

Understanding Intercultural Communication Challenge of Indonesian PhD Muslim female students in the US and Australia as Transnationals

Win Listyaningrum Arifin
Universitas Gadjah Mada
arifinwiwin@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the identity process done by Indonesian PhD Muslim female students in the US and Australia due to their intercultural communication's life as transnationals. Therefore, they face not only the language hardship but also the newest environments challenge as Muslim women and Indonesian both in the campus and in the society. Stereotype, stigmatization, discrimination, and other form of oppressions appear in relation to their visual identity.

By applying Stella Ting-Toomey' Identity Negotiation Theory, the study is done to meet the answers for the following question: (1) How far is the influence of the intercultural communication of these students living in a country? and (2) To what extent does intercultural communication effectiveness influence the success of these students?

This study is a qualitative approach using two different techniques of data collection i.e. virtual ethnography to obtain data from the US and ethnography in Australia. Similar treatments were used by asking the respondents to take notes or video taking from the issues, questionnaires fillings, and interviews. The Skype interviews were used for respondents in the US while direct interviews were conducted to respondents in Australia.

Keywords: *intercultural communication, educated Muslim women. transnationals*

Introduction

Globalisation has influenced people's ways of thinking. Among its positive global effects, it has motivated people particularly educated individuals to get involved in international education system by obtaining scholarships to pursue study outside their home countries. Surprisingly, it also opens wide opportunities for both males and females. This has enabled people from developing countries such as Indonesia to obtain scholarships in affluent countries like the US and Australia. They challenge themselves to secure donors from the host countries or from the Indonesian government especially from the ministries.

To journey from a developing country like Indonesia to pursue study in developed and well-known countries such as the US and Australia is a blessing. Applicants must be

academically and mentally prepared to pursue qualifications. Aside from financial benefits, to be graduated from a wealthy nation's universities helps secure future employments for the awardees. They have more bargaining positions in sectors they choose. For both parties, the host universities and the awardees, the international scholarship creates financial reward.

This also challenges the Indonesian Muslim women to compete in obtaining scholarships. As part of South East Asia countries with the urge to attain a better level of national education, Indonesian Muslim female students become a certain cohort of students from developing country to seek equality under the name of education. In Australia for instance, Indonesian students both males and females occupy a higher proportion of student numbers than other SEA countries. The feature seems different in the US.

Indonesian PhD Muslim female students as international students (transnationals) represent communities who live temporarily in a culturally different country. Like other international students, they face problems concerning their personal, cultural, and social identity that force them to engage in intercultural communication to be accepted in the host country. But due to their gender and religion, they face challenges that many other international students do not.

Previous studies reveal only the narrative life of international students (as being conducted by Amirul Mukminin, 2013)¹ where Indonesians might be participants of these studies, but there are no other studies that focus exclusively on Indonesian Muslim female students as the respondents. Further, those studies do not show how communication problems may influence the success of Indonesian Muslim women in both academic and social life.

Problems arise when students lack capacity for language competence in the field of intercultural communication. Respondents can also lack awareness and skill dealing with the communication gap. Thus, this study explores the problems that result from the internal and external challenges faced by these specific students. I examine the influence of intercultural communication knowledge, awareness, and skill on the success of the students in both academic and social life while they stay in a center of question when Islam is globally stigmatized. Furthermore, I investigate the strategies revealed by those students in dealing with problems.

To initiate this study, I proposed the following questions: how far is the influence of the intercultural communication of these students living in a country? and To what extent does intercultural communication effectiveness influence the success of these students?

To get a clear picture on problems faced by these international students, I argue that the most significant problems faced by these PhD Indonesian Muslim women students in the US and Australia in dealing with their identity negotiation come from internal causes (personal matters) rather than from the external (the environment), and ability in intercultural communication helps students to succeed.

¹ Mukminin, Amirul. (2013). *From East to West: A Phenomenological Study of Indonesian Graduate Students*. Electronic Dissertation. The Graduate School: Florida State University Libraries.

Research Method

This study is a qualitative descriptive study to investigate the problems experienced by Indonesian female Muslim students in the US and Australia dealing with their first year intercultural communication processes and problems both in the academic and social settings.

The research design uses: 1) virtual ethnography for respondents in the US located at Albany University, Boston University and Northern Illinois University: correspondence was undertaken via Skype for business, email, and WhatsApp, and 2) ethnography for respondents in Australia located at Australian National University, Melbourne University, Monash University, and Western Sydney University. Data collection approach was similar for both cohorts i.e. audio/video diary tape. Virtual ethnography is still a new approach to research culture of a certain phenomenon by using online or digital social media. This is used due to certain consideration e.g. the time limitation to conduct questionnaires/interviews that cannot be conducted face to face, the research is not burdened by the digital network and the flow reduced cost of research. However, the research should also meet criterias e.g. the deal for consent form which is used to ask permission from the sample to get involve in the research. The participants were pseudonymous to meet code of ethics. I selected students in each university using a purposive sampling technique to explore the dynamics of individual exposure during their study in overseas' university. The targeted students were those who were active socially and academically.

Indonesian PhD Muslim female students' personal life is included in their social situation as this is a part of their individual condition. Some of them are married with children, some are married with no children, and the rest are unmarried. Thsesse married students' conditions are also varied. Some are accompanied by the husband while others are not. This range of students' characteristics presented different strategies for dealing with their intercultural communication

The choice to use these students is because they represent unique temporary transnationals with double responsibilities both as students and as mothers (or single) who are responsible for managing domestic lives. In most of families in Indonesia, husbands and wives go hand in hand in the child-rearing and domestic duties. In modern families, though the wives decide to have career, the husbands support them as long as the domestic duties are handled well. Thus, good and well-maintained communication between husbands and wives are very important. In the child-rearing. However, these students who are married with no children also describe different features. In addition, the contradictory situation is seen from students with single status.

This paper only describes only revealed 3 respondents who were styudying in the US and 2 respondents who were studying in Australia. Many respondents involved in this study experienced obstacles in both university and social lives during the first year living overseas made it difficult for them to fully participate in this study.

Discussion and Finding

Many studies investigate the experiences of international students overseas. Typically, findings are generalised for males and females but they did not specifically investigate the lives of Indonesian Muslim women students.

Studying overseas does not mean that these international students are ready for the exposure to new environment situations. Most of these students are still bound to their nations and not ready to embrace their status as transnationals. This is consistent with what has been found by Weis and Ford (2011).² First year experience of pursuing studies overseas is always described as the toughest time. Thurber and Walton (2012)³ point out that first year college or university students face significant transition issues from living in home countries to host countries. Though this situation may not be experienced by all foreign students, I concur that most of them have been in this situation no matter the level of preparation.

The situation of these students should be taken into account. Many reports state that host countries' students do not like to communicate with international students (Hotta and Ting Toomey, 2013)⁴. This makes these transnationals feel alienation (Klomegah, 2006)⁵, marginalisation (Brown, 2009)⁶, discrimination, and other forms of rejection that drive them to feel loneliness (Sawir et. al, 2008)⁷ which can escalate to feeling of helplessness (Klomegah, 2006).⁸

The unknown situations lead these students to find comfort by only developing conational engagement with friends from similar countries to form mono-cultural interaction (Li & Zizzi, 2018).⁹ Most of them choose this tight-knit home community to reduce homesickness. To note, homesickness is a severe problem faced by most international students. Thurber and Malton (2012)¹⁰ state that all people who live far from home will miss something about home. They add that this feeling may be painful and debilitating. However, this may generate another problem as the pupils will not be able to get along with people from different backgrounds. Hendrickson et. al. (2011)¹¹ state that having conational interaction will cause the students to miss out on opportunities for intercultural communication and hinder their acculturation. Their attachment with host students, in fact, will give benefits to these students in terms of improving language and social communication, adjustments that

² Weiss, M.L. & Ford, M. (2011). Temporary transnationals: South East Asian students in Australia. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. 41: 2. 229-248.

³ Thurber, C.A. & Malton, E.A. (2012). Homesickness and adjustment in university students. *Journal of American College Health*. 60: 5, 415-419.

⁴ Hotta, J & Ting-Toomey, S. (2013). Intercultural adjustment and friendship dialectics in international students: A Qualitative study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 37 (5), 550-566.

⁵ Klomegah, R. Y. (2006). Social factors relating to alienation experienced by international students in the United States. *College Student Journal*, 40(2), 303.

⁶ Brown, L. (2009). An ethnographic study of the friendship patterns of international students in England: An attempt to recreate home through conational interaction. *International Journal of Education Research*, 48(3), 184-193.

⁷ Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C., & Ramia, G. (2008). Loneliness and international students: An Australian study. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 12 (2), 148–180.

⁸ Klomegah, *Social factors relating to alienation experienced by international students in the United States*.

⁹ Li, Shuang & Zizzi, S. (2018). A case of international students' social adjustment, friendship development, and physical activity. *Journal of International Studies*, Vol 8, Issue 1, 2018, 389-401.

¹⁰ Thurber, et al, *Homesickness and adjustment in university students*.

¹¹ Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D., & Aune, R. K. (2011). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(3), 281–295.

lead to meaningful overseas experiences (Hendrickson et al, 2011).¹² Language gap, even though the international students have passed the English proficiency test, also becomes a primary factor in why some sojourners fail in the communication phase within the campus and social life. Lack of English competence, especially in the daily communication, may indicate the failure of the students' progress (Li and Kaye, 1998).¹³ Though this is not a generalisation, I argue that one major cause for this is because these students, are not used to initiating conversations with speakers of other languages. This is not a matter of gender but it closely relates to the cultural intake.

Culture shock is mostly experienced by these sojourners when they stay in unfamiliar environments. Zhou et al. (2008) added that most students experienced this culture shock in English speaking countries.¹⁴ In their conclusion, they state that there should be institutional policies to guide and support these students that accommodate them into good practices in very different culture in the form of pre and post departure preparation. The preparation positively helps the students to maintain situations caused by culture shock. The question on the personal background relate to their religion as Muslim and veiled women should also be taken into account as they spent days in countries where Islam is negatively perceived. This challenge also support the culture shock as they must clarify many questions that drive to other forms of social rejections as discrimination, stereotype, alienation, and so on.

Later, the success of these students in both academic and social life should also be supported by the local students. Local students may help these educated transnationals by supporting the social integration. Research by Snell and Zhou (2015)¹⁵ indicates how the acculturation between the host and foreign students through Facebook (or other forms of social media) becomes the bridge to communication as this social media is the dominant means of communication between youths. I strongly support this finding. Social media becomes a form of effective language practice through chatting and providing comments.

The cultural, the socio-cultural, the psycho-cultural and the environment influence the effectiveness of intercultural communication. The effectiveness/success of intercultural communication depends on the motivation, knowledge, and skill of the students in the forms of strategies they have found during the interaction. In addition, to get a clear understanding about the issues in this paper, some operational definitions from the literature are provided.

Educated Transnational Indonesian PhD Muslim women

Most of muslim women wear veil to cover thier hair. Unfortunately, Islamophobia has influenced the position. The choice to have veil on them may create many narratives either pros and cons. For these veiled muslim women, they have practiced the schema as religious

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Li, R.Y. & Kaye, K. (1998). Understanding overseas students concerns and problems. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*. 20: 1, 41-50.

¹⁴ Zhou, Youfang et al. (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*. 33: 1, 63-75.

¹⁵ Snell, K. & Zhou, C. (2015). Predicting acculturative orientations of American College Students toward international students. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 44: 3, 179-200.

women who try to fulfill the command from Alloh. Mahmood in Rinaldo (2014)¹⁶ states that religious practices such as veiling are not a means of gaining something outside religion but are done to fashion oneself as a good religious subject. Mahmmod perspective invites feminists to rethink on their view about veil for muslim women. As people understand in general, many feminists state that forcing muslim women to put on veil means break these women freedom toward their own body.

The recent phenomenon in Indonesia, many muslim women put on veils is not only about fulfilling religious call but also veil becomes trend of fashions in both cities and villages. Modern veil fashion in Indonesia gains popularity after many Indonesian veil designers have involved in many fashion exhibitions both nationally and internationally. Moreover, Indonesian veil fashion has become the center mode for muslim women fashion in the world. This is a blessing for Indonesia as the first majority Muslim community in the globe.

Though the previous scene is not the cause of the birth of Muslim feminist, this special feminist try to interpret the call to have veil for muslim women by using an emphasis on contextual interpretation (Rinaldo, 2014: 833).¹⁷ The shift of veil interpretation has opened the public eye about Islam and women. The dynamics of the world has also given opportunities for Muslim women to show their potentials that can be mutually done in many aspects of life. Generally, making good clarification using good language and gesture is one of them. Showing good deed in the community is also one of examples to open public eye that Islam in general and Muslim women is specific is not to their narrow understanding. This is actually the task of Muslim women who get involved in international education as the agents for Islam maintenance.

By pursuing education in a new country, the international students are engaging intercultural connection with new people and places. Weiss and Ford (2011)¹⁸ define international students as an unusual form of diaspora. They argue that international students negotiate national and international identities in complex ways. They may best be described as “cosmopolitan locals” for their mix of agency as (upwardly) mobile, educated citizens and liminality in inherently temporary, subject positions, clearly identified with a nation-state in which they choose not to reside presently. Products of a particular stage in global economic neo-liberalism, the rapidly expanding ranks of international students present a distinctive diasporic community, important not just for education and employment markets, but for their particular mobilisational potential – a potential that is not, however, at least for Southeast Asians studying in the US and Australia necessarily always reached. Thus, I agree with their statement about the situation of these students - whether they are merely transnational, truly internationalist or something in between - and how that placement affects their capacity for activism. Transnational relationships are viewed as important factors for the international students both for their well-being and learning in the host country.

¹⁶ Rinaldo, Rachel. 2014. Pious and critical: Muslim women activist and the question of agency. *Gender and Society*. Vol 28 No. 6, December 2014, 824-846.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Weiss, et al, *Temporary transnationals: South East Asian students in Australia*.

Intercultural communication

Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2015)¹⁹ state that communication competence or effectiveness has been investigated in multiple intercultural communication contexts. With another colleague, Ting-Toomey and Chung (2004) state that understanding Intercultural communication offers a comprehensive look at the foundational concepts of the discipline. They offer a more practical nature of the intercultural communication field by encouraging students to think critically by asking thought-provoking questions and posing intercultural ethical dilemmas for students to ponder.

Ting-Toomey (2007)²⁰ suggests that a competent intercultural communicator should have four abilities, i.e. ability to manage change and transition; ability to be reflexive about self and also organizational ethnocentric tendencies; ability to develop dynamic, hybrid, and communication styles; and ability to code verbal switching verbal and nonverbal styles within particular cultural and workplace (here university lives) situations and interaction goals' analysis .

Ting-Toomey (1999)²¹ then differentiates identities into two which are primary identity and secondary identity. Some examples of primary identity are: race, ethnic, cultural identity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, spiritual identity, physical/mental abilities, generation, language, age, social class, family role, relationship identity, professional role, and salient individual attributes passions, etc. Meanwhile, she mentions some examples of secondary identity include personal habits, recreational habits, educational experience, and secondary work role.

She adds also two approaches in intercultural communication which she divides into a monologue approach that covers self-interest focus, emphasize positional difference, fixed objectives, and win-lose to lose-lose outcome. The monologue approach should be altered into a dialogue approach that covers mutual-interest focus, emphasizes common ground and reframe, and creates creative options and win-win synergetic outcome (Ting-Toomey, 1999).²²

Later, she proposes how to be a mindful intercultural communicator who should be able to develop appropriate and effective intercultural verbal and nonverbal interaction skills; flows with adjustment changes, transition, and ambiguities in the unfamiliar cultural community; understands deeply the unfamiliar cultures' beliefs, value systems, and communication styles; deepens cultural/ethnic self-awareness and other awareness and systems-level communication issue; and is fully-Present and In-the-moment (Ting-Toomey, 1999).²³

Problems in the intercultural communication

As has been noted for many years, language is the core point of communication. This has been universally declared by people who engage in communication. The communication

¹⁹ Ting-Toomey, S & Dorjee, T. (2015). Intercultural and intergroup communication competence: toward an integrative perspective. *Research Gate*. 503-538.

²⁰ Ting-Toomey, S. (2007). Intercultural conflict training: Theory-Practice approaches and research challenges. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 36(3), 255-271

²¹ Ting-Toomey, Stella. (1999). *Communicating Across Cultures*. New York, London: The Guilford Press.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

may often fail when the understanding and the message of the communication is lack of language competence. Communication is not always easy even when the participants come from a similar culture. Thus, communication will be more difficult if the participants come from a different background. This is why knowing barrier in intercultural communication is the first and the best way to overcome the rising problems. Problems which exist in intercultural communication are: language difference; body language; level of context; negative stereotypes and prejudices; and feeling and emotions. However, there are many other barriers highlighted by other scholars.

Language difference is the common prevailing feature of communication gap. Participants of the communication will not achieve similar message when they stand with different language. To be noted, language is a part of distinguished cultural identity of a person who stays in a certain place and it is impossible to expose the use of similar language to others whose cultural identities are quite different. In order to have a similar picture during the communication, the use of similar language is very highly recommended.

Some experts state that the different language competence during the communication can be minimized by using body language. But again, only few body languages have similarities in meaning among many different languages in the world. Common body languages only help a little amount of the meanings in the communication. Cultures in most English speaking countries such as the US and Australia have low level of context to state explicit meaning while most of Asian cultures are more high level in context. Low context level is a straight forward and honest gesture and meaning about certain message in communication.

The most common feature on culture difference is on negative perspective/ stereotypes. People from certain culture might be too offensive and proud of self-belief. This is then what is called ethnocentrism that states someone's culture is superior than others. In terms of communication, English deficiency will lead people from English speaking countries to make an unfair prejudice to people outside the culture. This might result in anxiety for lack of strong English competence to get involved in communication and try to pull back themselves from any communication situation that forces them to speak up in the language. They are less likely use the language as they still face the language gap.

Findings

I asked permissions by sending sending consent forms to the respondents to make their daily live diary audio-video tape via email, Facebook messenger, and WhatsApp. They shared information about their situation in their first year. Though the diary tape also showed features of their daily lives, the communication via social media was more intense. As a partial student at ANU was also beneficial. At least, my living here as a temporary student for one year helped me to understand my respondents' situations. Sometimes, we shared similar experiences about friendship with other international students when we discussed about the research themes, obstacles in a new environment, communication gap with other students, and the community.

This paper only focused on the results from the diary tape in form of video-audio sent by the respondents based on the the research guidelines concerning about their effective intercultural communication during their stay. The results show some internal

and external problems they face during the intercultural communication process along with their triggering factors. After sending some consent infoms and guidelines to several respondents in the US and Australia, some respondents had returning back their responds in videos and tapes. The respondents were reached by some friends from similar scholarship and colleagues. Here, I only display three students in the US and two students in Australia.

Nurul from Central Java studies in the US. When she first came to the US, she felt confused by the language though her English proficiency test was very high. She felt lost in translation when she had to open a conversation about some information with her new American friends. During the first two months of academic life, she only went out to sit in the class. She preferred to stay in her room and started feeling lonely (Sawir et. al., 2008)²⁴ and homesick (Thurber & Walton, 2012).²⁵ She thought that she was not in the right place while the scholarship salary was still limited for her daily needs. She did not know who and where to ask for help as there were no other Indonesians in her department, hence she felt of helpless (Klomegah, 2006).²⁶ She only kept smiling with everyone she met without words. She often doubled the prayers as she did not know the place to perform prayers. She felt of being alienated (Klomegah, 2006)²⁷, marginalized (Brown, 2009)²⁸, discriminated (Sawir et. al., 2000)²⁹ as she had no friends in the campus who wanted to open communication with her. She then met some other Indonesians to get social support as they came from similar country (this situation is caleed mono-cultural interaction by Li & Zizzi, 2018).³⁰ She then found out that all the feelings she had were caused by her own intepretation of her new environment. Some Indonesians advised her that those feelings were common during the first year experience living overseas (Thurber & Walton, 2012).³¹ Those feelings were part of culture shock (Zhou et. al., 2008).³² She then found out that the importance of attachment and interaction with other local students and values to solve her miscomfort situation. She found that stigmatization was only her own unpredictable thinking as the people in the host country were no longer concern about the difference on race, religion, ethnicity, etc. The poeple there were quite moderate. Though there were some friends asked her about having veiled for Muslim women, she had answered diplomatically that it was not only about a duty but also about to have safety as a woman. It was also her challenge to answer the question about Islam and women, even about her country Indonesia, as she was the only Indonesian in her department.

Nurina is studying in the US. She was fortunate as her family accompanied them. Her husband was a freelance consultant in Indonesia that allowed him to accompany his wife and children. Both Nurina and her husband shared responsibility to take care of

²⁴ Sawir, et al, *Loneliness and international students: An Australian study*.

²⁵ Thurber, et al, *Homesickness and adjustment in university students*.

²⁶ Klomegah, *Social factors relating to alienation experienced by international students in the United States*.

²⁷ *ibid*.

²⁸ Brown, L. (2009). An ethnographic study of the friendship patterns of international students in England: An attempt to recreate home through conational interaction. *International Journal of Education Research*, 48(3), 184-193.

²⁹ Sawir, et al, *Loneliness and international students: An Australian study*.

³⁰ Li, Shuang & Zizzi, S. (2018). A case of international students' social adjustment, friendship development, and physical activity. *Journal of International Studies*, Vol 8, Issue 1, 2018, 389-401.

³¹ Thurber, et al, *Homesickness and adjustment in university students*.

³² Zhou, et al, *Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education*.

domestic chores and children raising. Fortunately, Nurina's husband was graduated from well-known university in Singapore. This became a social capital for him to have a new life in the US. However, this was Nurina's first time to study in the US. Her husband always gave her supports of what sort of problems might be experienced by the international students. Though, he worked in the US, he took care of house and children's school time while Nurina should concentrate with her education. He taught her about his previous experiences about academic and social life. Though, the situation was slightly different but this helped Nurina to make strategies when she was in a troubled situation due to her studying and social life. She felt fortunate to have a supportive husband and wonderful children who were easily adjusting with the new environment. Indeed, she faced a bit stressful with her financial matter that forced her husband to work. She also felt to have communication gap that made her academic record failed. Her lack of exposure in using English drove her to have bad student's progress (Li & Kaye, 1998).³³ Fortunately, she came to her supervisor about her academic profile. She also asked some other students who had similar condition. Her open communication helped her to solve her problems. She had many friends from different backgrounds after she was success with her intercultural communication problems. During the discussion, some friends asked her personal background as Muslim women and Indonesia. She thought that stigmatization on Islam from the West did not occur in her environment though the question for her about being veiled educated woman once happened during her conversation with local people. Indeed, she could explain the question by giving good response.

Salma is studying in a well-known university in the US. Once she reached the US, she should stay in a student accomodation while she was seeking a house to bring her children and husband. After staying for 3 months, she brought her family in a house. She has two teenagers children. Unfortunatly, her husband and two children found it difficult as they lack of English competence. She felt of having negative attachment to the situation as her family was not ready for the overseas exposure. She was struggling to prepare her family to get along with the situation that sometimes drove debates with her husband. She felt guilty that this also influenced her academic progress (Li & Kaye, 1998).³⁴ She realized that her family was her big concern that both academic and social life as well as her family's condition must be in balance situation. She told me that the children's teenage life also influenced her as she found out that the children imitate their friends at school whereas to her it was like rebel deeds. She then discussed with her husband and then went to some friends They then came to a solution that the communication between parents and children should be reshaped. This took several months that also influenced Salma's academic progress. She came to her supervisor, lecturers and academic staffs to manage her academic results and to have chances to remake her records. She once experienced the situation on being stigmatized by other Asians, not Americans, of being Muslim. However, she was able to answer about terrorists, bombs, gun shooting, circumcision for women, veil, and the like. She answered the questions properly and the discussion never ended to such long and bothering one.

Meanwhile, Nuril from South Sulawesi studies in Australia. She got a scholarship in a big and well-known university in Australia after finishing her master in the US. But still,

³³ Li, and Kaye. *Understanding overseas students concerns and problems*.

³⁴ *Ibid*.

being far from home was a matter as she left her two children at home while her husband couldn't leave his work. She then became frustrated and started blaming herself. She felt homesickness (Thurber & Walton, 2012)³⁵, and loneliness for feeling guilty over her children (Sawir et. al, 2008).³⁶ She thought that she was too egoistic that made a negative place attachment. It happened until one year that she had to return to Indonesia to ask the family to Australia. Again, her husband refused. She then, asked a relative to accompany her in the child-rearing. This was not simple as she had to train the children and the relative about Australia life while she was still struggling. This made her depressed as her academic and social life became bad (Li & Kaye, 1998).³⁷ She tried to make list of problems she had and asked many friends and her supervisor. She was then able to figure out her unstable academic life. To her, living in Australia is better than in the US where the people were not suspicious with her dress. It was also easier to get musholla and Islamic gathering and halal food. There were many Indonesian who became her conational support system. The Islam stigmatization was not a big matter as there were many other Indonesian veiled muslim women who were taking education in this country.

Another story is revealed by Nurma who is single. She received her master degree in the US. Now, she is enrolling her PhD education in Australia. To her, living overseas without any family support is something common. Once she reached Australia, she felt excited as she could find many other Indonesian students. She followed Indonesian gathering but she then realized that her study was totally important. She then challenged herself not to rely on the support from other Indonesians. She declined to participate in social gatherings as many Indonesians asked about her status which made her uncomfortable. Though, she has experiences living in the US but she still felt loneliness (Sawir et.al, 2008)³⁸ and homesickness for two months (Thurber & Walton, 2012).³⁹ Dealing with her intercultural communication, she applied her understanding about living overseas as international student. She followed many seminar and workshops that delivered her to meet other local and international students. However, she felt that what she had done was not enough as she has low self-confidence to engage in communication. She felt that she needed to formulate her situation. Then, she always went to her lecturers and supervisors when she had problem concerning about her study. To her, the education system in Australia is similar to in the US. Thus, she did not find any academic difficulty. She stated that challenges were something beneficial for the future of the students as mental exposures. She informed that Islam in Australia was not a big issue as there were many Muslim immigrants who stayed in many big cities in Australia especially in a certain places in Sydney, NSW. Australians were quite permissive toward veiled Muslim women that made these special women were confidence in both academic and social life.

The internal and external problems faced by the students

Internal problems with social life on campus and in the wider society at the beginning were: the feeling of being discriminated against, self-isolation, language gap, and low self-

³⁵ Thurber, et al, *Homesickness and adjustment in university students*.

³⁶ Sawir, et al, *Loneliness and international students: An Australian study*.

³⁷ Li, and Kaye, *Understanding overseas students concerns and problems*.

³⁸ Sawir, et al, *Loneliness and international students: An Australian study*.

³⁹ Thurber, et al, *Homesickness and adjustment in university students*.

confidence. Meanwhile, internal problems in academic life were caused by the language gap: among students, student-lecturers, student-supervisors, student-academic staff, and dealing with a different education system.

The readiness of the students to study abroad that meets the psychological exposures is very crucial matter that should be taken into account. The psychological exposures here are like obstacles that might be faced by the psychological students' situations as fears of being discriminated, alienated, left-behind, and so on.

Meanwhile, the external problems as Muslim women included: finding prayer sites (specifically finding proper place to take ablution); halal food availability; being forced to answer questions on the jilbab as symbol (not so much in campus life but in the broader society), on being pious Muslim women, and on being educated Indonesian Muslim women.

These female students who were married also face problems. Their spouses and children mostly lacked English language proficiency. They had to provide understanding to the families about the importance of communication. This situation also influenced these students' achievement. There were also some female students whose husbands could not accompany them while the children were with them. They also had problems with their children. The children found it difficult to make adjustments that asked them to always communicate with the teachers.

Some children also tended to pay little attention during the religious gatherings. They rarely stayed calm during the prayer congregation and other types of Islamic activities. Meanwhile, the Islamic gatherings were successful to make the parents (the female students), whilst the children seemed unhappy during the gatherings. This showed that the Islamic transmission to the children living overseas seems a contrast picture with their life before. The children have friends to interact with and engage with different values and attitude which may be not be in line with the Islamic values as advocated in the Islamic religious context and doctrines and in the teaching of the parents. Though the recent situation in host country cannot be stated as something negative, the parents are not well-prepared with this situation that may lead to negative child-rearing process.

The success of intercultural communication of the students.

The Indonesian Muslim female students were able to develop strategies to address intercultural communication problems after they experienced their situation while studying abroad. The experiences drove them to acknowledge skills they had to use in dealing with problems such as finding some friends to talk with including both Indonesian friends and local friends, communicating about academic matters with lecturers, supervisors, and academic staffs, opening communication with local people to ask sort of information in the society such as the halal food court, the prayer site, or the recreational place, the good educational institution, and so on. Their engagement in religious and social activities gave them support that impacted on their academic and social life. They stated that the first year was always difficult especially for the students who brought their family.

From the diary tape it can be concluded that the following general problems are faced in the beginning phase: homesickness, loneliness, negative place attachment, culture shock, and financial problems. Their internal problems with social life on campus and in the wider society at the beginning were: the feeling of being discriminated against, self-isolation,

language gap, and low self-confidence. Moreover, internal problems in academic life were caused by the language gap: among students, student – lecturers, student – supervisors, student – academic staff, and dealing with a different education system.

On the other hand, external problems as Muslim women included: prayer sites (including taking ablution); halal food availability; answering questions on jilbab for pious Muslim women, and on being educated Muslim women.

Conclusion

To conclude, Indonesian Muslim female students tend to construct their understanding on different cultures by undertaking acculturation, socialization, interaction, and other forms of social exposure with the host countries. These can be achieved when these students can accomplish communicative competence through language exposure. Again, all problems can be communicated. Dorjee and Ting Toomey (2015)⁴⁰ suggest Intercultural communication competence is achieved by making internal frame and external code switching to gain a productive and satisfied message between communicators. The competence of the sojourners will also be noted by strategies they make after getting along with the local people that force them to internalize knowledge and skill of communication during the interaction. Creative strategies resulted from problems by the students are the implementation of knowledge, awareness, and skill they achieved after experiencing intercultural communication exposures.

Language is a crucial element of communication. People will fall through the gaps if they do not start to communicate their difference with other people from different backgrounds. This is the aim of intercultural communication. Indonesian female Muslim students who study overseas are also agents of transnational who can voice what Muslims and Indonesians are. The problems, both internal and external, can be diminished if they start thinking about the importance of mindful intercultural communication competence to negotiate their identities in the forms of communication strategies.

Bibliography

- Brown, L. (2009). An ethnographic study of the friendship patterns of international students in England: An attempt to recreate home through conational interaction. *International Journal of Education Research*, 48(3), 184-193.
- Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D., & Aune, R. K. (2011). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(3), 281-295.
- Homerin, Emil Th. (2006). *Islam: What It Is and How It Has Interacted With Western Civilization*. In Jacob Neusner (Ed.). *Religious Foundation of Western Civilization: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. USA: Abingdon Press.
- Hotta, J & Ting-Toomey, S. (2013). Intercultural adjustment and friendship dialectics in international students: A Qualitative study. *International Journal of Intercultural*

⁴⁰ Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, *Intercultural and intergroup communication competence: toward an integrative perspective*.

- Relations*, 37 (5), 550-566.
- Klomegah, R. Y. (2006). Social factors relating to alienation experienced by international students in the United States. *College Student Journal*, 40(2), 303.
- Li, R.Y. & Kaye, K. (1998). Understanding overseas students concerns and problems. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*. 20: 1, 41-50.
- Li, Shuang & Zizzi, S. (2018). A case of international students' social adjustment, friendship development, and physical activity. *Journal of International Studies*, Vol 8, Issue 1, 2018, 389-401.
- Mahmood, Saba. (2005). *The politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Mukminin, Amirul. (2011). *From East to West: A Phenomenological Study of Indonesian Graduate Students*. Electronic Dissertation. The Graduate School: Florida State University Libraries.
- Rinaldo, Rachel. (2014). Pious and critical: Muslim women activist and the question of agency. *Gender and Society*. Vol 28 No. 6, December 2014, 824-846.
- Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C., & Ramia, G. (2008). Loneliness and international students: An Australian study. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 12 (2), 148–180.
- Snell, K. & Zhou, C. (2015). Predicting acculturative orientations of American College Students toward international students. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 44: 3, 179-200.
- Thurber, C.A. & Malton, E.A. (2012). Homesickness and adjustment in university students. *Journal of American College Health*. 60: 5, 415-419.
- Ting-Toomey, Stella. (1999). *Communicating Across Cultures*. New York, London: The Guilford Press.
- Ting-Toomey, S. (2007). Intercultural conflict training: Theory-Practice approaches and research challenges. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 36(3), pp. 255-271
- Ting-Toomey, S & Dorjee, T. (2015). Intercultural and intergroup communication competence: toward an integrative perspective. *Research Gate*. 503-538.
- Zhou, Youfang et al. (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*. 33: 1, 63-75.
- Weiss, M.L. & Ford, M. (2011). Temporary transnationals: South East Asian students in Australia. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. 41: 2. 229-248.