




The Role of Subnational Migration in Fulfilling Higher Education Aspirations and (Re)shaping Contemporary Youth Identity

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Abstract. This research examines how East Java students perceive, negotiate, and construct their identities at UNESA, elucidating the interconnections between cultural heritage, educational aspirations, and social integration. To address gaps in the existing literature, this study examines students' life experiences and identity narratives to understand how they reconcile their cultural roots with the demands of higher education in an urban environment. This research employed a qualitative methodology, phenomenological approach, and collected data through an online survey with open-ended questions and in-depth interviews. Participants provided personal narratives and reflections, which were recorded with consent for accuracy. Thematic analysis revealed recurring patterns and themes, offering a comprehensive understanding of identity construction at UNESA. The findings are presented in the form of narrative descriptions, which highlight the complexity and diversity of identity experiences among East Javanese students. The objective of this research is to inform educational policies and practices that support the holistic development of students and encourage regional and national cohesion in Indonesia.

Keywords: Youth Mobility, Internal Migration, Higher Education, Multifaceted Identities, Social Geography

1 Introduction

The ambition to improve one's quality of life through mobility is a widespread phenomenon [1]. This view is prevalent across all levels of society, from young individuals in urban centers to those in more remote areas. It is an aspiration shared by those seeking to enhance or secure their prosperity, as well as by those attempting to escape difficulties and resource scarcity through higher education [2], [3], [4]. While the relationship between migration and education has been thoroughly explored, there is a notable lack of in-depth research on the personal perspectives of young migrants and their influence on forming contemporary identities [5], [6].

Migration can be classified into three principal categories: permanent, circular or commuting migration. Sukamdi posited that this classification would be more useful,

particularly in examining the socio-economic circumstances of migrants, if migration is conceptualised as a process [7]. From an empirical perspective, Rijanta posits that population movement is an indicator of developmental disparities between regions. The issue of youth mobility, as addressed in this research, is founded upon theoretical and empirical challenges pertaining to the interconnection between migration and education. This research employs the definition of circular migration to elucidate the mobility patterns of young people [4]. A number of studies have examined the relationship between migration and education in Indonesia [2], [3], [8]. Nevertheless, the spatial process by which young people construct identities through their mobility in pursuing higher education remains a relatively understudied area of enquiry. The objective of this research proposal is to address this gap in the existing literature.

In the context of Indonesia's diverse cultural landscape, higher education institutions play a pivotal role in shaping students' identities as they navigate through academic pursuits and cultural transitions. East Java, renowned for its cultural richness and regional diversity, presents a dynamic backdrop where students from various ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds converge in the urban environment of Surabaya for their university education. The city of Surabaya, which is renowned as the City of Heroes, boasts an impressive concentration of universities, with the 2023 data from the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency indicating that there are 64 private universities and 6 state universities in the city [9]. This makes the city a significant educational hub, attracting young prospective students from various regions of Indonesia to pursue higher education opportunities.

Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA) serves as a significant educational institution in East Java, attracting students not only for its academic excellence but also as a hub for fostering regional and national development through education. Understanding how East Javanese students perceive, negotiate, and construct their identities within the context of UNESA is crucial for comprehending the intricate interplay of cultural heritage, educational aspirations, and social integration. This research explores the multifaceted dimensions of identity among East Javanese students at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA). The research aims to illuminate the diverse pathways through which identity formation occurs among students in East Java. This study seeks to foster a deeper understanding of identity dynamics in Indonesian higher education contexts, thereby contributing to broader discussions on educational equity, cultural integration, and regional development. Through its empirical findings and theoretical contributions, this study seeks to enrich discussions on the role of higher education in promoting regional development and advancing inclusive prosperity in Indonesia's diverse and dynamic landscape.

2 Method

This article uses phenomenology to explore the cultural transition experiences of migrant youth [10], [11]. By employing descriptive psychological phenomenology, the study aims to deeply understand the lived experiences of adolescents who attend UNESA back and forth from their hometown. Data was collected through survey

with an open ended question. This method captures the youths' subjective and nuanced perspectives, offering insights into the complexities of their identity formation and the impact of migration on their development [10].

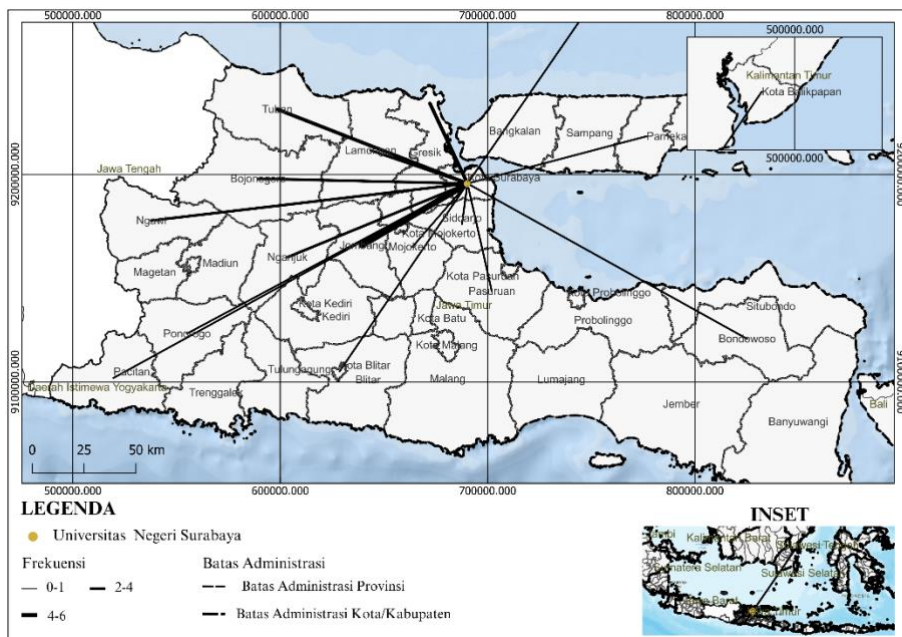


Fig. 1. The origin of students studying at the State University of Surabaya

A total of 25 students at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences are currently participating in the study. The data collection process entails the administration of an online survey and (then followed) conduct of in-depth interviews, guided by an interview guideline developed to explore key themes related to identity. Additionally, data triangulation is employed [12], [13]. The participants are invited to share their personal narratives, reflections, and insights, which are recorded with their consent in order to ensure accuracy and thoroughness. Thematic analysis is employed to identify recurring patterns, themes, and narratives within the data, facilitating a comprehensive understanding [14], [15], [16]. In particular of how East Javanese students construct and negotiate their identities amidst the educational environment at UNESA.

The research findings will be presented through narrative descriptions that highlight the complexity and diversity of identity experiences among East Javanese students. This study aims to contribute valuable insights into identity dynamics within higher education settings, informing educational policies and practices that support holistic student development and promote regional and national cohesion in Indonesia.

3 Result and Discussion

Identity formation among East Javanese students at Surabaya State University (UNESA) is a multifaceted process influenced by cultural heritage, educational aspirations, social interactions, personal values and global perspectives. East Java, known for its cultural diversity and rich traditions, provides a dynamic backdrop where students from cities such as Mojokerto and Sidoarjo converge on Surabaya, seeking academic advancement and cultural integration. The dual identities of these students reflect their efforts to navigate between their local roots and the cosmopolitan environment of the university.

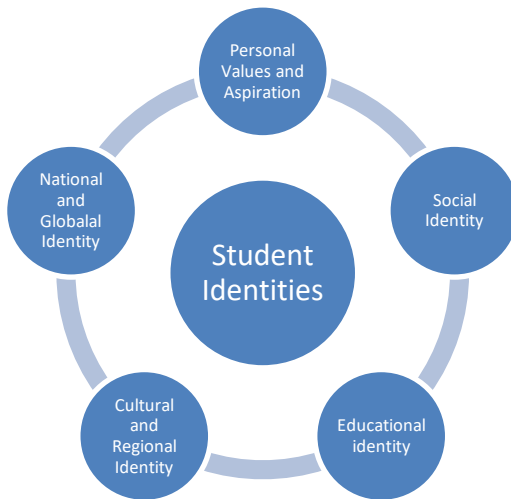


Fig. 2. Illustration of the constructed student multifaceted identities

Cultural and Regional Identity

A student from a rural village in Lamongan, East Java, moves to Surabaya to study Geography Education. While preserving their Javanese cultural identity, they immerse themselves in Surabaya’s urban lifestyle. They participate in cultural events that blend traditional Javanese arts with contemporary architectural trends, reflecting a hybrid identity that integrates local heritage with urban influences.

I usually bring a lot of fruit after returning home, so I will distribute it to my boarding house neighbors, in the form of pieces of fruit or cakes that I bring from home. Although I myself do not know exactly how old they are or younger. However, I feel that the culture of my hometown is very important to be preserved if it has a good impact on us.

(Female, 19 years old)

Educational Identity

A student from Tuban explains her favorite course during her two years study at the Department of Geography Education.

The most favorite course in semester 4 is, Social and Physical Landscapes. I learned many new things when I taught the course.

(Female, 20 years old)

Beside explaining the highlight of their study experience. Another student from Bondowoso also explain a challenging aspect that he sees shaping his growing character.

The interesting experience gained when making a project is to be able to directly display the work of students to the wider community, so that it becomes a matter of pride for us after being able to complete the project

(Female, 20 years old)

Social Identity

A student from Blitar joins a student organization. Through outreach programs of sport at the university. This experience nurtures a social identity centered around student extracurricular activities.

When a futsal event was held by the UNESA ormada in February, I decided to join and was selected to be the event organizer. In this fairly large event, I learned a lot of new things related to sports and futsal, of course, and I got a lot of relationships that were not even from the UNESA Ketintang campus but also the UNESA tongue wetan campus.

(Female, 20 years old)

Personal Values and Aspirations

A student from Pacitan pursues Geography Education. She is motivated by her previous failure entering her targetted department, and got accepted in the current program instead:

I have indeed had the desire to study at unesa since I was in the 12th grade of high school. Starting from SNBP and SNBT, I registered myself in options 1 and 2 at Unesa with my first choice study program being at FIP and my second choice being at FBS, but no one graduated from either of the options. When I was given the opportunity to register independently, I tried to enroll in another study program and yes, I was accepted in Geography Education. Even though it turns out that studying in a major is not my dream. I am grateful to have made very good friends in geography and I can learn new things about geography more broadly. Exciting

(Female, 20 years old)

Another Student from Gresik explains that her aspiration to be a geography teacher

To be honest, when asked about my goals, I was confused and didn't know what the answer was. But because I am studying in education, I will focus more on becoming a geography teacher, but if I don't become a teacher, maybe

I can open a food business because I also like to cook even though it is very far from the study program that I am currently taking, but it doesn't hurt to try.

(Female, 20 years old)

National and Global Identity

A student from Bojonegoro explains that even though she never been joining an international program. She nevertheless enjoyed a lecture from a visiting scholar from abroad. This experience has broadened her knowledge.

I have never attended an international event in person, but for a webinar I have and it has managed to open my eyes to the topics discussed.

(Female, 19 years old)

A student at the Social Science Education program said that being engage in an international program has brought her an enrichig new experience.

Once, adding new experiences and being able to meet people who are very experienced.

(Female, 19 years old)

Another student from Pamekasan, studying at the Public Administration program expounds that though she never been actively engage in an international program, but she has deep impression on the foreign lecturer that has taught her,

Webinar with foreign lecturers. Outside of the material, the lecturer felt happy to be able to interact with Indonesian students because Indonesia is rich in culture, language and other diversity.

(Female, 19 years old)

These research findings illustrate how youth from and outside Surabaya, UNESA students, navigate migration for higher education to develop identities that are shaped by cultural, educational, social, personal, and global influences. Each case study reflects the dynamic interplay between local roots and global perspectives, contributing to the diverse tapestry of identities within Indonesia's educational landscape.

Multifaceted Youth Identities

The formation of identity among the students at Surabaya State University (UNESA) is a complex and multifaceted process, shaped by an interplay of cultural heritage, educational aspirations, social interactions, personal values, and global perspectives. East Java, celebrated for its cultural diversity and rich traditions, provides a vibrant setting where students from cities such as Gresik, Pasuruan, Mojokerto and Sidoarjo converge in Surabaya, aspiring for academic achievement and cultural integration. These students' dual identities exemplify their efforts to reconcile their local heritage with the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the university, reflecting a continuous negotiation between their indigenous roots and the broader global influences they encounter in their academic environment.

Educational identity plays an important role in shaping the way East Javanese students perceive themselves at UNESA. For example, a student from Jombang taking Geography Education exemplifies this aspect through active involvement in peer mentorship and educational research projects aimed at improving education standards in back in his hometown in the future. These experiences not only enhanced their academic skills but also shaped their identity as future educators committed to regional development through education. Such aspirations underline the transformative role of higher education.

Social identity among East Java students at UNESA is closely intertwined in their participation in campus life and community activities. Students from Sidoarjo often take leadership roles in the Student Extracurricular, advocating for student welfare and organizing events that promote cultural diversity and social inclusion. This involvement fosters a sense of responsibility and leadership among peers, basing their social identity on community service and representation.

Personal values and aspirations significantly influence the identity trajectories of East Javanese students at UNESA, guiding their decisions and commitment within the university environment. For example, student from Jombang demonstrated a strong commitment to sustainability through active participation in local environmental initiatives and partnerships. Their involvement in projects that address regional environmental challenges reflects a personal identity rooted in environmental stewardship and community empowerment. These experiences contribute to the development of their holistic identity, integrating personal values with academic activities to promote sustainable practices and regional prosperity.

Moreover, the internal migration of students to Surabaya to continue higher education at UNESA provides an opportunity to grow national and global identity. A student from Central Java who took part in an international exchange program to Malaysia is an example of this global perspective. Though this case remains few among the key informants, this experience broadens their identity as global citizens while fostering aspirations to contribute to Indonesia's global engagement and advocate for East Java's interests on international platforms.

Regional Development Promotion

The research highlights the importance of preserving and celebrating the rich cultural diversity of East Java within the university community. This promotes inclusivity and mutual respect for diverse cultural backgrounds, enriches the learning environment through intercultural exchange and collaboration, and fosters a stronger sense of belonging among students. Insights from this research shed light on how university students in East Java perceive and contribute to regional development initiatives. By understanding their career aspirations, skills development needs, and community engagement, UNESA and similar institutions can forge effective partnerships with local industries, government agencies, and community organisations. This collaboration supports sustainable development in East Java, driving economic growth, infrastructure development and improved social welfare.

The study findings provide a basis for advocating policy modifications and institutional reforms that facilitate comprehensive student development at UNESA.

Recommendations include augmenting financial support for academic programmes, enhancing access to higher education for underprivileged groups, and reinforcing collaborations between academic institutions, government bodies, and the private sector to effectively address regional and national development objectives.

4 Conclusion

Identity formation among the students at Surabaya State University (UNESA) is a multifaceted process influenced by cultural heritage, educational aspirations, social interactions, personal values, and global perspectives. This discussion highlights how each dimension contributes uniquely to students' identity development in the university context, reflecting their diverse backgrounds and aspirations. By exploring these dimensions, this discussion contributes to understanding the complex interactions between factors that shape young people's identities in higher education in Indonesia, offering insights into educational policies and practices that support holistic student development and contribute to regional and global progress.

The mobility or the internal migration of students to institutions such as UNESA plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of East Java. This is achieved by fostering a dynamic educational environment, regional integration and the development of skilled labour, which in turn drives sustainable development. The influx of students from diverse backgrounds has resulted in an increase in cultural diversity in East Java, thereby strengthening the intellectual capital of the region and expanding its capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship. By capitalising on the collective talents and aspirations of its student body, UNESA has played a pivotal role in the emergence of East Java as a hub for academic excellence, economic growth, and cultural vibrancy. The discussion emphasises the transformative impact of migration on regional development, establishing East Java as a model for innovation, opportunity and inclusive prosperity in Indonesia.

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