

Stories of Thai Student on The Process of Cultural Adaptation to support The English Learning

Nur Qomariah Dyah Ratnasari

(Mahasiswa Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris FKIP Unisma)

Abstract: This research explores how Thai students learn English in Indonesia using a qualitative approach with a narrative design. This research aims to identify the challenges faced by Thai students as well as the strategies that motivate them when studying English at universities in Indonesia. Research was conducted at the Islamic University of Malang in East Java to explore Thai students' cultural adaptation experiences in the context of English language acquisition. This research uses in-depth interview and observation research instruments in collecting data. The results of this research show that there are many challenges and learning strategies faced by Thai students when studying English at universities in Indonesia, including a new education system, an unfamiliar academic environment, as well as different language and cultural issues. These findings provide insight into how Thai students adapt to the English language learning process in different environments. This research offers an important perspective on the flexible approaches used by Thai students to successfully learn English in Indonesia, emphasizing the importance of social contact and cultural awareness in the language learning process. These findings can help lecturers understand and support Thai students' adaptation in learning English.

Keywords: Thai student, Cultural adaptation, English learning

INTRODUCTION

Lately, higher education institutions worldwide have increasingly focused on globalization, bringing together students from diverse sociocultural, linguistic, and racial backgrounds. This trend has led to numerous challenges for international students, affecting their academic and socio-cultural adaptation to host institutions (Volkova & Kolesov, 2022). Universities are encouraging student mobility to emphasize the global aspect of education, recognizing that effective learning management significantly influences educational outcomes (Kim & Lawrence, 2021). English, as a global communication language, holds particular importance for Thai students. Mastering English is essential for their academic and professional success, making early education in English crucial. Learning is a fundamental aspect of human development, enabling individuals to acquire new knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes through various methods (Widiasih et al., 2020). For Thai students, learning English can be challenging yet rewarding, given its widespread use and significance in global communication. The advent of social media and online learning platforms has provided diverse resources for English learners. Social media offers options for written and verbal communication, both synchronously and asynchronously (Anwas et al., 2020). Platforms like YouTube have proven effective in improving students' speaking skills, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and content (Syafiq et al., 2021). Mobile learning apps also enhance critical thinking and speaking abilities (Kusmaryani et al., 2019).

Studying abroad presents Thai students with unique challenges, including language barriers, cultural differences, and varying educational systems (Pho & Schartner, 2021). These students must adapt to new environments, academic systems, and study levels, which involves a 'triple transition.' Research indicates that Thai students face psychological, socio-cultural, and academic adaptation challenges (Hussain & Shen, 2019). These include depression, stress, anxiety, insomnia, cultural shock, loneliness, homesickness, food and housing issues, language difficulties, and understanding lectures. Thai students studying English in Indonesia experience significant language barriers that affect their academic performance and communication with peers and instructors. This study focuses on the challenges faced by Thai students and the support they receive while studying English at Indonesian universities. It also explores the strategies they use to adapt to the culture and language and other challenges they encounter. Comprehensive student preparation, covering aspects like understanding the admission process, financial issues, and motivation, is essential for success (Maretha & Waluyo, 2022). There is significant interest among Thai students in studying in Indonesia, reflected in the number of Indonesian language programs available in Thailand (Pratama, 2021). The city of Malang in East Java, known for its Islamic-based campuses like Universitas Islam Malang, is a popular destination for Thai students.

This study delves into the perceptions of Thai students about their adaptation process while learning English at Universitas Islam Malang. Language barriers are a primary obstacle to their academic success and adjustment to university life. The study aims to explore the challenges, learning strategies, and encouragement Thai students receive while adapting to learning English in a different cultural and linguistic environment. The research questions focus on identifying the challenges Thai students face in learning English in Indonesia and the strategies they use to overcome these challenges. The study's objectives include understanding how Thai students face and receive support that motivates their learning, examining their adjustment strategies, and exploring the difficulties, coping mechanisms, and support systems they encounter.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policy, support networks, and educational practices for international students. It aims to enhance inclusive learning environments, strengthen support networks, and improve instructional strategies. The study's findings can guide the creation of focused assistance programs, promote cross-cultural understanding, and inform language education policies. The research contributes to the theoretical and practical understanding of supporting Thai students' cultural adaptation process within the framework of English language study. Key terms defined in this study include 'story,' referring to personal narratives of Thai students; 'international student,' denoting Thai students studying abroad to improve their English proficiency; 'cultural adaptation,' describing the process of adjusting to a new cultural environment; and 'English learning,' encompassing the acquisition of English language skills. Understanding these terms helps contextualize the challenges and strategies of Thai students in adapting to their new educational environment.

Numerous concerns revolve around the role awareness plays in education. This chapter reviews findings from applied linguistics and psychology, focusing on general questions of awareness and learning linked to input processing in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Ismiatun & Suhartoyo (2022) examined synchronous and asynchronous learning approaches for social language acquisition in a private university setting, exploring how preferred online study methods impact student participation and task completion. In various domains, debates focus on the role of consciousness in behavior and the acquisition of language. While space constraints prevent a full discussion, it's essential to consider conversations around philosophy, neurology, and artificial intelligence. One active research tradition in SLA seeks to establish

causal relationships between environmental factors and learning, such as the type and quantity of input, instruction and feedback, and the interactional context of learning (Krashen, 2003).

Language acquisition is the natural process by which people learn to comprehend and use language, starting early in life and continuing through childhood. This process requires both expressive (speaking or writing) and receptive (understanding) skills. There is a critical period when language acquisition is optimally influenced by environmental variables and genetic predisposition. Language development progresses through stages, from babbling to increasingly complex phrase construction. Inherent language abilities, social interaction, and language exposure are crucial to this process (Bowerman & Choi, 2010). The increasingly sophisticated technology makes studying globally more accessible. To improve education quality and foster positive experiences in Indonesia, the Ministry of Education has globalized higher education, leading many Indonesian universities to conduct global seminars to attract Thai students. This study's investigation of Thai student adaptation draws on the theoretical frameworks developed by Ward and Geeraert (2016) and Ward et al. (2001), which identify psychological and social categories of cross-cultural adaptation.

The acculturation model by Arends-Toth and van de Vijver (2006) suggests that various contexts or acculturation circumstances affect acculturation processes and outcomes. Ward and Geeraert (2016) highlight the need to reexamine the effects of cultural distance between host and heritage cultures on cross-cultural adaptation. Masgoret and Ward (2006) emphasize the importance of examining environmental factors—social and physical—that impact individuals and necessitate adaptation. They argue that context-specific learning can help overcome difficulties arising from these sources. Hattie & Donoghue (2016) proposed three learning strategies: cognitive strategies like elaboration, metacognitive strategies like planning, and motivational strategies like self-efficacy. Given the vast amount of information available today, they added a fourth category: management strategies for finding, navigating, and evaluating resources. Understanding the local culture helps students adjust to the environment and communicate effectively with native speakers (Laksono & Ismiatun, 2023). Research on Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA) often focuses on online education, encompassing language tests, learning design, speaking, teaching materials, and cultural resources (Laksono & Ismiatun, 2023). Acquiring competency in a foreign language includes grammatical proficiency, communication aptitude, language proficiency, and cultural competence. Brooks (1968) noted the necessity of offering insights into the speaker culture of the language being taught, emphasizing that understanding the target language's culture is essential for effective communication. One of the primary goals of cross-cultural understanding is to provide students with a basic understanding of the culture of the language they are learning, enabling them to communicate effectively in both linguistic and cultural contexts. A language reflects various distinctive facets of a society, and learners of second languages exhibit different perspectives about the target language, its speakers, and its cultural and social significance (Krasniqi, 2019). The degree of resemblance between the target culture and the learner's own culture influences the language learning process and fosters cooperation.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the adaptation of Thai students. However, these studies often focus more on specific Thai student traits rather than the host culture's impact on their lives. Alasmari (2023) suggests that stereotypes regarding Islam affect Thai students' experiences. This study delves into how Thai students adapt to different cultures and languages, exploring the challenges they face and the support that aids their English learning at Indonesian universities. Cultural differences can lead to challenges such as adjusting to religious beliefs, lifestyle restrictions, and unfamiliar cuisine. For international students, language is a significant barrier that can hinder interaction with the local culture (Kozponti "

Hivatal, 2019). Language is not just a means of communication but also a repository of cultural information and heritage. Thai students often face language problems, which, despite being proficient in English, may not be helpful when interacting with locals, as English is not widely spoken. Hussanee & Ismiatun (2023) highlight the profound impact of cultural, societal, and educational factors on English learning experiences in Indonesia and Thailand. Language and culture complement each other in various ways, revealing aspects of a civilization or concealing them. Pratama (2021) examines Thai students' intercultural anxiety and the factors contributing to this anxiety when interacting with culturally diverse Indonesians. This anxiety is normal due to the unfamiliar environment, and Thai student organizations play a crucial role in helping new students adapt.

METHOD

This research aims to explore how Thai students learn English in Indonesia, employing a qualitative approach using narrative inquiry design. Narrative inquiry is suitable for this study as it deals with experience as the primary phenomenon under investigation. This method focuses on personal narratives and reports to examine individuals' lived experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argue that humans are storytelling organisms who lead storied lives individually and socially. The researcher used a narrative lens approach to investigate Thai learners' experiences. Under this approach, students provided personal narratives, focusing on "Stories of Thai Student on the Process of Cultural Adaptation to Support English Learning." This methodology involved students sharing their experiences, enabling the researcher to understand how they adjust to a new culture and advance their English language learning. The research aims to identify common responses and classify them to gain insights into their experiences.

The research was conducted at a private university in East Java, Indonesia, specifically at Universitas Islam Malang. The participant selection employed purposive sampling, which involves choosing individuals whose attributes are relevant to the research. The participant was a Thai student majoring in English education, selected for her proficiency in Bahasa and ease of communication, which facilitated in-depth interviews. This student was closely related to the researcher and highly communicative, making her suitable for providing rich, detailed data.

Before data collection, the researcher prepared instruments including in-depth interviews and observations. The interview instrument aimed to obtain detailed information from the participant, ensuring data validity. Interviews were conducted twice to ensure consistency and covered topics such as personal background, academic experiences, cultural adaptation processes, challenges, and learning strategies. Observations were used to gather additional accurate and in-depth data on the participant's behaviours and interactions in various settings.

Data were collected using in-depth individual interviews and participant observation. The researcher explained the study's purpose to the participant and ensured clear communication using digital translators if necessary. The qualitative approach involved defining research objectives, recruiting participants, selecting data gathering techniques (interviews and observations), and ensuring data quality. Interview questions focused on experiences of cultural adaptation, challenges faced, learning styles, and social interactions.

Data analysis involved organizing, categorizing, and interpreting data to identify patterns or themes. Creswell et al. (2015) describe qualitative data analysis as a systematic process involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data

preparation involves cleaning, organizing, and ensuring data accuracy. Data organization systematically arranges qualitative data such as transcripts, field notes, and recordings. Familiarization entails repeatedly reading or listening to the data to identify key sections. Coding assigns labels and categories to data segments based on themes or patterns. Interpretation involves analysing the relevance and significance of identified themes in relation to the research questions. Finally, analytical narratives are written to integrate themes with data-driven evidence, providing detailed explanations and insights.

Ensuring the accuracy and reliability of findings is crucial. The researcher employed member checking to validate findings, asking the participant to confirm the accuracy of their reports. This process involved presenting the results to the participant and obtaining their feedback on the accuracy of the report. Additionally, the researcher provided a detailed explanation of the research results and had them reviewed by an expert lecturer specializing in professional identity development. This comprehensive review ensured the relevance and coherence of the research findings.

FINDINGS

1. The challenges that Thai student adapt on the English Learning in Indonesia

The findings of this study showed that there are many factors that contribute to the challenges of Thai students in Indonesia including new educational system, unfamiliar academic environment, different languages and cultural issues.

1.1 Education System

Based on the statement from the Thai student, academic challenges were not a significant issue for her because it was not so different from the education system in Thai.

“Previously, I have researched about education in Indonesia and found that the education system in Indonesia is not significantly different from the education system in Thai. After experiencing education in Indonesia firsthand, it turns out to be true.”

However, according to the participant, academic programs in Indonesia and Thai have many similarities. Therefore, the information I will provide will focus on the role of teachers, attitudes of students, and also include their learning strategies in Indonesian universities.

The instructor’s role and attitude

The respondent expressed dissatisfaction with the behavior of some Indonesian teachers who frequently missed classes without providing clear reasons, a situation that rarely occurred in their academic experiences in foreign students' contexts. Furthermore, in the respondents' countries, teachers played a more significant role as facilitators who actively facilitated student learning and discussions. In their academic context, students were expected to participate actively and take responsibility for their own learning. This starkly contrasted with the academic system in the respondents' host university. Consequently, when they arrived and began studying in the Indonesian context, they had to make significant adjustments to their academic approach. The following excerpts are statements from the respondent:

1) The fact that sometimes lecturers do not show up to class without prior notice, and sometimes the information is provided late. In English communication classes, lecturers speak in Indonesian, and even in local languages such as Javanese.

2) In Indonesia, the questions and answer session are conducted in the middle of the lecture. In Thai, however, students are prohibited from asking questions during the explanation session. Instead, they are required to write down their questions on a piece of paper and ask them during the designated question and answer session at the end of the class.

3) Additionally, in Indonesia, when students want to ask a question in class, they are expected to raise their right hand, and raising the left hand is not allowed. On the other hand, in Thai, students are allowed to raise either hand to ask a question.

Local Student's Attitude

According to one of Thai student studying at universities in Universitas Islam Malang, one of the challenges she faces is the behavior of local students. It is not uncommon for her to have difficulty understanding or even communicating with local students. When she wants to ask something, she doesn't understand in class, she tries to ask her classmates. However, she often does not get the desired answers because the information is not effectively conveyed due to the lack of communication in the local language. Sometimes, local students may also ignore her because they may not understand what she is saying.

Additionally, when she finds the right friends who are willing to understand her, she may end up in different classes during a new semester. This poses a new challenge as the professors and course materials may be different. She needs to establish relationships with classmates who are in the same classes as her. It is a common issue for her that even though she studies English majors, the students within the major communicate in the local language rather than English.

Socio-cultural

The study's results indicated that Thai students in Indonesia encounter numerous challenges similar to those faced by Thai students in other countries. It is a common occurrence for her to encounter difficulties in adapting to a new environment and adjusting to an unfamiliar academic system. One of the new things for Thai students is the classroom rule regarding question sessions.

"Students can ask questions in the middle of the session while the teacher is explaining the material. In Thai, however, there is a separate question session at the end after the teacher has explained all the material, and the teacher will allocate time for questions. In class, my classmates suddenly raised their hands when they didn't understand the teacher's explanation while the teacher was still teaching."

As we know, in the Indonesian education system, there is indeed a designated question session within the classroom, which usually takes place after the teacher finishes explaining all the material. However, there are teachers who allow their students to ask questions whenever they fail to understand the ongoing lesson. This practice may be unusual for her in a classroom setting.

Besides that, cultural and behavioral differences pose common challenges for Thai students studying in Indonesia. As we know, Indonesia has a rich cultural diversity that has been passed down by our ancestors through generations. These cultural norms and habits may not be practiced or commonly seen in other countries. One of these cultural practices is the use of the right hand for various actions. This can be a new and unfamiliar experience for her.

"When I wanted to ask a question in class, I raised my left hand, and then my classmate next to me reprimanded me and told me to lower my left hand and raise my right hand instead. It

made me wonder what was wrong with raising my left hand. It turns out that it is a cultural norm in Indonesia to use the right hand for any actions or gestures."

And that is something new for her. Considering that Indonesia prioritizes the right hand to do everything. In Indonesia, using the right hand for many daily tasks is a sign of respect and good manners.

1.2 Languages

While Bahasa is the main language for Indonesian citizens, when communicating with people around us, we don't only use Bahasa but also local languages according to our respective regions. This becomes a new challenge for her. Often, when gathering or working on projects together, Indonesian students communicate with each other using their local languages instead of Bahasa. This can be confusing for her.

"There are times when I gather with friends from Indonesia, and they often communicate more in their local languages rather than in Bahasa. Even though we are all from the English major, they do not use English when communicating among themselves. However, when communicating with me, they are willing to use English, although sometimes mixed with their local language. They not only teach me Bahasa Indonesia but also teach me Javanese."

It seems that when interacting with her Indonesian friends, she tends to use local languages for communication, but they make an effort to use English when speaking with her. This highlights the importance of language adaptability and the cultural exchange that occurs among students studying together.

1.3 Cultural Issues

Besides, there are new cultural issues they encounter outside the classroom. This statement is based on an interview with a respondent, so I am including the statement. One of the new things that she discovers is the smoking culture.

"The first thing that shocked me was when I first arrived in Indonesia, I saw people smoking everywhere at the airport. There were many of them, and they varied in age. I saw not only adults but even young children who seemed to be in elementary school holding cigarettes. That was something I had never seen in Thai. Of course, there are people who smoke there, but not as many as I saw in Indonesia at that time."

Smoking has become a common sight in Indonesia, and smokers do not discriminate by age or place. Even underage children are allowed to smoke by their parents. This becomes a new experience for her studying in Indonesia.

Additionally, English major students are also reluctant to communicate in English, even though they are studying English. They prefer to communicate in Bahasa or their local languages. Indeed, this situation compels her to learn multiple languages, and they may even acquire some vocabulary in local languages like Javanese. The language challenge is a common hurdle faced not only by Thai students but also by English major students studying in Indonesia University

2. The strategies used by Thai student to overcome the challenges in learning English in Indonesia

According to the respondent's statement during the interview, to tackle the challenges encountered while learning English at universities in Indonesia, she has developed their own strategies. Here are some of the strategies she mentioned:

2.1 Engaging in Language Exchanges: She actively seek opportunities for language exchanges with local Indonesian students or proficient English speakers. she joins Indonesian friend groups or find conversation partners willing to communicate in English. Participating in social gatherings with Indonesian friends and engaging in conversations not only helps with language comprehension but also facilitates learning local language vocabulary. By immersing herself in Indonesian social circles, she not only acquires new vocabulary but also learn about Indonesian culture and customs. She gathers detailed information about what is permissible and what is not in Indonesia by participating in social gatherings during break times or group project work.

"I am glad to be invited to hang out with Indonesian friends, whether it's just to wait for the next class or to work on projects together."

She mentioned that she enjoys being invited to gather with Indonesian friends, whether it's simply to wait for the next class or to work on projects together. These gatherings provide opportunities for socializing, bonding, and collaborating with her Indonesian peers. By participating in such activities, she can further improve her language skills, deepen her understanding of Indonesian culture, and develop meaningful friendships. Being included in these gatherings also helps her feel more connected and supported in her academic journey.

2.2 Utilizing Language Learning Resources: She make use of language learning resources available in Indonesia. She utilizes textbooks, mobile applications, and language learning websites specifically designed for English learners. These resources provide structured lessons, interactive exercises, and additional support to improve grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Since not only her classmates but also her professors explain the subjects in Bahasa Indonesia, she relies on translation apps to help her understand the class materials. It is not uncommon for her to ask classmates about word order or correct pronunciation.

"Throughout this time, to facilitate my understanding of the explanations from the lecturers and to communicate with Indonesian friends, I have always been assisted by an electronic translator."

The sentence means that she has been relying on an electronic translator to assist her in understanding the explanations given by lecturers and to communicate with Indonesian friends.

2.3 Practicing English with Local Friends: She actively interact with local Indonesian friends who are fluent in English or are also learning English. She practices speaking English in everyday conversations, participate in group activities or study sessions, and receive feedback and guidance from her local friends. As she builds more Indonesian friendships and spend more time together, their relationships become stronger. This allows her to communicate and share stories comfortably with her Indonesian friends.

"Sometimes, I make plans with Indonesian friends to hang out and play together during our free time. It helps strengthen our friendship."

She occasionally schedules activities with Indonesian friends to hang out and have fun during her free time. This helps strengthen her friendship. This creates more opportunities for experiences and shared time, which supports her academic journey in learning English in Indonesia.

To overcome the various challenges of learning English at universities in Indonesia, she undoubtedly continues to receive encouragement and support from various sources. This ongoing support helps to keep her motivated to learn in a country with a different language and

culture. She often feels isolated because of her distance from family. She needs the support of the family and friends.

“Of course, my home supports me fully in my studies. And my high school has made an MOU with Unisma (Universitas Islam Malang). To accept high school students to study for degree and Unisma will send interns to my high school. If it's easy to understand, it's "It's an exchange of students of 2 institutions" only we did not specify the name of the exchange appointment”.

The above statement is from the respondent during the interview. One of the strongest supporters she has is her family, who provide full support both financially and emotionally. In the learning process, especially when studying English or studying abroad.

In the research, the observations, serving as a secondary instrument, provide valuable insights into the adaptive strategies utilized by Thai students to navigate and thrive in a new cultural context while enhancing their English language proficiency. These observations highlight the students' experiences and challenges as they integrate into different cultural settings. Key themes identified include language barriers, social integration, and the impact of cultural differences on learning. The data suggests that students who actively engage in cultural exchange activities and seek support from peers and mentors tend to show greater improvement in their English language skills. Additionally, the role of cultural empathy and openness in facilitating smoother adaptation processes is evident from the students' narratives.

Observations were made twice, first during teaching practice at one of the high schools in Malang. The second time, the researcher visited his dormitory and spent time together. Outside of the above activities researchers are often together and spend time together while on campus. here are some of the results of the observations that have been made:

At first observation during her teaching practice at one of the high schools in Malang, the researcher noticed how she interacted with new friends. During her teaching practice she met various people such as local residents, teachers, students, even a food seller and even students from various majors where they of course communicate using the local language where not all of these people understand English. Of course it was a challenge for her. When you look at her, she is already quite fluent in Indonesian. She can understand basic words even though it often needs to be accompanied by body gestures. Dominant always keeps quiet, for example if there is an activity she tends to be with students who understand English. When she wants to go to the canteen, she always asks a friend who can speak English. But that was in the first few days he was at school, after that she wanted to mingle with the others. Even went to the canteen herself. After that, when she taught the class. She teaches tenth grade students. Of course, at that level not all students are good at English. After paying attention, she taught in English accompanied by body movements. and not infrequently she tries to speak Indonesian to clarify his explanations. She is an active teacher when teaching. She always went around the class to make sure her students understood her explanations. And it is not uncommon for students to ask questions using Indonesian and she try to understand by asking questions to confirm her understanding with other students.

Then secondly, observations were made when the researcher visited the dormitory. In this session the researcher found out how she interacted with the people around her. After paying attention, when she wanted to buy food around the dormitory she went alone. As much as possible she communicates with food sellers using Indonesian. She orders food by pointing to the food he wants. She interacts with people around her using Indonesian, made clear by body gestures.

The following are the results of the researcher's observations in the learning environment and how she socializes with the surrounding environment. The researcher paid attention to how she studied in the class. She doesn't talk much in the class. During the lesson she paid close attention to the lecturer. When there is something, she doesn't understand, she tries to look for the meaning of the word she doesn't understand on one of the translation platforms. When she failed to understand the word. She asked a friend beside her how the word was spelled. Then write the new vocabulary in a notebook.

3. Framework

According to the participant, academic programs in Indonesia and Thai have many similarities. This study showed that there are many factors that contribute to the challenges of Thai students in Indonesia including new educational system. Therefore, the information focus on the role of teachers, attitudes of students, and also include their learning strategies in Indonesian universities. The fact that sometimes lecturers do not show up to class without prior notice, and sometimes the information is provided late. In English communication classes, lecturers speak in Indonesian, and even in local languages such as Javanese. According to one of Thai student studying at universities in Universitas Islam Malang, one of the challenges she faces is the behavior of local students. It is not uncommon for her to have difficulty understanding or even communicating with local students. When she wants to ask something, she doesn't understand in class, she tries to ask her classmates. However, she often does not get the desired answers because the information is not effectively conveyed due to the lack of communication in the local language. During the interview, to tackle the challenges encountered while learning English at universities in Indonesia, she has developed their own strategies. For education system, she actively seeks opportunities for language exchanges with local Indonesian students or proficient English speakers. she joins Indonesian friend groups or find conversation partners willing to communicate in English. Participating in social gatherings with Indonesian friends and engaging in conversations not only helps with language comprehension but also facilitates learning local language vocabulary.

Often, when gathering or working on projects together, Indonesian students communicate with each other using their local languages instead of Bahasa. This can be confusing for her. This becomes the most challenging for her. While Bahasa is the main language for Indonesian citizens, when communicating with people around us, we don't only use Bahasa but also local languages according to our respective regions. To overcome these challenges, beside engaging in language exchanges, she also used of language learning resources available in Indonesia. She utilizes textbooks, mobile applications, and language learning websites specifically designed for English learners. Since not only her classmates but also her professors explain the subjects in Bahasa, she relies on translation apps to help her understand the class materials. It is not uncommon for her to ask classmates about word order or correct pronunciation.

Besides, there are new cultural issues they encounter outside the classroom. cultural and behavioral differences pose common challenges for Thai students studying in Indonesia. As we know, Indonesia has a rich cultural diversity that has been passed down by our ancestors through generations. These cultural norms and habits may not be practiced or commonly seen in other countries. One of these cultural practices is the use of the right hand for various actions. Practicing English with local friends is not enough overcome those challenge engaging in language exchanges also needed. By immersing herself in Indonesian social circles, she not only acquires new vocabulary but also learn about Indonesian culture and customs. By participating in such activities provide opportunities for socializing, bonding, and collaborating

with her Indonesian peers. She mentioned that she enjoys being invited to gather with Indonesian friends, whether it's simply to wait for the next class or to work on projects together.

From the data above, there are adjustments that were successfully carried out by the participants. Regarding adjustments in class, previously he found it difficult to understand the lecturer's explanations when using language. then the strategy he uses is learning to understand the language by exchanging languages so he can understand the language used. This strategy succeeded in getting her to get answers to her difficulties and understand the lecturer's explanations in class and gain new language vocabulary. The strategy that she used can also have an impact on getting closer to her classmates and increasing her involvement in class. then talk about his involvement outside the classroom, especially in the neighborhood where he lives. with the challenges she faces, differences in habits and behavior. She has faced these challenges, besides continuing to learn English, she also tries to continue to be involved and join local friends. exchange languages and actively participate in group discussions. That way, apart from gaining new knowledge, she also gets new language vocabulary and also gets new information about local culture. Therefore, the participant succeeded in facing the challenges she experienced by exchanging languages, assisted by a translator and also succeeded in building relationships with friends so that he could obtain new information to support English learning.

DISCUSSION

In an academic setting, foreign students, including those from Thailand, face several challenges. These challenges can be categorized into three main areas: the role and attitude of teachers, poorly organized programs, and the attitudes of local students. Even in an English education program, the predominant communication language is Indonesian, with occasional use of the local Javanese language. This creates a significant language barrier for foreign students. The functional model of friendship networks (Zhou et al., 2008) emphasizes the importance of intercultural contact in understanding adaptation challenges. Previous studies have illustrated that Thai students face various challenges in Indonesia, particularly during their transition periods. According to Hussain & Shen (2019), these challenges fall into three major areas: academic, socio-cultural, and language challenges. Academic problems include teachers' roles and attitudes, poorly organized programs, and the attitudes of local students (Poedjiastutie, 2009).

These problems vary depending on individual circumstances such as language proficiency, prior educational background, and available motivations. Challenges associated with language and cultural adaptation increase psychological and sociocultural distress among international students (Ralarala et al., 2016), significantly impacting their social and academic lives (Swami et al., 2010). Language proficiency affects students' capacity to navigate social interactions and acts as a buffer against perceived prejudice (Medved et al., 2013). In multicultural university settings, minimal interaction between students from different cultures is typical, leading to group separation and communication barriers (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). Foreign students often feel ashamed of their lack of proficiency and believe that fluent speakers hold negative or critical opinions of them (Murphy & Carole, 2009). Communication is the biggest problem when working with overseas students, leading to language barrier issues. Hattie & Donoghue (2016) added a fourth category of learning strategies—management strategies such as finding, navigating, and evaluating resources. In this study, participants used strategies like communicating with classmates and using translation tools to overcome language barriers. Effective learning strategies are crucial for achieving language acquisition

goals and addressing challenges (Sholihah et al., 2024). The findings of this study indicated two major areas of social life impacted by culture shock for international students: behavioral differences and cultural habits. The environment influences students' learning outcomes and achievements (Ismiatun et al., 2019). One behavioral difference is the cultural practice in Indonesia of using the right hand for various tasks, including gestures, which differs from the more flexible norm in Thailand (Najamuddin, 2019). In Indonesia, parents advise their children to use their right hand for handling objects and consider it impolite to use the left hand, especially when eating (Niehof, 2013). The diversity of cultures in Indonesia also means that the language of communication varies according to the region, creating communication problems for Thai students. Martin & Nakayama (1999) describe four patterns of cultural adaptation: marginalization, separation, integration, and assimilation. Marginalization occurs when there is little interest in maintaining cultural ties with the host culture, separation when individuals maintain their original culture while avoiding interaction with others, integration when there is interest in maintaining original culture and daily interactions with other cultures, and assimilation when individuals do not want to maintain an isolated cultural identity but seek relationships with other groups.

In this research, Indonesian citizens tend to separate, using their local language even in multicultural contexts. Thai students experience difficulties communicating with local people, including lecturers who often use the local language. Social interactions are crucial for language acquisition, as interactionists emphasize the role of social context in obtaining a second language (Al Masri & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). Thai students need to continue interacting with local students in English and the local language to overcome communication barriers and enhance their learning experience.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Integrating Thai students into Indonesian colleges presents numerous challenges related to language and cultural adaptation. Thai students face significant obstacles as they navigate unfamiliar academic and social settings, including linguistic barriers, culture shock, and academic adjustments. Despite these difficulties, initiatives aimed at improving cross-cultural adaptation through integrated acculturation tactics have shown promising results. To better support Thai students in their pursuit of academic success and cultural integration at Indonesian colleges, future research should delve deeper into these processes. Effectively addressing these issues not only aids individual students in their development but also enhances the international educational environment by promoting diverse cross-cultural interactions.

This study explores how Thai students learn English in Indonesia using a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry design. By employing personal narratives to examine lived experiences, this research focuses on storytelling as a fundamental human activity. The research aims to understand the cultural adaptation process and its impact on English learning among Thai students at a private university in East Java, Indonesia. The participant, a Thai student proficient in Bahasa Indonesia, was selected through purposive sampling for their suitability to the study's objectives. The study highlights the various difficulties Thai students encounter, such as linguistic barriers, cultural disparities, and differences in educational systems. Thai students cope with these challenges by engaging in language exchanges, utilizing language learning materials, and speaking English with friends. Empathy and openness towards different

cultures are critical in promoting adaptation processes. Social integration and peer support are emphasized as key factors in enhancing language competency. Active participation in cultural exchange activities is necessary for successful adaptation to new cultural environments. The role of family support in education, particularly while studying English overseas, is also underscored. Overall, the study provides significant insights into the flexible approaches Thai students employ to succeed in their English language learning pursuits in Indonesia, highlighting the importance of social contact and cultural awareness in the language learning process.

Suggestions

The findings of this study can assist Thai students in adjusting to linguistic and cultural disparities. Foreign students can be inspired to understand that cultural and linguistic differences do not have to be barriers to learning by observing how research participants handle diverse issues and the methods they employ to learn English in varied contexts. To better comprehend and adjust to social norms, foreign students studying English in Indonesia should fully immerse themselves in the local way of life by participating in cultural events and activities. Regular practice using language tools such as apps, online dictionaries, and educational platforms can improve English proficiency. Establishing a support network by interacting with peers from both local and international backgrounds is crucial. When faced with academic, linguistic, or cultural difficulties, seeking assistance is important. Maintaining a resilient and positive mindset also helps overcome problems and successfully adjust to a new environment.

Local students can help Thai students adjust to their new surroundings by being friendly and inclusive. Offering support for language barriers and having regular conversations with Thai students can enhance their language fluency. Providing insights on customs, traditions, and social standards can help Thai students better understand and fit in with the local culture. Encouraging involvement in extracurricular activities and clubs can aid in developing their social network. Offering academic support, including study groups or tutoring sessions, can address academic difficulties. Patience and understanding are essential as adjusting to a new language and culture can be challenging. Establishing a friendly atmosphere and volunteering as peer mentors promotes mutual respect.

Teachers play a crucial role in helping Thai students succeed by providing an inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environment. They should give concise and understandable explanations of course material, considering language limitations and various learning styles. Encouraging active involvement and group work facilitates English practice in a friendly environment. Providing extra academic support, including office hours or tutoring sessions, helps Thai students when needed. Integrating diverse viewpoints into the curriculum and fostering discussions about cultural differences and similarities advances cultural awareness. Providing resources such as educational platforms, online dictionaries, and language learning apps supports English language growth. Creating a welcoming and compassionate learning environment allows Thai students to feel comfortable discussing their struggles and experiences. By applying these strategies, educators can effectively enhance the academic and social integration of Thai students, fostering a prosperous and fulfilling learning environment. The results of this research produced general findings.

To improve the generalizability of the results, future researchers could consider enlarging the scope of this study by incorporating a larger and more varied sample of Thai students from other Indonesian universities. A mixed-methods approach could provide a more

comprehensive understanding of the difficulties and methods Thai students employ to adjust to new cultural and academic contexts. Researchers should explore longitudinal studies to investigate the long-term adaptation processes and outcomes for Thai learners. Examining the roles of various support networks, including community involvement, institutional resources, and peer mentorship programs, can provide deeper insights into the best ways to facilitate adaptation processes. Additionally, comparing Thai students' experiences with those of students from other countries might reveal both unique and shared challenges.

REFERENCES

- Al Masri, H., & Abu-Ayyash, E. A. S. (2020). Second language acquisition from Syrian refugees' perspectives: Difficulties and solutions. *Open Linguistics*, 6(1), 372–385. <https://doi.org/10.1515/opli-2020-0025>
- Alasmari, A. A. (2023). Heliyon Challenges and social adaptation of international students in Saudi Arabia. *Heliyon*, 9(5), e16283. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e16283>
- Andrade, C. (2021). *The Inconvenient Truth About Convenience and Purposive Samples*. 43(1), 86–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0253717620977000>
- Anwas, E. O. M., Sugiarti, Y., Permatasari, A. D., Warsihna, J., Anas, Z., Alhapip, L., Siswanto, H. W., & Rivalina, R. (2020). Social media usage for enhancing english language skill. *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies*, 14(7), 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.3991/IJIM.V14I07.11552>
- Bowerman, M., & Choi, S. (2010). Shaping meanings for language: universal and language-specific in the acquisition of spatial semantic categories. *Language Acquisition and Conceptual Development*, January 2001, 475–511. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511620669.018>
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry. In *Educational Researcher* (Vol. 19, Issue 5, pp. 2–14).
- Creswell, J. W., Columbus, B., New, I., San, Y., Upper, F., River, S., Cape, A., Dubai, T., Madrid, L., Munich, M., Montreal, P., Delhi, T., Sao, M. C., Sydney, P., Kong, H., Singapore, S., & Tokyo, T. (2015). *Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research. Fifth Edition*.
- Hattie, J. A. C., & Donoghue, G. M. (2016). Learning strategies: a synthesis and conceptual model. *Npj Science of Learning*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/npjscilearn.2016.13>
- Hussain, M., & Shen, H. (2019). A Study on Academic Adaptation of International Students in China. *Higher Education Studies*, 9(4), 80. <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v9n4p80>
- Hussanee, P., & Ismiatun, F. (2023). Portrait of English Student in Learning Approaches: A Case Study for Indonesia And Thai Student. *LET: Linguistics, Literature and English Teaching Journal*, 13(2), 233–253. <https://doi.org/10.18592/let.v13i2.11617>
- Ismiatun, F., Ni, D., & Widowati, D. R. (2019). *A narrative approach : English learning strategies amongst EFL students*. 9804(5), 381–385.
- Ismiatun, F., & Suhartoyo, E. (2022). An Investigation on The Use of Social Strategies in Online EFL Learning. *Education and Human Development Journal*, 7(01), 97–106. <https://doi.org/10.33086/ehdj.v7i01.2314>
- Khanal, J., & Gaulee, U. (2019). Challenges of international students from pre-departure to post-study: A literature review. *Journal of International Students*, 9(2), 560–581. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v9i2.673>
- Kim, H. S., & Lawrence, J. H. (2021). Who Studies Abroad? Understanding the Impact of Intent on Participation. In *Research in Higher Education* (Vol. 62, Issue 7). Springer Netherlands. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-021-09629-9>

- Krashen, S. D. (2003). Explorations in language acquisition and use. *Heinemann, February*, 87. <https://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/E00554/chapter2.pdf>
- Krasniqi, K. (2019). *The Relation between Language and Culture (Case Study Albanian Language)*. 7(2), 71–74. <https://doi.org/10.13189/lls.2019.070205>
- Kusmaryani, W., Musthafa, B., & Purnawarman, P. (2019). The influence of mobile applications on students' speaking skill and critical thinking in English language learning. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1193(1). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1193/1/012008>
- Kusmiatun, A., & Liliani, E. (2020). *Indonesia – Thailand Culture Similarities and Their Contributions in BIPA Learning*. 401(Iceri 2019), 270–274.
- Laksono, P. T., & Ismiatun, F. (2023). Adapting to a Hard Situation: BIPA Teachers' Successful Strategies for Teaching Local Culture During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *REiLA : Journal of Research and Innovation in Language*, 5(1), 63–76. <https://doi.org/10.31849/reila.v5i1.11199>
- Maretha, A. L., & Waluyo, B. (2022). Profiles, Differences, and Roles of Learners' Agency in English Learning in Thailand. *International Journal of Instruction*, 15(2), 543–564. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2022.15230a>
- Martin, J. N., & Nakayama, T. K. (1999). Thinking dialectically about culture and communication. *Communication Theory*, 9(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.1999.tb00160.x>
- Medved, D., Franco, A., Gao, X., & Yang, F. (2013). *Challenges in teaching international students : group separation , language barriers and culture differences Intercultural friendship formation*. 1–11.
- Murphy Carole, O. Ö., & Carole. (2009). Literature vs . Practice : Challenges for International Students in the U . S . *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 22(3), 374–385. <http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/%0A2009, Volume 22, Number 3, 374-385 ISSN 1812-9129%0ALiterature>
- Najamuddin. (2019). The Meaning of Gesture in Social Cultural Context. *El-Tsaqqafah: Jurnal Jurusan PBA*, 0(63), 102–113.
- Niehof, A. (2013). Ageing and the elderly in Indonesia; Identifying key issues. *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia*, 151(3), 422–437. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90003039>
- Pho, H., & Schartner, A. (2021). Social contact patterns of international students and their impact on academic adaptation. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 42(6), 489–502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1707214>
- Pratama, F. Y. (2021). Thai Students' Intercultural Apprehension in the Indonesian Context. *Jurnal Bahasa Indonesia Bagi Penutur Asing (JBIPA)*, 3(2), 115–124.
- Ralarala, M. ., Pineteh, E. A., & Mchiza, Z. (2016). A Case Study on The Language and Social-Cultural Challenges Experience By International Students Studying At Cape Peninsula University Of Technology. *South African Journal of Education*, 30(4), 231–255.
- Sholihah, F. A., Ni'mah, D., & Azami, M. I. (2024). *Examining Strategy-based Instruction's Impact on Students Reading Comprehension: An Experimental Study*. Atlantis Press SARL. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-120-3_19
- Swami, V., Frederick, D. A., Aavik, T., Alcalay, L., Allik, J., Anderson, D., Andrianto, S., Arora, A., Brännström, Å., Cunningham, J., Danel, D., Doroszewicz, K., Forbes, G. B., Furnham, A., Greven, C. U., Halberstadt, J., Hao, S., Haubner, T., Hwang, C. S., ... Zivcic-Becirevic, I. (2010). The attractive female body weight and female body dissatisfaction in 26 countries across 10 world regions: Results of the international body project I. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(3), 309–325.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167209359702>

Syafiq, A. N., Rahmawati, A., Anwari, A., & Oktaviana, T. (2021). Increasing Speaking Skill through YouTube Video as English Learning Material during Online Learning in Pandemic Covid-19. *Elsya : Journal of English Language Studies*, 3(1), 50–55.
<https://doi.org/10.31849/elsya.v3i1.6206>

Volkova, N. V., & Kolesov, A. A. (2022). Adaptation Challenges of Domestic and International Students in a Russian English-Medium Instruction University. *Journal of International Students*, 12(2), 302–323. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v12i2.3594>

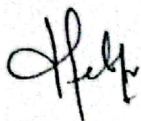
Yerken, A., Urbán, R., & Luu, L. A. N. (2022). Sociocultural Adaptation Among University Students in Hungary: The Case of International Students From Post-Soviet Countries. *Journal of International Students*, 12(4), 867–888.
<https://doi.org/10.32674/JIS.V12I4.4076>

Zhang, H., & Gibson, H. J. (2021). Long-term impact of study abroad on sustainability-related attitudes and behaviors. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13(4), 1–20.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su13041953>

Zhou, Y., Jindal-Snape, D., Topping, K., & Todman, J. (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(1), 63–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070701794833>

Zhang, H., & Gibson, H. J. (2021). Long-term impact of study abroad on sustainability-related attitudes and behaviors. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13(4), 1–20.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su13041953>

Approved by
Advisor 1,



Febti Ismiatun, S.pd., M.Pd.
NIP/NPP.152702199232217