

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Internationalization in higher education encourages students, including those in Indonesia, to gain more experience and study in various parts of the world. Students across different countries study abroad and often use English as a common language for communication. The ability to communicate effectively in English has become an essential skill for individuals seeking to pursue international education and global opportunities. The Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) is a scholarship program offered by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (*Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi* abbreviated as *Kemendikbud*) in Indonesia. It is part of a larger program called Emancipated Independent Campus Learning (MBKM), which aims to provide students with more flexibility and opportunities to learn outside of the traditional classroom setting. The IISMA program allows Indonesian students to study at top universities abroad for one semester. The program has been met with great enthusiasm from students across Indonesia, who are eager to gain international experience and enhance their academic path. Studying abroad as an international student does, in fact, entail the prominent challenge shown through language use. Thus, the IISMA program recognizes and supports outstanding Indonesian students who demonstrate exceptional academic achievements and English language skills.

A key point to highlight is that many of the opportunities given by the IISMA program also take place in countries where English is not the native or first language. According to the IISMA website, there are 57 host university partners from both European and Asian regions. It is widely known that there have been numerous students pursuing education across non-English-speaking countries for decades. This evolving role of English as a common means of communication among individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds in international education settings has given rise to scholars like Jenkins (2006), Cogo and Dewey (2011), and Seidlhofer (2011) to explore the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). According to Seidlhofer (2011), ELF refers to any situation where individuals with

diverse native languages employ English as their preferred or exclusive mode of interaction. English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has gained prominence as a global medium of communication, transcending cultural and linguistic boundaries, and is increasingly becoming the language used in international education. ELF serves as a global language not just for academic purposes and research, but it is also widely used for everyday communication in social settings like friendships and families worldwide (Pietikäinen, K.S., 2018). The use of ELF is not bound by native speaker norms but adapts to the needs and contexts of its users. When examining language in its social and practical contexts, ELF is seen as an adaptable tool for communication that brings together diverse regions and cultures. Rather than treating non-native English speakers as outsiders, ELF recognizes their central role in intercultural communication (Ferguson, 2009). As a result, English is increasingly regarded as a global communication tool among non-native speakers, who are considered the largest group of English users worldwide (Baker, 2015).

A significant body of research has explored students' attitudes toward English as a lingua franca (ELF), delving into various aspects of their language encounters, perceptions, and identities. One study by Xu and Van De Poel (2011) investigated the frequency and contexts of university students' English language interactions, the significance of English in diverse contexts, and their views on motivation, ownership, and communication in English. Another study by Situmorang et al. (2021) examined the construction of language learning identities by international students within the context of ELF in Indonesia. The study suggested that studying abroad in an ELF environment could positively influence language learning and identity formation.

Despite growing research on students' attitudes towards English as a lingua franca (ELF), there is a notable gap in studies specifically focusing on IISMA students' experiences in this context. While Sanawiyah (2023) study explores the intercultural communication barriers, and Zidani and Sudarwati's (2023) work explores the emotional geographies of students enrolled in an international IISMA program, they did not delve into the nuances of their interactions in engaging with ELF or perceptions of ELF usage.

As ELF continues to shape global communication, it is vital to explore its impact on specific communities, such as IISMA Awardee students, who represent a unique and dynamic group whose experiences and challenges encountering ELF require a thorough and in-depth inquiry. This research seeks to explore the experiences and challenges faced by IISMA Awardee students in engaging with ELF as well as the challenges, both within and outside the academic community during their participation in the program. By delving into their perspectives, this study seeks to shed light on the realities of using and encountering ELF in diverse settings, highlighting the intricacies of language use in a globalized context, ultimately offering a comprehensive view of IISMA Awardee students' experiences and challenges encountering English as a Lingua Franca.

This research explores the experiences and challenges faced by IISMA Awardee students in their use of English as a lingua franca (ELF). Drawing upon the theories of ELF scholars, namely Jenkins, Seidlhofer, and Ferguson, this study aims to understand the sociolinguistic and pragmatic dimensions of ELF and its impact on these students' experiences. In this context, one fundamental question guides this research: How do the participants perceive their English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) experiences through the IISMA program?