

## The Impact of Cross-Cultural Adjustment and Intercultural Sensitivity on Intergroup Bias in Migrant Students

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**Abstract.** Issues faced by migrant students, such as misperceptions, prejudice, and discrimination, can lead to intercultural conflicts and physical violence that warrant further investigation. This study aimed to examine the contributions of cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity to intergroup bias among migrant students in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Participants included 96 migrant students residing outside the Special Region of Yogyakarta with diverse ethnic cultural backgrounds, selected via purposive sampling. The measurement instruments comprised the Cross-Cultural Adjustment Scale, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, and the Intergroup Bias Scale. Data were analyzed using multiple regression. Results indicated that both cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity negatively predicted intergroup bias among migrant students ( $F = 40.404$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The combined contribution of cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity to the reduction of intergroup bias was 46.5%.

**Keywords:** Cross-cultural adjustment, Diversity, Intercultural sensitivity, Intergroup bias

**Abstrak.** Beberapa isu yang dihadapi mahasiswa perantau seperti kesalahan persepsi, prasangka, dan diskriminasi dapat menyebabkan munculnya konflik antarbudaya dan kekerasan fisik yang perlu untuk dikaji lebih jauh. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana kontribusi penyesuaian lintas budaya dan sensitivitas antarbudaya terhadap *intergroup bias* pada mahasiswa perantau di Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. Subjek penelitian terdiri dari 96 orang mahasiswa perantau yang berdomisili di luar Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta dengan latar belakang suku budaya berbeda, yang diperoleh melalui teknik *purposive sampling*. Instrumen penelitian yang digunakan dalam pengukuran adalah Skala Penyesuaian Lintas Budaya, Skala Sensitivitas Antarbudaya dan Skala *Intergroup Bias*. Analisis data menggunakan regresi berganda. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan pengaruh negatif variabel penyesuaian lintas budaya dan sensitivitas antar budaya terhadap *intergroup bias* pada mahasiswa perantau ( $F = 40.404$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Kontribusi penyesuaian lintas budaya bersama dengan sensitivitas antarbudaya terhadap penurunan *intergroup bias* adalah sebesar 46,5%.

**Kata kunci:** Diversitas, Intergroup bias, Penyesuaian lintas budaya, Sensitivitas antarbudaya

Yogyakarta is widely recognized as one of the largest education hubs in Indonesia, attracting students from various regions across the country. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2022), the number of higher education students in the Special Region of Yogyakarta has reached approximately 400,000 individuals across public and private universities. A considerable proportion of these students originate from outside the region, making Yogyakarta one of the major destinations for migrant students in Indonesia. Students come from diverse geographical areas including Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, and Papua. The presence of students from diverse cultural backgrounds creates an intercultural environment in which interactions between individuals with different ethnic identities frequently occur. Previous research has shown that culturally diverse environments may increase the likelihood of intercultural misunderstandings, stereotypes, and prejudice if intercultural competencies are not adequately developed (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Tamam & Krauss, 2017).

Migrant students bring diverse cultural backgrounds that may lead to several challenges, including psychological problems related to cultural gaps like differences in values, behaviors, and customs (Akhtaruzzaman & Hoque, 2011), issues in daily life such as language and life satisfaction (Gabel, Dolan, & Cerdin, 2005), and academic achievement problems among migrant students (Nasir, 2011). Cultural differences can lead to misperceptions (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Miller, 2008), negative emotional reactions such as prejudice, and behavioral forms like discrimination (Engberg, 2004). Purwaningsih, Galba, and Ariani (2014) recorded several cases of intercultural conflicts among migrant students in Yogyakarta, such as the attack on the Sumatran student dormitory in 1970, fights between students and the raid on the South Sulawesi student dormitory in 2008, and conflicts between locals and students from NTT in 2013. Another case in 2016 involved Papuan students clashing with community organizations, with the perception that Papuan students could not integrate with the local community (Kusumadewi, 2016).

Hewstone et al. (2002) explained that intergroup bias is associated with the emergence of certain emotions, perceptions of other groups, and tendencies to act. Bias toward other groups arises due to differences in norms or actions perceived as unfair by one group. Stronger emotions toward other groups are manifested in forms of fear, hatred, disgust, and specific reactions. Reactions to stronger emotions can take the form of opposition or violent actions against other groups. Miller (2008) revealed that bias causes individuals to experience misperceptions when

receiving information from people belonging to different groups. This bias toward other groups is termed intergroup bias, or as McCaslin (2010) refers to it, favoritism toward one's own group.

Intergroup bias can also be explained through the perspective of Social Identity Theory, which suggests that individuals tend to categorize themselves and others into social groups in order to maintain a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Through this categorization process, individuals often develop ingroup favoritism while evaluating members of other groups less positively. In multicultural environments such as universities where students come from diverse regional and ethnic backgrounds, these social categorization processes may emerge based on ethnic identity, regional origin, or cultural affiliation. Even when a shared national language reduces communication barriers, social identity processes may still produce subtle forms of intergroup bias.

Hewstone et al. (2002) stated that bias encompasses cognitive components, namely stereotypes; attitudinal components, namely prejudice; and behavioral components, namely discrimination. The first component, stereotypes, is the cognitive aspect of intergroup bias defined as beliefs about the characteristics of members of a particular cultural group, which are less consciously activated and automatically triggered in daily life during socialization. The second component, prejudice, is a negative attitude stemming from judgments and evaluations of others. The third component is discrimination, which is inappropriate negative behavior toward members of a specific cultural group. Engberg (2004) explained that bias manifests in attitudes, beliefs, emotional reactions, and behaviors.

Cross-cultural adjustment plays an important role in shaping individuals' interactions within multicultural environments. Individuals who successfully adjust to a new cultural context tend to develop better understanding of local norms, values, and behavioral expectations (Ward et al., 2001). Greater familiarity with members of other cultural groups may reduce uncertainty and misinterpretation during intercultural interactions. According to Intergroup Contact Theory, meaningful and positive interactions between members of different groups can reduce prejudice and stereotyping (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Therefore, individuals who demonstrate higher levels of cross-cultural adjustment are more likely to experience constructive intercultural interactions that weaken negative stereotypes and reduce the emergence of intergroup bias. Cross-cultural adjustment in intercultural interactions becomes crucial, particularly for students expected to adapt and interact effectively with the local environment and culture. According to Rozaimie, Amelia,

and Aiza (2013), the inability to adjust to a different cultural environment causes individuals to feel hindered in their development due to a lack of support and can lead to misunderstandings of unfamiliar local cultures. Furthermore, an individual's ability to adjust to a new culture and its social environment can predict success in performing tasks (Gabel et al., 2005) and achieving adequate life satisfaction (Yu & Wright, 2016).

Rui and Wang (2015) defined cross-cultural adjustment as a combination of socio-cultural adaptation and psychological adaptation. Akhtaruzzaman and Hoque (2011) explained that cross-cultural adjustment is a complex process in which individuals become capable of interacting effectively within a culture other than their own. Konanahalli and Oyedele (2016) defined cross-cultural adjustment as the process of understanding and integrating behaviors, values, and beliefs from the local cultural perspective with one's original cultural perspective. Cross-cultural adjustment consists of three aspects: socio-cultural adjustment, which involves healthy interpersonal relationships with local community members; work adjustment, related to the workplace culture, but in the case of migrant students, linked to educational institutions; and general adjustment, encompassing adaptation to daily issues or activities such as food, language, life satisfaction, etc. (Gabel et al., 2005). Recent research among Indonesian freshman students has demonstrated that friendship network centrality, assessed via social network analysis, significantly predicts psychological adaptation, underscoring the role of social ties in facilitating adjustment to new cultural environments (Nurjaman, 2020).

The negative impacts of unmanaged cultural diversity manifest as bias in perception, attitudes, and behaviors, which are also linked to a lack of intercultural interaction skills. One concept developed in intercultural interaction skills is intercultural sensitivity. Aspects of intercultural sensitivity play a role in reducing bias during intercultural interactions, including stereotypes and prejudice, as shown in studies by Graf (2004) and Sizoo, Serrie, and Shapero (2007).

Chen and Starosta (2000) defined intercultural sensitivity as an affective response in the form of feelings and emotions related to cultural similarities and differences. Intercultural sensitivity consists of six aspects: self-esteem or confidence when engaging in interactions within cultural diversity; self-monitoring or consciously controlling behavior to adapt; open-mindedness or willingness to think openly; interaction involvement or engagement in cross-cultural

interactions; non-judgment or avoiding hasty conclusions; and empathy, which is understanding others' feelings and perspectives (Chen & Starosta, 1997).

A study by Chen and Starosta (2000) showed that individuals with high intercultural sensitivity tend to be more attentive, more competent in accepting the social-interpersonal aspects of others when building relationships in efforts to adjust to behaviors of people from different cultures, exhibit high self-esteem, self-control ability, greater empathy, and effectiveness in intercultural interactions.

This study addresses a gap in literature by examining the role of cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity in intergroup bias among migrant students. Rozaimie et al. (2013) revealed that the ability to adjust in an intercultural environment helps overcome misunderstandings related to unfamiliar cultures and when facing barriers in intercultural interactions. Research by Soedarmadi (2020) indicated that aspects of intercultural sensitivity trained in a form of intercultural skills significantly reduce intergroup bias levels among government agency employees. Based on the above description, the hypothesis of this study is: Cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity have a significant influence on intergroup bias among migrant students.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

This study examined three variables: intercultural sensitivity, cross-cultural adjustment, and intergroup bias. Cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity served as predictor variables, while intergroup bias was the criterion variable. Participants were migrant students from several private universities in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. A total of 96 participants were involved in the study (26% male and 74% female). The age range of the participants was as follows: 17 years (2%), 18 years (13%), 19 years (65%), 20 years (17%), 21 years (2%), and 22 years (1%). Based on domicile, 36% originated from Central Java, 18% from West Java, 7% from East Java, while the remaining 39% were spread across various regions in Indonesia, such as North Sumatra, Riau Islands, Bangka Belitung, Bengkulu, Jambi, Lampung, North Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, West Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi, Lombok, Maluku, and Papua. Based on ethnicity, 47% of the participants were Javanese, 20% Sundanese, and the remaining 33% were distributed among ethnic

groups including Betawi, Banjar, Paser, Ambon, Batak, Karo-Karo, Bugis, Buton, Muna, Dayak Mantan, Dayak Ngaju, Dayak Benuaq, Ende, Minangkabau, Melayu, Kulawi, Lembak, Serawai, Sasak, Tolaki, Toraja, and Papuan. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they met the criteria of being migrant students with diverse ethnic backgrounds residing outside Yogyakarta.

A statistical power analysis was conducted to determine whether the sample size was sufficient for the regression analysis. Using G\*Power software with a medium effect size ( $f^2 = 0.15$ ), a significance level of  $\alpha = .05$ , and statistical power of .80 for two predictor variables, the minimum required sample size was estimated to be 68 participants. Therefore, the sample size of 96 participants in this study was considered statistically adequate to detect the expected relationships among the variables.

### *Measures*

The instruments used in this study included the Cross-Cultural Adjustment Scale, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, and the Intergroup Bias Scale. To measure cross-cultural adjustment among students, the research instrument was developed based on the aspects of cross-cultural adjustment outlined by Gabel, Dolan, and Cerdin (2005), consisting of socio-cultural adjustment, work adjustment (adapted to educational institutions for students), and general adjustment. Prior to use, the Cross-Cultural Adjustment Scale underwent expert judgment and was pilot-tested on 65 migrant students. The scale demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.872, with item-total correlations ranging from 0.319 to 0.551.

The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale was adapted from the instrument used by Soedarmadi (2020), which was developed from the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale by Chen and Starosta (2000). This scale had a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.908, with item-total correlations ranging from 0.384 to 0.695. The Intergroup Bias Scale was based on the instrument used by Novira (2013), comprising aspects of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. It exhibited a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.918, with item-total correlations ranging from 0.308 to 0.752.

### ***Research Procedure***

Data were collected through the administration of the scales to participants in their university settings. All participants provided informed consent prior to completing the questionnaires. The process ensured anonymity and voluntary participation.

### ***Data Analysis Technique***

This study aimed to examine the role of cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity on intergroup bias, measured using multiple linear regression with the assistance of SPSS software.

### **Result**

The descriptive statistics for the study variables, including the two predictor variables (cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity) and the criterion variable (intergroup bias), are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.  
*Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Cross-Cultural Adjustment	96	75	116	93.98	8.767
Intercultural Sensitivity	96	47	72	57.51	6.073
Intergroup Bias	96	24	59	38.96	8.498

The hypothesis of this study is that cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity have a significant effect on intergroup bias among migrant students in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Prior to hypothesis testing, linearity and multicollinearity were examined. The linearity test for the two predictor variables against the criterion showed that cross-cultural adjustment (Linearity  $F = 37.556$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and intercultural sensitivity (Linearity  $F = 75.699$ ;  $p < .01$ ) had a linear relationship with intergroup bias. The multicollinearity test indicated no multicollinearity or strong correlation between cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity (VIF = 1.487; Tolerance = 0.672).

Table 2  
*Hypothesis Testing Results*

Parameter	B	t	Sig.	β (Standardized)
Constant	102.376	13.802	.000	-
Cross-Cultural Adjustment	-0.236	-2.628	.010	-0.243
Intercultural Sensitivity	-0.718	-5.546	.000	-0.513

Based on Table 2, the regression results indicate that the research hypothesis is supported. There is a significant effect of cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity on intergroup bias among migrant students in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, with the regression equation  $Y = 102.376 - 0.236 X_1 - 0.718 X_2$ . The regression equation shows a negative contribution to intergroup bias. This means that for every one-unit increase in cross-cultural adjustment, there is a reduction of 0.236 in intergroup bias; similarly, a one-unit increase in intercultural sensitivity reduces intergroup bias by 0.718 among migrant students. Thus, the variables cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity can reduce intergroup bias among migrant students in DIY. Collectively, cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity explained 46.5% of the variance in intergroup bias ( $R^2 = 0.465$ ), with intercultural sensitivity emerging as the stronger predictor.

### Discussion

The results of this study indicate that cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity have a significant influence on intergroup bias. Cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity play a role in reducing intergroup bias. These findings align with research by Soedarmadi (2020), which states that intercultural sensitivity can reduce intergroup bias. Chen and Starosta (1997) argue that the concept of intercultural sensitivity can foster intercultural awareness and sensitivity. Aspects of intercultural sensitivity, such as empathy, which is defined as the ability to feel what others feel, including caring, understanding, and validating others' feelings (Wondra & Ellsworth, 2015), are relevant. Hewstone et al. (2002) mention that at the individual level, empathy is one aspect capable of reducing bias by creating positive feelings toward differences.

In the aspect of self-monitoring within the intercultural sensitivity concept (Chen & Starosta, 1997), defined as an individual's ability to consciously control their behavior to adapt to situations, Hewstone et al. (2002) state that motivation can form control mechanisms. Motivation

directs individuals to create self-control mechanisms aimed at inhibiting the emergence of bias. Spears, Oakes, Ellemers, and Haslam (1997) explain that an individual's motivation is also related to self-esteem, which is one aspect of intercultural sensitivity. Motivation to recognize, understand, and accept diverse values can create positive self-esteem. Individuals with positive self-esteem are more confident in intercultural interactions. Conversely, negative self-esteem increases the likelihood of intergroup bias. Chen and Starosta (1997) state that positive self-esteem leads individuals to think positively about someone from a different culture and expect acceptance, resulting in harmonious interactions. The next aspect of intercultural sensitivity, interaction involvement, encourages individuals to accurately receive messages and understand situations, thereby reducing intergroup bias.

Other aspects of intercultural sensitivity include open-mindedness, which is the willingness to recognize, accept, and appreciate different views and ideas, and non-judgment, which is the attitude of not hastily drawing conclusions without sufficient facts during interactions, thus avoiding erroneous judgments about messages conveyed by others. Open-mindedness and non-judgment can form objective perceptions and an understanding that every person is a unique individual. Engberg (2004) explains that de-categorization can reduce bias by removing barriers in an individual's thinking process and emphasizing that each person is a unique individual. Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that aspects of intercultural sensitivity can reduce intergroup bias.

Although this study did not examine intervention strategies, previous research suggests that intercultural sensitivity can be enhanced through intercultural skills training (Graf, 2004; Sizoo, Serrie, & Shapero, 2007). Given that intercultural sensitivity was found to be a significant predictor of intergroup bias in this study, such training may represent a potential avenue for reducing intergroup bias among migrant students.

Tamam and Krauss (2017) in their research revealed that intercultural sensitivity among students has a positive relationship with the level of interethnic relationship engagement, which is also associated with attentive attitudes in interactions, openness in interactions, and self-confidence in interactions. Positive attitudes and feelings of attachment to intercultural relationships further influence intercultural individual interactions to become more harmonious.

Cross-cultural adjustment can reduce intergroup bias in line with research by Rozaimie et al. (2013), which reveals that the ability to adjust in an intercultural environment helps overcome

misunderstandings related to unfamiliar cultures. Cross-cultural adjustment can reduce intergroup bias by presenting appropriate assessments and emotional expressions related to cultural differences and new things encountered during intercultural interactions. Koveshnikov, Wechtler, and Dejoux (2014) in their research results state that individuals who can assess and express their emotions well have a positive relationship with adequate aspects of cross-cultural adjustment.

In addition to intercultural sensitivity and cross-cultural adjustment, there are other factors that can influence intergroup bias, such as social-cognitive factors that create differences in intergroup prejudice, especially in children and adolescents (Hewstone et al., 2002). Over and McCall (2018) state that stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination are influenced by cultural factors and learned through social learning from the individual's social environment since childhood.

The values of cultural diversity and the educational environment in Indonesia are important not only in enhancing nationalism among Indonesian students (Rukiyanti, Hanum, & Purwastuti, 2023), but also in creating harmonious interactions and improving the achievement climate in the educational environment. The importance of social learning for individuals related to diversity has begun to be developed by the Indonesian government through the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program. This program aims to liberate the learning process by, among other things, providing multicultural learning content. Research by Suharno, Rifai, and Sudrajat (2023) explains that in this government-initiated program, it provides experiences and solutions to cross-ethnic problems for students by offering spaces to share cultural identities. However, there are no activities yet that can enhance understanding and collaboration in this multicultural program. This study can serve as a consideration for activities that can be designed in multicultural programs, as Indonesia is a country with diverse cultures and customs, expected to live harmoniously and prosperously within the framework of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.

Activities in multicultural programs as efforts to enhance harmonious intercultural interactions can be carried out by incorporating intercultural sensitivity content, which includes efforts in aspects of self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, interaction involvement in cross-cultural interactions, non-judgment, and empathy (Chen & Starosta, 1997). Cross-cultural adjustment training can also be implemented by translating understanding and attitude changes in cross-cultural adjustment aspects into training programs consisting of three aspects: socio-cultural adjustment, involving healthy interpersonal relationships with local community members; work

adjustment, related to workplace culture, but in the case of migrant students, linked to educational institutions; and general adjustment, encompassing adaptation to daily issues or activities such as food, language, life satisfaction, etc. (Gabel et al., 2005).

### **Conclusion**

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that there is a significant influence of cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity on intergroup bias. Cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural sensitivity play a role in reducing intergroup bias among migrant students in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The reduction in intergroup bias levels can be pursued by developing aspects of intercultural sensitivity, consisting of self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, interaction involvement in cross-cultural interactions, non-judgment, and empathy. In addition to intercultural sensitivity, cross-cultural adjustment among migrant students also contributes to reducing intergroup bias. Migrant students with adequate cross-cultural adjustment can present appropriate emotional expressions and understand misunderstandings during intercultural interactions, thereby minimizing intergroup bias. Intercultural sensitivity can be developed to promote more effective management of cultural diversity, particularly regarding intergroup bias issues that can lead to intercultural conflicts. Sensitivity development can be achieved, among other ways, through training methods that can reduce intergroup bias.

Cross-cultural adjustment should also receive special attention from higher education institutions, which are expected not only to consider academic abilities during student recruitment and selection. It is important to develop cross-cultural adjustment abilities among migrant students so they can interact interculturally effectively, thereby improving academic performance and life satisfaction. More importantly, this is to manage cultural diversity effectively so as not to cause negative stereotypes, prejudice, or discrimination that can evolve into conflicts and physical clashes harming many parties, as well as fracturing the unity of the Indonesian nation with its diversity that has existed for centuries. For researchers interested in similar topics, they can explore other factors influencing intergroup bias, such as social-cognitive factors, cultural influences, as well as social learning factors and the environment where individuals were raised.

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