

The Role of Interpersonal Communication in Maintaining The Mental Health of University Students in Makassar: A Phenomenological Study

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Interpersonal Communication, Mental Health, University Students, Phenomenological Study, Social Support System, Cultural Adaptation.	Maintaining mental health among university students is a growing concern, especially in culturally rich regions like Makassar. This study investigates the role of interpersonal communication in supporting the mental well-being of students in Makassar. The research aims to understand how students utilize interpersonal communication to address mental health challenges and adapt to academic and social environments. Using a qualitative approach with an interpretative phenomenological design, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten students from various study programs in Makassar. The findings reveal five primary functions of interpersonal communication: (1) serving as emotional catharsis, (2) establishing social support systems, (3) managing conflicts and academic pressures, (4) aiding cultural adaptation for migrant students, and (5) facilitating mental health care through technology. The research highlights the influence of local cultural values, such as sipakatau (mutual respect) and siri' na pacce (a sense of shame and empathy), on the ways interpersonal communication is practiced. The results underscore the importance of interpersonal communication skills in equipping students for academic and professional challenges. These findings have critical implications for higher education institutions in designing mental health support programs that are culturally sensitive and address students' interpersonal communication needs.

INTRODUCTION

Students in Makassar city, like students in other big cities in Indonesia, face various challenges and pressures in their academic life. A heavy course load, with a busy schedule of lectures and piles of assignments, often overwhelms students in managing their time and energy. High expectations, whether from parents, lecturers, or themselves, add to the psychological pressure that students have to face on a daily basis.

In addition, the intense competition in the academic environment, especially at top universities in Makassar, creates a competitive atmosphere and has the potential to trigger anxiety among students. For students who come from outside Makassar, the challenge of adapting to a new environment is also an additional factor that can increase stress levels. They have to adjust to the culture of a big city, an education system that may be different, as well as building new social networks away from family and old friends.

Economic conditions are also often a source of pressure for Makassar students. The cost of living in a big city and the high cost of education can cause financial worries, especially for students from lower-middle class families (Paulsen & John, 2002). Some students even have to split their time between studying and working part-time, which further adds to their mental burden.

These situations, if accumulated and not handled properly, have the potential to negatively impact the mental health of college students. When stress becomes chronic, the body's systems are constantly on alert, which can result in hormonal and neurotransmitter imbalances in the brain. This condition becomes the starting point for various psychological disorders.

Prolonged stress can trigger various psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety disorder, or burnout (Tomaszek & Muchacka-Cymerman, 2022). Depression in college students may manifest as ongoing feelings of sadness, loss of interest in activities that are usually enjoyed, or even thoughts of self-harm. Anxiety disorder may manifest as excessive worry about the future, irrational fear of social situations, or intrusive panic attacks. Meanwhile, burnout can be seen in emotional exhaustion, cynicism towards studies, and a drastic decline in academic motivation.

This in turn can affect not only academic performance, but also students' overall quality of life. In an academic context, students who experience mental illness may experience decreased concentration, difficulty remembering lecture material, or lose motivation to attend classes and complete assignments. As a result, academic grades may suffer, risk repeating courses, or even dropping out of college in extreme cases (Alsubaie et al., 2019).

The negative impact also extends to students' social relationships. They may begin to withdraw from social interactions, have difficulty maintaining friendships, or face conflicts in romantic relationships. This social isolation can further deteriorate their mental health conditions, creating a negative cycle that is difficult to break.

Students' physical health is also not spared from the impact of prolonged stress. Disturbed sleep patterns, changes in appetite, chronic headaches, or a decreased immune system are some of the physical manifestations that may be experienced (Attia et al., 2022). In the long run, these conditions can develop into more serious health problems such as digestive disorders, cardiovascular disease, or immune system disorders (Furman et al., 2019).

Furthermore, future career prospects may be jeopardized. Students who struggle with mental health may struggle to develop soft skills that are important for the workforce, such as the ability to communicate or work in teams.

Mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, or burnout can hinder students' ability to build healthy interpersonal relationships. They may tend to isolate themselves, have difficulty starting or maintaining conversations, or even avoid social interactions altogether. This can impact their ability to work collaboratively in teams, build professional networks, or communicate ideas effectively (Martínez et al., 2020).

Not only that, students who are struggling with mental illness often lose the energy and motivation to engage in extracurricular activities or other self-development opportunities. They may miss out on internships or networking opportunities that are crucial to building a future career. In fact, the experience and connections gained through these activities are invaluable for students in starting a career after graduation.

Even after graduation, the impact of mental health issues during college can linger, affecting their work performance and career development. Former students who have experienced depression or anxiety disorder may still carry psychological trauma, low self-confidence, or excessive anxiety when entering the workforce. This can lead to decreased productivity, difficulty adapting to new environments, or interpersonal conflicts in the workplace (Yi et al., 2022).

In the long run, mental health disorders that go unaddressed during college can be a significant obstacle for graduates in realizing their career potential. Prospects of promotion, skill development, or even keeping a job can be jeopardized if psychological issues continue to follow them. Thus, investing in the mental health of university students not only benefits their current well-being, but also has long-term implications for their future careers and contributions to society. Holistic efforts to promote and support the mental health of university students in Makassar are crucial to consider.

In this context, interpersonal communication emerges as one of the potential strategies that can be utilized to maintain students' mental health (Hargie, 2021). Effective interpersonal communication can be key for college students to build and maintain supportive social relationships, which is an important factor in supporting mental well-being.

Through direct interaction and exchange of information with peers, lecturers, or family members, students can express feelings, share experiences, and obtain needed emotional support. Open and understanding communication can help students better identify and address their mental health issues (Yumar et al., 2023).

Effective interpersonal communication provides space for students to openly express their emotions, fears, and concerns (Hasanah, 2015). With a safe and supportive communication channel, students can more freely share the psychological burdens they bear, both related to academic demands, life transitions, and the challenges of social adaptation in the campus environment.

Through an honest and empathetic exchange of information from peers, lecturers, or family members can provide students with new perspectives, advice, and the emotional support they need. This helps students feel more understood and less alone in facing problems. The process of sharing experiences and active listening can facilitate a better understanding of the root causes and steps to overcome mental health problems.

Furthermore, healthy interpersonal communication can also help students develop effective coping strategies. Through open discussions with those closest to them, students can identify sources of stress, explore coping options, and develop action plans that suit their individual needs. Thus, students can be more empowered in managing their mental health issues.

Ultimately, constructive and supportive interpersonal communication can be the foundation for students' psychological well-being (Zheng, 2022). Warm and understanding interactions can build a sense of security, trust and self-esteem, which are important factors for optimal mental health. Through open and supportive communication, students can develop the resilience and adaptability needed to overcome challenges during their studies.

Based on the above problems, the purpose of this research is to find out and analyze interpersonal communication as a way for students in Makassar to maintain mental health. So that the benefits in this study are that students are able to understand the role of interpersonal communication, by exploring how students in Makassar use interpersonal communication in dealing with pressure and maintaining their mental health. Secondly, Identifying Supporting and Hindering Factors, by analyzing the factors that support and hinder the effectiveness of interpersonal communication in maintaining students' mental health.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with an interpretative phenomenological study design. This approach was chosen to deeply understand how university students in Makassar interpret and experience the role of interpersonal communication in maintaining their mental health. Ten informants (5 male and 5 female) were involved in this study who came from various study programs at several universities in Makassar, with a purposive sampling method. The

researcher used a screening method in selecting informants, namely: First, active students of at least third semester from various universities in Makassar. Second, diverse study program backgrounds and demographics. Third, High score on Interpersonal Communication Inventory (ICI). Fourth, Low score on Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI-II) and Taylor Minnesota Anxiety Scale (TMAS). Fifth, Above average academic grades (minimum GPA of 3.0). Sixth, Actively involved in campus activities or student organizations. Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and observations to assess participants' personalities. Then the interview results were analyzed using a thematic system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Interpersonal Communication

Based on thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with 10 student informants in Makassar, this study identified several main themes that describe the role of interpersonal communication in maintaining students' mental health. The following are the roles of interpersonal communication in maintaining students' mental health:

As an Emotional Catharsis

The results showed that university students in Makassar often use interpersonal communication as a means to release emotional distress. Sharing stories and feelings with close friends or family is a common strategy to reduce stress. In the context of Makassar's culture that emphasizes togetherness and kinship, this sharing process is not only limited to formal conversations, but also integrated in daily interactions. Students reported that they often take advantage of casual moments such as having coffee together at a coffee shop, or just sitting on the terrace of the boarding house to open up conversations about the problems they face. Some students stated that they have a special "confidante", whom they trust to share personal problems with. The choice of this "confidante" is not always based on the length of the friendship, but rather on the level of comfort and trust built. Most informants emphasized the importance of feeling safe and not being judged in this sharing process.

Interestingly, some students also reported that they often shared their problems with friends from the same region. This suggests that cultural and linguistic proximity facilitates the emotional catharsis process. The use of local language in these intimate conversations is considered more capable of expressing nuances of emotion that may be difficult to express in formal Indonesian. In addition, communication with family, especially through phone calls or video calls, was also a significant source of emotional support. Although most students live far away from their families, they reported that hearing the voices of parents or siblings can provide a sense of comfort and reduce feelings of homesickness which is often a source of stress.

This sharing process is not always aimed at finding concrete solutions to the problems faced. Many students emphasized that sometimes all they need is "a listening ear". This shows that empathy and presence in interpersonal communication play an important role in the process of releasing emotional distress. Informant A stated: "Sometimes if I'm really stressed, I call my best friend. Just tell stories, not necessarily get a solution, but it's a relief to get everything out of my mind." This finding is in line with the emotional catharsis theory which states that expressing emotions can help reduce psychological distress. In the context of Makassar's culture, which tends to be collective, sharing feelings with the closest people is a natural and effective coping mechanism.

Emotional catharsis theory, rooted in Freud's psychoanalytic thinking, suggests that releasing pent-up emotions can reduce psychological tension (Hawkins, 1986). In the context of Makassar students, the process of sharing stories and feelings with friends or family serves as a catharsis, allowing them to "let out" negative emotions and gain a new perspective on the

problems they face. Makassar culture, like many cultures in Indonesia, has strong collectivistic characteristics. The people of Makassar value togetherness, kinship, and helping each other. These values are reflected in local concepts such as "sipakatau" (mutual respect), "sipakalebbi" (mutual respect), and "sipakainge" (mutual reminder). In this context, sharing feelings and problems with those closest to you is not only accepted, but even expected as part of maintaining social harmony.

Informant H, a student from Makassar, explained: "For us, keeping problems to ourselves is not good. There is a saying 'tena kulle taua kale-kale' which means 'we cannot live alone'. So sharing the burden is part of our life." The habit of gathering and talking, which in the local language is called "a'bicara-bicara", is a natural place for this cathartic process. Coffee shops, boarding house terraces, or campus corners are favorite places for students to gather and share stories. In this relaxed atmosphere, students feel more comfortable to open up and express their emotions.

Interestingly, some students reported that they often use humor and "joking around" as a way to start serious conversations. Informant J stated: "Usually we start with joking around first. But from there, sometimes it can lead to a deeper conversation. It's a less pushy way to start sharing problems." The effectiveness of these coping mechanisms is also supported by the concept of "siri' na pacce" which is deeply rooted in Makassar culture. "Siri'" meaning pride or shame, and "pacce" meaning solidarity, create a strong social support system. When a student shares his or her problems, there is a sense of collective responsibility to help or at least listen, as this is considered part of maintaining the collective "siri".

However, it is important to note that while sharing feelings is considered positive, there are cultural boundaries that are maintained. Some students reported that they remain selective in who and what they share with, especially for issues that are considered very personal or could potentially bring shame to the family.

To build a Social Support System

Students utilize interpersonal communication to build and maintain social support networks. Study groups, campus organizations, and hobby communities become a place to establish supportive relationships. This research reveals that university students in Makassar actively and strategically use various social platforms in the campus environment to build a strong support network. This process not only occurs naturally, but is also a conscious effort by students to create a reliable support system during their studies.

Study groups are one of the most common and effective forms of support networks. Students report that study groups serve as more than just a means to improve academic understanding. Informant B explained, "Our study group is like a second family. We not only discuss course material, but also support each other when someone is down or stressed." Interestingly, some study groups develop into informal support groups. They hold regular meetings, not only to study, but also to share stories and motivate each other. Some groups even have special rituals, such as eating together after exams or celebrating members' birthdays, which strengthens the emotional bond between them.

Campus organizations also play an important role in building social support networks. Students who are active in organizations report that they feel they have a "family" on campus. Informant C, a student organization officer, stated, "In organizations, we learn many things, including how to manage stress and conflict. Friends in organizations are often the first place to confide in when there is a problem."

Some campus organizations in Makassar have even started to realize their role in supporting the mental health of their members. They hold special programs such as sharing

sessions, stress management workshops, or even invite psychologists to give seminars. This shows a growing awareness of the importance of mental health among students.

Hobby communities have also emerged as an important platform for students to build supportive relationships. From photography, music, and nature communities, these groups provide a space for students to express themselves and find friends with similar interests. Informant I, a member of the nature lovers community, shared, "When we go up the mountain or camping together, we get closer. Many stories and problems are shared around the campfire."

Interestingly, some students reported that they deliberately joined various groups or organizations as a strategy to expand their support network. They realized that having a variety of support groups could help them gain diverse perspectives and a wider source of support. However, some challenges also emerged in the process of building this support network. Some students reported difficulties in balancing time between academics, organizations, and personal life. There were also concerns about unhealthy group dynamics, such as excessive gossip or competition, which could reduce the effectiveness of the support network.

To address this challenge, several campuses in Makassar have begun conducting leadership and organizational management training for students. The goal is to help students build and manage healthier and more supportive organizations or groups. This finding confirms the importance of encouraging and facilitating students' participation in various social activities on campus. Universities may consider integrating social activities and soft skill development into the curriculum, so that students have more opportunities to build strong support networks during their studies.

Informant C explained: "Joining campus organizations is very helpful. We can share experiences, support each other. If there is a problem, it feels like we are not alone in facing it." These results confirm the importance of social support in maintaining mental health, in accordance with stress buffer theory. Interpersonal communication facilitates the formation of social bonds that can buffer against the negative effects of academic stress.

These findings suggest that individuals who have strong social support networks tend to be more resilient to academic stress. Through meaningful social interactions, students can share emotional burdens, gain new perspectives, and feel valued by others. This process not only helps reduce feelings of isolation, but also increases self-confidence and coping ability.

Furthermore, the quality of interpersonal communication plays an important role in the effectiveness of social support. The ability to express oneself clearly, listen actively, and empathize with others can strengthen social bonds. Relationships built on trust and mutual understanding create a safe environment for students to face academic challenges.

Stress buffer theory states that social support acts as a shield against the negative impact of stress (Bekiros et al., 2022). In an academic context, this could mean that students with strong social support are better able to manage heavy workloads, deal with failure, and maintain their motivation. This support can come from a variety of sources, including peers, family, lecturers, or campus counselors.

The implications of these findings are significant for higher education institutions. Universities and colleges can develop programs that encourage the formation and maintenance of positive social relationships among students. This could include orientation activities that emphasize the importance of building support networks, communication skills workshops, or peer mentoring systems.

In addition, the results of this study also emphasize the importance of creating a campus culture that supports mental well-being. Institutions can consider providing communal spaces that encourage social interaction, offering easily accessible counseling services, and training academic staff to recognize signs of stress in students.

By understanding and applying these principles, educational institutions can create a learning environment that not only focuses on academic achievement, but also supports students' social and emotional development. This in turn can improve not only students' mental health, but also their academic performance and retention rates.

As a Negotiation of Conflict and Academic Pressure

Interpersonal communication is used as a tool to manage conflict and negotiate academic pressure. Students learn to communicate their needs to lecturers, peer groups, or administrative staff. Interpersonal communication skills become a key instrument for students in navigating the complexities of academic life. By developing these skills, students can not only articulate the challenges they face, but also actively seek solutions through constructive dialog.

In interactions with lecturers, effective communication allows students to: First, Clarify expectations of the assignment or project. Second, Request more detailed feedback on their performance. Third, Negotiate deadlines if needed. Fourth, Express interest or difficulty in specific subject matter. This can be heard from Informant D's statement: "I used to be shy to talk to the lecturer. But now I dare to ask for an explanation if I don't understand, or ask for an extension of time if I really need it. It turns out that many lecturers can understand if we communicate well."

When dealing with a group of friends, interpersonal communication skills help in: First, Fair division of tasks in group projects. Second, Resolution of conflicts that may arise during collaboration. Third, Synchronizing different schedules and work methods. Fourth, Building a supportive and productive team environment

In dealing with administrative staff, students can use interpersonal communication to: First, Inquire information about academic policies or administrative procedures. Second, Apply for special needs or accommodations. Third, Resolve issues related to course registration or financial matters. Fourth, Seek support for student initiatives or activities

The development of these skills also prepares students for the professional world, where the ability to communicate effectively and manage interpersonal relationships is highly valued. Students who are proficient in interpersonal communication tend to be more confident in facing challenges, more adaptive to change, and more successful in building professional networks. Educational institutions can support the development of these skills through: First, offering workshops or seminars on effective communication. Second, Integration of tasks that require interpersonal communication into the curriculum. Third, Provision of opportunities for practice, such as presentations or debates. Fourth, Providing constructive feedback on students' communication skills.

Furthermore, good interpersonal communication skills can help students manage academic stress (Safari, 2015). By being able to express concerns, seek help, and negotiate effectively, students can reduce the mental and emotional burden that often accompanies high academic demands. Ultimately, mastery of interpersonal communication is not only beneficial for academic success, but also contributes to the development of students' emotional and social intelligence. These are life skills that will continue to be relevant long after their studies have ended. The ability to communicate assertively in an academic context helps students manage stress more effectively. This shows the importance of developing communication skills as part of preparing for the challenges of college. Assertive communication is a crucial skill that enables students to express their thoughts, feelings and needs clearly and respectfully, without disregarding the rights of others (Johnson & Johnson, 2024). In the often stressful academic environment, this ability becomes an invaluable tool for stress management and academic goal achievement.

Several ways assertive communication helps students manage stress: First, communicating personal boundaries: Students can clearly state their capacity to take on additional responsibilities

or decline requests that may interfere with their academic priorities. Second, Seeking help and support: With assertive communication, students are better able to identify and express their needs, whether it is asking for additional explanations from lecturers or seeking help from campus counseling services. Third, Academic negotiation: The ability to negotiate effectively with lecturers regarding deadlines, workload, or clarification of assignments can reduce unnecessary stress like Informant E said: 'Sir/Ma'am, I would like to discuss the possibility of an extension for this assignment. I want to give my best work, but I also have two exams this week.'". Fourth, Conflict resolution: In group work situations or interactions with peers, assertive communication helps in the constructive resolution of conflicts, reducing interpersonal tension. Fifth, Expectation management: Students can better communicate their abilities and limitations, helping to manage expectations of self and others.

The development of assertive communication skills in preparation for the challenges in higher education can be done through: First, the new student orientation program: Including a module on assertive communication in the orientation program can equip students with basic skills from the start. Second, workshops and seminars: Colleges can organize regular workshops on assertive communication, stress management, and interpersonal skills. Third, Integration in the curriculum: Include elements of assertive communication in existing courses, especially those involving presentations or group work. Fourth, Practice and feedback: Provide opportunities for students to practice assertive communication in a safe environment, with constructive feedback from instructors or peers. Fifth, Mentoring: A mentoring program where senior students skilled in assertive communication can mentor their juniors. Sixth, Counseling services: Provide individual or group counseling sessions that focus on developing assertive communication skills.

By developing assertive communication skills, students are not only better prepared for academic challenges, but also prepare themselves for future professional careers. This ability helps in building healthy relationships, increasing self-confidence, and creating a more positive and productive learning environment. Furthermore, assertive communication skills can help students in: First, Professional identity development. Second, Increased self-awareness and emotion regulation. Third, Building a strong professional network. Fourth, Improved leadership abilities. Thus, investing in the development of assertive communication skills is not only beneficial for short-term academic success, but also provides a strong foundation for long-term personal and professional development.

As the Key to Cultural Adaptation

For immigrant students, interpersonal communication is key in adapting to Makassar culture. They learn local communication norms and use them to build relationships with friends from different backgrounds. The adaptation process of migrant students in Makassar through interpersonal communication involves several important aspects: First, Understanding the Local Language: Migrant students often have to learn Makassarese or at least some key phrases in Bugis-Makassar. This not only helps in daily communication but also shows respect for the local culture. For example, learning to say "Iye" (yes) or "Tabe" (excuse me) can smoothen social interactions. Second, Adaptation to Communication Style: Makassarese society is known for its indirect communication style and upholds politeness. Migrant students need to learn to read non-verbal cues and understand the implied meaning in conversations. Third, Understanding Social Hierarchy: In Makassar culture, there is a strong emphasis on social hierarchy and respect for people who are older or have higher social status. Migrant students must learn to use appropriate language and demeanor according to the status of their interlocutors. Fourth, Participation in Social Activities: Joining in local social and cultural activities such as traditional ceremonies, religious celebrations, or campus events can help immigrant students understand and internalize local communication norms. Fifth, Building Social Networks: Migrant students can actively seek

out local friends who can help them understand the nuances of local culture and communication. This can be done through study groups, student organizations, or extracurricular activities. Sixth, Overcoming Cultural Misunderstandings: Cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings. Immigrant students need to develop the skills to handle such situations with patience and openness, and learn from the experience. Seventh, Adapting to Local Values: Understanding and respecting local values such as *siri' na pacce* (self-respect and solidarity) in Bugis-Makassar culture can help immigrant students build deeper relationships with local friends. Eighth, Use of Local Social Media: Migrant students can utilize social media platforms that are popular among Makassar students to stay connected and understand local communication trends. Ninth, Learning from Mistakes: Mistakes in communication are normal in the adaptation process. Migrant students need to develop an open attitude to learn from mistakes and continuously improve their communication skills. Tenth, Maintaining Identity While Adapting: It is important for immigrant students to find a balance between maintaining their own cultural identity while adopting relevant aspects of Makassar culture. Eleventh, Overcoming Stereotypes and Prejudice: Immigrant students may need to overcome existing stereotypes about their home region, while also learning not to judge Makassarese culture based on prejudice. Twelfth, Development of Cultural Empathy: Through continued interaction, immigrant students can develop greater empathy for the perspectives and experiences of people from the Makassarese culture.

This adaptation process not only helps immigrant students to live their academic life more smoothly, but also provides valuable experience in the development of intercultural competence. These skills will greatly benefit them in their future professional careers, especially in an increasingly connected global context. Informant G, a student from outside Sulawesi, shared: "At first it was difficult to understand the accent and culture here. But by asking a lot of questions and learning from local friends, I was able to adjust over time. This really helped reduce the stress of culture shock." This process of cultural adaptation through interpersonal communication is in line with acculturation theory. The ability to communicate effectively in a new cultural context helps to reduce acculturation stress and improve the psychological well-being of migrant students.

Acculturation theory, developed by scholars such as John Berry, explains the process of psychological and cultural change that occurs when individuals from one cultural background interact with a new culture (Sam & Berry, 2010). In the context of migrant students in Makassar, this theory is highly relevant and can be elaborated as follows: First, Acculturation Strategies: Berry identifies four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Students who are able to communicate effectively tend to adopt an integration strategy, where they retain important aspects of their home culture while adopting elements of Makassarese culture. This is considered the most adaptive strategy and is associated with lower levels of acculturation stress. Second, Cultural Learning: Effective interpersonal communication facilitates faster and deeper cultural learning. Migrant students are able to understand the social norms, values, and expectations of Makassarese culture through direct interaction with the local population, which is an important aspect of the acculturation process. Third, Bicultural Identity Development: Through effective interpersonal communication, immigrant students can develop a balanced bicultural identity. They learn to "code-switch" between their home culture and Makassar culture, which increases their cognitive flexibility and social adaptability. Fourth, Social Support: The ability to communicate effectively allows migrant students to build a strong social support network. Acculturation theory emphasizes the importance of social support in reducing acculturation stress and improving psychological well-being. Fifth, Cultural Conflict Management: Good interpersonal communication skills assist students in managing cultural conflicts that may arise. This is in line with the concept of "cultural negotiation" in acculturation theory, where individuals learn to balance the demands of two different cultures. Sixth, Reduction of

Acculturation Stress: Acculturation stress, which is a key concept in acculturation theory, can be significantly reduced when immigrant students are able to communicate effectively. This includes the ability to express oneself, understand others, and overcome cultural misunderstandings. Seventh, Enhanced Intercultural Competence: Through the continuous process of adaptation and communication, migrant students develop higher intercultural competence. This not only helps them in the Makassar context but also prepares them for future intercultural interactions. Eighth, Understanding Cultural Relativism: Effective interpersonal communication helps immigrant students develop a deeper understanding of cultural relativism. They learn to see Makassarese cultural practices and values in context, not just through the lens of their home culture. Ninth, Development of Psychological Resilience: The ability to overcome communication and cultural challenges increases the psychological resilience of migrant students. This is in line with acculturation theory which emphasizes the importance of adaptability and resilience in the face of cultural change. Tenth, Facilitation of Personal Growth: The process of acculturation through effective interpersonal communication can be a catalyst for significant personal growth. Migrant students often report increased self-awareness, empathy and emotional maturity as a result of their cross-cultural experiences. Eleventh, Effects on Academic Achievement: Acculturation theory also suggests that successful cultural adaptation is positively correlated with academic achievement. Students who can communicate effectively tend to be better at understanding academic expectations and navigating an educational system that may be different from what they are familiar with. Twelfth, Preparation for Globalization: These acculturation experiences, facilitated by effective interpersonal communication, prepare immigrant students for an increasingly globalized world. They develop skills that are highly valued in the international job market.

By understanding and applying the principles of acculturation theory through effective interpersonal communication, migrant students in Makassar can not only reduce their acculturation stress but also optimize their cross-cultural experience for long-term personal and professional growth.

To support mental health care

Some informants often use technology to care for their mental health. The technology used is in the form of health applications such as Alodokter, Halodoc, and Riliv.

Technological developments have opened up new opportunities for university students to access mental health resources and manage their psychological well-being. The use of this app allows students to practice stress management techniques independently and consistently. The platform also offers access to psychologists or counselors via chat, video call, or voicemail. The flexibility and anonymity offered by these services can reduce stigma and barriers to seeking help.

This aspect is very important, especially in the context of Indonesian culture which still has a certain stigma towards mental health issues. Online services allow students to seek help without being seen visiting a mental health clinic. This reduces embarrassment or fear of being judged by peers or family. As Informant F's said:

"In the Alodokter application I can consult without having to worry about meeting acquaintances in the clinic waiting room and access can be 24 hours"

Based on this, technology can offer flexibility and convenience so that time and distance barriers to mental health facilities can be overcome. In addition, such apps offer the option to not show faces or use pseudonyms, allowing students to be more open about sensitive issues. This helps to increase understanding and normalize discussions on these topics. By overcoming these barriers, technology-based mental health services open the door for more students to seek help. This not only increases access to mental health care but also gradually changes people's

perception of the importance of maintaining mental health, especially among the younger generation in cities like Makassar.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that interpersonal communication has an important role in maintaining the mental health of university students in Makassar through five main functions. Interpersonal communication serves as an emotional catharsis to release pressure and share psychological burdens, builds a social support system through study groups and communities, and becomes a tool to manage conflict and academic pressure by communicating effectively with lecturers, friends, and staff. In addition, interpersonal communication assists migrant students in adapting to a new culture, reducing acculturation stress, and supporting mental health care through technology and digital applications. Makassarese cultural values, such as sipakatau (mutual respect) and siri' na pacce (self-esteem and solidarity), play a significant role in influencing how interpersonal communication is used to maintain mental health.

The contribution of this study lies in a new understanding of the contextual role of culture in interpersonal communication to support students' mental health. The findings provide practical implications for higher education institutions in designing interpersonal communication skill development programs that suit the needs of university students, particularly in multicultural contexts. In addition, this study highlights the potential of mental health technology to improve access, reduce stigma, and provide flexibility in the management of college students' mental health. As such, the results of this study can inform the formation of more holistic and mental health-oriented educational policies and student support services.

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Riyadi, Jeanny Maria Fatimah, Hasrullah (2024)

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International Conference on Social Science & Technology

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