers also impact social and professional dynamics within the educational environment.

The fourth question specifically asked about the use of local dialects: "Do disparities in local dialects pose a serious communication obstacle?" 60% of respondents (24 people) stated that they had difficulty understanding local expressions, such as the use of Sundanese or Bandung-specific terms that were unfamiliar to them. This finding reinforces the argument that dialect variation is one of the most challenging linguistic factors in the adaptation process for students in Pekanbaru.

The final question was: “To what extent does culture shock contribute to the difficulties in communication in your new setting?” The most common response was issues with adaptation and cultural misunderstandings, with 50% of respondents (20 people) stating that culture shock was the main factor exacerbating their communication barriers. This indicates that the adaptation process involves not only cognitive dimensions but also emotional and psychosocial aspects.

Overall, the survey results show that between 50% and 70% of respondents face significant communication barriers in the academic and social environment of Telkom University. This percentage highlights the urgent need for support programs such as intercultural communication training, social-linguistic orientation, and adaptive mental resilience to enable students from outside the region, such as Pekanbaru, to interact more effectively and inclusively in campus life.

The percentages presented in the preliminary survey were derived from a total of 40 respondents, all of whom are students from Pekanbaru currently enrolled at Telkom University. Each percentage represents the proportion of students who selected or expressed a specific response aligned with the given question. These values were calculated by dividing the number of respondents who provided a particular answer by the total number of participants ($n = 40$), then multiplying the result by 100 to obtain a percentage. The following is a detailed explanation of how each percentage was generated and interpreted:

Language, Accent, and Cultural Differences emerged as one of the most common sources of difficulty. This figure emerged from responses to the question: "What communication difficulties do you frequently encounter while acclimating to the Telkom University environment?" A significant number of students expressed that the differences in language structure, regional accents, and cultural expressions posed a barrier when trying to integrate into academic and social environments. This highlights a sense of dissonance between the students' familiar communication styles and the linguistic expectations in Bandung. Students found that both verbal elements (such as pronunciation and vocabulary) and non-verbal aspects (such as body language and tone) did not always align with what was culturally normative in their new environment. These misalignments often resulted in misunderstandings and feelings of exclusion.

Influence of Cultural and Linguistic Differences were also frequently reported. In response to the question: "How do cultural and linguistic disparities between Pekanbaru and Bandung influence your communication methods?", Many students described how their speech patterns, clothing choices, and general behavior were often shaped by the cultural norms of their hometown, which differed significantly from those in Bandung. For example, while formality and indirect communication are often valued in Pekanbaru, the local environment in Bandung tends to favor a more relaxed and straightforward style of interaction. This contrast caused some students to feel awkward or hesitant when participating in conversations, as they were unsure whether their behavior would be interpreted correctly or appreciated by their peers.

Obstacles in Campus Interaction were also prominently noted. When asked: "What obstacles do you encounter when interacting on campus with friends, instructors, or staff?", Students reported difficulty when engaging with friends, lecturers, and administrative staff, stemming from unfamiliarity with local expressions or a fear of being misunderstood. Some mentioned a sense of intimidation when needing to express opinions in group discussions or ask questions in class. The psychological weight of these challenges often led to reduced participation and social withdrawal, further impeding their academic involvement and sense of community on campus.

Dialect as a Serious Obstacle was a particularly striking issue. For the question: "Do disparities in local dialects pose a serious communication obstacle?", Many students found themselves confused or left out during informal conversations, especially when peers switched to Sundanese or used slang unique to Bandung. For students from Pekanbaru, who are not accustomed to these linguistic forms, the use of local dialects often made it difficult to follow conversations or fully engage in social settings. This led some students to avoid certain interactions altogether to prevent embarrassment or discomfort.

Impact of Culture Shock was another key theme, particularly in relation to emotional and psychological adjustment. Lastly, in response to: "To what extent does culture shock contribute to the difficulties to communication in your new setting?", Several students acknowledged feeling overwhelmed by the new social norms, values, and expectations they encountered upon arriving in Bandung. This sense of cultural disorientation often affected their motivation, confidence, and overall well-being.

Many reported that they needed time and, in some cases, support from peers or mentors to gradually adjust and feel comfortable in their new environment.

The preliminary survey results highlight that communication barriers experienced by students from Pekanbaru at Telkom University are complex, recurring, and deeply embedded within the socio-cultural dynamics of campus life. These challenges are not incidental, but rather reflect broader systemic issues related to regional linguistic and cultural disparities. The responses, with percentages ranging from 50% to 70%, consistently pointed to difficulties in five main areas: understanding local language and dialect, adapting communication methods to suit different cultural expectations, engaging in social and academic interactions, interpreting local expressions and idioms, and coping with culture shock. Language-related difficulties were among the most prominent, as many students struggled with differences in pronunciation, intonation, and unfamiliar expressions, particularly those rooted in Sundanese. Beyond that, cultural expectations such as differences in humor, politeness norms, and formality contributed to miscommunication and discomfort in both academic and informal settings. These factors often made students feel misunderstood or excluded, reinforcing psychological barriers such as fear of judgment and loss of confidence. Furthermore, the high occurrence of reported culture shock points to the emotional and cognitive strain that comes with navigating a new environment where norms, behaviors, and communication styles differ significantly from students' backgrounds. While the data showed that students made efforts to adapt, the process was often hindered by a lack of familiarity with the host culture's social cues and linguistic codes. Overall, the survey findings confirm that the communication barriers faced by Pekanbaru students are systemic in nature and interwoven with their adaptation experience. The survey underscores the urgency for institutions like Telkom University to implement structured, culturally responsive support programs—ranging from intercultural orientation to peer mentoring in order to ease the transition process and foster inclusive academic environments for students from diverse regional backgrounds.

While several prior studies have explored intercultural communication and adaptation among university students, many of them focus on general migration experiences or different cultural regions. For example, (Sukma Akila & Agung Esfandari, 2024) investigated the cultural re-adaptation process of Riau students returning to their

hometown after studying in Bandung, highlighting the challenges they face in negotiating dual cultural identities. Similarly, (Wahyutama & Maulani, 2022) examined the cultural shock and adaptation strategies of Minangkabau students in Jakarta, demonstrating how their cultural values influence communicative behavior in an urban academic setting. Meanwhile, (Hidayat, 2022) explored how Minangkabau students studying at Universitas Padjadjaran Pangandaran adjust their communication patterns and cope with linguistic and social differences in West Java.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into cultural adjustment and communication dynamics involving Minang or Riau students, they each present limitations in terms of scope, focus, or participant background. The study by (Sukma Akila & Agung Esfandari, 2024) explored intercultural sensitivity and student integration, but it primarily focused on students from Java and did not address the specific experiences of students from Sumatra such as Pekanbaru. (Wahyutama & Maulani, 2022) investigated communication barriers faced by international students, thereby limiting the applicability of their findings to intra-national student migration and cultural friction within the same country. Meanwhile, (Hidayat, 2022) examined the adaptation process of migrants from Riau, but his research emphasized post-migration reintegration after returning to their place of origin, rather than the initial adjustment phase in a new host culture. As such, these prior studies do not sufficiently address the first-hand intercultural adaptation experiences of students from Pekanbaru who often embody a complex Minangkabau-Malay identity especially in relation to their adaptation to the Sundanese-dominated sociolinguistic and cultural environment of Bandung. The specific intersection between regional dialects, communication norms, and psychological adjustment within a multicultural academic institution like Telkom University remains underexplored and thus forms the core focus of this study.

This reveals a clear research gap: there is a lack of focused research that examines the communication barriers and adaptation process of Pekanbaru students whose cultural identity is shaped by indirectness, respect-based communication, and collectivist values within the unique social and linguistic context of Bandung-based academic institutions such as Telkom University. The absence of literature that centers on this demographic underscores the need for a contextualized study that addresses the internal intercultural dynamics within Indonesia itself, not merely between international and local students.

Based on these findings, the urgency of this research lies in addressing a critical yet underexplored dimension of intercultural communication: the experience of students from culturally distinct regions within the same national context. Although many higher education institutions in Indonesia promote inclusivity, there remains a lack of targeted understanding and institutional support for students like those from Pekanbaru, whose linguistic heritage and cultural values differ significantly from their host environments. These gaps result in unmet adaptation needs and continued social disconnection, which could lead to long-term academic disengagement and psychological strain.

Therefore, this research entitled “Communication Barriers and Adaptation Process of Students from Pekanbaru: A Case Study at Telkom University” aims to examine, through a case study approach, how communication barriers are experienced and negotiated by students from Pekanbaru within the micro-context of Telkom University. By exploring their adaptation journey in depth, this study seeks to provide not only academic insight but also practical recommendations for institutional stakeholders. Ultimately, the goal is to foster a more culturally responsive campus environment that empowers students from diverse regional backgrounds to thrive academically, socially, and personally.

1.2 Research Problem

To better understand the communication challenges faced by Pekanbaru students at Telkom University, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do the students of Pekanbaru get adapted at Telkom University?
2. How do they overcome communication barriers at Telkom University?

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1. To explore how communication barriers occur among students from Pekanbaru during their adaptation process at Telkom University, particularly in relation to verbal communication, variety of language, and social norms within a multicultural academic environment.

2. To analyze the adaptation strategies employed by Pekanbaru students in overcoming intercultural communication challenges and to understand how these strategies facilitate their academic and social integration on campus.

In order to do this, it is anticipated that the study will offer a more thorough comprehension of the elements that impede communication in a cross-cultural setting and identify practical adaptation techniques for international students.

1.4 Research Benefits

- **Theoretical Benefits:** This study aims to contribute to the field of intercultural communication by deepening the understanding of how regional linguistic and cultural differences particularly those rooted in Minangkabau-Malay traditions impact the communication barriers and adaptation process of students from Pekanbaru. As emphasized by (Tamiko Halualani, 2018), intercultural communication requires adaptability, cultural awareness, and the ability to negotiate meaning across different interactional norms. In addition, (Levy, 2020) highlights that adaptation is not a linear process but involves continuous emotional, behavioral, and cognitive adjustments. By focusing on the lived experiences of Pekanbaru students at Telkom University, this research will provide theoretical insight into how linguistic dissonance, cultural expectations, and psychosocial factors intersect during the adaptation journey. Moreover, this study extends existing literature by examining the dual influence of communication barriers and adaptation processes on both academic performance and social integration in a specific university context. It also contributes to broader scholarly discourse on how higher education institutions can identify communication challenges and foster inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments.
- **Practical Benefits:** The findings of this case study are expected to offer practical benefits for Pekanbaru students, university administrators, and academic staff, particularly within Telkom University. By identifying specific communication challenges and adaptation patterns, the study can help inform the development of support mechanisms such as

tailored orientation programs, intercultural communication workshops, and structured peer mentoring systems. These interventions can help ease the transition of students from culturally distinct regions into the academic and social fabric of the university. Additionally, the results may guide university policy-makers in designing long-term strategies that promote cultural sensitivity, reduce miscommunication, and enhance students' sense of belonging. Ultimately, this study aims to serve as a foundation for building more inclusive educational practices that accommodate the realities of internal student mobility in Indonesia.