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license**ADAPTIVE ACCULTURATION IN CONTEXT: BATAK STUDENTS AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN EASTERN INDONESIA****Salni Rosita Silaban^{1*}, Tonny Donald Pariela¹, Dominggus E.B. Saija¹**¹Universitas Pattimura, Ambon, Indonesia*Correspondence E-Mail: salnilaban20@gmail.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/baileofisipvol3iss3pp656-677>**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the social adaptation of Batak students in Rumah Tiga, Ambon, and reconstructs the concept of social integration within the context of Indonesia's island societies. It responds to the dominance of deficit-oriented approaches in migrant adaptation studies, which overemphasize conflict, culture shock, and marginalization, by proposing an alternative perspective: adaptive acculturation in context. This perspective conceptualizes adaptation as a contextual, relational, and value-based process mediated through everyday social interactions and cultural resonance. A qualitative descriptive-interpretive design was employed. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews with 11 purposively selected informants, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that social adaptation occurs relatively rapidly and positively through value negotiation, participation in informal social spaces, and the transformation of interpersonal relations from functional interactions into kinship-like ties. Initial barriers, including linguistic differences and cultural perceptions, are gradually overcome through informal learning and active engagement in local social life. Adaptation is facilitated by the interplay of bonding and bridging social capital, as well as shared cultural values such as kinship and mutual cooperation. This study contributes by introducing cultural resonance as a key mechanism of cross-cultural adaptation, highlighting informal spaces as micro-sites of integration, and reconceptualizing social integration as a dynamic and co-constructed process.

Keywords: Acculturation, Cultural Resonance, Everyday Multiculturalism, Social Adaptation, Social Capital

INTRODUCTION

The study of migrant adaptation has long occupied a central position in sociology, particularly in understanding how individuals navigate new cultural environments and reconstruct their social identities. In the Indonesian context, internal migration, especially for educational purposes, has intensified over the past decades, driven by uneven regional development and the concentration of higher education institutions in specific urban centers. Cities such as Ambon, located in the eastern part of Indonesia, have increasingly become destinations for students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including those from the Batak ethnic group of North Sumatra (Dandy et al., 2026; Yi et al., 2025). While this mobility is

often framed as a pathway toward social mobility and human capital development, it simultaneously produces complex processes of cultural encounter and social negotiation that remain insufficiently theorized, particularly within the context of archipelagic societies in the Global South.

Conventional approaches to migrant adaptation have predominantly relied on deficit-oriented frameworks, emphasizing disruption, dislocation, and cultural conflict as the defining features of the adaptation process. Classic models such as the U-curve theory and the stages of culture shock have been widely applied to explain the emotional and psychological trajectories of migrants (Ndaguba & van Zyl, 2025; Sari et al., 2025; Setianti et al., 2025). These models, while influential, tend to universalize the migrant experience and position adaptation as a linear progression from crisis to adjustment. Empirical studies in diverse contexts have often reinforced this narrative by highlighting issues such as language barriers, social exclusion, and identity struggles (Delina, Tam, et al., 2025; Sharma et al., 2022; Wijerathna & Hewapathirana, 2022). In Indonesia, similar tendencies can be observed in studies focusing on student migrants, where adaptation is frequently framed as a response to perceived cultural distance and social marginalization (Hua & Soh, 2026; Yıldız et al., 2023). However, such perspectives risk overlooking the possibility that adaptation may also unfold through more fluid, reciprocal, and even harmonious processes.

Recent empirical observations in Ambon suggest a more nuanced reality. Rather than being marked by persistent tension, interactions between migrant students and local communities often exhibit patterns of coexistence, mutual accommodation, and even solidarity. Informal social spaces, such as boarding houses, small food stalls, and community gatherings, serve as key arenas where everyday interactions take place, enabling the gradual construction of trust and familiarity. These observations challenge dominant assumptions about cultural incompatibility and invite a rethinking of how social integration is conceptualized in multicultural settings. The relative absence of overt conflict, coupled with the emergence of close interpersonal relationships, indicates that shared cultural values may play a more significant role in facilitating adaptation than previously acknowledged. Yet, these dynamics remain underexplored in mainstream sociological literature, which continues to privilege narratives of tension over those of resonance and alignment.

Scholarly efforts to understand acculturation have evolved significantly over time, with Demirel et al. (2026) framework offering one of the most widely cited models. Berry conceptualizes acculturation as a process shaped by two key dimensions: the maintenance of original cultural identity and the degree of engagement with the host society. This model identifies four acculturation strategies, integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization, each reflecting different orientations toward cultural adaptation. While Berry's model has been instrumental in advancing the field, it has also been critiqued for its static categorization and limited sensitivity to contextual variation (Rudmin, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2010). In particular, the model does not fully capture the dynamic and situational nature of everyday interactions, where

individuals may shift between different strategies depending on the context.

Building on interactionist traditions, scholars such as Sui (2024) have emphasized the importance of social encounters in shaping individual and collective identities. From this perspective, integration is not a fixed outcome but an ongoing process of negotiation that unfolds through repeated interactions. More recent approaches, such as everyday multiculturalism, further highlight the significance of mundane practices and informal settings in fostering social cohesion (Afridah et al., 2025; Ajis et al., 2026; Larson et al., 2023). These studies demonstrate that cultural diversity is often managed not through formal institutions but through routine interactions that generate mutual understanding and accommodation. In parallel, Sugandha et al. (2022) concept of social capital provides a useful lens for examining how networks and relationships facilitate access to resources and opportunities, including in the context of migration. The distinction between bonding and bridging social capital is particularly relevant in understanding how migrant communities maintain internal cohesion while simultaneously building connections with the broader society.

In the Indonesian context, studies on student migration and intercultural interaction have begun to emerge, although they remain relatively limited in scope. Research by Dhungana et al. (2025) and Meoded & BenDavid-Hadar (2025) highlights the role of youth culture in shaping new forms of identity and belonging in a rapidly changing society. Other studies have examined the experiences of migrant students in urban settings, pointing to the importance of peer networks, institutional support, and cultural adaptation strategies (Chee, 2024; Kuhnt & Obersneider, 2025). However, much of this literature continues to focus on challenges and barriers, with less attention given to the enabling conditions that facilitate successful integration. Moreover, the majority of these studies are situated in major metropolitan areas, leaving smaller and more peripheral regions, such as eastern Indonesia, underrepresented in academic discourse.

Further insights can be drawn from studies on cultural similarity and value congruence, which suggest that shared norms and practices can significantly ease the adaptation process (Lai & Cai, 2023; Sigeman, 2026). In societies where communal values such as collectivism, kinship, and mutual cooperation are deeply embedded, migrants may find points of connection that transcend ethnic and linguistic differences. This is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context, where values such as *gotong royong* and *kekeluargaan* are widely recognized across different cultural groups. Yet, the role of these shared values in shaping adaptation processes has not been systematically examined, especially in relation to student migration in archipelagic settings.

Despite the growing body of literature on migration and adaptation, certain silences persist. Much of the existing scholarship continues to rely on theoretical frameworks developed in the Global North, often without sufficient consideration of their applicability to different socio-cultural contexts. At the same time, the emphasis on formal structures and institutional mechanisms tends to obscure the significance of informal social spaces as sites of integration. These gaps point to the need for a more context-sensitive approach that recognizes the diversity of adaptation experiences and the multiple pathways through which integration can occur.

It is within this intellectual landscape that the present study positions itself, offering a perspective that foregrounds the interplay between cultural resonance, everyday interaction, and social integration. By examining the experiences of Batak students in Rumah Tiga, Ambon, this study seeks to illuminate how adaptation unfolds not merely as a response to difference, but as an active process of alignment and negotiation grounded in shared values and lived experiences. In doing so, it subtly shifts the analytical focus from deficit to potential, from conflict to compatibility, and from structure to practice.

The contribution of this study lies in its effort to articulate a more nuanced understanding of acculturation, one that is attuned to context, relational dynamics, and the micro-level processes of everyday life. It brings into conversation multiple theoretical strands, including acculturation theory, interactionism, and social capital, while also extending them through an empirical engagement with a relatively understudied setting. The emphasis on informal social spaces as arenas of integration, along with the identification of cultural resonance as a facilitating mechanism, offers a conceptual refinement that may be relevant for other contexts characterized by cultural diversity and mobility.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the processes through which Batak students adapt and integrate into the social fabric of Rumah Tiga, Ambon, with particular attention to the role of everyday interactions, shared cultural values, and informal social spaces. By doing so, it seeks not only to enrich the empirical understanding of student migration in eastern Indonesia but also to contribute to the broader development of sociological perspectives that are more reflective of the complexities and possibilities inherent in Global South contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretative design, grounded in the intention to capture the depth, complexity, and contextual nature of social adaptation among migrant students. A qualitative strategy is particularly appropriate for this research because the phenomenon under investigation, adaptive acculturation, is inherently relational, processual, and embedded in everyday interactions that cannot be adequately reduced to numerical indicators. Rather than measuring adaptation as an outcome, this study seeks to understand how it is experienced, negotiated, and constructed in lived reality. Such an approach allows for a nuanced exploration of meanings, perceptions, and social practices from the perspective of the actors themselves, aligning with the interpretive tradition in sociology that emphasizes subjective experience and social context (Amorim-Maia & Olazabal, 2026; Chen et al., 2025; Ping et al., 2026).

The research was conducted in Negeri Rumah Tiga, Ambon, a setting that offers a compelling empirical context due to its role as a socio-educational hub in eastern Indonesia. The presence of higher education institutions and a relatively diverse student population has made Rumah Tiga a site of sustained intercultural encounter. At the same time, the social fabric of

Ambon, shaped by strong communal values such as kinship and mutual cooperation, provides a distinctive backdrop for examining how cultural differences are navigated in practice. This location was therefore selected not only for its relevance to student migration but also for its capacity to reveal forms of integration that may differ from those typically observed in more metropolitan or conflict-prone settings.

The study involved eleven informants, selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance and depth of insight. The primary informants consisted of Batak students who had been residing in Rumah Tiga for varying lengths of time, allowing the research to capture different stages of the adaptation process. These individuals were chosen because they directly experience the phenomenon under study and are able to articulate their strategies, challenges, and reflections. To enrich the analysis and provide a more relational perspective, additional informants included local residents who frequently interact with the students, such as boarding house owners and community members. Their inclusion was important in understanding how adaptation is not only shaped by migrants but also co-constructed through the attitudes and practices of the host community. The diversity of informants thus enables a more holistic account of social integration as an interactive process.

Data were collected through a combination of participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Participant observation was conducted over an extended period to capture the rhythms of everyday life and the subtle dynamics of interaction that often escape formal inquiry. This method was chosen because many aspects of adaptation, such as gestures of hospitality, informal conversations, and patterns of social inclusion, are best understood through direct engagement in the field. In-depth interviews provided space for informants to narrate their experiences in their own terms, while the semi-structured format ensured that key themes related to adaptation, cultural values, and social relations were consistently explored across participants (Aminah et al., 2024; Ha et al., 2024; Roestamy et al., 2022). Documentation, including field notes and relevant local records, was used to contextualize and support the primary data.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation was employed at multiple levels. Methodological triangulation was achieved by combining observation, interviews, and documentation, allowing for cross-verification of data from different sources. Source triangulation involved comparing perspectives between student informants and local community members, thereby reducing the risk of one-sided interpretation. In addition, temporal triangulation was applied by revisiting key informants and observing changes over time, which helped to capture the dynamic nature of adaptation. Data analysis followed an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, enabling continuous reflection and refinement throughout the research process (Azad & Pritchard, 2023; Helen & Ellisa, 2024; Yang et al., 2022). Through this integrative and reflexive methodological approach, the study seeks to produce findings that are both empirically grounded and analytically robust.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Negotiating Difference: Early-Stage Adaptation and the Dissolution of Initial Barriers

The initial phase of adaptation among Batak students in Negeri Rumah Tiga reveals a process that is far more fluid and negotiated than what is typically portrayed in deficit-oriented migration literature. Rather than experiencing adaptation as a prolonged rupture marked by disorientation and conflict, most informants described their early encounters as a mixture of curiosity, uncertainty, and gradual familiarization. This finding resonates with the notion of contextual acculturation, where adaptation is shaped by situational interactions and evolving social contexts rather than fixed stages alone (Pohan et al., 2025; Sovacool et al., 2024). While the classical model of cultural adaptation proposed by Maurischa et al. (2023) remains analytically useful in mapping broad phases, the empirical data suggest that these stages are neither linear nor rigid; instead, they overlap and are continuously negotiated through everyday social engagement.

At the outset, the so-called honeymoon phase was characterized by a cautious optimism. Several informants acknowledged that they arrived in Ambon with preconceived notions shaped by mediated narratives about intergroup tensions. However, these assumptions did not fully translate into lived experience. Informant AS, for instance, noted that “I was initially worried because of stories I heard back home, but when I arrived, people were actually very open.” This initial openness was often supported by pragmatic considerations such as access to education, affordability, and the desire for independence, which provided a strong motivational foundation for adaptation. In this sense, early adaptation was not defined by cultural dissonance alone, but by a coexistence of expectation and adjustment that unfolded simultaneously.

The emergence of culture shock, as identified in Oberg’s framework, was indeed present but manifested in relatively specific and situational forms, particularly in relation to language. Linguistic differences between Bahasa Indonesia and Ambon Malay created moments of confusion that were often experienced as minor disruptions rather than deep crises. A frequently cited example involved informant SS, who recounted misunderstanding the word “dangke,” initially interpreting it as offensive due to phonetic similarity with expressions in his native dialect. Such incidents highlight how language operates not only as a communication tool but also as a cultural code that requires contextual interpretation. Importantly, these moments did not escalate into sustained alienation; instead, they became entry points for learning and interaction.

The recovery phase was marked by active, self-directed efforts to bridge these gaps, often through informal and socially embedded learning strategies. Observational data indicate that language acquisition occurred organically within everyday settings, such as conversations in boarding houses, interactions at local food stalls, and participation in community activities. Informant AN described how he gradually learned Ambon Malay “word by word, just by listening and trying to repeat,” reflecting a form of situated learning that is deeply embedded in social practice. Similarly, informant LN emphasized the role of digital communication spaces,

particularly WhatsApp groups, as informal platforms for linguistic and cultural exchange. These findings suggest that adaptation is facilitated not by formal instruction but by repeated exposure and participation in shared social environments, reinforcing the importance of micro-level interactions in shaping broader integration outcomes.

Participation in communal activities further accelerated this process. Engagement in practices such as collective work, religious gatherings, and youth group activities functioned as both social entry points and mechanisms of trust-building. These spaces allowed students to move beyond observer status and become active participants in local social life. The data show that such involvement not only improved communicative competence but also fostered a sense of belonging that transcended ethnic boundaries. In this regard, adaptation becomes less about overcoming difference and more about inhabiting a shared social world through practice and presence.

The adjustment phase, as observed in this study, is best understood not as a final stage but as an ongoing condition of negotiated belonging. Indicators of successful adaptation were evident in both linguistic competence and relational depth. Most informants reported achieving a functional proficiency in Ambon Malay within one to three years, often complemented by the ability to switch between languages depending on context. This code-switching practice reflects a high level of cultural sensitivity and situational awareness, enabling students to navigate different social settings with ease. More significantly, social relationships evolved from transactional interactions into forms of kinship-like ties. Terms such as “papi” and “mami” used to address boarding house owners, or “Mama Piara” attributed to a caregiver figure, illustrate how emotional bonds are constructed through repeated interaction and mutual care.

Cultural Resonance as a Mechanism of Adaptive Acculturation

The findings of this study reveal that the process of adaptation among Batak students in Negeri Rumah Tiga cannot be adequately understood solely through the lens of difference; rather, it is deeply facilitated by what may be termed as cultural resonance. This concept emerges from the empirical observation that shared cultural values, particularly those related to kinship and mutual cooperation, play a decisive role in bridging social distance and fostering meaningful connections between migrant students and the local Ambonese community. In this sense, adaptation is not merely a process of adjusting to unfamiliar norms, but also an active recognition of familiar values embedded within a different cultural setting. This aligns with recent discussions on value-based integration, which emphasize that perceived similarities in moral and social frameworks can significantly ease cross-cultural interaction and accelerate the formation of trust (Delina, Afable, et al., 2025; DePuy, 2023; Qian et al., 2025).

In everyday practice, cultural resonance becomes visible through patterns of interaction that are both routine and relational. One of the most prominent sites where this process unfolds is the local warung, which functions far beyond its economic role. Observational data and interview narratives consistently highlight the warung as a socially inclusive space where informal

conversations take place, relationships are initiated, and mutual recognition is cultivated. Informant LN described how “at first I just came to buy food, but over time the owner would ask about my studies, and eventually I was invited to family events.” Such interactions illustrate how seemingly mundane encounters can evolve into deeper social ties, grounded in shared values of hospitality and care. These micro-level engagements reflect what AL-Qadri et al. (2025) and Yulianto et al. (2022) conceptualizes as the foundation of society itself: the continuous flow of interactions that produce and reproduce social bonds.

Beyond the warung, similar dynamics were observed in other everyday spaces, including boarding houses, neighborhood environments, religious gatherings, and even during routine administrative interactions. These spaces collectively form a network of social arenas where repeated encounters allow for the gradual alignment of expectations and behaviors. From a Bourdieusian perspective, these arenas can be understood as sites where habitus is both challenged and reconfigured (Subekti et al., 2026; Wahid, 2024). Through sustained participation, Batak students begin to internalize local norms, such as forms of greeting, expressions of respect, and modes of collective engagement, while simultaneously maintaining elements of their original cultural identity. This dual process does not result in cultural dilution, but rather in the emergence of a flexible and context-sensitive disposition that enables effective social functioning.

What makes this process particularly significant is the way in which shared cultural values operate as a form of symbolic bridge. Both Batak and Ambonese cultures place strong emphasis on kinship, communal solidarity, and reciprocal care. These overlapping value systems create a sense of familiarity that reduces the perceived distance between “insider” and “outsider.” Informant AS reflected this sentiment by noting that “even though we come from different places, the way people treat each other here feels similar to home.” This perceived similarity fosters emotional comfort and encourages openness, which in turn facilitates deeper engagement. In this context, cultural resonance functions not only as a cognitive recognition of similarity but also as an affective experience that strengthens social attachment.

The role of social capital further reinforces this dynamic. The data indicate that bonding social capital within the Batak student community, particularly through networks such as informal student associations, provides an initial support system that helps individuals navigate early uncertainties. At the same time, bridging social capital emerges through interactions with local residents, enabling access to new social resources and opportunities. Informant AN explained that local neighbors often provided guidance on everyday matters, from navigating local customs to accessing services, which significantly eased the adaptation process. This interplay between bonding and bridging ties reflects Fanari & Kim (2025) argument that social capital operates as a resource embedded in networks of relationships, allowing individuals to mobilize support and recognition across different social fields.

Importantly, the effectiveness of these processes cannot be separated from the relational openness of the host community. Adaptation, as observed in this study, is not a one-sided effort undertaken solely by migrants; it is co-constructed through reciprocal engagement. The

willingness of local residents to include, guide, and even symbolically “adopt” migrant students into their social circles plays a crucial role in shaping outcomes. This reinforces the idea that integration is fundamentally relational, contingent upon the mutual recognition of shared values and the ongoing negotiation of difference.

Informal Social Spaces as Micro-Sites of Integration

The findings of this study demonstrate that informal social spaces play a decisive role as micro-sites of integration, where adaptation is not orchestrated through formal institutional mechanisms but emerges organically through routine, low-intensity interactions embedded in everyday life. Spaces such as boarding houses, small food stalls, neighborhood pathways, and communal gathering points function as relational arenas in which social familiarity is gradually constructed. In line with the perspective of everyday multiculturalism, these mundane encounters are not trivial; rather, they constitute the very foundation upon which broader patterns of social cohesion are built (Isia et al., 2023; Pooyan & Hokugo, 2025; Wedyaswari et al., 2026). The data reveal that it is precisely through these repeated, seemingly ordinary interactions that Batak students begin to navigate, internalize, and ultimately inhabit the social world of Rumah Tiga.

A particularly striking dimension of this process is the emergence of a balanced acculturation strategy, in which students maintain their Batak cultural identity while simultaneously engaging with and adopting elements of Ambonese social life. This finding resonates with Rayo et al. (2024) conceptualization of integration as the most adaptive acculturation strategy, yet it extends it by demonstrating how such balance is not merely an individual choice but is deeply shaped by the relational and spatial contexts in which interaction occurs. In Rumah Tiga, the presence of shared cultural values, especially those related to kinship, mutual respect, and collective responsibility, creates a fertile ground for this balanced adaptation to unfold. Informant AS noted that “it does not feel like we have to choose between being Batak or adapting here; it feels natural to be both,” suggesting that the coexistence of identities is experienced as complementary rather than contradictory.

This compatibility is not incidental but rooted in deeper structural parallels between the two cultural systems. The Batak philosophy of *dalihan na tolu*, which emphasizes relational obligations and respect within kinship networks, finds a meaningful counterpart in the Ambonese traditions of *pela-gandong* and *masohi*, which similarly prioritize communal solidarity and mutual assistance (Arli et al., 2023; Duan et al., 2024; Oo et al., 2026). These shared moral frameworks create what can be understood as a latent cultural infrastructure that supports integration. Rather than confronting an entirely unfamiliar social order, students encounter recognizable patterns of social organization that can be reinterpreted and reactivated in a new context. This process significantly reduces the friction typically associated with cross-cultural adaptation and enables a smoother transition into local social life.

The importance of informal spaces becomes particularly evident when examining how these shared values are enacted in practice. Boarding houses, for example, are not merely sites of residence but function as intimate social environments where daily interactions foster emotional bonds. Informant AN described how the boarding house owner would regularly initiate conversations, inquire about academic progress, and provide advice, gradually transforming the relationship into one resembling familial care. Similarly, interactions in neighborhood settings, such as participating in collective cleaning activities or attending local religious events, create opportunities for students to demonstrate their willingness to engage and to be recognized as part of the community. These practices reflect what Nopriyasman et al. (2024) conceptualizes as the formation of habitus, where repeated participation in social life generates dispositions that align with the norms of the surrounding environment.

The role of local actors, particularly boarding house owners and community members, further underscores the relational nature of integration. The data indicate that these actors actively facilitate the adaptation process through deliberate yet informal strategies. They invite students into social and religious activities, encourage storytelling about their home regions, and provide emotional support during periods of adjustment. Informant LN recalled that “being invited to join family prayers made me feel like I was not alone here,” highlighting how inclusion in everyday practices can significantly enhance a sense of belonging. Such actions exemplify what has been described as an inclusive social environment, where openness and tolerance toward cultural diversity create conditions conducive to adaptation (Ergün & Bozdağ, 2026; Esteban, 2026; Oktari et al., 2023).

This supportive environment also reflects the presence of optimal social support, where individuals feel acknowledged, valued, and integrated within their social surroundings (Alomair et al., 2026; Rahmatullah et al., 2025; Tias et al., 2026). Importantly, this support is not institutionalized but emerges through interpersonal relationships and shared experiences. It is precisely the informality of these interactions that allows them to be flexible, responsive, and emotionally resonant. In contrast to more formal settings, where roles and expectations may be rigid, informal spaces thus allow for a more fluid negotiation of identity and belonging.

The contrast with findings from other contexts further highlights the significance of these conditions. Studies conducted in more culturally distant or less cohesive environments, such as those reported by Avni & Moser (2026) and Kasula et al. (2026), often describe adaptation as a more conflictual and constrained process. The relative ease of adaptation observed in Rumah Tiga suggests that the character of the host culture, particularly its openness and value compatibility, plays a crucial role in shaping outcomes. This reinforces the argument that integration is not a universal process but is deeply contingent upon the interplay between cultural structures, social practices, and spatial contexts.

From Functional Interaction to Kinship-Like Relations

The transformation of social relationships from initially functional interactions into kinship-like ties represents one of the most significant findings of this study, revealing that social integration in Rumah Tiga extends beyond mere coexistence into the realm of emotional belonging and relational depth. At the early stage, interactions between Batak students and local residents were largely instrumental, centered on practical needs such as securing accommodation, purchasing food, or navigating administrative procedures. These encounters, while necessary, were initially limited in scope and did not immediately produce strong interpersonal bonds. However, as interactions became more frequent and embedded in everyday routines, their character gradually shifted. What began as transactional exchanges evolved into more personal and emotionally meaningful relationships, reflecting a process in which familiarity gives rise to trust, and trust, in turn, enables deeper social connection.

This progression is closely tied to the repetitive and cumulative nature of everyday interactions. As students continued to engage with the same individuals in consistent settings, such as boarding houses, neighborhood spaces, and small commercial venues, the boundaries between formal and informal relations began to blur. Informant AN described how his relationship with the boarding house owner changed over time: “At first, we only talked about rent and rules, but after a while, she would ask about my family, my studies, and even give advice like a parent.” This shift illustrates how relational proximity, when sustained over time, fosters emotional investment and mutual recognition. In this context, integration is not an abstract condition but a lived experience shaped by ongoing interpersonal engagement.

The emergence of kinship-like relations is particularly evident in the use of familial terms and symbolic practices that signify inclusion. Many informants reported addressing local figures with terms such as “papi,” “mami,” or “mama,” reflecting not only linguistic adaptation but also the internalization of local relational norms. Informant LN noted that being called “anak” by a local resident made her feel “accepted as part of the family, not just a guest.” These forms of address are not merely rhetorical; they carry social meaning and emotional weight, signaling a redefinition of social boundaries. Through such practices, migrants are no longer positioned as outsiders but are gradually incorporated into the moral and affective structure of the community.

From a theoretical standpoint, this relational transformation can be understood through the lens of social capital, particularly the interplay between bonding and bridging forms (Arnab et al., 2025; Cutter, 2024). Bonding social capital, which exists within the Batak student community, provides an initial sense of security and continuity, allowing individuals to maintain their cultural identity and access emotional support during the early stages of adaptation. Informant AS emphasized that “having fellow Batak friends helped me feel grounded, especially when I first arrived.” However, while bonding ties are essential for stability, they alone are insufficient for broader integration. It is through bridging social capital, connections that extend beyond one’s immediate cultural group, that students gain access to new social networks, resources, and forms of recognition within the host society.

What is particularly notable in this study is that these two forms of social capital do not operate in isolation but are deeply intertwined. Bonding networks often serve as a platform from which bridging interactions are initiated. For example, group participation in local events or collective engagement in neighborhood activities allows students to enter broader social circles while still maintaining the support of their peers. Over time, as bridging ties strengthen, they begin to take on characteristics traditionally associated with bonding relationships, such as emotional closeness and mutual obligation. This blurring of boundaries suggests that social capital is not static but evolves in response to changing relational dynamics.

The role of reciprocity further reinforces this transformation. Integration is not achieved solely through the efforts of migrant students but is co-constructed through mutual acts of care, assistance, and recognition. Informant SS recounted how a local neighbor helped him during a period of illness, bringing food and checking on his condition regularly. In response, he later participated in community activities and offered assistance when needed. Such reciprocal exchanges create a cycle of trust and obligation that strengthens social ties over time. This aligns with the broader sociological understanding that social cohesion is built through repeated acts of mutual support, which gradually solidify into enduring relationships (Huebner, 2025; Salmiati et al., 2026; Simpson & Pellegrini, 2022).

Importantly, the emergence of kinship-like relations also reflects the cultural context in which this adaptation takes place. In societies where communal values and relational identities are emphasized, the extension of familial metaphors to non-biological relationships is a common and socially meaningful practice. In Rumah Tiga, this cultural orientation provides a conducive environment for the reconfiguration of social relations, allowing migrants to be incorporated into existing social structures without requiring full assimilation. Instead, integration occurs through a process of relational embedding, where individuals become part of the community by participating in its everyday life and shared values.

Adaptive Acculturation in Context: Toward a Dynamic Model of Social Integration

The empirical findings of this study converge toward a broader conceptual articulation that may be understood as *adaptive acculturation in context*, a process that is inherently relational, dynamic, and co-constructed through ongoing interactions between migrant students and the host community. Rather than unfolding as a linear trajectory from disorientation to adjustment, adaptation in Rumah Tiga emerges as a continuous negotiation shaped by situational encounters, shared values, and the evolving nature of social relationships. This perspective challenges the enduring dominance of static and stage-based models of integration, which tend to assume a universal pathway of adaptation irrespective of context (Lin & Selim, 2026; Polishchuk et al., 2026; Zainal & Barlas, 2022). In contrast, the findings presented here suggest that adaptation is better understood as a fluid process that is contingent upon the interplay between individual agency, cultural compatibility, and the social environment in which interactions occur.

At the core of this process is the recognition that adaptation does not reside solely within the migrant subject but is distributed across a network of relationships that include local actors, social spaces, and cultural norms. Informants consistently emphasized that their ability to adapt was not only a result of personal effort but also of the openness and responsiveness of the surrounding community. Informant AS reflected that “it would have been much harder if people here were closed or distant; instead, they made it easier for us to feel at home.” This observation underscores a crucial dimension often underexplored in migration studies: the agency of the host society. Integration, in this sense, is not a one-directional process of adjustment but a mutual engagement in which both migrants and locals participate in shaping the conditions of coexistence.

The dynamic nature of this process becomes particularly evident when examining how adaptation unfolds across different social contexts. In formal settings, such as academic institutions or administrative interactions, students often rely on standardized forms of communication and behavior, drawing on their prior experiences and institutional norms. However, it is within informal contexts, boarding houses, neighborhood interactions, and communal activities, that adaptation becomes more nuanced and deeply embedded. These spaces allow for experimentation, learning, and the gradual alignment of expectations, enabling students to navigate cultural differences in a flexible and context-sensitive manner. Informant LN noted that “in class, everything feels structured, but outside, you learn how to really live here,” pointing to the importance of situational adaptability in shaping integration outcomes.

This continuous negotiation also reflects a temporal dimension, where adaptation is not confined to a specific phase but evolves over time in response to changing circumstances. Early experiences of uncertainty or misunderstanding do not disappear entirely but are reinterpreted and integrated into a broader narrative of belonging. The capacity to engage in code-switching, both linguistically and culturally, illustrates this temporal fluidity, as students learn to adjust their behavior according to context without abandoning their original identity. Such practices challenge the binary logic of assimilation versus separation, suggesting instead a more hybrid and process-oriented form of integration.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings contribute to ongoing efforts to rethink migration and integration within the context of the Global South. Much of the existing literature has been shaped by experiences and models derived from Western societies, where issues of migration are often framed in terms of structural inequality, cultural distance, and institutional integration. While these frameworks offer valuable insights, they may not fully capture the relational and context-dependent nature of adaptation in societies characterized by strong communal values and dense social networks. In settings such as Rumah Tiga, integration appears to be less about navigating formal systems and more about engaging with everyday social life, where trust, reciprocity, and shared values play a central role.

The concept of adaptive acculturation in context thus offers a way to bridge these theoretical gaps by foregrounding the importance of local conditions and relational dynamics. It

emphasizes that adaptation is not a fixed endpoint but an ongoing process that is continuously shaped by interaction, negotiation, and mutual recognition. This perspective also invites a shift in analytical focus from deficits to potentials, from barriers to facilitators, and from individual adjustment to collective co-construction. Informant AN captured this sentiment succinctly when stating that “over time, it no longer feels like adapting to a new place, but like becoming part of it.”

Reconfiguring Social Integration in Island Societies

The findings of this study invite a broader reflection on how social integration is understood within archipelagic societies, particularly in the context of the Global South. In settings such as Ambon, integration does not primarily unfold through formal institutional pathways or rigid assimilationist expectations; rather, it is deeply embedded in relational practices, cultural alignment, and the dense networks of everyday social life. This suggests that island societies offer a distinct social ecology in which proximity, interdependence, and shared moral frameworks shape the conditions of coexistence. The experiences of Batak students in Rumah Tiga illustrate that integration in such contexts is less about overcoming difference and more about navigating and activating points of connection that already exist within the cultural fabric of society.

One of the defining features of island communities is the intensity of interpersonal relations, where social life is often organized around close-knit networks and recurring interactions. Unlike large metropolitan settings, where anonymity can be a defining characteristic, social visibility in places like Rumah Tiga is relatively high. Individuals are quickly recognized, remembered, and positioned within local relational structures. Informant AS noted that “people here notice you quickly, and once they know you, they keep engaging with you,” highlighting how visibility can function as both a challenge and an opportunity. While initial exposure may create a sense of vulnerability, it also accelerates the process of recognition and inclusion, allowing newcomers to become part of the social landscape in a relatively short period of time.

This relational density is closely tied to the persistence of communal values that prioritize kinship, reciprocity, and collective responsibility. In Ambonese society, practices such as mutual assistance and shared participation in social and religious activities are not merely cultural ideals but lived realities that structure everyday interaction. For migrant students, entering such a social environment provides opportunities to engage with familiar value systems, even if expressed through different cultural forms. Informant LN reflected that “the way people help each other here feels very similar to home, even if the language and customs are different,” pointing to the role of cultural alignment in facilitating adaptation. This alignment reduces the perceived distance between migrant and host, enabling a form of integration that is grounded in recognition rather than negotiation alone.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the specific case of Rumah Tiga, challenging dominant paradigms in migration studies that tend to privilege deficit-oriented frameworks. Much of the existing literature, particularly those derived from Global North contexts, has emphasized issues such as marginalization, exclusion, and cultural conflict as central to the migrant experience (Hang & Zhang, 2023; Jung & Reyes, 2025; Pınarbaşı et al., 2026). While these dynamics are undoubtedly present in many settings, the evidence from this study suggests that they do not constitute a universal condition. In contexts where social life is organized around strong communal ties and inclusive practices, integration may follow alternative pathways that are less conflictual and more generative. This calls for a reorientation of analytical frameworks to account for the diversity of social environments in which migration occurs.

The concept of relational embeddedness becomes particularly useful in this regard. Integration, as observed in this study, is not achieved through formal membership or legal recognition alone, but through the gradual incorporation of individuals into the moral and social networks of the community. This process is marked by participation, recognition, and the development of trust over time. Informant AN described this transition by stating that “at some point, you stop feeling like a visitor and start feeling responsible for the place,” indicating a shift from presence to belonging. Such transformations highlight that integration is as much about emotional and moral positioning as it is about structural inclusion.

At the same time, the findings underscore the importance of moving beyond binary distinctions between host and migrant, insider and outsider. In the context of Rumah Tiga, these categories become increasingly blurred as relationships deepen and identities are renegotiated. The use of kinship terms, the sharing of daily routines, and the mutual exchange of support all contribute to the redefinition of social boundaries. This process reflects what contemporary sociological debates describe as the co-production of social integration, where both migrants and local communities actively participate in shaping the terms of coexistence (Fekete & Rufat, 2023; Sun, 2026). It also reinforces the argument that integration should not be conceptualized as a one-sided process of adaptation, but as a relational achievement that emerges through interaction.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social adaptation of Batak students in Rumah Tiga, Ambon, is best understood not as a linear response to cultural disruption, but as a contextual and relational process shaped by the continuous negotiation of values, interactions, and social positions within everyday life. The findings demonstrate that adaptation unfolds through the recognition of shared cultural values, particularly kinship and mutual cooperation, which function as a form of cultural resonance that reduces social distance and enables the gradual formation of trust. Within this process, informal social spaces emerge as critical arenas where repeated

interactions transform initially functional relationships into more enduring, kinship-like ties, reflecting a deeper level of social integration. Importantly, this integration is not solely driven by the adaptive strategies of migrant students but is co-constructed through the openness, participation, and relational practices of the host community. In this sense, social integration in archipelagic contexts such as Ambon is characterized less by formal assimilation and more by relational embeddedness and cultural alignment. By articulating adaptive acculturation in context as a dynamic and co-constructed process, this study offers a nuanced reconceptualization of integration that moves beyond deficit-oriented frameworks and contributes to a more context-sensitive understanding of migration within Global South societies.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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