

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

My experience studying in Indonesia for further education was an enriching one. I was able to learn a lot of new things both academically and non-academically. I had the chance to experience a style of education that is different from the educational style in Nigeria. I was exposed to academic writing, public speaking, character building, financial management and I developed interpersonal and communication skills. Studying in Indonesia brought out my independent nature and I had an opportunity to discover myself while gaining an understanding of a different culture. Due to the cultural diversity of *Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia* campus, I was able to build long-lasting relationship with Indonesians and students from other countries, I tried lots of cuisines from different countries, participated in conferences, seminars and camping. I was exposed to new activities, interests and new forms of entertainment. Studying in Indonesia made me have a better understanding and appreciation for people (regardless of their background, ethnicity, and race) and history.

Despite this enriching experiences I still had to overcome challenges related to my adjustment experiences which was overwhelming and filled with uncertainties. The beginning of my stay in Indonesia seemed awkward. Everything seemed strange to me, starting from the food to the language, the people, the means of transportation, the values, and so on. I didn't know how to communicate with anyone because of the language barrier, Google translate became my companion. I also didn't know anyone, hence "*I felt so lonely*". There were a lot of times I felt like going back home because I couldn't just cope with everything.

After a year, I had to start my Master's degree at the postgraduate school in *Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia* (UPI) and the medium of instruction was in the Indonesian language. My first semester in the postgraduate school was discouraging, I couldn't comprehend what my lecturers and classmates were discussing in class. *I felt lost, different* (being the only black-skinned student in my class) *and odd*. One stressful experience I can't forget easily was when a lecturer asked us to submit a task on SPOT UPI within a given time frame. I didn't understand what SPOT UPI meant. I asked my classmates about it, the more they explained the more confused I became. I also didn't know how to navigate on the website. Then, I discovered that I wasn't well informed about the academic demands of my school. I had to seek help from my classmates that understood English to cope with the academic demands. I couldn't participate in class as I would love to. Although I was allowed to write my assignments, tests, exams, and do presentations in English, "*I still felt lost most of the time*", I had difficulties in comprehending lectures, taking notes, writing reports, expressing ideas, class presentations, reading academic literature and understanding the language of instruction. I was constantly experiencing psychological problems like anxiety, stress, insomnia, loneliness and there was no place I could go to for professional help.

I was generally characterized by feelings of restlessness and fatigue because I felt it was impossible for me to do well in class. I always have feelings of nervousness during test and exams. Every time a new semester is coming I was always anxious of what to expect. I was literally stressed most of the times especially when lecturers give me assignments. The confusion of how to interpret and understand the task, the writing template and if I'm doing the task well made me stressed. Also, I had to manage heavy loads of course work during semester 2 and the classes were back to back, I was really stressed and I didn't even know how to cope because there were lots of tasks for each courses. The feelings of anxiety and stress I experienced eventually led to

sleeplessness. Most nights I couldn't sleep and when I eventually slept I kept waking up at intervals. I was always feeling headaches and fatigue due to lack of sleep.

The psychological struggles I experienced during my stay in Indonesia and the postgraduate school, especially during my first semester was what prompted me to research the patterns and problems of international students' self-adjustment and a case study of international students in my school.

My friend from Ukraine also shared her adjustment challenges in the postgraduate school with me. She talked about how the frustrations and embarrassment she felt almost led to depression. She noted that:

“When I started I didn't understand what was going on. I was very dependent on my classmate because the educational culture at UPI is different from my country. Sometimes I get frustrated because of some assignments I was asked to do by my professors that I don't know how to do and it seems so easy for my friends to do. I was also embarrassed due to expectations from others because they have this image that I'm a foreigner so I should be better. Sometimes I don't even know what's going on in the classroom especially when they talk in Indonesian. I'm a moody person, so sometimes these emotional outburst influences me, I don't want to go anywhere, and it's like don't touch me. It was near depression. I didn't want to study anymore, I just wanted to stay at home”.

International students are a growing population in many universities around the world. Around 4.5 million students enrolled in universities away from their home countries in 2012, which reveals an average annual growth rate of almost 7% from 2000 (OECD, 2014). According to the forecast of the IDP in Australia, there would be a fourfold increase in the worldwide demand for international education with approximately 7.2 million students by 2025, representing a 5.8% compound rate of growth during this era.

According to this study, China and India will develop as two major sources for overseas education, while Turkey, Morocco, and Iran will become new sources of international students shortly given the increasing demand for overseas education in

these countries. The study also estimated that the demand from western countries like Europe and the USA will decline over the years (Bohm et al., 2002).

According to UIS (2014), Indonesia is becoming a significant pillar in the global economy given its promising economic outlook. Indonesia is on course to be the world's 7th largest economy by 2030 and the largest economy in ASEAN, hence, it is naturally attracting the interest of international students. However, to date, Indonesia has less than 6,000 international students studying in local universities. With the establishment of the *Kemitraan Negara Berkembang* (KNB) scholarship in 1992 by the Ministry of Education and Culture, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of international students enrolled in Indonesian universities over the previous couple of years. From 2009-2019, a total number of 1,290 scholarships have been awarded to students from 71 developing countries around the world.

International students are characterized by high intellectual ability and greater than average motivation which, with appropriate mentoring and support, can assist them in overcoming the challenges associated with academic achievement (Boylan, 2002). There is a comprehensive body of literature devoted to exploring the experiences of international students (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). A recent critical review identified numerous factors associated with positive learning experiences among international students studying in the UK, such as the opportunity to meet and develop relationships with students from around the world, broadened understanding and improved skills in independent thinking, and improved language skills (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014). The benefits for international students from studying abroad are immense, and studies have reported the opportunities for the student to gain a new and exciting chance to mix with a wide range of nationalities (Brown & Holloway, 2008), to increase their level of confidence and responsibility in learning (Warring, 2010), and to have their views challenged and experience personal development as they become independent thinkers and agents for change (Campbell,

2010; Kelly, 2010). Through all of this, according to Campbell (2010), students become employable global graduates, improve their career perspectives and in some cases on returning home become leaders in their chosen field, often in position of influence (Gribble, 2008; Luxon & Peelo, 2009). The experience can also transform their ideas and mind-set in relation to engagement with the world (Intolubbe-Chmil et al., 2012), and challenge their sense of self (Kim, 2005). Many students' experiences are commonly beneficial and can shape their outlook for the rest of their lives (Furnham, 2004).

International students experience a lot of psychological issues while studying abroad. They face lots of adjustment stress which can manifest as physical complaints for which there is no physical basis; cognitive fatigue, seen as cultural confusion and disorientation and /or difficulty concentrating; and psychological symptoms including feelings of isolation, sadness, loss, homesickness, resentment, and frustration. These may escalate to feelings of hopelessness, and helplessness sometimes associated with depression (Mori, 2000). Depression and anxiety are commonly experienced during the process of adjusting to a new environment. Some international students experience loneliness, culture shock, and somatic complaints such as headaches (which are manifestations of psychological symptoms in some cultures). Some international students struggled with depression, anxiety, academic difficulties, relationship issues (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas 2004; Yi et al., 2003; Yakushko et al., 2008), loneliness, and cultural adjustment (Yakushko et al., 2008) while adjusting to their host country. Han et al. (2013) found that approximately 45% of Chinese international students in their study reported symptoms of depression, and 29% reported experiencing some symptoms of anxiety. Sa et al. (2013) found that levels of acculturative stress, anxiety, and depression were predictors of South Korean international students' smoking prevalence. International students who engaged in self-critical perfectionism were more likely to experience severe depression (Rice at

al., 2012). Some of the students who internalized their adjustment issues experienced reactive depression and/or anxiety.

Studies show that international students face various challenges adjusting to the new environment when they go abroad for studies (Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Wilton & Constantine, 2003). International students live in doubt because they have left their country of origin and do not quite fit into the host country (Sawir et al., 2008). Lee (2015) reported that international students face challenges such as visa procedures, social isolation, cultural norms, discrimination, Second language learning, and costs. Assisting international students to make a successful transition and adjustment to universities is crucial and if these problems are not attended to international students may feel stress and depression (Constantine et al. 2004). These challenges can cause feelings of homesickness, anxiety, stress, and depression and can lead to withdrawal from the university (Tochkov et al., 2010). A general belief among educators is that international students are not sufficiently academically and socially adjusted to higher education in their host countries (Rienties et al., 2011). Furthermore, research reveals that students who do not adjust well to college, especially in the aspects of institutional attachment and social adjustment, are more likely to leave school before graduation.

Research shows that international students experience difficulties adjusting to food, finance, weather, accommodation, health care, and native language, while financial and language limitations increase the difficulties for the newcomers (Tseng & Newton, 2002; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). International students' difficulties in adjusting to host countries have been examined in many studies and the studies suggested that international students' adjustment is influenced by various factors. For instance, they encounter language difficulties, a different mode of education and learning style, difficulties with transportation, and accommodation (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). During this process of adjustment, international students are faced with how to manage these social, academic, and emotional problems.

Researchers have discovered that international students establish a support network of friends, usually consisting of co-nationals or friends from similar cultural backgrounds (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006).

Studies indicate that students reach out to the university and larger community to assist them to solve problems. For instance, students use the international office, trusted academic advisors, international student clubs, and academic services, such as the writing center, computer laboratories, and tutoring services (AlMubarak, 2000; Zhou, Frey & Bang, 2011). For instance, some Korean students use the Korean church as a way to cope with adaptation problems, while Alazzi & Chiodo (2006) reveal that many Middle Eastern students get involved in religious activities to help counter stress. Some researchers also suggest that domestic students use counseling services than international students (Carr et al., 2003; Hyun et al., 2007), and even when international students seek available services, they tend to end therapeutic relationships prematurely (Mori, 2000). The reasons for the underutilization of counseling services by international students is because of the lack of awareness of their needs for counseling, most of them have not been exposed to counseling services in their home countries (Kilinc & Granello, 2003), and lastly, the cultural stigma associated with emotional expression (Hyun et al., 2007; Vogel, et al., 2007). Due to the fact that international students' values are different from those of domestic students, their mindset toward counseling may be divergent as well (Zhang & Dixon, 2003).

Statistics reveal that the number of international students enrolled in *Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia* has increased from 6 students in 2006 to 116 students in 2019. According to the information gathered from the international office, in 2019, UPI enrolled approximately 116 students (44 undergraduates, 36 graduates, and 36 students for short courses), with 3% from Europe, 3% from America, 9% from Africa and 85% from Asia. The increasing number of international students at UPI shows that it is going to be a destination for international students. This study on the

patterns and problems of international students' self-adjustment would assist in the development of a comprehensive guidance and counseling program for international students at UPI.

1.2 Focus of the Study

The United States (19%), the United Kingdom (11%), Australia (8%), France (7%), Germany (6%) and Japan (4%) has been found as the most popular destinations with the highest number of international students (University World News, 2012). Therefore, it may seem logical that a majority of the research on the challenges facing international students is concentrated on international students studying in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Gebhard, 2012; Li et al., 2014; Lin & Scherz, 2014; Roy, 2013; Wenhua & Zhe, 2013; Brunsting, et. al., 2018; Omobola, 2019). However, several researchers have also maintained that the research on the challenges of international students in non-English speaking countries is still in its infancy and should receive more attention (Ikeguchi, 2012; Lee, 2017; Tsegay et. al., 2018).

Research shows that international students experience challenges adjusting to food, finance, weather, accommodation, health care issues (such as difficulties in understanding health services information, communication, discrimination and adjustment), and native language, while newcomers experience more challenges due to financial and language limitations (Tseng & Newton, 2002; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). The most critical issues experienced by international students are health care issues, which is why this study focused on an aspect of it which is adjustment issues. This study focused on adjustment issues because the researcher has an experiential knowledge in this area and only little research has been done on the adjustment of international students in non-English speaking countries.

This study focuses on the self-adjustment of international students from Europe, America, Asia, and Africa in Undergraduate, Masters, and Doctoral degree programs at *Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia*. Based on the background explanation above, the formulation of the problem can be described in the form of the following statements:

1. The patterns of international students' self-adjustment.
2. The self-adjustment problems of international students in Undergraduate, Masters, and Doctoral degrees.
3. The characteristics of the self-adjustment of international students from Europe, America, Asia, and Africa.

1.3 Purpose of Research

The major intent of this study is to explore the self-adjustment of international students (a case study of international students in *Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia* {UPI}). Specifically, the objective of this study is as follows:

1. To understand the patterns of international students' self-adjustment.
2. To investigate the self-adjustment problems of international students in Undergraduate, Masters, and Doctoral degrees.
3. To explore the characteristics of the self-adjustment of international students from Europe, America, Asia, and Africa.

1.4 Significance of Research

Theoretically, this study adds to the dearth of literature on international students' adjustment and propels further research on this population. This research is also beneficial to various personnel at the university. The findings of this study would help:

1. Domestic students have a better understanding of the adjustment challenges of international students and how they can contribute to their smooth adjustment process.
2. Prospective international students to better prepare themselves before coming to Indonesia, thus facilitating their transition process.
3. Lecturers who have international students in their classes to understand the struggles of international students and provide assistance to improve their academic adjustment as well as referring them to UPT-BK if need be.
4. Staff at OIER to be more knowledgeable on the kind of information to give to international students before and on arrival and prepare for future international students that will enroll at UPI.
5. Counselors at UPT-BK to design a comprehensive guidance and counseling program tailored towards helping international students' self-adjustment.
6. Research that helps foster a deep understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and interpretive frameworks of international students as they make sense of their everyday adjustment processes may allow administrators to be more empathetic and supportive to a group of students who face critical challenges as they adjust to unfamiliar environments. It would also help administrators in enlightening and training the university community on how to help international students cope with adjustment problems..

1.5 Definition of Terms

1. International Students: to have a common language, the definition of international students used throughout this study is according to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics. International students are individuals who leave their countries of origin and travel to another to study as temporary citizens (UIS, 2010).

2. Self-Adjustment: to have a common language, the definition of self-adjustment used throughout this study is according to Schneider (1964). Self-adjustment is a process involving both mental and behavioral responses by which an individual strive to cope successfully with inner tensions, needs, frustrations, and conflicts, and to effect a degree of unity between these inner demands and those levied on him by the objective world in which he lives (Schneider, 1964).