



Adaptation of Tajikistan International Students to Indonesian Culture

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Abstract

The culture of Tajikistan and Indonesia is very different. Some of the differences found include differences in language, traditions, and customs, types of food and how to cook it, and so on. This study explored the phenomenological details of Tajik students who study in Purwokerto. The specifics revolved around the adaptation strategy to the Indonesian culture. A qualitative research method with a phenomenological study approach is used in this study. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews, observation, and review of relevant previous research articles and documents. According to the study's findings, the similarity of religious background (Islam) is a medium that allows Tajik students to bridge and make friends with residents or Indonesians. Language skills are essential in intercultural communication with local citizens (classmates, lecturers, and society). Learning national and local languages (Indonesian and Javanese) and English is extremely beneficial in intercultural communication. Tajik students are more likely to engage in low-contact communication, patriarchal systems, collectivism, and value feminism. Food and climate differences can cause culture shock. "Life is only once, so we must enjoy it," is one approach to dealing with cultural issues. The presence of students assigned as companions greatly aids the adaptation process of Tajikistan international students to Indonesian culture.

Keywords: Adaptation, intercultural communication, Tajikistan, phenomenology.

Introduction

According to the 2019 Higher Education Institution Accreditation Guidelines (AIPT), foreign students' presence in universities is important because it will support accreditation, both for institutions and study programs. The presence of foreign students can also increase local students' interest in enrolling in the relevant study program. Furthermore, having foreign students in a study program can provide local (Indonesian) students with new perspectives

and knowledge through interaction and communication with these foreign students.

Based on preliminary interviews with international student officers or Public Relations at Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Universitas Jendral Soedirman, and Universitas Amikom Purwokerto, several universities in Purwokerto, Central Java accepted foreign students from Yemen, Nigeria, Thailand, and Tajikistan in 2022. Tajikistan has six foreign students spread across three universities: two at Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, two at

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Universitas Jendral Soedirman, and two at Universitas Amikom Purwokerto. Foreign students from Tajikistan are accepted after a selection process conducted by the sponsor and each university. All Tajik students visit Indonesia for the first time. Tuition fees, also known as educational scholarships, are waived for all Tajik students attending universities in Central Java. They travel to Indonesia by paying for transportation (air tickets), visas, and other permits. Apart from being exempt from tuition fees, students in Indonesia receive a living allowance, the amount of which varies depending on the policies of each university.

Tajikistan is a former Soviet Union colony in Central Asia, bordered by China to the east, Kyrgyzstan to the north, Uzbekistan to the west, and Afghanistan to the south. Its geographical condition is a plateau that is not bordered by the sea. Tajikistan's majority population is Tajik, who speak Persian and share a history, language, and culture with Afghanistan and Iran. Tajikistan became a constituent republic of the Soviet Union/ USSR in the twentieth century under the name Tajikistan Soviet Socialist Republic after becoming a part of the Samanid Empire. Tajikistan gained independence after the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991.

Tajikistan's capital city is Dushanbe with the majority of the population being ethnic Tajiks (84.3%) and ethnic Uzbeks (13.8%), as well as other ethnicities (1.9%). About 98% of Tajikistan's population is Muslim. The official language of Tajikistan is Tajik (Kiprop, 2019). According to Sabzali Jafarzoda, Head of the National Testing Centre in Tajikistan, the number of school graduates attending universities in Tajikistan decrease in 2022/2023. This is due to the opening of

borders, more and more young people or school graduates are continuing their studies abroad, including Indonesia (Wolfson, 2022).

The consequence of having meetings and interactions with students from different cultural backgrounds is the existence of intercultural communication. In other words, intercultural communication cannot be avoided by the interaction between people of different cultures. In principle, intercultural communication is interpersonal communication in which the communicators have different cultural backgrounds (Gudykunst, 2005; Liliweri, 2013; Turistiati et al., 2018). Culture in the context of intercultural communication includes values, norms, beliefs, religion, customs, language, habits, traditions, food, climate, fashion, and speech styles.

Previous studies related to intercultural communication and adaptation strategies between individuals of different cultures have produced various findings. In general, foreign students who are visiting a country with a different environment for the first time experience stressful conditions. This is related to the process of adaptation to the culture in the local country which is different from the culture of the country of origin.

The results of Polat & Arslan's research in 2022 show that foreign students pursuing higher education in Turkey experience several obstacles. Problems faced by foreign students include experiencing homesickness, accommodation problems that often do not meet expectations, language barriers, problems with the education system at the university they choose, and traditions that are different from those practiced in their country (Polat & Arslan, 2022). Meanwhile, research results show that the language factor plays

an important role in the adaptation process. Students from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia who study Russian tertiary education and have good Russian language skills demonstrate better opportunities and feelings in the classroom and everyday life (Makeeva et al., 2022).

Research conducted by (Volkova & Kolesov, 2022) shows that the language barrier factor that occurs among foreign students in Russia affects social relations and friendships with local students. These conditions ultimately affect the focus and effectiveness of their education in the classroom. The department dealing with foreign students should pay attention to the process of adaptation of foreign students, not only academic matters but also social relations issues.

Other research shows that the obstacles faced by foreign students, in this case Indonesian students studying at Nara, Japan are due to factors from within (internal) and from outside (external) individuals. The adaptation process is carried out to overcome the obstacles experienced. The factors of similarity in religion, ethnicity, and mastery of the same language were found to be the 3 main factors that facilitate the adaptation process (Turistiati, 2019).

According to Hofstede, five cultural dimensions can influence intercultural communication. These measurements are: 1) Individualism vs. Collectivism: An individualist culture prioritizes the interests of the individual, whereas a collectivist culture prioritizes the interests of a group or community. These differences can have an impact on how people communicate and interact with others.

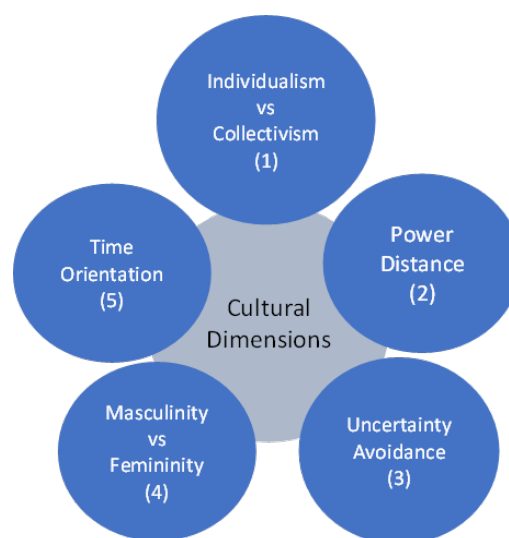


Figure 1. Hofstede's Model of Cultural Dimension

2) Power Distance: The extent to which people in a particular culture accept and maintain power inequality is referred to as power distance. High power distance cultures value greater hierarchy and power, whereas low power distance cultures value more egalitarian power relations. These distinctions can have an impact on how people communicate with people of different statuses or positions.

3) Uncertainty Avoidance: Uncertainty avoidance refers to how much people in a particular culture dislike uncertainty and seek certainty. Cultures with a high level of uncertainty avoidance seek clear rules and security, whereas cultures with a low level of uncertainty avoidance are more open to change and uncertainty. These differences can have an impact on how people respond and communicate in uncertain situations.

4) Masculinity vs. Femininity: Masculinity refers to cultures that value masculine values like success, ambition, and competition, whereas femininity refers to cultures that value feminine values like cooperation, care, and quality of life. These distinctions can have an impact on how people communicate and express themselves.

5) Long-term

Orientation vs. Short-term Orientation: Long-term orientation cultures value such as perseverance, prudence, and respect for the future, whereas short-term orientation cultures value values such as immediate pleasure and tradition. These distinctions can have an impact on how people communicate about time, goals, and decision-making (Brewer & Venaik, 2011; Fan, 2021; Hofstede, 2011).

In intercultural communication, understanding and acknowledging these cultural differences is very important. Individuals who can understand and respect cultural differences will be better able to communicate effectively with individuals from different cultures.

The researcher employs phenomenology theory to explore in-depth Tajikistan students' intercultural communication experiences and adaptation strategies in Purwokerto. Schutz's critique of Weber and Husserl's sociological thinking resulted in phenomenological theory. Schutz shares Weber's perspective on human experience and behavior in the everyday social world as a socially meaningful reality. "Actors" are people who act out. Someone will understand the meaning of the action if he sees or hears what the actor says or does. This is known as an "interpretive reality" in the social world (Kuswarno, 2013).

The primary goal of phenomenological analysis is to reconstruct the "real" world of human life as it was experienced by an individual. The world's reality is intersubjective in the sense that community members share fundamental perceptions of the world, which they internalize through socialization and use to interact or communicate. The subjective meaning formed by actors in the social world takes the form of common and shared among

actors. As a result, "intersubjective" refers to a subjective meaning.

Phenomenological theory focuses on understanding individual subjective experiences of natural phenomena or events and their connections. Symbolic interaction theory focuses on the interpretation of subjective meanings that arise from interactions with other people or their environment. In other words, symbolic interaction is an interaction that gives rise to a special meaning and gives rise to interpretation or interpretation. The basic theory of symbolic interaction is rooted in and focuses on human nature which is a relational being where each individual is involved in relating to each other. Symbolic interaction theory explains that individuals appear in and through interactions with those outside themselves, where these interactions require certain symbols (Sobur, 2014).

The theory of symbolic interaction can simply be interpreted as a communication or interpersonal relationship by using certain symbols that are given meaning. Individuals form meaning through communication, according to symbolic interaction theory. To create meaning, people must use interpretive constructs.

Based on initial observations and interviews with Tajikistan students as research informants, it is known that the culture of Tajikistan and Indonesia is very different. Some of the differences found include differences in language, traditions and customs, types of food and how to cook it, and so on.

Researchers are interested in analyzing and understanding more deeply how foreign students from Tajikistan adapt to Indonesian socio-cultural environment. In the context of

intercultural communication, culture includes not only traditions and habits, but also mindset, language, speech style, and religion.

Method

The researchers employed a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. This research is based on the views or perspectives of the participants (research informants). In line with this view, the researcher did not perform statistical analysis. However, the researcher summarized and analyzed a collection of stories and opinions from informants. Phenomenological studies do not aim to test the theory.

According to Creswell, phenomenological studies are studies that describe the general meaning of a group of people's various life experiences as they relate to concepts or phenomena. The researchers described the research informants' experiences and general meanings in this study (Cresswell, 2014).

Observations and in-depth interviews were carried out with research informants totaling three students from Tajikistan, five Indonesian students who interacted with Tajikistan students, one public relations person from Universitas Amikom Purwokerto, and two lecturers who teach Tajikistan students. The total number of research informants are 11 people. All interviewees were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. In addition, the data source comes from secondary data where researchers conduct literature studies and document reviews in the form of articles published in accredited or reputable journals, books, and websites that can be accounted for. Following data collection, additional processing and data analysis are performed. Data analysis

activities aim to give meaning to data and are useful for solving formulated research problems. The researcher's data analysis technique consisted of four stages: providing data, reducing or selecting data, displaying or presenting data, and drawing conclusions.

Result and Analysis

Intercultural communication is influenced by culture. When people from different cultures interact with one another, they engage in intercultural communication. Culture influences how individuals understand, give meaning to, and respond to received messages.

Tajikistan has a rich and diverse culture, with influences from various ethnic groups living in the country, including Tajiks, Uzbeks, Russians, and Pamirs. Tajikistan's culture consists of unique art, music, dance, language, and religious traditions. Intercultural communication in Tajikistan is often based on local customs and traditions. Meanwhile, for Tajikistan students studying in Indonesia, especially in Purwokerto, their interactions with Indonesian citizens can be classified in the context of intercultural communication which includes language, customs or traditions, religion, food, and fashion. These results and discussion of this research explore and discuss adaptation of Tajikistan students to Indonesian culture, what challenges they face during the adaptation process, and how they attempt to overcome these challenges.

Adaptation of Tajikistan Students to Indonesian Culture

Language proficiency is an essential component of successful intercultural interactions. Language proficiency opens up more opportunities for cultural learning and,

as a result, better sociocultural adaptation. Individuals who express an interest in learning a foreign language are more likely to participate in study abroad programs (Goldstein & Keller, 2015).

Tajikistan students learn the Indonesian language to communicate more effectively with classmates, lecturers, and Indonesian local citizens. They were given the opportunity to learn the Indonesian language in the first months they arrived in Purwokerto. They took Indonesian language courses with students from other countries.

When participating in the teaching and learning process, lecturers use bilingual languages, namely Indonesian and English. Except for the teaching and learning process in the English study program which fully uses English. For students who take part in the undergraduate program, a student assistant is provided to help them in their learning process. This is done especially if it is related to the need to understand the lessons delivered in the Indonesian language.

The official language of Tajikistan is Tajik language, which is a variant of Persian. However, many people in Tajikistan also understand and speak Russian. For Tajik people, the Tajik language is a national language, Russian is a second language and English is a foreign language.

Many languages, particularly English, have spread worldwide. They focus on actual World Englishes manifesting globally in three zones: the Inner Circle, where English has long been the primary native language; the Outer Circle, former colonies where English is used as a second language for many social functions; and the Expanding Circle³, where

English is increasingly learned as a foreign language (Bahry & Olimnazarova, 2023).

Students from Tajikistan in Purwokerto have different levels of English skills. Students at the master's level have adequate English skills, even students taking the master's degree in the English department has fluent English skill. The English language skills of Tajikistan undergraduate students (S1-degree) still need to be improved, especially for academic English purposes. English become more difficult for Tajik students in terms of writing because they have their own Tajik alphabet which is different from general alphabets.

With the advancement of information technology, Tajik students can use Google Translate and other applications to translate words they do not understand. For a Tajik student whose English is not that good, too much or too often use the gadget for translating is disturbing to other students they communicate with. Their Indonesian classmate whose English is quite good helped them to explain the materials delivered by their lecturers. For Tajik students, Indonesians are friendly and show a desire to help others. This is similar to the Tajik people in general. In addition, Tajik students can also communicate with family and friends via video calls, text messages, and social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram.

The style of speech in Tajikistan is generally quite formal and respectful, especially when interacting with elder people or higher-position people. They use polite language and avoid harsh or offensive words. Tajik students feel that Indonesian students behave less politely towards lecturers

compared to Tajik students who behave towards their lecturers. This happens for example students use mobile phones while the lecturer is explaining material in front of the class.

"In Tajikistan, students are not allowed to use mobile phones while the lecturer is explaining the lesson. If it is done, it is a violation and is considered impolite" (Interview with Nina, 2023).

Referring to Hofstede's five cultural dimensions, Tajik students value greater hierarchy and power. This has an impact on how they communicate with people of different statuses or positions. Other than that, Tajik students tend to value feminine values like cooperation, care, and quality of life.

Tajik students can be classified as collectivist which prioritizes the interests of a group or community. They know each other and often have gatherings to discuss or share their experience and how to adapt to Indonesian culture.

"We often have gathered with all Tajik students here in Purwokerto to have a chit-chat moment and eat traditional Tajik food we cooked" (Interview with Hasan, 2023).

Verbal and non-verbal aspect of communication is very important in interacting among people (Vogel et al., 2018). The culture of Tajikistan places great value on politeness, respect, and empathy for other people when they meet and communicate with each other. Tajik people consider it important to greet others respectfully.

"Tajik women will shake hands, hug, or touch their faces left and right in greeting. However, they would not do it with someone of the opposite sex. A man or woman of the opposite sex will greet by placing his/her right hand on his/her chest, not touching it. The hand on the

chest indicates that the greeting is sincere from the heart" (Interview with Nina, 2023).

Non-verbal communication is used to supplement verbal communication as well as to regularize meaning, emphasize, and reinforce information (Adetunji & Sze, 2012). Tajik students recognize that Indonesian Muslim students in Java who avoid touching the opposite sex in greeting do so by clasping both hands in front of their chest. This is almost similar to what is done by the Tajik students, where the point is that individuals of the opposite sex do not touch their hands when greeting. This behavior is also in line with Muslim morals in carrying out relationships between men and women who are not their *mahram*.

Challenges and Solutions During the Adaptation Process

Critical factors in the adaptation process are related to religion, food, climate, and fashion. Based on the data from the Association of Religion Data Archives, the majority religion of Tajikistan's citizens is Islam which dominates about 98% of the population. Of these religions, it is divided into three, namely Sunni Islam by 95%, Shia Islam by about 3%, and Sufi orders by 2% (Pew Reserach Center, 2023). There are Sunni and Syiah differences but as long as they don't interfere with each other, they are respected. Both are basically the religion of Islam.

"When talking about Muhammadiyah or Nahdatul Ulama in Indonesia, I don't mind. It is more likely the same situation in Tajikistan with the presence of Sunni and Syiah. Both are Islam. We respect each other" (Interview with Nina, 2023)

Respecting and being open to different religious perspectives can help Tajik students adapt and coexist harmoniously within the

local community. These strategies may not be exhaustive or universally applicable. Each person's experience can differ based on individual preferences, circumstances, and willingness to adapt.

The main challenge of Tajik students in Purwokerto is food. Tajik students perceive Indonesian food, particularly Javanese cuisine, to be spicy and sweet. Tajik students rarely consume chicken. Tajik people eat more beef or mutton than chicken. Tajikistan's beef prices are lower than Indonesia's beef prices. The price difference is approximately IDR 50 thousand per kilogram.

Food types can contribute to a region's cultural identity. *Rendang*, for example, is from Minangkabau in West Sumatra, *mendoan* from Purwokerto, *batagor* from West Java, and so on. Tajik students learn how to consume food in Purwokerto, which is spicy and sweet. They choose non-spicy foods for their daily needs. If they can't find what they're looking for, they will cook it themselves. Similarly, if they accept the invitation while the available food appears spicy, they will choose non-spicy foods.

On one occasion, they also tried food that contained chilies but was not overly spicy. They believe that trying local cuisine is an effort to become more acquainted with the locals and to respect the host if they are invited to an event where spicy food is served. Another way to integrate into society is to experiment with local Indonesian cuisine and adapt to the local food culture. Exploring local markets, trying traditional dishes, and learning about new ingredients can help them to improve cultural understanding and make adaptation more enjoyable.

Food as discourse "serves as a socializing mechanism through which we learn about our

cultures, societies, and groups to which we belong." (Wenzel, 2016). Food can facilitate intercultural communication. In other words, food serves as a media for intercultural communication. Students exchange information, opinions, and stories with Indonesian friends or local citizens through Indonesian food. Food can also bring Tajik students and local residents or college friends closer together.

Other than food, climate environment can also affect people living in a foreign country. The climates and environments in Tajikistan and Indonesia are very different. Understanding and adapting to the tropical climate, local weather patterns, and environmental conditions can help people feel more comfortable and at ease. For Tajik students, the weather in Indonesia is hotter than the weather in Tajikistan, which is surrounded by mountains with cool air. Tajikistan has four seasons: summer, autumn, winter, and spring. Tajikistan students had to adjust to the relatively hot weather during their first months in Indonesia. Failure to adjustment to this new situation and condition can potentially cause culture shock.

"I don't like spicy Indonesian food and can barely stand the hot weather. I often compare with the situation in Tajikistan. The more I compare the more I want to go home" (Interview with Amin, 2023).

For foreigners in a new place, the desire to return home is natural. However, a strong desire to return home can be a sign of culture shock. Cultural newcomers are likely to experience adaptation fluctuations over time. In this regard, residence length is a significant predictor of adaptation, particularly in the socio-cultural domain (Fakir, 2018).

One of the informants experienced culture shock as a result of this study. Based

on observations and indications, the students in question are disturbed and dislike living in Indonesia because the food is too spicy, the weather is hot, and the cost of living is relatively high in comparison to their pocket money. On the other hands, there are many cases that the reality is less than expected.

Everyone can have differences in how they approach problems. This will depend on each individual.

"It appears to me that we only have one chance at life. So, we should be able to enjoy ourselves. All problems are not as big as we think if we are grateful. The key is to appreciate and enjoy life (Interview with Amin, 2023)

Fashion is one of media for communication. In today's competitive environment, fashion embodies symbolic meaning for society, as well as how it is individually received and processed, provides a critical point of fashion style. The recent evolution of Muslim clothing in Indonesia has changed dramatically. By adapting to the local culture, the basic procedure for Muslim clothing is adapted flexibly and smoothly in Indonesia. As a result, such a condition generates a Muslim clothing design, which then becomes a popular culture. In Tajikistan, local men and women used to dress in flamboyant, multilayered, and beautifully adorned outfits. It's a shame that these costumes are no longer worn in everyday life; only simpler pieces like a skull-cap or kerchief are still worn by many Tajiks. Local women also wear modified folk dresses, which are made from the same fabric with the same patterns, though the design may be quite modern.

The study's findings indicate that the social environment habit has unconsciously influenced the trend of Muslim clothing wear and the role of public figure. According to

the findings of the research, Indonesia has shaped a style and Muslim design clothing (Prasetyawati & Sitinjak, 2022). For Tajik students, the large number of Muslim citizens influences the clothes they wear to feel at home in their own country. As a predominantly Muslim country, Indonesia and Tajikistan share many characteristics. The majority of Muslim women wear headscarves in public places, not just mosques, schools, or colleges. However, the hijab worn varies to cover the hair and is usually a long hijab (syar'i), covered up to the shoulders, and some are styled like a hood with a little hair visible. This woman's dress style is almost the same as women in Indonesia. The sameness of fashion style make Tajik students feel at home in Indonesia

Conclusion

Tajik students who come to Indonesia as international students must engage in intercultural communication with Indonesians. Tajik students' similarities to Indonesian culture in terms of religion, religious practice, and ritual, as well as fashion style, make Tajik students more adaptable to Indonesian culture. Learning the Indonesian language and being fluent in English will greatly improve intercultural communication. Tajik students are more likely to be interested in low-contact communication, patriarchal systems, collectivism, and value feminism.

Food and climate differences can cause culture shock. "Life only comes around once, so we must enjoy it," one approach to dealing with social and cultural issues. The presence of students assigned as companions greatly aids the adaptation process.

Participating actively in cultural exchange activities, community events, and

festivals allows Tajik students in Indonesia to broaden their understanding of Indonesian culture, meet new people, and strengthen connections. Understanding and respecting Indonesian cultural norms, values, and practices is critical for successful adaptation. Tajik students learn about Indonesian customs, traditions, and social etiquette in order to better navigate social interactions.

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