

## The Social Construction of Lecturer-Scholarship Student Relations at the State University of Surabaya

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### Abstract

This study aims to understand the social construction of the relationship between lecturers and scholarship recipients at the State University of Surabaya (UNESA) within the context of academic interaction and everyday campus life. Using a qualitative approach and a case study method, this research involved three purposively selected informants: two KIPK scholarship students and one academic advisor. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and field documentation, then analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that social relations between lecturers and students are shaped through empathy, social negotiation, and awareness of academic justice. Scholarship recipients interpret financial aid not merely as economic assistance but as a means to foster independence, academic integrity, and social resilience. Lecturers play a crucial role in cultivating inclusive learning spaces, promoting social sensitivity, and empowering students from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate equally in academic life. This study emphasizes that scholarships are not only financial mechanisms but also transformative mediums for reinforcing social justice and empathetic relationships within higher education institutions.

**Keywords:** *social construction, empathy, social justice, scholarship, academic interaction*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami konstruksi sosial dalam relasi antara dosen dan mahasiswa penerima beasiswa di Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA) dalam konteks interaksi akademik dan kehidupan kampus sehari-hari. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode studi kasus, penelitian ini melibatkan tiga informan utama yang dipilih secara purposif, terdiri atas dua mahasiswa penerima beasiswa KIPK dan satu dosen pembimbing akademik. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi lapangan yang kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa relasi sosial antara dosen dan mahasiswa terbentuk melalui dinamika empati, negosiasi sosial, serta kesadaran terhadap keadilan akademik. Mahasiswa penerima beasiswa tidak hanya memaknai bantuan finansial sebagai dukungan ekonomi, tetapi juga sebagai sarana untuk membangun kemandirian dan integritas akademik. Dosen berperan aktif dalam menciptakan ruang pendidikan yang inklusif, menumbuhkan kepekaan sosial, dan memperkuat rasa percaya diri mahasiswa dari latar belakang ekonomi terbatas. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa beasiswa bukan sekadar kebijakan finansial, melainkan medium penting dalam membentuk relasi sosial yang transformatif dan berkeadilan di lingkungan perguruan tinggi.

**Kata Kunci:** *konstruksi sosial, empati, keadilan sosial, beasiswa, interaksi akademik*

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## Introduction

Within the landscape of higher education, interpersonal relationships between lecturers and students constitute an essential component that shapes the learning process, academic motivation, and achievement outcomes. Empirical studies on interpersonal communication emphasize that both verbal and nonverbal interactions, as well as the quality of academic feedback provided by lecturers, determine how students organize their learning strategies and respond to evaluative demands in the classroom context (Aisyah et al., 2023). Furthermore, the communication patterns between students and academic supervisors influence learning motivation and goal orientation; regular dialogical meetings and continuous reinforcement enhance students' academic engagement and readiness to face complex academic tasks (Lestari, 2022). Together, these studies underscore that the quality of interpersonal relations on campus is not merely affective but has direct implications for the reproduction of academic capabilities a crucial dimension when institutions attempt to expand educational access through scholarship or affirmative programs.

Interpreting academic relationships through a multicultural lens offers insight into how social identity and cultural values influence interaction dynamics within the classroom. Research on multicultural education construction highlights that education sensitive to identity differences must go beyond curricular adjustments; institutions need to provide spaces of recognition that allow diverse student experiences to be internalized within teaching practices (Nego & Yohanes, 2024). Operationally, the cultural context of communication between students and lecturers including the use of digital platforms for academic discussions shapes expectations of participation and accommodation mechanisms necessary for equitable and productive interactions (Siti Maisaroh et al., 2024). Thus, efforts to create inclusive campuses require simultaneous attention to curricular structures and communication practices that embrace the diversity of student experiences.

Focusing on pedagogical practices reveals another dimension that cannot be overlooked:

teaching methods and assessment design play a crucial role in students' competence development. Empirical findings on the link between instructional methods and competence demonstrate that participatory learning strategies, formative assessment, and task designs requiring real-world application can enhance students' ability to internalize knowledge and professional skills (Harefa & Harefa, 2025). Within a policy framework, initiatives such as Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (Freedom to Learn Independent Campus) hold potential to foster collaborative networks among students, lecturers, and external partners that enrich learning experiences. However, the success of such initiatives largely depends on the quality of implementation at the faculty level and lecturers' capacity to adapt teaching practices responsively to the diverse backgrounds of students (Fuadi & Meutia, 2024). Therefore, analyzing the relationship between teaching methods and students' socioeconomic conditions becomes essential to understand whether access policies genuinely foster engagement and competence mastery.

The role of student organizations and political education in universities also serves as a critical arena for developing collective identity, social capital, and advocacy capacity. Studies on identity construction through student organizations reveal that participation in associations such as Himpunan Mahasiswa (HIMA) and other collective activities provides a socialization space that cultivates leadership practice, professional networks, and social legitimacy supporting both academic and non-academic career growth (Afif et al., 2022). Political education embedded in campus experiences can strengthen students' civic awareness and collective participation in public agendas, thereby enhancing their ability to articulate issues of educational justice and institutional representation (Fauziyah, 2024). The interrelation between organizational activities and the quality of lecturer student relations demonstrates how personal academic interactions can influence students' collective capacity to advocate for shared interests.

Within the realm of social inclusion, studies examining interactions between non-disabled and disabled students highlight that the

quality of collaboration is highly contingent on institutional readiness to provide accommodations and the academic community's ability to enact pedagogical adjustments (Afifah, 2023). The implementation of multicultural-based education further illustrates that fostering inclusive values requires systematic efforts such as lecturer training modules, the formulation of standard operating procedures, and continuous evaluation mechanisms to ensure inclusion is realized in practice rather than remaining rhetorical (Umiati & Sufi, 2024). In this context, a sharper understanding is required regarding how access policies such as scholarships and affirmative pathways are rearticulated in interpersonal relationships on campus so that policy decisions move beyond administrative access to ensure meaningful participation.

Although previous studies contribute significantly to understanding communication, pedagogy, organization, and inclusion, there remains a relevant analytical gap. Most prior research tends to isolate one dimension such as interpersonal communication or pedagogical design without linking it simultaneously to cross-actor relationships like those between lecturers and scholarship recipients within the same institution. This study distinguishes itself by situating its analysis on the simultaneity of these inter-actor relationships, exploring how pedagogical empathy, students' adaptive strategies, and institutional conditions interact to construct relational meanings on campus. Using a qualitative case study approach that places interview data as the primary source, this research aims to uncover the mechanisms of inclusive meaning-making emerging from everyday academic interactions and to discuss its practical implications for formulating policies and teaching practices that are more responsive to the social diversity of students.

### Method

This study employed a qualitative method with a case study approach aimed at deeply understanding the construction of social relations between lecturers and scholarship recipient students at Universitas Negeri Surabaya. This approach was chosen as it is

considered most appropriate for exploring the subjective meanings and social experiences of participants within their real-life contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The research focused on the dynamics of pedagogical empathy, interpersonal communication, and the interpretation of inclusivity built within academic relationships between lecturers and students. The research site was purposively selected since Universitas Negeri Surabaya represents an affirmative policy practice within higher education and reflects diverse social backgrounds.

Table 1. List of Participants

Informant Code	Initials	Status
I-1	R	Lecturer
I-2	Z	Student
I-3	A	Student

Source: Primary data form interview results

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, followed by a snowball technique, to recruit individuals who possess a deep understanding of the studied social situation (Moelong, 1989). Three informants participated in this research one lecturer and two scholarship recipient students chosen due to their direct involvement in academic and social interactions on campus. The number of informants was deemed sufficient, as the data had reached saturation, meaning that no new themes emerged from subsequent interviews (Naeem et al., 2024). Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, limited observation, and administrative documentation to ensure comprehensive and detailed information (Sugiyono, 2018).

Data analysis followed the interactive model, encompassing three concurrent stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2018). Each dataset was analyzed through coding and interpretative reading to identify conceptual themes relevant to the study's objectives. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as

verification with participants to ensure alignment between the researcher's interpretation and actual field experiences. Throughout the research process, ethical principles were strictly observed, including informed consent, identity protection, and respect for the academic norms and social values upheld within the university environment.

## Findings and Discussion

### Representation of Social Relations between Lecturers and Scholarship Recipients at UNESA

The social relations between lecturers and scholarship recipient students at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA) reveal an academic interaction grounded in empathy, openness, and social recognition. During the interview, student (A) explained:

*"Saya sering berinteraksi, baik di kelas maupun kegiatan organisasi, tanpa hambatan dari status beasiswa."*

"I often interact, both in class and in organizational activities, without any barriers caused by my scholarship status."  
(Interview with student A)

This statement emphasizes that scholarship status does not hinder the process of social integration within the campus environment. Such phenomena indicate an inclusive social construction, where students from diverse economic backgrounds can actively participate in academic life. According to (Tandilangi & Rompis, 2022), interpersonal empathy within the academic sphere significantly contributes to building social trust and enhancing students' learning motivation. Thus, the healthy social relationship between lecturers and scholarship students at UNESA forms a foundation for equitable academic solidarity.

Student (A) further noted:

*"Beasiswa sangat membantu dalam menunjang kebutuhan kuliah seperti*

*membeli buku, membayar seminar, dan kegiatan pengembangan diri."* "The scholarship greatly helps in supporting my academic needs, such as buying books, paying for seminars, and funding self-development activities." (Interview with student A)

This experience reflects that financial support functions not only economically but also psychologically, strengthening students' confidence and academic engagement. (Dingel & Punti, 2023) assert that social support from lecturers and institutions can bridge participatory gaps among students from different economic backgrounds. Hence, scholarships at UNESA may be seen as a form of social capital that expands educational opportunities while reducing hierarchical distance between lecturers and students.

The social relationship built within UNESA also demonstrates adaptive interaction among students across economic statuses. Student (Z) stated:

*"Saya berinteraksi secara normal dengan mahasiswa lainnya, baik penerima maupun non-penerima beasiswa, terutama saat kerja kelompok dan kegiatan kelas."*

"I interact normally with other students, both recipients and non-recipients of scholarships, especially during group work and class activities." (Interview with student Z)

This expression reveals that academic interaction at UNESA occurs equitably, without symbolic segregation between recipients and non-recipients. (Mojtahedzadeh et al., 2024) emphasize that cross-background collaboration within educational spaces fosters social resilience and reinforces a sense of belonging. This pattern shows that scholarship recipients are not marginalized groups but integral

members of an active and participative academic community.

Lecturers play a vital role in shaping an inclusive social atmosphere. Lecturer (R) expressed:

*“Saya cenderung memberi kelonggaran jika mahasiswa menghadapi kendala pribadi, seperti masalah kesehatan, tekanan psikologis, atau keterbatasan akses teknologi. Menurut saya, empati perlu dijalankan secara praktis dalam bentuk kebijakan kelas yang lentur.”* “I tend to offer flexibility when students face personal challenges such as health issues, psychological pressure, or limited technological access. I believe empathy should be practiced concretely through flexible classroom policies.” (Interview with lecturer R)

This statement illustrates a genuine form of empathic pedagogy, where academic policies are tailored to individual student needs. (Sun et al., 2023) argue that empathy-based teaching practices improve students’ emotional well-being and academic outcomes. At UNESA, such relationships mark a paradigm shift from an instructional model toward a more relational, humane, and adaptive approach.

Academic empathy also manifests through flexible teaching policies provided to scholarship students. Student (Z) shared:

*“Dosen memberikan ruang fleksibel dalam hal tugas atau praktikum jika mengetahui mahasiswa mengalami kesulitan finansial.”* “Lecturers provide flexible opportunities for assignments or practicum if they are aware that students face financial difficulties.” (Interview with student Z)

This attitude reflects a form of social justice rooted not in administrative formality but in moral awareness of students’ conditions. As

noted by (Hodis et al., 2023), pedagogical relations grounded in flexibility and trust can enhance academic fairness in classrooms. Therefore, the social interactions between lecturers and scholarship students at UNESA demonstrate the internalization of empathy as part of professional academic ethics.

Social relationships at UNESA extend beyond formal academic settings to encompass informal and supportive interpersonal communication. Lecturer (R) shared:

*“Saya pernah memberi tugas dalam bentuk refleksi pribadi alih-alih makalah akademik pada mahasiswa yang mengalami gangguan kecemasan, dan memberi rekaman materi kuliah bagi mahasiswa yang kesulitan akses internet.”* “I once assigned a reflective essay instead of an academic paper to a student experiencing anxiety and provided recorded lectures to a student struggling with internet access.” (Interview with lecturer R)

This action reflects need-based flexibility and a profound understanding of student diversity. (Wang & Kang, 2023) suggest that emotional support from lecturers significantly enhances students’ sense of belonging to their institution. Such relational patterns serve as social capital that strengthens academic integration and loyalty at UNESA.

Lecturers’ involvement in providing flexible policies signifies not only personal empathy but also exposes structural policy gaps within the institution. Lecturer (R) stated:

*“Saya belum pernah menerima panduan teknis yang jelas dari pihak kampus, sejauh ini saya mengandalkan inisiatif pribadi dan diskusi informal dengan sesama dosen.”* “I have never received a clear technical guideline from the university; so far, I rely on personal

initiative and informal discussions with fellow lecturers.” (Interview with lecturer R)

This reveals that inclusivity at UNESA is primarily driven by individual awareness rather than institutional systems. (Ifediora et al., 2024) highlight that socially just higher education requires integrated institutional support structures connecting lecturers and administration. Hence, empathetic practices at UNESA remain sporadic and necessitate formal policy reinforcement to ensure sustainability.

Social relationships with lecturers serve as a key factor in fostering motivation and academic resilience. Student (A) explained:

*“Dosen memberikan fleksibilitas waktu tugas jika saya mengalami kesulitan finansial.”* “Lecturers provide flexible deadlines when I face financial difficulties.” (Interview with student A)

Such support encourages students to remain focused on academic achievement amid economic constraints. (Tyler, 2024) emphasizes that trust-based and understanding relationships between lecturers and students cultivate responsibility and active participation in class. This indicates that affective dimensions of education significantly influence academic success and character formation among scholarship students.

Balanced social relationships also encourage students to develop autonomous academic identities. Student (A) expressed:

*“Saya melakukan berbagai cara untuk meringankan beban finansial, seperti memberikan jasa massage dan siaran live TikTok, agar tidak membebani orang tua.”* “I do various things to ease my financial burden, such as offering massage services and live streaming on TikTok, so as not to burden my parents.” (Interview with student A)

This practice demonstrates social independence and economic creativity arising from supportive academic interaction. (H. Li, 2023) notes that social trust built between lecturers and students strengthens individual autonomy and responsibility. Thus, scholarships at UNESA serve not only as financial aid but also as a platform for forming resilient and productive social identities.

The open social environment at UNESA fosters equal participation between scholarship and non-scholarship students. Student (Z) shared:

*“Saya tidak pernah merasa malu menjadi penerima beasiswa. Lingkungan saya suportif dan tidak menilai dari latar belakang ekonomi.”* “I have never felt ashamed of being a scholarship recipient. My environment is supportive and does not judge based on economic background.” (Interview with student Z)

This testimony highlights how social capital in the form of solidarity and empathy dissolves economic divisions in the academic sphere. (Tuma & Dolan, 2024) emphasize that collaborative social relations enhance academic inclusion and broaden students’ social networks. Therefore, social relations at UNESA embody not only formal academic interaction but also moral values reinforcing social justice in higher education.

The representation of social relations between lecturers and scholarship students at UNESA reflects the integration of personal empathy, pedagogical flexibility, and social solidarity. These findings indicate that higher education can serve as a site for moral and social reinforcement when supported by reciprocal respect. Both lecturers and students actively contribute to creating an academically just environment. Within the framework of social construction theory, such relationships are formed through repeated interactions that produce shared understanding acknowledging

education as a universal right rather than an economic privilege. Consequently, social practices at UNESA embody a tangible expression of inclusive education oriented toward humanity and collective well-being.

### **Social Experiences of Scholarship Recipients in Academic and Campus Daily Life**

The social experiences of scholarship recipients must be understood within a dialectical framework between tangible material assistance and the practical daily needs that often remain partially unmet. In many cases, scholarship programs alleviate direct burdens such as tuition fees or the purchase of books yet still leave uncovered expenses related to learning processes, including laboratory materials, support tools, or episodic scientific activities. The discrepancy between stable support and urgent expenditures generates a pattern of uncertainty that compels students to adopt certain managerial and social strategies to remain fully engaged in academic life. According to (Nasr et al., 2024), recent quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that financial stress significantly affects students' mental well-being and academic capacity; interventions limited to monetary aid, without incorporating practical and financial literacy components, tend to be less effective in ensuring academic continuity. Within the UNESA context, this experience emerges not merely as an individual challenge but as a structural relationship among resource allocation, academic norms, and campus social networks where scholarship recipients continuously reassess priorities, utilize social access, and negotiate informal rules to bridge remaining gaps. Thus, social experience becomes a productive arena: students transform from passive recipients into strategic agents who design their academic lives to remain empowered despite material constraints.

Scholarships, in students' lived experiences, function not only as financial transfers but also as a form of legitimacy to participate in academic and professional

development activities. As stated by informant A:

*“Beasiswa sangat membantu dalam menunjang kebutuhan kuliah seperti membeli buku, membayar seminar, dan kegiatan pengembangan diri.”* “The scholarship greatly helps in supporting my study needs, such as purchasing books, paying for seminars, and participating in self-development activities.” (Interview with Student A)

This statement highlights two aspects: first, the scholarship as an enabling resource that opens access to learning materials and professional opportunities; and second, the expectation that through this aid, students can enhance both their competencies and academic networks. (Pinto et al., 2024) assert that combining financial support with non-financial mentoring and access to extracurricular opportunities maximizes student engagement outcomes. Practically, this means that scholarship assistance should include mechanisms that guide its utilization toward competence development. At UNESA, informant A's narrative reflects both instrumental and aspirational awareness: the scholarship is perceived as capital to be managed for tangible academic and professional results. Consequently, scholarship recipients tend to become more proactive in seeking academic opportunities, perceiving the scholarship as legitimization to invest in relevant educational activities that shape their future trajectories.

The daily life of scholarship students is often sustained through disciplined and pragmatic microeconomic management. Informant Z elaborated concrete strategies to balance academic needs with financial limitations:

*“Saya membuat prioritas pengeluaran dengan memisahkan kebutuhan primer dan sekunder. Saya masak sendiri di kos, membeli bahan makanan di pasar, serta memanfaatkan perpustakaan dan bantuan kampus untuk menghindari pengeluaran besar. Saya juga menggunakan transportasi hemat dan mencari kegiatan gratis di kampus. Untuk menambah penghasilan, saya menawarkan jasa pengetikan dan desain. Saya belajar literasi keuangan dari webinar, dan menyisihkan uang mingguan meskipun jumlahnya kecil. Saya juga berbagi biaya dengan teman untuk praktikum dan alat.”*

“I set spending priorities by separating primary and secondary needs. I cook for myself, buy groceries at traditional markets, and use the library and campus support to minimize major expenses. I also use affordable transportation and seek free campus activities. To earn extra income, I offer typing and design services. I learn financial literacy from webinars and save a small weekly amount. I even share costs with friends for practicum materials and equipment. (Interview with Student Z)

This quote captures a combination of problem-focused strategies (budgeting, part-time work) and social strategies (cost-sharing, resource utilization) that enhance academic persistence. (Waterhouse & Samra, 2025) observe that financial literacy improvement, consumption prioritization, and relevant part-time employment foster resilience without compromising academic involvement. In UNESA’s case, Z’s practice exemplifies a practical capability rooted in collective learning (peer sharing, library-based study) and personal initiative forming a holistic life skill essential to scholarship students’ social experience.

Daily experiences also underscore the significance of social networks as both

economic and emotional support systems. Scholarship students frequently rely on horizontal solidarity within peer groups, study circles, or student organizations to mitigate the cost of extracurricular demands. Such solidarity manifests through shared practicum materials, collective cost management, and peer-to-peer assistance that reduce acute burdens. Evidence-based studies on social capital demonstrate that these networks act as buffers against potential dropout risks caused by financial strain while strengthening academic engagement (Jackson, 2024). At UNESA, these peer networks serve dual roles: they operate as informal channels of resource distribution and as social learning spaces that enhance collective competence. For example, students share cost-saving strategies or collaborate in low-cost projects. Importantly, this network is not merely a survival response but also a mechanism for academic identity formation allowing scholarship students to assert competence, dispel stigma, and consolidate their scholarly reputation.

The relationship with lecturers becomes a crucial determinant of whether students’ daily strategies succeed. Informant A emphasized the presence of practical academic leniency:

*“Dosen memberikan fleksibilitas waktu tugas jika saya mengalami kesulitan finansial.”* “Lecturers give flexible deadlines when I experience financial difficulties.” (Interview with Student A)

Such support reduces the risk of academic disengagement when students encounter unexpected expenses such as high printing costs or temporary work obligations. Literature on inclusive pedagogy emphasizes that responsive flexibility, including digital submission options, alternative task formats, or fee waivers, strengthens student retention and well-being (LaDue et al., 2024). Nonetheless, sustaining such flexibility requires institutional support; if solely dependent on individual initiative,

consistency becomes fragile. Thus, a policy recommendation emerging from this study is the institutionalization of flexibility mechanisms within formal academic guidelines, ensuring equal accessibility for all students in need.

The cumulative impact of daily practices, lecturer support, and peer solidarity reveals broader implications for student well-being and social mobility. When scholarships are integrated with financial literacy, mentoring, and access to relevant employment opportunities, they function as catalysts for empowerment rather than mere survival. This synthesis fosters both human capital (skills, experiences) and social capital (networks). Studies investigating integrated support packages indicate a strong correlation between comprehensive aid systems and higher retention as well as academic success (Nasr et al., 2024) and (LaDue et al., 2024). At UNESA, examples such as budgeting discipline, relevant side jobs, and task flexibility illustrate how scholarships evolve from risk mitigation tools into long-term empowerment instruments. This underscores the necessity for institutional arrangements that blend financial, pedagogical, and capacity-building support to foster authentic social mobility.

A synthesis of the findings identifies several strategic priorities for reinforcing the social experience of scholarship recipients: (1) structured financial literacy programs teaching budgeting, microcapital planning, and sustainable income generation without academic compromise; (2) institutionalization of academic flexibility through clear, standardized guidelines; (3) entrepreneurship and mentoring programs connecting students with relevant labor markets; and (4) facilitation of peer solidarity through shared material subsidies and affordable development spaces. Theoretically, these findings affirm that scholarship students' social experience is co-produced by institutional structures and micro-level agency their strategic adaptation to circumstances is shaped by the

university's culture and policies. Therefore, effective interventions must be multi-pronged: addressing immediate practical needs while cultivating long-term capacities that enable students to contribute fully to the academic community and expand their prospects for upward social mobility.

### **Adaptation Strategies and Social Negotiations of Scholarship Recipients**

Scholarship recipients encounter unique challenges that require a high degree of social and economic adaptability. Academic pressure, organizational demands, and financial limitations create conditions that compel them to negotiate their social identities within the campus environment. According to (Kim, 2024), the ability to manage financial stress significantly shapes students' life satisfaction and coping strategies. Within UNESA's context, several scholarship recipients have developed disciplined time management habits to balance academic responsibilities and financial needs. One student informant explained:

*"Saya belajar menyesuaikan diri dengan cara membatasi pengeluaran dan membagi waktu antara kuliah, kerja paruh waktu, dan organisasi, supaya tetap bisa produktif tanpa mengganggu nilai akademik"* "I learned to adapt by limiting my expenses and dividing my time between studying, part-time work, and organizational activities so I can stay productive without compromising my grades." (Interview with Student A)

This statement illustrates that students' adaptation strategies extend beyond the economic dimension they also construct structured and reflective lifestyles aligned with their social-academic conditions.

The ability to negotiate social relationships among scholarship and non-scholarship students also reflects complex adaptive dynamics. As (Waterhouse & Samra,

2025) argue, social negotiation within higher education often emerges from reflective awareness of each student's social position. Scholarship recipients at UNESA strive to maintain egalitarian relationships with peers, even when faced with stereotypes regarding their economic capacity. They consciously regulate communication to avoid symbolic distance. One student informant remarked:

*"Saya berusaha aktif di kegiatan kelompok, tidak menunjukkan perbedaan soal beasiswa, supaya teman-teman tidak canggung"* "I try to be active in group activities and avoid highlighting the scholarship issue so my peers don't feel uncomfortable." (Interview with Student Z)

This behavior demonstrates that social adaptation is not merely a reaction to economic constraints but also a symbolic strategy to maintain harmony within academic peer networks.

Academic adaptation among scholarship students is often rooted in resource efficiency. Kroupova et al. (2024) observe that financially constrained students develop more independent learning strategies, emphasizing time and resource optimization. In practice, UNESA students utilize campus facilities such as digital libraries and laboratories to minimize expenses on textbooks and study tools. Informant A explained:

*"Kalau tugas butuh referensi, saya pakai jurnal gratis di portal kampus. Dosen juga bantu arahkan, jadi gak perlu langganan berbayar."* "When I need references for assignments, I use free journals from the university portal. Lecturers also help guide us, so I don't need to pay for subscriptions." (Interview with Student A)

This statement reveals that adaptive ability is not solely individual but reinforced by institutional support that enhances students' academic capital.

Adaptation strategies also manifest through the negotiation of meaning surrounding academic success. Scholarship students tend to interpret success not merely through grades but through their ability to persist and progress amid constraints. (Co et al., 2023) highlight that students' perception of resilience is shaped by socioeconomic context and relational support within their academic environment. At UNESA, persistence itself becomes a social identity marker for scholarship recipients. One student shared:

*"Saya merasa berhasil kalau bisa terus kuliah tanpa nunggak dan tetap ikut kegiatan akademik. Nilai penting, tapi bertahan itu juga prestasi."* "I feel successful when I can keep studying without missing tuition payments and still participate in academic activities. Grades matter, but being able to endure is also an achievement." (Interview with Student A)

This testimony confirms that negotiating the meaning of success forms part of a sustained social and academic adaptation process.

Social negotiation further involves how students manage relationships with lecturers. As (Almassri, 2024) notes, interpersonal relationships between lecturers and students play a key role in reducing social pressure and strengthening academic support for marginalized groups. Scholarship recipients often maintain polite, open, and reflective communication to earn lecturers' trust without appearing dependent. One student explained:

*"Kalau saya kesulitan biaya praktikum, saya izin baik-baik dan biasanya dosen kasih kelonggaran waktu. Tapi saya tetap usahakan gak minta belas kasihan."*

“When I struggle with practicum fees, I ask for permission politely, and lecturers usually give me more time. But I always try not to ask for pity.” (Interview with Student Z)

This reflects an ethical negotiation that maintains academic dignity while fostering trust within formal interactions.

Financial adaptation is not limited to frugality; it also functions as a form of socio-economic learning. Scholarship students often create small-scale sustainable income strategies to support their studies. (López et al., 2023) emphasize that students with financial constraints frequently engage in micro-entrepreneurship or informal economic activities to maintain stability. One informant elaborated:

*“Saya memanfaatkan waktu luang buat jasa desain atau bantu teman jualan online. Selain bantu ekonomi, ini juga bikin saya lebih percaya diri dan punya relasi baru.”* “I use my free time to offer design services or help friends sell products online. Besides improving my finances, it also boosts my confidence and expands my social connections.” (Interview with Student A)

Such activities illustrate that adaptive strategies extend beyond resource management into the social domain, enhancing autonomy and relational capital.

The adaptation and social negotiation strategies of UNESA scholarship recipients illustrate a shift from a passive to an active paradigm in managing limitations. Adaptation is no longer confined to survival it becomes a process of social identity formation that reinforces independence, efficiency, and critical awareness of institutional structures. Consistent with previous findings, this process balances economic rationality and social sensitivity.

Students are not merely subjects of the scholarship system but active agents who negotiate positions, build relationships, and redefine success amid complex socioeconomic pressures.

### **The Construction of Empathy and Social Justice Values in Academic Interaction**

The presence of empathy within academic environments serves as a vital foundation that binds social relationships between lecturers and students, particularly those from economically vulnerable backgrounds. In this context, lecturers function not merely as conveyors of knowledge but also as moral figures capable of cultivating sensitivity toward structural inequalities in learning spaces. According to (McEwen et al., 2025), inclusive practices in higher education are only meaningful when grounded in social awareness and pedagogical training that enable lecturers to understand students’ diverse backgrounds. This view resonates with the reflection of informant (R), who emphasized that empathy should be expressed concretely through flexibility in assignments and adaptive classroom policies for students facing psychological or economic distress.

*“Saya cenderung memberi kelonggaran jika mahasiswa menghadapi kendala pribadi, seperti masalah kesehatan, tekanan psikologis, atau keterbatasan akses teknologi. Menurut saya, empati perlu dijalankan secara praktis dalam bentuk kebijakan kelas yang lentur.”* “I tend to offer flexibility when students face personal challenges such as health issues, psychological pressure, or limited access to technology. In my view, empathy must be enacted practically through flexible classroom policies.” (Interview with Lecturer R)

This statement indicates that academic empathy is not merely an emotional disposition

but a pedagogical action that constructs social justice through flexibility and acknowledgment of students' diverse circumstances.

Social justice within academic spaces also manifests through institutional mechanisms that promote fairness for marginalized student groups. (Boyadjieva et al., 2024) state that justice in higher education should be assessed by how far educational systems ensure equitable access and opportunities regardless of students' social or economic backgrounds. This idea aligns with lecturer (R) reflection emphasizing the importance of inclusive student service units that lecturers can consult for pedagogical guidance.

*"Institusi sebaiknya menyusun modul pelatihan pedagogi inklusif secara rutin dan menghadirkan unit layanan mahasiswa inklusi yang dapat diakses oleh dosen."* "Institutions should regularly design inclusive pedagogy training modules and establish student inclusion service units accessible to lecturers."  
(Interview with Lecturer R)

This statement reveals that academic empathy does not end at the interpersonal level but requires institutional support. Hence, social justice becomes not only an ethical discourse but also a structured policy practice ensuring that all students can participate meaningfully in the learning process.

According to (Chang, 2023), higher education institutions have a moral responsibility to develop social leadership grounded in empathy and justice. In diverse academic settings, lecturers play a pivotal role in embedding these values through fair and reflective interactions. Informant (R) explicitly highlighted that many lecturers still face internal barriers such as excessive workloads and the absence of structured training in inclusive teaching.

*"Hambatan paling nyata adalah beban kerja dosen yang tinggi, sehingga menyulitkan adaptasi metode pengajaran. Di sisi lain, tidak adanya pelatihan terstruktur juga membuat dosen bingung harus mulai dari mana."* "The most evident obstacle is the heavy workload of lecturers, which makes it difficult to adapt teaching methods. Moreover, the lack of structured training leaves lecturers uncertain about where to begin."  
(Interview with Lecturer R)

This observation underscores that without institutional reinforcement, empathy often remains confined to individual goodwill. Therefore, establishing academic social justice requires not only moral awareness but also structural transformation in educational systems so that empathy becomes a normative value within classroom culture. As (Ahmad Ridwan & Faruki, 2024) assert, strengthening empathy and social justice within academia nurtures a humanistic and inclusive university culture, fostering solidarity and reinforcing moral integrity as the foundation of teaching and learning.

The notion of academic empathy is closely tied to the lecturer's role as a mediator of student well-being. (Douwes et al., 2023) emphasize that students' perception of well-being improves when lecturers engage in empathic communication, active listening, and adaptive teaching strategies tailored to individual needs. This is evident in the practice of lecturer (R), who described providing alternative assignments for students facing particular constraints:

*"Saya pernah memberi tugas refleksi pribadi alih-alih makalah akademik pada mahasiswa yang mengalami gangguan kecemasan. Bahkan saya beri rekaman materi kuliah karena mahasiswa kesulitan mengakses platform online."* "I once

assigned a personal reflection instead of an academic paper to a student with anxiety issues. I even provided lecture recordings because the student had difficulty accessing online platforms.” (Interview with Lecturer R)

Such actions represent a concrete embodiment of micro-level social justice in academia. Empathy here is not framed as pity, but as a pedagogical practice that aligns the learning process with the diverse realities of students’ lives.

Cuenca-Soto et al., (2023) argue that learning grounded in empathy and social justice not only shapes individual character but also strengthens collective solidarity within academic communities. In classroom settings, when lecturers and students engage in dialogic and egalitarian interaction, a moral space emerges enabling the transformation of humanistic values. This dynamic is reflected in informant (R) statement advocating for structured and periodically evaluated inclusive pedagogy training. Such programs, according to him, would enhance lecturers’ social awareness in identifying and addressing student needs proportionally. This finding implies that academic social justice must be internalized through continuous pedagogical reflection rather than imposed as formal policy alone. When empathy becomes embedded in lecturers’ professional culture, the university transforms into a moral agent beyond its role as a credential-granting institution.

Vance-Chalcraft et al., (2024) found that students’ social engagement increases when institutions integrate social justice principles into academic and community service activities. Within UNESA, this can be observed in lecturers’ empathetic and equitable approaches to evaluating scholarship students. Lecturer (R) empathetic stance not only alleviates students’ psychological stress but also strengthens their sense of self-worth within the campus

environment. In this way, empathy and social justice operate as interdependent values: empathy cultivates interpersonal sensitivity, while social justice ensures equitable distribution of opportunities. Consequently, both are inseparable in constructing humane academic relationships oriented toward collective well-being.

The construction of empathy and social justice values in academic interactions at UNESA emerges from the interplay between micro-level lecturer actions and macro-level institutional policies. Consistent with (Boyadjieva et al., 2024) and (McEwen et al., 2025), the successful integration of these values depends on institutional commitment to providing reflective spaces, pedagogical training, and inclusive policy frameworks. Field data show that lecturer (R) has practiced empathy through flexible classroom policies but continues to face challenges due to the absence of official institutional guidance. Therefore, the study recommends developing an integrated pedagogy model that merges individual moral values with structural policy commitments. In this sense, academic justice evolves from a normative ideal into a tangible practice embodied in everyday campus life.

### **Critical Reflection on Social Relations and Academic Perspective Transformation at UNESA**

A critical reflection on the dynamics of social relations between lecturers and scholarship students at the State University of Surabaya (UNESA) reveals a paradigm shift toward a more inclusive academic culture. Based on interviews with lecturer (R), it becomes clear that teaching practices are no longer confined to the transmission of knowledge but now extend to empathy and adaptation toward students’ social circumstances.

*“Saya cenderung memberi kelonggaran jika mahasiswa menghadapi kendala*

*pribadi, seperti masalah kesehatan, tekanan psikologis, atau keterbatasan akses teknologi. Menurut saya, empati perlu dijalankan secara praktis dalam bentuk kebijakan kelas yang lentur.*” “I tend to provide flexibility when students face personal difficulties such as health issues, psychological stress, or limited access to technology. In my view, empathy should be implemented practically through flexible classroom policies.” (Interview with Lecturer R)

This statement demonstrates a deliberate effort to cultivate social justice within higher education. As (Indrašienė et al., 2023) explain, critical reflection is a key element in developing pedagogical awareness and transforming educational systems from instructional models toward dialogical ones. Thus, the empathetic relationship between lecturers and students at UNESA serves as a foundation for reflective consciousness and helps strengthen an academic climate that prioritizes equity and fairness in teaching and learning.

Openness in social relationships also contributes to the transformation of scholarship students’ perspectives toward a more humane and equitable academic system. Student (A) expressed this sentiment clearly:

*“Dosen memberikan fleksibilitas waktu tugas jika saya mengalami kesulitan finansial.”* “Lecturers give me flexibility in assignment deadlines whenever I face financial difficulties.” (Interview with Student A)

This flexibility illustrates that lecturers act not only as educators but also as facilitators of students’ academic well-being. (Crawford et al., 2024) note that a student’s sense of belonging increases significantly when the campus environment accommodates diverse economic and social experiences. Such emotional

attachment does not only enhance academic achievement but also fosters social responsibility among students in a multicultural university context. At UNESA, this practice indicates the presence of transformative learning, bridging the gap between institutional values and the individual realities of scholarship recipients.

Empathy-based and justice-oriented social relations demonstrate a reconfiguration of power dynamics between lecturers and students. Previously, academic relationships were often hierarchical, positioning students as passive recipients of policy. Today, however, a more reflective form of participation has emerged, allowing students to engage in shaping their learning strategies. Lecturer (R) acknowledged this evolving reality, noting:

*“Kampus belum menyediakan panduan teknis yang jelas dari pihak institusi. Sejauh ini saya mengandalkan inisiatif pribadi dan diskusi informal dengan sesama dosen.”* “The university has not yet provided a clear institutional guideline. So far, I have relied on personal initiative and informal discussions with fellow lecturers.” (Interview with Lecturer R)

This statement underscores the need for a stronger institutional framework to guide pedagogical reflection. As (McEwen et al., 2025) argue, critical reflection must be accompanied by structured institutional support such as professional training and standardized policies so that it does not rely solely on individual goodwill. The transformation of academic perspectives thus requires that personal empathy be institutionalized as a sustainable cultural value.

The transformation of academic values at UNESA is also visible in the way scholarship students internalize their social experiences as

moral and emotional learning. Student (Z) reflected on this through his own experience:

*“Saya tidak pernah mengalami perlakuan berbeda karena latar belakang ekonomi saya. Lingkungan saya, baik di kampus maupun luar, cukup terbuka dan menilai seseorang dari sikap, bukan latar belakang.”* “I have never been treated differently because of my economic background. Both inside and outside campus, people judge others by their attitude, not their background.”(Interview with Student Z)

This statement reveals that social justice values are not only taught theoretically but also embodied through lived experiences. (Muzyk et al., 2023) emphasize that critical consciousness grows when individuals reflect deeply on social realities through empathetic and egalitarian interactions. Within UNESA’s context, such awareness indicates that scholarship recipients are not passive beneficiaries of aid but active agents contributing to the development of a socially just academic culture.

The academic paradigm shift toward social justice and reflective awareness is further evident in lecturers’ policy recommendations. Lecturer (R) proposed the following:

*“Institusi sebaiknya menyusun modul pelatihan pedagogi inklusif secara rutin dan menghadirkan unit layanan mahasiswa inklusi untuk konsultasi dosen.”* “The institution should regularly develop inclusive pedagogy training modules and establish a student inclusion service unit for lecturers to consult.” (Interview with Lecturer R)

This recommendation reflects a structural consciousness that individual empathy must be institutionalized through integrated systems. (X. Li & Mu, 2024) argue that the success of

scholarship and inclusion programs depends on the synergy between institutional policies, training, and culture. In UNESA, such reflective insights have the potential to drive progressive systemic change particularly in curriculum development and teaching policy to ensure equity for marginalized groups without compromising academic standards.

A critical reflection on social relations and academic transformation at UNESA suggests that equitable higher education cannot rely solely on economic or administrative reforms but must emerge from the reflective awareness of its academic actors. The lived experiences of scholarship students and the empathetic practices of lecturers demonstrate that equity can be cultivated through sincere interaction and inclusive policy frameworks. (Crawford et al., 2024) and (Indrašienė et al., 2023) both affirm that critical reflection is the core of social transformation within academia, as it calls for collective awareness rather than mere bureaucratic reform. Hence, UNESA through its community of lecturers and students has shown the potential to serve as a social laboratory for fostering academic justice rooted in empathy, equality, and sustained reflective participation. (Affandi et al., 2025) further emphasize that UNESA’s scholarship policies and inclusive educational system have catalyzed students’ social transformation toward a more egalitarian and critically reflective academic consciousness. These initiatives represent a dialectical process linking social values, moral responsibility, and educational equality within higher education.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the social construction of relationships between lecturers and scholarship recipients at the State University of Surabaya (UNESA) is shaped through dynamic and reflective academic interactions. Such relationships are not characterized by rigid hierarchy, but by the presence of empathy, social negotiation, and the

shared pursuit of justice within higher education. Scholarship students actively develop adaptive strategies to navigate economic limitations while maintaining academic independence through social networks and moral support from their lecturers. Conversely, lecturers function as empathetic agents who actualize social justice values through flexible classroom policies and responsive pedagogical practices tailored to students' diverse needs. This reciprocal relationship illustrates a transformation of humanistic values within an inclusive educational framework, where empathy and justice transcend moral ideals and manifest as tangible actions in daily academic interactions. The findings highlight that inclusivity in higher education is not achieved solely through financial support but through dialogical relations grounded in recognition, trust, and collective reflection. Accordingly, scholarships at UNESA should be understood not merely as economic instruments but as social mechanisms that foster solidarity, expand equality, and construct participatory academic relationships. Ultimately, this study affirms that empathetic communication, adaptive strategies, and flexible teaching practices together form the foundation of an equitable and human-centered academic culture one that positions higher education as a moral and transformative space for social justice.

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