Differentiating the quality of friendships among students from other regions and local students based on multicultural personality

Membedakan kualitas pertemanan mahasiswa rantau dan tidak rantau berdasarkan kepribadian multikultur

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia is a country rich in diverse cultures, ethnicities, races, and religions. Migration for educational purposes is a common phenomenon, with many young people pursuing higher education in different regions. This quantitative study investigates differences in the quality of friendships between migrant and non-migrant university students, examined through the lens of multicultural personality. Participants were 184 active students at the University of Surabaya, aged 18–25, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire–Short Form (MPQ-SF), the McGill Friendship Questionnaire–Friend's Functions (MFQ-FF), and several open-ended questions developed by the researchers. Data analysis used ANCOVA and independent t-tests via SPSS. The results showed that multicultural personality significantly influenced friendship quality, but there were no significant differences in either friendship quality or multicultural personality between migrant and non-migrant students. Open-ended responses revealed that students choose friends based on shared tasks, hobbies, and personal traits rather than migration status. These findings suggest the need to consider other influencing factors and expand future research to diverse university settings to better understand student friendship dynamics.

ABSTRACT

Indonesia merupakan negara yang memiliki berbagai macam budaya, suku, ras, dan agama. Kehidupan merantau telah menjadi hal yang lumrah di Indonesia, di mana begitu banyak generasi muda yang melanjutkan pendidikan ke perguruan tinggi dengan merantau ke daerah lain. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kuantitatif yang berfokus pada perbedaan kualitas pertemanan mahasiswa yang merantau dan tidak merantau dengan dilihat dari kepribadian multikultur. Partisipan penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa aktif Universitas Surabaya dengan rentang usia 18 hingga 25 tahun, yang diperoleh dengan teknik *purposive sampling*. Pengumpulan data menggunakan Multicultural Personality Questionnaire Short Version (MPQ-SF), McGill Friendship Questionnaire-Friend's Functions (MFQ-FF), serta beberapa pertanyaan terbuka yang disusun oleh peneliti. Data yang diperoleh kemudian dianilisis dengan uji anakova dan uji t-independen dengan SPSS. Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa kepribadian multikultur memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap kualitas pertemanan, namun tidak terdapat perbedaan antara mahasiswa rantau dan tidak rantau. Oleh karena itu, perlu memperhatikan faktor-faktor selain kepribadian multikultur serta memperluas lingkup penelitian untuk melihat dinamika kualitas pertemanan mahasiswa rantau/tidak rantau secara lebih signifikan.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a nation rich in cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity. Each region has its own unique cultural characteristics and traditions. This diversity serves as a unifying force among its people, regardless of their location—including in the field of education. As is widely known, many universities and higher education institutions in Indonesia attract prospective students from various parts of the country. This phenomenon is partly due to the uneven distribution of higher education quality across the nation. According to the 2023 updated data from UniRank, most higher education institutions that meet UniRank's selection criteria are located on the island of Java, particularly in regions such as Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, and East Java (UniRank, 2023). As a result, Java is often perceived as the hub for high-quality universities in Indonesia. Consequently, the tradition of studying far from home—or *merantau*—has become a cultural norm in the country (Marta, 2014).

The university years represent a critical period in a student's social and emotional development. One essential aspect of this phase is the ability to form and maintain meaningful friendships. High-quality friendships not only provide social support but also significantly influence psychological well-being, academic success, and personal identity development (Bukowski, Laursen, & Rubin, 2018). Within the context of higher education in Indonesia, students may come from a wide range of geographical backgrounds, including both local students and those who have relocated from other regions. These differences can give rise to varied patterns of social interaction, particularly in terms of friendship quality.

Living away from home requires strong social support, making it essential for individuals to build relationships within a multicultural environment. For those who relocate, cultivating meaningful relationships is crucial to fulfilling both personal and emotional needs (Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune, 2011). Research by Hendrickson et al. (2011) found that international students who formed friendships with local residents reported higher satisfaction compared to those who primarily connected with individuals from similar backgrounds. Similarly, Gareis (1995, as cited in Gareis, 2012) discovered that students from Germany, India, and China were most likely to develop close friendships with local residents of their host countries. In contrast, Ward and Masgoret (2004) found that Asian students in New Zealand often struggled to form relationships with the local population.

Students who relocate for university—mahasiswa rantau—face numerous adaptation challenges, including cultural, environmental, and social adjustments that may affect the quality of their interpersonal relationships (Rahmawati & Fitriana, 2020). Establishing connections in a new environment can be difficult, especially when navigating unfamiliar cultural norms. This process is often complicated by the experience of culture shock. Research by Jusmika, Hadawiah, and Zelfia (2020) shows that in their early semesters, students who had relocated to Makassar commonly experienced symptoms of culture shock such as anxiety, confusion, boredom, and a sense of disconnection from the local culture and people. When interacting in a new cultural setting, individuals are frequently confronted with unfamiliar languages and behaviors that may differ significantly from their own.

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On the other hand, non-migrant students who live in their hometown may not face socio-cultural challenges as complex as those encountered by migrant students, but they may not necessarily possess the same level of openness to cultural diversity. Studies have shown that migrant students often struggle to form friendships due to the need to adapt to new environments, while non-migrant students tend to find it easier to build and maintain relationships because of more stable social connections (Rufaida, 2017). However, many migrant students are still able to develop high-quality social relationships, depending on their personality traits and social skills. Therefore, the ability to socialize within a new culture is essential for adapting to the new environment.

Various factors influence the quality of friendships. Key factors include: (1) inter-personal communication skills, (2) emotional intelligence, (3) perceived social support, and (4) individual personality traits, including multicultural personality (Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002). Multicultural personality refers to an individual's capacity to adapt to situations and environments within different cultures. This personality type encompasses critical aspects such as empathy, flexibility, social initiative, emotional stability, and openness to cultural differences (van der Zee et al., 2013). These abilities are crucial for individuals to successfully adjust and engage in social interactions in multicultural settings. People with strong multicultural personalities are generally more effective in dealing with challenges and differences in new environments. Hence, this study identifies multicultural personality as the independent variable.

The choice to examine multicultural personality as the independent variable is supported by theoretical and empirical findings that suggest multicultural traits mediate successful social adaptation and the quality of interpersonal relationships (Yoon et al., 2012). Research by Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven (2002) also highlights a positive correlation between multicultural personality and effective cross-cultural interaction and harmonious social relationships. In the context of migrant students living in new environments, this personality plays a crucial role in bridging cultural differences and establishing meaningful social connections. Previous studies have explored the link between personality and friendship quality. For example, research by Rahmawati & Fitriana (2020) found that migrant students often face obstacles in forming social relationships due to cultural differences and the lack of initial social support. Meanwhile, a study by Yoo & Lee (2008) revealed that dimensions of multicultural personality—such as open-mindedness and cultural empathy—positively influence friendship quality in intercultural contexts.

However, most of these studies have not explicitly compared migrant and non-migrant students in terms of multicultural personality, particularly within the Indonesian social context. The selection of migrant and non-migrant students as research subjects is based on the social reality of the university where the study is conducted, which hosts a diverse student population from across Indonesia. This university serves as an active intercultural interaction space, making it a highly relevant setting to examine the impact of multicultural personality

on friendship quality. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to integrate students' migration status and multicultural personality as predictors of friendship quality, in a context that reflects Indonesia's rich cultural diversity.

2. METHODS

Research Participants

This study is a quantitative research project involving a population of active students at the University of Surabaya, aged between 18 and 25 years. The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling, in which participants are selected based on specific characteristics (Sugiyono, 2016). A total of 184 subjects participated in this study, consisting of 54 males and 130 females, who were either migrant or non-migrant students, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Participants

Description	Gender	Frequencies
Migrating	Male	38
	Female	70
Not Migrating	Male	16
	Female	60

Research Variables and Instruments

This study involves two variables: multicultural personality as the independent variable and friendship quality as the dependent variable. Multicultural personality is measured using the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire Short Version (MPQ-SF) developed by van der Zee et al. (2013). This instrument consists of 40 items covering five dimensions: Cultural Empathy ("I am someone who pays attention to others' emotions."); Flexibility ("I am someone who works according to strict rules."); Social Initiative ("I am someone who enjoys taking the lead."); Emotional Stability ("I am someone who easily feels worried."); and Openmindedness ("I am someone who enjoys trying different approaches."). Responses are rated on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument demonstrates good reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values for each dimension ranging from 0.7 to 0.84 (van der Zee et al., 2013).

The variable of friendship quality is measured using the McGill Friendship Questionnaire–Friend's Functions (MFQ-FF) developed by Mendelson & Aboud (1999), adapted into Indonesian by Mahirah & Putri (2021). This instrument consists of 30 items that encompass six dimensions: Stimulating Companionship ("My friend has ideas about fun things we can do."); Help ("My friend helps me when I need it."); Intimacy ("My friend is someone I can tell personal things to."); Reliable Alliance ("My friend would still want to be

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friends even if we didn't see each other for several months."); Self-Validation ("My friend makes me feel smart."); and Emotional Security ("My friend helps me feel comfortable in new situations."). Responses are measured on a Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). This instrument has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.96 (Putri & Muttaqin, 2022). In addition, the researcher developed several open-ended questions to gain deeper insights into the dynamics of friendship quality among migrant and non-migrant students.

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique used is ANCOVA to compare the average friendship quality between migrant and non-migrant students with different multicultural personality traits. In addition, an independent t-test is used to differentiate friendship quality between migrant and non-migrant students. The data analysis for this study was conducted using IBM SPSS software.

3. RESULTS

Based on the collected data, a total of 184 subjects participated in the study, consisting of 108 migrant students and 76 non-migrant students. From this data, the multicultural personality variable had a mean of 4.6905 and a standard deviation of 0.59803. Meanwhile, the friendship quality variable had a mean of 5.0127 and a standard deviation of 0.77376 (Table 2).

Table 2. Research Variables

	Multicultural Personality	Quality of Friendship
Mean	4.6905	5.0127
Std. Deviation	0.59803	0.77376
N	184	184

Table 3 presents the results of the covariance analysis to examine whether there is a difference in friendship quality between migrant and non-migrant students when controlled for multicultural personality.

Table 3. ANCOVA Test Results

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	42.116[a]	2	21.058	56.513	<.001
Intercept	5.170	1	5.170	13.875	<.001
Multicultural Personality	38.153	1	38.153	102.389	<.001
Migrating/Not Migrating	0.534	1	0.534	1.434	0.233
Error	67.445	181	0.373		
Total	4732.924	184			
Corrected Total	109.562	183			

a. R Squared =.384 (Adjusted R Squared =.378)

Based on the results, it is evident that multicultural personality has a significant effect on friendship quality, with a significance value of < 0.001. Friendship quality can vary by as much as 5.170 even without being influenced by multicultural personality. Furthermore, whether a student is a migrant or non-migrant does not have a significant effect on their friendship quality (sig = 0.233, p > 0.05) (Table 3).

Next, Table 4 shows the results of the comparison test of multicultural personality and its aspects between migrant and non-migrant students. All results show significance values above 0.05, indicating that there is no significant difference in multicultural personality between migrant and non-migrant students.

Table 4. Results of the Multicultural Personality Variable Difference Test

	F	Sig.
Multicultural Personality	2.431	0.121
Cultural Empathy	0.353	0.553
Flexibility	0.270	0.604
Social Initiative	4.573	0.034
Emotional Stability	1.241	0.267
Open-mindedness	3.728	0.055

Table 5. Frequency of Close Friends

Categories	N	%
1-5	141	76.63
6-10	32	17.39
11-15	1	0.54
16-20	8	4.35
>20	2	1.09

Then, there are several frequency results based on open-ended questions prepared by the researcher. Table 5 shows that 76.63% of the subjects have between 1 to 5 close friends. Regarding similarities between the subjects and their close friends, the most common shared aspects are religion, hobbies, cultural background, hometown, and ethnicity. In addition, some similarities are based on personal characteristics (such as mindset, traits, sense of humor, etc.) (Table 6).

Next, the frequency results of feelings experienced by the subjects when in a new environment are presented. Most of them reported feeling happy, awkward, excited, confused, and afraid. However, some also felt sad or indifferent (Table 7).

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Table 6. Frequency of Similarity between Self and Close Friends

Categories	N	%
Religion	125	67.93
Hobbies	100	54.35
Cultural background	85	46.20
City of origin	78	42.39
Ethnicity	61	33.15
Mindset	7	3.80
Character	4	2.17
None	4	2.17
Sense of humor	3	1.63
Educational background	2	1.09
Ambition	2	1.09
Social status	1	0.54
Organization	1	0.54
Needs	1	0.54

Table 7. Frequency of Feelings in a New Environment

Categories	N	%
Happy	101	54.89
Awkward	98	53.26
Excited	93	50.54
Confused	51	27.72
Scared	40	21.74
Sad	6	3.26
Just Fine	3	1.63

Table 8. Frequency of Considerations in Choosing Friends in a New Environment

Categories	N	%
Tasks/Things to do	102	55.43
Hobbies	82	44.57
Cultural background	40	21.74
Religion	38	20.65
City of origin	38	20.65
Educational background	37	20.11
Ethnicity	24	13.04
Character	16	8.70
None	5	2.72
Sense of humor	2	1.09
Mindset	1	0.54

Then, based on the subjects' considerations when choosing friends in a new environment,

most made their choices based on tasks or activities to be done. This was followed by similarities in hobbies, cultural background, religion, hometown, educational background, and ethnicity. Additionally, some individuals considered the personal character of potential friends, while others did not consider any specific factors when making friends in a new environment (Table 8).

4.   DISCUSSION

This study aimed to compare the differences in friendship quality between migrant and non-migrant students, viewed through the lens of multicultural personality. The results showed that multicultural personality significantly affects friendship quality. This finding aligns with the theory proposed by van der Zee et al. (2013), which states that an individual's multicultural personality helps them face the challenges and differences found in new environments or cultures.

However, the test of friendship quality differences between migrant and non-migrant students showed no significant difference between the two groups, even when accounting for multicultural personality. This contrasts with a previous study by Rufaida (2017), which emphasized that migrant and non-migrant students do differ in terms of social challenges and stable social connections, respectively.

This discrepancy may be explained by the open-ended question data gathered in this study. Most subjects selected friends based on cultural background, but other aspects were also considered—such as hobbies, shared tasks, and personal character. This supports the findings of Rahmawati & Fitriana (2020), who stated that migrant students often struggle to build social relationships due to cultural differences.

Additionally, several subjects reported feeling happy, awkward, confused, or afraid when entering a new environment. These findings are consistent with those of Jusmika, Hadawiah & Zelfia (2020), who found that migrant students often experience culture shock, leading to feelings of awkwardness and confusion. These emotions are natural parts of the adaptation process to a new environment.

The findings are also supported by Byrne's similarity-attraction theory (Mitteness et al., 2014), which suggests that individuals are more likely to form relationships with those who share similar values, beliefs, and interests. This is in line with the study by Liu, Yu, & Liao (2020), which found that similarity in values and/or interests significantly contributes to the sustainability of student relationships.

Despite these insights, this study has several limitations. First, the population was drawn from only one university, which limits the generalizability of the findings to all Indonesian university students. Second, the study only focused on multicultural personality as a factor influencing friendship quality, while this personality trait may itself be influenced by other factors. Local cultural context, campus and living environments, and social media may all affect friendship quality regardless of migration status. These limitations suggest that the study's findings may not fully represent the social realities experienced by students.

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5.   CONCLUSION

The quality of friendship between migrant and non-migrant students does not show any difference, even when viewed from multicultural personality aspects. Although multicultural personality is proven to significantly influence individual friendship quality, no differences were found between the multicultural personalities of migrant and non-migrant students. This indicates that migration status is not the main factor in shaping multicultural personality or in how friendship quality develops.

In addition, the results of this study also show that in the process of choosing friends, subjects consider various other factors outside of multicultural personality, such as shared hobbies, tasks performed together, and personal character of prospective friends. This shows that friendship quality is influenced by more complex and diverse aspects, which are not fully covered within the scope of this study.

Based on these limitations, it is recommended that future research develop the independent variable by including other factors that potentially influence friendship quality. For example, by considering the influence of technological developments (such as social media), campus environment characteristics, learning systems, or student living conditions. In addition, the research scope should also be expanded by involving subjects from various universities in different regions, to capture more diverse and contextual social dynamics.

This study is expected to be a starting point in understanding the relationship between multicultural personality and friendship quality among students. The findings of this research can serve as a foundation for further studies that want to delve deeper into the factors that shape and influence student social relationships in a multicultural context.

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