
A Collaborative Auto-ethnographic Study of Indonesian Higher Degree Research Students' Adaptation in Anglophone Universities

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Abstract

Background:

This research explores the experiences of Indonesian doctoral students in English-speaking universities through a collaborative auto-ethnographic approach. Utilising Schartner and Young's (2016) stress and coping strategies and culture-learning frameworks, we analyse narrative data to investigate our academic and sociocultural journeys in the US, UK, and Australia.

Methodology:

To attain a profound comprehension, we participate in personal and group introspection, analysis, and interpretation, utilising imaginative thought, creativity, emotional self-exploration, and ongoing dialogues. The study identifies four major psychological adaptation themes (social support, survival, spirituality, and compliance), a critical socio-cultural adaptation theme (feeling like cultural aliens), and a vital academic adaptation theme (questioning our academic capability amid struggles with critical reading and writing).

Findings:

The findings reveal three themes: *Psychological Aspects: "Social Support, Survival, Spirituality, and Compliance"*, *Sociocultural Aspect: "We Are Cultural Aliens"*, *Academic Aspect: "Questioning Our Academic Capacity as We Struggled to Read and Write Critically"*.

Conclusion:


The findings underscore the significance of awareness and emphasise the necessity for effective adaptation among international doctoral students. This research contributes valuable insights into the challenges faced by Indonesian doctoral students in Anglophone academic settings, shedding light on the importance of support systems, cultural understanding, and academic confidence stop where for a successful academic journey.

Originality:

While previous studies have largely examined the difficulties faced during adaptation, the way these challenges ultimately lead to successful outcomes remains under-explored. This research seeks to address this deficiency by investigating how Indonesian international research students in Anglophone universities convert cultural, psychological, and academic obstacles into successful adaptation.

Keywords : Academic adaptation; Anglophone universities; Collaborative auto-ethnography; Cross-cultural adaptation; Psychological adaptation

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1. INTRODUCTION

International students pursuing postgraduate degrees abroad often face a multitude of challenges stemming from cultural differences, separation from home, and the need to acclimate to new educational and socio-cultural environments (Pho & and Schartner, 2021; Schartner & Young, 2016; Yu, S., & and Bodycott, 2021). The failure of cross-cultural adaptation can result in various mental and physical health issues (Smith & Khawaja, 2011), making socio-cultural adaptation particularly demanding (Lai & Tai, 2021; Yu & and Wright, 2017a). Social and peer support can mitigate these challenges and aid in cross-cultural adaptation (Collins, Dailey-Strand, & Callaghan, 2021).

Beyond socio-cultural adaptation, international students may encounter psychological challenges leading to disorientation, anxiety, isolation, or depression (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Familiarity with the study environment and interactions with peers can facilitate psychological adaptation (Kim & and Kim, 2019). Academic adaptation poses its own set of difficulties, including academic shock resulting from language proficiency, teaching and assessment differences, extensive reading requirements, and concerns about meeting institutional expectations (Sheridan, 2011; Sovic, 2008; Wang & Hannes, 2014; Yu & and Wright, 2017b). Integration into the community, interactions with students and supervisors, and access to study spaces are crucial for adapting to the new linguistic and academic environment (Yu & and Wright, 2017b). Positive correlations exist between contact with non-co-national international students and academic adaptation, while social support mediates the relationship between leisure activities and academic adaptation (Lee et al., 2018; Pho & and Schartner, 2021).

No, the study investigates the adjustment experiences of Indonesian students completing their sandwich and doctoral programs in the US, UK, and Australia through collaborative auto-ethnography. By exploring the integrated adjustment domains and their transformation into psychological, socio-cultural, and academic adaptation, the research seeks to contribute to intercultural adaptation literature and methodological perspectives in acculturation literature for higher education.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What are the core challenges to the psychological adjustments of Indonesian research higher degree students, and how do these adjustments transform into psychological adaptation?
2. What are the learning cultures contributing to socio-cultural adjustments for Indonesian research higher degree students, and how do these adjustments transform into socio-cultural adaptation?
3. What are the learning cultures influencing academic adjustments for Indonesian research higher degree students, and how do these adjustments transform into academic adaptation?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to expand the cross-cultural transition framework, encompassing stress coping, culture learning, and social skills through psychological, academic, and sociocultural adjustment processes, ultimately leading to successful adaptation outcomes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Adjustment and Adaptation Framework

This paper distinguishes between adjustment and adaptation (Littrell et al., 2006), defining adjustment as the dynamic processes involved in functioning within a new academic environment (Anderson 1994) and adaptation as the outcomes of these processes (Pitts, 2005). Monitoring adjustment over time is facilitated through qualitative methods, while adaptation can be measured by various outcome indices, including academic grades (Young & and Schartner, 2014). The transformative nature of adjustment is emphasised, turning struggles into gradual mastery of culture-specific skills operationalized in the new surroundings (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Schartner and Young (2016) argue that successful adjustment is essential for international research students to become successful sojourners, impacting the overall adaptation. They integrate stress and coping approaches with culture-learning and social skills perspectives, viewing cross-cultural sojourners as proactive individuals responding to change (Zhou et al., 2008). This concept is visualised in the following figure (Schartner & Young, 2016).

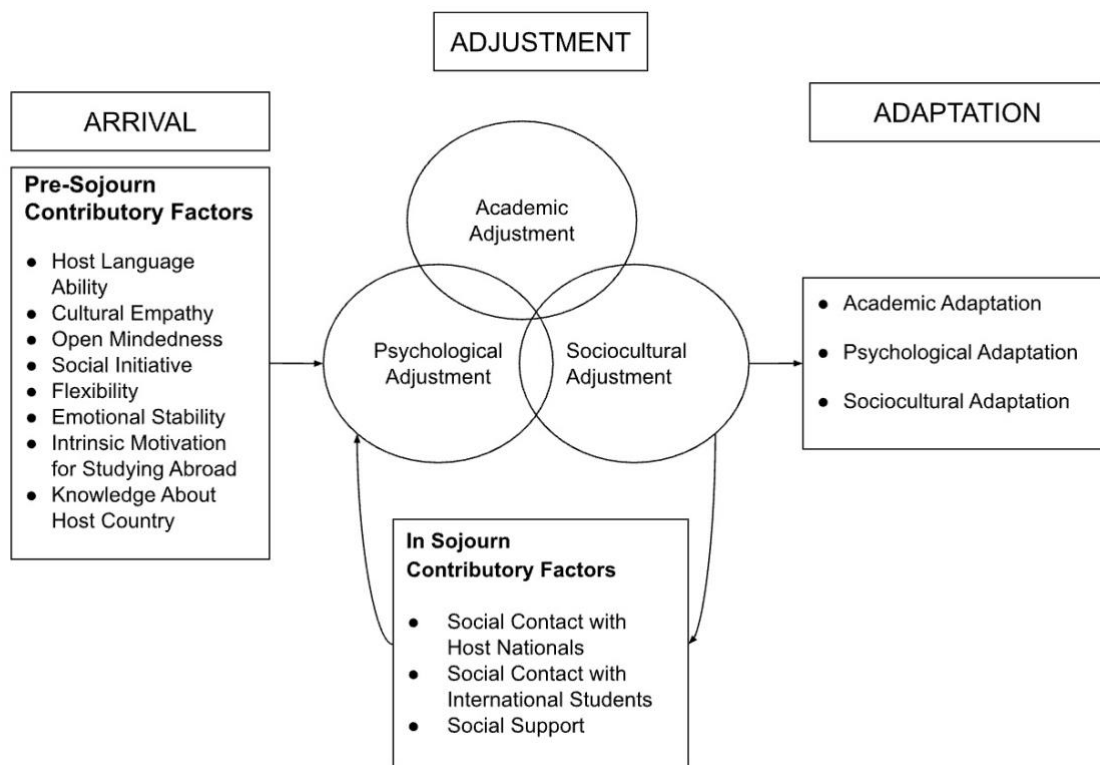


Figure 1: A conceptual model of international student adjustment and adaptation

Psychological adjustment is viewed through a stress and coping lens, with coping strategies crucial for dealing with acculturative stress, ultimately determining the degree of psychological adaptation achieved (Schartner & Young, 2016). Coping strategies are deemed vital for acculturative stress relief, emphasising the importance of survival skills for sojourners (Berry, 1997). In terms of academic and sociocultural (Schartner & Young, 2016)al adjustment, the focus is on the acquisition of culture-specific knowledge and social skills, which determine academic achievement and sociocultural adaptation (Schartner & Young, 2016). Culture-learning and social skills approaches are fundamental for understanding the behavioural aspects of sojourners, particularly when they initially struggle with social and cultural skills upon arrival in the destination country. The paper adopts by Schartner and Young (2016) framework to explore international students' adjustment and adaptation, emphasising the interconnectedness of stress and coping, culture-learning, and social skills in the sojourner experience.

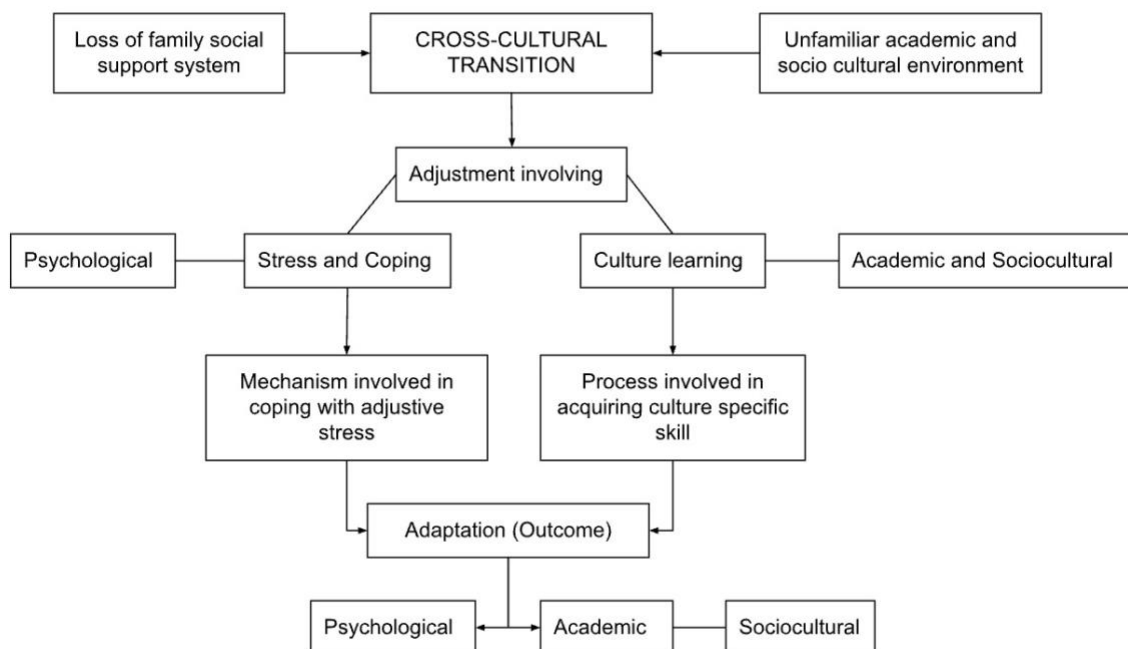


Figure 2: The framework of study

2.2 Psychological Adaptation

Yu, Bodycott and Mak (2019a) identified challenges faced by nonnative English no no-speaking international students in Hong Kong, including language barriers and limited interpersonal resources affecting psychological and sociocultural adjustment. Issues such as depressive symptoms, academic performance, English proficiency, and perceived discrimination emerged. Ward (1996) notes that adapting to a new culture can lead to disorientation and anxiety. To enhance adaptation, policies and programs fostering academic self-efficacy, offering psychological and social support, and addressing intergroup prejudice are essential, creating a conducive academic and intercultural learning environment for non-local students (Yu, Bodycott, & Mak, 2019b).

2.3 Socio-cultural Adaptation

Socio-cultural adaptation is intricately linked to psychological adaptation with Ng, Wang and Chan (2017) highlighting a correlation between the two. It encompasses behavioural responses reflecting an individual's effectiveness in fitting into a new society (Sheng, Dai, & Lei, 2022). Sociocultural adaptation involves acquiring behavioural skills crucial for navigating life in a new cultural environment (Wilson et al., 2017). Essentially, it denotes gaining culturally appropriate skills and exhibiting functionally adaptive behaviours in unfamiliar cultural contexts, also known as "cultural competence" (Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

2.4 Academic Adaptation

Early research, exemplified by Klineberg and Hull (1979), presumed that academic abilities alone signalled overall academic adaptation. Language barriers, unfamiliar socio-cultural contexts, diverse educational systems, and mismatches between academic expectations and university realities in the host country pose obstacles for international students (Sheng, Dai, & Lei, 2022).

Recent conceptualizations of academic adaptation consider broader dimensions, encompassing motivation, satisfaction with academic lifestyle, expectation management, and achievements

(Anderson, Guan, & Koc, 2016). Language proficiency is identified as a central challenge, impacting integration, interactions, relationships, and study space provision (Yu & Wright, 2016). Coping with extensive reading, understanding instructors, participating in discussions, and navigating academic writing traditions also pose significant challenges (Cheung, 2013; Lee, P., & Brown, 2013; Tran, 2013; Wang & Hannes, 2014)

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Collaborative Autoethnography and Cross-cultural Adaptation

Grounded in qualitative research, collaborative autoethnography, as defined by Heewon Changa, Longmanb and Franco (2014), involves researchers pooling autobiographical materials on a chosen topic, analysing personal experiences within sociocultural contexts. This study employed collaborative autoethnography to unravel deep-seated beliefs and attitudes, fostering shared understandings (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2012). By linking life stories to broader cultural, social, and political contexts, this approach provides an insider's perspective, aiding in cross-cultural adaptation exploration (Duncan, 2004; Yu, 2024). It facilitates an examination of subjective experiences and memories, enhancing comprehension of social, cultural, and political contexts (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2022; Jones, 2005; Soelberg et al., 2023). Researchers, viewing tasks from a first-person perspective, vividly depict cultural adaptation, contributing to a deeper understanding of events and reflecting sociocultural perspectives (Park, 2017). Collaborative autoethnography is instrumental in exploring international students' cross-cultural adaptation, fostering a nuanced understanding of their experiences.

3.2 The Setting and the Researcher-Participant

Self-reflection is a salient characteristic in a qualitative approach. Therefore, autoethnography research cannot be disputed from the researchers' cultural background, personal background,

and educational background. As researchers in this study employ collaborative autoethnography, a brief presentation of each researcher's background is elaborated below.

Mr. Niz

Hailing from Baturaja with Semendo as my L1, I embarked on learning English in grade 7, under EFL teachers in a small city. My pursuit of native-like proficiency led me to Yogyakarta for higher education in 1994, where Sumatera and Javanese cultures influenced my life. Graduating in 2000, I settled in Yogyakarta, teaching English part-time at a Senior Vocational School. A master's degree in 2003 led to a government teaching position in 2005. In 2015, I pursued an integrated PhD in the UK, focusing on applied linguistics. Academic culture differences posed a challenge initially, reflecting my efforts in psychological, socio-cultural, and academic adaptation.

Mr. Lim

Hailing from Limbong village, Delli, North Sumatera, I pursued my education journey in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, starting with senior high school in 1989. Living with my elder brother, I acquired various skills like typing, computer literacy, and English. Beginning university in 1994, I initially enrolled in Business Education at Universitas Mulawarman, later shifting to English Education in 1995. Intensive English learning with the Grammar Translation Method characterised my academic journey. Securing an Australian Partnership Scholarship, I earned a Master's in Leadership and ICT (M.Ed.) from 2007 to 2009. Undertaking a doctoral degree in Educational Management, I faced challenges in psychological, sociocultural, and academic adaptation over six years, eventually completing it in 2015 with a DIKTI Scholarship.

Mrs. Rid

Born and raised in Bandung, West Java, to a Bataknese father and Sundanese mother, I embody a beautiful blend of Bataknese and Sundanese cultures. Married to a Manadonese man, I embrace cultural diversity. Fluent in Indonesian and Sundanese, I learned English in junior high, cultivating a love for the language. Majoring in English Education at UPI, I worked part-time with American families, gaining invaluable exposure to the language. A lecturer for 30 years, I pursued a Doctoral Sandwich Program in the US in 2009-2010 after completing my doctoral study at UPI, further enriching my cultural and academic experiences.

3.3 Data Sources and Self-reflection Analysis

Rooted in autoethnography, this study involves researcher-participants reflecting on their personal journeys as doctoral students in the US, UK, and Australia. Utilising collaborative autoethnography (CAE), we broaden perspectives on psychological, socio-cultural, and academic adaptation during our studies. Autobiographical materials, in the form of narratives, serve as our data sources, analysed through simultaneous writing ([van Manen, 1990](#)). Each participant responds to overarching research questions, fostering deep insights into our doctoral trajectories. To achieve a meaningful understanding, we engage in individual and collective reflection, analysis, and interpretation, employing inventive thinking, creativity, emotional self-inquiry, and continuous dialogues ([Gannon, 2017](#)). This process enhances our self-study through a rich reflection on past and present experiences. The procedures of analysing these narratives are adopted from [Hernandez, Ngunjiri, and Chang \(2015\)](#), which include four phases.

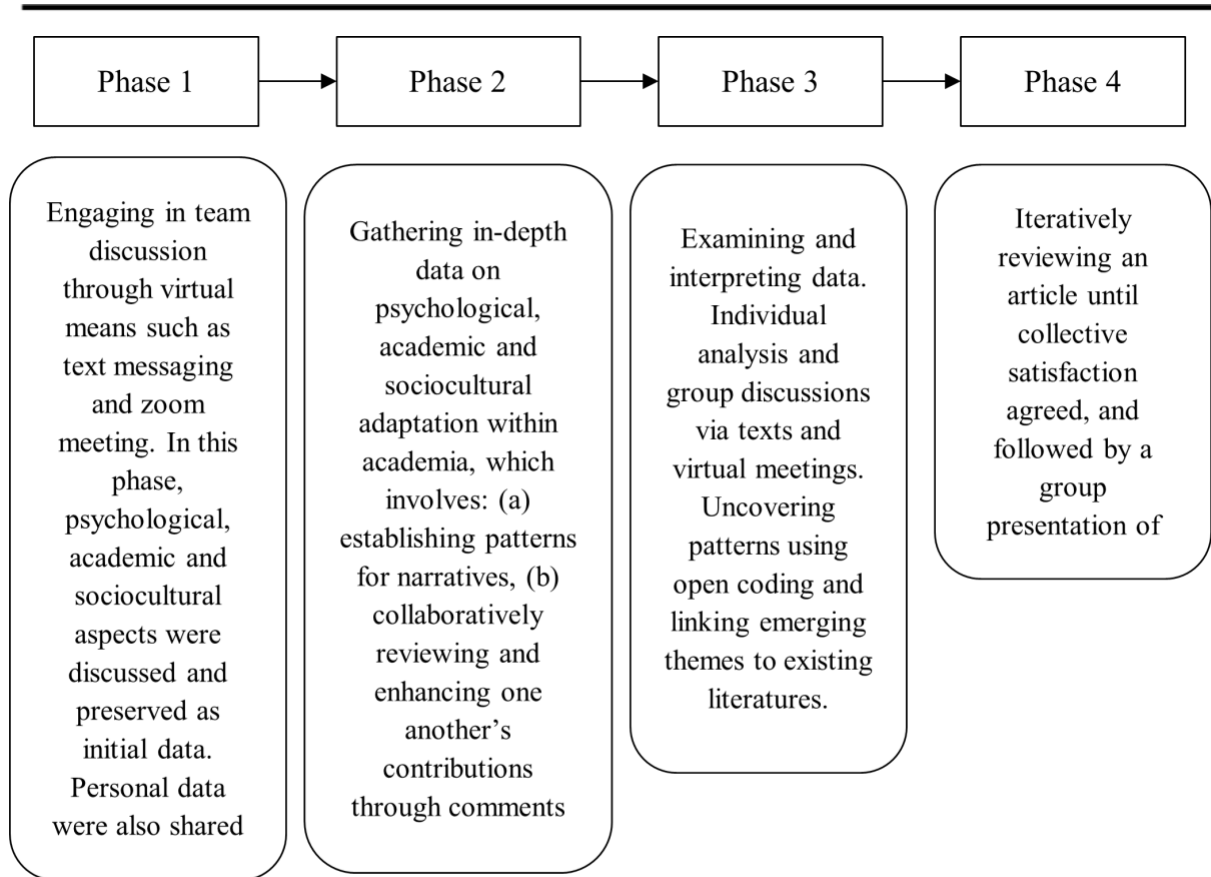


Figure 3: Phases of data collection

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Findings

Drawing on the data analysis, we found four major themes for psychological adaptation (social support, survival, spirituality, and compliance), one crucial theme for socio-cultural adaptation (we are cultural aliens) and one vital theme for academic adaptation (questioning our academic capability as we struggled to read and write critically).

4.2 Psychological Aspects: “Social Support, Survival, Spirituality, and Compliance”

In the context of psychological adjustment, situated within a stress and coping framework, elucidating acculturative stressors is crucial before delving into the four primary thematic categories. Mr. Niz faced depression linked to financial challenges, while Mr. Lim dealt with heightened anxiety during the ablution ritual for Salah, arising from procedural discomfort. Additionally, Mrs. Ridha navigated physical and psychological fatigue, intensified by a

malfunctioning heater, resulting in despondency. Responding to these stressors, our approach involved strategic interventions: social support, survival strategies, spiritual engagement, and compliance, detailed in the following discussion.

4.3 Social Support

The key thematic discovery pertaining to psychological facets centres on the concept of social support. It is consensually acknowledged that the presence of social support plays a foundational role in facilitating the progression of our psychological adjustment. The following data depicts such concerns.

I discussed these with my wife and talked to my children about the worst scenario if I could not find solutions. After thorough deliberation with my spouse, we reached the decision to remain in the UK by devising a comprehensive plan. (Mr.Niz, April, 2023).

Some of my Indonesian students, particularly, Johan, Harris, and Arnold (pseudonym) were the people who helped me a lot to have a car and to know all regulations and traffic signs to improve my driving discipline in Australia. It was also an unforgettable memory to develop my knowledge and skills to know how to drive a car with full awareness of many things. (Mr.Lim, April, 2023).

I discussed these with my friends who joined the same program to lessen my fatigue condition. They also encountered the same problems with different symptoms, so we supported each other. We decided to talk openly to each other as apartment mates, and managed to overcome initial challenges well. (Mrs.Rid, April 2023)

Drawing upon the aforementioned narrative data, it is incontrovertible that, when viewed through the psychological adjustment perspectives, external assistance from individuals is integral to our coping with acculturative stressors. Examining these challenges through the lens of coping strategies, we affirm that the social support we have garnered emanates notably from the intimate familial circle, including the spouse (Mr.Niz), fellow students from home country (Mr.Lim), and fellow program (Mrs.Rid).

4.4 Survival

An additional thematic consideration in the realm of psychological adjustment pertains to

survival, an outcome intricately linked to the social support expounded upon in the preceding theme. This survival dynamic is an integral component of coping strategies, which can manifest through collaboration with a family member, individualistic endeavours, and collective teamwork survival. The issue is presented below.

After thorough deliberation with my spouse, we reached the decision to remain in the UK by devising a comprehensive plan such that my wife would become the primary breadwinner through full-time employment, while I took on the responsibility of caring for our children while working part-time. In addition, we opted to rent a room instead of a house. (Mr.Niz, April 2023)

To address my toilet paper shortage, I devised a solution involving a kettle filled with water. I also placed a small towel and tissue as a mat in the toilet to prevent water from spreading. Despite appearing unconventional to my Australian peers, I persisted with this method. I also found a time when the restroom was unoccupied by other students as a new routine for ablution. I continued to bring the kettle to the toilet and perform ablution by putting my legs in the sink. (Mr.Lim, April 2023)

Upon conversing with fellow participants, we decided to support one another, and fostered open communication as apartment mates. A crucial and prompt decision was to relocate to a well-equipped apartment with heating and hot water facilities. Exploring the public places and social amenities, including bus transportation to the university, further eased our adaptation. (Mrs. Rid, April 2023)

The presented narrative excerpts unveil a spectrum of survival strategies. Mr. Niz tactically transitioned roles with his spouse, making her the primary breadwinner while he cared for their children. Unconventional practices like carrying a kettle, Mr. Lim personalised his survival methods. His idiosyncratic toilet routine, though unconventional to Australian peers, remained steadfast. In contrast, Mrs. Rid embraced collaboration, fostering teamwork with apartment mates for mutual support. Together, they swiftly relocated to a well-equipped apartment, showcasing her collaborative survival strategy. The group's active exploration of public spaces aimed to collectively enhance living conditions, portraying their concerted efforts.

4.5 Spirituality

The psychological adjustment theme centres on unwavering commitment to religious practices. Mr. Niz and Mr. Lim prioritise Salah, while Mrs. Rid, despite geographical distance, attends the nearby church regularly. This underscores the crucial role of religious commitment as a pivotal aspect of coping mechanisms in the context of psychological adjustment. This matter is further elaborated from their excerpts below.

I increasingly worshipped and prayed for the help of Allah, the Almighty. (Mr.Niz, April 2023)

In Islam, it is advised to relieve oneself before performing ablution (wudu) to avoid any disruptions during Salah (prayer). However, there is a lack of water facilities, leading to the use of toilet paper for cleaning after urination and defecation. Consequently, doubts arose regarding the validity of my ablution and concerns about impurity. The resulting unease and inconvenience caused immense anxiety. (Mr.Lim, April 2023)

Attending a nearby church, we received warm welcomes from native inhabitants. Encountering Indonesian churchgoers during a shopping trip, and we have since been attending the Indonesian church regularly. This nurturing community assuaged my distress, providing spiritual fulfilment, and revitalising my enthusiasm for the program. (Mrs.Rid, April 2023)

The data reveals our shared approach to acculturative stressors: a dedicated commitment to ritualistic norms. Mr. Niz intensifies worship, seeking Allah's aid more fervently during depression. Despite challenges, Mr. Lim steadfastly observes religious prescriptions for ablution and hygiene. Mrs. Rid's spirituality is expressed through regular church attendance, vital for coping with stressors, providing spiritual fulfilment, and rekindling enthusiasm for the program. These individual strategies underscore the transformative power of spiritual engagement in navigating acculturative challenges, offering a source of strength, guidance, and renewal in the face of stressors during our shared program experience.

4.6 Compliance

In the realm of psychological adjustment, the theme of compliance emerges. Despite individual stress, a steadfast adherence to local customs, legal regulations, and public policies prevailed. This included compliance with immigration regulations, driving laws, and public

transportation protocols. The following data depicts this concern.

Negotiations were conducted to establish a tuition fees payment scheme and adhere to visa restrictions, including a request for a 20-hour workday. (Mr.Niz, April 2023)

I continued to bring the kettle to the toilet and perform ablution by putting my legs in the sink. Over time, my Australian colleagues grew accustomed to witnessing these practices in the restroom. (Mr.Lim, April 2023)

...exploring public space and transportation to the university with her fellow participants to deal with the the habits of public policy (Mrs.Rid, April 2023)

The above data reveals that Mr. Niz's consistent adherence to policies involving tuition fee payments and visa restrictions despite facing challenges. Concurrently, Mr. Lim creatively sought to address personal needs, such as bringing a kettle to the restroom for ablution purposes. In a distinct context, Mrs. Rid actively observed and adapted to American customs in navigating public policies concerning public spaces, social amenities, and public transportation.

4.7 Sociocultural Aspect: “We Are Cultural Aliens”

When we go to Anglophone countries to pursue our doctoral degree, we have been aware that we would experience different sociocultural norms. What is more, we went to countries, which were located in different geographical locations namely UK, US and Australia. Therefore, we admitted that we are culturally alienated. The following data reveal such an issue.

As an international student, the major challenge I faced did not revolve around language or communication barriers, but rather adapting to the culture of making friends and fitting in. Notably, in the UK, there were friend circles, which often centred around gatherings at public bars where alcohol was consumed. These settings did not align with my preferences and observance of prayer times, making it difficult for me to fully integrate. (Mr.Niz, April 2023)

I felt uneasy with the driving rules and regulations in Australia, struggling to remember various traffic signs and unfamiliar terms like roundabouts and turns with caution. The presence of speed cameras along the roads added to the complexity, making driving less enjoyable. (Mr.Lim, April 2023)

My main challenge in socio-cultural adaptation revolved around addressing prejudice from the program's head. During a discussion about insurance payments not covered in our living allowance, a friend's inquiry triggered her anger, claiming an attack on her integrity. Witnessing her furious reaction left me shocked and fearful. I wondered if there were discrepancies in university-coordinated expenses, as we were all sponsored by the Directorate General of Higher Education of Indonesia. This incident caught all participants in the Sandwich Program off guard, prompting efforts from senior participants to mediate and resolve the issue with the program's head. Expressing ideas publicly provided me with a valuable lesson. Discussing financial matters, insurance fees, tuition, and allowances in front of all participants triggered the head of the program's fury, questioning her integrity. (Mrs.Rid, April 2023)

In the sociocultural adjustment aspect, we each underwent significant culture-learning experiences. Mr. Niz, adapting to the UK, discovered distinctions in friendship dynamics. In his home country, friendships formed quickly, but in the UK, the process was gradual. He adapted by appreciating academic friendships, understanding the nuanced cultural approach to companionship. Mr. Lim, acquiring a car in Australia, navigated the local driving culture with guidance from peers. Adhering to traffic rules, he limited routes, obtained insurance, fostering confidence and discipline. Mrs. Rid, through an incident, embraced integrity, realising the importance of trust, honesty, and moral principles in relationships, highlighting the significance of adapting while upholding identity and values.

4.8 Oklahoma

In the academic aspect, one of the most important concerns that we honestly admitted was academic capacity. We realised that critical reading and writing were the most salient skills that we need to improve. The following data depicts this concern.

Undoubtedly, the prospect of termination of candidature posed significant risks of failure. Enduring challenges during the first-year presentation was arduous, and the looming threat of candidature termination in the second year was a dreadful ordeal. My initial attempt at the confirmation exam resulted in failure, and my supervisor informed me of the possibility of termination due to this outcome. She criticised my thesis with no argument building, too descriptive. To my surprise, my supervisor's reaction to my failure was not one of encouragement, but rather it filled me with anxiety and

fear. My supervisor lacked empathy when discussing the termination, leaving me feeling disheartened. Despite the pressure to quit, we thoroughly examined the feedback from examiners, ensuring I addressed all their points diligently. (Mr.Niz, April 2023)

Upon completing my doctoral dissertation, a crucial concern arose due to a lack of critical thinking in developing my arguments. Subsequently, my first and second supervisors arranged separate urgent meetings to discuss the dissertation. I was taken aback by the extensive written feedback and comments, particularly in the introduction, literature review, and discussion chapters. The main issue highlighted was my tendency to rely on experts' ideas and knowledge without providing sufficient evidence and reasons to support them. To address this, my supervisors recommended employing the Claim, Reason, Evidence, and Warrant (CREW) formula throughout the entire dissertation. Identifying a lack of reading habits as the primary issue, I recognized the necessity of extensive reading, analysis, and interpretation of expert ideas to succeed in my dissertation. (Mr.Lim, April 2023)

My primary challenge during academic adjustment was related to my capacity as a research student. In the supervision meeting, my supervisor pointed out the need for revisions and enhancements, specifically in clarifying my research methodology and theoretical framework for data analysis. She advised me to re-evaluate the entire proposal and include additional theories for discussion. Having these feedbacks, I felt less confident and inadequate in my academic abilities. However, my supervisor displayed kindness, understanding, and strong competence, sharing valuable insights on assessment and evaluation in ELT, which directly related to study on the washback of National Examination. (Mrs.Rid, April 2023)

The data indicates Mr. Niz sought reassurance, sharing ideas with international academic peers and a tutor. Determined not to concede to failure, he persevered, displaying resilience in his academic journey. Meanwhile, Mr. Lim diligently followed supervisors' suggestions, utilising the CREW formula with international peers to enhance understanding, proving beneficial for many struggling international students. Mrs. Rid, after an incident with her advisor, recognized the need to strengthen her academic agency, focusing on academic reading. Establishing a routine, she dedicated more time to reading in Thompson library, acknowledging the constraints of her short stay in the Sandwich Program. Despite this, she efficiently utilised her time, engaging in classroom sessions, school observations, conferences, sharing sessions, superintendent's office visits, and presenting and revising her dissertation proposal.

5. DISCUSSION

During our doctoral studies, we grappled with significant psychological adjustment, particularly facing depression in response to specific circumstances. Coping with acculturative stress involved drawing on various strategies, including social support, survival tactics, heightened spirituality, and adherence to local customs. Financial issues, a common stressor, were categorised under general living stress (Tseng & Newton, 2002), and social support from both the inner (spouse) and outer circles (fellow students, church community) proved crucial (Yu, Bodycott, & Mak, 2019b). Studies emphasise the importance of a robust social network for international students' psychological adjustment (Schartner, 2015), leading to lower stress levels and more positive study abroad experiences (Russell, Rosenthal, & Thomson, 2010). Survival strategies, often centred around teamwork and individual efforts, play a fundamental role in psychological adaptation, fostering self-determination in the new environment (McClure, 2007). Notably, adherence to religious practices emerged as a mandatory aspect of our psychological adaptation. Regardless of religious background (two Muslims and one Christian), worship and prayers were integral to our coping mechanisms, resonating with research indicating that activities like prayer, church attendance, and meditation are common psychological coping practices among international students (Chun & and Poole, 2009). The study underscores the multifaceted nature of psychological adaptation, highlighting the interconnectedness of social support, survival strategies, spirituality, and cultural compliance in navigating the challenges of international doctoral studies.

In terms of socio-cultural adjustments, individual survival strategies played a significant role in our adaptation. These strategies included developing reflective thinking, maintaining composure, appreciating the academic circle, accepting the loss of a familiar social atmosphere, restricting driving routes, and internalising insights gained from reflections on life in an environment with different moral principles and values. Social support, crucial for our well-being, primarily came from Indonesian colleagues who had been in the country longer.

Their willingness to assist us provided a sense of relief and comfort, aligning with research indicating that strong social support among international students correlates with lower levels of anxiety and depression (Sümer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008). Additionally, social support is a valuable factor in alleviating the emotional challenges that individuals may face during the process of acculturation, which includes feelings of loneliness, inferiority, and discrimination (Poyrazli et al., 2004). Adhering to local laws was also essential for survival, as it facilitated smoother integration into the host country's way of life. This adherence reflected the wisdom of "doing as the Romans do," recognizing that failure to comply with local regulations could lead to daily challenges and complications.

The academic adjustment during our doctoral studies was significantly influenced by the support from friends, colleagues, tutors, and supervisors. Interactions with supervisors, as emphasised by Yu and Wright (2016), played a pivotal role in academic adaptation. Positive and enthusiastic student responses were observed when support was provided by supervisors, highlighting the importance of this relationship. However, academic relationships should extend beyond supervisors to encompass strong interpersonal connections. Shared challenges in academic writing abilities emerged during supervision meetings, leading to feelings of apprehension and concern about feedback. This experience resonated with Yu and Wright (2016) findings, where participants received consistently critical feedback without reassurance or support for improvement. Individual survival strategies became crucial, with a focus on daily library visits, dedicated reading of reference books, and active participation in various academic activities such as classroom sessions, school observations, conferences, sharing sessions, visits to the superintendent's office, and presenting and revising dissertation/thesis proposals. These strategies reflected our determination to navigate the academic challenges and succeed in our doctoral studies.

6. CONCLUSION

This study illuminates the pervasive stressors we encountered during our doctoral studies, encompassing financial issues, challenges with ablution procedures, and physical and psychological fatigue. These stressors, constituting elements of our psychological adjustment, prompted our adoption of coping mechanisms—social support, survival strategies, spiritual engagement, and compliance—as integral components of our psychological adaptation. Sociocultural adjustments involved acquiring cultural insights, such as variations in friendship dynamics in the UK, adapting to unfamiliar driving cultures, and recognizing the importance of integrity and moral values. Reflecting on these cultural nuances, Mr. Niz embraced composure within the academic circle, valuing friendships within this community. Mr. Lim, in navigating driving culture differences, restricted routes, gained insight from fellow students, and secured car insurance for confidence and safety, contributing to self-assurance and driving discipline. Mrs. Rid emphasised the significance of upholding identity and moral values in sociocultural adaptation. Recognizing the prominence of critical reading and writing skills in academic adjustment, we acknowledged the need for improvement. Facing academic challenges, we leaned on guidance from supervisors, resilience, and unwavering commitment to continuous improvement. Combining these elements facilitated our academic adaptation, underscoring the crucial role played by friends, colleagues, tutors, and supervisors in the process. This multifaceted approach allowed us to overcome the challenges of academic adjustment, ensuring a successful journey through our doctoral studies.

6.1 Implications

Drawing upon the aforementioned findings, this study posits several practical implications. Firstly, it is imperative for international research students to proactively equip themselves with an understanding of diverse norms, socio-cultural nuances, and academic hurdles as they embark on their doctoral journey, particularly within Anglophone countries. Consequently, fostering social support networks, formulating effective survival strategies, engaging in

spiritual pursuits, and demonstrating compliance for enduring success emerge as indispensable facets of their preparation.

Secondly, the establishment of robust relationships with both supervisors and fellow members of academic cohorts emerges as pivotal for sustained academic advancement during the pursuit of a doctorate. This interpersonal rapport not only facilitates the cultivation of resilience but also plays a crucial role in transforming psychological, socio-cultural, and academic adjustments into adaptive mechanisms. By situating oneself within an ecologically supportive academic environment and circles, it is anticipated that a confluence of support from family members, colleagues, and fellow students from one's home country, coupled with an inherent spirit of resilience, will engender an elevated awareness among international research students regarding the imperative nature of sustainable adaptation in a doctoral milieu.

6.2 Limitations and Further Research

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations inherent in this study. The restricted sample size undermines the generalizability of the findings, warranting caution in their application to broader contexts. Furthermore, the exclusive focus on participants studying in Anglophone countries accentuates the contrast between developed and developing nations, thereby underscoring the necessity for a nuanced exploration of international students' experiences in these distinct settings.

Consequently, future research trajectories may benefit from an authentic examination of international students' encounters in developing countries. Moreover, deeper scrutiny into the efforts expended by international research students to transition from psychological, socio-cultural, and academic adjustment to adaptation is warranted. This necessitates a more extensive inclusion of participants from non-Anglophone countries, such as those in Asia and Latin America, to comprehensively understand how psychological, socio-cultural, and academic adaptation manifest in diverse cultural and academic contexts. The

evidence gleaned from this study advocates for the amplification of conceptual and practical discourse surrounding psychological, socio-cultural, and academic challenges, thereby contributing to the nuanced development of adaptation transformation within the international research student community.

7. REFERENCES

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