

## Navigating Educational Crossroads: Unveiling the Cultural Journey of Indonesian Graduate Students in European Scholarship Programs

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### Abstract

This research departs from the challenges and adaptation processes undertaken by international students from Indonesia. The research aims to provide a deep understanding of the scholarship alumni in Europe's academic life during their studies. This research adopts a constructivist paradigm with a qualitative case study approach. The data collection in this research uses purposive sampling techniques with in-depth interviews and the data analysis uses thematic analysis. The subjects are European university alumni from Indonesia who have completed their studies within the past 5 years. There are four themes: study abroad fantasies, a touch of foreign cultures, academic problems and challenges, and academic strategies or solutions. There are also problems and challenges encountered such as academic constraints, stress, and weather. Scholarship alumni in Europe have strategies to adapt, such as traveling while studying, self-management, having a support system, and establishing social interaction with Indonesians. The findings and results can become a foundation document for donors, sponsors, scholarship providers, and the Indonesian Embassy in European countries in creating strategic programs as a provision for students in their studies.

**Keywords:** : academic challenges, academic strategies, cultural adaptation, cultural journey, education crossroads, education navigating

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## 1. Introduction

The lives of Indonesian students who study and live in Europe for a certain period are vulnerable to various challenges, obstacles, and adaptation processes. This research will discuss the experiences of scholarship alumni from Indonesia while continuing their studies in Europe. The focus of this research is the experience of college life and daily life of alumni of Indonesian scholarship recipients in Europe.

Indonesian students who continue their studies in Europe belong to a minority group

that must adapt to the majority group. In the era of globalization, ideally, students who continue their studies abroad get the opportunity to study between cultures, but they do not automatically master intercultural interaction. The process of intercultural adaptation is an interactive process that develops through communication between individuals, including (God & Zhang, 2019; Otten, 2003) the adjustment of communication patterns between migrants and their new socio-cultural environment (Turistiati, 2019; Zakaria et al, 2022).

This process of intercultural adaptation is also not without challenges. These challenges are characterized by cultural and language differences, making it difficult to adjust, causing misunderstandings, anxiety, loneliness, or cultural stuttering, experiencing hostility and discrimination, and psychological challenges (Geary, 2016; Gong et al., 2021; Otten, 2003; Pacheco, 2020; Wu et al., 2015; Yan, 2018). Indonesian students who continue their studies abroad will get a pleasant experience (Lugman, 2022). However, the study also confirms that students need to be prepared for the challenges of adjusting to cultural, linguistic, and academic differences, as well as power distance degrees. The degree of power distance is behind how students act when there are cultural differences, including the hierarchical relationship between lecturers and students in the classroom (Novera, 2004).

In facing and minimizing various challenges when continuing their studies outside their home country, these students carry out an adaptation process. Cultural stuttering as one of the challenges felt by international students can be minimized with expectations that are more in line with the reality in the destination country (Pacheco, 2020). Another adaptation strategy is seeking help from colleagues and lecturers and clarifying every conversation with students or residents (Ezebilo, 2012; God & Zhang, 2019; Gong et al., 2021).

Cultural adaptation is something that international students cannot avoid when going abroad to continue their studies (Gong et al., 2021; King & Bailey, 2021; Leung & Yu, 2022). Intercultural differences are closely related to students' daily lives and lecture activities (Gong et al., 2021; Leung & Yu, 2022; Ishartono et al, 2023). Intercultural communication is important for students to learn to obtain strategies to avoid adaptation

difficulties amid cultural differences (Leung & Yu, 2022; Martin & Nakayama, 2018; Samovar et al., 2013).

Cultural adaptation is seen as a long-term process by which individuals learn the context of new cultural rules to adjust and feel comfortable in a new environment (Kim, 2001, 2005; Lysgaard, 1955). A study on cultural adaptation in Norwegian students in America found that the adaptation process that takes place occurs like a U-shaped curve (Lysgaard, 1955; Hardini et al, 2022). Based on these findings, migrants (people who move to a new country) go through a fairly predictable phase in adapting to a new culture. The phases in the U-shaped curve consist of the exhilaration stage, disenchantment stage, adjustment stage, and finally effective functional stage (Samovar et al., 2013). Academic adaptability which is a theoretical assumption in this study includes academic adjustment, interaction with colleagues or lecturers, and adaptation to campus culture and environment (Syahmani et al, 2021). Researchers assume that scholarship students in Europe face cultural differences, thus encouraging them to have adaptability.

Supporting the study of cultural adaptation, previous research conveyed the theoretical framework of the cultural dimension Hofstede held the view that the work environment experienced cultural attachment, one of which was the power distance dimension (Cortina et al., 2017). Power distance refers to the imbalance of power between superiors and subordinates, teachers or lecturers and students (Chudnovskaya & Millette, 2023; Cortina et al., 2017), as well as other relationships with a strong hierarchy in an institution or organization. The concept of power distance studied focuses on the experience of scholarship recipients in Europe while undergoing lectures. Specifically, the distance

to be studied is a form of interaction between lecturers and students, both in the classroom and outside the classroom. Researchers assume that there is a difference in the degree of power distance between lecturers who teach in Europe and international students, especially in Indonesia.

The results of the discussion of several studies on the cultural challenges faced by students when studying abroad have several gaps. First, some previous research has focused on the strategic steps that must be taken by universities to facilitate international students (King & Bailey, 2021; Leung & Yu, 2022). Second, similar studies on the struggles of Indonesian students in facing challenges and cultural adaptation are still few. To fill both gaps, this study seeks to find out how international students adapt to these challenges, especially the adaptation of academic culture and daily life.

This study examines the adaptation of alumni scholarship while studying in Europe and returning to Indonesia. The cultural adaptation studied in this study departs from the experiences of scholarship alumni during the learning process in the classroom and daily life while in Europe. In terms of research subjects, researchers limit the concept of postgraduate international students to alumni of scholarship recipients in Europe who come from Indonesia. International higher education scholarships provide opportunities for students from low and middle-income countries to pursue good quality higher education abroad. After completing education in the destination country, alumni of international students receiving scholarships are assumed to develop, apply, and bring back new skills, knowledge, and attitudes gained in their home countries (Campbell et al., 2021).

The obstacles experienced by scholarship alumni are shaped by several aspects, one of which is cultural differences. These

differences include academic culture and the dimension of power distance between Indonesia and European countries. Based on this, the academic life of scholarship alumni becomes something inseparable from their daily lives. This requires scholarship alumni in Europe not only to adapt academically but also to daily life in Europe.

The purpose of this study is to describe the in-depth understanding of the lecture life of scholarship alumni in Europe during their studies, their experience in facing academic challenges, and how they interact with cultural differences. This research wants to find appropriate cultural adaptation strategies for students studying abroad. This research also provides an understanding that there is a difference in power distance between Indonesia and Europe, so students need to adapt both in academic and everyday life.

Based on the explanation above, an important element that's been a focus of research to understand the problem is cultural adaptation in academic life and daily life. This research is more relevant and important than previous research because until now many prospective postgraduate students from Indonesia are interested in continuing their studies abroad, especially in Europe (Dinata, 2022; LPDP, 2020, 2021). Previous research has mostly focused on one aspect only between obstacles of cultural differences or academic differences and has not discussed the process of cultural adaptation, especially for Indonesian students who receive scholarships studying in Europe. Therefore, this research tries to look at both aspects, cultural differences in daily life and academic life experienced by scholarship alumni in Europe. There is also not much literature or studies that discuss this, so this research can be a guide for stakeholders, such as Indonesian student organizations abroad, donors, sponsors, scholarship providers, and

the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) to introduce adaptation strategies for students while studying.

The academic contribution of this research can fill the research gaps related to culture shock and cultural adaptation that have never been done before. The experience of facing culture shock and adaptation from scholarship alumni from Indonesia while studying in European countries is a distinctiveness of research.

Meanwhile, the practical contribution of this research is used as a valid source of information for prospective international postgraduate students who receive scholarships in European countries. In addition, this research can also be useful for international student organizations from Indonesia in European countries in making strategies for preparing cultural adaptation and building strong support while studying in Europe. In terms of donors, sponsors, scholarship providers, and Embassies of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) located in European countries, this research is useful to be a basic document in creating strategic steps from the start of the university selection process until graduation, as well as being a study for monitoring students' mental health in facing cultural differences, as a preparation for Indonesian students when studying abroad.

This research brings novelty to find any cultural adaptation strategies that are applied by scholarship alumni in Europe, especially academic cultural adaptation and daily life. Researchers assume that the novelty found is in the form of the feeling of facing cultural differences and cultural adaptability experienced by scholarship students during lectures and daily life. This research also contributes to expanding our insight into the difficulties and adaptations faced by Indonesian students studying in Europe. In

addition, to the lack of studies on the experiences of Indonesian students in facing challenges and cultural adaptation, researchers try to enrich the study of the lives of Indonesian students studying abroad.

## 2. Method

This research uses the constructivism paradigm with a qualitative approach. The research strategy uses descriptive case studies that can provide an interesting format to highlight core research findings. Case studies serve more purpose than exploratory methods. In contrast to explanatory case studies, descriptive case studies focus on the uniqueness of a case and do not try to create an inferential model that can be extended to other cases (Lune & Berg, 2017). This approach aims to define a case that is limited or described to a certain parameter. Case studies also attempt to provide an in-depth understanding of a case (Creswell, 2013). This research uses a descriptive case study strategy to examine and describe the in-depth understanding of informants' experiences while studying abroad. A descriptive case study allows researchers to provide a comprehensive explanation of that phenomenon for future insight for students who want to continue their studies abroad.

We focused on the experiences of scholarship alumni from Indonesia who studied in different universities and countries in Europe, also were declared graduates between 2018 and 2022 (the last five years). We limited the scope of subject research to the scholarship alumni who completed their studies on time. We assume that students who complete their studies on time and have returned to Indonesia also have successful experiences in adapting to different cultures. The subjects of this study involved 5 (five) informants who were scholarship recipients and were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The five

informants are currently lived in Jakarta, Bekasi, and Bandar Lampung.

This study has several data sources. Primary data sources come from interviews, while secondary data sources come from observations of informants' Instagram social media accounts and literature studies. The data obtained will then be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques which then become the basis of the themes formed. Thematic analysis was carried out to identify themes that were "told" by the informants (Creswell, 2013). The aim is to determine the relationship between categories and construct several themes formed from the experiences of all informants. The interview data was transcribed, then compiled all the transcripts into a code book. Data analysis in this research was conducted by using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This process helps researchers to identify various themes that are formed using thematic analysis techniques.

The quality of research results is an important aspect of qualitative research to create trustworthiness and validity in research. The techniques for testing the validity of the research data are tested by triangulation techniques. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Carter et al., 2014). Triangulation is also seen as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from various sources. This research used the informant's social media, Instagram, for the triangulation techniques.

The research methods and techniques above can help researchers in answering research problems to examine in depth the uniqueness of each scholarship alumni expe-

rience while studying abroad. In-depth interviews combined with the triangulation method contribute to achieving the research objectives, specifically giving a comprehensive explanation of cultural adaptation strategies for students studying abroad.

### 3. Result and Discussion

The research involved 5 (five) informants who were scholarship alumni in Europe. Informant 1 is an alumnus of the Studeren in Nederland (StuNed) scholarship who studied from 2020 to 2022 in the Netherlands. Informant 2 is an alumnus of the Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP) scholarship who studied from 2016 to 2018 in the Netherlands. Informant 3 is an alumnus of the StuNed scholarship who studied from 2018 to 2020 in the Netherlands. Informant 4 is an alumnus of LPDP scholarship who studied from 2018 to 2019 in the UK. Informant 5 is an alumnus of The German Academic Exchange Service or Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) scholarship who studied from 2018 to 2020 in Germany.

Scholarship recipients have a high commitment to complete their studies on time, based on the contract that has been agreed with the scholarship institution or donor. They are also responsible for providing excellent study grades to the scholarship institution or donor. When faced with cultural differences while studying in Europe, they need to adapt so that the learning process goes well. Therefore, the researchers felt it was important to know how informants adapted to cultural differences in European countries.

Based on the results of research and interviews with 5 (five) informants of scholarship alumni in Europe, overall they faced academic life in the middle of the cultural differences in daily life. The studies conducted by scholarship recipients in Europe

are not without obstacles. They are faced with various problems and challenges which are then responded to with various strategies or solutions. In the end, when they return to Indonesia, they bring new habits that were formed while studying in Europe.

Researchers try to explain the results of the research following the themes that arise from interviews with informants. These themes include study abroad fantasies, touches of foreign cultures, academic problems and challenges, and academic strategies or solutions. A more detailed explanation related to the concepts of the theme will be explained in the section below.

#### a. The Fantasy of Studying Abroad

Based on the results of the interview, there are internal motivations and external motivations when continuing their studies in Europe. The five informants shared about their internal motivation and external motivation. There are some forms of internal motivation such as desiring to experience studying far from home, seeking experience, improving language skills, increasing knowledge, wanting to know what it feels like to live abroad, and sharpening work specialization to benefit society.

*“Because at that time, in the job regulation, there were benefits if you studied abroad. Especially at that time, I had taken intellectual property rights intending to help the promotion and marketing of Indonesian content abroad.” (Informant 4)*

External motivations are shared by the scholarship alumni, such as the presence of colleagues who are motivated to continue their studies in Europe. Another external motivation is a curriculum and reputation owned by the destination campus. This is shown by the data obtained from Informant 1.

*“Maybe I start to be motivated around four years later. Starting from some seniors (mentioning some names of colleagues who are currently or finished studying abroad) just came home, all of them are studying abroad.” (Informant 1)*

From the results of the interview, there are expectations and realities experienced while in Europe. These expectations and realities are over-expectation and under-expectation. Over-expectations such as the reality of friendship that is dominant occur with Indonesians and not with Europeans, expectations to get high scores are not as high as imagined, and expectations on the use of English are not appropriate.

*“GPA (abroad) turns out to have a range not on a scale of 1-4, but 0-10. I expected to get a GPA of 8, but then he (his friend) said getting a GPA of 8 was very difficult, GPA of 7 was already good haha. So yes, it has.” (Informant 2)*

Under-expectation is experienced when scholarship alumni face very cold or hot weather that is more than expected at the beginning of leaving for Europe. They also do not expect that there will be a lot of group work in graduate studies.

*“And I didn't have any expectations at the beginning (chuckles). I thought it would be like that, but it turns out that there are so many group projects.” (Informant 2)*

#### b. A Touch of Foreign Culture

There are stereotypes felt by scholarship alumni when they continue their studies. Their faces who represent Asian society make them considered passive and shy people. Their classmates assume that Asia people are considered too shy to ask questions during lectures, are smart in mathematics, and are weak in English writing academics. One of the scholarship alumni was even shouted at by a local person.

*"Looks like I've experienced it (experienced stereotypes). When I wanted to take the bus, I kept being cheered by, Chinese, COVID COVID. Why? I confused. Hmm, maybe it's because my face is like an Asian." (Informant 5)*

During their studies, scholarship alumni found several cultural differences that were felt both in the lecture process and in daily life. They feel the diversity of classmates' backgrounds, the habit of not talking about lectures during holidays, and the use of time when doing assignments.

*"It's really different, for them (local students) time is money because time is very valuable and precious. So, if we get group tasks, we are targeted to finish on time. It means what we must achieve, then we focus on having to solve it. I think it's different compared to Indonesia, sometimes it is a bit wasteful of time to chat or for others, it becomes less effective and efficient" (Informant 3)*

There is also an informant who finds differences in alcohol consumption patterns that are generally only consumed at night, it becomes commonplace to be consumed since noon. The use of bicycle transportation as the main transportation and the cultural differences in work life are also real.

Communication between students and lecturers goes two ways. The interaction that occurs between lectures and scholarship alumni in Europe runs dynamically. They can interrupt the conversations in class, ask lecturers, and conduct discussions outside lecture hours.

*"The interaction was surprising hmm, for example, if we want to interrupt the lecturer, we can do it at any time. So, when the lecturer is talking, then we interrupt it, no problem, just raise your hand. Yes, raise their hands, The lecturers haven't finished talking, they just interrupt it. And that's okay." (Informant 3)*

Based on information from one of the informants, students are also free to meet lecturers or professors outside of lecture hours. The meeting happens casually, unlike a formal meeting when facing a person who is higher than us.

*"So, they (lecturers and students abroad) always have two-way communication. The professor does not always present the material of the class from the beginning to the end. But they also asked for the opinions of college students. The class discussions are interactive and everyone plays a role in learning." (Informant 5)*

The interaction that occurs between scholarship alumni and lecturers does not only occur in class. The results found that lecturers can be contacted outside of lecture hours. Students who want to discuss outside lecture hours simply make an appointment with the lecturer. As confirmed by informant 5, students who want to discuss outside lecture hours simply make an appointment with the lecturer.

*"When lecturers or professors are in their room, students can go discuss directly with them. It's better to make an appointment in advance. But for example, if you don't have time to make an appointment and want to discuss, just meet in the room, casual and informal." (Informant 5)*

After returning to Indonesia, scholarship alumni in Europe brought some new habits that they got after passing the study period in Europe. Some of them continue to use the products they use in the study country, and some have unconsciously adopted relaxed or laid-back habits like people in the study country.

*"But the Englishman has a habit of laidback. Not relaxed in the sense of how it is, but how to solve problems casually. Maybe that's what makes the cave will be more laidback in the work scope or pressure, it's more like how to finish your job effectively, so don't worry too much" (Informant 4)*

Then, from the results of the study, there is also one of the alumni who became accustomed to not eating bread and not having rice to feel full.

*“Ah yes, if you don't eat rice, it doesn't matter. Now the principle is you don't have to eat rice. You can eat anything besides rice, like bread, cheese, vegetables, or any Western food. Before going abroad, eating rice is something that seems mandatory in Indonesia. It's not okay if you don't eat rice. But after returning from college (abroad), it feels no longer.” (Informant 2)*

### c. Academic Issues and Challenges

Studying in Europe is not without obstacles. The academic issues and challenges experienced by scholarship alumni can be obstacles in their lectures due to differences in learning culture with Indonesia. Based on data collected from five scholarship alumni in Europe, four scholarship alumni in Europe experienced academic obstacles. There are two academic obstacles experienced, namely internal and external obstacles. Internal constraints consist of obstacles in working on the thesis and obstacles in English.

*“The obstacles in the thesis preparation occur during the practicum process. When working on the thesis preparation, there is an experimental part. At that time, when conducting experiments, the results were not always successful. Many of my experiments failed, not according to the expected results.” (Informant 3)*

English is also an internal obstacle experienced by scholarship alumni in Europe. Some of the English language barriers experienced include listening or conversing, writing, including concerns about conveying something in English.

*“Speaking English was initially an obstacle. I sometimes get constrained when speaking English. When I hear an English conversation, I have a hard time understanding the word (with a chuc-*

*kle). Inwardly puzzled ‘What did they say?’ Sometimes I want to communicate in English, but I'm afraid of saying a wrong phrase or word” (Informant 1)*

External obstacles based on findings from interviews consist of the passive members in the project group, obstacles in finding internship places, and obstacles in implementing online lectures. One informant experienced problems while working on a group project, where the group consisted of various students from various countries. Data found in the field said that not all group members were active in discussions or task work. This is an obstacle because informants find it difficult when one group member does not contribute well and even likes to disappear during group discussions.

*“But once the group work, yes there are also those who disappear and left their work irresponsibly. This is very troublesome and disturbing for others.” (Informant 5)*

Another finding, namely obstacles when finding an internship place. One informant said that internships are part of the curriculum that students must follow in the final year. The campus gives freedom for students to find their respective internship places according to the topics mastered. Along with the internship time, the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly changed the habits of all lines of life, including the learning process and internship plans. So it was very difficult to find an internship place at that time.

*“My obstacle is to find an internship place. That's an obstacle, I have applied for maybe 30 applications. But there is no company that is interested in hiring me as their intern staff.” (Informant 3)*

The interview results revealed that several public places and campuses were closed and inaccessible during the pandemic, one of



which was the campus library. This makes it difficult for one of the scholarship alumni because they cannot access the reference resources provided by the campus library. This reference will be used as material for preparing a thesis.

*“Maybe it's because of the pandemic situation. So, I started the thesis period during the initial pandemic, in early 2020. I wonder because we don't know what's going on. Many libraries continue to close, while many journals can only be accessed on campus, using campus networking. Some places must follow the lockdown policy from the government during the COVID-19 pandemic. That situation limited our movements to find some literature in the campus facilities.” (Informant 5)*

The five informants claimed that they were able to attend lectures well, despite differences in academic culture. However, one of the informants said that she experienced excessive anxiety due to poor communication between him and his supervisor. If this is not handled properly, it can hinder the completion of the final task. While another informant said that she was stressed to the point of crying. Stress is a problem and challenge faced further by scholarship alumni in Europe. The stress occurs in the context of lectures and daily life. Even stress in their study makes the scholarship alumni in Europe cry.

*“I consulted with a psychologist to overcome my anxiety... I can't build good communication with the professor. I'm afraid that I can't finish my thesis.” (Informant 2)*

*“Hmm... Actually, not that stressful, sis. But once cried too. But I was crying because it's already overwhelming.” (Informant 1)*

In addition to the stress experienced during lectures, stress is also experienced by the informants in daily life. Scholarship alumni in

Europe had been ill while abroad and had discomfort with living conditions.

*“The challenge may be during the first four months. I don't know why, maybe because I was uncomfortable with the accommodation. I didn't like the housing neighborhood. At that time, it was just stressful for me, I really wanted to move and find another housing where the environment was comfortable.” (Informant 4)*

Weather is a new finding revealed by scholarship alumni in Europe. The weather in Europe is a problem that was not previously encountered by scholarship alumni when they studied while in Indonesia. The weather that is a problem and obstacle is cold and hot weather. Cold weather made the atmosphere of discussion in class less active, and cold weather made the mood gray or gloomy.

*“I feel that the atmosphere in the classroom is less lively when the weather is gloomy. The weather can affect a person's mood.” (Informant 1)*

Hot weather is another problem encountered when scholarship alumni in Europe study there. The hot weather according to information from scholarship alumni in Europe feels very hot and unpleasant.

*“Heatwave - this temperature can be 40C, it's hot because there is no fan, and my housing is really hot. So in the end, I went diligently to campus to do something in the cool area.” (Informant 2)*

#### **d. Academic Strategy or Solution**

During their studies, all scholarship alumni in Europe have a support system that comes from Indonesians and non-Indonesians in the country where they study. One of the scholarship alumni chose to tell the support system, who is Indonesian, to find solutions for their problems.

*"If there is a problem, sometimes I cry in front of my Indo friends. I think the existence of Indo friends is very helpful." (Informant 1)*

The other informant chose to see a professional psychologist, who is not Indonesian, to seek support in overcoming her anxiety. According to the interviews, the anxiety felt by informants was mostly caused by academic problems on campus.

*"I consulted to a psychologist (resident) to overcome anxiety. The campus facilitates students related to mental health issues." (Informant 2)*

The results of the research found that scholarship alumni in Europe had interactions with fellow Indonesian students.

*"But some Indo students are living there. We often get together like cooking, chatting, sharing, supporting each other. It's exciting to feel like you're not alone here." (Informant 3)*

In addition, some informants have interacted with Indonesians who are not students, including interacting with waiters or owners of Indonesian restaurants.

*"Where to eat? I often eat at Indo restaurants and often chat with the waiter and owner because they have known each other. So, it's fun for me when I come there, sometimes while telling stories too, continue to be given support such as motivation with the owner" (Informant 2)*

Based on the results of the interview, it was also found that all alumni of scholarship recipients fill their free time by traveling around the countries in Europe. Some of them travel abroad because the location of the country where they study is quite strategic.

*"Of course, traveling (laughs). Because Germany is quite strategic. The location is in the West. If you want to go anywhere, it's quite near." (Informant 5)*

Meanwhile, the interview results also found that there was one of the scholarship alumni in Europe who filled his spare time by watching musical performances.

*"It's a lot. I choose to travel more, travel to other cities usually. I also often watch musical performances in London." (Informant 4)*

Self-management is carried out by scholarship alumni in Europe to face daily life and lectures. One of the scholarship alumni expressed the need to learn independently about matters related to lectures.

*"Self-learn and self-study by digging myself and because I've already been a graduate student." (Informant 4)*

This research finds that one form of self-management is carried out in the form of strategies for survival in academic life. The scholarship alumni said that adaptation is an important thing to survive when studying abroad.

*"We have to adapt, follow the surrounding culture, for example drinking warm water. Everything adapts by itself, humans have a sense of survival in certain circumstances, or certain conditions." (Informant 5)*

Based on the results of interviews, it is known that each informant has a different strategy in his academic life. The strategies are built from within themselves and also help from those around them. In overcoming academic issues and challenges, self-management and building relationships with others were important, because they can help the informants adapt to their academic life. Various strategies were carried out by the five informants while studying abroad and led them to complete their studies on time.

Figure 1 is an Instagram social media screenshot of the personal account of the



dying abroad, a touch of foreign culture, academic problems and challenges, and academic strategies or solutions.

The concept of motivation to study in Europe and expectations vs the reality faced after arriving in Europe form a theme that is classified into the fantasy theme of studying abroad. The concepts of stereotypes, cultural differences, power distance, and new habits are grouped into themes of foreign cultural touch. The concept of academic constraints during lectures, stress in daily and academic

life, and the concept of European weather form the theme of academic problems and challenges. The concept of a support system, social interaction with Indonesians, traveling activities during study in Europe, and self-management owned by scholarship alumni are grouped into the theme of academic strategies or solutions. Researchers grouped the four themes above into a big theme, namely the experience of alumni scholarship recipients in Europe.

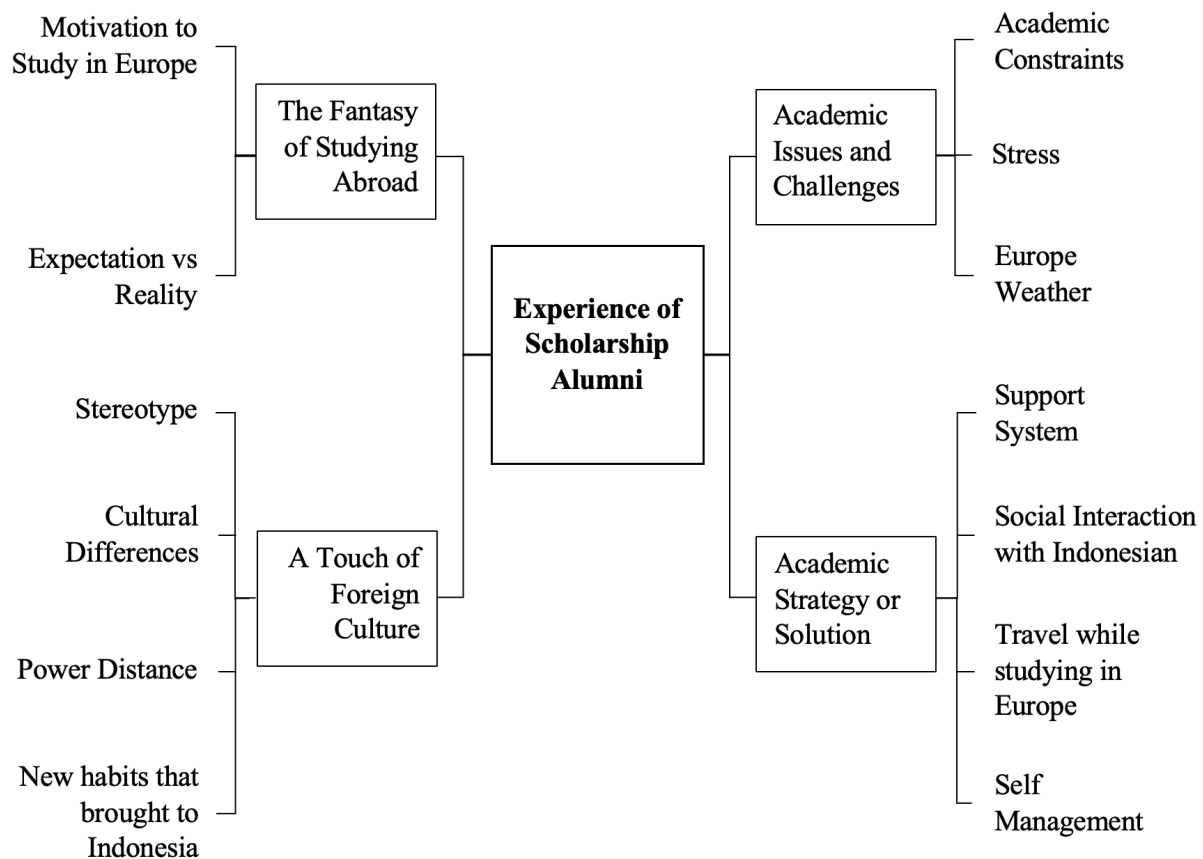


Figure 2. The Four Themes

The results of field data collection show that there is a motivation that encourages scholarship alumni to continue their studies in Europe. In addition to motivation, expectations that clash with reality are other things that are encountered and experienced by them. While studying in Europe, scholarship alumni feel a new touch through interaction

with new cultures in the destination country. Scholarship alumni in Europe also find new experiences when interacting in class with lecturers and other students. During the interaction process, there were also various academic problems and challenges encountered while studying in Europe. The scholarship alumni in Europe have carried out several strategies or

solutions to overcome these problems and challenges. This strategy or solution has indirectly formed new habits that are then carried by scholarship alumni in Europe when returning to Indonesia.

The research found that there are motivations that generate expectations from scholarship alumni in Europe. This motivation comes both from internal and external. In addition, researchers also found a clash between expectations and the reality faced by scholarship alumni in Europe. Expectations in studying abroad were previously discussed in a study conducted by Pacheco (2020) which found that cultural stuttering can be minimized if there is a match between expectations and reality. In contrast to previous research, this study found that expectations that do not match reality do not necessarily make scholarship alumni culture-shocked. These inappropriate expectations and realities are not a source of problems in college and daily life. Motivation, expectations, and reality build the fantasy of studying abroad with scholarship alumni in Europe and then becoming part of the experience during their studies.

During their studies in Europe, scholarship alumni feel a touch of foreign culture, both in college and daily life. The scholarship alumni in Europe felt the difference in power distance between Indonesia and Europe. Power distance itself has two different degrees, high power distance and low power distance (Alshahrani, 2017; Cortina et al., 2017; Hofstede et al., 2010). In this study, scholarship alumni in Europe did not feel the existence of high-power distance as felt in Indonesia. The power distance they found in Europe was so low, that the students' relationships with lecturers felt more casual. Students and lecturers can talk or discuss casually, and even students can interrupt the lecturers when teaching in class. Alumni who received scholarships in Europe explained that their lecturers are also

more flexible to meet outside the classroom, in contrast to the academic culture in Indonesia.

In daily life, interaction with the local culture provides an unpleasant experience. Previous research discussed prejudice from lecturers and local students regarding the language skills of international students (King & Bailey, 2021; Zhai & Razali, 2022). This study found something similar but in the form of stereotypes related to students' national and racial identities.

However, not all experiences related to cultural differences bring unpleasant experiences. Cultural differences also construct new habits that scholarship alumni in Europe feel when they return to Indonesia.

Academic problems and challenges in studying abroad have been discussed in some literature (Amiri & Puteh, 2018; Gong et al., 2021; Haneda, 2014; Zhai & Razali, 2022). This research finds the existence of academic constraints, stress, and weather as a background to the academic problems and challenges of scholarship alumni in Europe. There were difficulties in speaking English in previous studies (Amiri & Puteh, 2018; Haneda, 2014; Zhai & Razali, 2022), also found in this study. Some English language barriers are experienced such as difficulties in communicating and writing, and worries about conveying something in English. In addition, other obstacles that were found in this study include obstacles in working on the thesis, passivity of members in group projects, and obstacles in finding an internship. The implementation of online lectures turned out to be an obstacle felt by scholarship alumni in Europe.

According to academic obstacles, scholarship alumni in Europe also experience stress while living there. Gong et al (2021) found that differences in education and teaching systems represent academic challenges

experienced by international students. These challenges put pressure on the scholarship alumni in Europe to experience stress. From the findings of this study, there are differences in the education and teaching system between Indonesia and Europe, including too many courses and assignments and incompatibility between supervisors when preparing the thesis. These were found to be stress triggers for scholarship alumni in Europe. Further findings in the study found that there were other stressors, such as experiencing pain and discomfort with living conditions. European weather conditions were a distinctive finding that became another problem and academic challenge. Hot weather is felt very hot and unpleasant, while cold weather makes the mood of scholarship alumni in Europe and people around gloomy. These weather conditions then change the atmosphere of discussion and classroom learning becomes passive.

In the face of the academic problems and challenges experienced by scholarship alumni in Europe, they have a variety of academic strategies or solutions. Academic strategies and solutions from previous research can include learning the local language with locals, finding a language teacher, and deepening knowledge of local culture (Gong et al., 2021; Leung & Yu, 2022; Zhai & Razali, 2022). In contrast to previous studies, the findings in this study revealed the distinctive academic strategies or solutions of scholarship alumni in Europe. These academic strategies or solutions include the presence of a support system, the emergence of social interaction with other Indonesians, traveling while studying in Europe, and self-management. Support from fellow Indonesians and foreigners is used as a support system for alumni scholarship recipients in Europe. The existence of a support system is supported by social interaction between scholarship alumni in Europe, both with fel-

low students and non-students. The interactions include making friends with Indonesians, joining the Indonesian Student Association (PPI), interacting with Indonesians in student dormitories, and interacting with church communities, waiters, or Indonesian restaurant owners in Europe.

Academic strategies or solutions that become unique findings in this study are traveling activities during college and self-management carried out by scholarship alumni in Europe. Scholarship alumni in Europe traveled to the city center or other countries with Indonesian friends who became their support system to fill their free time and long holidays. The purpose of other traveling activities carried out by scholarship alumni while in Europe such as doing assignments or theses and watching musical performances.

Academic strategies or solutions are not only supported from outside themselves but also from within themselves in the building of self-management. Self-management carried out in lecture activities and daily life includes management of completing assignments or thesis activities independently (self-paced), management for self-learning (self-learn), and stress management by reading books (self-help). They also manage themselves by setting lecture targets, self-reflection in every course, financial management, survival strategies, time management, prioritizing various activities, and always focusing on the targets they want to achieve while in Europe.

Based on the discussion above, the motivation that generates expectations clashes with the reality faced by scholarship alumni in Europe. The touch of foreign culture that they feel during college and daily life, makes them have to deal with several problems and challenges. Strategies and solutions are also needed to ease the study process to complete lectures on time. The initial assumption of this study is that the strategy or solution needed

only focuses on academic life. But in reality, the strategies and solutions used by scholarship alumni in Europe are not only in academic life but also in daily life. All of these things then construct the adaptation experience of scholarship alumni in Europe.

The process of adaptation in the new country was previously proposed by Lysgaard in 1955 (Samovar et al. 2013). He found that the process of adaptation to the new culture takes place in four phases, namely the exhilaration stage, disenchantment stage, and adjustment stage until finally, the newcomers can function effectively in the new environment (effective functional stage). Unlike the adaptation process by Lysgaard, this study does not see the occurrence of the adaptation process immediately in line with the phases of Lysgaard. If it is associated with the Lysgaard phase, there is indeed anticipation by alumni of scholarship recipients in Europe in the form of motivation and expectations. In addition, adjustments also occur in the college life of scholarship alumni in Europe. However, these adjustments continued and not only stopped at the effective functional stage but also gave birth to habits that eventually carried back to Indonesia.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Alumni who receive scholarships are motivated to continue their studies abroad, where the motivation comes from both internal and external themselves. Departing from this motivation, expectations are formed when studying abroad. Being in touch with the Europe culture makes scholarship alumni experience stereotypes, cultural differences, and differences in power distance degrees. In addition, while continuing their studies in Europe, scholarship alumni experience problems and challenges such as academic constraints, stress, and problems with European weather.

Adaptation to problems and challenges in academic and daily life is carried out with various strategies or solutions. Academic strategies or solutions that became unique findings in this study include traveling activities during college, doing self-management, having a support system, and establishing social interaction with Indonesians. During the process, alumni who received scholarships in Europe adapted new habits that were then carried over when returning to Indonesia.

From the explanation above, we can find that this research described an in-depth understanding of how the scholarship alumni experience faced cultural differences and academic challenges until they found some cultural adaptation strategies, like traveling, finding their support system, interacting with Indonesian people, and building strong self-management. These adaptation strategies led them to complete their studies and return to Indonesia.

The findings in this study contribute to the academic field that examines academic and cultural adaptation, especially the study of Indonesian students who continue their studies abroad. In practical terms, the strategies and solutions found in this study can be used as a basis for donors, sponsors, scholarship providers, and the Indonesian Embassy in European countries to create strategic steps as a provision for students to study.

This study recommends that in the future there will be assistance provided to scholarship students who will continue their studies outside Europe. Assistance can be in the form of mentoring systems from international student organizations from Indonesia in European countries, donors, sponsors, scholarship providers, and the Indonesian Embassy given before lectures start until returning to Indonesia. The form of mentoring system that can be implemented is sharing knowledge related to obstacles that may be faced during college, such as weather, academic obstacles, or other

things that can trigger student stress conditions. In addition, the next mentoring system program suggested by researchers can be in the form of a "Foster Family" program from international student organizations from Indonesia in European countries. It is hoped that this program can become a support system and a new family for scholarship recipients during their studies.

## 5. References

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