

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. The Background of the Study

Education was one of the keys to a person being able to broaden the range of their view of the conditions and situations in the world. People could know the progress and decline of a civilization by criticizing education. Dewey (1986), in his writing, mentioned that "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself." He emphasized the relationship between life and education. Chan et al. (2021) wrote that pursuing higher education exchange allowed students to acquire new skills and gain unique learning experiences.

Student Exchange was one of the newest innovations and was constantly improving in education. Exchange, referred to as 'mobility' or 'study abroad,' was often defined as a semester-long learning experience at a partner institution or internship abroad (Crossman & Clarke 2010, 600). Student exchange was a program that allowed students from one institution to another institution in another region, city, or even another country to study or take part in academic programs at the host institution for a certain period. These programs were typically designed to provide students with educational and living experiences in a culturally and academically diverse environment.

With the increasing opportunity to pursue a more varied education from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, as the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, published a new curriculum for

education in Indonesia named "Kurikulum Merdeka." There were many programs that students could take part in during their years of critical education. In 2021, a domestic exchange program was officially launched called the Emancipated Student Exchange (Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka/PMM). Based on a report from the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (2022), "PMM was part of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka program, which provided opportunities for Indonesian students to gain learning experiences outside of their lives."

According to Batau et al. (2022), the Emancipated Student Exchange was held for 1 semester, inviting students to gain learning experience at the best institutions throughout Indonesia. The Emancipated Student Exchange was divided into 2 parts: outbound student exchange and inbound student exchange. Outbound student exchange was a learning activity carried out by students in similar/dissimilar study programs at partner institutions at home or abroad. Inbound student exchange was a student learning activity outside the University in study programs at partner institutions . Through this program, students could increase their national insight, integrity, and solidarity through intercultural learning and develop competence and leadership.

Exchange programs generally assisted students in expanding their perspectives on the globe. Several global developments, including the recent student exchange program, facilitated globalization. Students participating in student exchange programs often enjoyed and benefited from the program. Many students felt that the insights developed during the program enabled them to feel a

more profound interest in the country of exchange, making them more tolerant and adjustable to cultural differences (Atalar, 2020).

The exchange program created cross-cultural experiences that students would experience, from their home culture to foreign cultures that students would discover in new places. Fitzpatrick (2019) argued that cross-cultural referred to how meetings were conducted, identifying different forms, addresses, levels of formality or status, use of non-verbal cues, and so on, in different cultural contexts. He added that cross-cultural also referred to the context in which individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds and perspectives interacted and navigated across cultures. However, there was also a cross-cultural focus. Some concepts referred to the processes involved in moving from one context to another or preparing to move, as in cross-cultural adjustment.

Beil and Garcia Mayor (2018), in their study, highlighted that in this sense, "cross-cultural" meant "involving two or more different cultures and their ideas and customs" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018a), while "Adjustment" referred to a person's psychological well-being in a new environment (Black, 1988). Therefore, cross-cultural adjustment could be seen as "getting used" to living and working in a culture different from one's home culture. This cross-cultural adjustment referred to individuals adjusting or blending into a new cultural environment.

In previous research, Zhang et al. (2018) conducted research on 15 first-year Chinese graduate students enrolled at a large university in the United States region. They adopted Kolb's (1984) and Berry's (2006) experiential learning theory to test whether and how international students used experiential learning

strategies to improve their ability to adjust socio-culturally and explore the role of leisure in the cultural experience learning process.

Wang & Hannes (2014) conducted research on the Flemish community in Belgium as a case example to study the experiences of Asian international students due to the lack of research that explored the adjustment process of Asian international students in Europe. Anderson (1994) used adjustment theory as "working toward a fit to the person and the new environment."

Based on previous research that had been explained, many studies used social culture analysis, and culture adjustment used theories from experts such as Lysgaard (1955) and Oberg and Berry (2006). Previous researchers also chose human/exchange students from various regions and countries as data, and most chose to conduct short interviews as their research method. In contrast to this research, this research selected outbound students from Universitas Negeri Medan who had been carrying out student exchange programs to institutions/universities in various regions/islands in Indonesia. This study used a questionnaire via a question-and-answer platform, such as the Google Form platform, as a research method using two main theories: Lysgaard's U-shaped curve model and Oberg's model of cross-cultural adjustment.

According to Hernández López (2021), Lysgaard (1955) was a pioneer in developing international academic mobility research and was prominently recognized for his proposal of adjustment as a process over time. Based on his evidence, a relationship between duration and adjustment was understood as a "U-shaped curve" that passed through a series of stages before "good adjustment" was

achieved. A few years later, Oberg (1960) supported Lysgaard's view and argued that there was an initial attraction stage. It was defined as a "honeymoon" characterized by the lightness and excitement of being abroad. The initial arrival phase, which lasted from a few days to an extended period, was replaced by a "crisis phase" during which the traveler sought "refuge" by experiencing "real-life situations" and establishing contact with compatriots (Oberg, 1960, p. 178). In the third recovery stage, the traveler gained a cultural and linguistic understanding of the host culture and could find his way better. Eventually, acceptance and enjoyment of the new habit were achieved, negative emotions such as fear disappeared, and complete adjustment occurred.

This research prepared questions regarding the difficulties or problems that Emancipated Student Exchange faced, how they dealt with them to solve these difficulties, and the extracurricular activities they chose to speed things up. Furthermore, the reason this research used Emancipated Student Exchange in the English Department was that students who went to other regions/other institutions outside of Medan city or Sumatra Island were students who never had or had no cross-cultural knowledge or experience in host institutions outside Medan city/outside Sumatra island. This Emancipated Student Exchange (PMM) activity also had several credits related to culture that were of great interest to exchange students. It was also one of the references in this research. According to this research, two dominant factors were negatively related to cross-cultural Emancipated Student Exchange (PMM) adjustment: (1) language and communication barriers and (2) homesickness and culture shock. Based on

previous open questions, exchange students highlighted insightful comments, as could be seen in the following quote:

"I had difficulties communicating with native residents of the host institution;"

"I had a language barrier because many local people used regional languages. Likewise, the same thing happened among PMM students themselves, many of whom still brought their own regional languages."

"I sometimes got sick because the food didn't suit my taste buds and sometimes I felt a little sad because I missed my hometown;"

"Firstly, when I arrived, I felt depressed and a little homesick and culture shocked. Sometimes I still felt alone and sad but I loved my time here and I tried to make the most of the remaining time I had here."

So, from the variety of comments above, the analysis of cross-cultural adjustment in exchange students (PMM) became an interesting research topic to study.

B. The Problem of the Study

In this research, two problems were identified which became the reference for conducting this research:

1. What cross-cultural experiences do Emancipated Student Exchange have?
2. How does the Emancipated Student Exchange adjust to the cultural changes they were experiencing?
3. Why is it important for Emancipated Student Exchange to adjust during their exchange program?

C. The Objective of the Study

Regarding the aforementioned research question, this research established the following research objectives:

1. To find out what cross-cultural experiences Emancipated Student Exchange experienced.
2. To analyze how Emancipated Student Exchange adjusts to the cultural changes they were experiencing.
3. To find out why adjustment is important to the Emancipated Student Exchange during their exchange program?

D. The Scope of the Study

To make it more understandable for the readers, this study had a limited research sample, with the total number of Emancipated Student Exchange (PMM) in Universitas Negeri Medan being approximately 816 students from PMM Batch 1 (2021) to PMM Batch 3 (2023). However, in this study, to limit the number of research and make it easier for the researcher to conduct a study, this research analyzed 14 students from Emancipated Student Exchange (PMM 2) who came from the English Department. The theory used in this research investigated how selected students individually coped with cultural adjustment. This study utilized two main theories: Lysgaard's U-shaped curve model and Oberg's model of cross-cultural adjustment.

E. The Significance of the Study

1. Theoretically

Theoretically, this study was of great importance as it provided theory and insight into the cross-cultural adjustment of Emancipated Student Exchange students who had been carrying out student exchange programs to institutions/universities in various regions/islands in Indonesia. This experience

also helped the local academic community and was broadly important for the field of cross-cultural research and the challenges faced by exchange students in culturally diverse environments.

2. Practically

The results of the study should were useful for:

a) For students

The results of this study helped empower future exchange students by giving them insight into the potential challenges they might face in the institutions/universities in various regions/islands in Indonesia where they were. Recognizing these challenges and suggested adjustment strategies helped students better prepare for and navigate cross-cultural experiences.

b) For readers

This research helped increase the cultural awareness and sensitivity of Universitas Negeri Medan students, faculty, local staff, and all readers from diverse backgrounds. Understanding the unique challenges faced by international students fostered a more welcoming and supportive campus community.

c) For other researcher

This research added to existing knowledge on the cross-cultural adjustment of exchange students. It provided insight into the specific situation in another city, valuable data that could be compared and contrasted with similar studies around the world, and enriched the academic debate on student mobility.