

Self-Adaptation Among Students at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School in the Context of Intercultural Communication: An Analysis Based on Young Yun Kim's Adaptation Theory

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to examine the self-adaptation process of students to the pesantren culture at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected from **seven student participants** through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, and analyzed using Young Yun Kim's Adaptation Theory from an intercultural communication perspective. The findings demonstrate that students' adaptation is a dynamic process involving adjustment to institutional regulations, social norms, communal living patterns, and communication practices within the pesantren environment. Through ongoing interactions with teachers, senior students, and peers, students gradually acquire new cultural understandings and behavioral patterns, fostering greater discipline, independence, and communication competence. The study concludes that adaptation within the pesantren context represents an intercultural communication process characterized by cultural adjustment, negotiation of meaning, and identity development in response to a new cultural environment.

KEYWORDS: *self-adaptation, intercultural communication, cultural adaptation, Young Yun Kim's Adaptation Theory, Islamic boarding schools.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) constitute distinctive socio-cultural environments characterized by unique values, norms, languages, and interaction patterns. For students, particularly newcomers, entering a pesantren involves not only a change of residence but also immersion in a cultural setting that differs from their previous way of life. At Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School, students are introduced to a collective lifestyle marked by structured schedules, strict discipline, and adherence to institutional regulations and authority. These conditions require students to adjust their daily routines, communication practices, and understanding of their roles within the pesantren community.

The adaptation process unfolds through continuous interactions with teachers, administrators, and fellow students. Through these interactions, students learn and internalize the values, norms, and cultural practices that shape life within the pesantren. However, adaptation does not occur uniformly across individuals. Preliminary observations at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School indicate that while some students are able to adapt relatively quickly, others require a longer period to understand and embrace the pesantren culture. These differences suggest that adaptation is a dynamic process influenced by individual experiences and the social interactions encountered by each student.

From an intercultural communication perspective, adaptation is understood as a communicative process through which individuals come to understand a new culture while simultaneously developing an identity that aligns with their new environment. Young Yun Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory conceptualizes adaptation as a continuous process that emerges through interaction with an unfamiliar cultural setting. Through this process, individuals gradually acquire the communication patterns, values, and cultural norms necessary to function effectively within a new social environment. Accordingly, this study focuses on the self-adaptation process of students at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School as a form of intercultural communication involving adjustment to pesantren culture, the construction of new meanings, and the development of identity as members of the pesantren community.

Previous studies have highlighted adaptation as a significant challenge for students entering Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). Chusniyah et al. (2025) found that new students at an Islamic boarding school in Malang experienced culture shock, communication barriers, cultural stereotypes, and social pressures, with

adaptation occurring through stages of culture shock, adjustment, and growth. Similarly, Enjelina and Rosada (2024) reported that students encountered emotional, social, and behavioral difficulties in adjusting to pesantren norms and expectations. Research by Dias et al. (2023) further demonstrated the importance of adaptation within residential educational settings, emphasizing its role in fostering resilience and personal development. In the pesantren context, Risaldy (2019) showed that international students at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor underwent a gradual adaptation process shaped by intercultural communication and Islamic values. Likewise, Alfarisi and Mulyanto (2022) found that adaptation was facilitated through guidance from teachers and gradual familiarization with pesantren routines and regulations. Hafidhuddin et al. (2023) also highlighted that adaptation to pesantren regulations requires time, support, and continuous adjustment.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into students' adaptation within pesantren environments, most focus primarily on adaptation challenges, educational routines, or communication barriers. Limited attention has been given to understanding adaptation as a dynamic intercultural communication process involving the construction of meaning, identity development, and continuous interaction within the pesantren culture. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by examining students' self-adaptation at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School through Young Yun Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory and an intercultural communication perspective.

II. LITERATUR REVIEW

Theory in this study serves as an analytical framework for organizing, categorizing, and interpreting empirical data. Rather than being examined in isolation, data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation are analyzed through conceptual perspectives that enable systematic and meaningful interpretation. The use of theory facilitates the identification of patterns, themes, and relationships within the data while ensuring that the analytical process remains conceptually grounded (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Furthermore, theory functions as an interpretive lens through which participants' experiences, perceptions, and social realities can be understood more comprehensively. By linking empirical findings to broader conceptual meanings, theoretical interpretation allows the study to move beyond description toward analytical explanation (Creswell, 2014; Neuman, 2014).

This study is primarily guided by Young Yun Kim's Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation, which explains adaptation as a continuous process through which individuals adjust to a new cultural environment through communication and social interaction. The theory is employed to examine how students adapt to the cultural norms, values, communication patterns, and social structures of the pesantren environment. To support this analysis, concepts of intercultural communication and the sociocultural environment are incorporated to explain how cultural differences and social interactions shape students' adaptation experiences within the pesantren community.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism, developed by George Herbert Mead (1934), posits that human behavior is shaped through the interpretation of meanings that emerge from social interactions. Rather than responding passively to their environment, individuals actively interpret symbols, language, gestures, and social experiences before determining their actions. Consequently, meaning is socially constructed, negotiated, and continuously reproduced through everyday interactions.

Mead identified three interconnected concepts within Symbolic Interactionism: mind, self, and society. *Mind* refers to the individual's capacity to interpret symbols and engage in internal dialogue that guides behavior. *Self* denotes the ability to perceive and evaluate oneself through the perspectives of others. *Society* represents the social context in which meanings, norms, and expectations are created, maintained, and shared. These concepts operate interdependently and continuously shape one another through social interaction.

Within educational and religious communities such as Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), Symbolic Interactionism provides a valuable framework for understanding how students interpret social norms, religious values, and everyday practices. Through interactions with teachers, senior students, and peers, students learn the meanings associated with various symbols, rituals, and social expectations embedded within the pesantren environment. Accordingly, adaptation can be understood not merely as behavioral adjustment but as a process of meaning-making and identity formation that occurs through ongoing social interaction.

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication refers to the process of exchanging messages between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. According to DeVito (2013), intercultural communication involves the transmission and interpretation of messages that are influenced by differences in values, beliefs, norms, language systems, and cultural experiences. Effective intercultural communication requires individuals to recognize cultural differences while fostering mutual understanding and respect.

When individuals enter unfamiliar cultural environments, communication becomes a primary mechanism through which adaptation occurs. Through verbal and nonverbal interactions, newcomers learn social norms, negotiate meanings, and establish relationships with members of the host culture. However, intercultural communication may be hindered by barriers such as stereotypes, prejudice, and ethnocentrism, which can lead to misunderstandings and social distance.

To address these challenges, scholars emphasize the importance of intercultural communication competence. This competence refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in culturally diverse contexts. It encompasses cultural awareness, openness to differences, empathy, communication skills, and adaptability. Individuals who possess intercultural communication competence are generally better able to navigate cultural differences and build positive social relationships.

In the context of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), intercultural communication plays a crucial role because students often come from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and regional backgrounds. Living and learning together in a shared environment requires students to adapt to new communication patterns, understand different perspectives, and develop mutual respect. Therefore, intercultural communication serves as a key factor in facilitating students' adaptation and integration within the *pesantren* community.

Sociocultural Environment and Adaptation

Adaptation does not occur in isolation but within a specific sociocultural environment. From a sociocultural perspective, individuals and society continuously influence one another through social interaction. Values, norms, beliefs, traditions, and communication practices constitute the sociocultural context in which adaptation takes place.

The *pesantren* represents a distinctive sociocultural environment that integrates religious education, communal living, moral development, and traditional social structures. Students are expected to adhere to established norms governing behavior, communication, worship, and interpersonal relationships. Through participation in daily activities, such as communal prayers, religious study sessions, and collective responsibilities, students gradually internalize the values and cultural practices of the *pesantren* community.

The sociocultural environment also provides social support that facilitates adaptation. Interactions with teachers, senior students, and peers help newcomers understand social expectations and navigate the challenges associated with cultural adjustment. As students become increasingly familiar with the norms and values of the *pesantren*, they develop a stronger sense of belonging and social integration.

From this perspective, successful adaptation extends beyond compliance with institutional rules. It involves the ability to understand shared meanings, establish social relationships, and actively participate in the cultural life of the community. Adaptation can therefore be understood as a process of social integration through which individuals construct new meanings, identities, and relationships within a particular sociocultural environment.

Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation

The primary theoretical framework of this study is Young Yun Kim's Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation. Kim (2001) conceptualizes adaptation as a dynamic and continuous process through which individuals achieve functional fitness and psychological integration within a new cultural environment. Adaptation occurs through ongoing communication and social interaction, resulting in changes in individuals' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral orientations.

Central to Kim's theory is the Stress-Adaptation-Growth dynamic. Individuals initially experience stress when confronted with unfamiliar cultural norms, values, and social expectations. These challenges stimulate learning and behavioral adjustment, enabling individuals to adapt to their new environment. Through continuous interaction and communication, adaptation gradually leads to personal growth, enhanced intercultural competence, and greater social integration.

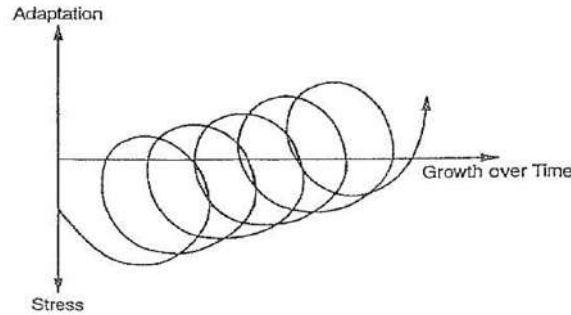
Kim further argues that adaptation is influenced by both personal and environmental factors. Personal factors include motivation, openness, resilience, communication competence, and psychological readiness, while environmental factors encompass social support, opportunities for interaction, and the characteristics of the host culture. The interaction between these factors shapes the effectiveness of the adaptation process.

A significant contribution of Kim's theory is the concept of intercultural personhood, which describes the development of a more flexible, inclusive, and culturally adaptive identity. Through repeated experiences of stress, adaptation, and growth, individuals acquire broader perspectives and stronger capacities to function across cultural boundaries.

In the context of Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School, this theory provides a useful framework for understanding how students adapt to a sociocultural environment characterized by religious values, collective living, hierarchical relationships, and structured daily routines. Through continuous communication and

interaction with teachers, senior students, and peers, students gradually learn, negotiate, and internalize the norms and values of the pesantren community.

Figure I. Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic

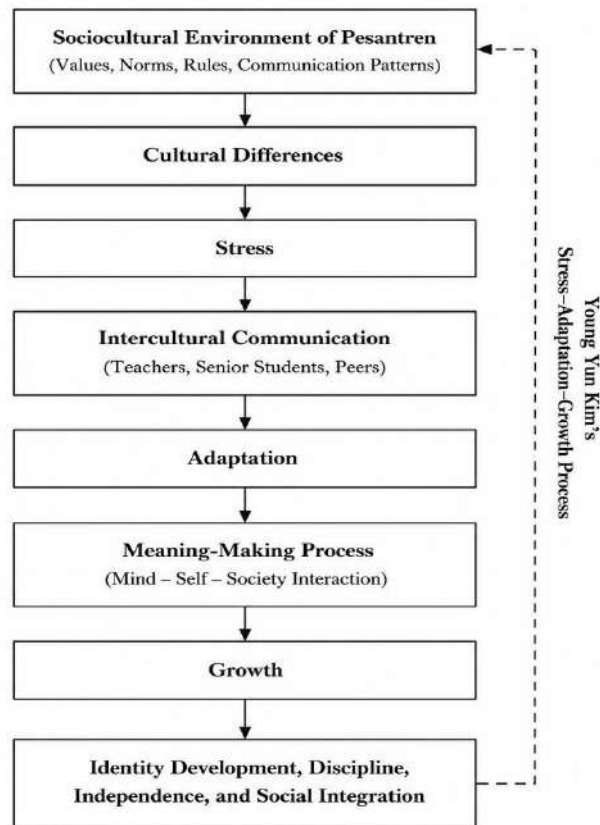


According to Kim (2001), cross-cultural adaptation is a dynamic process of stress, adaptation, and growth. Through continuous communication and interaction, individuals gradually adjust to a new cultural environment, leading to increased adaptive capacity, intercultural competence, and personal growth.

Conceptual Framework

Students entering Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School encounter a new sociocultural environment characterized by distinct values, norms, communication patterns, and institutional regulations. These cultural differences create adaptation challenges that initiate the stress phase described in Young Yun Kim’s Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory. Through continuous interaction with teachers, senior students, and peers, students gradually learn and negotiate the meanings of pesantren norms and practices. This process of intercultural communication facilitates adaptation and the construction of new meanings and identities. As adaptation progresses, students internalize pesantren values, resulting in personal growth, communication competence, and social integration within the pesantren community.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Students’ Self-Adaptation at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School



III. METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach within an interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm was adopted to understand how students construct meanings and interpret their lived experiences of adaptation within the sociocultural environment of Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School. Phenomenology was used to explore the subjective meanings attached to students' adaptation experiences and to understand how they perceived, interpreted, and made sense of life within the pesantren environment. This approach enabled an in-depth examination of adaptation as a lived experience rather than merely a behavioral adjustment.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School in Lebak, Banten, Indonesia. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience of adapting to the pesantren environment. The study involved seven participants, consisting of four female students and three male students. Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved, indicating that no substantial new information emerged from subsequent interviews.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the adaptation process. Participant observation was employed to examine daily interactions, communication practices, and behavioral adjustments within the pesantren environment. Documentation was used to provide contextual information and support the interpretation of the findings.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytical process involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and interpretation. The resulting themes were interpreted through Young Yun Kim's Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation and a phenomenological perspective to understand how students experienced and made meaning of adaptation within the cultural environment of the pesantren.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study was established through data triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation, while member checking involved verifying the accuracy of interview findings with participants. These procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

IV. RESULT

Participant Characteristics

This study involved seven participants who were selected purposively based on their experiences of adapting to the pesantren environment. The participants consisted of four female students and three male students, aged between 15 and 18 years. They came from diverse regional backgrounds, including Lebak, Bogor, West Bandung, Jakarta, and Lampung, providing varied cultural experiences relevant to the adaptation process. Their length of residence in the pesantren ranged from 3.5 to 5.5 years, allowing them to reflect on both their initial adaptation experiences and their longer-term adjustment to pesantren life.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Age	Grade	Place of Origin	Length of Stay
SP1 (Mutia Mudianti)	Female	17	Grade XI	Lebak Regency	4.5 years
SP2 (Harnum)	Female	16	Grade XI	Bogor	4.5 years
SP3 (Syintia)	Female	15	Grade X	West Bandung	3.5 years
SP4 (Gina)	Female	15	Grade X	Jakarta	3.5 years
SP5 (Fachri)	Male	18	Grade XII	Jakarta	5.5 years
SP6 (Gozi)	Male	17	Grade XI	Lampung	4.5 years
SP7 (Alam)	Male	17	Grade XII	Lebak Regency	5.5 years

The diversity of participants' demographic backgrounds enabled the study to capture a range of adaptation experiences within the pesantren environment. Differences in age, gender, regional origin, and length of residence provided valuable insights into how students experienced and interpreted the adaptation process at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School.

Initial Experiences of Students Entering the Pesantren Environment

The findings revealed that students experienced significant changes upon entering Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School. These changes included adjustments to structured daily routines, institutional regulations, communication practices, collective living arrangements, and increased expectations for independence. Although the specific experiences varied among participants, all reported encountering challenges during the initial stage of adaptation.

Several participants described feelings of shock and uncertainty as they adjusted to the highly regulated environment of the pesantren. Students who were accustomed to greater freedom at home found it difficult to adapt to fixed schedules and institutional rules. As one participant explained:

“At home, I could be more relaxed and decide things on my own. In the pesantren, everything was scheduled, from waking up to going to sleep.” (SP1)

Communication differences also emerged as a prominent challenge. Some participants reported difficulties adapting to the more polite, controlled, and hierarchical communication style practiced within the pesantren. One participant noted:

“At home, I usually spoke very directly. In the pesantren, I had to think carefully before speaking.” (SP2)

Similarly, participants encountered challenges in interpreting unfamiliar communication patterns and social expectations. Differences in tone, language use, and interpersonal interactions occasionally led to confusion and uncertainty during the early stages of residence.

In addition to communication-related challenges, participants reported difficulties adjusting to increased independence and collective living. Students who had previously relied on family members were required to manage their own daily responsibilities, while others struggled to adapt to communal activities and shared responsibilities. As one participant stated:

“At home, everything was taken care of by my parents. In the pesantren, I had to manage everything by myself.” (SP5)

Overall, the findings indicate that the initial stage of adaptation was characterized by experiences of shock, confusion, uncertainty, and adjustment challenges resulting from differences between students' previous home environments and the sociocultural environment of the pesantren. These experiences marked the beginning of a broader adaptation process through which students gradually learned and internalized the norms, values, and interaction patterns of the pesantren community.

Cultural Differences and Adaptation Challenges Experienced by Students

The findings revealed that students encountered various cultural differences upon entering Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School. These differences primarily involved communication patterns, values of obedience, collective living practices, independence, discipline, and institutional regulations governing daily life. Although participants came from different backgrounds, they shared similar experiences of adjustment difficulties during the early stages of residence in the pesantren.

One of the most frequently reported challenges involved adapting to new communication norms. Several participants experienced uncertainty regarding appropriate language use, interaction styles, and emotional expression when communicating with teachers, senior students, and peers. Differences in language, tone, and communication etiquette often created confusion and concerns about being perceived as disrespectful. As one participant stated:

“I was confused about what language to use and whether I should speak or remain silent. I was afraid of making mistakes and being considered disrespectful.” (SP1)

Participants also reported difficulties adjusting to the collective nature of pesantren life. Students who were accustomed to greater personal freedom at home found it challenging to follow shared routines, comply with group decisions, and participate in communal responsibilities. One participant explained:

“At home I was used to managing things on my own, but here everything is done together and we have to follow collective decisions.” (SP1)

Another significant challenge concerned the expectation of independence. Several participants described feelings of shock when required to manage their daily responsibilities without relying on family support. As one participant noted:

“I was surprised because I was used to being helped at home, but here I had to do everything independently.” (SL1)

In addition, students experienced pressure arising from the highly structured and regulated nature of pesantren life. Strict schedules, behavioral expectations, and communal obligations required substantial adjustments in daily habits and lifestyles. Participants frequently reported fear of making mistakes, uncertainty about social expectations, and difficulties understanding unfamiliar norms and practices.

Overall, the findings indicate that the pressures experienced by students during the initial adaptation period were largely associated with cultural differences between their home environments and the pesantren culture. These challenges required students to learn and internalize new norms, values, communication patterns, and behavioral practices in order to become accepted and function effectively within the pesantren community.

Table 2. Cultural Differences and Adaptation Challenges Experienced by Students

Cultural Difference	Adaptation Challenges
Communication patterns	Fear of making mistakes, misunderstanding messages, communication uncertainty
Obedience and discipline	Adjusting to rules, schedules, and behavioral expectations
Collective living	Adapting to shared activities and collective decision-making
Independence	Managing personal responsibilities without family assistance
Social norms and etiquette	Learning appropriate behavior and interpersonal conduct

Table 3 shows that students experienced adaptation challenges primarily related to communication, discipline, collective living, independence, and social norms. These cultural differences generated various forms of psychological and social pressure during the early stages of adaptation within the pesantren environment.

Common Patterns of Students' Adaptation Experiences

The findings revealed a common pattern in students' adaptation experiences at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School. Although participants encountered different challenges during the initial stage of residence, they generally underwent a gradual process of adjustment through observation, interaction, habit formation, and participation in daily pesantren activities. Over time, students became increasingly familiar with the norms, values, communication practices, and routines that characterized the pesantren environment.

A prominent pattern identified across participants was the development of greater awareness regarding appropriate communication and social behavior. Students who initially experienced uncertainty in interpreting communication styles and social expectations gradually learned to adjust their ways of speaking, expressing emotions, and interacting with others. As one participant stated:

"Adaptation means learning to accept that our way of doing things is not always the same as other people's, and that we need to know how to place ourselves in different situations." (SP2)

Another recurring pattern involved the transition from unfamiliarity to acceptance of institutional rules and collective living. Participants reported that routines and regulations that initially felt restrictive gradually became meaningful and beneficial aspects of daily life. One participant explained:

"At first it was difficult, but over time it became a habit. I realized that the rules were important and helped everything run smoothly." (SP4)

The findings also indicate that adaptation was associated with personal development, particularly in terms of independence, emotional regulation, communication competence, and social responsibility. Students learned to manage their own needs, become more considerate in their interactions, and actively participate in communal activities. As one participant noted:

"I learned to take care of myself and become more responsible while following the rules." (SL1)

Interestingly, students who had successfully adapted often assumed supportive roles in helping new students adjust to the pesantren environment. By sharing experiences, providing guidance, and encouraging participation in communal activities, senior students contributed to the adaptation of subsequent cohorts.

Overall, the findings suggest that students' adaptation followed a common trajectory from initial uncertainty and adjustment difficulties toward acceptance, integration, and personal growth. This process enabled students to develop a stronger sense of belonging and become active members of the pesantren community.

Table 3. Common Patterns of Students' Adaptation Experiences

Adaptation Pattern	Description
Communication Adjustment	Learning appropriate ways of speaking, expressing emotions, and interacting with others
Habituation to Rules	Gradually accepting institutional regulations and daily routines
Development of Independence	Becoming responsible for personal needs and daily activities
Social Integration	Participating in collective activities and building social relationships

Adaptation Pattern	Description
Peer Support	Assisting new students in adapting to the pesantren environment

Table 4 demonstrates that students' adaptation involved communication adjustment, habituation to institutional rules, increasing independence, social integration, and peer support. These patterns indicate that adaptation was a gradual process through which students became integrated into the social and cultural life of the pesantren.

V. DISCUSSION

Students' Adaptation Process from the Perspective of Young Yun Kim's Adaptation Model

The findings indicate that students' adaptation at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School reflects the stress–adaptation–growth dynamic proposed by Young Yun Kim (2001, 2009, 2017). Adaptation emerged as a continuous process through which students adjusted to a new sociocultural environment characterized by religious values, institutional discipline, collective living, and distinctive communication norms. Rather than occurring as a linear progression, adaptation developed through recurring cycles of challenge, adjustment, and personal growth.

Stress Phase

The findings reveal that the initial adaptation experiences of students were characterized by various forms of adaptive stress. These challenges primarily stemmed from differences between students' previous home environments and the sociocultural environment of the pesantren. Communication norms, institutional regulations, collective living arrangements, and expectations of independence created uncertainty and discomfort during the early stages of residence.

From Kim's perspective, such experiences represent a natural response to cultural differences and serve as the foundation for subsequent adaptation. Stress emerges when individuals encounter unfamiliar values, norms, and patterns of interaction that differ from their existing cultural framework. Therefore, the challenges experienced by students should not be viewed as indicators of maladjustment but rather as essential components of the adaptation process.

This finding supports previous studies that identified culture shock, communication barriers, and adjustment difficulties among students entering pesantren environments (Chusniyah et al., 2025; Enjelina & Rosada, 2024). Similarly, Hafidhuddin et al. (2023) reported that adaptation to pesantren regulations often involves feelings of discomfort and uncertainty during the initial period of residence. The present study reinforces these findings by demonstrating that adaptive stress is closely related to cultural differences between students' previous social environments and the culture of the pesantren.

Adaptation Phase

The findings further suggest that adaptation occurred primarily through communication and social interaction. Continuous engagement with teachers, senior students, and peers enabled students to learn the norms, values, communication patterns, and expectations that governed everyday life within the pesantren community. Through repeated participation in religious, educational, and communal activities, students gradually developed a deeper understanding of the cultural meanings embedded in pesantren life.

This process is consistent with Kim's argument that adaptation is achieved through communication with members of the host culture. Through interaction, individuals acquire the knowledge and behavioral competencies necessary to function effectively within a new cultural environment. Adaptation therefore involves not only behavioral adjustment but also changes in perception, interpretation, and social understanding.

The findings are consistent with Alfarisi and Mulyanto (2022), who emphasized the importance of institutional guidance in facilitating students' adaptation. Similarly, Risaldy (2019) found that intercultural interaction played a significant role in helping students navigate cultural differences within the pesantren environment. The present study extends these findings by highlighting how adaptation is facilitated through everyday communication practices that allow students to negotiate meanings and gradually internalize pesantren values.

Growth Phase

The findings demonstrate that prolonged engagement with the pesantren environment resulted in significant personal growth. Adaptation was associated with increased discipline, independence, emotional maturity, communication competence, and social integration. Values and practices that were initially perceived as restrictive gradually became meaningful elements of students' daily lives and identities.

According to Kim, growth represents the outcome of successful adaptation, whereby individuals develop greater flexibility, resilience, and intercultural competence. In the context of this study, growth was evident not only in students' ability to function effectively within the pesantren environment but also in their willingness to guide and support newer students. This suggests that adaptation had progressed beyond behavioral adjustment toward the internalization of pesantren values and the development of a stronger sense of belonging.

These findings are consistent with Dias et al. (2023), who reported that adaptation within residential educational environments contributes to personal development and resilience. Likewise, Enjjelina and Rosada (2024) found that successful adjustment is reflected in improved emotional maturity and social engagement. The present study contributes to this literature by demonstrating that growth involves not only successful adjustment but also the development of new meanings and identities within the pesantren culture.

The Spiral Nature of Adaptation

A notable finding of this study is that adaptation continued beyond the initial adjustment period. As students assumed new roles and responsibilities within the pesantren community, they encountered new challenges that required further adaptation. This finding supports Kim's view that adaptation is a spiral rather than a linear process, in which each cycle of stress, adaptation, and growth contributes to higher levels of personal development and cultural integration.

Unlike previous studies that primarily viewed adaptation as an initial response to pesantren regulations and routines (Alfarisi & Mulyanto, 2022; Hafidhuddin et al., 2023), the present study suggests that adaptation is an ongoing process of identity development and social integration. Students continuously reconstruct meanings, relationships, and self-understandings as they participate in the cultural life of the pesantren. Adaptation can therefore be understood as a process of becoming, through which individuals gradually develop identities that are aligned with the values and norms of the pesantren community.

Meaning Construction in Students' Adaptation through Symbolic Interactionism

The findings indicate that students' adaptation at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School was not merely a process of adjusting to institutional regulations and daily routines but also a process of constructing meaning through social interaction. From the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, adaptation occurs when individuals interpret, negotiate, and internalize the meanings of symbols encountered in a new social environment (Mead, 1934). Consequently, adaptation can be understood as a process through which students learn to interpret the symbolic world of the pesantren and position themselves within it.

The findings demonstrate that students entered the pesantren carrying meanings, habits, and communication patterns derived from their family and community backgrounds. Upon entering the pesantren, they encountered a different symbolic system characterized by religious values, institutional regulations, communication norms, hierarchical relationships, and collective responsibilities. These differences initially created uncertainty because the meanings attached to various symbols within the pesantren environment did not always correspond to the meanings students had previously acquired. Therefore, adaptation required students to reconstruct their understanding of social reality through continuous interaction and experience.

From the perspective of mind, adaptation involved a gradual transformation in how students interpreted social situations, communication practices, and institutional expectations. Through observation, interaction, and participation in daily activities, students learned to understand the meanings associated with discipline, respect, collective responsibility, and appropriate communication. Symbols that were initially perceived as restrictive or unfamiliar gradually became meaningful components of everyday life. This finding supports Mead's argument that meaning is socially constructed and continuously shaped through interaction.

The findings also highlight the development of self throughout the adaptation process. Students gradually adjusted their behaviors by considering how they were perceived by others within the pesantren community. Through observation, role-taking, and self-reflection, they learned to align their actions with the expectations of teachers, senior students, and peers. This process reflects Mead's distinction between the *I* and the *Me*, whereby individuals negotiate between personal preferences and socially defined expectations. Adaptation therefore involved not only behavioral adjustment but also the reconstruction of identity within a new sociocultural environment.

Furthermore, the findings emphasize the role of society in shaping adaptation. The pesantren functioned as a social structure that provided shared meanings, behavioral standards, and collective expectations. Institutional rules, religious practices, communal activities, and hierarchical relationships collectively served as mechanisms through which students learned how to behave and communicate appropriately within the community. In this sense, the pesantren operated as a *generalized other* that guided students' understanding of acceptable conduct and social identity.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of social interaction in shaping students' adjustment and identity formation within pesantren environments (Enjjelina & Rosada, 2024; Hafidhuddin et al., 2023). They also support the view that adaptation involves more than compliance with institutional regulations; it requires the internalization of shared meanings and active participation in social life. However, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that adaptation is fundamentally a symbolic process through which students reconstruct meanings, negotiate identities, and gradually become integrated into the cultural life of the pesantren.

Therefore, students' adaptation at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School can be understood as an ongoing interaction between mind, self, and society. Through this process, students gradually develop new interpretations, identities, and behavioral orientations that enable them to function effectively and meaningfully within the pesantren community.

Table 4. Students' Adaptation through Symbolic Interactionism

Concept	Findings	Interpretation
Individual	Students gradually learned to interpret rules, communication styles, religious practices, and collective activities within the pesantren.	Adaptation involved reconstructing meanings through interaction and experience.
Self	Students adjusted their behaviors, emotions, and communication patterns according to social expectations.	Adaptation reflected the negotiation between personal preferences (<i>I</i>) and social expectations (<i>Me</i>).
Society	The pesantren provided norms, values, hierarchies, and behavioral standards that guided students' actions.	The pesantren functioned as the <i>generalized other</i> shaping identity and social conduct.
Outcome	Students became more disciplined, independent, socially aware, and integrated into the community.	Adaptation resulted in identity formation and the internalization of pesantren values.

Students' Adaptation as a Form of Intercultural Communication

The findings indicate that students' adaptation at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School can be understood as a process of intercultural communication. Although students share a common national and religious background, they enter the pesantren with diverse regional cultures, communication styles, habits, and systems of meaning. Consequently, adaptation involves not only adjusting to institutional regulations but also learning how to communicate effectively within a cultural environment characterized by its own norms, values, symbols, and interaction patterns.

From an intercultural communication perspective, the challenges experienced by students during the initial stages of residence reflect the encounter between different cultural systems. Students were required to navigate unfamiliar communication norms, social expectations, and behavioral standards that differed from those practiced in their home environments. These differences often generated uncertainty and misunderstanding, particularly in interpreting language, communication styles, social hierarchies, and collective responsibilities. This finding supports DeVito's (2013) argument that communication is shaped by cultural values and symbolic systems that influence how messages are transmitted, interpreted, and understood.

The adaptation process demonstrates that intercultural communication is fundamentally a process of meaning negotiation. Through continuous interaction with teachers, senior students, and peers, students gradually learned the meanings attached to various symbols, practices, and social expectations within the pesantren. Communication therefore functioned not only as a means of exchanging information but also as a mechanism through which students acquired cultural knowledge and developed an understanding of the social realities of pesantren life.

The findings further suggest that adaptation was facilitated by students' increasing ability to adjust their communication behaviors to the norms of the pesantren environment. As students became more familiar with institutional expectations, they developed greater awareness of appropriate ways of speaking, interacting, and expressing themselves in different social contexts. This process reflects the development of intercultural communication competence, which involves the ability to communicate effectively, appropriately, and sensitively across cultural differences.

Another important finding concerns the role of the pesantren as a sociocultural environment that promotes intercultural learning. Daily interactions, collective activities, religious practices, and hierarchical relationships created opportunities for students to engage with individuals from different backgrounds and perspectives. Through these experiences, students gradually developed cultural awareness, empathy, and social understanding, enabling them to build more harmonious relationships within the pesantren community.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of communication and social interaction in the adaptation process of students within educational and residential environments (Chusniyah et al., 2025; Risaldy, 2019; Enjjelina & Rosada, 2024). However, the present study extends this literature by demonstrating that adaptation in the pesantren context is not merely a process of behavioral adjustment but also a process of intercultural communication through which students negotiate meanings, internalize cultural values, and develop new social identities.

Therefore, students' adaptation at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School can be viewed as an intercultural communication process that enables them to understand cultural differences, develop communication competence, and achieve social integration. Through ongoing interaction and participation in the cultural life of the pesantren, students gradually become capable of functioning effectively within a new sociocultural environment while simultaneously reconstructing their identities as members of the pesantren community.

A Model of Students' Adaptation at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School

Based on the synthesis of Young Yun Kim's Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model, Symbolic Interactionism, and Intercultural Communication Theory, this study proposes a model of students' adaptation at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School. The findings suggest that adaptation is a dynamic, symbolic, and continuous process through which students adjust to a new sociocultural environment while simultaneously constructing meanings and developing new identities.

Entering the pesantren requires students to engage with an established cultural system characterized by institutional regulations, religious values, communication norms, hierarchical relationships, and collective living practices. From Kim's perspective, this transition generates an initial phase of stress, resulting from differences between students' previous cultural experiences and the culture of the pesantren. These differences create uncertainty and challenges as students encounter unfamiliar expectations, communication styles, and social practices.

However, adaptation extends beyond behavioral adjustment. From the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, students must learn to interpret and negotiate the meanings of symbols embedded within the pesantren environment. Institutional rules, communication practices, religious rituals, collective activities, and social hierarchies function as symbolic systems through which students gradually construct new understandings of appropriate behavior and social identity. Through interaction with teachers, senior students, and peers, students learn to interpret these symbols according to the shared meanings recognized within the pesantren community.

The findings further indicate that communication serves as the primary mechanism through which adaptation occurs. Continuous interaction enables students to acquire cultural knowledge, negotiate meanings, and develop communication competencies necessary for functioning effectively within the pesantren environment. Adaptation therefore operates as a process of intercultural communication in which students learn to understand cultural differences, adjust communication practices, and participate in collective social life.

As students become increasingly familiar with the norms and values of the pesantren, they gradually enter the adaptation phase. During this stage, they begin to internalize shared meanings, modify behavioral patterns, and develop stronger social relationships. Adaptation is reflected not only in behavioral conformity but also in the reconstruction of self-understanding through the interaction of mind, self, and society.

Over time, this process contributes to growth, which is reflected in increased discipline, independence, social awareness, communication competence, and integration into the pesantren community. Values that were initially perceived as external demands become internalized as part of students' identities. Consequently, adaptation results not only in successful adjustment but also in personal transformation and identity development.

The model proposed in this study suggests that students' adaptation is best understood as a spiral process linking stress, communication, meaning construction, adaptation, and growth. Through continuous interaction with the sociocultural environment of the pesantren, students gradually develop new interpretations, identities, and behavioral orientations that enable them to function effectively as members of the pesantren community. Thus, adaptation is not merely a process of becoming accustomed to a new environment but a process of becoming a member of a new cultural community.

Table 5. Proposed Model of Students' Adaptation at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School

Stage	Main Process	Meaning Construction	Adaptation Outcome
Stress	Encountering differences in norms, communication patterns, discipline, and collective living	Students experience uncertainty and reinterpret unfamiliar cultural symbols	Initial adaptation challenges
Intercultural Communication	Interaction with teachers, senior students, and peers	Learning cultural meanings, norms, and communication practices	Increased cultural understanding
Meaning Construction	Development of mind, self, and society	Internalization of pesantren values and social expectations	Identity negotiation

Stage	Main Process	Meaning Construction	Adaptation Outcome
Adaptation	Adjustment to institutional rules and social life	Acceptance of shared meanings and behavioral norms	Social adjustment
Growth	Integration into the pesantren community	Transformation of identity and self-understanding	Discipline, independence, communication competence, and social integration

Table 8 summarizes the proposed adaptation model developed in this study. The model demonstrates that students' adaptation is a continuous process beginning with cultural stress, followed by intercultural communication and meaning construction, leading to adaptation and ultimately personal growth. Through this process, students gradually internalize the values and norms of the pesantren and develop identities that are aligned with the sociocultural environment of the institution.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined the adaptation process of students at Nurul Madany Islamic Boarding School from the perspectives of Young Yun Kim's Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model, Symbolic Interactionism, and Intercultural Communication. The findings demonstrate that adaptation is a dynamic and continuous process through which students adjust to a new sociocultural environment characterized by distinctive values, norms, communication patterns, and collective living practices.

The adaptation process begins with experiences of stress resulting from cultural differences between students' previous environments and the pesantren culture. Through ongoing interaction with teachers, senior students, and peers, students gradually learn to interpret cultural symbols, understand social expectations, and adjust their communication practices. This process enables them to construct new meanings, negotiate identities, and internalize the values of the pesantren community.

The study further reveals that adaptation extends beyond behavioral adjustment. Through the interaction of mind, self, and society, students reconstruct their understanding of themselves and their social environment. Over time, this process contributes to personal growth, reflected in increased discipline, independence, communication competence, and social integration. Therefore, adaptation in the pesantren context can be understood as a process of intercultural communication and meaning construction that leads to identity development within a new cultural environment.

Recommendations and Future Research

The findings suggest the importance of providing structured orientation programs and supportive communication environments to facilitate students' adaptation during the early stages of residence in Islamic boarding schools. Teachers, senior students, and institutional leaders can play significant roles in helping newcomers understand cultural norms, communication practices, and social expectations within the pesantren community.

Future research may examine adaptation processes across different pesantren settings or explore how variations in organizational culture, regional background, and communication practices influence students' adaptation experiences. Comparative and longitudinal studies would also provide deeper insights into how adaptation and identity development evolve over time within diverse educational and cultural contexts.

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