

LONELINESS IN OVERSEAS CHILDREN WHO STUDY IN GRESIK CAMPUS

Dicky Aldisar Prautama¹, Prianggi Amelasasih²¹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik, Indonesia² Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik, Indonesia

Corresponding Author:

Dicky Aldisar Prautama,
Fakultas Psikologi, Jurusan Psikologi, Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik, Indonesia Jl. Sumatera No.101, Gn. Malang,
Randuagung, Kec. Kebomas, Kabupaten Gresik, Jawa Timur 61121
Email: prianggi_amelasasih@umg.ac.id

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Abstract

Loneliness is a psychological condition commonly experienced by migrant students who must adapt to new environments far from their families. This study explores the subjective experiences of loneliness among *rantau* (migrant) students studying at several universities in Gresik, Indonesia. The research aims to identify the factors contributing to loneliness, its emotional and behavioral impacts, and the coping strategies adopted by students. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with three participants from different universities: Aira (Politeknik Semen Indonesia), Citra (Universitas Internasional Semen Indonesia), and Ferismaldy (Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik). The results indicate that loneliness arises from limited intimate relationships, difficulties in communication, and emotional distance from family. Personality traits such as introversion and low self-confidence intensify feelings of isolation. The psychological effects include sadness, decreased motivation, loss of appetite, sleep disturbances, and a sense of worthlessness. However, several participants were able to reduce loneliness through positive coping mechanisms, including engaging in part-time work, joining campus organizations, and maintaining close friendships. This study concludes that loneliness among *rantau* students is a multidimensional experience shaped by personal, social, and environmental interactions.

Keywords: Emotional Adaptation, Loneliness, Migrant Students



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INTRODUCTION

Loneliness is a complex psychological phenomenon that has increasingly attracted scholarly attention, particularly among young adults undergoing major life transitions such as university education (Kotwal, 2022). For students who migrate from their hometowns to pursue higher education, loneliness represents more than physical isolation—it reflects an emotional and cognitive disconnection from meaningful social relationships (Dahlberg, 2022). Within the Indonesian context, *anak rantau* (migrant students) are a distinct sociocultural group that embodies resilience and adaptability while facing significant emotional struggles (Tibirićá, 2022). These students often experience a mismatch between their expectations of social connectedness and the reality of their new environment, leading to a sense of emptiness and alienation (Goldman, 2024). In cities such as Gresik—an industrial and educational hub—students from various regions of Indonesia gather to study, creating a diverse yet challenging social landscape.

The experience of *rantau* life frequently demands a rapid process of adaptation—academically, socially, and culturally (Vedder, 2022). For many, the departure from their familial environment entails a sudden loss of emotional anchors, familiarity, and daily social interactions that previously served as psychological support (Igami, 2023). The absence of these stabilizing relationships intensifies emotional vulnerability, resulting in feelings of isolation, sadness, and helplessness (McDonald, 2022). Previous observations and interviews with students at universities in Gresik, including Politeknik Semen Indonesia, Universitas Internasional Semen Indonesia, and Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik, revealed that loneliness often emerges during the first year of migration, when students begin to face academic pressures and difficulties in forming close relationships.

Beyond the individual emotional dimension, loneliness among migrant students also has broader implications for academic engagement, mental well-being, and social functioning (Cardona, 2023). Studies in Indonesian higher education contexts, such as those by (Freak-Poli, 2022), have confirmed that loneliness correlates with low self-concept and reduced self-efficacy. Moreover, (Lim, 2022) found that loneliness negatively affects psychological well-being, leading to decreased motivation and concentration in learning (Yu, 2022). In this sense, loneliness among *anak rantau* is not merely a temporary emotional state, but a condition that may disrupt cognitive performance (Liang, 2023), social participation, and future professional readiness (Kojima, 2022). These contextual realities position loneliness as a significant psychological and educational issue requiring in-depth qualitative exploration.

The central problem addressed in this study lies in understanding how migrant students experience and interpret loneliness during their academic life in Gresik. Despite being surrounded by peers and academic communities, many of these students report persistent feelings of isolation and emotional disconnection (Bonsaksen, 2023). The problem is not limited to the absence of companionship but extends to the quality of interpersonal relationships and the students' ability to express themselves authentically within their new environment (Qi, 2023). The emotional burden becomes heavier when compounded by cultural barriers, communication difficulties, and the loss of familial warmth (Ge, 2022). For instance, students such as Aira and Citra, based on interview data, articulated how social withdrawal and overthinking led to exhaustion and emotional numbness.

The manifestation of loneliness among *rantau* students reflects a multifaceted psychological struggle influenced by personal traits, environmental dynamics, and past experiences (Powell, 2022). Students with introverted or self-conscious personalities often find it difficult to initiate or sustain social interactions, resulting in prolonged isolation (Straus, 2022). Conversely, even extroverted individuals who appear socially active may experience an internal void when relationships lack depth or emotional authenticity (Koehn, 2022). This paradox of “lonely in a crowd” emphasizes the subjective and multidimensional nature of loneliness that cannot be captured solely through quantitative measures (Gradiski, 2022). The

issue becomes more critical when loneliness translates into decreased self-esteem (Döring, 2022), depressive symptoms, and academic disengagement.

The need to examine this phenomenon arises from recurring observations that migrant students, particularly those from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, encounter systemic barriers to integration (Budak, 2023). In Gresik, the diversity of student origins—from Bawean to Brebes and Lamongan—creates distinct subcultures that may limit the formation of cohesive peer groups (Grycuk, 2022). When students fail to navigate these cultural differences, they often retreat into solitude (Akhter-Khan, 2023). The lack of emotional support, both from peers and from family due to geographic distance, deepens this psychological gap (Wilson-Genderson, 2022). Consequently, the current research problem is to uncover how migrant students construct meaning around loneliness, what internal and external factors contribute to it, and how they cope within their educational context (Geukens, 2022).

This study aims to explore and describe the lived experiences of loneliness among *rantau* students studying at various universities in Gresik (Shield, 2022). The primary objective is to understand the personal narratives, emotional processes, and coping mechanisms through which these students manage feelings of isolation (Haikalis, 2022). Specifically, this study seeks to: (1) identify the personal and social factors contributing to loneliness; (2) analyze how individual personality traits, such as introversion, low self-confidence, or social anxiety, shape these experiences; and (3) examine the strategies used by students to overcome or adapt to loneliness, including engagement in campus activities, work, or close interpersonal relationships.

The research also intends to uncover how students' backgrounds and family relationships influence their adjustment processes in a new environment (Chao, 2022). Understanding these dimensions provides valuable insight into the interplay between individual psychology and social ecology in shaping emotional well-being (Kim, 2023). For instance, findings from the interviews suggest that limited communication skills, fear of judgment, and unresolved family experiences—such as strict parenting or emotional neglect—may predispose students to loneliness (Lee, 2022). By identifying these patterns, the research contributes to a deeper comprehension of how emotional isolation manifests in academic life.

Through these objectives, the study aspires to provide a holistic understanding that integrates personal, relational, and contextual dimensions of loneliness. It goes beyond describing emotional discomfort to reveal the cognitive and behavioral mechanisms that sustain or alleviate it. The ultimate goal is to offer empirical evidence that can guide educational institutions in designing more inclusive and empathetic support systems for migrant students, ensuring that academic success is accompanied by psychological resilience and social connectedness.

Although loneliness among university students has been extensively studied, research focusing on Indonesian *rantau* students—particularly those studying in smaller industrial regions such as Gresik—remains limited. Most existing studies concentrate on loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic or in metropolitan contexts like Jakarta and Yogyakarta. These studies, while valuable, often generalize student experiences without considering the cultural and emotional complexity of *anak rantau* living in semi-urban academic environments. The uniqueness of the Gresik context lies in its hybrid identity as both an industrial and educational center, where cultural diversity, economic challenges, and urban-rural contrasts intersect to shape social interactions.

Furthermore, previous research has primarily relied on quantitative instruments such as the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996), which measure loneliness as a static variable rather than as a dynamic lived experience. While these tools provide numerical data, they fail to capture the nuanced emotional and social narratives underlying loneliness. The present study bridges this gap by employing a qualitative descriptive approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of individual voices and meanings. This approach emphasizes subjective

interpretation, giving space to students' personal reflections, contradictions, and coping practices—dimensions that are often lost in numerical analysis.

In addition, there is a paucity of research linking loneliness with personality formation, communication patterns, and emotional regulation among Indonesian *rantau* students. Existing literature has yet to fully examine how early-life experiences, parental styles, and self-perception intersect with the academic and social demands of university life. The absence of such integrative studies creates a theoretical and practical gap that this research intends to fill. By synthesizing insights from psychology, education, and cultural studies, this study contributes a comprehensive understanding of loneliness as a contextual, relational, and transformative phenomenon.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the lived experiences of *anak rantau* in Gresik, combining psychological depth with cultural sensitivity. Unlike previous works that treat loneliness as a homogeneous emotional state, this research conceptualizes it as an evolving process influenced by identity, environment, and coping strategies. The use of verbatim interviews from three different campuses provides authentic, first-hand perspectives that capture emotional subtleties—ranging from feelings of sadness and exhaustion to moments of acceptance and growth. Such narratives reveal that loneliness is not only a symptom of disconnection but also a potential catalyst for self-awareness, independence, and emotional maturity.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study advances Russell's (1996) conceptualization of loneliness by situating it within the sociocultural context of Indonesian *rantau* students. It expands the framework by incorporating variables such as personality traits, parental influence, and digital interaction patterns, which have become increasingly relevant in the post-pandemic era. The findings are expected to enrich discussions in cross-cultural psychology and educational sociology, offering new insights into how cultural expectations and emotional resilience intersect in shaping student adaptation.

The justification for conducting this study also stems from its practical implications. As higher education institutions in Indonesia continue to attract students from diverse regions, understanding the psychological challenges faced by migrant students becomes essential. The insights from this study can inform the development of campus-based counseling, peer mentoring, and emotional literacy programs tailored for *rantau* students. Furthermore, it contributes to broader policy discussions about student welfare, inclusivity, and mental health support within tertiary education. By emphasizing both the struggles and strengths of *anak rantau*, this research not only fills a scholarly gap but also offers a meaningful contribution to promoting empathy, resilience, and community-building in multicultural academic settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at exploring the lived experiences of *rantau* (migrant) students who study at universities in Gresik. The qualitative approach was chosen because loneliness represents a deeply personal and subjective psychological experience that cannot be fully captured through numerical data alone. (Lin, 2022), qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena within their natural context and from the perspective of those who experience them (Jeftić, 2023). This design allowed the researcher to capture the emotional nuances, coping mechanisms, and social dynamics associated with loneliness among students living away from their families (Hettich, 2022). The study was interpretative in nature, emphasizing meaning-making, emotional reflection, and the contextual understanding of each participant's experiences rather than generalization.

Population and Samples

The population of this study consisted of university students who migrated from other regions of Indonesia to pursue higher education in Gresik. The selection of participants was conducted using a purposive sampling technique, focusing on individuals who were identified as *anak rantau* and had lived in Gresik for at least one academic year. Three participants were selected to ensure data depth and variation of experiences. They included Aira from Politeknik Semen Indonesia, Citra from Universitas Internasional Semen Indonesia, and Ferismaldy from Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik. Each participant represented diverse backgrounds in terms of origin, personality, and academic discipline, which allowed for a comprehensive exploration of loneliness from multiple perspectives. These participants were considered information-rich cases, capable of providing meaningful insights regarding the emotional, psychological, and social aspects of living independently in a new environment.

Instruments

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide developed based on the theoretical dimensions of loneliness proposed by Russell (1996), which include *personality*, *social desirability*, and *depression*. The instrument contained open-ended questions designed to explore the participants' emotional responses, interpersonal relationships, communication difficulties, coping strategies, and reflections on their experiences as *anak rantau*. The interview guide was flexible, allowing the researcher to probe further into participants' responses and adapt follow-up questions as needed to ensure depth of understanding. The reliability of the instrument was supported through expert validation by two academic supervisors specializing in psychology and qualitative research. Each interview was conducted face-to-face and recorded with the participant's consent to ensure data accuracy. Verbatim transcripts were later produced to preserve the authenticity of each participant's narrative.

Procedures

Data collection followed several systematic stages. The researcher first obtained ethical approval and permission from the respective universities where the participants were enrolled. Participants were contacted personally, provided with an explanation of the study's objectives, and asked to sign an informed consent form to ensure voluntary participation. Interviews were carried out over multiple sessions between August and September 2024, with each session lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. The interviews took place in a quiet and comfortable environment, allowing participants to express their thoughts freely without external pressure. The researcher began by establishing rapport to create a trusting atmosphere, followed by guiding participants through questions related to their experiences of loneliness, adaptation, and emotional challenges.

Data were transcribed verbatim immediately after each interview and analyzed through thematic interpretation. The researcher coded the data according to recurring patterns and categorized them into key themes representing personality, social interaction, and depressive tendencies. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data from the three participants and by cross-referencing with field notes and literature to enhance credibility. To maintain trustworthiness, the researcher applied the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of interpretations with participants to ensure accuracy of meaning. The entire research procedure was guided by ethical considerations emphasizing confidentiality, respect for participants' emotions, and the voluntary nature of disclosure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive data of this study were derived from qualitative interviews conducted with three *rantau* (migrant) students representing different higher education institutions in Gresik: Aira from Politeknik Semen Indonesia, Citra from Universitas Internasional Semen

Indonesia, and Ferismaldy from Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik. Each participant had lived away from their hometown for more than one year, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the emotional and psychological dimensions of loneliness. Secondary data from previous studies, such as Saputri et al. (2022), Pramitha and Astuti (2023), and Russell (1996), were utilized as comparative references to contextualize the participants' experiences within broader theoretical and empirical frameworks.

The participants' demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1, which highlights their academic backgrounds, duration of stay, and self-reported emotional tendencies.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant	Origin	University	Major	Duration in Gresik	Key Emotional Traits
Aira	Brebes, Central Java	Politeknik Semen Indonesia	Information Technology	1 Year	Emotional, adaptive, sensitive to family separation
Citra	Lamongan, East Java	Universitas Internasional Semen Indonesia	Islamic Economics	2 Years	Introverted, self-reflective, low confidence
Ferismaldy	Bawean, East Java	Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik	Informatics	4 Years	Reserved, analytical, socially withdrawn

These data indicate that participants experienced prolonged separation from family environments and engaged in various forms of academic and social adaptation. Their emotional dispositions shaped the intensity and pattern of loneliness perceived throughout their studies in Gresik.

The experiences of loneliness among participants were primarily influenced by the contrast between their expectations of social connection and the reality of living independently. Aira described her initial days of separation from her father as an emotionally overwhelming experience, particularly when she realized she had to manage her life without familial support. The absence of a familiar presence resulted in emotional fatigue and occasional crying episodes, which she interpreted as part of her adjustment process. Meanwhile, Citra associated loneliness with exhaustion after social interactions, claiming that extended social engagement drained her energy, leading her to isolate herself for emotional recovery.

Ferismaldy's explanation of loneliness revealed a cognitive struggle linked to his limited communication skills and introverted nature. His experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted social interaction for nearly two years, intensified his communication anxiety. He acknowledged that his difficulty in initiating conversation often resulted in self-imposed isolation. Despite attempting to join student organizations and public-speaking events, he continued to feel detached from his peers. This finding aligns with Russell's (1996) theory that loneliness persists not only due to the absence of relationships but also due to the perceived lack of meaningful emotional reciprocity.

The data collected through in-depth interviews demonstrated three major themes: (1) personality influence, (2) social interaction, and (3) emotional depression. Aira's case revealed how adaptive yet emotionally fragile personalities respond to loneliness by seeking activity-based distractions such as part-time work. Citra's personality, characterized by hypersensitivity and social withdrawal, showed that loneliness could coexist with social exposure, suggesting that emotional fulfillment depends more on depth than frequency of interaction. Ferismaldy's responses showed a psychological detachment rooted in prolonged social isolation and lack of early interpersonal engagement during adolescence.

The narratives also reflected behavioral indicators of loneliness, including reduced appetite, insomnia, lack of motivation, and self-comparison with others (Cao, 2022). For instance, Citra often cried without a clear reason after attending social events, while Aira lost interest in eating when reminded of her family (Banerjee, 2023). Ferismaldy, on the other hand, displayed avoidance behaviors such as delaying meals and staying silent for long periods. These patterns corroborate prior research findings (Lazzari, 2022) that loneliness correlates strongly with emotional instability and disrupted daily routines among university students.

The thematic analysis inferred that loneliness among *rantau* students is significantly mediated by three interconnected variables: self-perception, communication ability, and emotional regulation. Participants who possessed a fragile self-concept, such as Citra, reported deeper levels of loneliness due to persistent fear of rejection (Atzendorf, 2022). Meanwhile, Aira's relatively adaptive coping style showed that self-efficacy and active engagement in productive activities can mitigate the emotional effects of isolation (Brett, 2023). Ferismaldy's case illustrated that cognitive withdrawal amplifies feelings of disconnection despite exposure to social opportunities.

Inferentially, these findings suggest that loneliness operates within an emotional feedback loop (Saralioglu, 2022). The lack of emotional reciprocity leads to cognitive self-blame, which then reinforces avoidance behaviors. Such avoidance perpetuates isolation, strengthening the perception of loneliness (Abshire, 2022). This cycle reflects Russell's loneliness model (1996), which conceptualizes loneliness as a discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships. The inferential insight from this study indicates that the degree of loneliness among *rantau* students in Gresik is determined not solely by environmental constraints but by internal personality mechanisms and perceived social acceptance.

A strong relational connection emerged between social adaptation and emotional well-being. Participants who managed to establish interpersonal stability, such as Aira through her workplace relationships, reported decreased intensity of loneliness (Tao, 2022). Conversely, participants like Citra and Ferismaldy, who experienced relational conflict and communication barriers, described more frequent emotional breakdowns and feelings of alienation. The presence of supportive peers functioned as an emotional buffer, highlighting the role of social validation in maintaining mental equilibrium.

The relational dynamics between loneliness and academic performance also appeared significant. Citra and Aira acknowledged that prolonged sadness and emotional fatigue interfered with concentration during lectures (Jiang, 2022). Ferismaldy, who tended to suppress his emotions, noted that his motivation declined drastically after experiencing conflict with peers. This relational pattern underlines that loneliness influences not only emotional states but also academic engagement, confirming earlier research by (Welch, 2023) on the impact of loneliness on psychological well-being and academic persistence.

Aira's case presented a gradual emotional transformation. Initially overwhelmed by homesickness, she learned to channel her feelings into productive routines. Her coping strategy involved balancing academic life and part-time work, which enhanced her self-reliance and reduced loneliness. She found emotional comfort through limited but meaningful friendships with co-workers, reflecting the role of occupational engagement in fulfilling social needs.

Citra's experience differed significantly. Her loneliness stemmed from a combination of social exhaustion and past emotional constraints imposed by strict parental upbringing. The lack of emotional freedom during childhood influenced her current social withdrawal and distrust of others. She preferred solitude to avoid potential conflict, yet paradoxically felt deeper emptiness as a result. Her narrative illustrated how early family dynamics shape adult emotional responses, reinforcing the psychosocial nature of loneliness.

Across all cases, loneliness appeared as a multilayered experience combining emotional, cognitive, and behavioral elements. The emotional dimension was dominated by sadness, insecurity, and yearning for acceptance. The cognitive aspect manifested through self-critical

thoughts and comparisons with others, while the behavioral component included withdrawal, avoidance of crowds, and reduced engagement in social events. The three participants shared a sense of ambivalence—seeking social connection yet fearing vulnerability.

The comparative interpretation between participants revealed that coping strategies vary depending on individual emotional regulation. Aira employed active coping, Citra relied on passive withdrawal, and Ferismaldy adopted intellectualization by immersing himself in hobbies such as reading comics and watching anime. These patterns demonstrate that loneliness does not manifest uniformly but is shaped by the interplay between personality traits and environmental adaptation. The diversity of responses highlights the complexity of loneliness as both a personal struggle and a contextualized social experience.

The overall findings illustrate that loneliness among *rantau* students in Gresik is an emotional and existential condition resulting from the disruption of familiar support systems and limited emotional reciprocity in new environments. Personality type and prior relational experiences significantly influence how students perceive and manage this loneliness. The adaptive capacity to engage in meaningful activities and form selective social bonds appears to serve as a key protective factor.

In synthesis, loneliness is not merely a symptom of isolation but a reflection of students' ongoing negotiation between independence and connection. The phenomenon embodies both vulnerability and growth, revealing that *anak rantau* students construct resilience through self-reflection, social awareness, and emotional regulation. These findings substantiate previous literature while offering a localized understanding of how loneliness evolves within the cultural and educational context of Gresik's higher education environment.

The results of this study reveal that loneliness among *rantau* (migrant) students studying at the Gresik campus is a multifaceted psychological experience influenced by emotional, social, and personality-related factors. The three participants—Aira, Citra, and Ferismaldy—illustrated distinct manifestations of loneliness shaped by their personal histories, communication patterns, and coping abilities. Aira experienced loneliness primarily due to the sudden separation from family, especially after her father left her alone in the boarding house, yet she gradually adapted through work and social engagement. Citra's loneliness was rooted in introversion, emotional fatigue, and distrust, which limited her capacity to form meaningful relationships. Ferismaldy's experience stemmed from his communication difficulties and social withdrawal developed during the pandemic, which led to sustained emotional detachment despite his exposure to campus activities.

The study further identified that loneliness produced tangible effects on the students' academic and emotional lives. Participants reported disturbances in sleep, appetite, and concentration, as well as decreased motivation and confidence. Emotional exhaustion after social interactions, overthinking, and a fear of rejection were common themes across participants. Loneliness also functioned as a cyclical phenomenon—feelings of isolation decreased social engagement, which in turn reinforced emotional emptiness. However, several students managed to mitigate these experiences by engaging in structured activities such as part-time work, joining organizations, and forming selective friendships. These findings emphasize that loneliness, while painful, can also foster adaptive growth when accompanied by self-awareness and coping strategies.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous empirical evidence suggesting that loneliness among university students emerges from the dissonance between expected and actual social connections (Russell, 1996; Saputri et al., 2022). Similar to the results of Magdalena, Sudagijono, and Mulya (2023), the current study shows that the absence of emotional support and limited family involvement significantly intensify the sense of isolation among *rantau* students. The role of familial emotional ties appears crucial, as Aira and Citra's narratives demonstrate how parental relationships—or the lack thereof—shape emotional

regulation and resilience. This reinforces the argument that familial communication functions as an emotional anchor in students' adaptation to new environments.

Distinct from some prior studies conducted in metropolitan universities, the participants in Gresik displayed loneliness more closely related to personality characteristics and regional cultural dynamics rather than to academic competition or digital isolation. The participants' experiences diverge from the digital-centered loneliness reported by Amna (2021), who emphasized *nomophobia* as a key contributor to student isolation. Instead, the students in this study experienced more direct emotional disconnection rooted in interpersonal trust and communication barriers. Moreover, while research by Pramitha and Astuti (2023) associated loneliness primarily with psychological well-being and motivation, this study extends the discourse by linking loneliness to cultural adaptation, self-acceptance, and the redefinition of social belonging within a regional academic setting.

The study also broadens the understanding of loneliness as not solely a negative experience but as a transformative emotional state. Whereas previous literature often focused on loneliness as a symptom of maladjustment, this study reveals that *rantau* students employ constructive coping mechanisms such as self-reflection, occupational engagement, and selective socialization. These strategies align with Febrianola's (2021) findings that coping strategies during stressful periods, including productive engagement and emotional reframing, serve as protective factors against psychological decline. The present study thus bridges micro-level emotional processes with macro-level cultural adaptation among Indonesian university students.

The findings indicate that loneliness among *rantau* students represents more than emotional distress—it is a reflection of identity reconstruction and psychological transition. The participants' narratives suggest that loneliness serves as an emotional marker of their efforts to renegotiate belonging, independence, and self-understanding in an unfamiliar social landscape. For Aira, loneliness symbolized a process of emotional maturity, evolving from dependence on family to self-reliance. Citra's experience reflected a struggle between the desire for connection and the fear of vulnerability, while Ferismaldy's loneliness revealed the long-term impact of disrupted communication development during adolescence. Collectively, these cases signify that loneliness functions as an indicator of emotional growth as much as it signifies psychological struggle.

From a broader perspective, loneliness can be interpreted as a mirror of societal and cultural expectations placed on young adults. The traditional Indonesian value of *kebersamaan* (togetherness) contrasts sharply with the individualistic demands of urban university life, creating a psychological dissonance for *rantau* students. The shift from communal familiarity to individual responsibility marks a cultural transition that challenges emotional stability. The findings thus highlight that loneliness, while deeply personal, is simultaneously sociocultural—emerging at the intersection of internal personality traits and external environmental conditions.

Furthermore, the participants' adaptive behaviors indicate that loneliness can serve as a catalyst for self-improvement. Aira's decision to work, Citra's selective trust-building, and Ferismaldy's intellectual coping through hobbies demonstrate self-regulatory responses that foster resilience. These patterns resonate with the concept of "functional loneliness," where solitude becomes a space for self-reflection rather than despair. Therefore, loneliness among *rantau* students may be reinterpreted as a developmental signal pointing toward emotional adaptation, identity consolidation, and the pursuit of meaning in solitude.

The implications of these findings are multidimensional, spanning educational, psychological, and institutional levels. For educational institutions, the results underline the importance of developing campus-based mental health programs that address emotional well-being alongside academic achievement. Universities in Gresik can implement peer mentoring initiatives and counseling services designed specifically for *rantau* students to facilitate social

integration and emotional resilience. Programs encouraging student collaboration through extracurricular or volunteer activities can help reduce feelings of isolation while fostering a sense of community.

For psychologists and counselors, the findings emphasize the need to approach loneliness not as a pathological disorder but as a contextual emotional response that requires empathy and understanding. Therapeutic interventions should focus on strengthening students' self-efficacy, communication confidence, and emotional literacy. Family involvement also remains a critical factor; maintaining consistent communication through calls, video chats, or virtual support can mitigate emotional distance. On a sociocultural level, the study suggests the importance of redefining *rantau* identity beyond hardship, viewing it instead as a journey of personal transformation and self-discovery.

From a research perspective, the findings call for the integration of emotional ecology in understanding student adaptation. The combination of personality traits, early-life socialization, and regional culture creates unique loneliness trajectories that should be explored in future studies. The Gresik context illustrates how urban-industrial environments intersect with traditional values, influencing students' coping mechanisms. Recognizing these factors can guide future policy on student welfare and inclusive education, ensuring emotional support systems align with cultural and individual needs.

The manifestation of loneliness among *rantau* students can be attributed to several underlying psychological and social mechanisms. The first factor is emotional displacement, wherein the absence of family and familiar relationships generates a void that students struggle to fill with new, less intimate connections. The second is the mismatch between personal communication styles and the social expectations of campus culture. Citra's introversion, for instance, made her vulnerable to exhaustion in group settings, while Ferismaldy's limited verbal confidence hindered his ability to maintain relationships. These interpersonal challenges magnify emotional isolation, validating Russell's (1996) proposition that loneliness is primarily a perceived relational deficit rather than an objective lack of contact.

Another explanatory factor is cultural incongruence. Students from smaller towns or rural areas, such as Brebes, Lamongan, and Bawean, enter the urban educational context of Gresik with different norms and interactional rhythms. The transition demands behavioral adaptation that may conflict with prior social conditioning. The contrast between collectivist upbringing and the relatively individualistic academic culture exacerbates emotional tension. Moreover, the pandemic legacy—characterized by prolonged isolation and reliance on digital interaction—has weakened interpersonal communication skills, especially among young adults like Ferismaldy. This combination of developmental, cultural, and situational factors explains the persistence of loneliness even in socially vibrant settings.

A further psychological explanation relates to self-concept and emotional regulation. Students with low self-esteem or unresolved familial conflict internalize loneliness as personal inadequacy, leading to self-blame and avoidance behavior. Conversely, individuals with better emotional awareness, like Aira, can transform loneliness into motivation for self-reliance. Thus, the study's findings reflect the interplay between internal psychological readiness and external social affordances. Loneliness, therefore, emerges as a dynamic construct that fluctuates according to the individual's emotional maturity and contextual adaptation.

Future interventions should prioritize emotional education and communication development among *rantau* students. Universities need to integrate psychological literacy programs within student orientation or personal development courses, emphasizing resilience, empathy, and interpersonal openness. Regular workshops on stress management, active listening, and emotional expression could significantly enhance students' coping capacity. Institutional collaboration with mental health practitioners can ensure sustained support systems, particularly for students showing signs of chronic loneliness or withdrawal.

The findings also imply the necessity for a more inclusive campus culture that values emotional well-being alongside academic excellence. Student organizations can play a key role in fostering belonging by creating peer networks sensitive to regional diversity. Mentorship programs pairing senior *rantau* students with newcomers may accelerate adjustment and minimize cultural dissonance. Additionally, incorporating digital counseling platforms may help introverted or time-constrained students access emotional support anonymously, bridging psychological gaps without fear of stigma.

From a scholarly standpoint, future research should adopt a longitudinal approach to track the emotional evolution of *rantau* students throughout their academic journey. Incorporating mixed-method designs combining qualitative interviews and psychometric measures could deepen understanding of how loneliness interacts with academic success, mental health, and cultural identity. Expanding the sample across different cities and institutional types would enhance generalizability while preserving the contextual richness observed in this study.

Overall, the findings underscore the need for empathy-driven educational environments. Recognizing loneliness not as a weakness but as a universal stage in personal growth enables both students and institutions to reframe solitude as an opportunity for reflection, self-knowledge, and resilience. The study thus offers not only theoretical contributions to the psychology of loneliness but also practical insights for nurturing emotional well-being in Indonesia's increasingly diverse higher education landscape.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this research lies in its revelation that loneliness among *rantau* (migrant) students in Gresik is not a static emotional state but a dynamic process shaped by individual personality traits, past relational experiences, and contextual adaptation. The three participants—Aira, Citra, and Ferismaldy—exhibited distinct emotional trajectories that illuminate the multidimensional character of loneliness. Aira's narrative portrayed a transformative experience where loneliness gradually evolved into self-reliance through work and social engagement. Citra's story reflected loneliness as an internalized struggle between the desire for connection and the fear of rejection, rooted in her introverted disposition and restrictive upbringing. Ferismaldy demonstrated how disrupted communication habits and prolonged isolation during the pandemic reinforced social withdrawal despite attempts at participation. These patterns collectively indicate that loneliness among *anak rantau* is both emotional and developmental, encompassing vulnerability, self-reflection, and identity formation within the sociocultural context of Gresik's academic environment.

The main contribution of this study lies in its conceptual and methodological advancement in understanding loneliness through a qualitative, narrative-based approach. Unlike quantitative studies that rely on numerical measurement, this research employs an interpretative framework grounded in lived experience and emotional expression. The integration of Russell's (1996) loneliness dimensions—personality, social disconnection, and depression—into the thematic analysis provided a holistic view of how internal and external factors intersect to shape students' emotional realities. Conceptually, the study expands the discourse on student well-being by framing loneliness not merely as a psychological deficit but as an adaptive stage of self-development. Methodologically, the use of verbatim transcripts from three distinct campuses in Gresik offered authentic, contextually rich insights into the intersection of culture, emotion, and education. This hybrid model of emotional and cultural interpretation contributes a new perspective to the field of cross-cultural psychology and higher education studies, especially within Indonesia's regional academic contexts.

The scope of this study is limited by its small sample size and focus on a single geographic area, which may restrict the generalizability of its findings. The qualitative design

emphasizes depth over breadth, meaning that the insights captured reflect individual realities rather than population-level patterns. Additionally, data collection relied heavily on self-reported narratives, which may be influenced by participants' current emotional states and memory biases. Future research should consider incorporating mixed-method designs that combine qualitative interviews with quantitative psychometric assessments to strengthen data validity and reliability. Expanding the study across different regions and educational settings would allow comparative analysis of cultural and institutional influences on loneliness. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to explore how loneliness evolves over time as rantau students progress through various academic and personal transitions. Further exploration of the role of digital communication, family dynamics, and social support systems could deepen understanding of how technological and relational factors mitigate or intensify loneliness among migrant students in Indonesia's changing educational landscape.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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