

**ADJUSTMENT AND ACADEMIC
ACHIEVEMENT OF UNSOED
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

Dini Puji Agustini ¹
Dede Nurdiawati ²

the Graduate of English Education Study Program
Peradaban University Bumiayu – Brebes
E-mail: deerdini@gmail.com
Phone: +62 851 1345 2320

the Lecturer of English Education Study Program
Peradaban University Bumiayu – Brebes
Email: dedenurdiawati7@gmail.com
Phone: +62 877 1030 5577

Abstract

This research is aimed to analyse the adjustment and academic achievement of international students at Jenderal Soedirman University. The writers propose two research questions: How do international students adjust with new environment at Jenderal Soedirman University? And how does better adjustment relate to academic achievement of international students at Jenderal Soedirman University? Qualitative approach is used in this research with interview, observation, and documentation as the data

collection techniques. The sources of the data are international students of Jenderal Soedirman University, the staffs of IRO in Jenderal Soedirman University, the lecturers of the economic and business faculty in Jenderal Soedirman University, and the staffs of the international program in economic and business faculty of Jenderal Soedirman University. The findings of the data indicate that the adjustment of the international students in this case follows the U-Curve theory and the better adjustment is related to academic achievement of the international students through the completion of the courses with good GPA. There are many successful factors that contribute to the adjustment and academic achievement of the international students such as well-organized support services, friendship with co-nationals, well-organized international program, and kindness of the society.

Keywords: international students, adjustment, academic achievement

A. Introduction

Both international students and local students experience difficulties to adjust in new educational environment in higher education. However, international students are facing great difficulty to adjust compared to local students. International students need to adapt not only with new academic procedures but also their adjustment with culture, values and language. They might experience culture shock upon their arrival in university, different perspective on friendship with local students and relationship with academic staff, lifestyle and language barrier. International students, who come to study at university, have their academic ambition or their academic goals just like any other students. They have their own way to achieve success in university.

Achieving academic goal for international students might become another challenge they will face. They need to adapt with new way of thinking, new education policy, and new learning style. Language barrier can also become a great deal when it comes to understanding the lecture.

We need to understand that not all international students in Indonesia are coming from an English speaking countries or those for whom English is not their native language making it as a big challenge for both the university and international students. Hosting international students can benefit both the university and international students. This research has several research questions, which are: How do international students adjust with new environment at Jenderal Soedirman University? How does better adjustment relate to academic achievement of international students at Jenderal Soedirman University?

Adjustment is derived from the Latin roots *ad jure* which means to bring or make it right (Moritsugu, 2017: 29). Adjustment describes the fit between students and the academic environment (Ramsay et al in Andrade, 1999: 5). Adjustment can also mean the process of seeking balance between internal demands and external demands, between the need for continuity and for adaptability to the new, and between self and others in the large community (Moritsugu, 2017: 29).

Meanwhile, academic achievement is the evidence of learning (Seaver, 2012: 5-6). Academic achievement could be measured by successful completion of course requirements, grade point average (GPA), satisfactory academic standing or retention (Andrade, 2006: 5).

In this research, the term of international students is defined as students who enrol in institution of higher education, who are using temporary students'

visa and they are non-native English speakers (Andrade, 2006: 5). It is used to address foreign students from China and Malaysian who join student exchange program lasting for one semester at Jenderal Soedirman University.

B. Literature Review

In this research there are two main theories that the writers use in order to find appropriate data from the research:

1. Adjustment Theory

It covers four stages, as follows:

a. Honeymoon Stage

The adjustment of the international students seemed to follow a U-Curve theory when it felt to be easy and successful in the beginning of their arrival in new country, new environment, new people, new culture and norms, and new academic environment (Black and Mark Mendenhall, 1990: 226).

b. Culture Shock

The second stage began with “crisis” in which one feels less well- adjusted and challenges began to occur. International students face a period of disillusionment and frustration because they need to live in new culture on daily basis (Black and Mark Mendenhall, 1990: 226).

c. Adjustment

This stage is characterized by gradual adaptation to the new culture and international students are learning how to behave appropriately according to the cultural norm in new environment (Black and Mark Mendenhall, 1990: 226).

d. Mastery

In the last stage, international students are increasing their ability to function effectively in the new culture (Black and Mark Mendenhall, 1990: 226).

2. Academic Achievement Theory

Various scholars define academic adaptation as a process of appreciation and acquisition of the target culture in an academic situation (Park, 2015: 78). Factors that contribute to the academic achievement (Andrade, 2006: 14) are:

- a. Language proficiency and academic achievement,
- b. Other factors related to academic success,
- c. Support services.

C. Method of Investigation

In this research the writers use descriptive qualitative method based on the theory of fenomenology and positivism (Bungin, 2007: 68). Qualitative research is known as interpretive research or field research. "Qualitative research focuses on the study of social phenomena and on giving voice to feelings and perceptions of the participants under study" (Lodico, et al, 2010: 142). The key characteristic of qualitative research is based on participant perspectives (McMillan, 2012: 277).

Arikunto (2010: 172) states that there are three types of data source. They are person, paper and place. The first source of data is person. The international students that act as the source of data are those who study at Jenderal Soedirman University for the academic year of 2015-2016. The staffs of IRO are interviewed to get to know the number of international

students, exchange programs and support services for international students at Jenderal Soedirman University. The lecturers of the Economic and Business Faculty are interviewed to find out the information about how international students interacted with local students, their relationship with the lecturers and many more. The staffs of the International Program are interviewed to get to know the international program that is designed by the faculty and the support services provided for the international students. Then, paper is a source of data that provides information in form of numbers, words, pictures or other symbols. Finally, place is the data source that presents the appearance of a place whether in a stand still condition or moving condition. The writers collect the data in several places: IRO (International Relation Office), Economic and Business Faculty, and Wisma Unsoed.

In collecting the data, the writers use observation, interview and documents, images and artifacts. A thorough analysis requires 6 steps (Lodico et al, 2012: 180-195). The processes of qualitative data analysis are: preparing and organizing the data, reviewing and exploring the data, coding the data into categories, constructing thick descriptions of people, places and activities, building themes and testing hypotheses, and reporting and interpreting the data.

D. Findings and Discussion

International education increasingly encompasses joint programs, branch campuses and transnational or multimodal education. These developments call for reconsideration of contemporary realities and practices and a re-examination of systems of knowledge and intellectual traditions. These global flows of

international students mean not only the exchange of people but also the exchange of ideas and academic traditions. It is important not to make assumptions about the way students learn because of their cultural background or even the way they look.

Jenderal Soedirman University begins to expand the international cooperation with universities abroad in accordance with the goal of the university to a world class university. The passion of the internalization of the university is seen from the development of the international program and the support services provided by the university to accommodate the international students' mobility.

There are several things that contribute to the adjustment and academic achievement of international students at Jenderal Soedirman University, explained as follows:

1. Well Organized Support Services

Support services for international students are basically the kinds of facility given by the university to accommodate the needs of international students such as housing, documents, language class, culture learning and information related to their academic stuffs. Some of the support services that are provided by the university are:

- a. IRO (International Relation Office)

The writers find out that IRO has its function as facilitator for international partnership between Jenderal Soedirman University and partner universities abroad. This office also provides the information that international students needs to apply the international programs at Jenderal Soediman University. Every year the office hold a program called Summer Camp and the aim of it

is to introduce local heritage especially around Banyumas regency to the participants. In serving the international students that already study at Jenderal Soedirman University, IRO has a program called BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*) that is held every week in the IRO's office. In BIPA class the international students are taught about *Bahasa Indonesia* and the class is full in *Bahasa Indonesia*. The BIPA class is aimed to teach *Bahasa Indonesia* to international students so they could use it while interacting with local students or local people. Other than BIPA class, IRO also has a program called Coffee Morning. Coffee morning is an activity designed for all international students and internship in Jenderal Soedirman University. This year they also hold Foreign Students Orientation on Friday, 24 February 2017 with the participants from University Utara Malaysia (UUM) international students who will study in Jenderal Soedirman University for 1 semester.

The programs and activities designed by IRO are tools for International students to get to know more about local environment before and even while they are studying at Jenderal Soedirman University. The orientation program is obviously beneficial because here they get the information about what kind of education life they will encounter at Jenderal Soedirman University. Coffee Morning can be used by the international students to share their thoughts while studying at Jenderal Soedirman University.

b. Faculty of Economic and Business

Faculty of Economic and Business (FEB) is the largest faculty with the biggest students population among faculties of Jenderal Soedirman university. This faculty is established in 1963 and now there are around 4000 students studying in this faculty. The Faculty has a program called International Program where international students from partners' university can study in the faculty and local students could also send to universities abroad.

c. International Program

International program is an undergraduate program in the faculty of economic and business that provide international level education, which is also in line with the university's mission to be a world-class university. This program is open for international students as well as local students. Teaching and learning process is conducted in English. The program offered were Bachelor in Accounting, Bachelor in Management, and Bachelor in Economics. Students could choose one of the following programs:

- 1) Dual Degree
- 2) Students Exchange
- 3) International Internship
- 4) International Academic Exposure
- 5) Overseas International Events
- 6) Overseas International Seminars

It can be seen from many programs that the aim of them is to involve students with global education setting and activities overseas. The programs are designed almost 10 years

now and now they are more serious in promoting international programs in the faculty to universities abroad. They provide some facilities to help the international students while they are staying and studying in Jenderal Soedirman University.

2. Friendship with Co-Nationals

In this case, international students do not study and live alone but they are studying in a group and they are also placed in the same house. The writers conclude that it creates sense of belonging for each other because they are facing everything together. This case can be different from students who are studying alone and need to provide housing and financial by themselves or even work part time to support their financial.

It explains the behaviour of international students that usually go out and study together with their friends from the same country. They discuss many problems with their friends from the same country and also solve academic problem with them. It is easily done mainly because they speak the same language. Both Malaysian and Chinese international students prefer studying on their own to asking to the lecturers unless it is really necessary for them to do that. Asking and giving opinion in class are seen as a way of adapting to the new classroom atmosphere and getting additional mark from the lecturers.

3. Well Prepared International Program

Malaysian and Chinese international students in the case of this study are joining Students Exchange in the economic and business faculty. They are supported by their university either by allowance and sponsorship for the tuition here. They already have pre-departure resources, a

structured educational exchange program, and also a predominant middle class family background. It is contrast with students who undertake independent study abroad, possess more modest financial resources, and have limited experience with international travel.

Thus, the job of these international students is just to focus on their study and the university makes it easy because it has prepared some facilities for them such as a free dormitory, free transportation, language class and a supportive staffs.

Chinese international students also mention that they want to enjoy their time by visiting many recreation places in Indonesia. Malaysian students also visit Bandung just before they are coming back to Malaysian. Basically they enjoy their time at Jenderal Soedirman University with the help of all stakeholders who support their study.

4. Kindness of the Society

There are many literatures in this field that show the struggles of the international students in adjusting with local people. Those literatures mainly come from the research of international students in developed countries where the number of the international students is larger than the number of international students in Indonesia. They are struggling to make friends with local students because of the cultural differences and the individualist societies.

The case is different from what happens at Jenderal Soedirman University, throughout the interview with the international students from both of the groups mention about the kindness of Indonesian. The local students are helpful and kind

to them. Not only the local students but also the lecturers are also very kind and close to them. They care about the international students. We cannot hide the fact that the help of the staffs of the international program also makes their study more enjoyable.

E. Conclusion

Throughout the research the writers find out that the adjustment factors of international students can bring effect to the academic achievement of the international students. The first research question of this research is how international students adjust with new environment in Jenderal Soedirman University turns out that the adjustment factors of the international students follow popular U-Curve adjustment factors of sojourners. There are also other factors that take an important role that support the adjustment of international students at Jenderal Soedirman University and those factors are well organized support services, friendship with co- nationals, kindness of the society, and well prepared international program.

The second research question is how better adjustment relates to academic achievement of international students at Jenderal Soedirman University. International students successfully achieve academic achievement from their study at Jenderal Soedirman University. We can see it from the GPA of the international students. The obstacles they have while encountering new environment can be minimized by the help of support services, friends from the co-nation and the kindness of the society and these affect the satisfaction achievement of the international students.

Acknowledgement

The writers would like to express the deepest gratitude to Prof. Dr. Yahya A. Muhaimin as the Rector of Peradaban University and IRO of Jenderal Soedirman University.

Bibliography

- Andrade, Maureen Snow. 2006. International Students in English Speaking Countries: Adjustment Factors. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5(2), pp.131-154.
- Black, Jack Steward and Mark Mendenhall. 1991. The U-Curve Adjustment Hypothesis Revisited: Review and Theoretical Framework. *Journal of International Business Studies*, pp. 225-247.
- Bungin, Burhan. 2007. *Penelitian Kualitatif*. Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media Group.
- Lodico, et al. 2010. *Methods in Educational Research*. San Fransisco: JosseyBass.
- McMillan, H James. 2012. *Educational Research*. Boston: Pearson Education.
- Moritsugu, John. 2017. *Psychological of Adjustment*. California: Sage Publication.
- Park, Eunjeong. 2016. Issues of International Students' Academic Adaptation in ESL Class: A Mix Methods Study. *Journal of International Students*, 6(4), pp.76-93.
- Seaver, Allison Renee. 2012. *Success of International Students in Higher Education*. A Thesis. Educational Specialist in School Psychology University of Dayton: Not Published.