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Unveiling Indonesian University Students' Adaptation in Taiwan: From an Intercultural Perspective

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ABSTRACT: *The study focuses on six Indonesian students at a public university in Taiwan, with programs ranging from undergraduate to postgraduate. Many Indonesian students studying abroad in diverse cultural and background settings must adapt academically, professionally, and socially to multicultural environments. The researcher aims to discover the students' perspectives on their adaptation to the campus, how they adapt to new environments, how they bridge gaps, and their hopes for future improvement. We conducted the research using semi-structured interviews to assess students' perceptions and adaptations. Then, we followed up by selecting robust data and narrating it in a narrative inquiry research design. We conduct a thematic analysis to make it easier to narrate data from identical participants. We analyzed the data using language appraisal and emotional geography to identify emotional and social phenomena in the story. The findings showed that the students navigated complex emotional geography, alternating between feeling alienated by social and cultural obstacles and feeling fortunate amid intellectual opportunities. The study uses language appraisal to show how the decision between Mandarin and English can both help and hinder the process of complete integration. The results of the study suggest that host-university policies should focus on fostering intercultural communication to create a more inclusive campus atmosphere.*

Keywords: Emotional geography, intercultural perspective, language appraisal, Taiwan, thematic analysis

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INTRODUCTION

The globalization of higher education has increased the number of international students pursuing academic opportunities. One crucial aspect international students face is cultural adaptation, which occurs when they relocate to a foreign educational setting. Cultural differences are the most significant challenges the students might encounter when they first come. They need to struggle with social etiquette and communication style. Second, international students might struggle with language barriers because they need to adapt to foreign languages to communicate with them fluently. Deardorff (2006) defines the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in an intercultural context as part of intercultural competence. Being positioned in different educational systems will affect students' adaptation and academic performance. In addition, students should understand the expectations for higher academic settings, workloads, and time management to succeed in their studies. In the same vein, intercultural competence plays a pivotal role in adjusting to various academic standards (Hastowohadi & Ma'rifatulloh, 2025).

International adaptation depends on intercultural competence, which should be developed before attending the target campus. Intercultural literacy has a significant effect in facilitating their adaptation process. In practice, students will encounter experiences different from what they had previously imagined, such as prejudices about the country they will study in. The realization of these differing assumptions becomes new information for the students, forming part of their reflection and self-improvement process. The adaptation process will be successful if students can enact intercultural competence effectively. Knowledge of cultural differences, the ability to interact, and communication in diverse cultural contexts are key points in this adaptation process.

We recruited participants from Indonesia as the sample data; the researchers attempted to explore the experiences of international students studying at a public university in Taiwan. The choice of Indonesian participants is due to the cultural differences in language, customs, and communication patterns compared to Taiwan. It will provide a unique experience for international readers, especially Indonesian students who wish to study in Taiwan. Grounded in qualitative methods, the participants' voices are narrated to the readers with diverse themes to capture their attention regarding the phenomenon within. Bennet (2009) strengthens the importance of understanding cultural differences in academic settings to improve student adaptation. Therefore, we need to select analytical tools such as language appraisal and emotional geography, which is an appropriate medium for interpreting the social context within the participants' narratives. In a previous study, Basuki et al. (2025) stated that engaging in

developing educational policies in Chile provides valuable information and insights that can inform and influence decisions regarding intercultural education (Basuki et al., 2025). Overall, these studies contribute to the conceptualization and policies of Taiwanese universities, particularly from the perspective of intercultural competence, in implementing communication strategies aimed at Indonesian students. The research question is as follows: How do Indonesian students perceive their emotions, attitudes, and judgments toward cultural adaptation on a Taiwanese campus?

The study integrates a theoretical foundation by using appraisal and emotional geography to analyze Indonesian students' adaptation. Language appraisal is used to evaluate emotional students' responses; meanwhile, emotional geography helps the researcher contextualize the spatial environment. These two theories delivered holistic Indonesian students' adaptation in Taiwan. In addition, the study differentiates intercultural competence with the two theories because IC focuses on interactional ability in terms of cultural facets; however, the two theoretical foundations stress emotional evaluation due to environmental issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Adaptation in Higher Education

Globalization has increased the number of students seeking to study abroad. Furthermore, cultural adaptation emerges as a key challenge international students face (Byram, 2008). This means that cultural adaptation in higher education is crucial for international students. Intercultural competence is communicating effectively in intercultural settings (Deardorff, 2006). Understanding and adjusting to diverse norms, values, and cultures is pivotal in academic settings. It is a critical point for the success of the adaptation process. Adaptation is complex for Indonesian students in Taiwan due to differences in language, social etiquette, and educational expectations. This finding is in line with Badri's study (2024) on Indonesian students in Taiwan. Cross-cultural adaptation is a complex and challenging process, mainly because of the significant differences between the student's home culture and the culture of the destination country. Students need to adapt both psychologically and socioculturally. Due to this issue, Ward and Kennedy (1994) stated that the adaptation process is influenced by the ability to interact with the local culture, manage communication differences, and handle the emotional challenges that arise unexpectedly. In the case of Indonesian students in Taiwan, the adaptation process also includes adjusting to the surrounding educational culture, which differs from their home country's educational system.

Intercultural Competence: A Pivotal Facet in Adaptation

Bennet (2013) noted that intercultural competence plays a crucial role in the success of international students. Higher education students need this ability, which is often associated with the capacity to function effectively across cultures, encompassing knowledge of cultural differences and the skills and behaviors required to bridge gaps in communication and understanding. Deardorff (2006) suggests that intercultural competence is multidimensional and requires students

to engage with cultural differences thoughtfully. For Indonesian students, language, communication styles, and social etiquette differences can pose challenges when adapting upon their arrival. Hastowohadi & Ma'rifatulloh (2025) present a study on international students with strong intercultural competence. The study showcases how international students achieve personal and cultural growth, adapt to cultural norms, and gain practical support from the host campus and environment. Nailed to this ability, it will enhance the student's competence to avoid miscommunication, address cultural misunderstandings, and navigate the complexities of intercultural interactions. In adapting to a new academic setting, the students must solve cross-cultural shock and adjust to a new educational setting.

Emotional geography and language appraisal perspective

To provide a coherent theoretical framework, this research integrates appraisal theory (2005) by Martin and White with emotional geography (2001) by Hargreaves. First, appraisal theory provides a lens for understanding how Indonesian students evaluate and express their experiences through effect, judgment, and appreciation, which reveals how they position themselves in an intercultural context. Meanwhile, emotional geography pinpoints that the emotional experiences of Indonesian students are shaped by their social and physical environments, including cultural norms and spatial context (Kenway et al., 2011). Rooted in Language appraisal, Martin and White (2005) argued that the study shows how people evaluate language in intercultural contexts, providing a tool for analyzing participants' perceptions and experiences related to language. This framework assesses the language international students use when recounting their experiences. Meanwhile, the emotional geography facet describes an analytical framework that emphasizes how students' responses are shaped by their spaces and social interactions (Kenway & Youdell, 2011). Indeed, engaging with a new cultural context helps us understand how to measure language proficiency, communication processes, and interactions. Aspects of emotional geography include personal, cultural, moral, professional, political, and physical geography (Hargreaves, 2001). For international students, this analysis helps understand how their emotional responses are shaped by the environment and community where they live. However, Ward and Kennedy have primarily focused on behavioral and cognitive aspects; more dynamic social and emotional encounters are needed to interpret interpersonal and textual comprehension via emotional geography and language appraisal.

Focusing on language appraisal can shed light on their efforts to overcome language barriers and how they overcome them. It will improve their capacity to integrate into academic and social settings, especially for Indonesian students in Taiwanese colleges. We can understand their social and emotional dynamics during the adaptation process by analyzing participants' language. Furthermore, language appraisal can reveal how students' perceptions of their language competence affect their social openness and self-esteem. On the other hand, the emotional geography framework for students in Taiwan will be constructive in understanding how

feelings of excitement, isolation, stress, and joy are influenced by their experiences in a foreign academic and cultural environment. The former study has explored intercultural competence in terms of international students, which connects to appraisal and emotional theoretical frameworks. In this study, the researcher found that IC and language appraisal and emotional geography complement each other.

METHOD

Research design

To align with theoretical approaches of emotional geography and appraisal theory, the research applied narrative inquiry. It is well suited to capture how individuals make sense of their living experience through language, which aligns with the appraisal focus on emotional and evaluative language. Additionally, the parameters of emotional geography influence participants' experiences within spatial and cultural settings, facilitating a deeper exploration of how these factors shape participants' emotional responses. The study adopts a narrative inquiry research design to explore the adaptation experiences of Indonesian students studying at a public university in Taiwan. Narrative inquiry, grounded in the interpretive paradigm, examines individuals' experiences and how their physical, social, and cultural surroundings shape and reshape them (Clandinin, 2006, 2007, 2013). Narrative inquiry allows us to examine individuals' lived experiences within what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to as a "three-dimensional narrative inquiry space" (p. 54). In this space, researchers and the researched engage in a "relational engagement" (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 541), sharing their narratives situated in the dimensions of time and place as well as the personal and the social. Therefore, this design is highly suitable for exploring human experiences, integral to the dimensions of place, space, and time.

Participants

We recruited participants from Indonesia using snowball sampling, in which we asked student peers with close ties to other Indonesian students for help. The use of snowball sampling is effective in accessing the participants more easily and is relevant to the study. This approach was used to facilitate data collection within a relatively short period. We were cautious in maintaining the confidentiality of the participants' data by anonymizing their names.

Participant demographics

No	Name	Gender	Age	Program
1.	ANDI	Male	30	Master
2.	FENA	Female	25	Master
3.	HANI	Female	23	Bachelor
4.	BOY	Male	27	Master
5.	NAYKILLA	Female	22	Bachelor
6.	VENI	Female	22	Bachelor

Interview

Based on Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the data analysis method in Narrative Inquiry involves two main steps. The first is writing the interim research text, and the second is writing the final research text. The researchers distributed a draft of the question guide, which included concrete answer examples to help participants follow the answering flow correctly. After participants responded to the questions, we filtered the robust and concrete answers. If any answers were unsuitable, we conducted voice notes or semistructured Zoom interviews to obtain responses that represented their experiences in line with the research theme. We interviewed them in April and May 2025. We conducted interviews lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes per participant. The answers we received were then analyzed thematically, which led to interesting discussions to be narrated. This type of interview allows the researcher to deeply explore the participants' voices in a specific and concrete manner. It will form the basis for the next phase of analysis using both language appraisal and emotional geography frameworks. We position ourselves as outsiders in this study; we seek to understand the participants' stories from an external viewpoint (Geertz, 1973; Angrosino, 2007).

Data analysis

Situated in narrative inquiry, we engage with participants as cocomposers of narrative accounts. Then, participants are asked to provide detailed insights into their experiences upon entering the campus environment in Taiwan for the first time. We asked them to reflect on what they experienced as part of their perception. Our exploration does not stop there; we ask them to express their perceptions as part of the dynamic change process. These dimensions of change include personal and social facets as part of the reflection on feelings, hopes, desires, and reactions. The final aspect is the representation of the reflection, which serves as a source of hope for future improvement. The participants' stories are then analyzed using language appraisal and emotional geography. Drawing on the appraisal language theory proposed by Martin and White (2005), there are four parameters, each with both positive and negative facets: inclination/disinclination, happiness/unhappiness, satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and security/insecurity. Additionally, from an emotional geography lens, Hargreaves (2001) divides the dimensions into the following: personal, moral, political, physical, and cultural geographies. Appraisal, part of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), emphasizes the importance of interpersonal functionality; it focuses on how identities are constructed in texts and how readers and listeners are either aligned or misaligned

(Bartlett & O'Grady, 2017). In line with this, emotional geography helps identify forms of support and threats from social ties, which can create distance or closeness (Hargreaves, 2001). These two tool analyses help researchers encapsulate and narrate the holistic point of view of the participant story. To ensure alignment between the interview questions and two analytical frameworks, namely, emotional geography and language appraisal, the queries were designed to capture the language and social context that shape participants' experiences in specific settings, for instance, "Can you describe how you feel when communicating with Taiwanese students in academic settings?." Furthermore, language appraisal focuses on affective and evaluative language, such as "How did the campus influence your sense of comfort?." These two interview protocols holistically guide the participants in narrating their experiences. In addition, the interpretation of the coding process is derived from how to handle various interpretations through thematic analysis, appraisal, and emotional geography categorization. It emphasized the relevance of the coding with the theoretical framework and how to complete different opinions within the coding process is a natural facet of the qualitative paradigm through narrative inquiry. The researcher sharpened the coding process and interpreted it with inductive thematic narration with the help of appraisal and emotional geography. Finally, the interpretation results have been arranged as a concrete narrative positioned as the outsider perspective in the study. The researcher explained that the final transcription interpretation was assigned in subjective positioning, delivering a detailed, concrete narrative. In the coding table frequency, the researcher gave detailed and specific guidance with examples on how to conduct the analysis.

The coded categories based on language appraisal and emotional geography were as follows:

Code	Definition	Examples	Theory
Inclination/Disinclination	Willingness or rejection	I want to interact with Taiwanese students. However, I am afraid.	Appraisal
Happiness/Unhappiness	Positive or negative emotion	I am happy if my teacher praises me.	Appraisal
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction	Positive or negative evaluation	I feel satisfied with the campus facility.	Appraisal

Security/Insecurity	The feeling of secure or insecure of something.	I am confident discussing my course in class.	Appraisal
Personal geography	Emotion of personal relationship	My roommate helps me so much.	Emotional Geography
Cultural geography	Norm or cultural practice	I was shocked by the on-time culture.	Emotional Geography
Political geography	Participants' experience of power or status.	Sometimes, I feel unwelcome because I am from a developing country.	Emotional Geography
Physical geography	Place or time	I am so pleased studying at the park.	Emotional Geography
Moral geography	Conflict or awareness of new culture or custom	I felt disappointed with group work communication.	Emotional Geography

FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal the adaptation experiences of Indonesian students at the Taiwan CCU campus. Several themes emerged from this research, namely, language barriers and adaptation, social and cultural interaction, adaptation and survival strategies, campus programs and improvement suggestions, personal transformation, and self-development. Each theme emerged from inductive analysis based on interviews with the six participants. Additionally, the researcher focused on the synthesis pattern among the participants, which made the findings more analytical and focused on significant findings as critical incidents. The researcher encouraged the interview transcription and theoretical framework to hinder long narration; it stressed how the quote was relevant to the applied theory.

Language Barriers and Academic

The theme describes participants' struggles to overcome Mandarin academic challenges as the language of instruction for undergraduate students. In particular, the participants used basic Mandarin language skills; they found it difficult to understand the technical terms in the class materials and were affected by the Taiwanese accent. Difficulty understanding instructions causes insecurity and forces them to use technological aids.

International students navigate the transition of familiarizing themselves with the educational ecosystem to overcome survival challenges, creating a dynamic shaped by their past experiences—as illustrated, for instance, by Boy's account of his Mandarin language proficiency. Moreover, English Medium Instruction (EMI) served as a bridge to a supportive academic environment for both Boy and Andi. Although Andi had difficulty listening because one of his lecturers used a Taiwanese accent in an EMI class, he managed the situation thanks to his strong English skills.

Mandarin for my Master's degree at this campus felt easy because I had studied in Taiwan since high school. In my class, the language of instruction used was Mandarin mixed with English. In my department, there was an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) class; coincidentally, there was a Professor from Vietnam who taught. Mandarin is the key to being successful in class and gaining a deep understanding of the material. (Boy, Master's student, Interview, April, 2025).

The participant's narrative highlighted the language appraisal parameters he felt secure in, which led to a positive, affective appreciation of his Mandarin language ability. It aligns with the emotional geography aspect, as the political facet directed him to use EMI, which significantly facilitated his academic adaptation. The personal geography of being in collaboration with his teammates made him satisfied with learning tasks, as it indicates language appraisal. This proves that the adaptation process focuses not only on language ability but also on how emotional security and satisfaction are built together in space and time dimensions.

Mandarin was not used in my class when I was in Taiwan. The use of English as the language of learning in class; there were lecturers whose English pronunciation was carried over to the Taiwanese accent, so it was not easy to understand. My English was good, but because many Taiwanese students were in the department and did not interact much with international students, they were not used to my English accent. I once had an unpleasant experience at the end of the semester. The assessment from the lecturer was not authentic enough. I once

filled out feedback. Assessment needs to be performed objectively. (Andi, Master's student, Interview, April, 2025).

Andi's experience highlighted how language appraisal directed him to feel satisfaction in being able to communicate in Mandarin. However, the language appraisal insecurity aspect appears as a means of negative appraisal of his lecturer's Taiwanese accent. However, the political parameter in emotional geography forced him to adapt to the way his lecturer communicated in terms of the academic setting. In addition, language appraisal underlined the participant's insecurity about being isolated by his Taiwanese classmates. It affected his accumulation of emotional distance, leading him to become a failure due to emotional tension. Moreover, his dissatisfaction arose from the pedagogical standard, which does not meet his expectations. The study showed that his adaptation process needs social and academic adjustment for the successful transformation of international student identity.

Fena's concerns regarding the electronic administrative documentation process have evolved into a transformation aimed at enhancing the responsiveness and sensitivity of the campus information system going forward. Meanwhile, Hani has navigated a transition involving study schedules and learning modalities at her campus in Taiwan, a process she describes as essential for successfully adapting to the new culture within the expected timeframe.

I cannot speak Mandarin at all. Another obstacle regarding the lecture process is that there is one lecturer whose English pronunciation/accents is difficult to understand; I have to focus when he speaks. On the other hand, I once applied for a scholarship for the following semester and entered the wrong identity for my S2 status instead of writing a bachelor's. The problem-solving that I experienced took weeks before it was resolved. (Fena, Master's student, Interview, April, 2025).

The experience of 'Fena' and 'Hani' exposed the language appraisal insecurity facet, which requires translating from Mandarin to Indonesian in the SSO system; it also showed that moral geography teaches her how difficult the transformation is in that particular situation. The emotional geography of the political parameter required her to communicate in English in an academic encounter, which she felt insecure about because she did not understand her lecturer's Taiwanese accent. Additionally, the negative judgment of her reaction to the OIA system was linked to insecurity and moral geography parameters that forced her to seek a solution to a problem she might encounter personally. This means that the findings highlighted how she significantly transformed her thinking about a better solution for academic technologies beyond pedagogical transformation on campus.

I had prepared Mandarin before leaving for Taiwan, but only to the basics. In practice, the application here was complex; things like that made it difficult. In addition, every time I came home from class, I reviewed the material, which included translating the material from the PPT. I once had a Hong Kong lecturer whose Mandarin pronunciation was difficult to understand. Especially the material about calculus, which was very difficult for me. For EMI classes, the average language used as the instructional language is English, which is also mixed with Mandarin. I take private online courses via Zoom. I prefer listening to Mandarin podcasts. I do not like learning Mandarin through videos or listening to music. I like podcasts; I write down some Mandarin terms from there and then translate them into Indonesian. (Hani, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025).

Hani had the same experience as the other two participants, Andi and Fena. Her initial desire to study Mandarin shows her language appraisal of the inclination parameter and the political power of the host university, indicating that language adaptation is urgently needed. Her positive step toward her inclination to study Mandarin online and through self-directed learning underpinned the physical geography parameter, showcasing her personal freedom and good maneuvering in her academic transformation in Taiwan.

Meanwhile, Naykilla asserts that proficiency in Mandarin must be actively cultivated. Veni also emphasizes the significance of Mandarin proficiency for effective classroom instruction.

I studied Mandarin from elementary to high school but did not learn to speak in that class; I only learned passively. The first time I studied here, I was confused by the lecturer's Mandarin. I once took a calculus class, which was very difficult to understand; the Mandarin used was calculus. Mastering Mandarin will impact my grades in class. I needed to adapt for about one to two years. My Mandarin skills improve when interacting with colleagues, such as in group work. When I took several EMI classes, I had difficulty understanding the English they used, maybe because of their pronunciation. I once took an EMI class, but the lecturer spoke in Mandarin. (Naykilla, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025).

Naykilla gave a moral lesson: the Mandarin used in the university is slightly different from what she learned in Indonesia. She also felt insecure about what she got from studying Mandarin in Indonesia, which did not satisfy her expectations, which is related to the insecurity parameter of language appraisal. In addition, the language appraisal of satisfaction. From the lens of the emotional geography of the political facet, EMI classes directed her to adapt to Taiwanese English, which was used by her lecturer. It shows a negative judgment upon her

integration of adaptation as an international student in a Taiwanese university. The political pressure exerted by the lecturer's accent encourages her to receive academic information. The host university shows how international students can easily navigate academic policy in terms of the lecturer's language choice, which would enable the student to transform the Taiwanese university setting.

I took Mandarin courses for one year before I studied here, using basic Mandarin. Practicing Mandarin on this campus differs from what I learned in Indonesia before. I do not understand the process of adapting to academic Mandarin. I cannot understand my friends' jokes. I once attended a class that was explained in English, but the lecturer spoke Mandarin. When I spoke English, the lecturer did not understand—input for this campus to improve the English skills of some of its lecturers. (Veni, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025).

Veni and Naykilla experienced the political power of Mandarin language as a medium of instruction in her classes, which pushed her to learn and practice basic Mandarin language. However, her insecurity in language appraisal came to light when she struggled to understand Mandarin jokes. Furthermore, the betrayal of her feelings during EMI classes, where the language of instruction was Mandarin, left her disappointed; this links to moral geography and language appraisal, reflecting dissatisfaction with the language policy used by her lecturer in classroom pedagogical practices. This means that the inconsistency in language instruction in university classes creates a disadvantage for proactive efforts by international students. This theme has successfully concluded that Indonesian students' adaptation process in a Taiwanese university has led to negotiated-emotional bonding. It presented how EMI inconsistency creates challenging professional and security parameters that burden international students independently. To bridge this gap, some of them utilized their ability to develop autonomous digital learning and labor support in the host university.

Social and Cultural Interaction

The theme highlights the emotional distance between Indonesian students and Taiwanese students. The participants reported that, in political geography, they were treated differently from Western students, such as in France and the United States, and were warmly welcomed. It creates an isolated, culture-shocking feeling due to less social behavior compared to Indonesian culture.

Andi observed a cultural difference marked by greater discipline on Taiwanese campuses and a pronounced sense of individualism within the social environment, particularly among Taiwanese students. Similarly, Veni perceived that students in Taiwan appeared passive and lacked warmth.

I felt shocked because regulations here are stricter than in Indonesia. In terms of cleanliness, it is also very disciplined. I also do not like the food here. Some Taiwanese students are not so warm. When I meet them on the street, I assume that Taiwanese students want me to use English with a Taiwanese accent. I have experienced some Taiwanese students not being so warm. On the other hand, I have friends on neighboring campuses who are very welcoming to international students who study there. Here, if there are students from the United States, they are more enthusiastic than those from Indonesia. (Andi, Master's student, Interview, April, 2025).

Andi's narrative emphasized the cultural identity of emotional geography, that he must obey the Taiwanese government regulation compared to Indonesia. It showcased her feelings of insecurity during the language appraisal in a new circumstance. The personal facet of emotional geography affected his warm feelings toward social interaction with Taiwanese peers, which in turn affected his enthusiasm to communicate with local people. Language appraisal also showcased unhappy feelings when he encountered white racial superiority that Taiwanese classmates admired; it shows social hierarchy status. The social distance revealed a dynamic space to bridge the gap by being more closely connected to the community. The findings show that the neighboring campus is a role model that will foster the positive judgment and equal treatment of international students.

The first time I came here, I was shocked because Taiwanese students were passive and did not have the initiative to reach out to students from abroad. I experienced culture shock when throwing away trash that had to be sorted. Hopefully, this campus can promote itself again to the international world, so Taiwanese students are more open to diversity. (Veni, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025).

Veni's experience revealed the language appraisal insecurity parameter, which indicates that she was shocked by the cleanliness regulation regarding trash sorting. The cultural parameter of emotional geography emphasized this strict regulation, making her aware of how to appreciate and obey the host university's rules. Additionally, the participant's insecure and personal experience promoted reshaping cultural awareness of students' diverse backgrounds, which may foster intercultural engagement to improve the social landscape.

Hani reported experiencing racist tendencies directed toward her, which she believed impeded social integration within the group. Similarly, Naykilla indicated encountering discrimination when interacting with certain Taiwanese friends, a sentiment shared by both participants.

I want to mingle more intensely with Taiwanese students here. However, they prefer students from France or America. Maybe because they want to be able to speak a foreign language. I get different treatment; they are not enthusiastic about interacting with me. My lecturer explained why Taiwanese students tend to want to be friends with white students. I tend to be more comfortable interacting with friends from the same church. I worked in that church for two years, and my transformation regarding cultural differences was significant. I am more open-minded. The environment here is open to LGBT people and sex outside of marriage. It surprised me. I still hold the values taught by my parents and my environment in Indonesia. (Hani, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025).

Hani's narrative language appraisal of inclination showcased that political geography dominated the discourse of her experience. Certainly, Taiwanese students welcomed European students rather than Indonesian students, which is shaping social capital. The inclination parameter emerged in the church community, reshaping the social equality of the personal parameter of emotional geography. The study indicated that emotional stability, rather than an egalitarian perspective, was associated with international students feeling under pressure. Interestingly, moral value emerged in the LGBT issue, which led her to stand against it and uphold Indonesian cultural identity, which relates to the emotional geography aspect. The findings showcased her transformation of the selective process and how she adapted to social and cultural differences in the host university setting.

"Socially, my colleagues are not very warm when welcoming international students. Sometimes, when I pass them on the street, they act indifferently. In contrast, in Indonesia, when we meet colleagues, we usually greet each other." (Naykilla, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025). Her story exposed the insecurity facet of language appraisal and the personal parameter of emotional geography, which represents negative appreciation. It is affected by an inhospitable social environment at the university. In comparison, she holds an Indonesian identity, which represents the moral value of emotional geography and the inclination aspect of language appraisal, encouraging racial equality and social appreciation. This finding implied that the accumulation of micro interactions plays an impactful role in shaping the intercultural awareness that university students must construct to promote international universities.

Boy previously encountered a conflict with a class group member, highlighting the importance of fostering open communication within collaborative settings. Hani observed a contrast between Indonesia, where people are generally open, and Taiwan, where individuals tend to be more reserved.

“I am an introvert and not traditionally minded, so I feel normal when studying here; there is no significant cultural shock. When working in a group, sometimes I get into conflicts because some tasks are more challenging. I consider this normal.” (Boy, Master’s student, Interview, April, 2025). The participant’s excerpt shows a personal dimension of emotional geography in which he considered himself not involved in social interaction. In addition, it brings him to adapt to new social circumstances, which he struggles to adapt to at the host university. The professional geographer developed his initiative in Taiwan when he needed to work collaboratively with his colleagues to survive in Taiwan. This resonance emotion allows him to construct not only an international student identity but also to engage in emotional labor.

What shocked me was that this campus was tranquil, unlike my previous undergraduate campus at Jakarta State University, which was very crowded. Regarding food and the environment, especially the adjustment to being able to pray here, because there is no Adhan sound as in Indonesia, in terms of culture, people here tend to be more individualistic, which is different from Indonesia, which tends to be friendly. There was an incident when having lunch in the canteen; the lecturer here was willing to reprimand me; there is a sense of equality here, and they are friendlier. (Hani, Bachelor’s student, Interview, April, 2025).

The participant’s insecurity toward the tranquility of the host university, in contrast to the crowdedness of her former university, made her aware of the cultural differences between the two. The moral facet of emotional geography seems to be tailored with Muslim identity, in which she needs to pray on time when hearing the Muslim call to prayer. However, in the host university, she could not find anyone who led the call to prayer, which made her feel less secure. She should navigate Muslim time prayer to establish five times a day prayer in Taiwan. It reshaped her emotional feeling of Muslim identity practices in a non-Muslim country experience, which needs the supremacy of her sophisticated understanding of intercultural stories. The personal facet of emotional geography and the feeling of warmth as her lecturer in a canteen was welcoming her made her surprised, which represents a sense of equality. The study revealed emotional distance between her and her classmates; however, she perceived academic equality in academic interaction. Andi, Hani, and Naykilla experienced political social capital versus Western students in the host university, indicating a hierarchical space where they have less power and social capital in social interaction, tailored to race-based superiority. However, the cultural transformation experienced by Hani is that she has been more open-minded since her arrival in Taiwan due to social equality in the environment.

Adaptation and Survival Strategies

The theme underscores the participants' dissatisfaction with the quality of the EMI program on campus. They found that the class used English as the medium of instruction; however, the students frequently found that the lecturers used Mandarin or had a difficult accent. Satisfaction and moral parameters regarding teaching professionalism on campus were evaluated.

Andi demonstrates a deliberate effort to adapt to local Taiwanese cuisine and to adjust his communication and negotiation strategies with local food vendors, as he has described. In contrast, Boy articulates a different perspective, emphasizing the necessity of undertaking part-time employment in Taiwan to manage the financial demands associated with his studies.

"Using Mandarin is very helpful when interacting with merchants outside the campus, and this is what I do. I eat vegetables as my food of choice. In general, I know a little about Taiwanese culture because I used to watch the drama series *Meteor Garden*." (Andi, Master's student, Interview, April, 2025). The participant demonstrated positive affective responses to language appraisal; Andi felt secure in using Mandarin as a tool for navigating merchants' needs outside the university. The Mandarin language is positioned as a political tool of communication, representing emotional geography, to facilitate receiving and communicating for a good understanding of an international student's identity. Furthermore, the cultural aspect of emotional geography captured the admiration for Taiwanese culture, which is recognizable and memorable to Andi. The study revealed that intercultural competence can come from small pieces of successful interaction and Taiwanese cultural familiarity through movies.

I am here to survive so I can study from the money I earn from work, such as teaching." The participant is eager to earn a lot of money, indicating the inclination parameter in language appraisal. It reveals political bargaining between the need to study and survive simultaneously, which relates to the emotional geography aspect. The study presented how he transformed from an international student to a labor positioner to survive in the Taiwanese higher education setting. (Boy, Master's student, Interview, April, 2025).

Another participant, Fena, reported having no prior cooking experience, which rendered the activity an exercise in resourceful survival. In contrast, Hani described a different experience, indicating that independent practice through a podcast channel facilitated her attainment of fluency in Mandarin.

I cook here to save money, even though I have never cooked in Indonesia. To survive here, the food I eat is rice, chicken, and eggs only; of course, as a Muslim woman, I avoid pork. I started working in the first semester to prepare money for the second semester. I am currently registering for ELTA, and I hope that next semester, I get a double job. My friends who study in Taichung and Chiayi get living stipends. I hope

international students like me are given living stipends. (Fena, Master's student, Interview, April, 2025).

The inclination parameter of language appraisal directed Fena to navigate how to survive economically through cooking, which she had never done before in Indonesia. This proves that cultural expectations of international students' independence made her aware of the moral and religious landscape as a Muslim woman who avoids nonhalal foods in Taiwan. In contrast, limited financial support made it difficult for her to transition from being an international student to a laborer, underscoring the importance of a supportive space in the host university to bolster her political power, as part of the emotional geography, as well as moral support.

To improve my Mandarin skills, I took a Mandarin course. I prefer direct practice through interaction with friends here. I wrote down terms from podcasts and translated them myself. I looked for courses myself because, at the beginning of my studies, there was no program from OIA for private classes. I took online private courses via Zoom. (Hani, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025).

Formerly, the Mandarin course was not available, which represented less academic support for international students' language program in the host university. Hani's experience encouraged her to come up with an inclination parameter in which the cultural aspect of 2.0 autonomous learning directed her to be an independent learner. The study revealed the host's political will to raise the bar for international students' ability to learn Mandarin for academic purposes and to communicate with Taiwanese people, which describes political bargaining and negotiation.

Naykilla shares her story of survival, relying on a learning process that utilizes body language or translation aids to interact socially within her campus environment. Veni chooses to study Mandarin intensively with a private tutor to navigate and survive in her new surroundings.

I use body language/gestures or Google Translate if I do not understand what the mentor is saying. Direct interaction with people to hone my Mandarin is essential. I was lucky to get a mentor who actively helped; he prepared the materials well. (Naykilla, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025).

The participant's narrative revealed an inclination to learn how to use body language for communication. Additionally, she demonstrates professional geography in communicating with the mentor through multimodal communication practices. The political power of her mentor to provide good

learning tasks made her comfortable with the learning atmosphere, which encouraged her to learn Mandarin actively. The study shows how to bridge the emotional distance between her and the mentor, providing micro support for the host-university strategy in the Mandarin language program.

I took a course provided by the campus with a one-on-one system with a tutor. My abilities have begun to improve since joining the program. My input on the program: increase the duration of learning to 3 times a week, with a duration of 60 minutes per meeting. (Veni, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025).

The participant's excerpt revealed an inclination toward language appraisal, indicating her autonomous learner transformation. Positive affirmation of her identity as part of the professional geography parameter showed that the Mandarin program satisfied her and that she needed more time to sharpen her language ability. It confirmed the host university's power to offer and extend the language program continuously as part of a dynamic policy framework. It showcased positive judgment of the university's quality and achievements. The six students demonstrated various survival strategies in Taiwan, with a focus on acquiring the Mandarin language as a crucial foundation. Fena also emphasized healthy eating as a priority. Hani preferred the free Mandarin language course provided by the university, which she found very helpful. Veni also felt the university had been beneficial by providing the course. Naykilla, on the other hand, preferred learning Mandarin through the Google Translate app. Meanwhile, Andi learned that by interacting with the Chinese language with merchants was helpful. The narration emphasized their unique strategies as part of intercultural adaptation covering attitude, knowledge, skills, internal outcome, and external outcomes as directed by the Deardorff model.

Campus Programs and Improvement Suggestions

The theme portrays a response to struggle; the students developed a learning autonomy strategy. They demonstrated resilience by using digital tools and personal effort to improve their language skills and better understand the material. The process pinpointed the transition from confusion to active adaptation to the current situation.

Andi contributes to campus development by offering suggestions on summative assessments in his classes, while Boy emphasizes recommendations to enhance intercultural interaction among international students.

I have filled out the feedback. The assessment needs to be performed objectively. In the future, this campus will prepare Taiwanese students to be friendlier to students from developing countries. There needs to be a program for international students to be together with Indonesian students. The use of Mandarin in class should not be included in the

curriculum but can be included in, for example, campus extracurricular activities. (Andi, Master's student, Interview, April, 2025).

Andi's story tried to expose emotional judgment toward summative assessment, which impacted his moral perspective; it created emotional distance. The professional identity appeared to position students who deserve fair assessment from their lecturer in a higher academic context and setting. However, the insecurity parameter of language appraisal led his Taiwanese classmate to seem like an inferior race, which made him feel distracted from forming a friendship; it highlighted the personal barrier between them. Additionally, there is a need to remap university political policies to foster togetherness among international students and create a better academic and social atmosphere.

"The OIA president promotes intercultural on campus, such as its multilingual course system. I heard that the campus has an overseas internship partnership program, and I thought it was good, but I did not take it." (Boy, Master's student, Interview, April, 2025). Boy reported that he was aware of the political power transition to the new OIA president, who is inclined to promote equal cultural positioning in the host-university setting. This proves that university leadership is considered positive affirmation. The professional geography of the campus program provides a good landscape for future institutional collaboration; it will support international students' actual participation. This shows that mutual university collaboration will enhance the inclination and professional parameters of international students.

Fena and Hani shared the perspective that the Office of International Affairs (OIA) plays a crucial role for international students, functioning both as an information hub and as a facilitator. "I had no guide, so I had to navigate the information independently. My only feedback for the campus would be the OIA information system; the website is buggy and sometimes slow to respond." The participant identified a professional parameter that she needs guidance on in the university program for international students. The host university's responsiveness will contribute to a better digitalization program.

The program offered by the OIA chairperson is excellent. Unfortunately, the private Mandarin course program has just started. Private courses facilitated by the campus should be held more often. The facilities are good. For example, the library is complete and clean. Taiwanese students maintain the facilities and cleanliness of the campus. The lecturers here are qualified; most of them are graduates from abroad. In terms of quality and facilities, studying here is better than studying at well-known private campuses in Indonesia. (Hani, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025).

The participant's description relates to the host university's political policy, which indicates a recent improvement in the program. The satisfaction and cultural parameters underlined a positive judgment of the participant. The physical parameters, such as the library and other universities' facilities, made her feel comfortable studying. This illustrated that emotional geography guided her in

navigating a good learning atmosphere, as well as her inclination. This shows that the skill of discovery is a pivotal thing in shaping her learning identity.

Naykilla underscored the significance of private Mandarin classes and stressed the importance of prioritizing the English-medium instruction (EMI) program. Veni praised the campus service system for its sustained high quality.

This campus provides a new program, namely, private Mandarin classes, and I am helped by this program. If we do not have basic Mandarin, joining a private program will be difficult because the mentor cannot speak English. In the future, the hope is that the campus can facilitate Taiwanese students' further improvement of their English skills so that they feel comfortable with international students. (Naykilla, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025).

The participant's story satisfied the language appraisal parameter, fostering international students' motivation to learn Mandarin. The professional parameters showcased that the mentor does not have the bilingual ability to help his student. The participant is eager to demonstrate an inclination toward language appraisal to improve English communication for the future mentorship program, which aligns with the host university's political strategy.

"The lecture system here supports me in gaining knowledge. The lecturers are very quick to respond to emails from students, which is very different from Indonesia. The campus will be more active in promoting itself to the international community." (Veni, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025). Veni narrative provided a security parameter, which made her comfortable with the study system in the host university. The excerpt might address professional identity, where the students' needs are prioritized. The inclination seems to stem from the hope of expanding the speed of interaction by the host university as a political power parameter in emotional geography; it could broaden the international university horizon in the future. The program to enhance intercultural cooperation is not only established among Indonesian students studying at the campus but also requires coordination and strengthening with international students from other countries. As stated by the Andi, he wants Taiwanese students to interact more actively with international students in general. Furthermore, Veni highlighted the campus's academic strength, noting that its lecturers consistently respond quickly to student needs regarding lessons and assignments.

Personal Transformation and Self-Development

Over time, individuals' coping strategies improved their emotional maturity and mental toughness. The change from bewildered, ignorant characters to completely self-reliant people capable of navigating their social and academic spheres was portrayed throughout. The subject demonstrated how the children pushed their boundaries early on and encountered difficulties in a cross-cultural

setting. Their character development, independence, and viewpoint on a global issue all saw changes in addition to their language proficiency.

Andi is undergoing a transformation, becoming a more inclusive member of the international student community. In contrast, Boy perceives the academic transition as less challenging than his undergraduate experience in Taiwan, attributing this to the survival skills he acquired during that period. I am now more open-minded, but there has been a significant change in my personality, which tends to be more withdrawn.” (Andi, Master’s student, Interview, April, 2025). The participant experienced how he demonstrated the professional geography parameter that he needed to transform and activate an affective state as an international student in Taiwan. The participant demonstrated intercultural competence, which was viewed as openness to social life and change in new surroundings; the transformation has engaged his international student identity.

I feel more comfortable studying for my Master's degree than my Bachelor's degree. The lecturers also help me in the process of attending lectures. I survive here by being able to study with the money I earn from working, such as teaching. (Boy, Master’s student, Interview, April, 2025).

Boy’s story underscored the security aspect of language appraisal, which made it more convenient for him to take a higher degree level of education; it depicted positive appreciation of the host-university education quality. The university successfully addressed a supportive and manageable academic atmosphere. Flexibility for Boy and Fena helps them maintain a professional identity as international students, as well as their academic goals.

Fena highlights the process of adapting to life as an international student and the significance of part-time employment in providing financial support during her studies in Taiwan. Similarly, Hani reports increased open-mindedness and a broader global perspective as a result of her experience as an international student in Taiwan.

I like studying and working, so I enjoy both processes. I cooked here until my mom said, 'It is so cool you cook in Taiwan.' Before I left, I prepared mentally and saved for this semester. Before I left for Taiwan, I googled on social media and found the name of a senior. I decided on Magister because it was the best choice. (Fena, Master’s student, Interview, April, 2025).

The Fena’s story depicted an inclination toward the language appraisal parameter, which exposed positive appreciation. The cultural facet of emotional geography leads her to adopt a new identity; she actively cooks, something she never did in Indonesia. She reflected on how well she had reformed her identity to become an inclusive and open-minded student to study overseas successfully; this is key to the transformation of international students, as they need intercultural awareness.

“I used to feel old-fashioned or traditional, but now I am more open-minded. I understand other people's mindsets better, and I still hold on to my identity values—the values I was taught as a child.” (Hani, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025). Hani has successfully transformed from being exclusive to being an inclusive student who tailors to the cultural parameters of emotional geography, and she is inclined to be open. The study highlighted the importance of core values in the new academic and social life of the host university.

Naykilla regards the technological transformation process enabled by IDLM as crucial in shaping her identity as an international student. Additionally, Veni has developed into an independent learner, demonstrating readiness to address global challenges with an inclusive and open mindset. “IDLM (Informal Digital Learning of Mandarin) would help learn Mandarin. My Mandarin skills have improved through direct interaction and support from mentors.” (Veni, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025). The participants showcased an autonomous learning scaffold via IDLM; it presents positive affirmation through the security parameter and the professional identity of emotional geography, which creates a supportive academic space. This proves that human mentorship and the use of digital learning can foster practical contributions in higher academic contexts.

“After I had been here, I became more independent and braver because I had been scared before. I am interested in studying here because the major I want is here, and it is also famous for its Meteor Garden.” (Veni, Bachelor's student, Interview, April, 2025). Veni's story is connected to the professional transformation of being an international student, which is part of emotional geography. These personalities' internalization is pinpointed to the resilience of the Taiwanese cultural landscape, which is pivotal to international students' development. In addition, the cultural aspect of the Meteor Garden movie drew her to emotionally connect with the historical value and celebration of the future hope of becoming a university student. In this theme, the students have shown the transformation process of their studies in Taiwan. Hani felt that she had transformed into an open-minded person with new cultures; however, she has held onto her family's core values and identity since childhood. Additionally, Andi felt mentally brave and independent; however, he is getting closer than before because of anxiety in the new surrounding environment. Fena expressed that she was getting more enjoyment and relaxation studying and working at the same time. She is even learning to cook by herself, which is a notable change from her time in Indonesia. The same voice that Veni experienced also suggests that she can overcome her anxiety and become more confident now with Taiwanese culture.

The experience of six Indonesian students in Taiwan showcases that language barriers are not just about communication but also about how to form complex emotional experiences in the academic environment of the Taiwanese campus. The inability of Indonesian students in Mandarin to understand English speakers using local accents makes them feel uncomfortable, confused, and isolated and hinders their active participation in lectures. The language aspect

becomes an emotional and social boundary that affects access to knowledge, self-confidence, and cultural relations in the classroom. However, Indonesian students show survival strategies to study in Taiwan smoothly, including through independent learning, utilizing informal media, and building social networks that illustrate their emotional adaptation capacity. At the same time, this experience encourages structural changes on the campus, such as improving English language skills and inclusive policies. Thus, language in the context of higher education is not only a means of communication but also a magnet that determines the ease of access to academic space, which can be felt and interpreted by Indonesian students.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study reveals how six Indonesian students studying on Taiwanese campuses adapt to the social and academic environment through an intercultural lens. Their adaptation process is influenced not only by language skills and campus academic policies but also by cultural differences and social dynamics that create moments of tension and emotional distance in the learning process on campus. The study's results are consistent with the research on the adaptation and adjustment of international students (Pritchard and Skinner, 2002; Lee and Rice, 2007; Iwara et al., 2017; Engel et al., 2014; An & Chiang, 2015). From the findings of this study, although Indonesian students have strong initiatives and motivations for independent learning and adaptation, they face significant challenges in communication, particularly related to Mandarin and English, as well as a lack of intense interaction with Taiwanese students. Indeed, it affects the learning experience and perceptions of Indonesian students toward the academic assessment process. This study reveals gaps, specifically in how Indonesian students cope with stress and emotional tension and how family and community support in Indonesia, including the instillation of Eastern cultural values and religion, influence the adaptation process. Although interest in this area is expanding, research in this area is still fragmented and frequently ignores how institutional variety and cultural context combine to shape student experiences (Singh & Xue, 2025). Hastowohadi et al. (2025) stated that to improve people's comprehension and appreciation of cultural diversity, intercultural competency promotes the adoption of a holistic approach in educational and professional settings. The results indicate that intercultural competence is advantageous and crucial for establishing cooperation and mutual understanding in today's heterogeneous environment by encouraging polite and appreciative engagement with varied cultural experiences. The results of this study are intended for practitioners and academics of international education. Additionally, students and prospective students can utilize the findings of this study as a reference to prepare themselves for studying abroad. Therefore, there is a definite need for a host university to facilitate intercultural communication between local and international students through regular discussions or meetings, supporting continuous EMI programs, developing Mandarin courses for international

bachelor students, and inclusive academic policy and assessment. In the future, this study can be expanded by examining the role of learning technology 2.0 as a medium for cross-cultural adaptation, which is increasingly important in the era of educational globalization.

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- ☐ None
- ☒ Some sections, with minimal or no editing
- ☐ Some sections, with extensive editing
- ☐ Entire work, with minimal or no editing
- ☐ Entire work, with extensive editing

This article incorporates content generated by artificial intelligence (AI) tools. The sections where AI tools were employed were grammar-checked. The use of AI tools complied with ethical standards and academic integrity guidelines. The final content has been thoroughly reviewed and edited to ensure accuracy, relevance, and adherence to academic standards.

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Appendix

Draft of questions

Language Appraisal: The questions were designed to explore how Indonesian students evaluate their experiences studying in Taiwan.

1. How did you feel when you first interacted with the teachers and classmates? Using Chinese or English and why?
2. Can you describe a specific moment you felt challenged by the way language influenced your understanding of Taiwanese culture? Including teachers and classmates.
3. How do you describe the differences in communication styles between Taiwanese students and those from their home country? How did you shape your emotional response to your academic interaction and adaptation?

Emotional Geography: The questions were designed to uncover how physical space may influence the adaptation of Indonesian students.

1. Do you feel stressed or blessed when you study in Campus?
2. Did you feel welcomed or isolated on Campus?
3. In what ways did the Taiwanese cultural environment affect your emotional adaptation?