check for updates

Exploring the transformative learning experience of international adult students in the Indonesian context

Sugito Sugito

Department of Non-Formal Education, Faculty of Education, Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia.
Email: sugito@uny.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The recent mobility of international students has a tendency to increase, in number Numerous studies, conducted in western countries, have investigated those students' academic and non-academic learning processes, albeit focusing more on the process of self-adjustment to a new environment different from their home country. This study aimed to examine the transformative learning process of international adult students in an eastern country. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study collected data through semi-structured interviews and analyzed it interpretively through the stages of coding, categorizing, and drawing conclusion. The findings showed that the international students went through various stages during the learning processes, namely a) disorienting dilemma as a result of the differences between habits and challenges faced; b) exploration of information by mingling with local students and local community, observing daily life events, and immersing themselves in the community real life; c) making meaning through reflection and feeling; and d) doing self-transformation in ways of being, the affective experience of life, and more discriminating. The results of this study can become a consideration for higher education institutions to provide international students with learning services.

Contribution/Originality: This research is one of the very few studies on the transformative learning experiences of international adult students in the eastern countries context. It contributes to university policy makers, faculty members, and staff in developing an effective assistance programs for international students in their social and academic adaptations within Indonesian higher education institutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization, economic regionalization, and the advancement of knowledge about economics have encouraged the development of the internationalization of higher education institutions. These phenomena are prevalent not only in developed countries but also in developing countries. The internationalization of higher education has become an industry and a source of income that can also improve the institution's reputation. This condition has encouraged governments in various countries to promote higher education institutions to go international (De Wit, 2020). One of the efforts made to realize this goal is to increase the number of international students. This effort is one of the indicators to rank world-class universities.

However, in the long run, these efforts need to be supported with meaningful learning experiences for students and the community. This is in line with the paradigm shift in the internationalization of higher education (De Wit,

2020) showing that in the last 5 years, there has been a tendency of gaining new learning experience through education. Hence, higher education needs to assist students to obtain meaningful learning experiences. This condition leads to the need to understand learning experience that a student aspires for and actually attains.

One of the big challenges faced by international students in the learning process is self-adjustment to a new environment that is different from their home country. The constraints include cultural differences, language barriers, social treatment, and social support (Ahrari et al., 2019; De Araujo, 2011; Killick, 2018; Xiao, 2021). Misra, Crist, and Burant (2003) found that international students would immediately make adjustments in the social environment and the prevailing education system. Nevertheless, the process of adjusting to this new environment might cause difficulties and psychological pressure (Ahrari et al., 2019; Gill, 2007; Li & Gasser, 2005). If not addressed carefully, this stressful adjustment process will lead to failure in their academic learning process.

There has been a lot of research on international students, which mostly focuses on adjustment, the types of problems faced, and the factors that influence it De Araujo (2011); Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2013) and Yusoff and Chelliah (2010). However, studying abroad is not simply about adjustment or adaptation (Marginson, 2014). It is also a process of experiencing and (re)shaping senses of agency, identity, and belonging with constant negotiations between home and host systems (Dai & Garcia, 2019) which is also known as self-transformation (Gill, 2007; Tran, 2012). However, the majority of studies on international student learning experiences tend to be from a problem-based vantage as opposed to transformative learning (Tran, 2012). In addition, these studies were commonly conducted in western cultures, such as in the USA (Kumi–Yeboah & James, 2014b; Ritz, 2010) Australia (Tran, 2012) and Europe (Nada, Montgomery, & Araújo, 2018).

Until now, there has been limited research on the learning process of international students in eastern cultures. This study fills the gap of research rareness in the eastern setting, specifically to investigate the learning process of international students in the Indonesian context from the perspective of transformative learning theory. The objectives of this research are to investigate: a) the challenges faced by international adult students when studying abroad, b) the student's learning process to deal with these challenges, and c) the outcome of the learning process.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. International Student Challenge

Being in a new academic environment is something that international students experience (Brisset, Safdar, Lewis, & Sabatier, 2010). Therefore, they must be able to overcome the problems related to the adaptation process. They have to deal with cultures, values, and customs that are different from those in their home country (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008). In general, international students face problems related to *academic adjustment* (academic experiences with English language, different learning models, and academic services), *psychological adjustment* (loneliness, safety and peacefulness, homesickness, anxiety, and stress), and *sociocultural adjustment* (language and communication challenges, discrimination, friendship with local students, and culture shock (Ahrari et al., 2019; Boafo-Arthur, 2014) accommodation, communication, and seasonal differences (Mustafa & Mevlüt, 2018).

Mukminin and McMahon (2013) research on Indonesian students in the USA found several academic problems that the students face. The problems include an unpredicted heavy academic load, unanticipated class dynamics that leads to less engagement, unfamiliarity with the informal relationship between lecturers and students, personal conflicts and unfair treatment of teaching staff, and lack of their English proficiency. Meanwhile, in social life, Constantine, Kindaichi, Okazaki, Gainor, and Baden (2005) found five challenging experiences of international female students in the USA. The students' experiences were related to the student's feelings and understanding of living in the destination country, cultural differences between the home and destination countries, English acquisition and use, prejudice or discrimination, and support from family and friends.

The success of the students in facing challenges and overcoming problems is much dependent on the learning process (An & Chiang, 2015; Tian & Lu, 2018), as was exemplified by female students from Saudi Arabia in the United States, such as improving English skills, establishing social relationships, being open to diversity, and increasing social mobility and opportunities for decision-making. In general, as a result, they felt confident, independent, intellectually developed, and accepted in their social environment (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

2.2. Transformative Learning Process

Individuals' experience in a new environment might trigger their critical reflection, which leads to a transformative learning process (Mezirow, 1981). In addition, Cranton (2011) argues "a transformative learning process can occur when a person or group encounters a perspective that is at odds with the prevailing perspective". However, Cranton (2011) reminds us that this condition does not automatically trigger a transformative learning process because when experiencing these differences, it is very likely that someone will ignore them. This cannot be considered transformational until there is a fundamental change in perspective and action as a result of the change. Furthermore, Mezirow (2000) states:

> "Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frame of reference (meaning perspective, habits of mind, mindset) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true and justified to guide action".

Learning to face new challenges is not easy because individuals already have a well-established and steady meaning structure or frame of reference acquired over the years during the early learning period. Therefore, to be able to successfully overcome particular problems, students must make changes to the meaning structure or frame of mind that they already have. Through this learning process, individuals will be able to develop a new frame of reference so that they have control over their lives as socially responsible and clear-thinking decision-makers (Mezirow, 2000).

The process of achieving self-change is not an easy undertaking. Mezirow (1991) states that in the learning process, individuals often meet obstacles, known as distortion. There are three forms of distortion i.e. epistemic, psychological, and sociolinguistic distortions. Only individuals who are able to free themselves from the shackles of these distortions will succeed in developing themselves. Therefore, they must console with their reflection, by questioning the frame of reference that they already have, in order to deal with a dilemmatic situation caused by contradictions among feelings, thoughts, and actions as a result of epistemic, psychological, and sociolinguistic distortions (Taylor, 1998).

Mezirow (1991) asserted that the transformational learning process includes ten stages, namely:

1. A disorienting dilemma.
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame.
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions.
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change.
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions.
6. Planning of a course of action.
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans.
8. Provisional trying of new roles.
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (pp.168-169).

Meanwhile, in an informal setting, Gill (2007) focused on intercultural learning process of Chinese students in England, and found that the transformative learning process involved four stages: new experiential experiences; on-going reflection and comparison; conceptualizing and constructing meaning; and engagement in learning and cultural practices. This learning cycle leads to on-going progressive development, as was added in the study.

The process of transformative learning is not linear. In his literature review, Taylor (1998) found that the transformative learning process is individual, changing, and repeating (recursive). In the context of international students' learning process, Kumi–Yeboah and James (2014a) found that around 84.8% of the students experienced a transformative learning process. The process was influenced by academic and non-academic factors. The academic factors are class discussions, support from lecturers, and learning English skills, while the non-academic factor is related to new life experiences.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was concerned with the learning experiences of international students while studying at a university in Indonesia. This research aimed at revealing the challenges faced by international students, explaining the learning process they went through while dealing with the challenges and problems, and exploring the results of the learning process. This qualitative study employed the phenomenological approach that focused on revealing what all participants had in common as they experienced a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014) or the essence or basic structure of experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) in the context of the environment (Marton, 2005). Therefore, the focus of the study was the learning experience of international students in the context of their relationship with the surrounding environment.

In order to gain a rich and varied learning experience, the sample was chosen purposively (Patton, 2015). Arrival time and country of origin were used as criteria in sample selection with the intention of obtaining in-depth and diverse learning experience. The voluntary research participants included seven (07) master students from different countries who had come to Indonesia for the first time, with consideration that individuals who were in a new situation would face a dilemmatic situation that would encourage their learning process (Mezirow, 1981). Table 1 presents the demographics of seven students involved in this study came from six (06) countries and took different majors.

Table 1. Participants' demographics.

No	Pseudo name	Age	Sex	Study program	Country
1	Mac	31	F	Educational research and evaluation	Rwanda
2	Miam	28	M	Arts education	Vietnam
3	Love	36	F	English education	Tanzania
4	Jack	31	F	Biology education	Uganda
5	Teck	35	F	English education	Mali
6	Feni	30	F	Educational management	Mali
7	Sue	35	M	Indonesian language and literature education	Uzbekistan

Disclosing information about their learning experiences was done through a semi-structured interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview was conducted informally to lessen the interviewees' psychological barriers so that they could express their experiences freely, smoothly, and naturally. The duration of the interview (60–90 minutes) was determined by considering the interviewees' heavy schedules. The main questions were prepared as a guide to explore information in accordance with the research objectives. With the consent of the research interviewees, the interviews were recorded using a mobile phone. Immediately after the completion of the interviews, the recordings were transcribed in order to avoid losing the context of the information. The results of this narrative were then checked repeatedly by reading the text while listening to the recording. This was intended

to avoid inaccuracies in the narrative and in capturing the emotional content of the expressions conveyed by the interviewees.

The data obtained were analysed through the following stages: coding, sorting categorizing, naming the category, and conclusion drawing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Coding was done by reading the text over and over again, then interpreting the meaning, and coding each piece of information according to the research objectives. The coding results were compared, sorted out, and grouped into a category. From this process, four categories were obtained: the challenges, mode of learning, meaning-making process, and students' development. The naming of categories was based on the research and literature review that is relevant to the research topic. Based on these categories, conclusions were drawn.

4. FINDINGS

From the data analysis, it was found that the learning process of international adult students went through four stages, namely: disorienting dilemma, exploring information, making meaning, and self-transforming. The learning process is illustrated in Figure 1. Initially, students experienced a disorienting dilemma due to the discrepancy between their assumptions and the new experiences they encountered. This condition stimulated them to explore information in an effort to overcome their disorientation. The acquired information was then used to interpret their assumptions, which ultimately led to self-transformation.
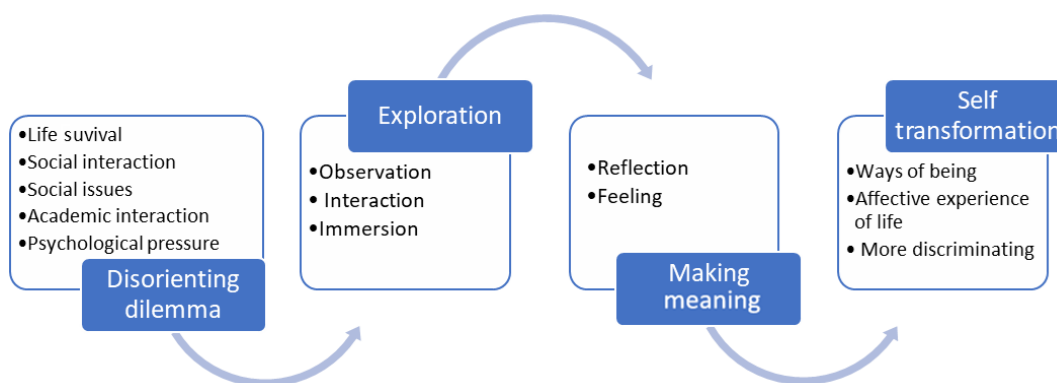

Figure 1. The process of transformative learning.

4.1. Disorienting Dilemma

When getting into the new environment, international adult students faced various challenges. These challenges led to a disorienting dilemma. Table 2 illustrates five types of challenges encountered by the research participants. They were related to (a) life survival, such as food and weather, and in general, this challenge was experienced in the early days of their arrival, and they generally experienced this problem; (b) social life, such as ways of interacting and communicating; (c) academic life, such as interaction with lecturers and language barriers; (d) social issues, such as racism and monopoly; and (e) psychological aspect, such as being depressed and confused.

Table 2. Challenges.

Themes	Codes	Sample of statements
Challenges	Life survival	Here food is spicy and sweet, it's very difficult
	Social life	'The problem here I cannot understand people here, whether they are angry or they are happy'
	Academic life	…How students behave towards lecturers and lecturers towards students… Yes, it was difficult at first
	Social issues	I often become the subject of racism, although not directly. For example, when I hang out with white students, people show more respect to them than to me
	Psychological aspect	I just keep quiet and don't respond

In their early days in a new environment, it was not uncommon for international students to deal with challenges related to their daily needs, such as food and weather. Jack stated that '… the food is too sweet. It is very difficult'. Another student said 'It is very complicated for me. For food, in the beginning, it is difficult. … in the first two weeks, the weather was very hot, and I had to ride on a motorcycle, which I failed at the beginning.

Along with food and weather issues, challenges in social life emerged, as stated by Teck from Mali.

> It is also different. I learn how to treat people… how to call people here. Sometimes I got confused about how to call people because sometimes I am polite but … sometimes I am afraid to talk to people because I think I can hurt them, so I don't want to talk too much. I am afraid of making mistakes in speaking politely so I don't like it, so sometimes I think if I don't say many words maybe I will be safe.

The same thing was experienced by Jack. He was confused when interacting with the local people. This problem came up because of differences in interaction patterns and politeness in his home country and the host country.

> Another culture in here is that people are very friendly. Apart from their culture, they always smile. When they see me and meet me, they always smile. In my country, it is very different. People rarely smile. So, sometimes I ask myself why people smile to me. Maybe there is something wrong with me.

The international students also encountered challenges in academic life. Even though they were trained for mastering basic host country language skills at the beginning of their study, they experienced problems in understanding the lecture materials. Miam said, "I find it difficult to understand the lecture materials because the lecturers speak too fast. I'm confused. I don't understand what they are explaining". Another challenge in academic life is interacting with lecturers. In general, the students felt the difference between student–lecturer interactions in their home country and those in the host country. They were used to having hierarchical and distant interactions, while in the new academic environment, the interaction patterns between lecturers and students were more informal and personal. One of the students' expressions was as follows.

> Here I think the relationship between students and lecturers is so close. They, the lecturer and the student, interact. There is no wide gap in the student-lecturer relationship. In my country, there is a very wide gap between a lecturer and his students so the lecturer should be respected very much. He cannot interact with the students so sweetly; sometimes they cannot even feel free to express themselves and speak freely with the lecturer or something like that ….

Along with the passing of time and the expansion of interactions in life, the challenges faced by students shifted from personal problems to issues of wider social life, such as racism. As Table 2 shows, one of the students felt that he was treated differently from white students. He said: '…if white students wear flip-flops and shorts, they (local student) don't say anything, but if we Africans wear sandals, they say … you are not allowed to wear it'.

The psychological problems occur when there was an imbalance between their ability to face challenges and the magnitude of the challenges they faced. Feeling depressed was one example of such a condition, as stated by Mac: 'In the beginning, I started thinking of how to change the country of destination. I mean to stop studying here and move out to another country."

4.2. Exploration

Various challenges have resulted in disequilibrium in the cognitive structure caused by the difference between the past experience and the new experience. It triggered exploration to acquire information in order to make a new balance. There are three modes of activity, namely interaction with local students and the local community, observation, and immersion in community life.

Table 3 shows that interacting with local students and the community was one of the modes of learning to acquire information. The international students tried to make relationships with the local students through social interaction in public places, such as stalls or shops and sports activities.

Table 3. Exploration.

Themes	Codes	Sample of statements
Mode of activity	Interaction with local students and community	I meet new friends, so I learn to socialize with people here
	Observation	When coming to the society, out of university, I found people here are kind, caring, you know willing to help international students or foreign people
	Immersion in community life	I live alone in my boarding house with local people, …I want to see how the student can eat once a day and keep on studying

The more friends they have with the local community, the more facilitated their learning process will be, as stated by Jack:

> So every time, I meet local people, such as in 'warungs' and food courts, wherever I go. From there I made many friends, who helped me to get used to the situation here. From that time, I got other friends. I meet new friends so I learn to socialize with local people.

In addition to providing facilitation, local students also provided a sense of security and comfort so that the international students did not feel worried about the new situations. This made it easier for them in their learning process. In the interview, Miam stated, 'Sometimes I worry very much, but my classmates always say, 'Don't worry, we will help later, in the first semester.' Now it's running well, I feel comfortable, and I get used to it'.

In addition, in facing new experiences, the international students learned not only through mingling with friends and local community but also through observing social phenomena in their environment and watching TV. The discrepancy between the experiences obtained and the phenomena encountered in the new environment triggers the learning process, as stated by Sue:

> I just understand that when you start a business, you always think about yourself. Mostly it's about money…and money is never satisfactory. The more the money is, the more it is affected. … I just understand that here business can have a negative impact. Back in my country, previously I thought business was good, and I didn't know it had a negative effect.

A similar experience in social life is from Love, when he interacted with the local community. He observed people's behaviour and acquired information about differences in the relationship between individuals in his home country and those in the host country, as he expressed:

> The other thing is the hospitality of the people here; the way they welcome people. I cannot say that we are not hospitable in my country. We are also kind, but I think here it is somewhat better than in my country.

Immersion in community life is another mode of acquiring information. Spurred by an insatiable curiosity about the lives of local students from low-income backgrounds, Mac was willing to struggle to live in a boarding house with local students in order to understand more about their lives. Even though his friends urged him to live with him, he refused the offer because he wanted to be directly involved in local people lives. His experience is presented below.

> I live alone in my boarding house with local people. There is no one from other countries living in my boarding house, but living there is my purpose because I wanted to know the condition of the students from the family whose economic background is not good, because I want to see how the students can eat once a day and keep on studying. This is my objective. My friend told me, 'Mac you have to move in to our place', but I refused, so I am happy with it, very happy with it because

that is what I want to see. I have now a book to read what I want to see. …their life is complicated, but struggling is the reason for their success. Living in the boarding house is not easy, and is very touching.

Immersion in community lives is done not only directly, but also indirectly through concern for other people's social problems. Critical consciousness of the problems faced by the community is one form of such involvement. Sue, one of the research participants, experienced the same thing. She saw that there was a phenomenon of exploitation of economic life that can endanger society. She said: 'I saw that the TV in here is too open. There are a lot of advertisements. It is b******t. I see it's useless. …This motivates people to go out shopping. It always plays the human brain'.

4.3. Making Meaning

Through interaction, observation, and immersion, students acquire information related to the challenges they faced. This information is then processed to get meaning.

Table 4. Making meaning.

Themes	Codes	Sample of statements
Making meaning	Reflection	But now after learning the characteristics, of course, I also have to be tolerant like the way they behave
	Feeling	As I said before. I was so touched by the kind of people's treatment here

As illustrated in Table 4, the making meaning process is carried out through reflection and feeling. Reflection is reviewing the existing habit of mind. For example, the process was experienced by Sue who realized confusion in her mind. She tried to overcome it through meditation, as she expressed below.

Actually, to overcome this, you need a calm mind, such as meditation and prayer. Being unable to do that, my eyes couldn't stand the negativity. Actually, before I came here I had to prepare myself first. But I can't do that. I already know my mistake, so I will meditate. I will act honestly, sincerely, and enjoyably. Yes, because the brain is full of garbage, and a little bit has to be removed.

Besides reflection, feeling is another mode used by international students in learning. It is a psychological condition in which a person is touched, and it is caused by environmental treatment. This touch made the students change without going through the process of analysing their frame of reference. This condition was felt by several students, including Jack, who expressed it in the following excerpt.

Actually, as I said before, I was so touched by the kind treatment… The people in here showed me when I just came here… hmm I tried to relate the situation to my country. Well… in my country, it is known that the people are very friendly. People around the world when they come to my country say that the people in my country are so kind, so caring, and so good. I agree with that, but when I come to this country I find that people in here is more… your status is quite better, what I mean the way the people treat the foreigner here so amazing'.

Mac also felt the same thing, he said :

If I want to go somewhere and they know that I don't know the place, they organize themselves. There are at least two people who accompany me every time. They do not allow me to go alone. You cannot find me going alone, impossible. So, if I want to go somewhere there should be someone to accompany me. See that. It is the kind of treatment that if you are a normal person you have to be changed by such a thing. That changes me.

4.4. Self-Transformation

The learning process that the international students experienced has resulted in transformation, which is indicated by a change in four aspects of the student's development. As illustrated in Table 5, with the passing of time, students became more egalitarian, patriotic, tolerant, and open.

Table 5. Learning results.

Themes	Codes	Sample of statements
Students' development	To be egalitarian	I have to treat all people equally
	To be patriotic	… So there are some changes of this spirit about the spiritual of my country
	To be tolerant	I will try to implement some of the good things I learn here… how to live in harmony with other people…
	To be more open	It made me realize that there are still many other problems that I have to learn to support my thinking

Having local students as close friends who always paid attention to them and gave support was invaluable. This had a very significant influence on the development of international students. Mac, for example, perceived being egalitarian as important, 'The way I was treated by my classmate has changed me a lot. Wherever I will be, I have to treat all people equally'. Jack also experienced a similar change, as he describes it as follows:

> I will try to implement some of the good things I learn here. Being a teacher, I mean I have a big audience.. So, I used the platform of being a teacher to inculcate in my students' good quality …how to behave, how to live in harmony with other people from different cultures, how to accommodate people no matter who they are.. I am hoping to do that.

Love experienced a change in attitude as citizen. He felt that the patriotism of the local people was very high. This changed his attitude as reflected in his following statement.

> Ya….there is something which I have to imitate. Actually, when I go back to my country I cannot just live as the people who live in my country. So, there are changes. There are some changes which are, I think…about being patriotic, patriotic in my country, loving my country that spirit in here is so strong, ….so I think when I go there, I cannot be like those people who are there so there are some changes of this spirit about the spirit of my country.

In academic life, Miam, the student from Vietnam realized that her knowledge was still limited, therefore he tried to keep learning to improve his knowledge. It indicated that he was open to a new idea. He put it as follows: '… when I gave a presentation at a seminar, at that time I got a lot of questions, I was confused. It made me realize that there are still many other problems that I have to learn to support my thinking.'

5. DISCUSSION

This study explores the learning process experienced by international adult students in eastern culture from the perspective of the transformative learning theory. The result of the analysis is an overview of the learning process experienced by international adult students. The learning process goes through four stages, namely: disorienting dilemma, exploration, making meaning, and self-transformation.

The findings of this study indicate that in the early stage, the international adult students were confronted with challenges caused by the difference between their previous frame of reference and the reality they faced. This condition is called the disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991). The five challenges that the international students in this study encountered are life survival, social interaction, academic life, social issues, and psychological pressure. Those challenges are in line with the research conducted by Taylor (1994) on the intercultural competency learning process; Ritz (2010) on the transformative learning process of international students in a cultural context; Ahrari et al. (2019) on the adjustment process of international students in Malaysia; Marinenko and Snopkova (2019) on a

challenge for international students in Belarus. One thing that makes this study stand out is the challenge to social issues, as experienced by Sue, a participant.

The result of this study further strengthens the belief that disorienting dilemmas are not always triggered or caused by dramatic situations or events, life-threatening or traumatic events, such as the death of a spouse (Mezirow, 1981) changes and life events (Narushima, 1999) or uncertainty and fear of change (King, 2002). This study also supports Cranton (1994) who says that an imbalance in cognitive structure can occur due to a mismatch between reality and expectations. It is this challenge that triggers the learning process.

There are three learning modes of activity used by the international students to face these challenges. The first mode is interaction with classmates. Close relationships and interactions with classmates are very helpful in understanding and experiencing the realities of local community life. Relationships and interactions that were established naturally are able to present the genuine value of the culture, making it easier for international students to get the real and life values. Unlike the results of previous studies in which the setting is in western societies (Briscoe, Oates, Yao, Rutt, & Buell, 2022; Erturk, Oker, & Luu, 2022; Robinson, Somerville, & Walsworth, 2020) this present study found that the international students had no difficulty in establishing relationships with local students. It can be assumed that there are similarities between Indonesian and their home cultures since mostly they come from Africa, which adheres to a collective culture that emphasizes more on harmony. This result is in line with previous research which found that local culture and society facilitate the adaptation process of international students (Kılınç, Arslan, & Polat, 2020). The second mode is observation. The learning process through observation is carried out through indirectly interacting with the environment, such as observing the phenomena encountered in everyday life and watching TV. The third mode is immersion. The immersion strategy is applied by integrating it into the life of the local community. Through this immersion, they not only understand the existing culture but also deeply appreciate the values of life. Mac, one of the research participants, experienced the struggles of students who came from poor families. This finding is in line with the study conducted by Taylor (1994) on the transformative learning process of intercultural competence, and Kearney, Perkins, and Maakrum (2014) study about cross-cultural service-learning immersion. The learning process takes place through critical reflection. This process is an attempt to question assumptions and beliefs on the basis of past experience. This is a response to the contradictions among thoughts, feelings, and actions resulted from epistemic, psychological, and sociolinguistic distortions (Taylor, 1998). This is what happened to Sue who always did meditation in order to get rid of her negative mind. In addition to reflection, the process of transformative learning also occurs through feelings. It was experienced by Love and Mac who were very touched by the treatment they received. The phrases 'amazing' and 'very touching' are examples of this feeling aspect. This finding supports Taylor's opinion which places feeling in the meaning of experience. In Taylor (2001) view, feeling and rationality are placed in a parallel and complementary position because they have a reciprocal relationship. Meanwhile, in a different dimension, Dirkx (2001) views that the transformative learning process is not carried out through rationality, but lies in imaginative engagement with the everydayness of our life.

The learning process undertaken produces changes in the individual. In Mezirow's perspective, learning outcomes are in the cognitive domain, namely perspective transformation and frame of reference or habit of mind. Meanwhile, through meta-analysis, Hoggan (2016) concludes that the results of the learning process can be in the form of changes in worldview, epistemology, ontology, and behaviour. Supporting the results of Hoggan's study, this present study found that the changes experienced by the international students are in the forms of (a) ontology (ways of being) as experienced by Mac who would treat everyone equally, Jack who lived in harmony with others, and the affective experience of life felt by Love, who turned to love her country more; and (b) epistemology (more discriminating) which was experienced by Sue who considered the need to analyse first before doing something, and Miam who realized her limited thinking capacity.

6. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of transformative learning theory, the learning process of international students includes four stages, namely: disorienting dilemma, exploring, making meaning, and self-transforming. The disorienting dilemma occurs because of differences between the individual's habit of mind or frame of reference and the demands of a new life. There are five disorienting dilemmas faced by international adult students. They are life survival, social interaction, social issues, academic interaction, and psychological pressure. These disorienting dilemmas stimulate international adult students to explore information by doing three modes of learning strategies, including establishing relationships with other students and the local community, observing daily life events, and immersing themselves in the community. The information obtained is then made into meaning through reflection and feeling. This learning experience resulted in changes in the aspects of ways of being, affective experience of life, and more discriminating. The results of this study can become a benchmark for higher education institutions to provide international students with services. Assistance at the beginning of arrival, intensive bridging course, real mingling experiences in community life, peer assistance, and individual services in lectures are some of the alternative programs that can be implemented.

REFERENCES

Ahrari, S., Krauss, S. E., Suandi, T., Abdullah, H., Sahimi, A. H. A., Olutokunbo, A. S., & Dahalan, D. (2019). A stranger in a strange land: Experiences of adjustment among international postgraduate students in Malaysia. *Issues in Educational Research, 29*(3), 611-632.

An, R., & Chiang, S.-Y. (2015). International students' culture learning and cultural adaptation in China. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 36*(7), 661–676. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2015.1009080

Ang, P. L. D., & Liamputtong, P. (2008). Out of the circle: International students and the use of university counselling services. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 48*(1), 108–130.

Boafo-Arthur, S. (2014). Acculturative experiences of black-African international students. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 36*(2), 115–124. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-013-9194-8

Briscoe, K. L., Oates, E. Q., Yao, C. W., Rutt, J. N., & Buell, K. J. (2022). Friendship within and across borders: Perceptions of social networks among first-year international students of color. *Journal of International Students, 12*(1), 195–215. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v12i1.3353

Brisset, C., Safdar, S., Lewis, J. R., & Sabatier, C. (2010). Psychological and sociocultural adaptation of university students in France: The case of Vietnamese international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34*(4), 413-426. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.02.009

Constantine, M. G., Kindaichi, M., Okazaki, S., Gainor, K. A., & Baden, A. L. (2005). A qualitative investigation of the cultural adjustment experiences of Asian international college women. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 11*(2), 162–175. https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.11.2.162

Cranton, P. (1994). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Cranton, P. (2011). A transformative perspective on the scholarship of teaching and learning. *Higher Education Research and Development, 30*(1), 75–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2011.536974

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Dai, K., & Garcia, J. (2019). Intercultural learning in transnational articulation programs: The hidden agenda of Chinese students' experiences. *Journal of International Students, 9*(2), 362-383. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v9i2.677

De Araujo, A. A. (2011). Adjustment issues of international students enrolled in American colleges and universities: A review of the literature. *Higher Education Studies, 1*(1), 2-8.

De Wit, H. (2020). Internationalization of higher education: The need for a more ethical and qualitative approach. *Journal of International Students, 10*(1), 1-4. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i1.1893

Dirkx, J. M. (2001). Images, transformative learning and the work of the soul. *Adult Learning, 12*(3), 15–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/104515950101200306

Erturk, S., Oker, K., & Luu, L. A. N. (2022). "I am not an immigrant. I am an international student:" A qualitative study of adaptation experiences of Turkish international students in Germany. *Journal of International Students, 12*(3), 716-735. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v12i3.3776

Gill, S. (2007). Overseas students' intercultural adaptation as intercultural learning: A transformative framework. *Compare, 37*(2), 167-183. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920601165512

Hoggan, C. D. (2016). Transformative learning as a metatheory: Definition, criteria, and typology. *Adult Education Quarterly, 66*(1), 57-75. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713615611216

Kearney, S., Perkins, T., & Maakrum, J. (2014). A transformative experience: A short-term cross-cultural service-learning immersion to Kenya. *Issues in Educational Research, 24*(3), 229-237.

Kılınç, A. Ç., Arslan, K., & Polat, M. (2020). Studying abroad: A phenomenological study of lived experiences of international students in Turkey. *Journal of International Students, 10*(4), 853-871. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i4.1190

Killick, D. (2018). Critical intercultural practice: Learning in and for a multicultural globalizing world. *Journal of International Students, 8*(3), 1422-1439. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1254605

King, K. P. (2002). *A journey of transformation: A model of educators' learning experiences in educational technology. ED 472 069.* Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED472069.pdf

Kumi–Yeboah, A., & James, W. (2014a). Transformative learning experiences of international graduate students from Africa. *Journal of Transformative Education, 4*(2), 109–125.

Kumi–Yeboah, A., & James, W. (2014b). Transformative learning experiences of international graduate students from Asian countries. *Journal of Transformative Education, 12*(1), 25–53. https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344614538120

Lefdahl-Davis, E. M., & Perrone-McGovern, K. M. (2015). The cultural adjustment of Saudi women international students: A qualitative examination. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 46*(3), 406-434. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022114566680

Li, A., & Gasser, M. B. (2005). Predicting Asian international students' sociocultural adjustment: A test of two mediation models. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29*(5), 561-576. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.06.003

Marginson, S. (2014). Student self-formation in international education. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 18*(1), 6–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315313513036

Marinenko, O., & Snopkova, E. (2019). Challenges facing international students during study in Belarus. *The New Educational Review, 58*(4), 144–154.

Marton, F. (2005). Phenomenography: A research approach to investigating different understandings of reality. In R. R. Sherman & R. B. Webb (Eds.), Qualitative Research in Education: Focus and Methods. In (pp. 140–160). New York: Taylor & Francis.

McMillan, J., & Schumacher, S. (2014). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry. In Pearson.* Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/id=ED577250

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Mezirow, J. (1981). A critical theory of adult learning and education. *Adult Education Quarterly, 32*(1), 3–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/074171368103200101

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA 94104-1310: Jossey-Bass, 350 Sansome Street.

Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress. The Jossey-Bass higher and adult education series. In. San Francisco, CA 94104: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome Way.

Misra, R., Crist, M., & Burant, C. J. (2003). Relationships among life stress, social support, academic stressors, and reactions to stressors of international students in the United States. *International Journal of Stress Management, 10*(2), 137-157.

Mukminin, A., & McMahon, B. J. (2013). International graduate students' cross-cultural academic engagement: Stories of indonesian doctoral students on an American campus. *Qualitative Report, 18*(35), 1–19.

Mustafa, İ., & Mevlüt, C. K. (2018). Social and cultural problems of foreign students who study at university in Turkey. *Turkish Studies, 13*(10), 371–385. https://doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.13598

Nada, C. I., Montgomery, C., & Araújo, H. C. (2018). 'You went to Europe and returned different': Transformative learning experiences of international students in Portugal. *European Educational Research Journal, 17*(5), 696-713. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904118765334

Narushima, M. (1999). *Transformative learning theory and the study of aging: The implication of case studies of older volunteers. ERIC Digest, ED 431 108*. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED431108.pdf

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Ritz, A. A. (2010). International students and transformative learning in a multicultural formal educational context. *Educational Forum, 74*(2), 158–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131721003608497

Robinson, O., Somerville, K., & Walsworth, S. (2020). Understanding friendship formation between international and host-national students in a Canadian university. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 13*(1), 49–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2019.1609067

Rose-Redwood, C. A. R., & Rose-Redwood, R. S. (2013). Self-segregation or global mixing? Social interactions and the international student experience. *Journal of College Student Development, 54*(4), 413–429. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2013.0062

Taylor, E. W. (1994). Intercultural competency: A transformative learning process. *Adult Education Quarterly, 44*(3), 154-174. https://doi.org/10.1177/074171369404400303n

Taylor, E. W. (1998). *The theory and practice of transformative learning: A critical review*. Retrieved from Information Series No. 374:

Taylor, E. W. (2001). Transformative learning theory: A neurobiological perspective of the role of emotions and unconscious ways of knowing. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 20*(3), 218-236. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370110036064

Tian, M., & Lu, G. (2018). Intercultural learning, adaptation, and personal growth: A longitudinal investigation of international student experiences in China. *Frontiers of Education in China, 13*(1), 56–92. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11516-018-0003-3

Tran, L. (2012). Transformative learning and international students negotiating higher education. International Students Negotiating Higher Education: Critical Perspectives. In (1st ed., pp. 124–141). London: Routledge.

Xiao, M. (2021). Chinese international graduate students at Canadian universities: Language barriers, cultural identities and perceived problems of engagement. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1941318

Yusoff, Y. M., & Chelliah, S. (2010). Adjustment in international students in Malaysian public university. *International Journal of Innovation, Management and Technology, 1*(3), 275-278.