

DOMESTIC CULTURE SHOCK: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN A STUDENTS EXCHANGE PROGRAM IN SEMARANG

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the dynamics of adaptation among students participating in the Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM) Program in Semarang, particularly in the Modul Nusantara activities. Using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, this study involved three participants who were interviewed using a semi-structured approach, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The results of the study indicate that the adaptation process of students follows the stages of Lysgaard's model (1955), namely honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. In the initial stage, students prepare administratively, mentally, physically, and financially, and build expectations about the new culture. The honeymoon phase is characterized by enthusiasm for the local environment and culture, followed by the crisis phase, which brings about culture shock due to differences in language, food, and social norms. Recovery strategies include observation, asking questions, and building relationships with local students. In the final stage, students feel comfortable, consider the destination city as a second home, and appreciate diversity. The Nusantara module is deemed crucial in introducing local culture, fostering nationalism, and promoting tolerance. These findings underscore the role of PMM as an effective cross-cultural learning tool in the domestic Indonesian context.

Keywords: cultural adaptation; culture shock; Modul Nusantara; Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka; intercultural tolerance.



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INTRODUCTION

The Minister of Education and Culture for Research and Technology launched the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program which aims to encourage students to master various sciences as provisions for entering the world of work (Oktaviana & Aldo, 2021). This initiative attempts to raise the standard of higher education in Indonesia giving students the tools they need to plan their own learning paths (Wahyudi et al., 2024). MBKM provides opportunities for students to choose the courses they will take and MBKM gives students the freedom to seek learning experiences outside their study program (Tohir, 2020). This program helps students expand their networks, boost their self-confidence, and foster personal growth. Overall, this experience enhances open-mindedness, acceptance of differences, and communication skills among

students (Nurhayati et al., 2024). Through this program, students can adapt to new environments, education systems, languages, and cultures, preparing them for success in a diverse and interconnected world (Febiola et al., 2024).

Until 2022, the Ministry of Education and Culture in collaboration with the Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP) organizes the PMM program. This program will be created with the reason that students gain new experiences related to the values of ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity that students not have experienced in their lives. In addition, the PMM program also aims to develop students' leadership skills, self-confidence, and social sensitivity for one semester at the university where students conduct the exchange. Confidence is an important factor in speaking skills that increases students' self-confidence has a correlation with speaking skills students (Maulidya & Maulina, 2021). So it is expected that through this program students will get many benefits and lessons, especially regarding life learning (Socialization of PMM, Kemendikbud, 2021). The PMM program is a student exchange program that is carried out for one semester between islands, from one regional cluster to another regional cluster. The PMM program is also a program that provides experience of diversity, culture with a maximum credit transfer system of +/- 20 credits. Through interaction with students from different universities, PMM program create a multicultural experience (Octavia et al., 2024). Students will experience cultural diversity first-hand, expand their academic competencies, and develop leadership skills (Batau et al., 2022). It can also increase self-confidence and social skills (Aliyyah et al., 2024).

The Modul Nusantara is one of the courses that must be taken by students who take the PMM program. The Modul Nusantara is a series designed in the form of diversity, inspiration, reflection, and social contribution activities that focus on creating a comprehensive understanding of students through sequential and repeated assistance (Silalahi et al., 2023). Modul Nusantara as cultural learning and mentoring to students while in their new environment. Students experience culture shock due to cultural differences in terms of food, language, style of speech, climate, prices of staples and food, attitudes and behavior of the community (Agustini et al., 2023). The Modul Nusantara is intended to maximize the meeting space between students on various islands, increase knowledge and understanding, and increase the meaning of tolerance. Tolerance is an attitude or behavior based on rules, demonstrated by the ability to appreciate, respect, and accept the actions and behavior of others (Bakar, 2015). An attitude that does not allow discrimination against different groups or groups in a society is the definition of tolerance in the social, cultural and religious context (Anwar & Muhayati, 2021).

The PMM program is part of the implementation of the 2022 MBKM policy initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. In addition to the archipelago module courses, one of the core elements of this program is classroom lecture activities, where students study at universities located outside their home island. The MBKM policy was designed as a response to the current needs of higher education. The Campus Autonomy concept provides a more autonomous and flexible learning

environment, thereby fostering a culture of creative, open, and student-centered learning. Key programs include streamlined procedures for establishing new academic programs, reforms to the higher education accreditation system, opportunities for public universities to transition into legally recognized institutions, and students' right to pursue studies for three semesters outside their academic programs. In this context, students have the opportunity to take one semester of interdisciplinary courses and two semesters to participate in various learning activities outside the university (Tohir, 2020). In the implementation of the PMM program, students have the opportunity to take a study load of up to 20 credits during one semester at the destination university. The credits include various courses provided by the receiving campus, including the Modul Nusantara which is a compulsory course for all students participating in the program. This module is designed as a means to instill the values of diversity, tolerance, and love for the country (Indriati et al., 2022).

However, this goal when entering a new environment requires a process of self-adjustment in order to blend in with the environment where students carry out the PMM program. The adjustment process is one of the challenges for PMM program, especially for those who are entering the area where students carry out the PMM program for the first time. Students need self-adjustment because of the potential culture shock that can be experienced by them. Culture shock is a feeling of confusion that a person feels when visiting an unfamiliar / new environment due to differences in culture, lifestyle, or daily habits (Storey, 2021). Cultural shock is closely related to the condition when someone is in a new and unfamiliar environment, causing anxiety and uncertainty due to excessive emotional and mental pressure (Nuraini et al., 2021). This phenomenon is commonly experienced when abroad, such as among students participating in the International Credit Transfer Program who faced cultural shock challenges during their program in the Philippines (Pratiwi et al., 2024). The changes that are experienced can cause a person to be easily stressed, anxious, and potentially become a disrupt to the learning performance of the individual experiencing it (Maizan et al., 2020).

Through this research, the researcher will examine culture shock, especially for students who take part in the PMM program in Semarang. Given that the PMM program is designed to recognize the culture and social sensitivity of students for one semester undergoing the program. Anwar (2022b) shows that students have their own satisfaction because through the (PMM) program activities, many students who were initially unable to visit other regions, due to various economic and other factors, can widely and openly visit and explore other provinces which are dream provinces that they want to visit. Affendi and Fauzi (2024) Students who take part in the PMM program feel culture shock from other students who have different cultures and cultural environments on a new campus. Mufidah and Fadilah (2022) culture shock, self-adjustment efforts, to the results of adjustment efforts in each informant vary. According to Anwar (2022a), this activity to encourage students to love Indonesian culture and increase intercultural tolerance.

Some previous studies are relevant to this research. The *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* experienced cultural shock due to differences in language, climate, food, customs, and communication barriers. Mufidah & Fadilah (2022) used a case study approach to identify forms of cultural shock and adaptation processes, while this study used a phenomenological approach to explore the meaning and impact of these experiences. Adiprawira et al. (2023) highlight the stages of cultural shock, optimism, cultural issues, recovery, and adjustment, as well as adaptation strategies through communication, which align with the objectives of this study despite differing in the depth of analysis. Ardila (2023), using a phenomenological approach, emphasizes external factors causing cultural shock such as language, transportation, and social customs, as well as the adaptation process in general. The difference in this study lies in its focus on exploring the challenges and adaptation strategies of students, particularly in the *Nusantara Module* activities. In general, previous studies indicate that effective communication, participation in cultural activities, social support, and an open attitude are key to successful adaptation, in line with Lysgaard's (1955) theoretical framework.

Although research on culture shock has been widely discussed in the international realm, especially related to students who participate in student exchange programs abroad, research on culture shock in the domestic context, especially experienced by students from various regions in Indonesia, is still very rare. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how students' challenges and strategies in participating in the *PMM* program, especially in the *Nusantara Module* and how they overcome the culture shock. To achieve this, the research is guided by the following questions:

1. What the challenges of students during the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program, especially in the *Modul Nusantara* activities?
2. How do their strategies in dealing with culture shock during the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program, especially in the *Modul Nusantara* activities?

RESEARCH METHODS

Research design is a plan that explains the research procedures to be carried out, starting from formulating questions related to the research subject to the data analysis stage Nashrullah et al., (2023). This research uses a descriptive qualitative design with a phenomenological approach. This phenomenological approach aims to understand the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and views of participants through direct interviews, so as to explore their perspectives in depth related to the phenomenological under study Creswell (2017). This method is in accordance with the research objectives which focus on 3 students who have participated in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program in Semarang, especially in the *Modul Nusantara* activities regarding students' challenges and strategies in overcoming culture shock. This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach with an interview phenomenological approach as the main instrument.

The subjects in this study were three female students participating in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program in Semarang. The selection of participants was based on several criteria, namely: (1) they are active students who have participated in the *PMM* program for one semester, (2) they have direct experience in implementing the *Modul Nusantara*, and (3) they are willing to participate and able to describe the challenges and strategies for dealing with cultural shock during their participation in the *Modul Nusantara* in the *PMM* program. Purposive sampling was chosen because it is more appropriate for the research objectives and targets, thereby enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the data and research results. This concept encompasses four main aspects previously outlined by Campbell (2020): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmation.

This study uses semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection. This technique gives researchers the flexibility to adjust questions according to research needs if there are changes, while maintaining focus because the main topic has been determined in advance (Ruslin et al., 2022).

The topic of this research question focuses on 3 students who have participated in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program in Semarang, specifically on the *Modul Nusantara* activities regarding students' challenges and strategies in overcoming culture shock. This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach with interviews as the main instrument. The researcher adapted some questions from Lysgaard's (1955).

Semi-structured interviews was the main technique used for data collection. The semi-structured interview method provides flexibility because it combines prepared questions with room to explore topics that arise during the interview, thereby deepening understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences (Salomao, 2023). Face-to-face interviews was conducted in person. The researcher and participants was discuss the timing of the interviews. Each participant interview was last between 30 and 40 minutes. The interview questions was designed to gain a deep understanding of Domestic Culture Shock.

To assist researchers, during the interview process, we conducted documentation in the form of photos and voice recordings as evidence and support in data analysis. This documentation plays a role in ensuring the accuracy of the information conveyed by participants and makes it easier for researchers to review the answers that have been given.

Thematic Analysis is data obtained through in-person interviews will be analyzed according to the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach consists of six systematic stages: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) compiling the final report. This process allowed for an in-depth and structured analysis of participants' responses, to identify key patterns and themes relating to how students dealt with challenges and strategies, culture shock in the *Modul Nusantara* during the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program in Semarang.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Before participating in the Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM) Program, students prepare themselves to face various challenges and strategies in a new environment. This preparation includes administrative, mental, physical, and financial aspects. In addition, they also seek information about the campus and destination city, and build expectations about the culture they will encounter. This form of preparation is reflected in the following statements from participants:

1. Preparation and Initial Expectations Before the Program

The initial stage before participating in an exchange program is an important phase for students to prepare themselves. During this phase, they generally undergo administrative and mental preparation, accompanied by searching for information about the campus and destination city, and begin to form expectations of the new culture they will encounter.

1. Administrative and mental preparation

Students made administrative, physical, and mental preparations before participating in the program as a form of initial readiness. This was explained by the following participants:

"Before joining the program, I prepared administrative documents such as my course registration form, transcript, parental consent letter, and passport photo. In addition, I also researched the culture and customs of my destination city and contacted friends who had participated in PMM to get a general idea of what to expect. I also prepared myself mentally to live independently in another city and learn to adapt to a new environment." (VAD)

"I also prepared the paperwork for the program. I gathered everything I needed. Then I prepared myself mentally and physically before joining the program. Finally, I also prepared some money as emergency funds." (SAA)

2. Searching for information about the campus and destination city

Before departure, students actively search for information about the campus and destination city to prepare themselves for the new environment. This is explained by the following participant:

"What I know about my target campus is that it is one of the best public universities in this city and also a fairly large campus." (COS)

"I know that my target campus is one of the largest universities in Central Java, known for its commitment to environmental conservation and character education. I have also heard that the campus environment is green and comfortable, with fairly complete facilities and various active student organizations." (VAD)

"My target university is one of the state universities located in Semarang and is among the top 10 universities in Indonesia. In my opinion, this university is considered good because, based on my research, the campus is quite spacious and is one of my dream universities." (SAA)

3. Expectations of a new culture

Students know that their destination city has unique places and foods, as well as hot weather. As expressed by the following participant:

"I know that this city is famous for its Old Town, unique foods such as spring rolls, and hot weather. In addition, this city is also known as a fairly tolerant city with ethnic and religious diversity." (VAD)

2. Early Phase and Enthusiasm for the New Environment (Honeymoon Phase)

Upon arrival, students typically exhibit high enthusiasm in adapting to their new environment. They experience feelings upon first arrival, form first impressions of the local community, and enjoy a pleasant experience at the start of the program. Curiosity, excitement about exploring the culture, and enthusiasm for trying new things are key characteristics of the honeymoon phase the initial stage of the adaptation process before facing subsequent challenges.

1. Feelings upon first arrival

Upon arriving at their destination city, students feel happy, curious, and enthusiastic. Here is a statement from one participant:

"My first feeling was quite happy because this is a new environment. So I felt excited and looked forward to all the new activities and explorations. So I was quite happy and really excited." (COS)

"When I first arrived in Semarang, I felt very enthusiastic, energetic, and curious. Everything seemed new and interesting, from the city's atmosphere, culture, to the local dialect." (VAD)

"I felt very happy because this was my first time leaving Sulawesi, so I was very happy and joyful." (SAA)

2. First impressions of the local community

Initial impressions of the local community are an important part of the adaptation process for students. This is reflected in the following statement from a participant:

"My first impression was that I was amazed by the local people because they were very friendly to visitors like us." (SAA)

"I was deeply impressed by the hospitality of the local community and their strong local values such as tolerance and solidarity. During the cultural visit, I saw how the community proudly preserves their traditions." (VAD)

3. An enjoyable experience at the start of the program

In the first few weeks, students participated in various enjoyable and memorable activities. As shared by the following participant:

"The first few weeks of the program were my favorite. I especially enjoyed the trips to tourist spots like Sampokong, Old Town, and Lawang Sewu. The visit to Lawang Sewu was what I was most looking forward to because it's famous for its thousand doors, which were part of the colonial era. I was really excited to see what it looked like." (COS)

"I most enjoyed the cultural exploration activities, such as visits to historical sites and cross-cultural discussions. Besides being interesting, these activities made me feel more connected to the local culture and my new friends." (VAD)
"The part I enjoyed the most in the early days was when we participated in the Nusantara Module, which involved visiting like Sampokong, and I really enjoyed it because I could learn about the culture of the people of Semarang. It turns out that the people of Semarang have three distinct origins: Arab, Chinese, and local. At that time, Sampokong was the location of the Chinese temple in Semarang, Klenteng Agung." (SAA)

3. Culture Shock and Adaptation Challenges (Crisis Phase)

During the crisis phase, students begin to experience the real impact of culture shock, which makes the adaptation process difficult. Common challenges include language and communication difficulties, discomfort with food, and differences in social norms and lifestyle compared to their home environment. This situation often causes confusion and discomfort, making it the most challenging part of their adjustment journey.

1. Language and Communication Difficulties

Some students experience barriers to communication due to differences in language and regional dialects. This was expressed by the following participant:

"Yes, especially language. Misunderstandings often occur with local residents. So, what we talk about and what they talk about can sometimes be confusing. Therefore, if we want to adapt to them, it takes time to understand what they are saying." (COS)
"At first, I was confused by the more direct communication style and the distinctive Semarang dialect, which was difficult to understand." (VAD)
"One of the issues is language culture. Because there, the language they use daily is mostly Javanese, not Indonesian. So we were a bit confused at first. And sometimes we also felt uncomfortable because they speak and communicate using that language. We felt like outsiders." (SAA)

2. Discomfort with food

Differences in food pose a particular challenge for students. One participant explained:

"I had difficulty adapting to the different times, customs, and food from my home region. The busy schedule also made me tired at first." (VAD)

3. Differences in social norms and lifestyle

Students experience confusion in adjusting to the norms and lifestyle of the local community. Here is a statement from a participant:

"I experienced culture shock due to the lifestyle and differences in social norms, such as the way of dressing or the more relaxed yet still polite way of communicating in Semarang." (VAD)

4. Strategies for Overcoming Culture Shock (Recovery Phase)

During the recovery phase, students begin to develop ways to deal with culture shock and adapt to their new situation. Some strategies used include observing and learning from the environment, actively asking questions and building relationships with local students, and trying to adapt to food and customs. These steps help them feel more comfortable, reduce stress, and facilitate the adaptation process.

1. Observation and learning from the environment

As part of the adaptation process, students began to observe local customs and communication through tour guides. This was explained by the following participant:

"After facing difficulties, because we were already accustomed to communication and had sufficient understanding, it was no longer too difficult. If there were difficulties, we would ask each other when the guide spoke in Javanese about the meaning of something. It wasn't as difficult as it was at the beginning." (COS)

2. Asking questions and building relationships with local students

As part of the adaptation process, students chose to actively ask questions and build relationships with local students in order to understand the culture and customs of their new environment. This was explained by the following participant:

"I started to be more open to asking questions, trying to speak in simple local language, and building closer relationships with local students. I also tried to follow their routines so that I could adapt more quickly." (VAD)

3. Adapting to food and customs

Students seek ways to adapt to the food and new environment in their destination area. As expressed by the following participant:

"I've become very accustomed to it, starting with the language. The food is quite familiar, and little by little, I've gotten used to the hot climate because I'm often there. So, I wasn't surprised when I first arrived." (COS)

"Yes, I feel like I'm used to the food, know my favorite places, how to interact appropriately, and even started to enjoy some local traditions." (VAD)

5. Adjustment and Comfort at the End of the Program (Adjustment Stage)

At the final stage of the program, students have reached a more stable stage of adjustment, enabling them to live comfortably in their daily lives. They have become accustomed to the environment, language, and weather, making the surroundings feel like a second home. In addition, close relationships have been formed with friends, further strengthening the sense of togetherness at the

end of the program. This phase demonstrates the success of the adaptation process experienced by students during the program.

1. Getting used to the environment, language, and weather

After a few months, students begin to get used to the environment and language in their destination city. This is explained by the following participant:

"I feel relieved because I've been able to adapt to the environment and language. At first, I was excited about the new environment, but after experiencing it, it felt a bit challenging. Only after we adapted properly did it become quite comfortable. So, after adapting, it became comfortable and enjoyable there." (COS)

2. The environment feels like a second home

Students feel so comfortable that they consider the destination city as a second home. As stated by the following participant:

"Semarang already feels like a second home to me. The atmosphere is comfortable, the people are friendly, and I feel safe and valued while living here." (VAD)

3. Closeness with friends at the end of the program

Towards the end of the program, relationships between students grew closer and left an emotional impression. Here are some participants' opinions:

"I feel much more comfortable and confident. I can do activities smoothly, have new friends from various regions, and am able to understand and appreciate differences more openly." (VAD)

"It was very comfortable being with my friends because by the end of the program, before our farewell, we had become very close, so I felt both comfortable and sad because we were about to part ways." (SAA)

"Yes, it was very comfortable. If I could do it again, I would definitely join this program again. Because I've become close with my friends, the local residents, and the dormitory staff. The food and language also feel comfortable." (COS)

6. Meaning and Impact of the Modul Nusantara

The Modul Nusantara plays a significant role for students as it serves as a medium for learning about culture, while also fostering a sense of nationalism and tolerance in diversity. This program also provides a deep and memorable experience, making the Modul Nusantara a unique and memorable experience during the exchange period. Thus, these findings show that the Modul Nusantara not only broadens cultural horizons but also strengthens national values and a sense of togetherness among participants.

1. The Modul Nusantara as a medium for learning about culture

Students consider the Modul Nusantara to be an effective means of learning about local culture firsthand. As expressed by the following participant:

"It's very enjoyable because the Modul Nusantara focuses more on introducing local culture. So, as outsiders, we are taken to cultural sites, places where local culture is more dominant than foreign culture. And I think it's meaningful because we come from various regions, from different provinces, some from Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua. We respect each other's religions and languages, so I think that's the most meaningful part."(SAA)

2. Fostering a sense of nationalism and tolerance

Students feel that the Modul Nusantara activities encourage a sense of nationalism and tolerance among participants. Interactions across regions make them more appreciative of differences. As expressed by the following participant:

"I feel that this activity not only introduces local culture, but also fosters a stronger sense of nationalism and tolerance among participants." (VAD)

3. The Modul Nusantara as a unique and memorable experience

For students, the Modul Nusantara becomes an unforgettable experience during the PMM program. This is shared by the following participant:

"Because this opportunity won't come twice. Because we can visit tourist spots, historical sites that are difficult for us to reach on our own. So when the Nusantara Module comes along, we can visit those historical sites. That's one of the most enjoyable and memorable things, even to this day." (COS)

Discussion

This section discusses in depth the main findings of the research that has been conducted, linking them to cultural adaptation theory and the results of previous studies. The adaptation process of students in the Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM) Program shows complex dynamics, from the preparation stage to complete adjustment. Each experience they encounter reflects the stages outlined in Lysgaard's (1955) cultural adaptation model, which includes the honeymoon phase, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. Field findings are further supported by direct quotes from participants and relevant literature to enrich the analysis.

The research results indicate that students participating in the Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM) Program in Semarang experience various adaptation dynamics, from initial preparation, culture shock, to eventually being able to adapt and feel comfortable with their new environment. These findings align with Lysgaard's (1955) cultural adaptation model, namely the honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment stages.

During the initial stage (*pre-departure*), students demonstrated administrative and mental readiness before departure. This is an important step in preparing them to face a new culture. As stated by VAD, "I mentally prepared myself to live independently in another city and learn to adapt to the new environment." This finding aligns with Tohir's (2020) view that the freedom to

learn in MBKM includes students' personal readiness to embrace new experiences.

When entering the *honeymoon phase*, students show high enthusiasm for their new environment and culture. They feel interested, happy, and want to explore more. As explained by COS, "My first impression was quite pleasant because of the new environment, so I was quite excited..." This reflects the initial euphoria commonly experienced in cross-cultural transitions (Storey, 2021).

However, during the *crisis phase*, challenges arise in the form of culture shock. The main causes are differences in language, food, social norms, and the local community's lifestyle. SAA participants stated, "Because most of the language they use daily is Javanese... we were a bit confused at first..." This finding is supported by Agustini et al. (2023), who state that differences in language, food, communication style, and the attitudes of the local community often become the main causes of culture shock in the Modul Nusantara.

In facing these challenges, students began to enter the *recovery stage*, where they applied adaptation strategies. One of the most common strategies was observing the surrounding environment, asking local friends, and trying to communicate using the local language. As expressed by VAD, "I started to be more open to asking questions, trying to speak in simple local language, and building closer relationships with local students." This highlights the importance of social interaction in accelerating the adaptation process, as emphasized by Silalahi et al. (2023) that the Modul Nusantara serves as cultural learning that promotes social strengthening.

At the final stage (adjustment), most students stated that they had begun to feel accustomed and comfortable living in Semarang. They viewed the destination city as a second home and started to enjoy the food, culture, and build strong relationships with friends from different regions. As stated by VAD, "Semarang already feels like a second home to me." The Modul Nusantara was also deemed meaningful in fostering a sense of nationalism and tolerance, in line with the objectives of Indriati et al. (2022).

Furthermore, the Modul Nusantara activities were considered highly meaningful as they directly introduced local culture and encouraged a sense of nationalism and tolerance. SAA mentioned, "We respect each other's religions and languages, so I think that's the most meaningful part." This aligns with the objectives of the Modul Nusantara as explained by Indriati et al. (2022), which is to instill values of diversity and love for the homeland through direct experience.

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the idea that domestic cross-cultural activities like PMM can have a significant impact on the development of social skills, intercultural tolerance, and the formation of students' national identity (Octavia et al., 2024; Batau et al., 2022). Additionally, the use of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in analyzing interview data helped identify recurring and meaningful patterns in their adaptation process.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that students who participated in the Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM) program and took part in the Modul Nusantara in Semarang experienced an adaptation process that included honeymoon phase, culture shock, recovery, and adjustment. During the honeymoon phase, they felt enthusiasm, curiosity, and joy as they explored the city, visited cultural sites, and met friendly local communities. Entering the crisis phase, cultural shock arose due to language barriers, differences in food preferences, and social norms, causing confusion and discomfort. During the recovery stage, students begin to adapt by observing their surroundings, asking local friends questions, using simple local language, and adjusting to the local food and climate. Finally, in the adjustment stage, they feel comfortable, consider Semarang their second home, build close friendships, and become more open to diversity. The Modul Nusantara provides valuable experiences in directly experiencing local culture, fostering a sense of nationalism, and promoting tolerance among students from various regions. This program has proven effective as a cross-cultural learning medium within the context of Indonesia's diversity.

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