

## **ADAPTATION OF MADAGASCAR STUDENTS LIVING IN INDONESIA TO THE PROBLEMS OF STEREOTYPES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

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*Submit, 07-12-2026*

*Accepted, 29-04-2026*

*Publish, 30-04-2026*

### **ABSTRACT**

Since the introduction of the Darmasiswa and KNB programmes and the opening of enrolment for Malagasy students in Indonesia, they have faced significant challenges in cross-cultural adaptation. This study examines stereotypes related to the origins and physical appearance of Malagasy students based on Edmund Husserl's phenomenology through a qualitative descriptive approach involving in-depth interviews, observations, and documentary studies of nine informants. The findings reveal three dimensions: stereotypical experiences (physical assessment, social labelling, impact on self-confidence); cultural intermediation strategies (acting as 'ambassadors', coping mechanisms, support from the Malagasy community); and the management of communication misunderstandings through linguistic adjustments and reduced speech in situations prone to prejudice.

*Keywords: Adaptation, Communication, Intercultural, Problem, Stereotype, Students from Madagascar*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In human society or social units, the evolution of linguistic in humans is based on communication and culture. When we communicate among persons of different cultures it is intercultural communication. The process of intercultural communication as the act of sending and receiving messages, thoughts, and ideas should be an interactional one to which the individual actively participates in a reality where local cultural patterns mediate messaging (Hall, 1976).

The engagement process involves the use of verbal and nonverbal codes during exchanges. Intercultural communication defines intercultural communication as correspondence between people who share personal,

interpersonal, and group interests, with a focus on cultural factors that influence the communicative behavior of participants. (Charley H. Dood, 1991)

The Darmasiswa study program has enabled Madagascar students residing in Indonesia, Unand University since 2018 to explore new horizons culture. So, they can get used to new and strange places and learn something from local custom. The interaction system in Indonesian is one of the difficulties we have to overcome in comparing the personal and local culture " which can result on problem with stereotyping among interlocutors (Eddy, 2025). Because stereotypes are not without educational value and can become a growth or regret factor in the adjustment to an absolutely different culture, place and society.

For people who are traveling to new countries with new cultures, adapting themselves to cross-cultural communication is an important means of successful adaptation. Newcomers must be prepared for challenges such as language, habits, strange behaviors, and cultural diversity (Chaignat, 2010), culture and communication cannot be dissociated because culture determines not only who speaks, what matters, and how communication is done but also who encodes the message, the meaning attributed to the message, as well as the conditions for sending, paying attention and interpreting the message. Understanding the others' culture and empathy will help avoid misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions (Handayani & Sokawati, 2016).

This process of adaptation is never easy and discomfoting, especially when the cultural values are very different from each other. As the saying goes, one must go through two stages in order to adapt and survive in a new culture and environment. A new setting-something with an absolutely new ethnic reality around-is very difficult to face; facing other cultures, especially at the university campus level, creates situations wherein acceptance and rejection become unavoidable, and stereotype plays a highly important role in the experience of adaptation. Stereotypes are sets of features that people generally attribute to certain groups of individuals, often based on their gender or cultural background. Prejudice, on the other hand, nurtures our consideration of others and may sometimes provide unwarranted discrimination toward them. For example, if a child grows up hearing that "girls are bad at mathematics," he/she may internalize that message and develop a narrow view of his/her intellectual self-worth. Confronted with conflicting experience-a brilliant woman in chemistry, perhaps-these stereotypes can be modified and adjusted to develop a truer picture of human diversity (Luckman & Berger, 1966).

The current era of globalization is characterized by profound changes in the global community. Education plays a critical role in sustaining a respectable life in a competitive society (Handayani & Sokawati, 2016). This has motivated many students to look for the best possible education even in the most distant and

least known parts of the world. Moreover, the current impact of globalization is giving a new boost to the education sector that, until then, was dominated by the concept of monocultural institutions of higher education, where students and lecturers alike hailed from the same cultural background. With the onset of globalization, now more and more institutions of higher education are opening their gates to people from varied cultures and nations. Indonesian institutions are now accepting more and more foreigners, particularly in the form of scholarships that advocate cultural diversity and academic excellence (Kemendikbud, 2025).

The culture of Indonesia is very diverse, with a total of 34 provinces and 5 major islands, so it is known as a country with the greatest number of ethnic groups worldwide. Foreign students also enroll in schools in Indonesia. There are numerous offers for foreign students to continue their education in Indonesia, and these include the various scholarships awarded by the Indonesian government or by the institutions of higher learning. Students from the country of Madagascar also enroll to study in Indonesia. The awarding of scholarships is one of the ways of influence of diplomacy exercised by various nations in the area of internationalization of education. When a nation offers scholarships, it is actually planting a seed that, with time, will produce good fruit in terms of its foreign policy goals, such as the development of bilateral friendship relations. Educational institutions keep improving in the aim of enhancing their quality and capabilities in the global arena. This involves building alliances with international institutions and students enrolled in Indonesian institutions abroad. At the moment, there are three special scholarships that the Indonesian government offers to foreigners. These scholarships include the KNB Scholarship (Developing Countries Partnership Scholarship), the Scholarship for the Study of Indonesian Language and Culture (Darmasiswa Scholarship), and the BSBI Scholarship (Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship) (Kemendikbud, 2025).

One of the destinations for foreign students is in Indonesia, which attracts especially students within the cultural exchange programs such as Darmasiswa, which focuses on encouraging the learning of the Indonesian language and culture (Rafi'ah Nur, 2021). Some students from Madagascar are pursuing higher learning in the above-mentioned two government of Indonesian scholarship programs, namely KNB and Darmasiswa. Agreement has been reached between the University of Antananarivo and University of Brawijaya, University of Trisakti and ISBI of Bandung, and also between the Cultural and Artistic Centre of Antananarivo and the University of Indonesia. The students from Madagascar can therefore be followed and directly selected towards obtaining an S-1 and S-2 degree in public Indonesian universities in partnership with developing countries (KNB), for students who would like to master the language. Many students from Madagascar were being followed in the above-mentioned two programs until

2019, which were temporarily closed owing to the Covid-19 pandemic (Kemendikbud, 2025). Every year, the Indonesian government funds dozens of students from Madagascar. Besides the KNB and Darmasiswa programs, there is also a university scholarship that is not managed by the government. Therefore, the number of students from Madagascar in Indonesia is rising each year. One of the aims is to develop Indonesian universities to be among the excellent ones globally, like the globalization of higher education and scholarships for international students.

Many students from Madagascar pursue further studies at the Indonesia level through the Indonesian government scholarship program named KNB for the level of S1 and S2. This is a full scholarship program. Besides the above-mentioned program, the students also join the independent university scholarship programs. This level comprises the stages of S1, S2, S3, and D4. It should be noted that they find themselves scattered across the regions, along with cultural and climatic diversities that pose the need for high adaptability (Handayani and Sokawati, 2016).

In the process of integrating intercultural dynamics, the networks, in this case, bring communication and liaison opportunities for the community living abroad, for Malagasy students in Indonesia in particular. A WhatsApp group, namely “Malagasy eto Indonesia,” shows the micro-community with 137 members, which comprise mainly Malagasy students in Indonesia, and its members were all alumni but remain actively involved. This is a platform for educational exchange and guidance, where educational activities encompass academic socialization and integration into the job market in Madagascar. The regular features of the publications encompass the Darmasiswa, KNB, and studies at the University, which enables the definition of training choices, criteria for eligibility, and deadlines, with the aim of facilitating the exchange of information and advice relating to students, such as housing, scholarships, visas, financial exchange, and cultural integration. The proposal for the Darmasiswa involves being the cultural and linguistic doorway for Malagasy students in Indonesia, KNB programs and studies at the University are evaluated based on their implications for accessibility and recognition of the diploma, and studies at the Academic institutions unveil the pathways and intra-institutional studies for future research (Dupont & Martin, 2023).

Generally speaking, a new culture can create pressure; it is very challenging to accept others' values when they have a huge difference from one's own values. Generally speaking, a person wants to take some optimum steps for adjusting themselves with a new culture and region. During this transition process, students who come from Madagascar may face culture shock and also

mental pressure in assimilating themselves with Indonesian culture. (Handayani & Sokawati, 2016).

Students from Madagascar to Indonesia would need to adjust to the new environment of culture and language to be able to conduct their life effectively. It is imperative to track the level of communication and adaptation to culture to help these students effectively adapt to the culture (Handayani & Sokawati, 2016). It is imperative for all individuals to demonstrate determination and adaptability to adapt to the new environment and the culture adaptation difficulties when communicating (Kemendikbud, 2025).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The problem of stereotype for the student from Madagascar living in Indonesia**

This study reveals the main principle of intercultural communication, an important field of study in contemporary society, which is marked by cultural diversity. It is through Matias Angelo's 2021 research into the adaptation of the intercultural communication of Madagascar students in Indonesia. Culture and communication relate to each other like the two sides of a coin. Culture is a core part of communicative behavior, while communication is a significant way through which culture is defined, maintained, developed, and passed on. This means that the two depend on one another, but as summarized by Edward T. Hall, "culture is communication and communication is culture" (Mulyana 2023).

In general, intercultural communication consists of three aspects: ethnocentrism, prejudice, and stereotype. His stereotype can be explained as follows: "a simplified and often exaggerated idea about other people." It is generally a generalization that could be in the form of positivity and negativity, but is mostly concentrated on the negativity. The reason stereotypes are often connected with prejudice is that it could cause misunderstandings in intercultural communication. (Daryanto, 2014).

Stereotype affects how people from different groups interact with each other. For instance, in intercultural communication, stereotypes could be an obstruction that prevents people from understanding one another. An Indonesian student could have stereotypes against Americans that could influence their interactions with them (Dewi, 2018). Stereotype could be an element that sparks discrimination in people, hence avoiding interaction with those who are in the stereotyped groups (Daryanto, 2014).

### **Phenomenological theory of Edmund Husserl**

Edmund Husserl: Edmund Husserl was born in 1859 and died in 1938. In terms of his background, he was a mathematician. The entire life he lived had one goal: it was an 'obsessive search for absolute philosophical truth.' In fact, he knew

that he lived in ‘times that were full of crisis,’ and in “The Philosophy and Crisis of European Man,” written in 1935, he wrote about an ‘intellectual crisis.’ In his opinion, it was a period in the Western world in which ‘man had lost faith in rational certainty and truth (Sobur & Mulyana, 2020).

To reclaim this certainty, Husserl turned to the Cartesian “Cogito” and the famous “I think.” He reinstated at the heart of his philosophy the role of consciousness, the intention of the subject, and his immediate goal for an object. According to his philosophy, consciousness is never alone alongside the world but merges with it in intention. His radically new approach to philosophy had been fed by the inspirations he had drawn from several important philosophers: Franz Brentano, Carl Stumpf, William James, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Theodor Lipps. It is through the later writings of Dilthey that Husserl developed his idea of transcendental phenomena.

### **The Foundations of the Phenomenological Method**

Husserl did indeed propose a rigorous method for the discernment of pure phenomena: phenomenological reduction. This method involves the dismantling of preconceived ideas through the purification of phenomena—be they about the world of objects or that of the subject—of all prejudices, assumptions, and interpretations (Sobur & Mulyana, 2020). The ultimate goal is the attainment of pure consciousness, that is, a continuous flow of pure experiences concerning thought, understanding, feeling, and conceptualization.

At the heart of this phenomenology is the concept of intentionality, inherited from Brentano. All consciousness is necessarily consciousness of something; it always moves towards an object (Sobur & Mulyana, 2020). However, Husserl considerably enriches this notion by asserting that intentionality is not simply an additional characteristic of consciousness, but constitutes its very nature (Sobur & Mulyana, 2020). Consciousness exists only as intentionality, as a movement that goes beyond its starting point to reach the intended meaning.

To access pure phenomena, Husserl elaborated three methodical procedures of reduction, each with a specific role:

First, “Epoché” itself, the Greek word for “suspension of judgment”, is the first very important step. This implies putting all one’s ordinary experience on “hold”, postponing any ordinary belief concerning the status of the objects of the conscious experience (Sobur & Mulyana, 2020). This entails the postponement of the decision to believe the reality of the phenomena observed.

Second, *Eidetic reduction*: The goal of eidetic reduction is to capture the essence or structure of the pure phenomenon. Eidetic reduction involves removing the existence and accidental characteristics of the thing for the purpose of retaining the phenomenon in its pure form (Sobur & Mulyana, 2020).

Third, *transcendental* reduction, it takes the final step of attaining the pure subject. Whatever does not belong to pure consciousness must be eliminated by the final reductive procedure of the transcendental reduction. As such, this last step grants access to the transcendental ground of any possible experience.

## **METHOD**

This research was carried out in 3 Indonesian islands, the Sumatra Island in the city of Padang where 2 students of Malagasy descent are found, the Java Island in the cities of Jakarta, Depok, Bandung, Malan, Surabaya where the greatest number of Malagasy students amount to 6, and the Sulawesi Island in the city of Makassar where 1 student of Malagasy descent was found.

The research that has been conducted is qualitative with a descriptive type to explore and uncover the stereo-type matters raised by the Malagasy students who are in Indonesia. Qualitative research in the phenomenological approach is one form of research that aims to explore in-depth information concerning the experiences of the respondents in the research undertaken by the concerned research authors (Crewell & Poth, 2018).

For the gathering of data in this study, the research used in-depth interviewing, observations, and document analyses. For the informants of the research study as participants for this study, the researcher uses the intentional sampling technique of the research study. The informants of this study are the Malagasy students living in the Indonesian state for over four years and have already experienced the problem of stereotypes upon their arrival as they were able to adapt to this new place.

The collected data from the research was handled through the concept of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. This quantitative data analysis technique is highly suitable to interpret the experiences that the Malagasy students face because of stereotypes in the context of intercultural adaptation in Indonesia. The data collected from conducting in-depth interviews, observations, and deskreviews needed to be transcribed in detail, checked for accuracy, validity, and completion. This was done based on the six-step iterative procedure outlined by (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009).

For the purpose of carrying out the analysis, the following steps were taken: First, an immersive reading and rereading of the transcripts facilitated the immersion in the narratives of the participants. Second, the use of exploratory notes facilitated the recording of descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual observations. Third, the developing of the emerging themes from the initial notes was facilitated, and this process adhered to the expressions of the participants and the developing of a phenomenological thematic analysis. Fourth, the exploration of the links between the emerging themes facilitated the developing of the structural thematic framework.

Fifth, this process of the analysis of the data of the thematic framework was conducted separately for each of the participants. Sixth, the cross-sectional analysis facilitated the observation of the recurrent links and the divergences between the experience of the 9 participants, and this made it possible to identify the superordinate themes for the experience of stereotypes, the cultural intermediation strategy, and the management of the misunderstandings of the communication.

## **FINDING**

The researcher used *interpretive phenomenological analysis* to analyze the results of the research topic to answer the question: How are the communicative experiences of Malagasy students living in Indonesia related to stereotype issues, in order to illustrate the relationships within the data. Through these figures, the results of interviews and in-depth observations were presented as a correlation in the form of a theme based on the related research topics derived from the data, the results of this interpretation of themes then constituted the results of this research, as presented in the following figures:

### **The roles of stereotypes in communicating about student experience**

Having arrived in Indonesia, the Malagasy students in each of them experienced their own experience, the emergence of the stereotypes of the differentiations of appearance with regards to the standards of thought of the Indonesians, which has as a basis of knowledge. The differentiations of the author of this paper led to the experiments of the tested persons regarding the expectations of the Indonesians in the labeling and the process of the reinvention of identity by the trust, and the emergence of the stereotypes of the experience of the communication of the students. The people were who participated in this paper.

#### *Encounters of Appearance Stereotypes*

From the experience of Malagasy students in the differentiation of appearance, the students state that there are questions on the appearance? The similarities with Indonesians are taken by the advantage of the stereotype of appearance on "Africa" (for frizzy hair and black skin). This notion expressed the racial categories that are implicitly present in Indonesian society. At the local level, the Malagasy are sometimes confused with Eastern Indonesians due to their phenotypic variability demonstrating their Austronesian and African origins. In the categories of culture, such as the animated movie "Madagascar," there are stereotypes in the form of a pre-existing opinion of the population, as in the final judgment on the nation. These above illustrations show the Malagasy experience that the students are often the target of simplified interpretations that downplay the African origins and ignore the Afro-Asian complexity, which show the implicit

existent categories of racial distinction and skin colors that are largely spread in the social imagination (Husserl, 1931).

#### *Tagging experience and categorization*

The students are sorted in a way that the Indonesians sort them in accordance with predetermined criteria, that is, Africans, Indonesians, Papuans, depending on their physical appearance. The spreadingrypoor, dark-skinned image. The students would inevitably be forced to revise their views, which in turn would result from the early sorting, introducing obstacles between the students' own perception and the Indonesian point of view. The intercultural contacts would then be determined by critical discursive practices, that is, "why aren't you black?" The students would then be obliged to constantly revalue the assigned identities, fluctuating between the exhaustion and the pedagogical need to debunk these misconceptions. From the perspective of a Husserlian reading, this would become visible as the phenomenology of lived experience, that is, the subject, finding itself in the presence of the Other, would discover the possibility for the new understanding of itself and the Other.

#### *Impact on trust and identity reinvention*

Observations in these experiments reveal that the repeated exposure to stereotypes led paradoxically to the process of identity reinforcement in the students coming from Malagasy. The reductive categorizations are usually destabilizing, thereby causing embarrassment and self-hesitation. However, a progressive reflective analysis allows for cognitive reconfiguration: stereotypes are reinterpreted as signs of an intercultural knowledge gap rather than as personal judgment. Cognitive shift from "I am problematic" to "the problem comes from the limited representations of the other", is an active process of identity reconstruction documented by the literature on acculturation. The success of a hybrid "Afro-Asian" Malagasy identity is progressively confirmed and transforms the exchanges that can be stigmatizing into opportunities for educational conversations. This dialectical process stimulates the development of a stable trust; this, in turn, results from the acceptance of the complexity of identity and the intercultural action.

#### **The role of intermediaries in communicating against stereotypes**

Concerning the stereotype, the importance of the intermediary within the culture is for the transmission of values, within this context, for Malagasy students within the culture of Madagascar to Indonesia. The importance of the intermediary illustrates the importance for Malagasy students, within a valorization of the importance of the ambassador that he established within raising awareness. The differences within the strategies that the subjects used within the apprehensions, adaptation, as well as the dispersion of the regions of Indonesia, a

support that assists Malagasy students within the context of the problem of stereotypes, the Malagasy group.

#### *Role of cultural intermediary*

In their daily activities characterized by stereotypes, the Malagasy students in Indonesia become cultural mediators. In an attempt to explain the diversity of Madagascar and Africa, several questions regarding its looks and position have been asked. Based on her emotional condition, she builds different strategies; In some instances, she takes apart her enemies' arguments step by step, while she surrenders to change in others. This informal and emotional mediation illustrates how an individual from a minority can display their cultural identity in an atmosphere of acceptance, converting misconceptions into opportunities for understanding. This exchange has had the consequence of strengthening the "ambassadorial role" through which Malagasy students in Indonesia have undergone an identity transition due to this intercultural experience. First destabilized by these stereotypes, she then sees these exchanges as times of discovery. Again, such an evolution follows several stages: stabilization of identity, reconnection with the Austronesian and African ancestors, and stereotyping used positively as an educational opportunity. It is this approach which reinforces their self-confidence and identity and allows them to take on the cultural ambassador role voluntarily. Far from being imposed, this mediator role becomes a singular resource promoting self-acceptance; it transforms intercultural conflicts into the positive affirmation of identity, forcing participants to reflect deeply upon who they are and how they wish to define themselves (Husserl, 1982).

#### *Strengthening the "ambassadorial role"*

Malagasy students in Indonesia have experienced a gradual identity transition as a result of this intercultural experience. Initially destabilized by stereotypes, she now sees these exchanges as opportunities for cultural discovery. This evolution goes through several stages, including stabilizing identity, reconnecting with one's Austronesian and African roots, and making constructive use of stereotypes as educational opportunities. This approach boosts their self-confidence and sense of identity, allowing them to voluntarily take on the role of cultural ambassador. Far from being imposed, this role of mediator becomes a unique resource that promotes self-acceptance and transforms intercultural conflicts into a positive affirmation of identity.

#### *Coping strategies*

"Malagasy students show different coping behaviors with intercultural stereotypes." Active listening and observation assist with recognizing misunderstandings and regulating emotional expression. Patience and mastery over emotions can turn negative remarks into learning experiences by capitalizing

on Madagascar's understanding. (Husserl, 1970) Humor enhances difficult experiences and enables positive transformations. A progressive cognitive reformulation achieves a new stereotype perception, being normally accepted as part of expatriation experience. Authenticity emerges as individuals decide to remain loyal to themselves rather than conforming to prevailing stereotypes, reflecting increased intercultural maturity.

#### *Support from the Malagasy group*

The group of Malagasy is an essential resource for intercultural adaptation and belonging to the Malagasy community. Emotional support creates resilience because it lowers feelings of isolation, and frustrations are transformed into shared experiences. Sharing in the mother tongue similar or common experiences allows an immediate mutual understanding which links difficulties with humor. The group offers practical advice; that is, the exchange of strategies on how to deal with stereotypes and misunderstandings. This cooperation transforms adaptation into a collective undertaking where participants feel supported in their intercultural approach. A sense of solidarity reduces stress and builds confidence, thus helping people to be more open to the Indonesian environment. Research subjects feel supported in their desire to explore cross-culturally, which limits the disintegrating effect of misunderstandings and furthers more balanced forms of mutual recognition.

#### **The perception of misunderstandings in communicative interactions for facing stereotype**

Stereotypes play a profound role in the adaptability of students. The regulation of stereotypical understanding shows the ability of the students to bounce back in the field of communication. For effective adaptation, the language adaptation process is done through the regulation of registers, tone, and formulation. The reduction of verbal experiences in the form of interruption and early reformulation complicates the process of intercultural adaptation. There is a need for the development of effective coping mechanisms even when language becomes a barrier and a means of stereotyping.

#### *Managing misunderstandings and resilience*

Cross-cultural misunderstandings, which initially represent an issue, have become a recurring issue in the life experience of the research subjects, because situations in which the meaning of the situation differed between the consciousnesses present within the same world of life have, in time, turned into an opportunity for personal growth. Being very deeply rooted in Indonesian stereotypes about African identity, these circumstances put the subjects in the problematic position of having to explain their Malagasy origins in a discriminatory manner, henceforth producing a communication gap. To compensate for the injustices, while keeping harmony within society, these

circumstances first have subjects feel dissatisfied and stressed. There is a change occurring since, after remembering these misunderstandings cognitively, which they attribute to ignorance but not malice, hence diminishing their weight, these subjects put the other person in the role of being instructed, adopting an explanatory approach. Therefore, these circumstances allow them to be very resilient, which was manifested by their enhanced capacity to calmly tolerate ambiguities, having many strategic approaches according to the given situations.

#### *Language adjustments*

The adjustments of languages show that there is an ongoing process of adapting communication skills. Whereas at first there was an academic style of speaking and at the same time a certain objectivity between the participants, they increasingly use indigenous informal expressions, thereby not only indicating an increasing awareness of matters of Indonesian sociolinguistics but at the same time illustrating, too, that Indonesians are now dealing with linguistic errors and intralingual effects by taking enthusiasm and tolerance instead of difficulties and thereby networking challenges turned into opportunities altogether. Due to this monitoring process that develops an environment of security and encourages verbal communication, it should be stated that processes of adjustments of languages open up opportunities of relationship-building instead of difficulties and flourish this experience of communication on a worldwide scale that affects the quality experience of intercultural communication.

#### *Speech Minimization Experiment*

The amount of speaking turns that Malagasy students have is substantially diminished in Indonesian-language classes. This brings back memories of how certain discourses are marginalized in dissonant realms of communication that present themselves through structures of misunderstanding. A common experience of Malagasy students during classes is that people tend to interrupt their utterances in mid-sentence, preface their statements too soon, and background their statements during group discussions and presentations. The prevalence of this trend tends to be greater when people struggle to express themselves or communicate at a slower pace owing to difficulties associated with the new language environment of communication, that is, the class. Language barriers create pauses that are misconstrued as opportunities to speak, while differences in communication style compound the problem: the direct and structured approach of participants, influenced by French, Malagasy, and English logic, is sometimes perceived as conversational dominance rather than argumentative clarification. Faced with these frustrations, participants develop coping strategies emphasizing patience and the management of their emotions, using contemplative approaches privileging attentive listening before calmly reexplaining one's viewpoint, and gradually turning these complex situations into

opportunities for the development of intercultural communication skills in which the subjects gradually transform these difficult situations into opportunities for the development of intercultural communication skills and for a more conscious management of misunderstandings in the relationship with others.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study demonstrate that stereotypes play a central role in shaping the communicative experiences and identity construction of Malagasy students in Indonesia. These experiences reveal the complex interplay between perception, interaction, and adaptation within intercultural contexts.

One of the most prominent issues is the role of appearance-based stereotypes in shaping initial interactions. The association of Malagasy students with “Africa (for frizzy hair and black skin)” indicates how social perceptions are constructed through simplified and generalized categories. This supports the argument that intercultural encounters are often mediated by pre-existing cognitive frameworks, where individuals are reduced to visible physical traits rather than understood in their full cultural complexity. As noted in the findings, such “simplified interpretations... ignore the Afro-Asian complexity” (Husserl, 1931), highlighting the persistence of racialized thinking within social imagination.

In addition, the process of labeling and categorization further complicates intercultural communication. The recurring question “why aren't you black?” reflects how rigid expectations about racial identity shape interaction and create tension between self-perception and external perception. This aligns with the phenomenological view that identity is constructed through encounters with “the Other,” where individuals are compelled to reassess themselves within social interaction (Husserl, 1936). Consequently, students are “obliged to constantly revalue the assigned identities,” demonstrating the ongoing and dynamic nature of identity negotiation.

Interestingly, the study reveals that repeated exposure to stereotypes does not only produce negative effects but also contributes to identity transformation. The cognitive shift from “I am problematic” to “the problem comes from the limited representations of the other” illustrates a critical turning point in how students interpret their experiences. This shift reflects a movement from internalizing stereotypes to critically challenging them, leading to the development of a more stable and reflective identity. The emergence of a hybrid identity further confirms that intercultural experiences can foster more complex and integrative self-understandings.

Another important aspect is the emergence of Malagasy students as cultural mediators. In their daily interactions, they “become cultural mediators”

who actively explain their cultural background and challenge misconceptions (Husserl, 1970; Husserl, 2023). This process evolves into what is described as an “ambassadorial role,” where students reinterpret intercultural encounters as “times of discovery” and opportunities for dialogue (Koc-Michalska et al., 2024). This transformation indicates a shift from passive recipients of stereotypes to active agents of intercultural understanding, reinforcing their self-confidence and identity.

Furthermore, the coping strategies employed by students highlight their adaptive capacity in dealing with challenging intercultural situations. As stated, “Malagasy students show different coping behaviors with intercultural stereotypes,” including patience, humor, and cognitive reinterpretation. These strategies allow them to transform negative experiences into constructive learning processes. The ability to reinterpret stereotypes as “signs of an intercultural knowledge gap” rather than personal attacks demonstrates emotional resilience and intercultural maturity.

The role of the Malagasy community also emerges as a significant factor in supporting adaptation. The group provides emotional and practical support, helping students cope with challenges and maintain a sense of belonging. Through shared experiences and mutual understanding, the community “transforms adaptation into a collective undertaking,” reinforcing resilience and confidence in navigating intercultural environments (Koc-Michalska et al., 2024).

Moreover, the study highlights the presence of communication barriers and power imbalances in interaction. The finding that “the amount of speaking turns... is substantially diminished” indicates a form of communicative marginalization, particularly in academic settings. Interruptions and limited opportunities to speak suggest that language barriers and differences in communication styles can position students in less dominant roles. However, students gradually adapt by adjusting their language use and communication strategies, turning these challenges into opportunities for developing intercultural competence.

Finally, the experience of misunderstanding is reinterpreted as part of the learning process. Although initially perceived as problematic, cross-cultural misunderstandings eventually become opportunities for growth. Students adopt an explanatory approach, positioning themselves as educators in interaction, which enhances their ability to “calmly tolerate ambiguities” and navigate complex communicative situations. This demonstrates that intercultural communication is not merely about avoiding misunderstandings but about developing the capacity to manage and learn from them.

Overall, this study shows that Malagasy students’ communicative experiences are characterized by continuous negotiation between stereotypes, identity, and adaptation. Through processes of reinterpretation, mediation, and

strategic coping, students are able to transform potentially negative experiences into meaningful opportunities for personal growth and intercultural understanding.

## CONCLUSION

This study examines how Malagasy students in Indonesia adapt to stereotypes in intercultural communication. The results show that stereotypes related to physical appearance, social stereotypes and racial categorization constitute structural challenges that, although destabilizing at first glance, paradoxically lead to a deep reflection on their Afro-Asian identity. This shock gradually becomes a catalyst for identity reconstruction, allowing students to negotiate the categories imposed on them and to transform stigmatizing exchanges into educational opportunities. Second, intercultural mediation mechanisms reveal a multifaceted and sophisticated adaptation that combines the cultural ambassador, various active listening strategies, emotional regulation, and humor, all supported by Malagasy as a crucial psychosocial resource. Third, communication disorders are a complex process characterized by the management of misunderstandings, progressive linguistic adjustments, and speech minimization experiments, which require significant diplomatic skills.

Student adaptation results from a process of dualization between the Indonesian intercultural context as a structure, which both constrains and facilitates simultaneous learning, and students as agents, who mobilize their individual and collective resources to continuously negotiate between identity authenticity and pragmatic adaptation, transforming stereotypical obstacles into opportunities for personal growth and intercultural dialogue constructive.

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