

SELF ADJUSTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT: LANGUAGE BARRIER AND CULTURAL SHOCK

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Abstrak

Peningkatan jumlah mahasiswa internasional menghadirkan tantangan unik, khususnya dalam hal penyesuaian diri selama perjalanan akademik mereka. Penelitian ini meneliti proses penyesuaian diri mahasiswa internasional dengan fokus pada dampak hambatan bahasa dan culture shock. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan mahasiswa internasional di Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hambatan bahasa secara signifikan menghambat komunikasi. Culture shock juga masuk dalam proses penyesuaian, karena mahasiswa harus menavigasi norma budaya yang tidak dikenal, ekspektasi akademik, dan kebiasaan sosial yang baru. Namun, penelitian ini juga menyoroti peran ketahanan pribadi, dukungan dari teman sebaya dalam membantu mahasiswa mengatasi tantangan-tantangan tersebut. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya sensitivitas budaya, program dukungan bahasa, dan cara untuk menghadapi tantangan Bahasa dan budaya bagi mahasiswa internasional. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman tentang pengalaman mahasiswa internasional serta menawarkan rekomendasi untuk meningkatkan proses penyesuaian mereka di institusi pendidikan tinggi.

Kata kunci: Penyesuaian diri, mahasiswa internasional, hambatan bahasa, culture shock, pendidikan tinggi.

Abstract

The increasing number of international students presents unique challenges, particularly in terms of adjustment during their academic journey. This research examines the adjustment process of international students with focus on the impact of language barriers and culture shock. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews with international students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. The findings of findings showed that language barriers significantly hindered communication. Culture shock also enters into the adjustment process, as students have to navigate unfamiliar cultural norms, academic expectations, and new social new social customs. However, the study also highlighted the role of personal resilience, peer support in helping students overcome these challenges. overcome these challenges. This research emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity, language support programs, and ways to deal with language and cultural challenges

for international students. language and cultural challenges for international students. This study contributes to the understanding of international students' experiences as well as offer recommendations to improve their adjustment process at higher education institutions.

Keywords: Adjustment, international students, language barrier, culture shock, education.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to UNESCO data (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019), the number of international students worldwide increased from 2 million in 2000 to 5.3 million in 2017. These international students come from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany, and Russia (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019). Countries have different reasons for hosting international students, including increasing national income, improving research and technology, and smooth cultural exchange (Joanna Hughes, 2019). Indonesia offers opportunities for international students to study at both public and private universities. The number of international students studying in Indonesia is increasing every year. The number continues to grow, although not as much as international students studying in the six developed countries mentioned above. International students tend to experience difficulties in adjusting to a new environment. Acculturation is defined as "the movement by which individuals establish (or re-establish) relatively stable interactions and maintain relatively stable interactions after moving into a new, unfamiliar, or changing cultural environment.

The large number of foreign students studying at universities in Indonesia is an attraction for any university and stimulates the interest of foreign students to study at affiliated universities, and Muhammadiyah University has a vision to become an international standard university (Biro Teknologi dan Informasi, 2023). The presence of international students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta brings a new nuance to the educational landscape on campus, but living in the community around the campus where the majority use local languages and Indonesian provides its own challenges for them. They must understand Indonesian as a second language. However, living and studying in a socially and culturally diverse community can have certain social and psychological impacts, such as differences in language and food (Reddy & Dam, 2020).

2. METHOD

In writing the results of this study, it was carried out with a qualitative research method design, and with a qualitative descriptive approach. Qualitative research can be defined as the study of the nature of phenomena and is especially suitable to answer questions of why something is not observed, assess complex multi-component interventions, and focusing on improving interventions. The most common method of data collection is document study, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups (Busetto et al., 2020). This study presents data systematically and accurately based on facts in the field. The purpose of descriptive research is to describe, explain, and answer the question under study in more detail by examining as many individuals, groups, or events as possible. This study uses qualitative research methods because the purpose of this study is to provide an overview of the self-adjustment of foreign students studying in Indonesia, especially for foreign students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

In this part of the data findings, researchers will first describe the problems faced by international students related to language barriers, find out the problems faced by international students related to cultural differences, and how international students overcome these problems.

3.1.1 Language Barrier

Based on the results of interviews with 5 international students at Surakarta muhammadiyah university. 5 out of 5 students experience problems when they communicate. The data is in accordance with the results of the interview. One student identifies language as a minor obstacle in their experience, specifically the need to learn Indonesian to communicate effectively with those who do not speak English. Although this challenge is acknowledged, the student frames it positively, describing the process of learning Indonesian as "fun."

[It's actually not a big obstacle but one of my obstacles is about language. I have to learn Indonesian because not everyone can speak English. So that's one of the obstacles in communicating using language but Indonesian is very fun] (Student 1)

3.1.2 Culture Shock

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with 5 international students from various countries, all of them stated that they had their own experiences regarding self-adjustment to culture shock. The data is divided into 4 different topics, which are the environmental condition, culinary, fashion style, and social norms or lifestyle. Five international students experienced culture shock in this chapter. Environmental conditions, food, clothing, and lifestyle/social norms are the four main categories of culture shock they experienced. These categories are based on the interview results. The students had difficulty adjusting to environmental conditions such as climate and transportation, as well as differences in food that affected their eating habits. In addition, differences in dressing styles, especially when adjusting to local trends. Finally, differences in lifestyle and social norms posed a big challenge, especially regarding social interactions, etiquette, and daily habits.

3.1.3 Students Effort In Overcoming Language Barrier And Culture Shock

a. Language barrier

From in-depth interviews conducted by researchers with 5 international students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, they each have ways of overcoming obstacles to language barriers. There are various ways from each student.

During the adaptation process, international students rely not only on verbal communication but also use gestures to help convey their intentions. While gestures can be helpful, they often find it necessary to provide verbal clarification to ensure their message is understood. Additionally, technology such as Google Translate plays a crucial role in overcoming language barriers and facilitating daily communication in their new environment.

[So far I have not only spoken but also gestured. Not only with gestures because sometimes it has to be translated with clear language so that they also understand. and I use google translate to communicate] (Student 2)

b. Culture shock

From in-depth interviews conducted by researchers with 5 international students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, they each have ways of overcoming obstacles to Culture shock.

Student 2 is from Myanmar who is trying to adjust to food in terms of texture. He explained that Indonesian food is no less delicious. Therefore, he can adjust well. In an

interview with a student from Myanmar, they shared their initial difficulty in adjusting to the eating habits in Indonesia, where rice is a staple food, unlike their home country where they are more accustomed to eating bread or noodles. Despite the initial challenge, they eventually came to enjoy Indonesian cuisine, finding it delicious and to their liking. This experience highlights that international students' adjustment also involves adapting to local culinary cultures.

[Yes, at first I had to adjust, especially with food. Because Indonesians eat rice very often unlike my country in Myanmar and my friends are also not used to eating rice, because we often eat bread or eat noodles. But Indonesian food is very tasty and it suits me very well] (Student 2)

3.2 Discussion

The researcher found that most international students at Surakarta Muhammadiyah University had to adjust to culture shock and language barrier. They admit that they need to adjust when they are in Indonesia, especially when they learn a foreign language. Of the five participants involved, there are those who have to adjust to culture shock and language barriers, such as within the scope of the school environment and the environment in the community can affect self-adjustment. cultural factors are also factors that influence individual life. for example in differences in food, how to dress and existing social norms.

The study also found that there are five foreign students' adjustment issues, which include: 1) differences in food; 2) ways of dressing; 3) differences in lifestyle; 4) obstacles when communicating in the campus environment; and 5) language barriers when interacting while traveling. The researcher has identified three external causes of anxiety, which are: 1) a social environment/friendships that always support and help each other; 2) self-adjustment that is not so difficult because it is still in a country with the same background in social and religious norms; and 3) technological advances that facilitate access to communication.

Meanwhile, to overcome the adjustment regarding the barriers in culture shock and language barrier faced by international students are 1) tolerance, 2) positive attitude, and 3) able to adapt and actively socialize. The speaker mentioned that his goal is to learn and take education can still adjust to the environment by appreciating and adjusting to the new environment. the attitude of tolerance is the basis of everyone to respect each other,

that is, to be able to maintain good relations between others. The first strategy relates to the research of (Pratimi & Satyawati, 2020), He stated that studying abroad today is nothing new or strange, and international students studying in Indonesia inevitably experience great communication patterns, cultural tremors, and the need to adapt. Experience a new environment, social environment, culture, etc. International students have their own strategies to deal with the adjustment process, such as tolerance, positive attitude, and active socializing.

As a result of the findings, the researcher concluded that International students' self-adjustment in language barriers and culture shock is not permanent. Students can overcome these obstacles with the passage of time and support from themselves and the social environment. The findings of this study can be used to help overcome language barriers and culture shock.

4. CLOSING

This study aims to understand the language barriers and cultural differences experienced by international students at Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, as well as the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. Based on the research findings, international students face various challenges, particularly concerning differences in food, clothing, and lifestyle in Indonesia.

Firstly, differences in food and clothing emerged as significant aspects requiring adjustment. International students have to adapt to the distinct taste and texture of food compared to what they are accustomed to in their home countries. They also have to get used to Indonesian food, which is typically known for being spicy or sweet, as well as the common practice of eating rice. In addition, they need to adjust to the local dressing customs, requiring them to respect and adapt to how Indonesians dress.

Secondly, the study identifies six main aspects of self-adjustment that international students undergo, including culture shock and language barriers. In dealing with culture shock, students are confronted with several differences, such as the taste and texture of food, clothing styles, and local habits or lifestyle. Language barriers present significant challenges, particularly when trying to communicate within the campus environment or while traveling. These difficulties are further compounded by differences

in tone and pronunciation, making it harder for students to establish effective communication with friends or new acquaintances.

Thirdly, international students utilize three key strategies to overcome these challenges. The first strategy is tolerance, which involves respecting others and maintaining good relationships. Tolerance is crucial in helping students adjust more easily to a new environment. The second strategy is maintaining a positive attitude, where students give themselves positive affirmations to constructively face challenges. This approach helps them stay motivated, enabling them to develop their potential and achieve academic success. The third strategy is adaptability and being socially active. Strong communication skills facilitate the adaptation process, helping students understand the new culture and minimize the effects of culture shock. Friendships and social interactions also play a significant role in supporting their academic progress and overall adjustment.

In conclusion, although international students face various challenges in adapting to their new environment, they are able to overcome these obstacles through tolerance, maintaining a positive attitude, and the ability to adapt and engage socially.

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