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## **A Narrative Inquiry of International Students' Experiences in Indonesia: Language Appraisal and Transitivity Analysis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study explores the promotion of ethical behavior through intercultural education via a narrative inquiry research design. Seven international students from Madagascar, Libya, Turkmenistan, Thailand, and Malaysia participated, providing diverse perspectives on their experiences. The participants' narratives were analyzed through the lenses of transitivity and language appraisal, revealing nuanced insights into how intercultural education shapes ethical behavior. The findings highlight the transformative impact of intercultural learning environments on international students' intercultural development and decision-making processes. This research underpins the integration of intercultural education into curricula to foster ethical global citizens and offers practical implications for educators and policymakers seeking to cultivate inclusive, ethically aware educational settings.*

**Keywords:** ethical behavior, intercultural education, language appraisal, narrative inquiry, transitivity

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In an increasingly interconnected world, promoting ethical behavior through education has become paramount. Intercultural education, which brings together

diverse cultural perspectives, offers a unique avenue for fostering ethical awareness and intercultural development. This study delves into the experiences of international students to understand how intercultural education influences their ethical behavior. Drawing on the narratives of seven students from Madagascar, Libya, Turkmenistan, Thailand, and Malaysia, this research comprehensively explores the interplay between cultural diversity and ethical development. Through narrative inquiry, we capture the voices and stories of these students, offering a deep, holistic view of their educational journeys and life experiences. Through narrative inquiry, we capture the voices and stories of these students, offering a deep, holistic view of their educational journeys and life experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18).

Despite the recognized benefits, implementing intercultural education in Indonesia faces several challenges. Research by Sari (2017) indicates that Indonesian educational institutions often need more resources and trained personnel to integrate intercultural education into their curricula effectively. Moreover, there is a significant gap in the understanding of how intercultural education influences ethical behavior in the Indonesian context. This gap is partly due to the limited research focusing on the ethical dimensions of intercultural education within Indonesia. Most existing studies emphasize linguistic and cultural adaptation, neglecting ethical implications. Therefore, there is a pressing need to explore how intercultural education can address ethical issues, particularly in diverse and multiethnic societies such as Indonesia.

The study employs transitivity and language appraisal as analytical tools to examine these narratives. Transitivity analysis helps understand how students attribute agency and responsibility to their ethical decision-making processes (Halliday, 1994). On the other hand, language appraisal reveals the evaluative language students use to express their intercultural judgments and attitudes (Martin & White, 2005). Focusing on the experiences of international students, this research delves into the narratives of seven individuals from Madagascar, Libya, Turkmenistan, Thailand, and Malaysia who have studied in Indonesia. Their unique perspectives provide valuable insights into the ethical challenges and opportunities they encounter in a culturally rich yet diverse educational environment. Narrative inquiry offers a promising approach to bridging this gap by providing a nuanced understanding of students' lived experiences. Daiute and Lightfoot (2004) argue that narrative research allows holistic exploration of phenomena, capturing the complexities of individuals' educational and ethical trajectories. By analyzing the narratives of international students in Indonesia, we can gain insights into how intercultural education shapes their ethical behavior. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform educational practices and policies aimed at promoting ethical behavior in diverse learning environments. By understanding the impact of intercultural education on intercultural development, educators and policymakers can better design programs that cultivate ethical global citizens equipped to navigate and contribute to a multicultural world.

Research questions:

- How do international students narrate their intercultural experiences and navigate cultural differences while studying in Indonesia?
- How does intercultural education influence international students' ethical development and adaptability in a multicultural context?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Intercultural Education and Ethical Behavior*

Intercultural education has been widely recognized as vital in fostering ethical behavior among students. Banks (2009) noted that intercultural education encompasses teaching practices that consider and respect cultural diversity, promoting social justice and equity. It provides a framework for students to engage with different cultural perspectives, thus enhancing their ethical awareness and sensitivity. Tang and Zang (2023) highlighted that cultural distance significantly affects the adaptation process of international students, influencing their ability to integrate and engage with the host culture effectively. In a broader sense, Smith and Zhao (2023) identify key challenges and strategies in intercultural adaptation, emphasizing the critical role of cultural awareness and communication skills in successful integration.

### *Empirical studies on intercultural education*

Empirical research continues to underscore the positive impact of intercultural education on ethical behavior, with foundational studies and more recent findings contributing to this understanding. Deardorff (2006) demonstrated that students who participated in intercultural education programs exhibited increased empathy, enhanced ethical reasoning, and a more significant commitment to social justice. Similarly, Cushner and Mahon (2009) highlighted how intercultural experiences, including studying abroad, significantly boost students' intercultural and ethical development by exposing them to diverse worldviews and challenging their cultural assumptions. In the context of higher education, international students often act as both beneficiaries and contributors to intercultural education. Their diverse cultural backgrounds and lived experiences enrich the academic environment, promoting a culture of ethical inquiry and intercultural competence development. Leask (2009) emphasized that the presence of international students in universities fosters intercultural dialog, which is vital for cultivating ethical behavior in an increasingly globalized world.

Recent empirical studies build on these earlier findings, highlighting new trends and extending their implications. For example, Zang et al. (2023) explored how virtual exchange programs, facilitated by digital platforms, enable intercultural learning and ethical awareness among students who may not have the opportunity to study abroad. These programs offer a cost-effective and accessible way to foster intercultural dialog and empathy across borders. Similarly, Halim (2023) examined the role of service-learning projects in multicultural communities, revealing that such experiences enhance students'

ability to navigate ethical dilemmas and develop a more profound sense of social responsibility.

Emerging trends also point to multicultural education's role in improving student engagement and reducing prejudice. A study by Liu et al. (2021) revealed that integrating intercultural education into curriculum design positively influences students' attitudes toward diversity, fostering ethical reasoning and collaborative problem-solving skills. Furthermore, Li et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of incorporating intersectionality into intercultural education, recognizing the overlapping dimensions of identity that shape students' experiences and ethical perspectives. The current study reveals the emotional difficulties associated with culture shock, described as starting with distress, helplessness, and frustration (Astley, 2024), while emphasizing the critical role of empathy and cultural sensitivity in managing intercultural interactions. Huff et al. (2021) highlighted the necessity of adapting to diverse cultural contexts, often resulting in opportunities for personal growth. These studies highlight the evolving nature of intercultural education and its critical role in developing ethical behavior. Expanding the literature review to include such contemporary sources strengthens the theoretical framework and ensures alignment with current research trends, providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

#### *Appraisal and transitivity in the SFL*

In the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) context, the study employs transitivity and appraisal analyses to examine how international students narrate their intercultural experiences, offering valuable insights into their ethical development. As described by Halliday (1994), transitivity analysis explores how language encodes experiences through six process types—material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential—providing a framework to understand how individuals attribute agency, represent actions, and contextualize events. For example, statements such as "I adapted to the new norms" emphasize self-agency, whereas "The community welcomed me warmly" highlights relational processes that underscore the host culture's role. Similarly, appraisal analysis (Martin & White, 2005) examines evaluative language, focusing on dimensions such as attitude (e.g., emotional responses such as "I feel overwhelmed"), engagement (e.g., alignment with others' viewpoints), and graduation (e.g., intensity of evaluations). Together, these tools offer a comprehensive lens through which to analyze narratives' structural and emotional aspects, revealing how students navigate ethical dilemmas and cultural challenges. By combining these approaches, this study reveals the actions and roles depicted in narratives and delves into participants' emotional and evaluative stances, providing a holistic understanding of how intercultural education fosters empathy, ethical reasoning, and intercultural competence. It contributes to broader theoretical discussions on the transformative impact of intercultural education in shaping ethical behavior.

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## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in narrative inquiry to explore the promotion of ethical behavior through intercultural education. Narrative inquiry is particularly suitable for this research, as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to these experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By capturing the stories of international students, we aim to reveal how intercultural education shapes their ethical development. Narrative research is used to explore a story involving the researcher and participants to explain the experiences and phenomena experienced by the participants directly (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

### *Participants*

The study involves seven international students from Madagascar, Libya, Turkmenistan, Thailand, and Malaysia who have studied in Indonesia. These participants were selected through Researcher Gate, which has access to seven international students and sampling convenience to ensure diverse cultural backgrounds and educational experiences. The inclusion criteria required participants to have engaged in intercultural education activities and to be willing to share their narratives about their educational and ethical journeys.

### *Characteristics of Participants*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Countries</b>
Paijo	Male	Philippines
Siti	Female	Madagascar
Ahmad	Male	Libya
Musikan	Male	Turkmenistan
Mohonmaap	Female	Thailand
Abdullah	Male	Nigeria
Tumbasmerejahe	Male	India

### Data collection

Data were collected through in depth, semistructured interviews lasting approximately 60--90 minutes. The interviews were conducted in a conversational style to encourage participants to share their stories openly and reflectively. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve the richness of the participants' narratives. Thus, the researcher can gather complete information by listening to the participants' stories (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

The interview protocol was designed to elicit detailed accounts of the participants' experiences with intercultural education and its impact on their ethical behavior. The interview protocol was designed to explore how participants navigate ethical challenges within multicultural environments and how they inform their intercultural behavior, aligning with the insights on intercultural

decision-making and intercultural communication presented in this resource (Holliday et al., 2010). The key questions included:

- Can you describe a significant experience you had in an intercultural education setting?
- How did this experience influence your understanding of ethical behavior?
- What challenges did you face in navigating ethical issues in a multicultural environment?
- How do you perceive the role of intercultural education in shaping your intercultural and ethical perspectives?

### **Data analysis**

The data analysis process employed in this study involved two complementary approaches: transitivity analysis and language appraisal. Transitivity analysis, rooted in systemic functional linguistics, was utilized to examine how participants construct their experiences and attribute agency and responsibility within their narratives. Transitivity is the lexicogrammatical system that construes the world experience into a set of process types (material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential) that participants and circumstances accompany at the clause level (Halliday, 1994, pp. 106–107). This approach provided insights into the dynamics of action and interaction in the participants' accounts and how participants were involved in various Indonesian universities' cultural settings and backgrounds. Language appraisal theory was applied to analyze the evaluative language used by participants, with a focus on how they expressed intercultural judgments and attitudes. Together, these methods offered a comprehensive understanding of the participants' ethical perspectives and the linguistic mechanisms through which these perspectives were articulated. Furthermore, on the basis of Halliday's (1994) systemic functional linguistics, transitivity analysis was used to examine how participants construct their experiences and attribute agency and responsibility to their narratives. This analysis focuses on the types of processes (material, mental, relational, etc.) described in the narratives, the participants involved, and the circumstances surrounding these processes. By analyzing transitivity patterns, we can gain insights into how participants perceive their actions and those of others in ethical situations. The data analysis technique leverages transitivity analysis, a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) component, to explore how language encodes participants' experiences in intercultural and ethical contexts. This approach focuses on the types of processes used in narratives—such as material processes (e.g., "I adapted to new norms," reflecting physical actions), mental processes (e.g., "I realized the cultural differences," indicating thoughts and emotions), relational processes (e.g., "The environment was welcoming," describing states of being), verbal processes (e.g., "She explained the tradition to me," highlighting verbal actions), and behavioral processes (e.g., "He hesitated before responding," involving physiological or psychological behavior). It also examines the participants involved in these processes (e.g., the storyteller, peers, or faculty) and

the circumstances (e.g., cultural or situational contexts). By analyzing these patterns, the study reveals how participants perceive and articulate their actions, the roles of others, and the ethical dimensions of their intercultural experiences, offering nuanced insights into their decision-making processes.

In addition, language appraisal, derived from Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory, was employed to analyze the evaluative language used by participants to express their intercultural judgments and attitudes. Appraise encompasses a value system categorized into attitudes, engagement, and graduation at the discourse semantics level (Hood, 2010, 2019; Martin, 2019). This approach examines how participants use language to convey emotions, assign values, and make ethical evaluations. The appraisal analysis was conducted in three main dimensions: attitude (emotions and evaluations), engagement (sources of attitudes), and graduation (intensity and focus of assessments). In a broader sense, focusing on the attitude subsystem categorizes emotions into dimensions such as happiness (e.g., feeling welcomed by peers), security (e.g., reassurance from faculty support), satisfaction (e.g., accomplishment in collaborative efforts), and inclination (e.g., a desire to learn about traditions). This approach reveals the nuanced emotional responses and ethical considerations in participants' narratives, highlighting how intercultural education fosters emotional well-being and moral growth.

## **FINDINGS**

This study explores the intercultural experiences and adaptations of seven international students who have pursued higher education at Indonesian universities. The participants from diverse cultural backgrounds, including countries such as India, Nigeria, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Madagascar, Libya, and the Philippines, provide a robust tapestry of perspectives on navigating life and academics in Indonesia. Their stories reveal a range of emotions, challenges, and growth, offering valuable insights into the intercultural adaptation process. The seven themes in these stories are Navigating Intercultural Ethics and Adaptation, Adapting to Intercultural Ethical Differences, Evolving Ethical Perspectives through Intercultural Experiences, Navigating Cultural Differences and Ethical Adaptation, Embracing Intercultural Ethical Differences and Adaptation, Adapting to Diverse Ethical Norms in an Intercultural Setting, and Understanding and Adapting to Diverse Ethical Perspectives in Intercultural Settings.

### **Paijo**

In 2018, the participant began a transformative academic and cultural journey in Indonesia, pursuing a bachelor's degree in West Java, where the warmth of the local people eased the transition to student life. The relaxed atmosphere of Bandung offered a stark contrast to that of Jakarta and helped the participants adapt to a new culture. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to online learning honed communication skills and adaptability. After completing the

bachelor's degree in 2022, the participants continued with a master's degree, deepening their knowledge and broadening their intercultural understanding. By 2024, the participants had grown significantly, developing empathy, adaptability, and a nuanced ethical perspective, preparing them for an interconnected world.

### *Navigating Intercultural Ethics and Adaptation*

In 2018, I moved to Indonesia [Material] just before the COVID-19 pandemic and was struck by the relaxed atmosphere [Happiness] of Bandung compared with Jakarta. [Relational] On my first campus visit, I was warmly welcomed [Behavioral] [Security], and the polite, soft-spoken demeanor [Security] of colleagues and faculty was a refreshing change from the higher tones in the Philippines. In Indonesia, I noticed cultural differences, [Material] such as a more formal approach to punctuality and indirect communication, in contrast to the flexibility and directness I was used to. I also learned [Verbal] the importance of polite phrases such as "Punten" [Inclination] (excuse me). A memorable moment was attending a seminar that started more than 30 minutes late [Existential], which contrasted with the punctuality I expected. After discussing it with a faculty member, I learned that delays are culturally accepted [Relational] in Indonesia. Although it took time to adjust, I grew to appreciate [Mental] this aspect of local customs. These experiences deepened my understanding [Mental] of ethics, making me more adaptable and empathetic while recognizing the influence of cultural contexts.

The text recounts his cultural adaptation and ethical growth journey in Indonesia before the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon arriving in West Java, he noticed a more relaxed atmosphere in Bandung than in Jakarta and felt warmly welcomed by colleagues and faculty. He observed differences in communication, with Indonesians being polite and soft-spoken, contrasting with the higher tones used in the Philippines. His first experience with intercultural education revealed key distinctions, particularly in terms of punctuality and communication styles, with Indonesians favoring indirectness and formality. A seminar that started 30 minutes later first puzzled him, but a conversation with a faculty member helped him appreciate this local custom. Engaging in intercultural dialog broadened his ethical understanding, fostering greater empathy, open-mindedness, and adaptability. Through continuous interactions with peers and faculty, he developed a more nuanced understanding of ethics within diverse cultural contexts.

### **Siti**

When the participants first arrived in Indonesia for a student exchange program, they were surprised by cultural differences, especially in Kendari, a quieter city than expected. The louder communication style compared with Madagascar, where people tend to speak more softly, was initially overwhelming. However, the participants' intercultural experience was both exciting and nerve-wracking, as they had to adapt to Kendari's open and energetic communication. One

memorable moment arrived late in a class discussion, which sparked loud reactions from classmates. Although initially uneasy, the participant soon realized that these responses were part of the normal, expressive interaction style, not a negative judgment. The participants also noted differences in attitudes toward punctuality, while Madagascar emphasized punctuality as a sign of respect, Indonesia's more relaxed campus atmosphere allowed for delayed starts to class, focusing instead on engaging in discussions. These experiences teach the participant that ethical behavior varies by culture, and understanding the reasoning behind different norms is essential before making assumptions.

### *Adapting to Intercultural Ethical Differences*

When I arrived in Indonesia [Material] for a student exchange, I was surprised [Mental] by the cultural differences. [Existential] Kendari, quieter than I expected, had a communication style much louder than in Madagascar, where people speak softly. It was initially overwhelming [Insecurity] but required patience and an open mind to adjust. [Inclination] I quickly noticed differences [Material] in communication and punctuality. Indonesians communicated more openly, and I misinterpreted loud reactions to my tardiness [Existential] as aggression. I later learned [Verbal] that it was just their expressive style, not judgment. [Relational] Punctuality [Relational] was also more relaxed than Madagascar's emphasis on punctuality as a sign of respect. Navigating these differences requires openness and diplomacy. [Behavioral] I learned that cultural contexts shape ethical behavior [Mental] and that understanding norms is essential before making judgments. These experiences made me more adaptable, empathetic, and globally conscious, highlighting the importance of respect, active listening, and clarification in intercultural interactions.

The text accounts for the participants' experiences navigating cultural differences during a student exchange program in Indonesia. Upon arrival at Kendari, she was surprised by the louder communication style, which contrasted with the more subdued tones typical in Madagascar. Initially, she found this overwhelming, but over time, she understood that these differences reflected cultural norms rather than negative judgments. Her intercultural education experience was exciting and nerve-racking, as she noticed contrasts in communication and punctuality. While punctuality in Madagascar signifies discipline and respect, the relaxed approach in Indonesia initially clashed with her expectations. However, she learned to appreciate the more informal atmosphere that prioritized engaging discussions. Through these experiences, she realized that cultural context deeply influences ethical behavior, requiring patience, diplomacy, and an open mind to avoid making assumptions. Reflecting on this journey, she emphasized the importance of active listening and understanding, which helped her become more adaptable, empathetic, and globally aware. Her interactions with peers and faculty deepened her awareness of the complexity of intercultural behavior across diverse cultural perspectives.

## **Ahmad**

In 2018, the participants moved to Indonesia for their studies, completing both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree by 2024. The participant initially struggled with cultural differences, particularly the relaxed attitude toward punctuality in Bandung, compared with his background, where timeliness was crucial. In addition, a notable instance involved waiting at a coffee shop for friends who arrived late, which they learned was a local norm. The participants quickly adapted, realizing that interaction quality outweighed punctuality. The participants' understanding of ethical behavior evolved as they navigated different communication styles and balanced individualistic and communal values. By 2024, the participants had become more adaptable and open-minded, appreciating that ethical behavior is context dependent and requires sensitivity to diverse cultural norms.

### *Evolving Ethical Perspectives through Intercultural Experiences*

In 2018, I moved to Indonesia, where I encountered cultural differences, particularly in time management and social interactions. I once arrived on time for a homework discussion, but my friends were delayed by 20 minutes. Although this relaxed attitude contrasted with my value of punctuality, I realized it did not affect the seriousness of our work. As I adapted, I learned that ethical behavior varies across cultures. In Indonesia, communication is more indirect than it is in the direct Libyan style. This subtlety initially confused me, but I understood it as a form of politeness. Balancing my individualistic background with Indonesia's communal values was challenging, especially during ethical dilemmas. I learned to approach these with empathy, considering different cultural perspectives. My experiences have made me more adaptable, open-minded, and culturally sensitive, reinforcing the importance of integrity while respecting diverse norms.

The text accounts for the participants' five years of experience living in Indonesia and their cultural differences, particularly with respect to time management and social interactions. Upon arriving for a homework discussion at a coffee shop, the participant found that while they were punctual, his friends arrived 20 minutes late, explaining that this relaxed approach to time was common in Bandung. It initially clashed with the participants' cultural background, where punctuality was highly valued, but they soon realized that despite the delay, their friends were serious about the project. The participants' perspective on ethical behavior evolved through navigating life in Indonesia and participating in intercultural education. They found that while Libyan communication often favors directness, Indonesians preferred more subtle, indirect approaches, which the participants initially struggled to interpret but later understood as reflections of politeness and respect. Balancing their individualistic upbringing with the more communal systems in Indonesia posed challenges, particularly during heated discussions around time management and outcomes, which forced the participants to reconcile collective values with personal integrity. These experiences, especially in

informal academic discussions, deepened the participants' understanding of how ethical norms vary across cultures. The participants learned to approach ethical dilemmas with empathy, recognizing the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability. As an international student, he broadened his understanding of ethics. It is context-dependent and requires an appreciation of diverse cultural norms.

## **Musikan**

From 2020 to 2024, during a participant's bachelor's studies in Indonesia, he faced the challenge of navigating intercultural differences, particularly in communication and ethics. In Turkmenistan, where directness and commitment adherence are valued, he initially needed help with Indonesia's more indirect style. For example, classmates often agreed with plans but needed to follow through, leading to confusion. A notable instance was when a friend reacted negatively to feedback on punctuality, prompting the participant to reassess their approach and better interpret indirect cues. The integrity of group projects was also tested when suggestions to bend the rules for better outcomes were considered. To balance collaboration with core values, the participants adapted while maintaining their ethical standards. Participation in an intercultural ethics workshop further enriched their understanding, teaching them the importance of empathy and open-mindedness in diverse cultural settings and ultimately shaping their ethical outlook in a global context.

### *Navigating Cultural Differences and Ethical Adaptation*

During my bachelor's studies in Indonesia, I encountered intercultural education for the first time. While excited [happiness], I felt anxious [insecurity] [mental] about navigating differences in ethical perspectives. One challenge was understanding Indonesia's indirect communication style, which contrasted with the directness valued in Turkmenistan, where I'm from [relational]. In one instance, a friend became frustrated with my feedback on punctuality [verbal], revealing how my constructive criticism was perceived differently due to cultural differences. This experience [existential] taught me to adjust [satisfaction] [mental] my communication style [inclination] and interpret indirect cues. Adapting was challenging [behavioral], especially when group members suggested bending the rules [behavioral] for a better outcome. I had to balance my commitment to integrity [inclination] [mental] with the need for collaboration. Participating in an intercultural ethics workshop deepened my understanding [relational] of how culture shapes ethical behavior and decision-making. These lessons reinforced the importance of maintaining integrity [satisfaction] while being adaptable and respectful of diverse perspectives.

This text reflects the participants' experience engaging with intercultural education during their bachelor's degree studies in Indonesia. This highlights their challenges and growth while navigating cultural differences in communication and ethics. In Turkmenistan, where directness and commitment are highly valued, he initially needed help with Indonesia's indirect communication style standard.

They faced situations where classmates would agree to plans but fail to follow through without explanation, which was confusing and frustrating. A specific incident involving feedback about punctuality created tension with a friend, leading the participant to reflect on how his communication style might be perceived differently across cultures. This experience helped him adjust his approach, interpreting indirect cues as part of an equally valid way of interacting.

As the participant adapted to his new environment, he faced ethical dilemmas that tested his values, such as when group members suggested bending the rules to achieve better results. This challenged their commitment to integrity while prompting them to consider the importance of collaboration and flexibility in teamwork. Participating in an intercultural ethics workshop offered valuable insights into diverse ethical norms across cultures, broadening the participants' perspectives and fostering empathy and open-mindedness. Through their interactions with peers and faculty, the participants learned that cultural factors shape ethical behavior and that effective multicultural decision-making requires balancing integrity and adaptability. These experiences gave the participant a deeper understanding of ethics, emphasizing the importance of empathy, respect for diversity, and open-mindedness in an interconnected world.

## **Mohonmaap**

From 2020 to 2024, during the participants' bachelor's studies in Indonesia, the participants' first encounter with intercultural education during orientation was both enlightening and overwhelming. Accustomed to Thailand's indirect communication, the direct and expressive style in Kendari, Central Sulawesi, stood out. Initially, perceived as aggressive, a friend's loud tone was later explained as typical in Bugis culture, underscoring the challenges of navigating cultural differences, particularly in communication and conflict resolution. A group project further tested the participants' ability to balance personal values with team expectations, requiring patience and openness. Over these years, intercultural workshops deepened their understanding of how culture shapes ethical norms, fostering greater flexibility, empathy, and a more open-minded approach to intercultural interactions.

### *Embracing intercultural ethical differences and adaptation*

My first exposure [happiness] to intercultural education came during a university orientation in Indonesia, where I encountered a range of perspectives [existential]. One significant difference was communication styles: in Thailand, communication indirectly maintains harmony, whereas in Kendari, Indonesia, it is more direct and expressive [relational]. I initially misinterpreted [insecurity] a friend's loud tone as anger [mental], but she later explained [relational] that in Bugis culture, speaking aloud is normal and not hostile [verbal]. Navigating these differences, especially in conflict resolution, was challenging [insecurity] [behavioral]. In a group project, I faced an ethical dilemma [disinclination] in balancing my values with my team's values [existential]. Finding a compromise [inclination] required patience and openness [material]. Intercultural workshops deepened my understanding [satisfaction] of how ethical norms vary across cultures

[mental]. This experience taught me [satisfaction] that cultural influences shape ethics and require flexibility, empathy, and understanding [mental]. It has made me more adaptable and open-minded [happiness], reinforcing the importance of respect and sensitivity in intercultural interactions [relational].

This text describes the participant's first significant experience with intercultural education during a university orientation in Indonesia, which revealed the richness and complexity of diverse perspectives. She encountered distinct differences in communication styles between Thailand and Indonesia, particularly in Kendari, Central Sulawesi. In Thailand, communication is often indirect and subdued to maintain harmony, but in Kendari, the participants noticed a more direct and expressive approach. Initially, she misinterpreted a friend's loud and high-pitched tone as a sign of anger, given that it deviated from the softer communication she was accustomed to. Later, the friend explained that speaking loudly in Bugis culture is normal and not indicative of conflict.

The participant reflected on her challenges in navigating these cultural differences, particularly in communication and conflict resolution. One group project presented an ethical dilemma that required the participant to reconcile her values with the expectations of her team, demonstrating the need for patience and openness to alternative perspectives. Intercultural workshops helped the participant deepen her understanding of ethical norms and the importance of context in decision-making.

Through these experiences, the participants learned that ethical behavior is often shaped by cultural influences rather than being universal. This journey required flexibility, empathy, and a commitment to understanding diverse viewpoints. During her time in Indonesia, she broadened her perspective on ethics, making her more adaptable and open-minded. She concluded that mutual respect and sensitivity are essential to fostering understanding and collaboration in intercultural interactions.

### **Abdullah**

Arriving in Indonesia in 2022 for a bachelor's degree as academic life resumed after COVID-19, the participants' first experience with intercultural education during orientation was both exciting and challenging. Through blended learning formats, the participants noticed stark differences in communication styles. One memorable moment was when a friend fell asleep during an online class and hesitated to address the lecturer's callout. It surprised the participant, as the authority is highly respected in Nigeria. This incident caused the participants to reflect on how discipline and respect vary across cultures. Adapting to these differences, especially in group projects, requires balancing ethical perspectives and navigating Indonesia's more direct communication style. Intercultural workshops deepened the participants' empathy and cultural sensitivity, transforming their understanding of ethics in a global context.

*Adapting to Diverse Ethical Norms in an Intercultural Setting*

My first intercultural education experience in Indonesia was exciting [security] and challenging [material], as I adapted to new cultural norms [happiness]. Arriving in 2022 during the "new normal," most learning was online [existential], but I gradually engaged [behavioral] with classmates and encountered different communication styles [material]. In one online class, a friend's hesitation to comply with a lecturer's request [mental] surprised me [verbal], as respect for authority is deeply ingrained in Nigerian education [relational]. This moment highlighted cultural differences in discipline and authority [existential]. Adapting to these differences required balancing formal communication norms [inclination] with Indonesia's more direct style [material]. Navigating group projects with varying ethical perspectives taught me empathy, compromise, and cultural sensitivity [mental]. These experiences expanded my understanding of how ethics are shaped by culture and deepened my appreciation for intercultural complexities [satisfaction].

The participant reflected on her experience with intercultural education during a university orientation in Indonesia, describing the excitement and challenges of adjusting to new cultural norms after arriving in 2022 following the COVID-19 pandemic. She navigated a blend of online and in-person learning, encountering significant cultural differences, such as a classmate's hesitance to respond to a lecturer after being called out for sleeping during an online session. This contrasts with the strict respect for authority typical in Nigeria. Adapting to the direct communication style in Indonesia and managing group projects with diverse ethical perspectives was challenging. Nevertheless, the participants developed empathy, compromise, and cultural sensitivity through intercultural communication workshops. These transformative experiences deepened her understanding of how ethics are shaped by cultural context and highlighted the importance of cultural awareness, reminding her that ethical principles must be considered within a culturally sensitive and adaptable framework.

### **Tumbasmerejahe**

From 2020 to 2024, during his bachelor's studies in Indonesia, the participants encountered diverse perspectives that enriched their understanding of ethics. A notable experience involved a misunderstanding of a term that he initially found playful but later discovered had derogatory connotations, emphasizing the importance of cultural context in language. Differences in respect and honor between their culture and Indonesia highlighted how cultural norms shape ethical views. Through adapting to new communication styles and participating in intercultural workshops, the participants developed greater cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and empathy, reinforcing the need for open-mindedness in navigating ethical issues.

### *Understanding and Adapting to Diverse Ethical Perspectives in Intercultural Settings*

During my university exchange in Indonesia, I encountered diverse perspectives that expanded my understanding [mental] of ethical behavior [happiness]. A misunderstanding, where I initially misinterpreted [verbal]

a friend's term [existential], highlighted the challenges [mental] of navigating cultural differences and the importance of context in language and behavior [insecurity]. Differences in attitudes [existential] toward respect and honor between my culture and Indonesia underscored how cultural norms shape ethical perceptions [relational]. Adapting [material] to new communication styles, particularly during group projects on sensitive issues, was a significant learning curve [behavioral]. These experiences emphasized the value of intercultural education programs, such as global ethics workshops, to promote [material] cultural sensitivity and understanding of ethical complexities across cultures [inclination]. My time as an international student broadened my perspective [mental], making me more adaptable and empathetic [happiness]. It reinforced that ethical behavior varies across cultures and deepened my appreciation [mental] for approaching moral issues with open-mindedness and cultural awareness [satisfaction].

The participant reflected on his university exchange program in Indonesia, where he encountered diverse perspectives that expanded his understanding of ethical behavior. A significant experience involved a misunderstanding of a term that initially seemed playful but was later revealed to have derogatory connotations, illustrating the challenges of navigating cultural differences in language and behavior. The participants also observed differences in attitudes toward respect and honor between their culture and Indonesian norms, highlighting how cultural values shape ethical perceptions. Adapting to new communication styles, particularly during group projects involving sensitive topics, required a steep learning curve. These experiences underscore the importance of intercultural education programs, such as global ethics workshops, in fostering cultural sensitivity and understanding the complexities of ethical behavior across cultures. The participants' time as international students enhanced their adaptability, empathy, and appreciation for approaching ethical issues with an open mind and cultural awareness.

## **DISCUSSION**

The stories narrate the participants' intercultural journey, characterized by personal and cultural growth. The seven participants explored and were immersed in various atmospheres on Indonesian campuses, sharing their lives and experiences. The "Mohonmaap" international student from Thailand feels fortunate that she has ever attended an intercultural seminar; she enlightened her on how to persuade herself with diverse cultural norms. Through a positive and reflective tone, the participants convey deep appreciation for the values and lessons learned in various cultural settings. Terms such as "warmly welcomed," "gratitude," and "selflessness" portray respect and admiration that participants feel for the cultural norms they encounter. The participants' discourses reveal their emotional bonding and underpin their engagement with principles such as respect and empathy values, which are central to their personal development as international students in Indonesia. The participants' active role in navigating and

adapting to cultural differences is illustrated through various transitivity processes, demonstrating their positive appraisal of these experiences.

The narrative captures the participant's evolving perspective, showing how initial challenges led to significant growth. Emotional responses, such as feeling "surprised" and "apprehensive," are contrasted with a deeper appreciation for the cultural insights gained. Terms such as "exciting," "warmth," and "friendliness" reflect a favorable view of the adaptation process. Their reflections on their communication styles and punctuality reveal their engagement with diverse ethical norms, highlighting their journey from discomfort to a more profound understanding of cultural differences. Many foreigners in intercultural situations experience culture shock, where they feel like they are starting over, similar to an infant learning basic things again. This process often causes feelings of distress, helplessness, and frustration toward the new environment (Astley, 2024). This nuanced exploration emphasizes the importance of empathy and cultural sensitivity. Idrus and Syakirah (2024) emphasize the importance of adapting to diverse cultural backgrounds. When the nuances of a community issue are explored, there are often valuable moments for personal growth and self-reflection.

The analysis further illustrates how the participants' experiences shaped their ethical facets. Through reflections on cultural norms, such as punctuality and communication styles, the participants revealed how these experiences influenced their understanding of ethical behavior. Terms such as "hospitality," "politeness," and "compromise" reflect a positive evaluation of the cultural values encountered. The suggestion for improved intercultural education highlights the transformative impact of these experiences on the participants' adaptability and empathy. Ethical behavior in intercultural contexts requires a balance between cultural values and understanding the host culture's norms, fostering mutual respect and kindness (Anderson & William, 2023). Furthermore, Chen and Xu (2023) stated that developing intercultural competence is crucial for ethical interactions, as it involves understanding cultural differences and adapting one's behavior to be respectful and considerate. The international students' experiences highlight the importance of respecting and understanding various ethical perspectives, reinforcing the complex nature of ethical behavior across different cultural contexts.

The current study revealed the emotional challenges of culture shock, such as starting over and leading to distress, helplessness, and frustration (Astley, 2024), while highlighting the importance of empathy and cultural sensitivity in navigating intercultural situations. Idrus and Syakirah (2024) underscore the importance of adapting to cultural diversity, with personal growth often emerging through such challenges. These findings likely corroborate studies on culture shock and adaptation, such as Oberg's (1960) stages of culture shock, and align with research on the role of empathy and cultural sensitivity in mitigating these challenges. They also resonate with studies on intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006), which view personal growth as a result of intercultural experiences. However, they may challenge studies that downplay the emotional toll of adaptation, suggesting a more nuanced and emotionally complex process.

## CONCLUSION

The stories of international students studying at Indonesian universities provide valuable insights into their intercultural experiences, which are characterized by notable personal and cultural growth. These narratives, marked by a cheerful and reflective tone, emphasize a deep appreciation for the values and lessons encountered in various cultural settings. Words such as "warmly welcomed," "gratitude," and "selflessness" highlight the participants' respect and admiration for the cultural norms with which they are engaged. Their emotional connections and engagement with principles such as respect and empathy are crucial to their personal development, highlighting their active role in navigating and adapting to cultural differences. The participants' evolving perspectives demonstrate how initial challenges led to significant growth. Emotional responses such as feeling "surprised" and "apprehensive" gave way to a deeper appreciation for the cultural insights gained. Terms such as "exciting," "warmth," and "friendliness" indicate a favorable view of their adaptation process. Their reflections on communication styles and punctuality reveal their engagement with diverse ethical norms, illustrating a journey from initial discomfort to a deeper understanding of cultural differences. This nuanced exploration underscores the importance of empathy and cultural sensitivity in intercultural experiences. In addition, attending an intercultural seminar is beneficial for Mohonmaap because she can anticipate differences in ethical norms in Indonesia.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of providing comprehensive support systems for international students, including language training, cultural orientation programs, and opportunities for social integration. These measures help ease the transition and enhance the intercultural experience, facilitating a smoother adaptation process. Indonesian universities should implement structured programs that promote active engagement with local customs and traditions, fostering a deeper appreciation for the host culture and mutual respect among students. Theoretically, this study advances the understanding of intercultural adaptation by emphasizing the significance of emotional responses and personal reflections in shaping ethical behavior and intercultural competence. The participants' experiences support existing theories on intercultural communication and adaptation while also offering empirical evidence for the role of empathy and cultural sensitivity in navigating diverse cultural contexts. Conceptually, the study reinforces that ethical behavior in intercultural contexts requires balancing cultural values with understanding the host culture's norms. Recommendations include developing intercultural education programs that focus on intercultural behavior and cultural sensitivity, fostering a supportive campus environment, and providing continuous support and mentorship to assist students in navigating cultural differences. Rather than waiting for students experiencing distress to seek assistance—which research suggests they may avoid—we advise institutions to proactively reach out to all sojourner students (Alkhalaf et al., 2024). These steps enhance international students' academic and personal experiences, promoting positive intercultural interactions and mutual respect. However, owing to practical constraints, this

paper cannot provide a comprehensive review of the transformative and positive effects of intercultural experiences, with limited exploration of unresolved challenges or negative experiences. Essential aspects such as ongoing culture shock, instances of discrimination, or difficulties in adaptation remain underexamined. This study could explore how insights into intercultural adaptation among international students in Indonesia can inform policies in similarly diverse settings. For example, the emphasis on empathy, cultural sensitivity, and structured support systems transcends cultural boundaries and could be adapted to address challenges faced by international students worldwide. Policies promoting proactive engagement, such as orientation programs tailored to local norms and ethics, mentorship opportunities, and fostering intercultural dialog, could be universally applied to enhance mutual respect and understanding. In addition, further research should be conducted to provide a more balanced and comprehensive perspective, highlighting both the benefits and the complexities of intercultural education and adaptation processes.

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