

Cross-Cultural Narratives: A Study of Indonesian EFL Exchange Students' Academic and Social Experiences in Taiwan

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Abstract

In today's interconnected academic world, student exchange programs are essential for developing cross-cultural competency, academic engagement, and global awareness. This study used a narrative inquiry approach to investigate the academic and social experiences of four Indonesian EFL exchange students from a private institution in Malang during a semester-long exchange at a public university in Taiwan. While students expected Taiwan to be English-speaking and culturally varied, they discovered unexpected language challenges, accent comprehension issues, cultural variances, and various academic standards. These difficulties forced students to grow their independence, adaptable methods, and intercultural communication abilities. The findings showed that, although their early difficulties, students' experiences promoted Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), which contributed to their academic performance and personal growth. This study highlights the importance of complete pre-departure language preparation, cultural orientations, and continuous academic and social support for better Asia-to-Asia exchange success. This study provides new insight on the lived experiences of Indonesian EFL students in Taiwan, revealing insights that are sometimes missed in international education literature and offering recommendations for institutions to improve support for exchange students in non-Western educational environments.

Keywords: Academic Adjustment; Cross-Cultural Narratives; EFL Exchange Students; Language Barriers; Narrative Inquiry; Taiwan

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has significantly increased international student mobility, offering the new opportunities for intercultural exchange and academic collaboration (Kim, 2020). Taiwan has developed as a popular choice for student exchange programs due to its unique combination of outstanding education and rich East Asian culture (Lin & Sung, 2020). Despite this trend, most research on exchange students' experiences continues to focus on Western contexts, ignoring Asia-to-Asia academic movement patterns, especially those involving Indonesian students (Zhang & Lütge, 2024).

International exchange programs provide an important role in developing students' intercultural and academic skills. According to Rohmah (2021), cross-cultural understanding (CCU) is crucial for EFL students because it improves their ability to navigate new environments and apply their language abilities effectively. Furthermore, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) helps students bridge cultural obstacles, promoting both academic performance and personal development (Bethel et al., 2020). However, many Indonesian students are still unprepared for linguistic and cultural problems in non-English-speaking countries such as Taiwan, believing that English will enough for everyday and academic communication.

Previous research by Xue et al. (2024) and Safitri et al. (2024) investigated international students' experiences in Asian nations such as Thailand and Taiwan. These studies emphasize critical issues such as language limitations, cultural adaptation difficulties, and social integration difficulties.

However, little focus has been paid to Indonesian EFL students' experiences in Taiwan, especially their academic and social adaptation to this non-Western environment. This study covers a gap by investigating the cross-cultural experiences of Indonesian EFL exchange students in Taiwan. It investigates their initial aspirations, academic and social obstacles, and how their international experiences shaped their intercultural skills and future perspectives. By centering the students' lived experiences, this study aims to provide new insights into Asia-to-Asia student exchanges as well as practical recommendations for strengthening institutional support for international students in Taiwan. The purpose of this study is to use narrative inquiry to take a look at the academic and social experiences of Indonesian EFL exchange students in Taiwan, focusing on the problems they experienced and the personal progress they made while studying abroad.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International students frequently consider education in host countries as academically more advanced, resulting in high expectations for teaching quality and evaluation standards (Mazzarol et al., 1997). However, reality frequently different. Foreign students, especially those from Indonesia, commonly become confused in Taiwan due to differences in instructional approaches, assessment systems, and academic culture. Shieh (2014) found that culture shock is a substantial barrier to academic adjustment, especially for Mainland Chinese students who share linguistic similarities with Taiwanese society. Peer networks, academic advisors, and orientation programs are all critical support systems for students as they navigate unfamiliar situations and deal with academic stress. Furthermore, international education has been recognized as improving employable and job opportunities (Nilsson and Ripmeester, 2016). Cross-border collaboration among institutions also improves institutional capacity and promotes student and teacher growth (Czarnitzki et al., 2021; Al-Youbi et al., 2020). Successful academic adjustment requires not only language competency, but also pre-departure planning and cross-cultural training (Liao, 2010).

Language remains a significant problem for overseas students in Taiwan. Mandarin's dominance, as shaped by national regulations (Yeh et al., 2004), prevents access for students who are not fluent in Chinese. While Taiwanese EFL students use a variety of learning methodologies to improve their English (Lai, 2005; Chang & Liu, 2003), international students in Taiwan frequently struggle to adjust due to a lack of Mandarin proficiency. Strategic language acquisition, specifically cognitive, metacognitive, and social techniques, has been shown in studies to improve proficiency and facilitate successful adaption.

Social integration is a critical component of effective exchange experiences. International students frequently fail to connect because of language limitations and cultural misunderstandings (Lau & Lin, 2014). Social networks, both formal and informal, are critical in facilitating adaptation (Avenarius, 2003). Cultural hesitation among local students and a lack of language engagement advertising frequently reduce international students from fully participating in campus life. Effective social integration initiatives, such as community-building activities and introduction programs, can help students feel a feeling of belonging (Chalapati et al., 2018; Yorke & Vaughan, 2013).

Cultural adaptation involves navigating both personal identification and social integration in the host culture (Chiang & Liao, 2006). Language ability has an important impact on adaptation, as demonstrated by Huang and Chang (2011)'s research, which found that better Chinese language abilities improved both academic and social adjustment. Rearrange culture shock can sometimes occur when returning home, preventing identity reconstruction (Chiang & Liao, 2006). To facilitate cultural changes, institutions should prioritize language acquisition and culturally relevant support services.

Psychological well-being (PWB) determines how students deal with cultural and academic problems while abroad. Studies show that proactive coping methods, emotional intelligence, and cultural mindfulness improve adaptability (Lee et al., 2014; Tzu-Ping et al., 2022). Higher levels of

PWB are tied to improve academic performance, social integration, and overall pleasure (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Support systems that address psychological requirements have become crucial for maintaining students' motivation and well-being.

Despite enhanced study on international students in Taiwan, little emphasis has been dedicated to the special issues encountered by Indonesian EFL exchange students. Studies such as Xue et al. (2024) and Lin & Sung (2020) show the adjustment processes of students from various Asian nations, but the Indonesian perspective is still neglected. Prior research indicates that Southeast Asian students face linguistic obstacles, cultural distance, and academic changes in Taiwan. This study fulfills the empty space by concentrating on the narratives of Indonesian students, which provide insights into their expectations, coping methods, and development of identity.

METHOD

The study used a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to examine the academic and social experiences of Indonesian EFL exchange students in Taiwan. Narrative inquiry was chosen because it helps students to express their lived experiences through personal storytelling, which provides valuable insights into cultural adaptation and academic adjustment processes (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). The research questions include: what were Indonesian EFL students' initial expectations about living and studying in Taiwan? (Past), what academic challenges do Indonesian EFL students face in intercultural fields, and how do the experiences influence Indonesian students' ability to form friendship and interact with local people? (Present), and how do Indonesian EFL students' experiences in Taiwan influence academic field and social interactions in the future? (Future).

The study took place at a private institution in Malang, Indonesia, with four Indonesian EFL students who participated in a semester-long exchange program at a public university in Taiwan. Students were chosen specifically for their motivation to share experiences and involvement in the same exchange program. All students were between the ages of 20 and 22, with three female and one male student. Pseudonyms were used to hide the students' identity.

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, which allowed students to freely describe their academic and social experiences in addition providing consistency among interviews. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to avoid misunderstandings and recorded with the students' permission. Each interview took around 40-60 minutes. The collected data was transcribed, member-checked, and name filtered before analysis. The transcribed interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which followed Braun and Clarke's (2014) six-phase process. Data coding revealed crucial trends about students' aspirations, obstacles, and personal development. The interview results then organized by looking at the past (prior expectations), the present (academic and social challenges), and the future (effect on intercultural competency).

To create trustworthiness, students were asked to verify and validate their interview transcripts. The use of narrative inquiry increased originality by allowing students to direct the sharing of their own experiences. The researcher kept a book of reflection to reduce bias and increase honesty throughout the research process.

FINDINGS

This section investigated the students' academic and social experiences in three main focuses: prior expectations before going to Taiwan (past), academic and social challenges during their stay in Taiwan (present), and their experiences on future perspectives after live in Taiwan (future).

1. Students' Initial Expectations and Motivations Before Studying in Taiwan

This section explores the pre-departure expectations of Indonesian EFL exchange students in terms of motivation, language preparedness, academic assumptions, cultural concerns, and overall preparations for the program in Taiwan. The students' reasons reveal the various personal elements

that influenced their decision to study in Taiwan. Syalala's decision emerged from a general desire to study abroad, rather than a specific aim tied to Taiwan. Taiwan became her destination solely because of the possibilities provided:

"I didn't have any specific country in mind. When I was in Taiwan, it was okay. I just accepted it and it was really good." (Syalala, Interview, January 11, 2025)

Anugrah, on the other hand, stated a clearer purpose based on international curiosity, highlighting his desire to interact directly with cultures other than his own:

"I just wanted to experience cultures from other countries. There aren't many chances for that." (Anugrah, Interview, January 15, 2025)

Aida's motivations were more complex. Initially, she intended to study in Japan, knowing it her dream destination. However, the unexpected opportunity to study in Taiwan led her to reconsider her aspirations. She accepted Taiwan as an option while holding out hope for future education in Japan.

"My dream was to go to Japan. But after getting the opportunity to join the exchange program for students in Taiwan, I didn't want to miss it."

(Aida, Interview, January 16, 2025)

Despite their EFL background, most students underestimated Taiwan's linguistic surroundings. They expected that English would be enough in both academic and social settings. Only Anugrah took intentional, although minor, steps to prepare for Mandarin usage:

"I had to learn from YouTube videos... basic greetings and common phrases."

(Anugrah, Interview, January 15, 2025)

Others, such as Syalala, relied on their general awareness of Indonesia's linguistic diversity without doing any direct language preparation:

"Before I left, I didn't really care about what language was used there... because it's still Asia, right? There must be local languages." (Syalala, Interview, January 11, 2025)

Similarly, Aida focused only on improving her English skills, although knowing that Chinese was Taiwan's primary language:

"I didn't prepare for Chinese at all... I just prepared my English."

(Aida, Interview, January 16, 2025)

This linguistic expectation shows a more general misperception among Asian EFL students about English's dominance in non-Western academic settings. Their little pre-departure language preparation demonstrates institutional limitations in teaching students about the linguistic reality of the host nation.

In other hand, students mostly anticipated that Taiwan's educational system would require more intellectual intensity. Syalala defined studying in Taiwan, a "developed country," with stricter academic requirements and independent learning:

"I expected to learn more by myself... I prepared myself be more independent."

(Syalala, Interview, January 11, 2025)

These concerns reflect students' poor intercultural understanding prior to departure, with many relying on assumptions or third-party information about Taiwanese society.

2. Students' Academic and Social Experiences when Studying in Taiwan

While pre-departure expectations affected students' optimism, their actual experiences uncovered the difficulty of academic and social adaptation in Taiwan's multicultural environment. This section discusses the major problems students faced in both academic and ordinary life, demonstrating how language barriers, cultural differences, and institutional limitations influenced their exchange experience.

Language became known as the greatest academic barrier, limiting classroom participation and comprehension. Aida explained that she had trouble comprehending courses because of the

Chinese-English accent utilized by local Taiwanese lecturers. Though she recognized the presenters' proficiency, unusual pronunciation and word usage impacted her understanding:

"Their accent is Chinese English... Before we understand, we still think first: where is this actually going? What does that vocabulary mean? We can't blame them, because it's their nature. But that's what made it hard to follow the lectures." (Aida, Interview, January 16, 2025)

Similarly, Syalala had difficulty comprehending both local lecturers and fluent English speakers. Though she had expected to understand native English speakers more easily, she found their vocabulary to be too advanced, needing frequent self-learning throughout lectures.

"The challenge was from the native teachers' vocabulary, which was sometimes too high-level... For local teachers, their Chinese-accented English also made understanding difficult. I often needed to Google terms during class to keep up." (Syalala, Interview, January 11, 2025)

In contrast, Anugrah's academic obstacle was technological. The university's online academic systems and webpages were primarily written in Chinese, making it difficult to access coursework and submit assignments without local support.

"Academic challenges are more on the website... it's all in Taiwanese. I have to often ask friends or lecturers how to navigate. Google Translate helps, but not always perfectly." (Anugrah, Interview, January 15, 2025)

The major issue for Lena was having to use both Chinese and English in class. Certain lecturers switched to Chinese and only provided brief English summaries, making it difficult for her to understand the course content:

"The lecturers explained mostly in Mandarin. We didn't have any Mandarin background, so we could only be confused. Lecturers would explain briefly in English during breaks, but we were always late to understand." (Lena, Interview, January 16, 2025)

These diverse experiences demonstrate how language obstacles extended across English competency, including accent familiarity, vocabulary levels, and Mandarin's structural influence in digital education environments. Besides academics, students faced cultural adjustment issues that impacted their social integration and daily routines. Aida mentioned feeling culture shocked by Taiwan's firm discipline, environmental initiatives, and regularity. These variations strongly contrasted with her experiences in Indonesia.

"In Taiwan, rules are very strict... even trash disposal has specific rules, and they announce publicly if someone fails to follow. Also, being on time is a habit there. If you're late, even if nobody says anything, you feel embarrassed because everyone arrives early." (Aida, Interview, January 16, 2025)

These cultural adjustments had an impact on students' daily routines, social behaviors, and level of comfort in public areas, highlighting common cross-cultural adaption challenges.

Taiwanese students' introverted attitude made it difficult to form connections with locals at first. Aida noticed that local students rarely started contact, leaving overseas students to approach first. Once communication began, locals were friendly and welcoming:

"If we don't approach them first, it's hard. But once we do, they're happy to help and talk. They're just closed at the beginning." (Aida, Interview, January 16, 2025)

Anugrah further stated that, however lecturers were consistently open and encouraging, local students needed strong engagement:

"Teachers are welcoming from the start. But with students, you have to approach them first... they're probably shy or unsure about speaking to foreigners." (Anugrah, Interview, January 15, 2025)

Cultural differences, such as alcohol consumption and intimate relationships, created social distance between Lena and local students, emphasizing how moral standards from home influenced her social comfort abroad.

“There are many differences between Taiwan and Indonesia... their normal habits would be taboo at home, so it felt hard to relate socially.” (Lena, Interview, January 16, 2025)

3. Students' Aspirations after Studying in Taiwan

Apart from academic and social adaptation, students considered how their exchange experiences influenced their future job goals, personal development, and understanding of cultural diversity. This part investigates how academic contact, cultural contacts, and interpersonal relationships during their time in Taiwan influenced their skill development, future objectives, and cross-cultural identity.

Students joined the exchange program with a variety of skill learning objectives. Lena planned to learn Chinese throughout her stay, as she recognized its relevance in both personal and professional settings. While she acknowledged the limitations of mastering the language in a single semester, her involvement with local environments allowed her to learn basic Chinese while also improving her time management and social balance abilities.

“I expected my language skills to be Mandarin... Even though it wasn't a long time, I learned the basics. Besides that, I learned to divide time between academics, social, and personal activities.” (Lena, Interview, January 16, 2025)

Syalala's aspirations were more professional. Interactions with local Taiwanese friends, many of them worked in cram schools while studying, motivated her to develop her teaching abilities. She liked their planned lesson planning and practical teaching experience, seeing these qualities as criteria for her future profession.

“From asking my local friends, I saw their teaching skills were really good. They had methods and structured plans, even before their teaching practice program. That motivated me to improve my own teaching skills.” (Syalala, Interview, January 16, 2025)

Anugrah's major goal was to improve his communication skills and self-confidence. Immersed in a foreign environment drove him to become more independent and confident in communication, skills he considered as critical for both personal development and future work.

“Exchange students have to be confident to communicate. This experience trained me to believe in myself and improve my communication skills.” (Anugrah, Interview, January 15, 2025)

Aida also aspired to multilingualism, wishing to speak Chinese fluently alongside English and Indonesian. She also wanted to improve her public speaking skills, which she saw as necessary for efficient professional communication.

“I want to be able to communicate not just in English and Indonesian, but also in Chinese. I also want to improve public speaking, so I can talk to anyone—even strangers.”

(Aida, Interview, January 16, 2025)

Students' views on academic practices were reevaluated after learning about Taiwan's educational system. Syalala saw a focus on practical learning over theory, which contrasted with Indonesia's theory-heavy approach. She enjoyed how Taiwanese students learned through direct application.

“In Taiwan, it's more about practice. Not just theory like in Indonesia... there, we actually know how to use what we learn.” (Syalala, Interview, January 11, 2025)

Lena emphasized contrasts in the educational environment and timeline. Taiwan's peaceful student-centered approach, complete with longer breaks and flexible eating and drinking rules, was in opposition to Indonesia's stricter systems. Returning home required her to readjust. Similar to how Anugrah viewed the Taiwanese academic atmosphere to be easier and more flexible, but admitted that returning to Indonesian academic obligations would be difficult:

“In Taiwan, academics were easier and more flexible. In Indonesia, the tasks are more difficult. So, I had to adjust again after returning.” (Anugrah, Interview, January 15, 2025)

Aida noticed her Taiwanese friends' ambitious study habits, which inspired her to follow after. However, keeping these practices proved challenging while returning to Indonesia.

"In Taiwan, students studied from sunset to midnight. I followed that there, but when I returned home, the environment made it harder to continue." (Aida, Interview, January 16, 2025)

Students stated how their experiences influenced their social behaviors and cultural attitudes when they returned to Indonesia. Syalala developed characteristics of timeliness and independence, absorbing the discipline she observed in Taiwan:

"Their discipline influenced me. In Taiwan, people walk fast, do things independently, and are always on time. If I'm late now, I feel ashamed." (Syalala, Interview, January 11, 2025)

In contrast, Anugrah felt himself becoming more comfortable and calmer, imitating the peaceful demeanor of Taiwanese people:

"After coming back from Taiwan, I felt calmer than before. Their calmness stayed with me." (Anugrah, Interview, January 15, 2025)

Aida became more aware of social norms, such as queuing and hygiene, and worked of including these practices into her Indonesian lifestyle despite situational limitations.

"In Taiwan, queuing and respecting others are everyday practices. It's difficult, but I try to apply those habits here too." (Aida, Interview, January 16, 2025)

Students included Taiwanese cultural practices into their routines, such as walking faster and being more aware of time.

Experiencing Taiwan's academic atmosphere broadened students' perceptions on worldwide educational norms. Syalala was particularly impressed by Taiwan's structured educational method and emphasis on lifelong learning from a young age, noting similarities with East Asian countries such as Japan and China.

"In Taiwan, students are disciplined from childhood. They balance study and play, but academics are never neglected. Their education system is better than in Indonesia." (Syalala, Interview, January 11, 2025)

Anugrah enjoyed Taiwanese lecturers' nonjudgmental teaching method, which contrasted with the more demanding and judging attitudes he related to Indonesian academics. Aida also emphasized how mutual respect between lecturers and learners led to a healthy academic environment, giving her optimism that similar traditions could grow globally similar to Anugrah's statement.

"Taiwanese teachers don't judge students' problems. They help without assumptions. That open-mindedness impressed me." (Anugrah, Interview, January 15, 2025)

Lena concluded that Taiwanese education's peaceful yet controlled approach should be a model for Indonesia. She argued for longer breaks, more concern for students' well-being, and more adaptable teaching methods:

"Taiwan's relaxed but disciplined style helps students focus without pressure. Indonesian classes should give more breaks and support, instead of constant lectures." (Lena, Interview, January 16, 2025)

DISCUSSION

This section discussed the students' findings result with several prior claims and researches related to students' primary expectations and motivations before arriving in Taiwan, students' academic and social experiences while in Taiwan, and students' future hope after study in Taiwan.

1. Students' Initial Expectations and Motivations Before Studying in Taiwan

Students' objectives for studying in Taiwan were mostly personal development and cultural curiosity, rather than simply academic or institutional ones. Syalala's story demonstrated how a personal interest in Mandarin and Taiwanese culture influenced her decision, which supports Avenida et al. (2023), who stressed intrinsic motives in students' decisions to study abroad. Similarly, Sun et

al. (2023) found that curiosity and intrinsic motivation in learning increase students' participation in novel educational settings. For many, Taiwan provided not just academic opportunities but also the opportunity to explore "uncharted geographies" (Kheir, 2021), proving Taiwan's growing attractiveness as a study destination for Indonesian students (Phillo and Susanto, 2021).

Anugrah's definition implied a type of self-determined motivation, which is in line with Yue and Lu's (2022) concept of integrated extrinsic drive. His curiosity was piqued by the imagined cultural opportunity rather than a specific academic purpose, which matches with Haisley et al. (2021), who stated that cultural immersion can be a main driver for overseas study no matter the location. In contrast, Aida's journey demonstrated how destination flexibility may result in unanticipated cultural involvement. Her original intention was to study in Japan, but she accepted the opportunity to study in Taiwan. This is similar to Braun (2023), who detailed how study abroad efforts may take advantage on students' need for cultural immersion even when the destinations are not their first choice. Fitriyah et al. (2024) noted how developing student motives influence effective cultural adaptation, and Aida's openness matched this.

Finally, Lena's unintended participation in the exchange program highlighted how chance encounters may lead to deeper engagement and identity development. This is that match with Casas et al. (2020), who found that studying abroad improves self-discovery and personal improvement, even among initially unmotivated students.

Language preparedness was identified as both a practical obstacle and a symbolic preparation step. Anugrah's proactive use of digital resources like YouTube for Chinese language engagement matched with broader trends in mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), as outlined by Nuraidayati (2024) and Wu (2024). Vargas-Urpí and Xu (2021) found YouTube to be a helpful tool for language learners seeking informal, visual, and contextual support, which fits in with his use of self-access digital platforms. This pattern shows how digital tools help prospective exchange students prepare for their language studies and gain confidence (Carolinawati et al., 2021).

Syalala, on the other hand, thought that English would be highly functional in Taiwan's academic context, confirming Tauchid et al.'s (2022) findings on the regional variation of English usage. Her understanding that communication frequently relies on localized varieties and minimal use of English emphasizes the importance of realistic language expectations for overseas students. Similarly, Aida's decision to concentrate only on English improvement before leaving indicates the global perception of English as a primary instrument for academic survival, especially in non-Anglophone settings (Indrastana & Rinda, 2021). However, her experience demonstrated the limitations of relying simply on English, strengthening Tauchid et al.'s (2022) demand for critical understanding of multilingual realities in international education.

The students' experiences highlighted the importance of pre-arrival cultural understanding in affecting their adjustment. Interestingly, Lena's expectations about academic competence were not met. Instead, she found Taiwan's educational pace and assessment techniques more relaxed, which challenged her assumptions. This supports Suprpto et al.'s (2019) discovery that academic adjustment involves adapting to not only instructional variances, but also variations in institutional culture and interactions between learners and teachers. On the other hand, Lena's dependence on social media to comprehend Taiwanese time efficiency and daily routines emphasizes the growing importance of digital platforms in cultural preparation, similar to Pricilla et al. (2022). Her experience supported Karimullah et al.'s (2021) concept that international students act as cultural informants, providing information into lived lifestyle differences such as Taiwan's fast-paced culture against Indonesia's slower pace.

2. Students' Academic and Social Experiences when Studying in Taiwan

This section discusses the academic and social obstacles that Indonesian EFL exchange students experience in Taiwan. Their experiences highlighted a variety of challenges relating to

linguistic obstacles, cultural adaptability, social isolation, and emotional stress. These findings support previous studies and offer additional perspectives from Indonesian EFL students.

Language issues dominated the academic difficulties. Aida's difficulties understanding her lecturers due to their strong Chinese-accented English matched Rahman et al.'s (2020) findings that non-native accents prevent comprehension for Indonesian students abroad. Her struggle to understand both the content and pronunciation of the lecturers' explanations showed what Pricilla et al. (2022) referred to as communication uncertainty, where foreign linguistic communication delay message interpretation.

Syalala faced comparable challenges at an English department, dealing with local lecturers' accents and native speakers' extensive language. This is in accordance with Prinarenti et al. (2024), who found that Indonesian students face a deep understanding obstacle when local educators use Chinese-accented English or when English usage is minimized. Such linguistic limitations have an impact on classroom engagement and academic performance, supporting Hussanee and Ismiatun's (2023) statement that real-world immersion is required for acquiring practical language competence.

Anugrah's digital management issues exposed a visual language barrier. His difficulties accessing university webpages written mostly in Chinese is correlate with Suprpto et al.'s (2019) observation that many Taiwanese universities fail to provide English translations for important academic content, preventing international students from important information. This highlights technological shortcomings that limit foreign students' academic progress.

Similarly, Lena's lecturers frequently switched to Chinese while teaching, making classroom topic unavailable until clearer explanations were given during breaks. Her experience provide support to Gardner et al. (2023), who found that international students frequently face language-related comprehension difficulties due to unfamiliar accents and teaching methods. Lena's delayed understanding supports Hussanee and Ismiatun's (2023) claim that proactive coping mechanisms, such as lecturer-led explanations, are critical for overcoming classroom linguistic obstacles.

Students' views show that language issues in Taiwan include not only vocabulary and grammar, but also accent unfamiliarity, inconsistent language use, and limited digital infrastructure. These findings underscore the need of multilingual availability in international academic programs.

Cultural adjustment developed as a continual fight of identity. Aida's adaption to put on recycling restrictions and timeliness constraints demonstrated the identity shift outlined by Sabaruddin (2019). Her steady change toward embracing local habits reflects Phillo and Susanto's (2021) finding that Taiwanese cultural norms, especially in terms of cleanliness and discipline, different significantly from Indonesian practices. This behavioral adaption demonstrates the dynamic rebuilding of identity after cultural immersion.

Syalala's method, actively seeking guide from local friends, highlights the practical benefits of social inquiry in cultural adaptation. This result aligns with Prinarenti et al.'s (2024) study that Indonesian students who participate in proactive questioning improve social integration and reduce cultural misunderstandings.

Lena's attentive and observant adjustment process stressed identity as flexible and dependent on context, which supports Sabaruddin's (2019) non-essentialist perspective on student identity. Her experience supports Roberts and Ching's (2021) insight that institutions facilitate cultural adjustment through student-led activities that promote multicultural participation. Lena's story suggests that identity modeling in international conditions is not passive, but rather actively modified by intentional observation and behavioral adaptation.

The students' social integration varies based on cultural norms and personal initiative. Aida noted that Taiwanese friends were initially closed off but became helpful when contacted, confirming Pricilla et al.'s (2022) concept of anxiety and uncertainty in early cross-cultural interactions. Her experience highlights the value of tolerance and proactive interaction in overcoming social boundaries.

Anugrah found Taiwanese instructors friendly, but he saw shyness among local students as a barrier to informal interactions. His experience is consistent with Silalahi and Sitorus' (2021) findings that Taiwanese society typically values cultural variety but maintains individualistic interaction patterns, preventing informal social bonding for Indonesian students adapted to socialist communication.

Lena's story highlighted social isolation as a result of competing cultural behaviors including living together and alcohol consumption, which supports Suprpto et al.'s (2019) findings that religious and cultural differences prevent deep social integration. Her few local friendships highlight the importance of structured intercultural programs that promote language interchange and cross-cultural understanding.

3. Students' Aspirations after Studying in Taiwan

This section explores how Indonesian EFL exchange students' academic, social, and cultural immersion experiences in Taiwan influenced their future career goals, personal development, and intercultural competencies. The students' perspectives illustrate the relationship between host-country academic procedures and personal development, emphasizing the transforming power of study abroad experiences.

Immersion to Taiwan's educational system and multicultural environment produced major changes in students' academic objectives and personal development desires. Lena's case showed how engagement in Taiwan's culture context influenced her journey. She began by focusing on improving her Chinese, but soon expanded her focus to include soft skills like time management and managing academic and social duties. This is match Avenida et al. (2023), who discovered that immersion experiences, such as industrial training or exchange programs, might reset students' learning objectives, increasing both academic and personal progress through real-world contextual interaction.

Syalala's observations supported Roberts and Ching's (2021) focus on the importance of informal learning environments in developing professional and cultural competencies. She obtained new insights about educational professionalism by comparing Taiwan's structured teaching methods and classroom practices with those in Indonesia. Her learning experience highlights how alternative educational institutions may promote professional knowledge and intercultural empathy.

Similarly, Anugrah's increased self-confidence and communication abilities prove how studying abroad promotes emotional intelligence and international adaptability. His enhanced openness and interpersonal competence resulted from everyday contacts in a multicultural setting, supporting Roberts and Ching's (2021) claim that comprehensive study abroad programs improve both cognitive and affective skills.

Aida's developing ambition to master Chinese and other languages emphasizes the motivating power of actual immersion. Her desire to improve multilingual competency and public speaking skills correlates with the findings of Avenida et al. (2023), who discovered that direct involvement in a target language context greatly increases intrinsic motivation, particularly for languages like Mandarin. This stresses the importance of experiential learning in determining long-term communication objectives and intercultural engagement strategies.

The students' stories emphasized the impact of Taiwan's practical, student-focused academic culture. Syalala complimented Taiwan's emphasis on applied learning over theoretical training, describing it as more interesting and successful than Indonesia's theory-heavy education system. Her perspective matches with Risaharti and Wang's (2018) findings, which found that Indonesian students abroad frequently embrace host-country educational approaches that they see as advantageous, adopting them selectively into their personal and professional development.

Anugrah saw Taiwan's academic atmosphere as more flexible and more controllable than Indonesia's, but when he returned home, he struggled to acclimate to the more demanding system. This supports Phillo and Susanto's (2021) observation that continual exposure to various educational

cultures can change students' academic identities, affecting their comfort with national academic institutions.

Aida highlighted how she adopted her Taiwanese friends' demanding study habits but struggled to maintain similar routines in Indonesia. This is in line with Silalahi and Sitorus' (2021) findings that students adjust to demanding academic practices overseas but frequently face reintegrate issues when returning to their home places. Lena's views show how seeing regulated, student-friendly academic settings in Taiwan caused her to reevaluate Indonesia's education system. She observed that Taiwan's use of break times and flexible classroom regulations aided concentration and learning. This is match Zhao et al. (2024), who stated that supportive learning settings improve students' self-management and academic performance.

Overall, these results confirm that Indonesian EFL students serve as cultural ambassadors, not only adjusting to host-country systems but also analyzing and reflecting on their home institutions, as mentioned by Roberts and Ching (2021).

The interaction with Taiwan's education system caused students to critically examine their own country's academic systems. Syalala appreciated Taiwan's early emphasis on disciplined study habits and planned academic advancement. Her narrative fits in with Roberts and Ching's (2021) concept of soft identity conflict, in which experience to various academic models supports critical thinking and prospective shifts in educational attitudes.

Anugrah praised Taiwanese instructors' empathetic, nonjudgmental approach, which contrasted with stricter and evaluative teacher-student relationships in Indonesia. His observations align with Roberts and Ching's (2021) findings that overseas students may begin to challenge home-country educational norms after experiencing "soft strategies" in host institutions.

Aida's admiration for mutual respect and gratitude in Taiwanese academic culture emphasizes the need of social recognition in maintaining academic motivation, especially in socialist countries such as Indonesia. This confirms Kotera et al.'s (2022) claim that respect and admiration play important roles in supporting students in multicultural settings. Finally, Lena's preference for Taiwan's student-centered teaching approach, which includes planned breaks and a focus on student well-being, emphasizes the need of combining academic excellence and emotional support. Her observations align with those of Gunarto and Hurriyati (2020) and Silalahi and Sitorus (2021), who both underlined the importance of supportive academic environments in developing deeper learning and continual participation.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The study concludes that despite difficulties in language adaptation, academic adjustments, and cultural integration, students perceived their exchange experience as transformative. Taiwan's generally supportive academic atmosphere and socially tolerant environment allowed students to overcome initial anxieties and improve their academic engagement, communication skills, and intercultural awareness.

The study recommends the implementation of basic Chinese instruction, cultural orientation programs, and the development of multilingual or bilingual university systems to assist new exchange students. Further research with a wider sample of students from various colleges is recommended to gain a better knowledge of Asia-to-Asia exchange experiences.

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