

ADAPTIVE DISSONANCE AND IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION IN INTRA-INSTITUTIONAL STUDENT TRANSFER: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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INFO ARTIKEL	ABSTRAK
<i>Sejarah Artikel: (Diisi Editor)</i> Diterima: 02 Februari 2026 Direvisi: 21 Februari 2026 Disetujui: 25 Maret 2026 Tersedia Daring: 30 April 2026 Kata Kunci: <i>Disonansi adaptif; Fenomenologi transcendental; Perpindahan intra-institusi; Rekonstruksi identitas Kata; Transisi Pendidikan</i>	Perpindahan santriwati dalam institusi yang sama merupakan bentuk transisi pendidikan yang unik namun masih jarang dikaji dalam literatur mengenai adaptasi dan perkembangan identitas peserta didik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap pengalaman hidup santriwati yang mengalami perpindahan intra-institusi dengan fokus pada munculnya disonansi adaptif (adaptive dissonance) dan proses rekonstruksi identitas. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologi transendental. Tujuh partisipan dipilih secara purposif berdasarkan pengalaman perpindahan antar-kampus dalam institusi yang sama. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan tahapan fenomenologi berupa horizontalisasi, pengelompokan tema, penyusunan deskripsi tekstural dan struktural, serta sintesis makna pengalaman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan empat tema utama, yaitu: (1) disonansi adaptif yang muncul akibat benturan antara kompetensi yang telah terinternalisasi dengan norma lokal kampus tujuan; (2) status sebagai individu terpilih yang dimaknai sebagai privilese, tekanan, sekaligus amanah; (3) rekonstruksi identitas melalui negosiasi peran ganda sebagai senior dan pendatang baru; serta (4) proses pemaknaan yang mengubah disorientasi emosional menjadi pertumbuhan diri dan ketahanan psikologis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa keberhasilan adaptasi tidak hanya ditentukan oleh kemampuan menyesuaikan perilaku, tetapi juga oleh kemampuan membangun kembali identitas dan memaknai pengalaman transisi secara konstruktif. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini menawarkan konsep disonansi adaptif sebagai kontribusi baru dalam kajian transisi pendidikan. Secara praktis, temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya dukungan institusional dalam memfasilitasi adaptasi psikososial dan pengembangan identitas santriwati pindahan intra-institusi.
Keywords:	ABSTRACT
<i>Adaptive dissonance; Educational transition; Identity reconstruction; Intra-institutional transfer; Transcendental phenomenology</i>	<i>Student transfer within the same institution represents a unique educational transition that remains underexplored in the literature on student adaptation and identity development. This study aimed to investigate the lived experiences of students undergoing intra-institutional transfer, focusing on the emergence of adaptive dissonance and the process of identity reconstruction. Employing a qualitative approach using a transcendental phenomenological design, the study involved seven purposively selected participants who had relocation between campuses within the same educational institution. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and analyzed using phenomenological procedures including horizontalization, thematic clustering, textural-structural description, and synthesis of meaning. The findings revealed four interconnected themes: (1) adaptive dissonance arising from tensions between previously internalized</i>

competencies and localized institutional norms; (2) the experience of selected status as a simultaneous source of privilege, pressure, and responsibility; (3) identity reconstruction through negotiation of dual roles as senior students and newcomers; and (4) a meaning-making process that transformed emotional disorientation into personal growth and resilience. The study found that successful adaptation was rooted not merely in behavioral adjustment but in participants' ability to reconstruct their identities and derive meaning from transitional experiences. Theoretically, the study introduces adaptive dissonance as a novel construct within educational transition research. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of institutional support systems that facilitate psychosocial adaptation, reflective learning, and identity development among internally transferred students.

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1. Introduction

Student mobility has become an increasingly significant phenomenon in contemporary higher education, reflecting the dynamic nature of educational trajectories and institutional structures. Educational transition is increasingly understood as a continuous developmental process requiring students to renegotiate identity, relationships, and engagement within changing institutional contexts (Gale, T.; Parker, 2021). While previous research has extensively examined transitions from secondary to higher education, international student mobility, and inter-institutional transfer, considerably less attention has been paid to students who relocate within the same educational institution. Such intra-institutional transfer represents a unique form of transition because students are not entering an entirely unfamiliar system but rather moving into a new social, cultural, and organizational environment while carrying established institutional identities and expectations (Tight, 2020).

Recent studies have demonstrated that educational transitions frequently generate psychological challenges, including uncertainty, social disconnection, role ambiguity, and identity disruption (Jindal-Snape, 2023). Transition experiences require individuals to negotiate continuity and change simultaneously, often creating tensions between previously internalized norms and newly encountered expectations. These tensions become particularly salient when students possess prior institutional experience yet must adapt to a different local culture within the same organization. Consequently, adaptation cannot be understood merely as environmental adjustment but also as an ongoing process of identity negotiation and reconstruction (Ecclestone, K.; Biesta, G.; Hughes, 2024). Recent perspectives further suggest that students' sense of belonging is relational, contextual, and continuously reshaped through interaction with institutional environments rather than being a fixed psychological state (Gravett et al., 2022).

Identity reconstruction has emerged as a central concept in educational transition research. Contemporary scholarship suggests that student identity is neither fixed nor static; instead, it is continuously reconstructed through interactions with institutional

structures, peer relationships, and personal meaning-making processes (Bliuc, A. M.; Ellis, R. A.; Goodyear, P.; Hendres, 2021). During periods of transition, individuals often experience discrepancies between their previous self-conceptions and the expectations associated with new contexts. Such discrepancies may lead to psychological discomfort, prompting students to reinterpret their roles, social positions, and future aspirations (McLean, K. C.; Syed, 2023). Recent studies also argue that students construct multiple forms of belonging and purpose throughout higher education, indicating that identity development is closely connected to how individuals position themselves within institutional communities (Ajjawi et al., 2025).

The present study introduces the concept of adaptive dissonance, defined as a multilayered psychological tension arising when previously successful patterns of adaptation become insufficient or incompatible within a new institutional context. Unlike traditional adjustment difficulties experienced by newcomers, adaptive dissonance emerges from the conflict between established competencies and unfamiliar contextual demands. This conceptualization is informed by contemporary perspectives on identity processes, which emphasize that adaptation involves not only behavioral adjustment but also cognitive and existential negotiation of selfhood (Vignoles, 2021).

Recent evidence further indicates that successful adaptation during educational transitions depends heavily on students' capacity for meaning-making. Meaning-making enables individuals to transform stressful experiences into opportunities for personal growth, resilience, and identity development (Park, 2022). Through reflective interpretation, students can integrate disruptive experiences into coherent life narratives, thereby reducing psychological distress and fostering well-being. Studies grounded in phenomenological and narrative traditions consistently demonstrate that personal meaning serves as a critical mechanism through which individuals navigate uncertainty and reconstruct their identities following major life changes (Syed, M.; McLean, 2021).

Despite the growing literature on student transitions, a notable gap remains regarding the lived experiences of students who undergo intra-institutional transfer. Existing studies primarily focus on transitions across educational levels, institutions, or national contexts, leaving unanswered questions concerning how students adapt when moving between campuses or organizational units within the same institution. More importantly, little is known about how these students experience adaptive dissonance, negotiate conflicting social roles, and reconstruct their identities throughout the transition process.

To address this gap, the present study employs a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of students who have undergone intra-institutional transfer. Specifically, the study seeks to uncover the essence of adaptive dissonance, examine the dynamics of identity reconstruction, and understand how students create meaning from their transition experiences. By illuminating these processes, this research contributes to the literature on educational transitions, student development, and identity formation while offering practical insights for institutions seeking to support students undergoing internal mobility.

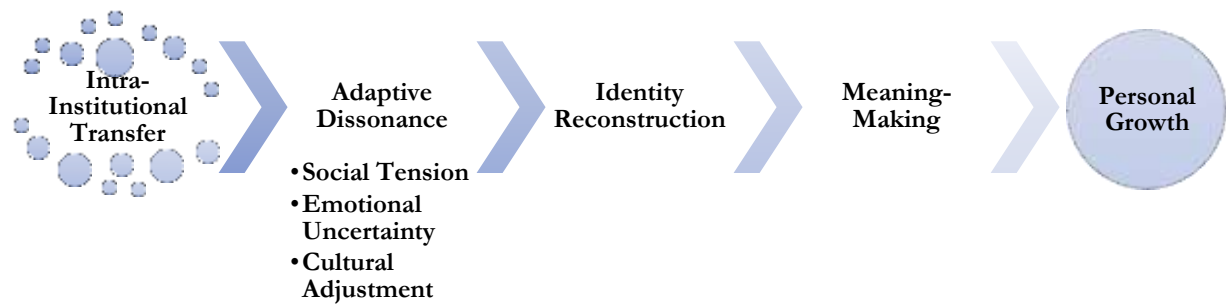


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a transcendental phenomenological design. Phenomenology seeks to understand and describe the essence of individuals' lived experiences concerning a particular phenomenon, emphasizing participants' subjective perceptions rather than external explanations (Creswell, J. W.; Poth, 2018). A transcendental phenomenological framework was selected because the study aimed to uncover the essential meanings underlying students' experiences of intra-institutional transfer, particularly the emergence of adaptive dissonance and the subsequent process of identity reconstruction.

The research was conducted in June 2026 at Gontor for Girls Campus 2, East Java, Indonesia. The institutional context is characterized by a strong academic and literacy culture in which scientific writing, reflective learning, and student leadership are systematically integrated into educational practice, providing a meaningful setting for examining students' transition experiences (Al-mujtahidi et al., 2026). an Islamic boarding school-based higher education environment where selected students experienced relocation between campuses within the same institutional system. Unlike conventional educational transitions involving movement between different institutions, intra-institutional transfer represents a unique phenomenon in which students possess prior organizational knowledge while simultaneously confronting new socio-cultural expectations. Such conditions provide a rich context for exploring the dynamics of adaptation, identity negotiation, and meaning-making through phenomenological inquiry (Alhazmi & Alhazmi, 2022).

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were: (1) students who had experienced intra-institutional transfer within the previous academic year; (2) had completed at least one semester in the destination campus; and (3) were willing to share their experiences in depth. Seven participants fulfilled these criteria and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Phenomenological research prioritizes depth and richness of experiential descriptions rather than large sample sizes; therefore, a small number of carefully selected participants is considered appropriate for capturing the essence of lived experiences (Creswell, J. W.; Poth, 2018).

Tabel 1. Participant Profile

Participant	Age	Previous Campus	Current Campus	Length of Transfer	Organizational Experience
P1	17	Campus 1	Campus 2	4 months	Student Leader
P2	17	Campus 1	Campus 2	4 months	Organization Member
P3	18	Campus 1	Campus 2	4 months	Organization Member
P4	18	Campus 4	Campus 2	4 months	Development Staff
P5	17	Campus 1	Campus 2	4 months	Development Staff
P6	18	Campus 4	Campus 2	4 months	Development Staff
P7	18	Campus 4	Campus 2	4 months	Development Staff

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews served as the primary source of data because phenomenological inquiry relies on detailed first-person accounts to reveal how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were conducted in multiple sessions when clarification was needed. Observations were undertaken to understand participants' interactions, social positioning, and adaptation practices within their daily educational environment. Relevant institutional documents, including organizational records and student activity reports, were also reviewed to support data triangulation.

To maintain phenomenological rigor, the researcher implemented epoché (bracketing), a process through which personal assumptions and prior knowledge regarding student adaptation and institutional culture were consciously suspended throughout data collection and analysis. This procedure is fundamental in transcendental phenomenology because it allows the phenomenon to emerge from participants' descriptions rather than from the researcher's preconceptions (Stilwell & Harman, 2021).

Data analysis followed the transcendental phenomenological procedures proposed by Moustakas and further elaborated by contemporary qualitative scholars. The process consisted of: (1) repeated reading of interview transcripts; (2) horizontalization, in which all significant statements were initially treated as having equal value; (3) clustering of meaning units into thematic categories; (4) development of textural descriptions explaining what participants experienced; (5) development of structural descriptions explaining how the experiences occurred; and (6) synthesis of textural and structural meanings to identify the essence of the phenomenon. Through these stages, the study sought to construct a comprehensive understanding of adaptive dissonance and identity reconstruction among students undergoing intra-institutional transfer.

Trustworthiness was established through triangulation of data sources and methods, member checking, peer debriefing, and reflexive journaling. Member checking was conducted by returning preliminary interpretations to participants for verification, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected their lived experiences. Reflexive notes were maintained throughout the study to document methodological decisions and enhance transparency. These procedures contributed to the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings.

3. Result and Discussion

Tabel 2. Development of Themes

Significant Statements	Meaning Units	Sub-Themes	Themes
Feeling unfamiliar despite belonging to the same institution	Contextual confusion	Local culture differences	Adaptive Dissonance
Being selected created pressure	Burden of expectation	Responsibility and trust	Selected Status
Being a senior but needing guidance	Role contradiction	Identity negotiation	Identity Reconstruction
Relocation changed personal perspective	Personal reflection	Meaning-making	Psychological Growth

Analysis revealed that all participants experienced a form of psychological tension during the initial stage of relocation. Although they were already familiar with the broader institutional culture, participants encountered substantial differences in local norms, leadership styles, communication patterns, and social expectations within the destination campus.

Observational data indicated that transferred students initially demonstrated limited participation in informal peer interactions and frequently relied on fellow transfer students during communal activities. Several participants appeared hesitant when responding to local procedural norms, suggesting uncertainty regarding contextual expectations. Field notes recorded repeated instances in which participants sought clarification from local students concerning routines that differed from practices in their previous campus.

These observations were supported by institutional documents showing differences in organizational structures, student leadership arrangements, and disciplinary procedures across campuses. Such differences created challenges despite participants' prior experience within the same educational system. As one participant explained:

"I thought I already understood how things worked because we were from the same institution, but after arriving here I realized many practices were different. It felt like starting over again." (P6, Interview, June 2026).

Another participant described:

"At first, I was confused because the rules looked similar, but the way people implemented them was completely different." (P4, Interview, June 2026).

The convergence of interview, observation, and documentary evidence suggests that participants experienced what this study conceptualizes as adaptive dissonance—a condition characterized by tension between previously internalized competencies and unfamiliar contextual demands.

The second theme concerned participants' perceptions of being selected for institutional transfer. Documentation from institutional records confirmed that transferred students were chosen through a selective process based on academic achievement, leadership potential, and organizational considerations.

Observational data demonstrated that local students often perceived transferred students as highly competent individuals and frequently expected them to display

exemplary leadership behavior. Such expectations created additional pressure during the adaptation period.

Interview data revealed that participants initially interpreted their selection as a burden because it was accompanied by elevated institutional expectations. One participant stated:

"Everyone expected us to perform well because we were chosen. That expectation became stressful because I was still trying to adapt." (P6, Interview, June 2026).

Another participant reflected:

"At first, I saw it as a burden, but gradually I understood that it was also an opportunity to learn and grow." (P6, Interview, June 2026).

Across participants, a common pattern emerged in which perceptions shifted from burden to opportunity and eventually toward a sense of responsibility and trust. This transformation illustrates an active acceptance process through which participants reinterpreted institutional expectations as meaningful challenges rather than external pressures.

A significant finding involved the coexistence of two conflicting identities: senior student and newcomer. Observational evidence showed that transferred students were often positioned in leadership roles while simultaneously seeking guidance regarding local campus culture.

During organizational meetings and daily activities, participants were expected to provide direction and serve as role models. However, field observations also recorded moments when they requested explanations about local procedures from students with lower organizational status but greater contextual knowledge. Interview data revealed that this contradiction generated considerable psychological tension. One participant explained:

"I was expected to know everything because I was a senior, but in reality I was still learning how things worked here." (P6, Interview, June 2026).

Similarly, another participant noted:

"Sometimes I felt uncomfortable giving instructions because I was not fully confident about local practices." (P4, Interview, June 2026).

Over time, participants developed strategies for reconciling these competing identities. Rather than choosing one role over the other, they gradually integrated both identities by embracing leadership responsibilities while openly acknowledging their need to learn. This process constituted a form of identity reconstruction through which participants developed a more flexible and contextually adaptive self-concept.

The final theme concerned participants' efforts to construct meaning from their relocation experiences. Documentary evidence, including reflective reports and institutional records, indicated sustained engagement in religious, educational, and leadership activities throughout the adaptation period.

Observational findings showed progressive changes in participants' social engagement, confidence, and willingness to assume responsibilities. Students who initially displayed hesitation became increasingly active in organizational and communal activities. Interview narratives revealed a three-stage process consisting of emotional disorientation, meaning negotiation, and psychological growth. One participant reflected:

"When I first arrived, I felt lost. Later I began to understand why I was placed here, and now I can see how much I have changed." (P5, Interview, June 2026).

Another participant stated:

"This experience taught me resilience, patience, and how to work with different kinds of people." (P7, Interview, June 2026).

Participants consistently described personal growth in terms of increased independence, emotional maturity, leadership competence, and spiritual development. These findings indicate that adaptive dissonance was not merely resolved but transformed into a source of self-development and reconstructed meaning. The transition process ultimately enabled participants to develop new perspectives regarding themselves, their roles, and their future aspirations.

Tabel 3. Summary of Findings

Theme	Core Experience	Psychological Outcome
<i>Adaptive Dissonance</i>	Tension between prior competence and new context	Initial uncertainty
<i>Selected Status</i>	Privilege and responsibility	Increased self-awareness
<i>Identity Reconstruction</i>	Negotiation of dual roles	Flexible identity
<i>Meaning-Making</i>	Reflection and reinterpretation	Personal growth

The findings indicate that participants experienced a unique form of adaptation challenge that differs from conventional transition experiences documented in higher education literature. Existing studies generally conceptualize educational transition as movement into unfamiliar institutional systems, requiring students to acquire new academic, social, and cultural competencies (Gale, T.; Parker, 2021; Jindal-Snape, 2023). However, participants in this study had already internalized the institutional culture prior to relocation. Their difficulties emerged not from unfamiliarity with the institution itself but from discrepancies between established competencies and localized cultural expectations.

This finding suggests the emergence of what this study conceptualizes as adaptive dissonance—a condition characterized by tension between prior adaptation success and new contextual demands. The concept extends transition theory by demonstrating that familiarity with an institution does not necessarily eliminate adjustment challenges. Rather, familiarity may create expectations of competence that intensify psychological strain when contextual differences are encountered (Ecclestone, K.; Biesta, G.; Hughes, 2024).

The present findings resonate with recent scholarship emphasizing that educational transitions should be understood as dynamic processes involving continuous renegotiation of identity, belonging, and competence rather than simple adjustment to new environments (Baxter Magolda, 2023; Gravett, K.; Winstone, 2022). The results further support arguments that student transitions are multidimensional experiences encompassing emotional, relational, and existential domains (Jindal-Snape, 2023). This finding reinforces the view that belonging develops through everyday participation and

interaction within institutional communities rather than through formal institutional membership alone (Gravett, K.; Winstone, 2022).

A significant finding concerns participants' experiences of simultaneously occupying the identities of senior student and newcomer. This duality generated role conflict and uncertainty regarding social positioning. Such findings align with contemporary identity development literature suggesting that identity is continuously reconstructed through social interaction and contextual negotiation rather than remaining stable across situations (McLean, K. C.; Syed, 2023; Syed, M.; McLean, 2021).

The coexistence of competence and uncertainty observed among participants reflects what Vignoles et al. (2021) describe as identity motive disruption during major life transitions. Individuals seek continuity, self-esteem, efficacy, and belonging; however, transitional experiences frequently challenge these motives simultaneously. Participants' narratives demonstrate that identity reconstruction occurred through gradual integration of previously conflicting roles rather than replacement of one identity by another.

These findings also correspond with social identity research showing that transitions often require individuals to renegotiate group membership and redefine their position within new social structures (Haslam, S. A.; Jetten, J.; Cruwys, T.; Dingle, G.; Haslam, 2021). In the context of intra-institutional transfer, students maintained organizational membership while simultaneously negotiating inclusion within a new local community. Consequently, identity reconstruction emerged as a process of balancing continuity and change, institutional familiarity and contextual unfamiliarity. Within Islamic educational environments, adaptation also involves recognizing cultural diversity while maintaining shared institutional values, allowing identity reconstruction to occur without weakening collective belonging (Andrian et al., 2023).

The findings further reveal that successful adaptation depended largely on participants' capacity to construct meaning from relocation experiences. Meaning-making enables individuals to perceive coherence, purpose, and personal significance despite stressful experiences, thereby supporting psychological well-being (George, L. S.; Park, 2021). This result is consistent with contemporary meaning-making theory, which emphasizes that individuals cope more effectively with adversity when they are able to integrate disruptive experiences into coherent personal narratives (Park, 2022).

Participants initially interpreted relocation as loss, uncertainty, and disruption. However, over time they reframed the experience as an opportunity for growth, leadership development, and spiritual maturation. Such transformations illustrate how meaning-making functions as a psychological mechanism connecting stressful experiences to resilience outcomes (George, L. S.; Park, 2021).

Recent phenomenological studies similarly report that educational transitions become developmental opportunities when students successfully reinterpret challenges as meaningful experiences (Alhazmi & Alhazmi, 2022; Berg et al., 2022). The present findings therefore reinforce growing evidence that adaptation is not merely behavioral adjustment but also a narrative and existential process through which individuals reconstruct self-understanding and future aspirations.

The three-phase process identified in this study—emotional disorientation, meaning negotiation, and identity reconstruction—contributes to the development of a phenomenological model of adaptive dissonance. Existing transition models frequently focus on adjustment outcomes such as academic achievement, persistence, or social integration (Thomas, 2021; Tight, 2020). In contrast, the present study highlights the subjective processes through which students experience, interpret, and transform transition-related tensions.

The findings suggest that adaptive dissonance should not be viewed solely as a problem requiring resolution. Instead, it may function as a developmental catalyst that stimulates self-reflection, identity reconstruction, and psychological growth. This perspective aligns with transformative learning theory, which proposes that disorienting experiences often initiate deeper reflection and perspective transformation (Cranton, P.; Taylor, 2023; Kitchenham, 2021).

The study therefore contributes theoretically by introducing adaptive dissonance as a phenomenological construct within educational transition research. It further extends current understandings of student mobility by demonstrating that adaptation challenges may emerge even within familiar institutional systems. Finally, the findings suggest that resilience in educational transitions is rooted not merely in coping capacity but in the ability to reconstruct identity and generate meaning from experiences of uncertainty and change.

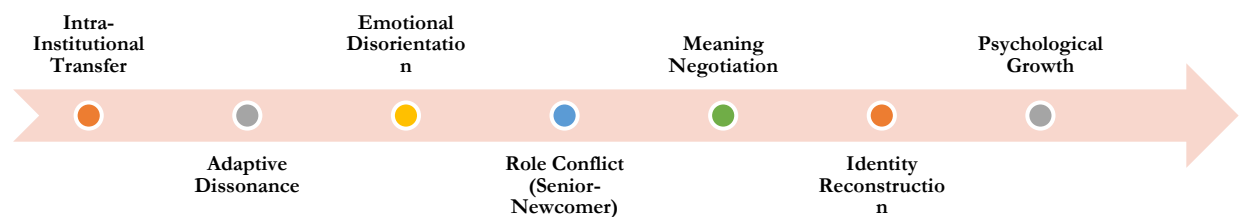


Figure 2. Phenomenological Process of Adaptive Dissonance

4. Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of students who underwent intra-institutional transfer through a transcendental phenomenological approach. The findings reveal that the transition process involved a distinctive form of psychological tension referred to as adaptive dissonance, emerging from the mismatch between previously internalized competencies and the localized norms of a new institutional setting. Unlike conventional transition experiences that are primarily characterized by unfamiliarity with an entirely new environment, participants experienced challenges arising from the coexistence of institutional familiarity and contextual unfamiliarity. This condition generated emotional disorientation, uncertainty, and relational challenges during the early stages of adaptation.

The study further demonstrates that adaptation was closely intertwined with identity reconstruction. Participants experienced role conflict as they simultaneously occupied the positions of senior students and newcomers. To navigate this tension, they engaged in

continuous identity negotiation, gradually integrating competing role expectations into a more coherent and flexible self-concept. The findings suggest that successful adaptation was not solely determined by behavioral adjustment but also by participants' ability to reinterpret their social roles, maintain a sense of belonging, and construct meaningful narratives about their experiences. Meaning-making emerged as a central mechanism through which adaptive dissonance was transformed into resilience, personal growth, and renewed purpose.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on educational transitions by introducing adaptive dissonance as a phenomenological construct that explains adaptation challenges within familiar institutional systems. The findings extend current understandings of student mobility, identity development, and transition experiences by highlighting the importance of contextual differences within the same organization. Practically, the study underscores the need for institutions to provide structured orientation programs, psychosocial support, and opportunities for reflective meaning-making for students undergoing internal relocation. Future research may employ longitudinal and comparative designs across different educational settings to further examine the development of adaptive dissonance and identity reconstruction over time.

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