

## Discovering Variables of Acculturation for Sojourners: An Explorative Study of Indonesian Students Living in Germany

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Sojourners are those who live in another culture for a period of time, with the intention of returning to their native land. Sojourning students have to adapt to a different culture and experience stresses due to acculturation. Most of the acculturation studies were about Chinese, Korean, or Japanese in the USA or foreign students other than Indonesians. No information was available on the significant variables of acculturation for Indonesian sojourning in Germany. This study aimed to explore variables of acculturation of Indonesian students in Germany, using qualitative approach. Results showed the following variables to be significant: (1) seasons and weathers, (2) living place, (3) current social relationship, (4) togetherness with Indonesians in Germany, (5) language, (6) the roles of work or academic environment, and (7) freedom. Details are discussed in this article.

*Keywords:* acculturation, sojourners, Indonesian students in Germany

Sojourner adalah mereka yang hidup di luar negeri yang nantinya akan pulang lagi ke tanah air. Mahasiswa di luar negeri termasuk dalam kelompok sojourner. Mahasiswa yang juga sojourner di luar negeri tidak hanya harus menghadapi stress beban studi melainkan juga harus mampu menghadapi proses akulturasi yang dilaluinya. Sebagian besar studi yang terdahulu masih tentang mahasiswa China atau Korea di Amerika atau mahasiswa asing, non-Indonesia. Karenanya studi ini bertujuan untuk eksplorasi variabel yang penting dalam akulturasi mahasiswa Indonesia di Jerman, dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa variabel akulturasi yang penting adalah sebagai berikut: (1) musim dan cuaca, (2) tempat tinggal, (3) hubungan sosial saat “ini”, (4) kebersamaan dengan sesama orang Indonesia di Jerman, (5) penguasaan Bahasa Jerman, (6) peran dalam kerja atau akademik, dan (7) kebebasan. Detail didiskusikan dalam artikel ini.

*Kata kunci:* akulturasi, sojourner, mahasiswa Indonesia di Jerman

Sojourners are those who live in another culture for a period of time, with the initial, continuous intention of returning to their native land (K. L. Dion & K. K. Dion, 1996). They can be migrant laborers or students obtaining their education background (K. L. Dion & K. K. Dion). Sojourning students attending a foreign university have to adapt to a different culture and experience stresses due to acculturation, in addition to the usual demands of student life. They were also susceptible to drinking and substance abuse (Losaya, Knight, Chassin, & Little, 2008; Prado, Szapocznik, Maldonado-Molina, Schwartz, & Pantino, 2008, Ojeda, Patterson, & Strathde, 2008; Akin, Mosher, Smith, & Gauthier,

2008; Torres, Pena, Westhoff, & Zayas, 2008). The risks of going through acculturation might even lead to reduction in individual's health status, as it was observed in the transition from collective to individual culture (Yeh, Ching, Okubo, & Luthar, 2007). Limited previous experiences in traveling abroad (Church, 1982) and being racially discriminated (Dion & Toner, 1988; K. L. Dion, K. K. Dion, & Pak, 1991) were strongly experienced by the Far East and Chinese students, respectively, in the United States. In reference to those previous studies, this study is limited only to Indonesian students in Germany.

Previous studies focusing on acculturation and stress of Chinese students on American university campuses reported that those who anglicized their names were more acculturated into American society in several regards (more likely to associate with Americans, joined non-Chinese students organization, were familiar with American magazines, and acculturate to American tastes and values) than were those who did not change

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their Chinese names (Bond, 1996). A five-year study by Graham (cited in Gudykunst & Kim, 1986) reported that English-language proficiency was perceived as the greatest difficulty among the Chinese or other Asian students in an American university.

Other stressful common personal problems were for example: homesickness, cultural misunderstanding, and financial pressures. Kuo and Tsai (1986) showed a consistent finding that the most pressing challenges for adaptation were problems with the English, followed by homesickness and lack of contact with other Chinese. These stressful life events and greater reported difficulties in adaptation were associated with increased depression (Kuo & Tsai, 1986). An interesting finding showed that personality dimension of hardiness reduce the psychological distresses of Chinese immigrants in North America. Precisely on how this hardiness achieved this buffering effect whether by reducing felt stresses and strains and/or by enhancing adaption reserves and coping responses remains to be determined (K. L. Dion, K. K. Dion, & Pak, 1992).

It was reported in the previous studies that duration of time and phases in entering the experience of living in a different culture were important in determining the type of acculturation. Although some studies were not on sojourners, there were interesting interaction and variables to learn during acculturation. Wolfgang and Josefowitz (1978), for example, reported in their study on "Possible Value Conflicts for Chinese immigrants in Toronto". It showed that the longer the Chinese students lived in Canada, the greater was their concern with the public presentation and the greater were their conservatism in views of family life. For example, they were opposing pre-marital sex and emphasizing respect for elders, both being in favor of traditional Chinese values. Nevertheless, the longer the length of residence in Canada, the more they also accepted individualistic values (such as standing up for one's own rights and not accepting authorities without criticism). This effect presumably reflected acculturation to Canadian culture over time (Wolfgang & Josefowitz, 1978).

Those studies have shown that duration of time is a significant factor in researching acculturation. Experience in International assignments was researched by Tung (1998). The respondents were asked how long it took them to feel completely comfortable in the foreign country, and the answers were: 22.3% needed 1 – 3 months; 25.3% took 4 – 6 months; another required 6 – 12 months; and 5.2% indicated that they never felt completely comfortable abroad. Chinese sojourners in Canadian universities (Dyal & Chan, 1985) reported

that female sojourners appeared to have a different stress symptom structure than male sojourners. In a longitudinal study of a group of sojourners Zheng and Berry (1991) showed that acculturative stress (Cawte Scale scores, see Cawte, Bianchi, & Kiloh, 1968) was increased from pre-departure up to 3-4 months post arrival and declined slowly for several years thereafter to the departure baseline, forming an inverted U-curved function.

### **Indonesian Students Sojourning in Germany**

Theoretically, the longer the Indonesian students sojourn in Germany, the closer cultural orientation is developed towards the host culture (Germany). And if they are able to get closer to the host culture, their susceptibility to the acculturative stress can be reduced, eventually associated with better general physical and emotional health. It can be predicted that the length of stay, gender, and social support (e.g. having at least one family member living with them in Germany) contribute with varying significance towards their health in general.

A study entitled "Studieren im Spannungsfeld zweier Kulturen" (Karcher & Etienne, 1991) stated that culture-specific attitudes might create difficulties for Indonesian students in Germany. They pointed out for example that Indonesian students were lacking in self-sufficiency compared to the German students in terms of matters related to apartment, immigration, shopping for their daily living, and cooking for themselves. The Indonesian students were reported to be working more in a familiar context and avoiding unfamiliar situations. It would also be difficult to move from "a group" to "an individual" society. Indonesians work in groups. It provokes a great deal of difficulties for them to work independently and to have to rely on their own self-initiative.

Karcher and Etienne (1991) wrote that the classroom-culture of Indonesians was quite different from Germany's. Indonesian students are not used to articulate their own opinion. It would be very impolite for them to have discussions with their teachers. It is not common to have dissimilar attitude towards something. "Asking questions" is acceptable, but "questioning something" is not acceptable. Therefore, the Indonesian students in Germany have a big problem in raising a question (even how to formulate it), proposing argumentation, and stating problems. At the German universities the Indonesian students were not used to having academic freedom, including making plans for their own studies, having no attendance list, and no regular achievement control.

The Indonesian students stated that the German students were individualistic, impolite, materialistic, disciplined, direct, independent, unhelpful, rationalist, and hard-working (Karcher & Etienne, 1991). Meanwhile, the Indonesian students perceived themselves as having the following characters: group oriented, polite, acting on a personal level (personal-oriented), less disciplined, shy, less independent, helpful, emphasizing on feelings, and not working hard. The Indonesian students mostly have difficulties in looking for an apartment, handling bureaucracy at the immigration office, getting accustomed to eating habits, adjusting to the Germans and the weather, and worst of all coping with the "Ausländerfeindlichkeit" (hostile behavior of German minorities towards foreigners in Germany).

### **Dynamics of Acculturation**

In defining the dynamics of acculturation, we need to enter this point from the perspective of the socialization process. Throughout the socialization process, people learn and acquire "all factors and processes, which make one human being fit to live in the company of others" (Kelvin, 1970). Socialization involves conditioning and programming the basic social processes of communication, including decoding patterns (perceptual and cognitive) and encoding (verbal and nonverbal language) mechanism. The form of this mechanism depends on the particular culture and is embodied in the process of enculturation. It was pointed out that in socialization and enculturation, the cultural forms for expressing basic social behavior are internalized from the teaching of early "significant others" and become "the world, the only existent and conceivable world", with a strong emotional overtone and identification (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Ward, 2000).

The process of socialization provides children with an understanding of their world and with the culturally patterned modes of responding to it. The familiar culture, then, is the "home world", which is associated closely with the family or other significant others. On the other hand, an unfamiliar culture is one that is out of harmony with one's basic understanding of self and reality (Gudykunst & Kim, 1986). When strangers, who have been fully socialized in their original milieu, move to a new and unfamiliar culture and interact with the environment for an extended period of time, the process of reconciliation occurs. Strangers, gradually begin to detect new patterns of thinking and behavior and to structure a personally relevant adaptation to the host society. Merely daily living requires the ability to detect similarities and

differences within the new surroundings. Strangers, thereby become acquainted with and adopt some of the norms and values of salient reference groups of the host society.

As reconciliation takes place in the course of adapting to a new culture, some unlearning of old cultural patterns occurs, at least in the sense that new responses are adopted in situations that previously would have evoked different ones. This process of unlearning of the original culture is called deculturation. As the dynamics of deculturation and enculturation continue, people gradually undergo a cultural transformation (Gudykunst & Kim, 1986). Of course a complete transformation in the basic values of adults is extremely rare.

Sometimes, however, a new culture has a substantial impact on the psychological and social behavior of strangers. They may become resocialized to a significant degree as a result of group support, institutional legitimization of the new identity, and the presence of new significant others to replace those of their childhood. Even then, the transformation is accomplished only slowly and in stages. It normally brings conflict, a struggle between the desire to retain old customs and habits and to keep the cultural traditions and the identity of the group and the desire to adopt new ways which are more in harmony with the new environment. This conflict between the old and the new, between what should be in the mind of the stranger and what is in the external reality of the host culture, is not peculiar to the stranger status alone. J. Dyal and R. Dyal (1981) stated that the core of cultural adaptation is change, in personal and social behavior. It is not only changing ourselves to suit the environment, but also changing portions of the environment to suit our needs better. The impact of the sojourner's culture on the mainstream host culture is relatively insignificant, compared to the substantial influence of the host culture on sojourners (Shin & Abell, 1999).

Most of the empirical studies of historical change in immigrant communities document their gradual conversion to the mainstream culture of the host society (Barnett & Kincaid, 1983). Barnett and Kincaid stated that the directionality of change in an immigrant community towards assimilation is particularly clear when we examine the adaptive change across generations. This premise is supported by the study of American Jewish (Zweigenhaft, 1979) and Japanese-Americans (Masuda, 1970). The study showed that ethnic identification was gradually decreased from the first to the third generation. This process of adaptive transformation commonly is called acculturation. Acculturation is described as the continuous process by which strangers are resocialized into a host culture, so as to be directed toward a greater compatibility

with or “fitness” into the host culture, and ultimately, toward assimilation, as the highest degree of acculturation theoretically possible (Gudykunst & Kim, 1986). For most people, even for natives, complete acculturation is a lifetime goal, and individuals vary in the degree of acculturation achieved in a given period of time.

According to Gudykunst and Kim (1986) underlying the acculturative process is the communication process. Acculturation occurs through the identification and internalization of the significant symbols of the host society. Just as natives acquire their cultural patterns through interaction with their significant others, so do sojourners acquire the host cultural patterns and develop relationship with the new cultural environment through communication. In viewing acculturation occurring through communication, it is important to recognize that sojourners’ communication capacities reflect their acculturation. This means the acculturation process is essentially that of achieving the communicative capacities of the host culture. Through prolonged and varied experiences in communication, sojourners gradually acquire the communicative mechanisms necessary for coping with the new culture. The acquired communicative competences, in turn, function as a set of adaptive tools assisting sojourners to satisfy their personal and social needs, such as the need for physical survival and for a sense of belonging and self-esteem. Through effective communication, sojourners will be able to gradually increase control over their own behavior and over the host environment.

Communication, by definition, involves interaction with the environment, and each person as a communicator can be viewed as an open system actively seeking and desiring interaction with the environment. Personal or intrapersonal communication refers to the three interrelated psychological processes (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) by which people organize themselves in a sociocultural milieu. Through personal communication, people develop ways of seeing, hearing, understanding, and responding to the environment.

### **The Cognitive, Affective and Behavioral Processes**

One of the most fundamental adaptive changes in personal communication occurs in the cognitive structure through which sojourners process information from the environment. As it was discussed earlier, differences in the way in which experiences are categorized and interpreted constitute some of the main differences between cultures. Campbell (1964) and Ward (2000) both independently stated that communication between strangers and hosts

sometimes becomes possible only by the strangers’ inferring how the hosts are constructing the world from their reactions to commonly perceived events. It is only by extending the domains of common perception and interpretation that strangers can begin to comprehend the categorizing system of the host culture and to gradually match their own cognitive processing to that of the others.

Because of their unfamiliarity with the cognitive system of the host culture, sojourners frequently find the “mentality” of the people difficult to comprehend. Their difficulty stems from the fact that, during the initial phases of acculturation, their perception of the host environment is relatively simple. Gross stereotypes are alien in the sojourners’ perception of the unfamiliar cultural patterns. The “thinking as usual”, as we may call it, often doesn’t work when dealing with the host environment since sojourners do not share the common underlying assumptions of the host population.

To the extent that culture is a learned phenomenon, sojourners are potentially capable of increasing their understanding of the host’s cognitive system. Cultural learning enables sojourners to recognize their cognitive structure as distinct from that of the host culture and to gradually increase their cognitive structure in “perspective taking” (Fogel, 1979 as cited in Gudykunst & Kim, 1986) and “orientation relation” with members of the host society (Pearce & Stamm, 1973). When the affective process is integrated successfully with the cognitive orientation, sojourners achieve an adequate social orientation enabling them to understand how members of the host culture feel and behave. Once sojourners acquire an adequate level of adaptation to the host affective orientation, they can share the humor, excitement, and joy of the natives, as well as their anger, pain, and disappointment.

It is also important that sojourners be able to carry out the appropriate role performance in the host society. The appropriate role performance requires not only cognitive and affective acculturation but also acquisition of the relevant behavioral skills for acting in certain situations. Taft (1977) categories these skills into two types: technical and social skills. Technical skill includes language skills, job skills, academic skills, and others that are essential to a member of a society. Social skills are generally less specific and more subtle than technical skills.

A highly acculturated person, therefore, can perform the required social roles without having to formulate a mental plan of action in accordance with cultural rules and norms of the host society. This means a sojourner has to internalize many culturally patterned behaviors, and the performance of roles has to become automatic

and largely unconscious. Insofar as these automatic actions are executed successfully, they increase the probability for strangers to experience satisfying social interaction and a sense of control.

## Indonesian Students in Germany

Data from the German Statistical Bureau showed that number of Indonesian students in Germany was significantly increased from 1896 in the year of 1998 up to 2537 in the year 2006 (DAAD, 2010). Among 2537 students, 500 of them were in the 1st semester in the academic year of 2006/2007. From the last update information, taken from DAAD Office in Jakarta (informal conversation with the director of DAAD in 2010), it was informed that a pre departure training was provided for the language and a bit knowledge on the culture and people in Germany. Knowledge and the descriptive culture may help, but previous studies showed that variables of acculturation is more than only knowledge on culture and people, it requires more acquisition on other cultural factors and skills. It is also experienced differently across cultures and nations. Therefore, discovering variables of acculturation for Indonesian students in Germany is very important. This study aimed to explore and identify significant variables of acculturation for Indonesian Students in Germany.

## Methods

The study was conducted in Hamburg, Germany. Self reported analysis was initiated to explore potential variables of acculturation among sojourners, Indonesian students. Result was used to develop items for the following interviews with more students. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Qualitative data analysis was run afterward and themes were discovered as important variables for Indonesian students living in Germany. It flows as the following: self report experience, theme analysis, interview's guide development, interview training, conducting the interviews, transcription, theme analysis, and discovering the significant theme/variables of acculturation in Germany for Indonesian students.

The interview was carried out at residential places of the interviewees. At this stage, the study subjects were recruited based on their potential resources for giving a variety of characteristics of individuals living in a foreign culture. The variance was derived from the different gender, current activities (full and part

time students), marital status, and duration of stay in Germany. Participation was voluntary.

Following are the interviewees (all are students/sojourners): (1) Participant 1: a 28-year-old Indonesian male (mechanical engineering), a part time student (working at an internet cafe), single, has been living in Germany for 7 years now; (2) Participant 2: a 38-year-old Indonesian male (Faculty of Education), a part-time student, working at the Indonesian Consulate, married, has been living in Germany for 6 years now, his wife and their two children live in Indonesia; (3) Participant 3: a 23-old Indonesian female, Faculty of Applied Chemistry, single, a part-time student, working part-time at a local factory, has been living in Germany for 7 years; (4) Participant 4: a 30-year-old young woman, single, full time student at the Faculty of Geology, has been living in Germany for 6 months; (5) Participant 5: a 31-year-old Indonesian male, a part time student, working part-time at a local factory, single, has been living in Germany for 10 years.

## Training of the Interviewers

Professional training was run to provide standardized interviews. Three interviewers were recruited and trained to standardize the procedure of interviewing. An interview always included an observer to control and evaluate the quality of the interview. In addition to that, the observer would also be expected to improve his own performance when he should take his turn to be the interviewer.

During interviews, efforts were made to let the mind flow naturally to get a genuine report of the personal experience. It is important to note that at this stage, a subjective experience is valued highly to enable the study to be culturally sensitive. Themes analysis was carried out afterwards to determine significant topics or themes that occur when living in a different culture. These topics were to be used for developing the interviewer guide. The guide consists of the three main themes, namely: (1) nature, (2) social and (3) personal life. These three themes were derived from the self-reported experience of the author, and subsequently used to undertake interviews.

Five interviewees with different gender and length of stay in Germany were recruited to enrich variability of subject matters for the developed interview guide. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed, then interpreted afterwards. Results were then incorporated into the previous draft. Following are the main themes, which were incorporated in the interview guide:

1. Nature: seasons and weather; living place (accommodation).

2. Social life: social interaction (current social relationships within the surrounding; language; togetherness with Indonesians in Germany); social systems or public regulations (the roles of work or academic environment; freedom).

3. Personal life: personal previous experiences and expectations, family, being "alone" while organizing personal and professional activities, the swing mood (personality); financial shortage; the need of having Indonesian friends; need of acknowledgement; long-term planning in Germany; tendency of rationalizing affect-related matters; sense of belonging.

4. Significant others: eating and drinking habits; concern with health; competition and being perfectionist.

Questions were administered based on this guide. However, the order was not given by the interviewer. The interviewers encouraged a natural flow of speech depending on the topics which were being discussed at that moment.

## Results

The self-reported experiences of the author, written in winter (1999/2000) after 8 months of living in Germany, showed that the previous experience of being in the United States and Australia had influenced the self-confidence and eventually the expectations of life in Germany. The arrival of a family member, the 7-year-old daughter, enabled the author to share the good sides of Germany. These were not able to be fully appreciated before.

The weather in Germany, especially during the wintertime was experienced as a very depressing time and eventually influenced the daily activities. A mixture of very limited sunshine (less than 12 hours), strong wind and rain resulted in the author trying to avoid going out to undertake any activities. It was felt that mood changes and impulsive eating were more frequently experienced in this kind of situation. On the other side, summer led to a better emotional state.

Compared to the Indonesian and American society, the social interaction in Germany (Hamburg) was experienced as a relatively "loose" and "cold interaction". Loneliness and a strong feeling of being an outsider in a foreign country were frequently faced. The cause was unclear to her. Whether this feeling was due to the language, self confidence, or any other significant factors in the social environment cannot be identified at this stage.

It was also reported that the academic system was perceived as somehow very loose in terms of choosing lectures and having to attend (or not), but also too structured in terms of the documents' requirement for the adminis-

tration (e.g. enrollment, library, etc.). It was difficult to have access to necessary books or scientific articles. These two components of the social system were perceived as contradictory, and presumably created a personal feeling of uncertainty. In addition to that, expectations of having good scientific reading materials in such an advanced country as Germany were not fulfilled. The accessibility of such materials is relatively low compared to countries like the USA and Australia.

It was great, however, to be in a country with well-scheduled public transportation. However the uncertainty of immigration's regulations (probably due to lack of information) was annoying.

In addition to the above experiences, the following personal concerns were significantly involved in the process, for example: the need of being a perfectionist, always well organized, ambitious, having the need of being acknowledged, making a good impression on others.

Having no housemaid to help organize the day to day activities at home and giving assistance in looking after the child made things a little bit chaotic when taking up the professional assignments. It was also recognized that the need of having relationships with others and making friends were strongly felt, even stronger than ever before. Loneliness was experienced as somehow unavoidable and subsequently influencing work, studying and any other significant activities. Having good relationships with the neighbors did not help that much.

Based on the themes derived from the self-reported experience, interviews on the same themes were undertaken with the study participants. The description of their experiences while living in Germany were structured and reported as the following categories.

## Seasons and Weather Conditions

All of the interviewees stated that winter was the most depressing period of the year. On the other hand, summer was the best time of the year. Spring and fall were not identified as "bad" seasons. Instead, these two seasons were associated with summer. It gave a good atmosphere for working and studying. Participant 3 and 4 mentioned that the four different seasons had influenced their moods.

## Living Place

Three of the students stated that they did not like living in an apartment. They would have preferred a house instead. However, they realized the difficulties of maintenance, in addition to the unaffordable prices. They stated that they felt like being in a locked box.

### **Current Social Relationship With the Surrounding**

All of the students (participant 1 - 5) shared the opinion that making friends, with whom one could share the day-to-day experiences, was not easy in Germany. They stated that it was easier to make friends in Indonesia. Participants 1 and 3 said that this was not only due to the language, but also due to the fact that time for making friends in Germany was not that much. Visiting neighbors without having made an appointment previously was not common in Germany.

In terms of living in the German society, all of the participants stated that having hard-working friends in their surroundings was felt as something encouraging. It was also encouraging to listen to stories from friends regarding how to deal with work and academic life.

### **Togetherness With Indonesians in Germany**

Some of the students (Participants 2, 3 and 4) and Indonesian residents (Participants 6 and 8) stated that they needed to have contact with Indonesian friends in Germany. They said that it helped them a lot to reduce their homesickness. Participants 1 and 3 stated that they needed to have contact with people from a similar cultural background whose sense of humor was similar to theirs.

### **Language**

Participants 1, 2, 3 and 5 stated that language was difficult at the beginning. However, they stated that they had to get through this period and be persistent in making efforts of practicing it every day without being afraid of making mistakes when speaking the language. Participants 1 and 3 shared the experience that difficulties in speaking the language created barriers when trying to get academic acknowledgment from the Germans, for example during a seminar. Once they have got better in the language, they gained better acknowledgement for their work.

### **The Roles of Work or the Academic Environment**

With regard to the chance of improving professionalism, Germany offered more options compared to Indonesia, both academically as well as in the area of working. This was expressed by all the participants. In the academic system, for example, students were allowed to select their own fields of interest and were able to participate in different disciplines from other faculties. This possibility enabled students to achieve a broad perspective of their knowledge regarding their field of interest. In the work places, people are appreciated according to their achievement at work. No nepotism was observed in most cases.

### **Freedom/Liberalism**

All of the students stated that freedom in Germany was perceived as a confusing situation at the beginning of their stay. They were not used to have such a big freedom in Indonesia. However, they also mentioned (all participants except Participant 4) that this sort of freedom gave a feeling of not being under pressure of any regulations. They stated that freedom in Germany was too liberal.

### **Personal Life**

Personal or individual characters of the participants, which seemed to be significant to the topic of the study, were categorized as follows.

**Family.** Family and relatives seemed to play a big role for all of the study participants. Being away from the family was experienced as a stress factor. Participant 1 stated that friends could never represent his parents at home in Indonesia. He always missed the loving tenderness of his parents. Similar feelings were expressed by Participant 4. Except Participant 3, all of the others stated that contact with relatives and family, especially parents, seemed to be very important for them.

**The need of having Indonesian friends.** It was shared by all the participants that relationships with friends or relatives in Indonesia were very supportive. It helped prevent homesickness. Nevertheless, all of the study participants stated that the need of having Indonesian friends in Germany was experienced much stronger compared to when they were still in Indonesia. They realized that friendship with Indonesians was strongly needed during the stay in Germany compared to when being in Indonesia.

**Need of acknowledgement.** This seemed to be very important. All participants, who were students, had the experience of not being acknowledged for their expertise. They stated that it could be due to (1) language, (2) coming from a developing country, and (3) having been brought up in a culture where "silence is golden".

**Observable progressive improvement.** All of the students stated that during their stay, they needed to have the feeling that they had made good progress. Sometimes it took quite a while to see the observable progress. This was regarded as being frustrating.

**Cognitive vs. affective orientation.** All of the students stated that in most cases, they had to make efforts to develop rational-based explanations in every discussion with Germans. Emotion was not emphasized.

**Sense of belonging.** It was shared by all participants that they needed the feeling of somehow belonging to a group, not always being seen as an outsider. This was

not that easy. They had to force themselves to be more active in local activities.

In brief, common experiences, which are shared by all of the study participants, are: (a) winter is perceived as a depressing time, (b) living in a house is preferable compared to an apartment, (c) friendship is easier to develop in Indonesia, (d) togetherness with Indonesians in Germany is important, (e) lacking in language (German) is the main obstacle in gaining academic acknowledgement, (f) the freedom is perceived as too liberal, (g) missing the family and a sense of belonging in Germany, and (h) academic environment and facilities are great.

## Discussion

### The Self-Reported Experience

The self reported experience was written during the 1st year (the 8th month, winter 1999/2000). Previous experience living abroad (1 year in the US and 1 year in Australia) had really influenced the pre-departure expectations and eventually stimulated disappointment when the expectations were not fulfilled. Most expressions and experiences (during this 1st year) were unconsciously constructed negatively, for example winter was associated with depression, the “cold” Germans, the complicated administration system, and so forth. “Everything” associated with this timeframe, was perceived negatively. However, by the end of the study (after 3 years sojourning in Germany), the author was able to appreciate all from another perspective, for example the nice and sweet winter and the snow, the “friendly” Germans, the sophisticated administration system, and so forth. The winter, the Germans and the administration system in Germany never changed. The ability of taking another perspective in judging the host culture changed, after 3 years of sojourning. The change can be due to the following: (a) ability in speaking the language (better than before), (b) having a good network with local people, (c) becoming familiar with the host culture, eventually increasing (1) a feeling of security and (2) individual tolerance towards the cultural disparity between the original (Indonesia) and host culture (Germany).

Additional themes, which were not from the author but derived from the students during the explorative study, were a sense of belonging and freedom. Regardless of the different length of sojourning in Germany, the students experienced a lack of the sense of belonging to the German society. It is theoretically understandable because even for an ethnic acculturating group, it requires over one generation

to gain the sense of belonging to a foreign culture. Sojourners in this explorative study were only up to 8 years sojourning.

All of the study participants of the explorative study had never been abroad before coming to Germany. Therefore their expectations were not related to any other industrialized countries but to Indonesia. No disappointment was reported in regard to the previous experiences.

### Cultural Disparity

Moving from high-context (Indonesia) to low-context (Germany) cultures of communication, which can be reflected in the language, the wording of humor, the greetings, and so forth would be necessary. An interesting issue was pointed out by students that precisely because German is a language that enables us say what we think, to some extent it reduces the possibilities of non-communicated affect-related expression. The emotional content of the communication might be evaporated by expressing it in words, such as “I do care about you” or “You should not say that!!”. The emotional content of the Indonesian communication, which is not expressible in words, has tailored the affiliated relationship. For example, the Western expression of getting a gift from someone would be:

“Oh, thank you very much for the novel (the gift) you gave me yesterday. It’s really nice of you and I do really appreciate it ...”

And that’s it. The fact that someone has given him/her a gift does not necessarily make him/her having the obligation of “always” being nice to the person, who gave the gift. The expression of thanks in words is enough to express the affective motion of “thank you”. A similar case would demand a different expression of responses of “thank you” by Indonesians. There is no such “complete” expression of “thank you” in Indonesian words. Indonesians would only be able to say “thank you very much”. But then, they would be culturally obliged to “always” be nice to the person who gave him/her the gift. Indonesians would probably feel obliged to help the family of the person who gave him/her the gift, Indonesians may even feel the need to bring something or a gift for that person too. In my personal observation after sojourning 5 years in Germany, this kind of cultural obligation is not observed or demanded in Western cultures.

**Cultural disparity related to a number of stereotype behaviors.** Karcher and Etienne (1991) reported examples on this cultural disparity in his study involving Indonesians and Germans. For example: Germans, according to Indonesian students were: individual-oriented, impolite,



sachorientiert, disciplined, direct, self-independent, not helpful, rational, hard-working and materialistic. On the other hand, the Indonesian students perceived themselves as having the following characters: group-oriented, polite, person-oriented, less disciplined, shy, less independent, helpful, focusing more on feeling, not that hard-working and idealistic.

**Cultural disparity related to freedom/ liberalism.**

"Too much freedom" may create difficulties for Indonesian students. This expression was stated during the study 1 (interviews). In Germany, the Indonesian students might not know what is expected from them. They had to face unknown consequences of any step they might do. Self-discipline could also be a potential problem in managing oneself. Living in a more structured surrounding full of obligations in Indonesia, gave more certainty of knowing what was expected from them. It was assumed that making decisions for oneself by oneself is considered difficult and stressful. Karcher's data showed that Indonesian students were not used to and have difficulties with self-organization and self-initiation (Karcher & Etienne, 1991).

**Cultural disparity related to classroom culture.**

Following examples were discovered during interviews, from my own personal experiences, and in the study done by Karcher and Etienne (1991):

(a) Academic freedom, which might trouble Indonesian students, demanding more self-initiative in addition to different teaching and learning systems in Germany. The options of taking seminars or lessons in Indonesia are more structured. The students in Indonesia can only attend lessons or seminars in their own faculties, whilst in Germany there are no boundaries at all across faculties.

(b) The absence of regular academic control and concrete supervision for studying in Germany. Indonesian students are used to it. In Germany, the students have to initiate themselves whether or not to take exams or supervisions. There is no structured obligation in this matter in Germany.

(c) Indonesians are not used to articulate their own opinions in academic discussions. In Germany the Indonesian students have to actively participate in that kind of discussion and no one would really care if they didn't participate in the discussion. In Indonesia, those who are not active in the discussion would be asked (or encouraged) by the moderator (or lecturer) to be more active.

(d) Argumentation against teachers in Indonesia is regarded as impolite. In Germany, the Indonesian students have to raise their own opinion and argumentation towards given subject matters, otherwise they will be "ignored" and never join in the argument.

(e) Having dissimilar attitude towards the teacher's opinion is not culturally accepted in Indonesia. Indonesian

students are not used to the culture in Germany where disagreement and dissimilar attitude of a given subject matter is well accepted in the society.

(f) Asking questions is okay, however, questioning teachers' arguments would be considerably inappropriate in Indonesia, whilst in Germany it is quite normal and accepted.

(g) Indonesian students are not used raising questions, proposing argumentation and developing statements related to problem solving, and therefore they have difficulties in such circumstances in Germany.

**Cultural disparity related to the languages.** The German language is known as a difficult foreign language for Indonesians. It is even more difficult than English as a foreign language. Grammatically, the Indonesian and German languages are totally different. With regard to the language issues and classroom cultures, the data from the explorative interviews showed that it was clearly identified that knowing and mastering how to speak German was one of the key abilities to avoid stress dealing with speaking German in the presence of Germans. This was especially important to gain acknowledgment in terms of professional expertise. Without having the ability of speaking German, professional acknowledgment might not be given. In Indonesia, the students might get acknowledgement only by writing good homework or written assignments. They do not necessarily have to speak aloud in the classroom.

Another obstacle in relation to the language (German), which might prevent Indonesian students to get more acculturated towards Western (German) values and behavioral orientations, can be due to stereotype thoughts of people coming from developing countries, for example the thought that most of the people in industrialized countries look down on them and have distinct prejudices towards those who come from developing countries. This was expressed by the students in the explorative interview (Study 1 Part 1). According to the Indonesian students, the Germans think that Indonesian students are not as smart as Germans. These kinds of thoughts might cause insecurity for Indonesians. This feeling of insecurity and not being acknowledged, eventually might lead to tension, stress and avoidance to open themselves towards the German society. The other obstacle to get active was possibly due to the Indonesians' culture of: "silence is golden". This was expressed during the explorative interviews.

**Host environmental condition.** There exists not only a big cultural disparity between Indonesia and Germany, which might prevent Indonesian students to adapt more to Western values and behavioral orientations. Additionally, there are no media or experiences facilitating the transfer of cultural orientations possible from Indonesian to Western/ German culture. This can be observed in the

forms of (a) interaction potential, (b) favorable/unfavorable attitude, and (c) demand for conformity (Gudykunst & Kim, 1986). Following are examples of these three cultural facilitators/obstacles:

**(a) Interaction potential.** In addition to facilities, which are deliberately provided to interact with the local host society, there are also obstacles preventing social penetration into the host environment. In my personal experience and as it was reported in the study by Karcher and Etienne (1991), in Germany, people do not usually talk to strangers sitting next to them in the trains or buses, neither in other public places like bus stops, shopping areas, waiting rooms, and so forth. In addition to the language difficulty, this circumstance (not talking with strangers) might not favor Indonesian students to be “more” Western” oriented during their stay in Germany.

In Indonesia, it is not uncommon to initiate a conversation with strangers sitting next to one in buses or public places. In Indonesia, Indonesians would not be comfortable sitting together with someone (even strangers) and not talking with her/him, or at least communicating by smiling. Sometimes the conversation even goes further to personal issues. It was shared in an “Intercultural Communication Training” done by ASTA-students at Hamburg University that it would be easier to move from an individual-oriented culture (e.g. Germany) to a group-oriented culture (e.g. Indonesia) than the other way around (HOPIKOS Training, 2002).

In Germany, people mostly work in closed offices. For Indonesians, this causes distance. And again, Germans seldom greet strangers, even if they are in the same neighborhood or at the same work places. It was shared by the study participants that making an appointment before seeing a friend was perceived as a restrictive boundary to some extent. It prevents people of getting closer to another. The need of guarded privacy was indicated by not allowing friends to come without a previous appointment. It could be experienced perhaps as setting limits to the closeness of a relationship.

As indicated by the interviewees, the attitude how to fill out a given timeframe in Indonesia and in Germany seems to be quite different. In Indonesian society, people were expected to provide time for communication with friends, whilst in Germany, time has a function for self organization, keeping discipline, and protecting the need of keeping privacy. In a ranking of personal needs privacy is not so important in Indonesia. In Indonesia friends, who in a way demand time, are more important than in Germany. It was also reported that close relationship with friends or relatives in Indonesia is regarded as being socially supporting.

**(b) Favorable/unfavorable attitude.** Based on the personal observation and experience, there exists some

“Ausländerfeindlichkeit” in Germany, for example a strong hostility towards strangers. This issue was also reported during the interviews. This might be a reactive effect of the experienced hostility of the host people. About 71% of the students experienced a feeling of being easily annoyed or irritated (Yuniarti, 2009). There is no specific data on what provokes hostility, annoyance and irritation of those sojourning between two months to a year, but this unfavorable conditions of both, the hostility of the Germans towards strangers and the experience of own hostility in these Indonesian students, might create a greater obstacles in internalizing Western cultural orientations into the Indonesian students.

**(c) Demand for conformity.** With regard to the Gudykunst theory of acculturation and according to my own personal experience having lived in Germany for 5 years, the demand for conformity in Germany is relatively low (compared to that in Indonesia). Theoretically it would not require a big adjustment for the Indonesian students. Logically this would make it easier to stimulate the students to adapt a Western/German cultural orientation. Nevertheless most of the television programs and films have already been synchronized into German language. This tendency (preference of having German language other than other language) can be seen as a demand for conformity. Other social conformity in Germany was hardly experienced. Some study participants mentioned that being foreigners and having different physical characteristics from German seemed to create the feeling of being outsiders. So, unlike the theory, the absence of demand of conformity leave the divergence between Indonesians and Germans as it is, eventually strengthening the feeling of being foreigners and lacking in sense of belonging to the German society. And like a vicious circle, this feeling of being a foreigner might prevent the Indonesian students of getting involved in more social engagement, subsequently keeping the students from transforming to the Western/German cultural orientations.

Data from the interviews showed that the feeling of associating oneself with people coming from the same country was enjoyable. It was not merely because of being homesick, rather than that, it was recognized as relying on a common background where and when Indonesians were able to share experiences and had fun with common verbal and non-verbal communication. In addition to that, having this kind of togetherness was partially replacing the need of being amidst the missing families, which warmed up the dried emotion during the time due to being far from the relatives in Indonesia. It was also found that comfort was experienced by sharing similar sense of humor and similar non-verbal communication.

According to Gordon's theory and my personal observation, the Indonesian students have gone through structural assimilation. They were attached to the German institutions. Indonesian students have to follow local legal regulations. For example: sojourners have to learn how to deal with immigration offices, administration at the universities, and other bureaucracy related to living in an apartment. The students also have to learn how to use public transportations and how to utilize "automatic" public services related to banking, ticketing and any other usage.

As it was reported that the students had still to adjust to the following stress provoking cultural milieu: (1) Language "in-acquisition" (not becoming skilful enough in speaking German); (2) Too much academic freedom, described as too many choices at hand, eventually creating a big confusion (Classroom cultural disparity); (3) Different housing/apartment system; (4) Immigration and other foreign legal procedures; (5) Different non-verbal communication rules, for example greetings and humor; (6) Different taste of food; (7) Different day-to-day activities (having no house maid, no personal secretary); (8) Being away from the family (9) Different weather/seasons and different clothes; (10) Different public transportations; (11) Poor in the acquisition of culturally appropriate behavior; (12) Perceptual immaturity

It requires up to one year to settle down and to arrive at the level of a minimum daily hassles. Probably, the Indonesian students have not yet mastered all of the above mentioned stress provoking life changes, but at least they were getting used to the new environment. Theoretically, the more they were able to make appropriate responses to the new culture, the less stress factors were accumulated in their daily life. The accumulated stress factors may cause or stimulate the onset of physical or emotional problems/complaints, for example: headache, sleeping problems, breathing problems, forgetting things, being easily disappointed and feeling blue (Yuniarti, 2009).

## Conclusion

The Indonesian students stated that significant experiences of being in Germany were experiences related to the weather, living place, presence of the family in Germany, friendship (with Indonesians and Germans), language (German) and freedom/liberalism. Positive attitude was expressed in regard to the weather, friendship with Indonesians in Germany, and having family staying with them in Germany. Receiving acknowledgment in academic activities seems to be very important for all of the students. The study reveals further that language and

the fact that they have to be independent in managing household and professional life have been experienced as somehow unfavorable. The lack of a sense of belonging to the German society was a major problem for most sojourners.

## Recommendations

This study would recommend the following activities regarding sojourning in a Western culture, specifically in Germany:

1. Provision of pre-departure cross-cultural training. Theoretically, the following skills have to be mastered or trained, to reduce potential stress-provoking cultural milieu in relation to: (a) language acquisition, especially in conversation, (b) good knowledge of Germany's academic freedom and having exercised it in Indonesia a little bit. This freedom is probably less a Western, but more specifically German, (c) good knowledge of housing in Germany (teaching also by role playing in searching apartment and how to deal with the administration requirements, e.g. learning reading and understanding a "Mitvertrag"), (d) good knowledge of immigration and legal procedures in Germany. It can be best learnt by visualization techniques, for example providing examples of the immigration documents and teaching how to learn how to deal with those documents, (e) training in the Germans' non-verbal communication, for example in regard to greetings and humor, (f) experiencing different tastes of food, (g) experiencing living without housemaid and personal secretary, (h) experiencing living away from the family, (i) experiencing being on time in public transportations. This can be probably best learnt by role playing as well, (j) experiencing and learning culturally appropriate Western behavior. This can be best learnt by role playing, for example regularly spending time in a "stammtisch" with the Germans in Indonesia.
2. Meetings with graduates from German Universities.
3. Sharing information about failures and successful sojourning.
4. Role playing of behavior in a different culture.
5. Gaining cultural experience by staying in German families for a week or even longer when it is possible, and practicing the already learnt cultural skills.

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