



Journey to Success: Exploring How Cultural Changes Affect the Academic Performance of Indonesian Final-Year Students

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Cultural transitions;
Cultural changes;
Academic performance;
Cross-cultural experiences;
Coping mechanisms.

The research being undertaken at an international university, seeks to examine how changes in culture affect the academic performance of Indonesian final-year students. The research includes qualitative approaches, including in-depth interviews with six respondents who are students in areas such as Media and Communication, Elementary Education, and Business Administration. The study investigates the difficulties encountered by these students including language hurdles, regional differences, and problems adjusting, all of which affect how well students do in school, the impact of cultural changes on their academic performance, and the coping techniques used. Key results include the importance of cultural diversity at universities, barriers to academic achievement, and support systems and events that help Indonesian students adjust to a multicultural environment. The research highlights the need for strong support mechanisms for overseas students' academic journeys and achievement, especially those enduring cultural adjustments.



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A. INTRODUCTION

An international university is a higher education institution that focuses on global connections, with a diverse student body, international faculty, and a dedication to collaborating on research worldwide. This can involve universities with overseas locations, research facilities, or branch campuses, as well as those that provide a comprehensive educational experience on campus. The term is commonly used to refer to schools that emphasize international involvement and cooperation, striving to improve the standard of education, research, and community service (Fumasoli, 2018). Malaysia stands as a top choice for Indonesians seeking to pursue their education abroad, as evidenced by the interesting data presented in Table 1.

Table.1 The total number of Indonesian students over the past 3 years by EMGS

Year	Number of Indonesian Students
2021	11,161
2022	10,000
2023	4,600

According to the data published by Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS), a significant number of Indonesian students have expressed their keen interest in pursuing higher education in Malaysia. This preference can be attributed to several factors, including the country's hospitable atmosphere, affordable living and educational expenses, and the presence of globally renowned universities. Malaysia's educational institutions are renowned for their high-quality education, emphasis on practical learning, and the development of industry-relevant skills, all of which make them highly appealing to international students. Moreover, Malaysia offers a multicultural environment that places great importance on cultural diversity and exchange, thereby fostering a sense of inclusivity and support for students from around the world.

The concept of transition in the context of higher education is closely related to questions about equality and inclusivity and how the Higher Education sector seeks to provide the best opportunities for success for all students (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017). In the current era, cultural diversity has become an important aspect in the educational environment. The increasing number of students studying abroad indicates the need for a deeper understanding of the impact of cultural changes in the countries where they study on academic achievement. This environment is very dynamic where they feel a global atmosphere that creates diversity in the surroundings. Sad to say that not all foreign students who are studying in international universities experience a positive transition, some problematic transitions lead to negative outcomes for international students, including stress, depression, and lower academic achievement (Brunsting et al., 2018). Additionally, cross-cultural transitions can also be very challenging. Individuals are called upon to learn new skills to operate effectively in an unfamiliar cultural environment, to resolve tensions between differences in cultural perspectives and worldviews, and to manage the stress associated with significant change in everyday life (Bethel et al., 2020). This turning point can be a part of collegiate culture shock that students experience during the acculturation process (Omachinski, 2014). That is why having a knowledge of what that environment is like is also critical to seeing how this diversity contributes to the overall student experience and creates success in the academic journey and well-being.

In today's global environment, cultural change is nothing new, especially for students who choose to study abroad. While the interest in pursuing new experiences and lifestyles is enticing, we also need to realize that final-year students at Albukhary International University have faced various challenges over the past two years. Like many students, moving abroad to study adversely impacts many potential challenges, and international students may experience acculturative stress i.e. stress due to life changes in the acculturation process and adjustment problems. Furthermore, cultural differences in communication styles and emotional expression can exacerbate the problem, making it harder for students to integrate and be recognized (Yale, 2017). They also experience some of the common challenges involving both domestic and international students, such as homesickness, financial problems, lack of social support, and changes in routine, and academic problems when living life abroad. Additionally, students experience turning points that can often create changes in their educational paths that result in them going to college, changing schools, dropping out, or seeking help for their mental health (Omachinski, 2014). In the context of the above problems, this research aims to understand the experience of cultural change faced by final year students from Indonesia. The aim is to find out the various challenges that are felt and what coping strategies are implemented. With this understanding, it is hoped that the research can provide insight into the factors that can help students stay focused on learning and achieve good academic performance. Thus, the objectives of this study are to examine the effect of cultural transitions towards Indonesian final-year students, to identify the challenges faced by

final-year Indonesian students and to explore potential strategies or support systems that can enhance the academic adaptation of Indonesian students in a multicultural university setting.

The results of this research will later be used to see how cultural changes can influence the academic performance of international students at Albukhary International University, especially Indonesian final students. Therefore, the aim of this research is to provide relevant information to support international students in overcoming the problems they face. So that universities or individuals can understand the gaps experienced in handling the existing situation. This support is important because international students need guidance and support, especially when they come from various regions and have to adapt to a new environment. Thus, it is hoped that this research can improve your academic journey and achieve success in learning in the future. This can be done by identifying factors that hinder their performance in learning and implementing resources that can be applied and have a good impact. For this reason, it is also hoped that this research can contribute to improving the academic achievement of international students by providing an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by international students and providing a basis for implementing effective solutions for their academic success.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Cultural Transitions and Academic Performance of International Students

Cultural transitions occur when people move from one cultural setting to another, forcing them to cope with and adjust to new norms of society, academic expectations, and lifestyle changes. The early phases of cultural adjustment may have a substantial influence on academic achievement as students deal with language difficulties, cultural differences, and a new educational system. In addition, studying abroad is a demanding experience for students of all nationalities and backgrounds, and the adjustment is not simple. Acculturation, or the act of adjusting to a new culture while maintaining parts of one's own, is critical for final-year Indonesian students since good acculturation is favorably connected with academic performance. Language competency, social integration, and the capacity to balance different identities all play an important role in determining how well students function academically in a new cultural setting.

When international students move to new cultural and linguistic environments, they often struggle to adjust. When they immerse themselves in the social, cultural, and academic life of another country, they may experience culture shock, obstacles, and misunderstanding. Cross-cultural adaptation was conceptualized as a systematic and thorough process by which immigrants' transition from cultural outsiders to more engaged and successful cultural insiders. Individuals who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the new circumstances may be constrained to possibly maladaptive actions performed in their original context (Wang et al., 2018). In addition, according to Mesidor & Sly (2016), going off to college is a big step for students. But for those studying abroad, the move can be tough. International students often struggle to adjust to college life, facing challenges in academics, social interactions, cultural differences, and mental health. While some find it easy to adapt, others may feel overwhelmed.

2. Challenges that International Students Encounter as They Navigate Cultural Transitions

The most significant problem that any overseas student faces is culture shock. The local environment and interactions create emotions of discomfort, dissatisfaction, and perplexity. Other significant hurdles were financial and psychological, including ordinary living and socio-cultural concerns and language is the primary obstacle to social contact and intellectual development (Brunsting et al., 2018). Homesickness greatly affects international students' academic progress and ability to adapt to new surroundings. It can cause feelings of loneliness, sadness, and anxiety, making it hard for students to focus on their studies and excel. The emotional strain from homesickness can lead to sleep problems, poor eating habits, and difficulties with memory and cognitive function, all of which impact academic performance negatively (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Moreover, mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, intensified by academic pressure and cultural adjustment challenges, can also impede students' concentration, motivation, and productivity.

According to a study conducted by Li & Zizzi (2018) have looked carefully at the social adjustment and friendship formation of overseas students. Navigating the complicated processes of forming a supportive peer network and developing connections in culturally diverse settings may be difficult. Previous research has shown that overseas students often experience sentiments of loneliness, discrimination, social loss, loneliness, and helplessness throughout their social adoption process. Common problems identified include language, food, climate, and societal issues. International students have several hurdles while transitioning to new contexts, including the host country's educational system. Failure to cope may lead to stress (Fernández Dávalos, 2021).

Cultural variances in how people communicate and express emotions (such as anger, sadness, or neutrality) can have a major influence on how international students integrate and are acknowledged in their new academic settings. These disparities can result in confusion, breakdowns in communication, and a sense of being alone, which can make it difficult for students to adjust and flourish in their host nations (Hareli et al., 2015). Differences in communication styles across cultures can make it hard for students to convey their emotions and needs, which might make it tough for them to connect with classmates and teachers. Moreover, varying ways of expressing emotions due to cultural differences can add to the struggles that international students already face. For instance, some cultures prioritize keeping emotions in check, while others promote being open about feelings (Ford & Mauss, 2015). These differences can lead to misunderstandings about emotional cues and expectations, further complicating the integration process. A research conducted by Jamaluddin & Idrus in 2021 university students did have negative stereotype towards other races. However, it is notable that those stereotypes they held towards other races did not affect their own academic performances.

3. Strategies or Support Systems is Identified to Enhance the Academic Adaptation of International Students in a Multicultural University Setting

Support systems and techniques are vital for foreign students in a multicultural university environment because they allow for a more seamless academic transition and overall well-being. First and foremost, language assistance services are critical for overcoming language obstacles, guaranteeing effective communication, and boosting academic achievement. Mentorship programs provide students assistance and support as they negotiate the complexity of the academic environment, comprehend cultural subtleties, and interact with experienced peers or

faculty members. Cultural orientation programs help foreign students better comprehend academic culture, expectations, and teaching techniques, therefore decreasing culture shock. Counseling programs address academic stress, homesickness, and cultural transition concerns while also encouraging mental and emotional well-being. Collaborative activities and study groups provide a feeling of community and intellectual engagement. These support systems work together to provide a more inclusive and friendly university environment, which improves foreign students' academic adaptation and success by addressing the different problems they may confront in a new cultural and academic setting. Researchers Martirosyan et al. (2019) have investigated a variety of characteristics that influence overseas students' social adjustment. Friendship is seen as a significant social adjustment component. Indeed, social support is identified as one of the most important drivers of the psychological well-being of overseas students. According to Hwang et al. (2015), as cited in (Martirosyan et al. 2019), international students' success in colleges depends on their ability to connect with campus groups such as peer groups, clubs, and recreational sports.

It is extremely important to provide cultural competency education to students, faculty, staff, and administrators. This type of education plays a vital role in helping individuals grasp and value cultural differences, new conversations, languages, and norms. By doing so, it creates an inclusive campus culture that welcomes international students. Additionally, actively communicating about academics and educating students on local customs and practices can greatly enhance their understanding and appreciation of their college experience. This, in turn, assists them in adapting academically and integrating into their new environment. Moreover, implementing extended orientation programs and workshops can greatly assist international students in adjusting to Western culture and the academic setting. These programs offer crucial support for the social, emotional, and academic challenges that international students face, ultimately promoting their successful cultural integration (Li, 2019). Universities need to provide language assistance, social programs for integration, and chances for international students to participate in cultural events. These efforts are essential in helping students feel connected, enhance their language abilities, and cultivate a sense of belonging within the university environment (Ma, 2022).

C. METHODOLOGY

In exploring answers to these research questions, qualitative methods were chosen because they are more suitable for exploring the impact of cultural transition on academic performance, allowing us to gain direct insight into respondents' experiences. Research on a person's life, life experiences, emotions, feelings, and behaviour, as well as organizational functions, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations that are not static in nature but combine several elements such as reality, are all examples of situations in which the qualitative method is utilized (Rahman, 2016). Qualitative methods are a great fit for studying how cultural transition affects international students' academic performance. Specifically, phenomenological qualitative analysis offers a way to delve into different aspects of human social experience, like cross-cultural transitions. This method allows researchers to directly understand the obstacles, coping mechanisms, and support systems that international students use to excel academically in diverse university environments. Additionally, qualitative research lets international students express their own stories and experiences, allowing them to share their individual viewpoints and struggles. This method is especially useful for grasping how cultural identity, academic success, and mental health intersect for international students (Valls et al., 2022).

Therefore, this study uses in-depth interviews by providing convenient location options for respondents and adjusting schedules so as not to interfere with their activities. Data collection methods included recorded face-to-face interviews and voice notes via WhatsApp, with full consent from respondents to involve their personal information. The researcher used purposive sampling to purposefully select participants who met specific criteria including six Indonesian final-year students from different cities, female students, and an age range between 23-24 years. Additionally, participants are selected based on the latest GPA results above 3.50 out of 4.00. They come from various schools, including the School of Education and Human Sciences, with two of them majoring in Elementary Education, two of them majoring in Media and Communication, and the rest from the School of Business & Social Sciences. This targeted approach in selecting participants' aims to ensure the representation of diverse Indonesian students with certain characteristics, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of cultural transition on academic performance, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Background of the Respondents

Respondents	Gender	Age	Hometown	Programme	GPA
A	Female	23	Medan	Bachelor of Media and Communication	3.7
B	Female	24	Jakarta	Bachelor of Media and Communication	3.5
C	Female	23	Sukabumi	Bachelor of Elementary Education	3.7
D	Female	23	Bekasi	Bachelor of Elementary Education	3.7
E	Female	23	Aceh	Bachelor of Business Administration (Marketing)	3.7
F	Female	23	Bandung	Bachelor of Business Administration (Marketing)	3.7

This research was carried out by combining in-depth interviews and GPA surveys asked via WhatsApp messages to get richer and more detailed information related to their academic performance. The questions asked are open-ended questions that are carried out like normal conversations in general. Interviews were conducted to cover themes such as experiences of cultural change experienced during their studies, its impact on academics, and how they overcame related problems. Here, they can freely express their opinions without fear of being judged and can choose the language they want to feel more comfortable. The interview session was recorded, transcribed, coded and rearranged in order to gather mutual information in the same category. To establish credibility, the researchers used the member-checking technique to establish agreement on the data gathered. Researchers use this technique in their qualitative research to establish credibility. Through rigorous coding and analyses, several themes were derived.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Cultural Transition and Academic Performance in the Diversity

All respondents emphasized that they had learned useful insights from the multicultural experience at Albukhary International University. By way of illustration, they said that they gained new experiences of new cultures and languages and that these interactions created a good place for everyone involved.

Respondent A:

"The majority of students at AIU come from various countries, and I feel that the culture I get here is very diverse..."

Respondent B:

"...I think it's a diverse and unique first experience to be in a place with wide cultural differences. It has provided me with a lot of experiences, especially in the classroom and outside of it..."

Respondent C:

"...It's diverse with different backgrounds and unique, providing me with new experiences in learning..."

Respondent D:

"...I think it is rich in diversity with people from more than 100 countries and various backgrounds..."

Respondent E:

"...There are a lot of international students, which is a good thing as it challenges me to use English and learn about their culture and language..."

Respondent F:

"...At the university there are a lot of international students, so that is a positive thing to learn a lot and get to know more cultures in the world..."

It is clear, based on the findings of the interviews, the university is home to a varied group of individuals who come from a variety of different backgrounds. This helps to create an atmosphere in which students may acquire useful ideas. There can be no doubt that this experience offers considerable advantages for human growth, especially in terms of widening and developing viewpoints. Students' personal growth and their ability to interact with people from other cultures are both improved as a result of their participation in study abroad programs. In today's interconnected world, when it is essential to have an appreciation for, familiarity with, and comprehension of various cultures, it is essential to cultivate intercultural competence (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2019).

2. Cultural Differences Affected Students' Personal Life

Based on the responses, five respondents acknowledged and agreed that there are significant differences in various aspects of their university experience

Respondent A:

"...Perhaps in terms of food, I find it different because every day I'm confused about what to eat since the food here is quite repetitive, causing my appetite to diminish..."

Respondent B:

"...We have a lot of differences, especially in understanding each other, the way of studying, and working in a group..."

Respondent C:

"...In terms of language and food, there are notable distinctions..."

Respondent D:

"...It's less competitive here compared to Indonesia. The students here are more relaxed, lying down, not active, and not involved in many activities. They are laid-back, and there are not many activities they participate in..."

Respondent E:

"...If I compare it to friends from other countries, there are a lot of differences, such as the way they take naps, sleep, have lunch, study, and greet someone with "dear"..."

Respondent F:

"...On campus, in terms of food, the celebration of Eid al-Fitr is different..."

According to Mohamed in 2020, students from other countries that come to Malaysia confront a number of obstacles, including those related to the diet, climate, language, and academics. Indonesian culture values group and family-oriented communication styles, while in an international university setting, there may be a more individualistic approach to communication. This difference can affect how students interact with peers and professors, influencing their academic and social experiences. Furthermore, students experienced a sense of culture shock within the academic setting, which involved dealing with language barriers and socializing with other students. Moreover, students had to adapt to unfamiliar food choices, adding to their overall culture shock experience (Ernofalina, 2017). It came to know that practically all of the individuals who participated in the survey had encountered cultural differences ever since they began their studies at this particular institution. The fact that students from Indonesia are much more active than students from this country is a major observation that can be made regardless of the cultural backgrounds of the students. In Indonesia, they are quite competitive, but in our country, many students would rather remain in their dormitories and not take part in any events.

3. The Students' Ability to Adjust to the Unexpected Culture

Three respondents expressed that cultural transition has an impact on their academic performance.

Respondent B:

"...I think a little more because when we work with international students, we try to understand their behaviour. It gives us challenges, and we need to learn more..."

Respondent C:

"...Yeah, it affects me, but not too much. We have different settings and discussions with classmates who have different opinions. Regarding their accent, I have to learn to understand them, which affects my learning process..."

Respondent D:

"...It's less competitive here compared to Indonesia. The students here are more relaxed, lying down, not active, and not involved in many activities. They are laid-back, and there are not many activities they participate in..."

While some acknowledged the challenges, such as cultural shock:

Respondent E:

"...Something that is missing in my family and home. The first year I arrived, I felt culture shock regarding food, timing, and the situation..."

Respondent F:

"...The time difference, prayer times, lack of sleep, and poor sleep management can be challenging..."

It has been determined that there are three major components that are significant for foreign students studying mental health: the ability to adjust to the unexpected, academic practice, and the development of abilities to handle daily life in various ways depending on the cultural setting. During the first phases of their transition, overseas students often experience what is commonly referred to as "culture shock." All of the participants recognized a number of interconnected problems and difficulties that they confronted. It is necessary to change to a highly different academic system as well as to adapt to distinct cultural standards in order to do this. When it comes to teaching, learning, and the relationship between teachers and students, this particular group is more likely to face significant difficulties related with new languages and classroom approaches (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016).

In the view of Shaibu (2021), International students' challenging experiences abroad should be reevaluated in terms of their actual experiences and the impact they have on them. Instead of making assumptions, it is crucial to engage with foreign students in practical ways to truly understand the difficulties they face. While culture shock explanations have been influential in shaping our understanding of migration experiences, it is important to now question how we can best capture and explain the challenges faced by international students. By moving away from solely attributing difficult experiences to culture shock, we can expand our knowledge and understanding of international students' experiences.

4. Language Barrier as the Main Challenge

Respondent A:

"... I found it hard to talk with international students because of their strong accent which makes it hard for me to understand..."

Respondent B:

"...Working in groups can be challenging. When collaborating with individuals from different countries, it becomes difficult, requiring explanations, and sometimes they seem a bit lazy..."

Respondent C:

"...I feel insecure in using English in the learning process, it makes me uncomfortable and less confident, impacting my mental health..."

Respondent E:

"...Lecturers using English can be hard to understand, and it feels unfamiliar to me. Seeing other people who are very smart makes me feel insecure too..."

Based on the findings by Heng, 2018 it has been proven that students have difficulties in relearning new language skills and communication styles, thinking like a "Westerner," comprehending new classroom expectations and sociocultural settings, and achieving a balance between work and leisure. An overwhelming majority of students, according to the findings of the study, are confronted with difficulties in terms of communication. The ability to communicate is an essential component for humans, particularly when it comes to interacting with other people. Additionally, the fact that this institution operates using English as the language of teaching contributes to the challenges that they have in terms of academic problems.

Final-year Indonesian students often encounter a variety of challenges when it comes to communication, especially in English speaking skills. These challenges can be quite complex and involve both linguistic and psychological barriers. Linguistic challenges may involve struggles with using the correct tenses, understanding grammar rules, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and pronouncing words accurately. These language-related obstacles can greatly impede students' ability to effectively express themselves in English (Muflihun & Tohamba, 2021). Moreover, students may encounter psychological obstacles like anxiety, low self-esteem, the dread of making errors, and worries about being judged or mocked, which can hinder their ability to communicate effectively. Inadequate practice and limited exposure to English-speaking settings can also add to the struggles faced by Indonesian students in their final year when it comes to English communication. To tackle these challenges, specific approaches may be necessary, such as improving language proficiency, building self-assurance, offering ample practice opportunities, and fostering supportive learning environments (Geria, 2022).

5. The Coping Mechanism Applied by the Students

The unanimous engagement in finding solutions suggests a collective agreement among the respondents on the importance of addressing and overcoming the challenges they face in their academic journeys.

Respondent A:

"...Until now, if I didn't understand the way they talked, I asked them to repeat. That's how I deal with it..."

Respondent B:

"...I started socializing with them and tried to understand. We cannot view everything from our own perspective; we try to understand and consider their conditions..."

Respondent C:

"...I have to adapt by engaging in conversations, hanging out with them, and learning about their accent..."

Respondent E:

"...I am attempting to find solutions, such as watching YouTube if I do not understand the material or using Google Translate..."

The individuals who participated in the survey have a strong comprehension of the significance of coping methods due to the difficulties they encountered while studying abroad. They are able to maintain their academic progress with the assistance of this awareness, which also assists them in better knowing themselves in terms of their own requirements. They are always looking for methods to persevere, even when confronted with a multitude of variables that have the potential to undermine their determination. Additionally, according to Ucheh (2024) bridging the gap caused by language and cultural differences necessitates empathy. Empathy involves understanding someone else's emotions and thoughts as if they were our own.

According to the results of this study as a whole, the cultural transition faced by Indonesian students who are in their last year at Albukhary International University have an influence on their academic performance especially in the process of learning. Despite the fact that they are confronted with a multitude of problems, such as differences in culture, difficulties in communication, a lack of confidence in English, and the foreign surroundings of Malaysia, these challenges do not prevent them from achieving well academically, it is proven that all of their grade point averages are higher than 3.5. In addition, they come from a variety of cultural backgrounds does not seem to greatly hinder their attempts to attain outcomes that are desirable. In spite of this, there are a few factors that students must take into consideration since they have the ability to affect their academic performance. One of these aspects is when students experience culture shock, which may result in emotions of tension and sadness, both of which can have an impact on their academic performance. Furthermore, the university seems to give less than full support in supporting their learning journey, which causes students to feel the need to discover their own methods to survive and achieve to the best of their ability. In addition, the institution appears to provide less than complete assistance. It is clear that the methods they use to deal with difficulties have played a significant role in enabling them to continue to achieve outstanding results in their academic pursuits. Consequently, it is of most significance for students who are studying abroad to pay attention to and look for strategies that might help them overcome these obstacles. The reason for this is to eliminate the negative influences in the lives of overseas students is the objective of this initiative. They have been able to maintain their motivation to achieve their intended results with the assistance of tactics that have been shown to be successful.

Most importantly, the results of the study from Bethel et al., (2020) show that foreign students may be able to deal with transfer stress and cultural differences better by making relationships with people from the host country. As the number of foreign students around the world grows, how to better connect people from different cultures stays a key question for students, teachers, psychologists, managers, and policymakers. In this section the author details the conclusions of the results of the discussion and data analysis and is advised to submit further research to the next researcher.

E. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The results of this study are far from perfect, therefore it is highly recommended for researchers to understand more deeply whether cultural transition can have an impact on their academic performance and in terms of how they are measured. So it is necessary to carry out ongoing research so that the results of this research are more accurate and can be used for several purposes. We highly recommend that future researchers to wider the participation from people from different countries, deepen their experiences by asking more in-depth questions, conduct studies to observe the academic performance of international students over a long period of time and to explore the role of peer support systems in mitigating the challenges faced by international

students. Investigate how student-led initiatives, support groups, or mentoring programs contribute to academic success and well-being

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