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Exploring Indonesian Students' Intercultural Competence in Taiwan: From Language Appraisal and Transitivity Analysis

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ABSTRACT: *Studying overseas is challenging for international students, especially Indonesian students studying in Taiwan. The study explores six Indonesian students pursuing their studies in a public university in Taiwan. The researcher explores their intercultural competence when they decided to study, the challenges of adapting to the academic environment and Taiwanese culture, and their hopes for the future. The study uses a narrative inquiry design to explore the participants' stories. The researchers analyze the data using language appraisal and transitivity analysis to gain an insightful interpretation. The research offers a more personal understanding of how Indonesian students in Taiwan develop intercultural competence via their lived experience.*

Keywords: Indonesian students, intercultural competence, language appraisal, narrative inquiry, transitivity.

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Studying overseas can lead to academic pressures and culture shock. One nation that Indonesian students find particularly appealing as a study destination is Taiwan (Phillo & Susanto, 2021). For Indonesian students studying in Taiwan, these challenges are compounded by the need to navigate the educational system and adapt to a different cultural environment. International students who study abroad confront various difficulties, such as cultural shock and academic expectations, which can significantly influence their academic and personal growth (Hastowohadi et al., 2025). For students accustomed to the Indonesian educational system, which emphasizes rote memorization and teacher-centered learning, Taiwan's system, with its strict academic demands and traditional classroom settings, may initially pose obstacles (Lee, 2018). Students' experiences with a new culture, language, education system, values, and social norms may significantly affect their adaptation. This adaptation could enrich their understanding and transformation before and after they arrive in Taiwan. Additionally, Indonesian students must adjust to Taiwan's distinct fusion of social standards, cultural practices, and Confucian ideals, which may differ significantly from those they are used to back home (Chiu & Kuo, 2017).

In addition, the need for intercultural competence may influence international students' successful adaptation in both academic and social interactions. Certainly, understanding international students' engagement in campus activities, including how they adapt to the local language and rules, as well as those of Taiwanese students, may foster their critical awareness of how to adjust to this new environment. As a result of this cultural transformation, students must adapt their behaviors and perceptions to the new environment, including adjustments in language and changes in values and social standards (Sullivan, 2015). The lens of intercultural competence enables international students to overcome the language barrier, social constraints, and the academic system.

This study aims to provide a deep understanding in how Indonesian students in Taiwan represent their intercultural competence in adapting to a new cultural, social, and academic setting. It focuses on their narration of early adaptation, ongoing adaptation, and future wishes regarding the transformation of higher education students in Taiwan. Furthermore, the study explores the complexity of cultural adaptation and academic struggle, and it observes a massive transformation that affects their identity as Indonesian students studying in Taiwan. It highlights the profound changes in their identities as they negotiate the challenges of balancing their Indonesian cultural background and the expectations and demands of Taiwanese society and academia (Ward et al., 2001). Students transitioning from Indonesian to Taiwanese educational norms often face a steep learning curve as they adjust to new teaching methods, pedagogical practices, and academic performance expectations (Lee, 2018). Their academic and personal development, as well as their changing sense of self, are significantly shaped by these scholastic difficulties and social and cultural adaptations (Hastowohadi et al., 2025). In short, the narrative inquiry study summarizes this personal experience of surviving and immersing in Taiwan's artistic and academic activities.

Research Question

RQ: How do Indonesian students in Taiwan represent the development of their intercultural competence and adaptation process in their life experience narratives?

LITERATURE REVIEW

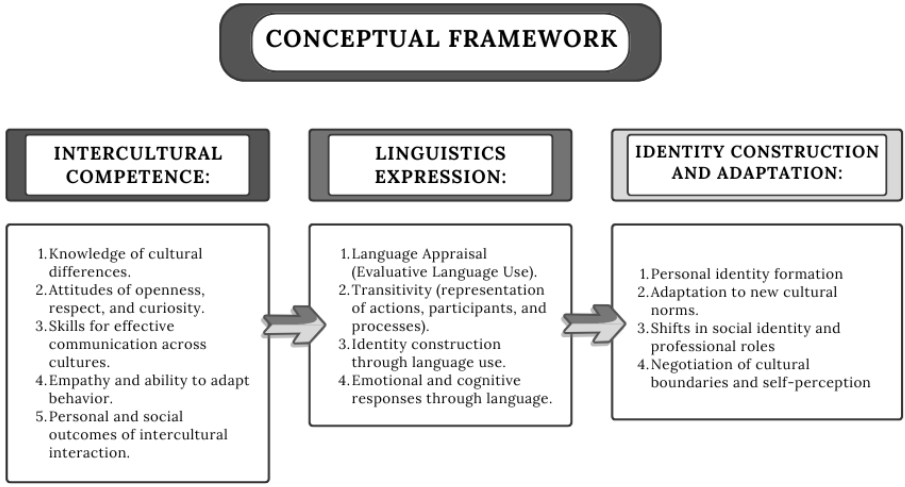
Intercultural competence

Deardorff (2006) states that intercultural competence is the capacity to engage and communicate appropriately and successfully with others from diverse cultural backgrounds. It encompasses knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors for navigating cross-cultural interactions. Deardorff (2006) emphasized that intercultural competence encompasses both internal and external outcomes. Others develop internal attitudes, such as curiosity, openness, and respect, which are essential for interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds (Deardorff, 2006). Externally, these attitudes manifest as actions that demonstrate flexibility, effective communication, and the capacity to handle cultural differences in social, academic, and professional settings. Within intercultural competence, Deardorff (2009) shows that it is not static but a dynamic process that develops over time across different cultural settings. International students studying in Taiwan need intercultural competence shaped by negotiation of identity, values, and behavior as they adapt to a new environment and academic setting

Academic adaptation

Academic adaptation refers to the adjustments international students should make to the educational system. Indonesian students in Taiwan should struggle with pedagogical practices, assessment criteria, and academic expectations in both countries. Indonesia's more traditional, teacher-centered approach may contrast with Taiwan's educational system, which emphasizes critical analysis, independent thought, and active involvement (Lee, 2018). Indonesian students may struggle in problem-solving, learning, and collaborative work. Additionally, the language barrier may affect their academic adaptation, as they need to develop language competence in Chinese and English, which serve as an international language or medium of instruction. Thus, academic adaptation requires more than just acquiring new material; it also entails learning new ways of thinking, speaking, and interacting with others in the classroom. As students learn new skills, become more culturally aware, and better understand the global academic community, this adaptability can eventually lead in significant academic and personal progress (Tariq & Abubakar, 2020).

Conceptual Framework



Description:
Intercultural competence is positioned as a core concept that addresses behaviors, skills, and knowledge, enabling participants to immerse themselves in a Taiwanese cultural setting. Additionally, the linguistic parameters that cover transitivity and language appraisal analyses assist in expressing and negotiating language use in relation to cultural experiences and identities. Ultimately, participants shape their identity and adaptation as a process of success in intercultural competence in the Taiwanese context.

METHOD

Research Design

The study used a narrative inquiry research design because its purpose is to examine a particular phenomenon in the story. Grounded in narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connely (2000) portray stories as a center of experience in the process of acknowledging and knowing. One can learn what is significant about the human experience by listening to stories (Kim, 2016). Since narrative considers the continuity and interplay of experience, it suited our year-long study. Experience interaction refers to a person's "interaction with his or her situation or environment," while continuity of experience explains how fresh experiences are shaped and informed by prior experiences (Kim, 2016, p. 71). We anticipated that, over the course of a year, our participants' tales would illustrate these concepts in the social facets of their lives.

Data Collection and Participants

The study obtained informed consent from six participants, during which the researchers provided detailed information about the research purpose and data collection procedures. The researchers collected participants' data from both outsider and insider perspectives. It is composed of five bachelor's and master's students. In addition, we also collected a Ph.D student who is pursuing a study in Taiwan. The outsider perspective views the data from someone not close to the participants; the insider perspective is from someone who is. We seek help from the gatekeeper, a Taiwanese student with close access to Indonesian bachelor students. The gatekeeper role helps address sampling bias and aligns with purposive sampling. The gatekeeper's assistance in recruiting participants may reduce bias in purposive sampling, thereby helping to collect more robust data. Additionally, the gatekeeper's representation persuades participants to participate in the study. To ensure confidentiality, we pseudonymize participants' identities. Moreover, we can easily recruit Master's students because one of the writers can access them.

Additionally, we proposed a semi-structured interview to collect robust data from the participants. We conveniently gathered data via Zoom, prompting participants to report their daily activities on campus to encourage informal conversation. Then, we focused on developing experience-based questions and moved on to ongoing activities. The last facet of our conversation focused on the participants' hopes for their future transformation.

Demography of Participants

No	Name	Sex	Age	Program
1.	NAILENDRA	Female	22	Bachelor
2.	HARSIAH	Female	22	Bachelor
3.	FIRNANDA	Female	25	Master
4.	ALDO	Male	30	Master
5.	NILA	Female	30	Master
6.	HADI	Male	38	Ph.D

Data Analysis

The research utilised thematic analysis to identify key themes; this was done to attract readers' attention and help them understand the overall reading passages. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a technique that enables researchers to find, examine, and present patterns (themes) in qualitative data. This method not only aids in locating essential themes consistent with the subject matter but also organizes the reading material to optimize reader attention and understanding. Thematic analysis ensures that content is presented engagingly by emphasizing recurrent themes and patterns, which can grab the reader's attention and enhance their comprehension of the main idea (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Then, the study applied language appraisal and transitivity analysis to examine data interpretation among Indonesian students. These two linguistic

analysis tools aim to uncover how the participants express their emotions, attitudes, and evaluations within the data. Martin and White (2005) noted that language appraisal assesses students' evaluative stance within the stories.

In contrast, transitivity analysis sought to determine how individuals and processes were portrayed in students' analyses by analyzing the grammatical structures they employed to express action and agency in their interpretations (Halliday, 2004). Using a dual-method approach, the study provided a thorough understanding of how Indonesian students interpret data by considering both their linguistic representations of relationships and activities and their evaluations. The research underpins the relationship between intercultural competence, thematic analysis, and linguistic role in shaping Indonesian adaptation in Taiwan, as revealed through language appraisal and transitivity analyses. Thematic analysis helps researchers identify recurring themes in Indonesian students' experiences and organize their narratives. By applying these two linguistic tools alongside thematic analysis, the researcher can more easily analyze and connect with Indonesian experiences in Taiwan. It makes it easier to understand how Indonesian students' immersion in Taiwan occurs through cultural and academic adaptation.

To sharpen the use of transitivity and language appraisal, the researchers provide the coded categories based on language appraisal and transitivity, 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
Material	doing+happening	I read an American history of book.	Transitivity

Mental	Sensing, seeing, thinking, feeling, wanting	I felt Andy was a kind person.	Transitivity
Verbal	Saying, quoting, reporting	James said that he wanted to study overseas.	Transitivity
Relational	Being (attributing and identifying)	Tommy is a new student.	Transitivity
Behavioral	Physiological and psychological processes	I do not want to be a bad person.	Transitivity
Existential (Cir.Loc. Time + Manner)	Existing	The English course opens from 8 am to 8 pm.	Transitivity

The use of thematic analysis is to identify patterns and themes related to participants' experiences of adaptation, with a focus on intercultural competence. It provided a qualitative understanding of Indonesian students' lived experience, including academic struggles, emotional encounters, and cultural boundaries. The thematic analysis assists the researchers in revealing participants' adaptation related to language learning, identity formation, and social integration.

RESULTS

The researchers narrated the stories of all participants through a thematic essay by six Indonesian students in Taiwan. The themes are ‘Study Experiences and Academic Challenges,’’Language Challenges,’’Cultural Experiences and Social Adaptation,’’Practical Issues and Logistics,’’Personal Reflections and Identity.’ From these themes, we coded the data with transitivity and language appraisal analyses. Afterwards, we interpreted the coding data and connected it to intercultural competence factors proposed by Deardorff.

Study Experiences and Academic Challenges

HADI:

> When I first arrived in Taiwan, I was really taken aback. I had **expected** [Inclination] [Mental] my journey to be more social and collaborative, with fellow PhD students around me, but I found myself **isolated**.[Insecurity] [Mental] There were no peers in my first year to share research or lectures with, which was **unexpected.** [Insecurity] [Mental] I **struggled** [Inclination] with the E-Course system because everything was in Mandarin. I **did not know** how to navigate it at first.[Insecurity] After a bit of trouble, a fellow student **helped me out**, [Security] [Material] and I **learned** to use the

> translation feature.[Inclination] [Material] The academic environment was **rigorous**,[Satisfaction] but it pushed me to **learn and grow**. [Satisfaction] My first year was a rollercoaster, full of challenges, but I kept going because I reminded myself, "**Never give up**."[Inclination] [Mental]

The narration shows that the participant expected a hopeful collaboration, as indicated by the (inclination & mental) facet. However, he felt isolated and struggled to navigate the Mandarin academic system (insecurity & mental health). A turning point came when he received support from a peer student (security & mental) and was encouraged to apply problem-solving strategies, such as a translation tool (inclination & material). Despite the demanding academic setting, these difficulties became a source of inspiration and growth (contentment), leading to a resilient mindset embodied in the resolve to "never give up" (inclination & mental).

NILA:

> I had always **dreamt** of studying in Australia, [Inclination] but I ended up in Taiwan, mainly because a colleague **recommended** it. [Mental] Initially, I felt **lost and uninspired**. [Insecurity] My Mandarin was basic, and it felt overwhelming when I **couldn't understand** the professors. [Insecurity] However, once I started asking more questions and the professors showed **support**, my attitude shifted. [Security] I realised I could succeed here, too. The main challenge for me was the coursework and how different it was from what I was used to, but with constant **effort and support** from professors, I adapted. [Security] The academic **support** I received was crucial. [Security]

The participant's narration exposes initial disappointment and insecurity in her adaptation and confidence. The student initially dreamed of studying in Australia (inclination), which was replaced by studying in Taiwan via her external influence (mental). It contributes to the feeling of being lost and unspired (insecurity). It covers a lack of Mandarin proficiency. Fortunately, the student started actively engaging with Professors who guided and supported her (security). The student adjusted to the new material and recognized that success was achievable with sustained effort and academic help. The code demonstrates how early concerns were addressed and resolved through external support and individual perseverance.

NAILENDRA:

> My experience with academics was initially **daunting**. [Insecurity] [Mental] The Mandarin used in classes was tough, especially in courses like calculus, where the language barrier made it difficult to **understand**. [Insecurity] [Mental] But I noticed that working with my classmates **helped** a lot. [Security] [Material] We would help each other out, and frequent interaction in group work **helped** me improve. [Security] [Mental] The university's new Mandarin program was a lifeline, but I realised that learning by interacting directly with people was the most **effective**. [Satisfaction] [Mental]

The Coding showcases her struggle from the beginning to eventual satisfaction. She felt overwhelmed by the Mandarin language barrier in class, particularly in technical subjects like calculus (insecurity and mental). Her classmates helped her with practical guidance (security and material) and confidence through

collaboration (security and mental). Luckily, the university's Mandarin program was helpful; she got direct interaction with peers, which was an effective way to learn (satisfaction and mental). It proves the benefits of peer collaboration in overcoming language barriers.

HARSIAH:

> Before coming here, I had prepared for basic Mandarin, but I still found it challenging to understand the professors, especially in specialised subjects. [Insecurity] [Mental] The challenge for me was not just learning the language, but adapting to how professors taught and explained things in Mandarin. [Insecurity] [Mental] There was also a lack of integration with Taiwanese students, as they seemed more eager to interact with students from Western countries. [Insecurity] [Mental] That made me feel isolated. Overall, I felt academically supported, and the environment here was conducive to learning.[Security] [Mental]

The participant's initial journey was shaped by insecurity but tempered by academic support. While preparing with basic Mandarin, she focused on understanding professors' material due to their teaching styles (insecurity + mental). Furthermore, Taiwanese students seemed to interact with Western students (insecurity + mental). Yet the participant acknowledged that the academic atmosphere was conducive to learning and offered stability.

FIRNANDA:

> Coming here without any guidance was difficult. [Insecurity] [Mental] I struggled [Inclination] [Mental] to understand the academic system, primarily [Relational] with course registrations and other online tools in Mandarin. It was tough to navigate without any explicit instructions. I focused on cooking to save money while managing the academic pressure. [Security] [Mental] My biggest challenge was balancing my studies, work, and adapting to the Taiwanese education system, especially without much support at the start. [Insecurity] [Mental]

The story reflects the participant's struggle with the lack of guidance upon her arrival (insecurity and mental). She found it challenging to navigate the academic system, especially the online platform in Mandarin and the course registration process. However, the student demonstrated practical strategies to save money, such as cooking, to achieve economic stability (security and mental). Without much support, it would be hard to adapt and study in the Taiwanese education system.

ALDO:

> I felt a **cultural gap** with the academic system here. [Insecurity] The professors spoke Mandarin with heavy accents, making comprehension **difficult**. [Insecurity] I also found that despite my efforts to engage, **my grades did not reflect** my efforts in class. [Dissatisfaction] [Mental] The grading system **was not objective**, and my input was not fully acknowledged.[Dissatisfaction] [Mental] My accent and communication style might have made me less understood by my professors and peers.

The narration showcases the student's struggle in adapting to the academic system. He felt difficulty in understanding the Professor's Mandarin accent. In addition, he was dissatisfied with the mismatch between effort and grades. His

contribution was also not acknowledged in classroom activities. Together, these facets contribute to a sense of unfairness in the academic environment, suggesting language barriers and cultural differences.

Language Challenges

HADI:

> The language barrier was the most significant challenge I faced. [Insecurity] [Mental] I initially struggled to navigate the course registration system. [Insecurity] [Material] All the instructions were in Mandarin, and I struggled with understanding even the most basic commands. [Inclination] [Mental] Although I was not proficient in Mandarin initially, the university provided resources, and eventually, I got the hang of it. [Security] [Mental]

The coding portrays the participant's mental and physical health due to a language barrier (insecurity). The student struggled to navigate the course registration system and understand basic instructions in Mandarin, which made the academic environment intimidating. However, the university's support made the student gain confidence, and he can adapt, which reflects his convenience (security).

NILA:

> The story represents the participant's lack of preparation for learning Mandarin, which became **a significant challenge** in daily life and academic settings [Insecurity] [Mental]. Although I could grasp basic Mandarin vocabulary, I found technical language difficult, which made me **unconfident** [Insecurity] [Mental]. My professors **supported** me a lot, and the use of Duolingo was a turning point, allowing me to gain **confidence** [security].

The participant's story represents a progression from insecurity to security in her language-learning journey. She struggled with her Mandarin in both her academic and daily life in campus (insecurity + mental). She got support from her professors to practice her Mandarin on Duolingo to improve her Mandarin skills (security+material). The external support and personal initiative strengthened her confidence and adaptability.

NAILENDRA:

> Learning Mandarin has been **a slow process** for me. [Insecurity] [Mental] Since my previous experience was primarily passive, I **struggled** [Inclination] to **speak and understand** it. [Material] However, I have improved by interacting with my peers more, and I also **benefit** from the private Mandarin classes the university offers. [security] [Material] It is a work in progress, but I know **consistent effort and openness** to making mistakes will get me there. [Satisfaction] [Mental]

The Coding reveals her journey from insecurity to satisfaction in learning Mandarin. She has low ability in Mandarin, as indicated by (insecurity + mental) factors. Her improvement came from practical strategies through a private Mandarin course with her mentor and peer interaction. She perceived these obstacles as key processes of success. The student views language learning as a rewarding journey (satisfaction + mental).

HARSIAH:

> The main challenge for me has been understanding Mandarin in academic settings. [Insecurity] [Mental] I still found it challenging to catch all the nuances in professors' accents, despite taking extra courses. [Insecurity] [Material] I tried different methods to improve—like reviewing material after class and using translation tools—but it still felt like there was a gap. [Inclination] [Material] Also, Taiwanese students prefer speaking with Western students, making it hard for me to connect with them as I wanted to. [Disinclination] [Mental]

The story describes her language struggle with Mandarin in an academic setting. The problem was in the Mandarin lecture due to the nuance of the professors' accents (insecurity + mental). She tried to bridge the gap by reviewing the subject material and using a translation platform (inclination + material). Additionally, the participant wanted to interact with Taiwanese students to improve her Mandarin; however, her friends preferred communicating with their Western students (disinclination + mental).

FIRNANDA:

> I did not know Mandarin when I arrived, so navigating the online platforms was the hardest part. [Insecurity] [Material] I had to translate everything, which was time-consuming. [Inclination] [Material] Even when I started to learn the language, [Inclination] [Material] the pace felt slow. [Insecurity] [Mental] I did my best, using Google Translate and exploring alternative ways to get by. It has been a challenge, but I am slowly getting better. [Security] [Material]

The narration reflects the student's struggle with technology and language in Taiwan. She had difficulty understanding the campus online platform, which uses Mandarin (insecurity + material). She invested effort in translating the content well. She used Google Translate to overcome the problem (security + material).

ALDO:

> Mandarin was **a big struggle** for me, especially when interacting with Taiwanese students who spoke little English. [Insecurity] [Mental] It was **easier** to use Mandarin outside of class, like at the grocery store, [Security] [Mental] but in class, the professors could have been **clearer**. [Security] I also noticed that my English accent sometimes led to communication **breakdowns** with Taiwanese students. [Insecurity] [Mental] They are more comfortable with an American accent, which added another layer to the **language barrier**. [Insecurity] [Mental]

The coding underscores the student's challenge in adapting to Mandarin in both academic and daily life. Her Taiwanese friends have limited English use, which made it difficult for him to interact (insecurity + mental). Additionally, his English accent sometimes caused misunderstandings with his Taiwanese peers (insecurity + mental).

Cultural Experiences and Social Adaptation

HADI:

> Adapting to Taiwan culturally was both **exciting and challenging**. [Inclination] The most significant difference I noticed was the **respect** for rules and discipline. [Security] I remember being surprised at how orderly the traffic was compared to the chaos in Indonesia. Food-wise, finding halal options **was a struggle**, but I adjusted by cooking for myself. [Insecurity]

> As for social life, I kept to myself initially because I was **focused on** my studies, but eventually, I found a supportive academic community. [Inclination] [Mental]

The story represents the student's mixed experience of cultural adaptation in Taiwan. He was excited to explore new experiences in Taiwan; however, he felt insecure about differences in social norms and daily life, especially traffic and limited halal food options. He preferred to cook and focused on the academic community (inclination + mental).

NILA:

> The biggest **cultural shock** for me was the food. [Insecurity] [Mental] Being from Indonesia, I am used to intense, spicy flavours, so I **struggled to find** food that suited my taste here. [Insecurity] [Material] The social life was also different; in Indonesia, we are more social and family-oriented, but here, there was more focus on **individualism**. [Insecurity] [Mental] It was initially strange, but I have adapted by becoming **more independent**. [Security] [Mental] One of the cultural differences I noticed was how people approach their identity—there is a certain openness to LGBT rights here, which was **a significant change** for me.[Insecurity] [Mental]

The coding reveals the participant's experience of cultural shock toward Taiwanese food and social norms. Coming from Indonesia, she struggled with an individualistic social environment. However, she tried to develop independence as she adapted to Taiwan. She noticed cultural differences in attitudes toward openness to LGBT rights (insecurity). She tried to adjust to this different norm in terms of cultural context (insecurity).

NAILENDRA:

> The cultural adjustment **was tough**, especially in the social environment. [Security] [Mental] Some of my classmates are **less warm** when interacting with international students, which was different from what I was used to in Indonesia, where we greet each other warmly. [Insecurity] [Mental] But over time, I **realised** it is just how things are here. [Security] [Mental] I also found it hard to adapt to the food, especially since I do not eat pork, [Insecurity] [Mental] but I **manage** by cooking for myself. [Security] [Mental] I **have had to learn** to navigate these changes by relying on my resources. [Inclination] [Material]

The story provides the participant's cultural shock at Taiwanese cultural norms. She struggled hard with individualistic social encounters. Nurtured in a family-oriented culture, she tried to develop a more independent student by recognizing cultural differences in Taiwan. She said her classmates were unwelcoming toward her because of her individualistic culture. However, she accepted the problem and reframed this difference as part of local culture. Additionally, she avoided eating pork, which created her insecurity. She began cooking on her own to address cultural challenges.

HARSIAH:

> I **have had to adjust** to a more open society here, which was very different from my conservative background. [Inclination] [Mental] The acceptance of issues like LGBT rights was something I **had not encountered** back home. [Insecurity] [Mental] I feel more **open-minded** now, [Security]

> [Mental] but I still hold onto my values. Regarding social life, **it has been challenging** to connect with Taiwanese students. [Insecurity] They seem to prefer socialising with students from Western countries, but I have found **a stronger connection** with my church friends, which helps me feel at home. [Security] [Mental]

The Participant's story illustrates the negotiation between personal value and a new cultural setting. Her family background is conservative; however, she faced insecurity regarding LGBT rights in Taiwan, which made her open-minded. She had limited connection with her Taiwanese mates because they preferred interacting with Western peers. She decided to get closer to her church friends, which made her comfortable (security & mental). It provided a supportive social anchor for social adjustment.

FIRNANDA:

> Coming to Taiwan and being away from home was a massive cultural shift. [Insecurity] [Mental] I had to navigate many things on my own, which made me more independent. [Material] [Satisfaction] It took about a month to adjust to the environment, and the food was a big challenge since it was not what I was used to. [Insecurity] [Mental] Coming from a much busier university in Indonesia, the quietness of the campus was also a shock. [Insecurity] [Mental] I have learned to cook and adapt, which has made a big difference. [Satisfaction] [Behavioural]

The coding showcases the participant's journey of adaptation (insecurity). She can finally adapt to this new social environment, which is far from her family in Indonesia (satisfaction). She adjusted to unfamiliar food and a quieter campus, which was different from Indonesia (insecurity + mental). She is now more independent in cooking (satisfaction + behavioral). It underlines her development from insecurity to resilience.

ALDO:

> The cultural differences were evident as soon as I arrived. I noticed the campus's quietness, a stark contrast to Indonesia's lively, bustling atmosphere. [Insecurity] [Mental] The food also was not up to my taste, [Insecurity] [Mental], and I found the regulations here strict. One thing that really shocked me was how Taiwanese students were more inclined to connect with students from Western countries. [Insecurity] [Mental] There is a gap regarding Taiwanese students' warmth toward international students from developing countries.

The narration presents the participant's cultural insecurity upon his arrival in Taiwan. The campus situation differed from Indonesia's lively atmosphere (insecurity + mental). The food difference and the strict regulations reinforce a sense of unfamiliarity—the feeling of discomfort when Taiwanese students prefer connecting with Western students.

Practical Issues and Logistics

HADI:

> The main practical challenge was the cost of living, which I underestimated. [Insecurity] [Mental] I had miscalculated the money and needed additional funding.[Insecurity] [Material] I also had to figure out how to cook for myself because of the halal food issue, which was a logistical challenge.[Inclination] [Material]

The student expressed his insecurity toward the cost of living in Taiwan (insecurity + mental). He needed extra funds to stay in Taiwan and to encourage comfort in his field of study. In addition, he cooked on his own due to halal food issues (inclination + material).

NILA:

> **The biggest practical challenge** for me was adjusting to the administrative processes. [Insecurity] [Mental] I **did not know** much about the university's procedures or how to apply for scholarships. [Insecurity] [Mental] But I am grateful for **the support** I received.[Security] Thanks to the scholarship, the cost of living here has been manageable, but I had to adjust to how things work. [Satisfaction]

The coding reveals the participant's unfamiliarity with university procedures and scholarship applications (insecurity + mental). However, she found scholarship support that made her comfortable (security). She felt satisfied with the opportunity to gain the scholarship to support her studies.

NAILENDRA:

> I think one of the **biggest challenges** for me has been the practicalities of day-to-day life—figuring out how to navigate the administrative systems in Taiwan.[Insecurity] [Mental] The language barrier made everything more difficult, but being proactive and asking questions **helped** a lot. [Security] [Mental]

The participant felt insecure about the Taiwan administrative system, which made her uncertain. She also had a language barrier, which made everything seem difficult. Additionally, she preferred to be active, asking questions to better manage the situation (security + mental).

HARSIAH:

> The practical issues I **encountered** were related to the administrative systems and understanding the logistics of daily life.[Insecurity] [Mental] It was tough to get everything done because of the **language barrier**, and the **lack of immediate integration** into Taiwanese society made it difficult to feel entirely comfortable. [Insecurity] [Mental] I **have learned to navigate** these challenges over time.[Inclination] [Mental]

The participant faces challenges due to administrative systems and logistical needs in her daily life (insecurity + mental health). However, she has learned to overcome the obstacles to make herself comfortable (inclination + mental).

FIRNANDA:

> When I arrived in Taiwan, my main logistical challenges were managing the administrative systems and understanding the academic platforms, which were primarily in Mandarin. [Insecurity] Navigating the SSO (Single Sign-On) system was especially difficult. When I logged in, everything was in Mandarin, so I had to rely on translation tools to understand the information. [Inclination] It was a learning curve, and at first, I felt overwhelmed by the amount of information I had to process. [Mental] But over time, I got used to it and developed a system for translating the necessary materials to keep track of deadlines, class schedules, and other critical academic details. [Security] [Material]

The participant struggled to manage administrative systems and academic platforms in Mandarin (insecurity). She relied on translation platforms to understand the message's meaning. She used mind mapping to understand the Mandarin language on the platform as part in her daily academic routine (security + material).

ALDO

> When I first arrived in Taiwan, I was shocked by how strict the regulations are compared to those in Indonesia. [Insecurity] [Mental] The people here are much more disciplined, especially when it comes to cleanliness. [Security] [Behavioural] I noticed they have multiple types of trash bins — sometimes 7 to 9! It was initially overwhelming, but eventually, I understood the system and started following it. [Mental] The idea of separating trash so meticulously was utterly new to me, and it really showed how much emphasis they put on maintaining order and cleanliness. [Satisfaction] [Behavioural]

The student felt Taiwan offers stricter regulations than Indonesia (insecurity + mental). However, he can gradually adapt to the culture and is satisfied with the emphasis on cleanliness.

Personal Reflections and Identity

HADI:

> Coming to Taiwan has really **transformed** me as an international student. [Security] [Mental] I have become more **disciplined and independent**.[Security] [Behavioural] My challenges have only strengthened my resolve. I **have learned** to manage my studies, handle difficult situations, and adapt to new environments. [Inclination] [Behavioural] Taiwan has helped me understand who I am as a researcher and what I **want for** my future. [Inclination] [Mental]

The participant felt secure with his transformation coming in Taiwan (security + mental). As a result of his adaptation, he became more confident and disciplined, and he wanted to develop a professional researcher identity in the future (inclination + mental).

NILA:

> I have become more **self-reliant and independent**. [Satisfaction] [Behavioural] Taiwan **was not my first choice**, [Disinclination] [Mental], but the experience has taught me a lot about **resilience**. [Satisfaction] [Mental] I **have learned** to navigate difficulties and remain positive.[Security] [Mental] I have also become **more open** to other cultures, which has helped me grow. [Satisfaction] [Behavioural]

The student seemed satisfied because of her transformation in Taiwan (satisfaction + behavioral). She learned about resilience, which gave her a sense of security, and she wanted to become a growth student (satisfaction + behavioral).

NAILENDRA:

> Studying in Taiwan has made me more **independent**. [Satisfaction] [Behavioural] Back home, I was always surrounded by family, but I **had to manage** everything by myself. [Inclination] [Mental] My identity has

> evolved as I **adapt** to a new culture and language. [Inclination] [Mental] It has been a struggle, but I have grown stronger because of it. [Satisfaction] [Behavioural]

The participant felt she had become more independent since coming in Taiwan (satisfaction + behavioral). She had to manage everything by herself, and she wanted to be a growth lady (satisfaction + behavioral).

HARSIAH:

> This journey **has made me rethink** my values and identity a lot. [Security] [Mental] I have become more **open-minded**, especially regarding issues I had not encountered back home. [Security] [Mental] I still hold my roots and beliefs. [Satisfaction] Taiwan has **broadened my perspective** on life and changed how I view the world. [Satisfaction] [Mental]

The participant perceived her progress in her professional and open-minded identity (satisfaction). It broadened her perspective as an international student from Indonesia (satisfaction + mental).

FIRNANDA:

> Living in Taiwan has made me much more **independent**. [Satisfaction] [Behavioural] I **relied heavily on family and friends** for everything before I came here. [Insecurity] [Behavioural] I **have learned to manage** by myself, and it has been a massive personal transformation. [Inclination] [Mental] I **learned** much about resilience and self-sufficiency. [Inclination] [Mental]

The participant has transformed into an independent student in Taiwan (satisfaction + behavioral). She has had a tough time with her personal transformation (inclination + mental).

ALDO:

> Living here **has challenged** my identity. [Inclination] [Mental] I **have had to adapt** to a new culture and way of life, which has not always been easy. [Inclination] [Behavioural] I **have become more flexible and understand** different perspectives. [Satisfaction] [Mental] It has been a growth journey, and I **feel like I am learning to balance** my roots with the new experiences I am gaining here. [Satisfaction] [Mental]

The students felt that living in Taiwan to study was challenging for them (inclination + mental). Now, he has become more flexible about cultural differences, and he wants to learn more to be an open-minded person (satisfaction + mental).

DISCUSSION

The study shows Indonesian students in Taiwan met significant academic and cultural challenges in their early experiences. They seemed isolated, uncertain, and insecure in Class. Indeed, the students struggled with Mandarin in the bachelor's program to connect with their academic environment. In addition, the students struggled to understand and navigate online educational systems. Despite these barriers, most Indonesia students express their support as they gradually

adapt through peer assistance, translation tools, and professors' encouragement. The students perceived the struggles as opportunities for growth and for developing their resilience and personal potential. It emphasizes the value of empathy, communication skills, and flexibility in adapting to new cultural encounters and is grounded in Deardorff's (2006) framework of intercultural competence. The study shows how Indonesian students learn to overcome academic and cultural obstacles through their own experiences. It relates to the theoretical construct of language use with intercultural adaptation by examining participant narratives using language appraisal and transitivity analysis.

The most challenging issue is language. Especially for bachelor students, they expressed frustration with academic vocabulary and navigating administration platforms written in Mandarin. These barriers impacted their educational progress and daily lives in Taiwan. To solve the problems, they used translation and online learning platforms to improve their Mandarin ability via Duolingo or a Mandarin private course. Some participants relied on communicating in markets or classroom discussions to secure their confidence and enhance their sense of belonging.

Indonesian students must improve their cultural adjustment to navigate these complex challenges. Some Muslim students struggle to find halal foods (FIRNANDA, HADI). Additionally, financial support plays a pivotal role in their engagement in studies, as some students were distracted from their studies due to a lack of economic support or miscalculation, as stated by FIRNANDA and HADI. This aligns with previous research showing that international students who received financial support from their families or lived with relatives in their host country tended to report a different stress trajectory (Torres-Arends et al., 2025). They also encountered unfamiliar cultural dynamics, such as local students who seemed more interested in connecting with Western colleagues. In the same vein, exposure to Taiwan norms, such as LGBT norms, prompted the students to reflect on how to protect themselves from the issue. These experiences created a sense of cultural distance and exclusion. The participants also encountered administrative, cost-of-living, and logistical aspects of daily

Implications

The study highlights how Indonesian students in Taiwan experience academic, cultural, and practical challenges that shape their identity and independence as they develop mental resilience and behavioral adaptation. In areas such as language, cultural adaptation, and academic challenges, these findings help Indonesian students studying in Taiwan develop intercultural competence. The study also highlights the global nature of student mobility, which often involves discrimination against students from non-Western countries. It relates to opportunities for Western students who wish to study in their host countries. The findings suggest that the university should strengthen support systems, such as academic mentoring, bilingual resources, and inclusive cultural engagement activities, to support international students during the transition phase. From a practical standpoint, the study emphasizes the importance of

universities implementing welcoming and accommodating policies for overseas students (Lu & Sun, 2025). The study highlights how one's tenacity and flexible tactics can turn obstacles into opportunities for growth, building intercultural competency and resilience. Indonesian students have demonstrated resilience in overcoming academic challenges (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013; Romadhoni et al., 2024).

The study is limited to Indonesian students and reported narratives. It would have been better to dig out more Indonesian Ph.D students' experiences from in academic and cultural perspective. The target readers for this study are university administrators, educators, and policymakers to encourage support for international students, as well as education scholars and migration scholars. Comparative research across host nations would enhance understanding of how institutional and cultural settings shape international students' independence and identity formation. A recent study showed that host nations can contribute to understanding how institutional and cultural settings affect international students' identity (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013).

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