CHILDREN'S SOCIAL INTERACTION IN THE ADAPTATION PROCESS DUE TO PARENT'S JOB MOBILITY

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ABSTRACT

The study examines how parents' occupational mobility affects children's social relationships as they adjust to a new environment. Over 5.2 million people in Indonesia migrate between provinces to find work, of whom 36% have children under 18. Such a phenomenon leads to social and cultural adaptation problems for about 2.1 million children every year. Among the negative effects are difficulty with socialisation, loneliness, low self-esteem, and various developmental maladies, all of which stem from cultural, language, and communication differences in the new place. Results from the researcher's preliminary survey also confirm barriers to initial social interaction among children. Accordingly, this study uses constructive qualitative phenomenology to assess the social adaptation experiences of children of circular migrant workers. The data are collected through semi-structured online interviews with five informants (aged 20–22) based on specific criteria and are supplemented by observation and documentation. Data analysis follows the Miles and Huberman interactive model (collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion) with source validity triangulation. Research findings indicate that the social adaptation of children of circular migrant workers is mediated by the quality of parenting, which instills social values to guide adaptation; cognitive abilities, such as self-efficacy and cognitive flexibility; and active communication strategies. The children develop language and interactional adjustment patterns based on Interaction Adaptation Theory to achieve social synchrony while drawing social capital from peer networks and significant figures such as teachers and parents.

Keywords: interaction, child, adaptation, mobility

INTRODUCTION

Human movement is an element of the discourse on globalization that people regard as a macro-thematic issue because the rapid advancement of information and communication technology and transportation makes human mobility easier but also more complex to regulate (Yazid & Lie, 2020). People move for work, education, tourism, and, for many, a safer way of life. In Indonesia, the government institutionalizes mobility through formal mechanisms for movement and assignment. Under Regulation Number 5 of 2019 issued by the Indonesian State Civil Service Agency (SASN), the term transfer refers to a change of assignment and/or place to central

or regional agencies, including requests (BKN RI, 2019). To provide empirical evidence, in 2023, 60,363 civil servants are transferred, with the third quarter registering the highest number of transfers at 20,109 (BKN RI, 2024). These common trends also appear in the military, where in February 2024, TNI General Agus Subiyanto authorizes reassignments, promotions, and rotations involving 61 officers, consisting of 33 from the Army, 13 from the Navy, and 15 from the Air Force, as reported by Major General Nugraha Gumilar, Head of the TNI Information Center (Antara, 2024).

Traditionally, movement is defined by Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) as a transfer from or to one place, or as readiness to move; whereas, according to Rahayu et al. (2022), worker mobility

constitutes one form of population migration. The Central Bureau of Statistics (2023) defines migration as one of the vital elements of natural population growth—birth and death—mostly influenced by dynamic socioeconomic aspects. Worker mobility continues to grow in Indonesia. This trend persists, especially in sectors that require specific regional assignments, such as mining and construction, as well as the military and government (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). According to the 2023 Statistics on Population and Labor Mobility, more than 5.2 million Indonesians engage in inter-provincial movements for employment purposes. These moving households include children under 18 at a rate of 36% (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). As shown in Figure 1, mobility plays a significant role in shaping Indonesia's demographic patterns and economic transformation (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023).
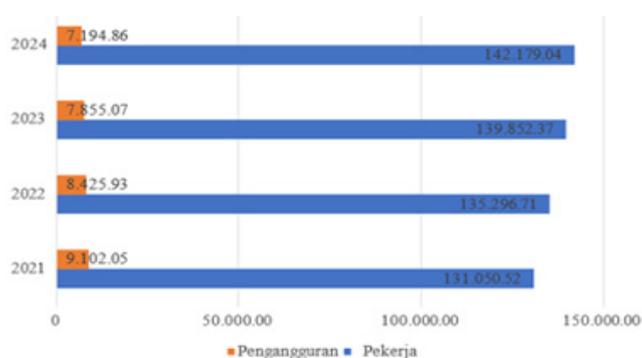

Figure 1 Labor Force Growth in Indonesia 2021 to February 2024

The modern world, now seen as a global village, is shaped by the expanding reach of information technology, communication, and transportation, with human mobility becoming increasingly important in this context. Not only do these facilities make it easier for people to move about, but they also make the art of living in mobility more complex (Yazid & Lie, 2020). People are highly mobile for many reasons, ranging from employment, education, and tourism to security considerations and almost anything else. On this continuum, one finds that transfers and postings of workers within the existing working community are frequent, as stipulated in Regulation No. 5 of 2019 issued by the Indonesian State Civil Service Agency (BKN RI, 2019). Data show high levels of movement and relocation among Indonesian civil servants, with 60,363 occurring in 2023 and peaking at 20,109 in the third quarter (BKN RI, 2024). The military also conducts reassignment; for example, in February 2024, 61 officers are reassigned, as reported by Antara (2024).

Significant changes occur in Indonesia's labor market since 2021, with the workforce increasing from more than 131 million to over 142 million, representing a rise of 7.83%. Meanwhile, the number of unemployed decreases from over 9 million to just above 7 million, amounting to a 20.95% reduction. Worker mobility also grows, rising from 2.5% of the total working population in 2021 to 2.8% in 2022 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). The number of workers occupying a specific region remains uncertain, as each region shows different mobility rates, including the Riau Islands, which record mobility rates of 5.8% in 2021 and 6.0% in 2022, positioning the region as one of the major destinations for relocating workers. In contrast, Banten records a very low mobility rate of 1.2%. Similarly, Papua records a mobility rate of 1.3%, indicating uneven patterns of labor mobility across the archipelago (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023).

Based on census data, migrants account for a larger percentage of the pattern illustrated above: of all Indonesians, 14.2% live in provinces other than their birth provinces due to lifetime migration. Such a phenomenon poses significant social problems, as children are among the most affected. Every year, nearly 2.1 million children change residence along with their families. At this stage, these children must transform their life systems to adapt to new cultural and social environments as they settle in their new homes. The journey often becomes an uphill battle for children's social integration and development, given the myriad cultural norms and social groups into which they must fit (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021).

Family life is affected by mobility, particularly when both parents work outside the home, as they spend limited time at home and have reduced opportunities to provide parental care and socialization that supports children's growth and development (Widyarto & Rifauddin, 2024). Understandably, social interaction forms the basis for reciprocal bonds among individuals or groups and remains central to the foundation and sustainability of social structures (Magara, 2025). In this regard, parental involvement is expected, as parents should not only provide for their children but also actively participate in their education, psychological development, and character formation. Parents are expected to facilitate learning at home, support children in overcoming academic challenges, and impart values that shape their children's growth and resilience (Adhani, 2019).

Social interaction serves as a means by which a human identifies within a family, workplace, school, community, and broader social spaces, and, by doing so, it deeply influences the internalization of social norms, interpersonal skills, and meaningful relationships. Social interaction shapes identities through verbal and non-verbal communication, enabling individuals to exchange ideas and emotions, offer support, and engage in conflict, which is inherent in the complex workings of social life (Ningsih, 2024). Early social interaction experiences, especially in childhood, are the most determinative because they span the formative stages of socialization and early functioning into the long term, shaping future capacities to participate and integrate (Silveira-Zaldivar et al., 2020). However, children of parents who move for work across distinctly

different regions often experience disruptions in these processes. Research shows that such children tend to have lower educational aspirations (Widyarto & Rifauddin, 2020) and face multifaceted challenges related to health, economic stability, family cohesion, moral and religious values, personal and social relationships, occupational adjustment, study habits, and even romantic experiences (Widyarto & Rifauddin, 2024). These outcomes remain largely unaddressed in structured guidance and counseling programs, indicating a critical gap in efforts to strengthen children's growth and resilience amid parental mobility.

Wider implications of migration extend beyond individual families, since migrant children are positioned within converging social, environmental, and political contexts that shape their autonomy and opportunities for participation. Comparative studies help demonstrate how these experiences vary due to national policies and societal attitudes. For instance, in Australia, although contemporary migration adds further layers of complexity, it remains influenced by historical legacies such as the rescinded "White Australia" policy and ongoing practices like boat repatriation, particularly in the post-COVID era, which coexists with an increasing reliance on migrants to sustain diversity across multiple sectors (Arndt et al., 2024). This paradox highlights the tension between restrictive migration policies and the simultaneous celebration of multiculturalism as a marker of national identity. These dynamics illustrate the complexities of how migration affects children, demonstrating how structural conditions and cultural narratives interact to construct opportunities for integration, participation, and social development.

Regarding Italian educators' beliefs about students with migrant backgrounds, Biasutti and Concina (2021) identify six major determinants of educational practice. These include how and for whom standard services are organized and delivered, programs and activities that build trust between migrant children and their parents, and teaching practices that address language barriers and ensure equitable outcomes for all students, among others. Educators value evaluation processes that involve families as a means of networking and promoting alternative educational options in classrooms with diverse student populations. These findings demonstrate that, despite persistent challenges, migrant children are entitled to and possess equal opportunities for personal and academic development within school environments (Biasutti & Concina, 2021).

From this educational perspective, the authors highlight the ethical complexities that naturally accompany qualitative research involving migrant children. To fully understand the lived experiences of vulnerable groups, researchers need to recognize the heterogeneity of migrant populations, the exploratory nature of qualitative inquiry, and the importance of ethically sensitive data collection. Evidence-based approaches serve as indispensable tools to prevent stigmatization and enable deeper insights into the social interactions of children whose parents engage in nomadic or highly mobile work. Previous studies consistently reveal adverse effects associated with parental job mobility, including findings that children experience limitations in their socialization processes (Goncalves, 2020). At the same time, research confirms that schools generally provide equal opportunities (Biasutti & Concina, 2021). Nevertheless, these children often experience alienation, leading to loneliness (Arndt et al., 2024) and disrupting the development of their life trajectories (Widyarto & Rifauddin, 2024).

The importance of recognizing and understanding children's migration phenomena is evident in this study, as their journeys frequently pose significant challenges in helping them establish themselves in new environments. A pilot survey conducted on October 4, 2024, involving two individuals, reveals cultural, language, and communication barriers as major hindrances to the social dimensions of early adaptation; consequently, conditions that should support relationship building are further constrained by these disadvantages. This study addresses a novel context of Indonesian worker mobility by examining its effects on children's social lives. Conducted in Bandung City through direct interviews, the case study focuses on a population that experiences frequent relocation due to parental job assignments.

METHODS

This study adopts a constructivist paradigm within a qualitative-phenomenological approach, viewing reality as being constructed through individual experiences. Its purpose is to explore the social interactions of children with circular worker parents as they adapt to new environments. Using in-depth interviews, the research seeks to capture participants' lived experiences and to reveal the essential meaning of adaptation, as guided by Burgoon's Interaction Adaptation Theory. The theory emphasizes how children negotiate mismatches between expectations, needs, and desires, with reciprocal communication adjustments fostering a sense of belonging, security, and social acceptance. The unit of analysis is children's social interactions as shaped by parental job mobility. The study involves five informants aged 20–22, all of whom experience relocation during childhood and possess documented evidence of frequent moves across cities or provinces.

Primary data are collected through semi-structured online interviews (conducted from Bandung), with source triangulation techniques applied to ensure data validity. Observation and documentation, including recordings and photographs, are used as supporting data to enrich and contextualize interview findings. In addition, the criteria for the informants are outlined in Table 1 below, providing

transparency regarding participant selection and strengthening the methodological rigor of the study.

Table 1 Informant Criteria

Type of Informant	Frequency
Key Informant	1. Being defined as under 18 years, this segment addresses contingencies in a new social context
	2. In the parents of any subject, the phenomenon of circularity of worker mobility is observed.
	3. Experiences are limited, so the informants' ages are capped at 28 years, suggesting the researchers included younger informants.
	4. Proof is, therefore, required to substantiate that the study subjects were mobile once their parents were transferred within their jobs.

This research is conducted in Bandung due to its proximity to the researcher's domicile, which facilitates data collection and processing. The selection of Bandung is also supported by the availability of strong digital infrastructure and a supportive academic environment, considering that this research is carried out under the auspices of Telkom University, which is likewise located in the city. Although most of the informants are located outside Bandung, the interviews are conducted online via video conferencing applications, ensuring that geographic location does not pose a technical obstacle.

Table 2 Informant Criteria

No	Name	Age	Domicile	Occupation
1.	Jasmine Nadea	20	Jakarta	Student
2.	Ajeng Oktavia	21	Bandung	Student
3.	Yasmin	21	Malang	Student
4.	Melvy	21	Malang	Student
5.	Safana	20	Yogyakarta	Student

The Miles–Huberman interactive model of data analysis is applied through four stages: (1) the collection of interview and observation data; (2) data reduction using hierarchical coding procedures, including initial, axial, and focused coding; (3) the presentation of data in the form of themes and subthemes; and (4) the formulation of conclusions. The validity of the data is established through source triangulation, which involves comparing the consistency of information across multiple data collection methods, such as interviews and observations, as well as across participants. This approach is adopted to obtain a comprehensive understanding of children's social adaptation. Furthermore, the list of informants who meet the predetermined criteria is presented in Table 2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

An analysis of interview data from five informants shows that parenting styles associated with work-related mobility vary according to factors such as family background, parental involvement, and the social conditions in the new environment. The informants, Ajeng and Jasmine, state that the observed parenting patterns tend toward emotional support. Ajeng narrates that her parents consistently encourage her and provide reassurance, advising her to be open and confident in social situations:

"My parents helped... gave encouragement and reassurance... to stay open and confident." (Ajeng, 2025)

Meanwhile, Jasmine adds that although her parents are busy, they still provide space for sharing stories. This suggests a delineation in parental support, where emotional validation remains strong despite limitations in physical presence or instrumental help. The parents' consistent verbal encouragement fosters a sense of capability in Jasmine, which contrasts with their limited availability for practical interventions. She shares personal reflections that illustrate how these verbal affirmations help her cope with challenges and maintain confidence during periods of adjustment, highlighting the emotional dimension of parental support in her experience:

"My parents were there for me, cheering me on and making me feel like I could do it." (Ajeng, 2025)
"My parents weren't called, so I handled it on my own. I told my mum and dad, but they were busy." (Jasmine, 2025)

This condition reflects a form of formal support through emotional presence and open communication, though its intensity varies across experiences. On the other hand, some informants emphasize the social values and core family principles that are instilled since childhood. Their parents teach the importance of politeness, openness, and the maintenance of harmony in social interactions. Melvy shares her experience to illustrate how these values guide her behavior and shape her interactions in new social environments, providing a concrete example of value-based parental influence:

"The first thing I was taught was to be polite… because being polite helps you get accepted." (Melvy, 2025)

Yasmin also notes that although her parents' direct involvement in parenting is limited, they continue to teach values such as shaking hands, avoiding harsh behavior or speech, and maintaining politeness in everyday interactions. This approach emphasizes the instillation of fundamental social and ethical principles rather than continuous direct supervision. Such minimal involvement is strategically designed to foster a high degree of autonomy, as long as the basic rules of social conduct are strictly observed. She states this perspective while reflecting on how these values guide her behavior in new environments, setting the context for her personal account:

"Parenting style: minimal involvement, taught independence; shake hands, be polite, don't be rude." (Yasmin, 2025)

These values serve as important capital in building new social connections in ever-changing residential environments. However, not all informants experience fully supportive parenting styles. Yasmin, for instance, reveals that she receives more significant support from her private tutor than from her parents:

"Private tutor was more supportive than school teachers in adapting." (Yasmin, 2025)

This highlights the limitations of formal family support, prompting children to seek alternative supportive figures to fulfill those roles functionally. On another note, informants such as Safana and Ajeng face cultural-linguistic gaps during the adaptation process. These difficulties often arise when informants are expected to integrate into extended families that use dialects or languages they do not learn in their immediate household. This lack of shared language acts as a significant barrier to establishing intimate connections and to accessing the cultural knowledge embedded within the extended family unit. Ajeng states:

"My father's family is from Kuningan, Sundanese, and my mother's from Cirebon... I don't speak Cirebonese." (Ajeng, 2025)

This condition creates barriers to forming initial social connections due to limited understanding of the local language, reducing children's confidence and complicating social acceptance within new groups. Some informants also describe internal coping strategies as responses to minimal parental involvement. Jasmine, as the eldest child, mentions that she tends to keep her feelings to herself:

"Maybe because I'm the oldest, I didn't want to burden others, like if I told my younger sibling—

at that time, they were still really little, what could they do? And if I told my parents, they were also busy with their own lives. So, I had to face everything by myself, and I learned how to deal with it… and tried to make sure no one else had to go through what I did." (Jasmine, 2025)

Melvy shares that she carries the impression of having been "passed around" and feels herself placed in unstable situations. This experience is emotionally challenging for her, making it difficult to be fully present during the adaptation process. As a result, she develops coping mechanisms to manage the stress and uncertainty involved:

"I used to be picked up by an ojek, and I felt like I was being tossed around, you know? Like being dropped off here, dropped off there… So I felt like from grade 3 to grade 5, I became a bit of a troublemaker, like I cried a lot and was kind of rebellious." (Melvy, 2025)

Children often respond to relocation by developing defense mechanisms, such as withdrawal or heightened emotional reactions. Yasmin shares that her parents help ease this process by preparing her mentally in advance. They offer guidance and describe the new environment in detail, which helps her adjust more smoothly and reduces uncertainty. She states this experience as part of her personal reflection:

"I faced the move with a pounding heart, but I enjoyed it because my parents taught me how to adapt. My parents only described the new environment, not their expectations." (Yasmin, 2025)

This type of parenting falls into the category of pre-adaptive anxiety and pre-adaptive information, which functions to reduce anxiety while shaping realistic expectations of the new environment. This strategy demonstrates that even in the absence of direct support, preventive parenting plays an important role in helping children prepare for social and cultural transitions. It also highlights how anticipatory guidance enables children to approach change with greater emotional readiness and cognitive awareness.

The preceding interviews suggest the potential development of a conceptual framework for parenting in the context of mobility. This concept is explained through a set of interwoven factors, including formal support, internal coping strategies, pre-adaptive anxiety and information, language gaps, and social values. The notion of parenting is further illustrated in Figure 2, which synthesizes these dimensions into an integrated analytical model and clarifies their dynamic relationships in shaping children's adaptive processes.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the interviews reveal that self-confidence, introspection, and the ability to account for diversity are core cognitive traits that affect children's adaptation patterns in shifting environments

shaped by structural and situational constraints. Such traits foster resilience and flexibility, enabling children to embrace periodic changes within social and cultural contexts. Jasmine states that she learns to adjust independently and becomes accustomed to life marked by mobility, explaining that self-confidence is not something she is born with but develops gradually through repeated social challenges. Her experience of forming friendships across racial and cultural boundaries demonstrates that confidence and resilience function as core elements of adaptation and social interaction. Likewise, Melvy notes difficulties in relating to peers, particularly following experiences of bullying or negative treatment, emphasizing her choice to turn inward through self-reflection while maintaining self-restraint and respect, even when facing harsh behavior. This process reflects an active engagement with empathy and character-building in unfamiliar social settings. Another strategy that emerges is self-defense, as Jasmine recounts her tendency to remain quiet and observe before engaging, involving a deliberate choice to stay under the radar in order to avoid conflict. In this sense, silence is not passive but functions as a constructive cognitive strategy that allows for safe situational assessment.

Jasmine's openness to cultural differences, meanwhile, draws on peer support, independent information-gathering, and a willingness to understand local norms as strategies to cope effectively. Her primary difficulty lies in acquiring certain local languages and cultural practices, though this limitation can be gradually addressed with the help of friends and sustained personal effort. Over time, these adaptive processes enable her to expand her social competence and cultural sensitivity in new environments. These narratives highlight how cognitive traits, reflective practices, and protective strategies interact to support children's adaptation, allowing them to integrate
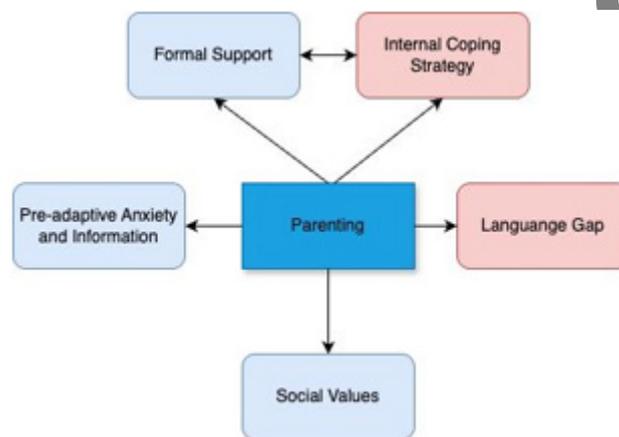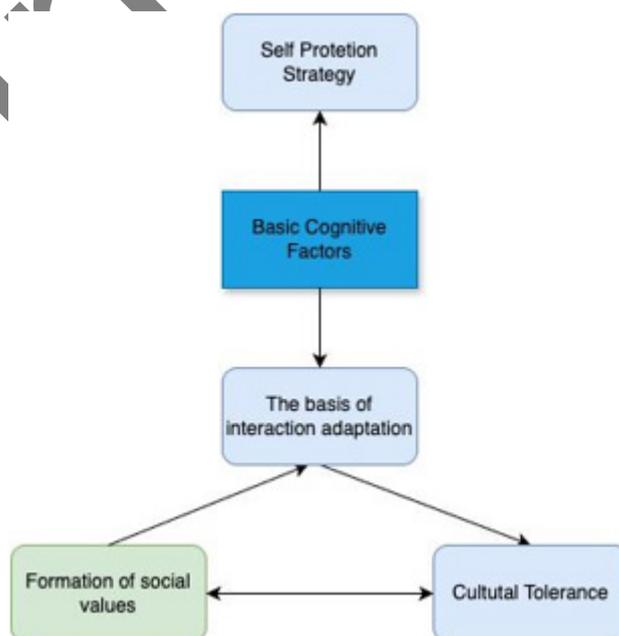

Figure 2 Parenting

Figure 3 Basic Cognitive Factors

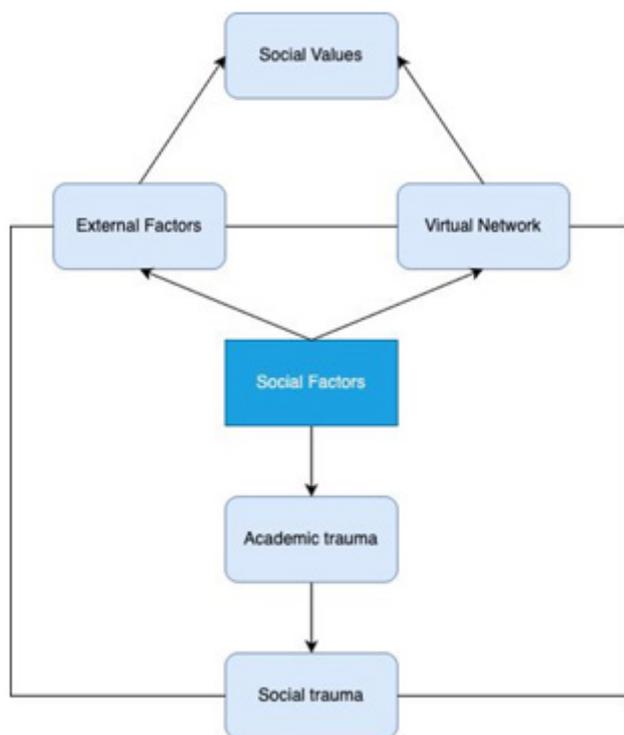into diverse settings while remaining resilient and developing new social values.

Figure 4 Social Factors

As indicated, such interviews show that children are involved in geographic mobility due to parental employment and that they rely on both cognitive and social factors to adapt to the new environment, as shown in Figure 4. These traits, as the informants assert, include self-confidence, reflective ability, and tolerance toward diversity, and they play a crucial role in shaping their adaptation strategies. Understanding these traits helps explain how children navigate challenges and integrate into unfamiliar social and cultural settings.

According to Jasmine, independent adjustment is facilitated in her case through moving and adapting to different cultures, as well as through a mature form of intercultural competence—her tolerance toward various cultural practices. Adaptation develops over time through adversity and through learning to appreciate differences that are not inherently primitive, according to these findings. Social factors also exert a strong influence, as informants narrate experiences of bullying, discrimination, and exclusion that shape their perceptions of belonging. Yasmin conceptualizes such acts as ostracism rather than outright bullying, situating them within broader debates about victimization. Peer support emerges consistently as a critical resource, with Melvy noting that adaptation accelerates due to acceptance from friends. Social media plays a role in maintaining connections with old friends, even if it does not always result in fully meaningful relationships. Interviewees demonstrate

awareness of social values and deliberately employ politeness and respect in their efforts to enhance their social image and secure acceptance within new peer groups.
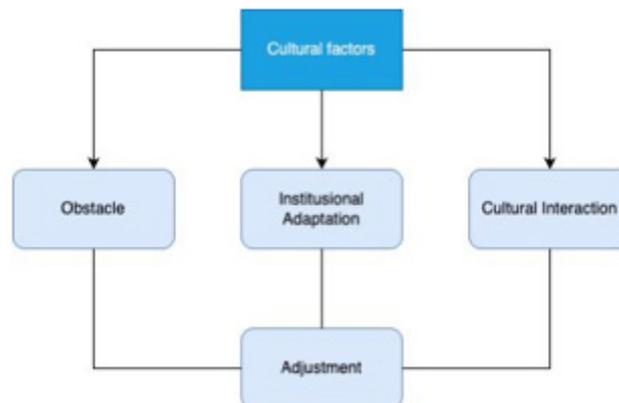

Figure 5 Cultural Factors

As seen in Figure 5, culture contributes to the complexity of adaptation. Informants report experiencing barriers such as language differences, unfamiliar accents, and institutional pressures to transfer schools in order to meet national educational requirements. These factors explain the transitional experiences and, in many cases, result in feelings of alienation when adjusting to a new culture. Nevertheless, Ajeng describes cultural barter as "the oddity of cultural exchange that turns into mutual learning." Moreover, participating in local traditions or festivals proves equally important for preventing misunderstandings and for bridging cross-identity understanding. Yasmin explains that adjusting to local lifestyles and norms, such as accepting offered food, symbolizes a readiness to embrace diversity. Overall, the adaptation process involves tackling social challenges, engaging in intercultural discourse, and embracing local values. Experiences of this kind, in turn, enrich children's perspectives and nurture flexible and inclusive identities capable of navigating multicultural environments, with support from peers, institutions, and family.

The study's findings indicate that three primary factors influence interaction adaptation among children who experience geographic mobility. The factors include the quality of parenting that instills social values to guide adaptation, cognitive abilities such as self-efficacy and flexibility, and active communication strategies. The development of language and interaction adjustment patterns in children is theorized as consistent with the Interaction Adaptation Theory, which aims to achieve social synchronization and effective interpersonal engagement.

Analysis of the informants' narratives shows that children's adaptation is strongly influenced by their ability to meet communication and interaction needs in a new social environment. As seen in Figure 6, one of the main aspects of this need is language and

communication adaptation. This process often involves learning the local language. When the intensity of adaptation becomes too exhausting, informants tend to use Bahasa Indonesia as a neutral language.
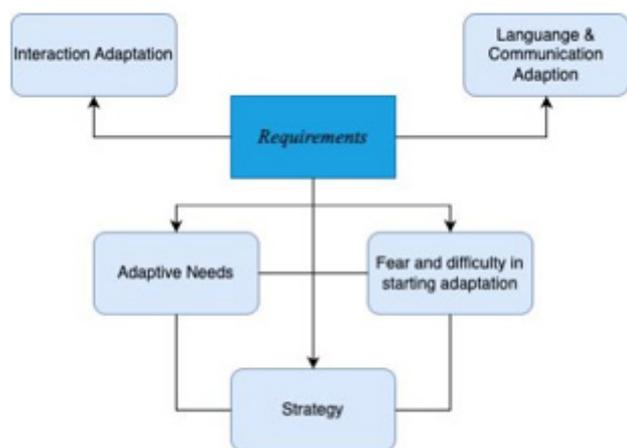

Figure 6 Requirements

Analysis of the informants' narratives shows that children's adaptation is strongly influenced by their ability to meet communication and interaction needs in a new social environment. As seen in Figure 6, one of the main aspects of this need is language and communication adaptation. This process often involves learning the local language. When the intensity of adaptation becomes too exhausting, informants tend to use Bahasa Indonesia as a neutral language.

"I think I adapted in about a month, and to make communication easier, I just used Bahasa Indonesia with friends who were fairly fluent in it." (Ajeng, 2025)

Informants say they prefer to interact with peers who speak Bahasa Indonesia rather than local dialects, to relieve social pressure and feel more comfortable in their communication. Safana (2025) adds, *"When talking with college friends and they speak entirely in polite Javanese, I just go quiet and then say, 'Can you explain it in Bahasa Indonesia?' I don't really understand. Then they say, 'Oh, sorry, sure,' and over time, I get it. I just still can't speak Javanese; I only understand it."*

Language adjustment is regarded as an important stage in the integration process. Yasmin (2025) stresses the importance of respecting the setting's values rather than imposing one's own. She reflects, "I don't stick to just using the language I know. For example, at the time, I am fluent in Bahasa Indonesia, but I do not insist on using it all the time. I also speak Javanese— the language they understand. So maybe I am able to adapt because I try to blend in, and I really immerse myself in it at the time."

Social adaptation imposes emotional trials, especially on introverts. Jasmine (2025) observes, "I'm the kind of person who finds it hard, well not hard exactly, but I'd say I'm an introvert, so it's pretty difficult for me to connect with one friend to another." Such reflections emphasize the psychological side of adaptation, where personality traits determine how easily new relationships form.

Support systems become important for adaptation, with most family members, peers, and teachers serving as facilitators. According to Melvy (2025), "The one who helps the most is actually my tutor, more than my schoolteachers — my private tutor helps more because I feel like I have a study buddy, maybe because I miss having my mom around to accompany me in studying." Informants also indicate the development of the coping strategy of withdrawing from social situations to cope psychologically, as experienced by Ajeng. They state that for clear and polite communication, expressing their feelings, corrections, or criticism is much more helpful, thus highlighting intercultural communication competence as the basis for adequate adaptation. These statements are illustrated in Figure 7.

The analysis reveals that children entering new social environments often carry expectations of acceptance, interpersonal connection, and recognition of cultural values as part of their adaptation strategies. Informants indicate that they wish to be acknowledged without discrimination based on regional origin, accent, or culture, emphasizing openness and inclusion in educational settings. Ajeng (2025) explains that adapting naturally without imposing one's previous cultural identity is seen as the most effective way to gain acceptance.

Teachers and authority figures play a crucial role in facilitating adaptation and help children establish harmonious relationships. Informants report varied experiences, with some noting that while they have many acquaintances, they lack deeper connections. Jasmine (2025) notes that the absence of close friendships often leads to feelings of loneliness and reduced confidence in new environments, underscoring
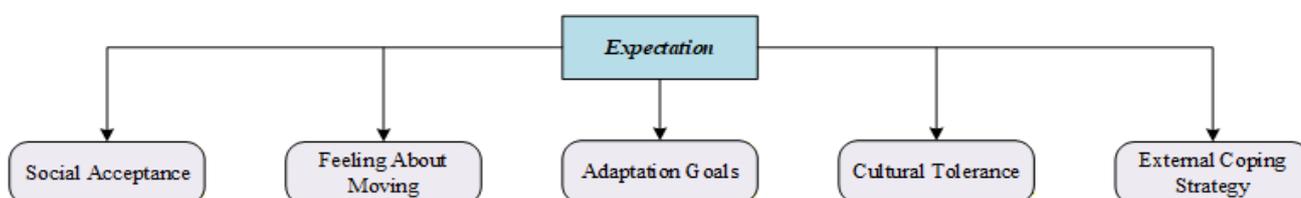

Figure 7 Expectation

the importance of supportive, meaningful social ties.

Ajeng (2025) describes that acceptance is also linked to the ability to form intimate relationships and a sense of belonging. Informants express that politeness in communication is regarded as a universal norm that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers, fostering smoother integration. At the same time, strategies such as engaging in side jobs are adopted to manage adaptation pressures, with Melvy (2025) noting that entrepreneurial activities provide both financial independence and confidence. These findings underscore how social expectations, supportive networks, and adaptive strategies collectively shape children's experiences in multicultural contexts.

Beyond this, there are communication strategies such as expressing opinions first to a few key individuals and then gradually presenting them to the group, thereby enabling the building up of social influence. This strategizing demonstrates active awareness of group dynamics and methodical engagement with the social structure. They test the waters with key figures, thus reducing the likelihood of outright rejection and positively framing their opinions before broad presentation. The children's expectations in the new environment can be seen as hopes for social openness, honest relationships, and a nurturing and tolerant atmosphere.
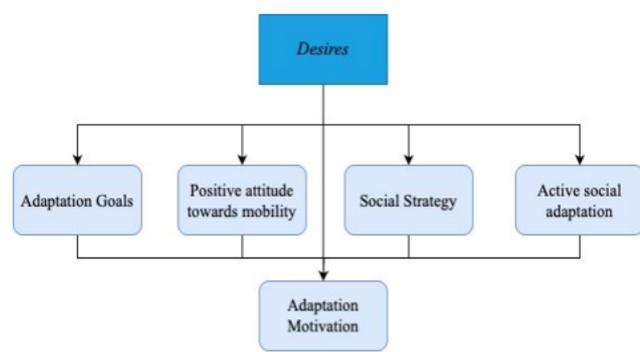

Figure 8 Desires

The results indicate that desires act as a direct catalyst for adaptation to new environments, as shown in Figure 8. The informants say their wants regarding intercultural adaptation go beyond mere survival, emphasizing the importance of appealing to social significance and pursuing meaningful, authentic social relationships. Within this context, the need to maintain support from old friends through social media is underlined as a means to reduce feelings of loneliness and keep alive communication established before the migration. Despite feeling lonely, Ajeng (2025) notes that social media is a strong tool for connecting with friends far away.

Social activities such as volunteer work and campus events are said to promote happiness and increase involvement. The informants state that these activities boost enthusiasm and receptiveness to making new friends, facilitating their adaptation.

Helping to establish a sense of place and connection for her are the book communities and volunteering with street children in Bandung, Yasmin (2025) states. Ajeng and other informants note that unconditional acceptance is critical to developing informal social relationships, and some express a preference for gregarious companions who act as ice-breakers and ease the adaptation process.

In the narratives, both internal and external motivations are evident in adaptation. Emotional reflection emerges as another key practice; informants learn patience, self-discipline, and the willingness to give in to others under adverse conditions. Peer support fosters a sense of belonging and acceptance, which Yasmin (2025) describes as vital for reinforcing social bonds. Such reciprocal interaction forms one of the building blocks of social ties.

Nevertheless, the adaptation goals expressed by these informants certainly extend beyond achieving momentary sociability. They aspire to create genuine, sustainable avenues for reconnecting with old friends and acquaintances in the current environment. This underscores the fact that adaptation is not just about integration into a new context; it is about deliberately nurturing enduring ties that contribute to an ongoing experience of social and emotional well-being.

The study highlights that despite limited emotional support, the quality of parent-child emotional communication remains intact. Hockenbury (2018) emphasizes that cognitive processes such as perception and self-reflection are vital for understanding social behaviour and adapting to new environments. Findings reveal that geographic mobility and family background significantly shape parent-child relations, underscoring that the strength of these bonds extends beyond interaction frequency. The research affirms the importance of emotional quality in relationships, particularly under constraints. Parenting practices that instill social values such as politeness and independence serve as a moral compass, guiding children's adjustment to new social contexts.

As Jin (2023) indicates, authoritative parenting is characterized by warmth and structure. It is associated positively with children's social adjustment and relationships with others in contexts that do not readily relate to family. The attributes of this kind of parenting constitute social values that allow children to develop their citizenship in new groups more effectively (García & Heckman, 2023). Whether occupational mobility limits physical closeness, however, it does not touch the essence of what sustains relationships, namely, the quality of communication, which can be direct or virtual. In addition, limited parental involvement provides more opportunities for adaptation through teachers, peers, and children's own coping mechanisms, such as emotional and cognitive self-regulation.

Family support may be limited in its application, but internal coping strategies, including self-compassion, are effective in addressing stress arising from family limitations (Khoirunnisa et

al., 2023; Ewert et al., 2024). Such strategies may, however, also increase the risk of emotional isolation or oppositional behavior. Pre-adaptive parenting, such as equipping children with realistic information about new environments, is vital for reducing anxiety and building confidence (Compas et al., 2001). According to Bandura, as emphasized by Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al. (2025), self-reflective capability is essential for evaluating experiences and adapting to new situations, a pattern evident among these children.

Factors internal to cognition, like self-confidence, self-reflection, and flexibility, remain pivotal to successful social adaptation (Hockenbury, 2018). Self-efficacy among children increases with cumulative experiences of surmounting social barriers that they encounter (Barkhordari-Sharifabad et al., 2025). Meanwhile, cognitive flexibility empowers children to perceive diversity holistically by appreciating multiple viewpoints that inform their new values, as demonstrated by Melvy's inner conversations. Private speech, as discussed by Jiang et al. (2025) and Mengxia (2024), supports self-control and empathy across cultures. Protective strategies, such as remaining under the radar at first, introduce the cognitive adaptations that become most effective in minimizing conflicts and accelerating cultural integration.

Ultimately, social adaptation determines an individual's capacity to adjust among children exposed to pressures such as academic work, discrimination, or violence. As cited in Martinez-Yarza et al. (2024), Bronfenbrenner states that direct interaction between family and school microsystems is necessary for adaptive development. The effects of peer support, which, according to the literature, substitute for strength through vicarious learning, can also counterbalance stressors such as bullying or unreasonable demands, which reduce an individual's confidence (Padilah & Afhiani, 2024). Further research shows that positive social-environmental adjustment is associated with higher academic performance and emotional well-being, whereas a negative social environment breeds aggression and hinders adjustment (Azpiazu et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2024). Those who master readjustment appear resilient and demonstrate lower aggression, a measure of social competence that helps them navigate new environments.

Burgoon's Interaction Adaptation Theory, as discussed by Morissan (2024), emphasizes that interpersonal communication is dynamic and synchronous, shaped by requirements, expectations, and desires (RED). These factors determine how individuals adapt to social interactions, particularly in unfamiliar environments. The findings indicate that children actively adjust their communication patterns in response to social dynamics, often using language strategically to achieve balance. Ajeng, for instance, employs Indonesian as a bridging language while simultaneously learning the local dialect, reflecting the principle of interactional synchrony in which communicative behaviors mutually influence one another. Similarly, Yasmin stresses that understanding the local language is essential for acceptance, while Jasmine reports that within weeks, she begins to grasp both formal and informal communication patterns. Such adjustments highlight that adaptation is not merely linguistic but also a strategic effort to gain social inclusion.

Adaptation further involves modifying intonation, language choice, and conversational topics to foster socially acceptable interactions. Yasmin blends Indonesian with Javanese to avoid barriers, exemplifying communication synchrony. Other children adopt social strategies such as observing their environment before initiating interaction and striving to integrate into peer groups. Nevertheless, challenges such as fear of isolation or difficulty making friends are also reported, particularly among those with diverse backgrounds or frequent school changes. These emotional states underscore the risks inherent in adaptation and the potential obstacles to successful adjustment (Morissan, 2024). Teachers and parents thus play pivotal roles in fostering acceptance and safety, while communication skills remain fundamental for building and sustaining relationships. Healthy coping strategies, including social support, reduce burnout and enhance resilience (Doolittle, 2021). Children's expectations extend beyond general acceptance to encompass interpersonal relationships, cultural values, and survival strategies in navigating social pressures.

The desire for acceptance without discrimination based on origin, accent, or culture aligns with the principles of multicultural education. Nainggolan and Nababan (2024) argue that multicultural education promotes tolerance and combats discrimination through collaborative projects that instill respect for diversity. Synchrony in interaction is reflected in relational patterns built upon expectations of inclusion. Safana, for example, prefers extroverted peers to ease conversational initiation and establish compatible rhythms. Supportive teachers are seen as instrumental in creating harmonious relationships and equitable school climates (Latifah et al., 2023). Despite broad social networks, some children report lacking deep, supportive friendships, underscoring the need for meaningful relationships. This aspiration is consistent with the development of interpersonal intelligence, which Tualaka (2023) identifies as vital for shaping character and social adaptation.

Politeness norms are also emphasized as crucial in multicultural contexts, helping overcome linguistic and cultural differences while maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict. Some children pursue part-time jobs, which provide income, boost confidence, and enhance psychological well-being (Rubin et al., 2024). When expectations are unmet, adaptive strategies such as withdrawal, distancing, or changing schools are employed, reflecting interactional adjustment mechanisms that recalibrate communication rhythms (Gasiorek et al., 2021). Children's desire to form authentic relationships suggests that adaptation is

affective as well as functional, tied to emotional synchrony in communication (Hoehl et al., 2021). Reciprocity in social support, as Yasmin describes, strengthens belonging, while Melvy's withdrawal strategy illustrates recalibration for stability. Mutual adaptation, as Shiiku and Takeuchi (2024) note, requires reciprocal adjustment rather than dominance, with language serving as an adaptive partner. Support from old friends and social media reduces loneliness and accelerates adaptation, while proactive strategies such as offering help and initiating conversations reflect reflective attitudes and respectful communication. Ultimately, children value not the frequency but the quality and authenticity of interactions, underscoring the centrality of meaningful social connectedness in adaptation.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigates the adaptation modes of children affected by their parents' work-related mobility, focusing on the influences of parenting styles, cognitive skills, social environments, and cultural contexts. It finds that supportive parenting fosters values and a readiness in children, enhancing their self-reflection, confidence, and openness, which are essential for adapting to change. Key elements such as peer support, flexible communication strategies, and social media use are identified as critical for maintaining connectivity during transitions. This dynamic interaction helps children integrate their original identities with the new cultural environment through culturally engaging communication.

The findings highlight that children's adaptation is a dynamic, multifaceted process influenced not only by family and cognitive factors but also by social networks, peer interactions, and culturally responsive strategies. Children actively negotiate their identities, employ flexible communication approaches, and draw on both traditional and digital support systems to navigate new environments. These insights emphasize that adaptation is not a linear process; it involves continual reflection, trial-and-error, and recalibration in response to social and cultural cues. Recognizing these complexities provides a nuanced understanding of how supportive structures and individual strategies interact to facilitate successful adjustment.

The limitations noted in this study include the relatively small sample size, which inherently limits the ability to generalize the findings broadly to larger or more diverse populations. Additionally, the use of semi-structured interviews as the primary methodology contributes to these limitations. The nature of this qualitative methodology, while offering depth, poses challenges in achieving high external validity and reliability outside of the specific research context. Therefore, these limitations indicate the need for caution when applying the conclusions of this study to different environments or demographic groups.

Future research should address current methodological limitations by using larger, more diverse samples to improve generalizability. Researchers are also encouraged to use alternative methodologies, such as participant observation or ethnography, to provide a richer, more contextual understanding of children's adaptation dynamics. Substantively, further investigation could examine the role of social media in the adaptation process and the relationship between interactional adjustment and psychological well-being, ideally using a longitudinal mixed-methods design for in-depth analysis over time.

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