

**UNDERSTANDING UNDIP INTERNATIONAL STUDENT'S
EXPERIENCE IN THE ADAPTATION PROCESS OF INTERACTING TO
THE HOST CULTURE**

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ABSTRACT

The success of an international student is not only determined by his or her academic achievement but also by how well the student experiences the adaptation process by interacting with the host culture. Indonesia is one of the destination countries for foreign students to study, and for sure those students have to adapt to the new environment and interact with the local people by using the local language (Indonesian Language) and living with the host culture. However, how do Diponegoro University international students experience the adaptation process by interacting with the host culture in Semarang City? The purpose of this research is to describe the experience of International students when they adapt to the host culture, to analyze the experiences of international students by interacting with the host culture, and to describe the identity of international students after interacting with the host culture. The method used in this research is a phenomenology qualitative method by Max Van Manen (1990), with a deep interview with five international students from Rwanda, Sierra Leon, Madagascar, Pakistan, and Sudan. The result of this study highlights the adaptation process of international students interacting with the host culture which shows that the international students at Diponegoro University experience the same feeling upon arrival in the host culture which is excitement and surprise, also, all of them passed through the culture shock. The common shock was regarding the language, food, and social norms. However, to overcome the culture shock, each international student has their way of adapting, including, accepting the host culture, choosing not to interact with the host culture (not interact with the locals) and other was making a lifestyle change. In conclusion, it can be concluded that the culture shock was the cause of the challenge faced by those students, however, to adapt to the host culture, the

important is to make themselves comfortable, and the influence of the host culture, may change students' lifestyle.

Keywords: cultural adaptation, culture shock, host culture language, interaction communication, international students, UNDIP

INTRODUCTION

International students around the world are challenged with different experiences and have different adaptation processes depending on the host culture and their origin. Several researchers have conducted research related to the adaptation process of international students as the empirical evidence has consistently shown that most research related to international students was conducted in various countries such as Carrie S. Tucker King and Kylar S. Bailay conducted research on intercultural communication in higher education in the United States, with a focus on how American students and faculty can enhance the classroom experience of international students. This study show that each international students have various pattern to adjust in the host culture not depend on the classroom experience (King & Bailey, 2021). In addition, concerning culture, a researcher

investigates the experiences of international students who have participated in exchange cultural. An examination of Asian students enrolled in English-speaking universities in the West who do not speak English. This research show that 80% of Asian international students is non-native in may cause the adjustment difficult (Marlina, 2009). Also, another scholar study involved an examination of how students adjusted while studying in an unfamiliar culture. The objective is to attain a more comprehension of the mechanisms that contribute to the adaptation in question, and find that cultural shock may lead in positive result the cultural learning in which the students adapt easily (Zhou et al., 2008).

One international Student at UNDIP who researched the adaptation of black African students at UNDIP, 2019, Samuel Anderson, confirmed that African students are

likely to face some level of stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination which disrupts their adaptation process. Otherwise, from the perspective of the international Students at UNDIP, namely Jabo from Rwanda, He said that Language is one of the biggest problems faced by international students, not only in their daily communication (such as in the market, with friends) but especially in their education.

The success of an International Student is not only determined by his or her academic achievement but also by how well the student is able to establish good cooperation and adapt to the host culture also, each International student around the world are challenged with different experiences and have different adaptation processes depending on the host culture and their origin. Since Diponegoro University (UNDIP) had around 42 different international students from around the world, it is important to understand the adaptation process of international students at Diponegoro University, Semarang. Therefore, the researcher

wants to understand how Diponegoro University international students experience the adaptation process by interacting to the host culture in Semarang city.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this research is to describe the experiences of international students when they adapt to the host culture, to analysis the experiences of international students by interacting to the host culture and to describe the identity of international student after interacting to the host culture.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

To conduct this research in depth, the researcher is going to use the U-Curve theory and the Identity Negotiation theory of cultural adaptation. The U-Curve theory is developed by Sverre Lysgaard in 1955, represents the process of cultural adaptation in the host country, which describes the social and emotional shifts one experiences when transferring into any new

environment (Alberts et al., 2019). It has become popular in many areas of study, especially when it comes to understanding the problems people face when they try to fit in with new cultures. The U-curve shows how an expatriate adjusts to the society of a new country over time. The expatriate goes through a honeymoon stage, culture shock, a process of getting used to (recovery) and improving the host culture (adjustment) (Pires & Stanton, n.d.). However, the identity negotiation theory (INT) emphasizes the dialectical tensions and challenges that immigrants and minorities experience as they cross cultural boundaries from a familiar turf to an unfamiliar milieu. The idea emphasizes the importance of negotiating sociocultural membership identification and personal identity aspects elastically in individuals' varied boundary-crossing trips (Bennett, 2015).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was carried out using qualitative research methods, which involved the use of interviews,

with five international students at UNDIP from Rwanda, Sierra Leon, Madagascar, Pakistan, and Sudan. To conduct this research, the researcher is going to use the phenomenology research method. by Max Van Manen (1990) to emphasize the examination of lived experiences, specifically highlighting the subjective nature of human perception and the contextual factors that shape our understandings. The phenomenon described in this study is the adaptation process of international students in Semarang, Indonesia, as they interact with the host culture. Concentrate on their living experience because they live in Indonesia, which has a different culture than their own. Furthermore, the description provides the reader with a better understanding of the experience of foreign students at UNDIP.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Honeymoon: Experienced feelings of excitement and surprise within the host culture.

Everyone has their way of adjusting to their new environment, as international students at Diponegoro University discovered. According to the researcher of (Adjustment, n.d.), this phase is marked by feelings of joy, optimism, and wonder while entering a new environment or culture. Students are more likely to focus on the positive aspects and enticing differences of the new environment as a result of encountering new people, environments, cultures, and situations. At this point, anyone who moves or travels to a place or country where they live will be excited.

This was also felt by the international students at Diponegoro University, who knew they would transfer to another country and experience a cultural environment in Indonesia. When they initially arrived in Semarang, they felt joyful and enthusiastic. They experienced many new things, including societal conventions that differed widely from their own, the technologically advanced country, and the lush greenery of Indonesia. Furthermore, international students discovered that

the food in Indonesia is significantly different from their own, as is the culture, such as the religion, as most people are Muslims and the fact that people cannot give someone something with their left hand.

Many factors can influence the intensity and duration of the honeymoon stage, including the individual's pre-existing cultural knowledge and experience, the degree of similarity or difference between the home and host cultures, and the individual's personality traits and coping mechanisms. Otherwise, what sets them apart is one informant feels surprised to see the developed country different from his own country. The other informant appears to have expectations met in the host country and a sense of familiarity with the new environment, possibly due to prior exposure or research.

Culture shock: The food, language, and social norms that surprise foreign students and the difficulties they encounter

Cultural shock will be the next thing foreign students at Diponegoro University will experience. In this stage of their adjustment to Semarang, the students enjoy the cultural differences that surprise and perhaps amaze them. Although it normally lasts a few weeks to a month, culture shock might start right away or later. It could start out with a full-blown catastrophe or with an ongoing series of developing problems, unpleasant encounters, and responses. People who encounter new cultures and surroundings and feel uneasy there may experience culture shock. Adjusting to the new surroundings and culture can take some time (Winkelman, 1994).

Food

Culture shock affects every foreign student at Diponegoro University in the same way. Those five informants are foreign students who experience the same feeling regarding the food context in Indonesia. Living in Semarang, they have observed several variations in the food and find that the cuisine in

Semarang tastes strongly of spices, while others eat it merely to survive. It means, there are strong differences between their home food and the food in Semarang, such as in Semarang, people eat chicken feet otherwise, it is not appropriate for other students to eat it in their culture. In addition, not only the taste but also the population, because it was the first time some of those international students to see dishes washed in the bathroom. It shocked those students because of how it can be possible for them. Cause of that, it has an effect on them, which is, they decide not to eat outside but prefer to cook their food. It's not only because of the pollution but also because of the taste differences.

Language

Language differences shocked them because it was the first time they heard about it, and the language they used academically was different from the everyday language. However, before they entered academic learning, the language they learned was only the everyday language. In

addition, there is a miscommunication between those international students and the local people. It caused misunderstanding because they didn't understand the Indonesian language, and it was difficult to find someone who could speak English, and they were struggling with the interaction with the locals. Also, sometimes some locals, such as in the Mark speak the Javanese language with them which is the main language in the tribe in central Java, it shocked them to hear that language because they never heard about it and even learned about it.

Social norms

The social norms of Semarang were somewhat shocking to foreign students because most Indonesians are Muslims and adhere strictly to their social norms. It shocked those international students especially when they discovered that in Indonesia, particularly in the dormitory of UNDIP, boys and girls cannot be in the same building. Indonesian people are very

welcoming people when they meet foreign people, however, it was a shock to those students how Indonesian people treat foreign people, and how they react when they meet a foreigner because they are very excited, nice, and polite. It shocked them because it was very different from their own culture, and their social norms.

Most of the particular units that those international students found and shocked them was to discovered for the first time that in Indonesian, "Mas and Mba" is used when someone addresses one another as "Sir or Miss." Indonesian people use it to call each other. It was a Unit of formal was to call someone not by their name. It indicates that their host culture and their own are very different, something that shocked them and they only realized when they got to Semarang.

Thus, each international student in Semarang were shocked by the social norms of Indonesia, where most Indonesians are Muslims and adhere to strict social norms. They discovered that boys and girls cannot

be in the same building in the dormitory of UNDIP. However, Indonesians are welcoming and polite when meeting foreigners, and their treatment and reactions differ significantly from their own culture and social norms. The students also discovered that Indonesians use "Mas and Mba" which means "Sir and Miss" for formal communication, indicating a significant difference between their host culture and their own. This realization was only realized upon arrival in Semarang.

Challenge

Most of the challenges faced by those International students were the language, especially related to their academic study. Language is foremost a means of communication, this is why effective communication requires an understanding and recognition of the connections between a language and the people who use it (Kuiper & Allan, 2017). Because of the language barrier, those students were struggling with their studies, and communication with the local people. Cause of that, it was

difficult for them to have a local friend. It is a common challenge for them due to the language barrier.

In addition, when the connections between a language and the people who use it, is challenging, the interaction is not working. From those students' experience, it is very different to find Indonesian people who can speak English fluently, especially for instance in the market. Cause of that, there is a misunderstanding between the foreign students and the locals. Also, there is a consequence in their study, because from their experience, in the class they use the Indonesian language not English, however, the academic language is very difficult and new for them. Cause of that, the students didn't effectively inform the class and there is an effect with their grade point, sometimes, even they don't understand the lesson and even the explanation of their teacher. All of those challenges affect that they don't get the response they want sometimes.

Recovery: Accepting the host culture and effectively adapting to life within it.

The adaptation stage is an important stage for each individual to be able to be in the environment comfortably. This step focuses on learning how to efficiently adjust to the new cultural environment. Cultural shock is resolved by learning how to adjust to the new culture in an acceptable manner (Winkelman, 1994). According to (*Theorizing About Intercultural Communication - Google Books*, n.d.) cultural adaptation is every individual who is in a new environment and tries to survive in the new environment, to maintain his survival in a new environment and culture. The recovery is a process in which each individual can be seen from their activities, as well as the communication process carried out while in a new cultural environment, in which each individual will adapt to culture in a new environment, this adaptation phase goes into the recovery and adjustment stages. At the recovery stage, every individual

who is studying abroad will adjust to their new environment and culture, at this stage individuals begin to understand the new environment and the host culture. While at the adjustment stage, each individual is at the peak stage of adjustment where individuals begin to understand how to adapt to new cultures and environments (Winkelman, 1994).

Each international student has a different strategy to overcome the challenges and culture shock they face in the host culture related to their academic study and their everyday life by interacting with the locals. The first thing they did was to accept the differences and the reality, and also, respect the host culture, and stop complaining because fact that they live in a foreign country and inevitably have to be able to adapt. In addition, they also try to communicate more with the local people to practice the language and to gain more vocabulary. By interacting more with the locals, they got to know more about the host culture and understand about it, because international students can adapt by socializing with the country's

residents so that it's easier to understand their way of living.

However, other international students decide to live their lives and stay as they are. It means the students come to Semarang to study and the important thing for them is when study and the education they want and eat to survive and be healthy, that's the important. This reason is because by living in Semarang is just temporary since after their study they will go back to their country. Thus, to adapt is to make himself comfortable. In addition, other international students, decide to live with other international students, because as far away from their home culture, they may understand each other. It means international students have the feeling of not being confident that the people in the host culture don't understand them. In addition, it evited culture shock and crisis between the host culture and the international students.

Thus, International students face various challenges and culture shocks in their host culture, including academic study and everyday life. They adapt by accepting differences,

respecting the host culture, and practicing language and vocabulary. Interacting with locals helps them understand the host culture and socialize with residents. Some students choose to live their lives in Semarang, focusing on their education and survival, as they will return home. Adapting is essential for comfort and survival. Some students choose to live with other international students because they fear that the host people may not understand them. This avoids culture shock and crisis with the host people and allows international students to adapt and make themselves comfortable in their new environment. Overall, international students' strategies vary depending on their needs and preferences.

2.1.Adjustment: The duration to adapt to the host culture

Everyone has their own identity, which is useful for individuals to socialize in their environment. Adjustment places an individual in a situation in which many past behaviors and associated

consequences are no longer appropriate and new sources of modeled behavior are different from the past (Black & Mendenhall, 1990). It aims to understand the way individuals and their surroundings behave, and also learn what can be done to improve the feasibility and effectiveness of each individual's communication. The existence of this goal is to see how the role of cultural identity in adaptation. Each individual who adapts will adjust their respective cultural identities despite the obstacles and disturbances that occur, this becomes a bridge to be able to adjust each other's perspectives so that an understanding of the differences that exist is formed, so that communication can still be directly accepted and interpreted.

Each international student experiences the host culture in Semarang, they start to understand the host culture and adapt to it. because they know the why during the culture shock and know how to adapt and overcome the challenges they face. What they have in common is during the duration of their adaptation, because those international students

can adapt to the host culture after two years of living in the host culture. In their experience, students can adapt to the host culture after two years because they get to know more about the host culture, and get more knowledge about it. Otherwise, for other students it has to take four years to adapt to the host culture because there is always some culture, that may surprise and shock differ with the place, the situation, and the person that they communicate with. Thus, for one of the participants, it takes four years to adapt.

What sets them apart is those international students have a new identity by following the host culture in Semarang as long as they live here. For instance, one international student from Pakistan started to wear a Hijab because most of the Muslim girls in Semarang wear a Hijab. It was her acculturation. When she arrived in Semarang she didn't wear a Hijab, because even though she is from a Muslim country, it's not their culture for young girls to wear a Hijab. Otherwise, cause of the social norms and influence of the society in Semarang, she decided to wear it and

not take it off again. Even her family was shocked by that choice but it's her change caused by the host culture.

International students in Semarang experience a culture shock and adapt to it, with some able to adapt after two years due to increased knowledge and understanding of the host culture. Others may take up to four years due to cultural differences and some new culture that may shock. However, these students often develop a new identity by following the host culture, such as wearing a Hijab, which is customary for Muslim girls in Semarang. This is a result of acculturation, as it is not their culture for young girls to wear a Hijab. Despite being from a Muslim country, the social norms and influence of Semarang society led her to wear it, despite being shocked by her family's reaction.

CONCLUSION

First, the international students at Diponegoro University experience the same feeling upon arrived in the host culture which is excitement and

surprise. They involve culture shock, influenced by the language, social norms, and food. Experiencing culture shock, led those students to misunderstand, and miscommunication because of the language barrier, and even there was an effect on their studies which was that they didn't effectively inform in class and it was difficult for them to have local friends. Thus, the culture shock is the cause of the challenge those students passed through.

Second, to overcome the culture shock, those students at Diponegoro University try to adapt to the host culture in their own way by accepting the reality and engaging with locals to practice language skills. However, one informant chose not to interact with the host culture but focus on his study, since he will stay in the host culture temporarily. The other informant decided to live with other international students to avoid culture shock and crisis. For those students, the important is to make themselves comfortable in the host culture.

Third, one international student from Pakistan made acculturation in her

lifestyle because before she arrived in the host culture she didn't wear a Hijab however by the influence of the host culture, she decided to wear it for the rest of her life. It shows that the influence of the host culture changed the identity of the international students who lived abroad.

IMPLICATION

Theoretical Implications

This study uses the U curve theory and negotiation theory, these theories are used to provide an overview of how the cultural adaptation process of international students at Diponegoro University. In the U Curve theory, the researcher found that each student has a different process of adaptation different from their origin culture which is different from the host culture. These differences occur when they interact with the surrounding environment, and the local people, and by discovering the host culture itself. It means that those international students went through several phases, which affected the initial process of

adaptation until they felt comfortable in a new environment and culture. For the negotiation theory, the researcher found that to be in a new cultural environment it needs a negotiation between the host culture and the international students to have better communication and interaction, especially in the language barrier.

Practical Implications

According to this research, Diponegoro University should have an improved understanding of the needs and challenges faced by international students. This study demonstrates the necessity for academics to be more comprehensible to international students and the challenge to adjust to the host culture. To learn about the needs of those students and build a stronger relationship with them, the institution must also undertake some orientation. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of intercultural communication competency not just among the international service office but across the entire academic community, including faculty, staff,

and domestic students. This is crucial to enhance international student satisfaction with university services, which in turn will lead to an increase in the number of international students

Social Implications

This research explains the adaptation process of international students at Diponegoro University in Semarang, it shows that to adapt to the environment and culture in Semarang, each student goes through several phases and it takes time around one to four years to adapt and to get to know about the host culture. The adaptation process is influenced by several factors including self-concept, personality, and environment. As mentioned in the study, students' preparation, personality, and environment also influenced their adaptation process. This finding is in line with another study that suggests international students require intercultural competence to be academically successful in their new cultural environment. However, the

adaptation process may vary depending on the origin culture of each international student.

Recommendation

- a. Future researchers can expand the subject not only to international students but also to the local people in the host culture, which means the relationship between international students and the locals. That research aims to know if the interaction of international students and the locals affects their adaption process.
- b. Future researchers can expand the stages of the adaptation process not only for those students from Africa or Asia but also the experience of adaptation for those students from Europe or America who decided to study in Indonesia. This aims to see whether the adaptation process of students from other countries has similarities in adapting.

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