

Foreign Student Experiences in Universitas Padjadjaran

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ABSTRACT

The foreign students' participation in Indonesia's educational system has become an interest to the Indonesian government, as the percentage has increased over the past few years. The essential aspect of this initiative is that the government is seeking to increase the education services in accordance with international standards, and thus foreign students are participating in this aim. Qualitative research method is used and the data are obtained from primary and secondary data sources. This research uses observation, in-depth interview, and literature and document study for data collection technique. Data validity is examined with the triangulation technique by analyzing the data obtained from several sources. The research found that, on the social life aspect, foreign students make friends with other foreign students rather than with local students or the local communities. On the cultural aspect, foreign students show interest in Sundanese culture; however, they seldom have the opportunity to be involved with the community to learn about the culture. This research contributes to the need of managing the foreign students in education setting, thus fulfilling the aim of internalization campus, and increase the visit of foreign people to Indonesia. Using management of social service concept, University Padjadjaran can achieve the world class university.

Keywords: foreign students, social interaction, management of social service

1. INTRODUCTION

The General Directorate of the Directorate of Higher Education Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of Republic of Indonesia is targeting 11

state universities to be part of World Class University (WCU) category in the next five years; one of them is Universitas Padjadjaran. The intent is to improve the reputation of Indonesian universities in the world-level university ranking system. Currently, universities are not only faced with demands for international levels, but also with the national government and educational services' increased demands for credibility. The increased foreign students' participation in the country's education system is noticed by the government, particularly in Universitas Padjadjaran, which is recorded as the university with the highest number of foreign students in Indonesia, and thus the interest of this study.

The diversity of the students' cultural background, both local and foreign, illustrates that the university has been recognized by the world community as one of the colleges that is able to provide educational services that meet the demands of the global sphere. Acceptance and social integration of foreign students in higher education are the essential components in the internationalization of the campus. This can be illustrated by foreign students' level of achievement and acceptance in respect of social adaptation based on the services rendered by the university. Social adaptation is one factor that supports foreign students' ability to integrate with the academic community, their peers (local and foreign students), as well as the local community, during their period of study.

Social adaptation is an important factor to notice. Lectures implicitly require every foreign student to have the ability to interact and engage with the society which consists of people with different cultures from their own. It is not only foreign students' responsibility to adjust to the cultural differences that exist as an effort to perform social interaction and engagement with the local community, but community's acceptance and the university's internationalization process are also influential for them.

Foreign students' social interactions will affect the quantity and quality of their adaptations with the surrounding. All foreign students have the ability to adapt through different social interaction from those of their social environment, in accordance with the cultural background from their home countries. Foreign students who come from the same region, as well as those from Southeast Asia, have the ability to adapt differently than those who come from Europe.

Based on the research conducted by Sherry, Mark, Thomas, and Wing (2010), foreign students' social interaction with the local communities will also give an impact on the academic community and local community as part of foreign students' daily activities. This may be one description of how foreign students, academics, and local communities are involved in a social interaction that can affect the quantity and quality of foreign students' admission as the implementation of higher education services for internationalization as part of the effort to promote the World Class University mission as mandated by the government.

The most essential part of this mission is the admission of foreign students as one of the efforts to improve education services within internationally based. This will be supported if foreign students have a good adaptability, especially in terms of social interaction between themselves and the surrounding social environment. Mesidor, *et.al.* (2016) state that foreign students' involvement to interact with the academic community and the local community is also one of the factors that support the internationalization of higher education and awareness of cultural tolerance. When foreign students are unable to interact well with the academic and local community, it will hamper their

performance in receiving educational services provided by the college and fulfilling the rights and obligations of as international students. Other factor influencing the improvement of education services for foreign students is on the performance of the people involved within the international unit. People hired in the international unit will representing the university's services to international students thus will influence the satisfaction of the students. As Hermiatin (2018: 55) mentioned "employee performance that directly or indirectly contributes to the company is crucial to the success of a company for external stakeholders and internal interests (employees), which are owned by the company".

Based on the above explanation, it appears that foreign students' admission is essential for the university internationalization, especially for those entrusted by the government to maintain their credibility in terms of education services as part of its efforts to become a world-class university. It will be supported if foreign students can adapt well, especially in terms of their social interactions with the surrounding physical and social environment. In this study, we examine foreign students' social interactions both with the academic community and local community around the campus.

2. METHODS

This study uses qualitative approach in order to obtain specific and complete data, and depth of the subject and object of this research from the various related perspectives. With such approach, we describe a more comprehensive picture of the real situation. The data will be analyzed to explain the reality and to draw conclusion. The phenomenon of this study is foreign students' social interaction at public universities, especially at Universitas Padjadjaran. Social interaction is used as an object of study as a factor that supports foreign students' adaptation in receiving educational services as part of efforts to internationalize public universities that are destined by the government to become world class.

Primary data are obtained directly from direct observations and interviews and secondary data are obtained from documents or other relevant literatures. Data are collected based on the availability of data in the field, time constraints, and the efficiency and the level of accuracy.

Informants are determined by purposive sampling based on the considerations and goals associated with this research focus that include various parties concerned with foreign students' social interaction at the Padjadjaran University. The considerations in determining the informants are as follows:

1. The parties involved in foreign students' social interaction at the Padjadjaran University
2. The parties involved in the provision of academic services for foreign students at the Padjadjaran University
3. The parties influenced by foreign students admission.

Data are analyzed in two stages: during the analysis and after the analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

At the time of our research, most informants have had a long time to settle into their new environment--a period of one to two years, which is enough for these foreign students to engage with new physical and social environment in the new area. The majority of the informants indicate that they do not have close relatives in Indonesia

before studying at the Padjadjaran University. However, the informants of African origin admit to have close relatives in Indonesia before studying at the Padjadjaran University. African students tend to have a strong attachment among their fellow Africans when in a foreign country, thus they provide each other with a bond between new African students and alumni in Indonesia. The informants who come from Malaysia and Japan, on the other hand, view their experiences differently because they do not have relatives in Indonesia before studying at the Padjadjaran University. Thus it takes them longer to adapt to the local community .

When it comes to communicating in Indonesian, Malaysian students have the ability to speak more fluently than those from other countries because the Malay language has common characteristics with Indonesian even though some words have the same form despite the different meanings. However, other foreign students have difficulty in using Indonesian to listen to conversation. Problems in listening to Indonesian especially affect academic performance. In this regard, foreign students have suggested the need of organized joint activities between students and local communities with the aim to help them increase their proficiency.

3.1. Academic Aspect of Foreign Students in Universitas Padjadjaran

Most informants suggest that the main reason they choose Universitas Padjadjaran is because of the reputation of the study programs and scholarships, including scholarships from the Ministries of Developing Countries from their country of origin. The Japanese students at the Padjadjaran University are typically financed by the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education of the Indonesian Republic. However, the majority of Malaysian informants indicated that they did not use scholarships, but that they came at their own expense because they had gained an interest in the reputation of the study program at the Padjadjaran University, which is already well known and trusted in Malaysia.

In addition, in terms of determining the thesis and the professor, the formulation of the thesis is done in conjunction with the supervisor. Supervisor selection is based on a policies of the professors at they faculty . However, the majority of informants indicated that they have the most admired professor to consult with about the thesis topic and the objectives of the study at the University.

The study finds that the majority of African origin informants suggested that they were inclined to pursue the doctoral programs after graduation, either to return to study at the Padjadjaran University or to go abroad again. Additionally, an Indonesian literature exchange student preferred to return to Indonesia after completing a student exchange program and then this student graduated from a university in Japan. This allowed him to work more immediately in a Japanese company operating in Indonesia than he would have experienced working in Indonesia itself. However, this experience was different from the Malaysian informants' as they preferred to to work in Malaysia because the reputation of the field of study has been recognized, and they believe that they would be able to receive a higher salary there than in Indonesia.

Most informants explained that they never felt motivated to study. Some reasons given included boredom, tutoring, homesickness, being uncomfortable socializing with the surrounding --especially with local students, and not understanding the professor's' intentions during learning activities in the classroom.

Most informants suggested that they often felt anxious during learning activities

when using Indonesian. An African student suggested that he sometimes felt scared because of his skin color. This made him prefer to join other foreign students rather than local students. Similarly, Malaysian students preferred to make friends with fellow Malaysians rather than with native Indonesian students. For example, some local students forced foreign students to work only with other foreign students, so the Malaysian students did not feel well received by local students, and one Malaysian student in particular found it difficult to communicate and thus to socially network with the local students. This student also argued that this could be one of the consequences of the separation of the classes. (International classes are separated with the classrooms for local students. Thus, they are not accustomed to working together in a group).

Most informants indicated that academic activities concerning curriculum and credit systems are already well provided through the Padjadjaran University's website for students. This is supported by the professors who provided clarifications related to the selection of subjects in the semester-credit system. The closeness between foreign students and a professor provides the opportunity for foreign students to express themselves, in spite of barriers in academic performance, without hesitation and anxiety.

3.2. Social Life Aspect of Foreign Students in Universitas Padjadjaran

Most informants suggested that the core social value they learned by interacting with the local people is the manners of expressing greetings, in terms of how to say both formal and informal greetings, and they also learned some manners in Sundanese culture. They also were guided to speak according to the Indonesian value of honoring and respecting their elderlies.

In addition, the majority of foreign student informants argued that they never asked for assistance from the Padjadjaran University Cooperation Unit related to economic and social activities. The majority of the African informants suggested that the staff approach through the Universitas Padjadjaran's Technical Implementation Unit of Cooperation to the foreign students has been very good in terms of social assistance. However, this is not the case with students from Malaysia and Japan, who provides advice to the UPT in financial transparency to foreign students.

Foreign student informants suggested that they attended the new student orientation and experience a positive vibe during the event. This event made it possible for them to make friends with local students and made it easier for them to understand the learning system and associations at the Universitas Padjadjaran.

The majority of foreign student informants suggested that the things that often prevent them from engaging in college activities or social organization or community are the accommodations as the infrastructure supporting the educational dynamic bureaucracy. The foreign students thus propose to the Padjadjaran University that they renew the accommodation system in Padjadjaran University because of the distance between Dipati Ukur campus and Jatinangor campus.

The availability of the Language Center for informants strongly supported foreign students' ability to learn the language. However, as mentioned in the foregoing discussion, students should not only be learning Indonesian in the classroom, but also outside the classroom, such as by becoming involved in programs where foreign students are able to interact with local residents.

Most informants from Africa suggested that they are often treated differently when they are in a new social environment outside the classroom. Furthermore, local

people often think these African students are from Papua (the eastern part in Indonesia). Most African informants argued that they have not been able to establish friendships in the long term with local students. Often local students do not accept the invitation to join in social activities outside the classroom. In addition, an informant suggested that a local student confessed to not being comfortable socializing together. Local students prefer to join with other local students rather than with foreign students. Uncomfortable with local students, Malaysian students prefer to engage with other Malaysian students.

In addition, the non-functioning of an organization that houses foreign students at the Padjadjaran University has prevented foreign students from having the means to establish relationships and communication, for example Malaysian students have never socialized with other foreign students due to ignorance of the existence of other foreign students because there is no introductions during the new student orientation. Because of this, the majority of informants admitted that they often felt homesick. Their treatment for homesickness is to contact their family through social media, such as through Line, Whatsapp, and Skype. In this regard, Indonesia's proximity to Malaysia made the Malaysian student informants experience less homesickness compared with other foreign students, especially those from Africa.

However, the majority of informants said that they were afraid of the local people's behavior, because they were afraid of becoming victims of local crime. For example, one of the African student informants met drunken local people; the Vietnamese and Thai students were victims of cellphone theft; a Malaysian informant mentioned being victim of laptop theft in a boarding house; and a Japanese student had a culture shock when riding public transportation because of the reckless driver. This fear made the majority of informants always be careful in every daily activity outside the campus.

Most informants argued that they were able to adapt to the social environment in Indonesia within a period of one to three months. However, foreign students admitted that making friends with foreign students was easier and that these friendships survive longer than those they made with local students.

Students of African origin often received academic support from professors and classmates. However, they have not yet received support in the form of social activities through the offices of UPT Padjadjaran University Cooperation and from fellow students from their country of origin. In this case, the informant suggested that he had made several complaints about the social activities at Padjadjaran University, as well as about facility improvements and the strengthening of the foreign student association at Padjadjaran University.

However, most informants of African origin suggested that they were very open to the social environment around the boarding house, particularly for local people. One of them has had the opportunity several times to be involved in social activities as an international speaker for international schools around the residence. Similarly, Malaysian students have been involved in activities with local communities through learning programs and faculty dedication to the surrounding communities. However, the engagement did not last long because of their busy days in academic activities.

3.3. Cultural Aspects of Foreign Students in Universitas Padjadjaran

The majority of foreign student informants suggested that the most miserable

experience they have ever experienced was related to being victims of local petty crimes. It is time to make their traumatic few days better by helping them to socialize with people and to know how to be more cautious about trusting the local people. On the other hand, some foreign students have had good experiences related to their ability to communicate with the local people. It is an achievement to be a foreign student in Indonesia, but it was so much more significant when one of our informants was able to be trusted by the teaching staff to be a research assistant.

Although sometimes establishing social interaction with the local population can be difficult, some foreign students suggested that local people have characteristics that are very welcoming and friendly. This makes them feel safe and comfortable when communicating, aside from the dreary experiences they have over their academic life. In particular, some foreign student informants acknowledged that the Sundanese people are very supportive of the social performance of foreign students, more so than the foreign students experience in other places.

In addition, one of the students was very interested in Sundanese culture, which has a distinctive and varied cultural characteristics, ranging from procedures, ethics, manners, musical instruments, and more. Sundanese culture is very diverse and interesting to learn. However, the majority of foreign student suggested that the Padjadjaran University not facilitate their further studying the Sundanese culture through a program for foreign students.

Social interaction is a process where the creation of action and reaction between people as fellow humans leads to people forming relationships (Macionis, 1996). This process is important because social interaction is essentially one of the main parts of social life. Through social interaction, foreign students can learn and study the cultural elements of other communities, including technology, art, science, and more. The cultural aspect of social interaction shows the dynamic of social life that becomes the basis of change in attitude and forms a social structure. Social structure by definition is a rule forming the norms.

Naturally, social interactions in society have positive and negative effects. In a positive social interaction, the needs of foreign students are met as they interact with the community and college life through their ability to communicate with the local population. This is in line with the process of interactions in meeting human needs, strengthening cooperation, creating peace, improving social relations between individuals and between groups, and creating stability in the society. In the process of inheriting the culture of the surrounding community, one can see that some foreign students try to assimilate and conform to the local communities' customs, such as by trying to speak and communicate in the Indonesian, trying to greet the neighbors and even to the point of dating Indonesian people.

The results of the study showed that the African students were friendly, courteous, and open to the local community; however, the local community and local students have not been able to fully accept the African students' being in their country because of the different cultures and languages. The Universitas Padjadjaran needs to review the situation in order to maximize the potential of African students to engage in community activities with local students, given the fact that the number of students from Africa continues to increase at the Universitas Padjadjaran.

But in social interaction, there is evidence showing the impact is negative, due to the contacts and communication that are not going well. These things will lead to the

creation of individual and group divisions and prejudices, and these will certainly causing damage to many people (including property and lives). This is because the basic concept of social interaction is a reciprocal relationship, which means that every interaction will affect the response of other parties as well.

3.4. Services for Foreign Students at Universitas Padjadjaran

As moving forward to become world class university, ideally a university should have an International Students Service Unit. At Universitas Padjadjaran, the International Office is located under the authority of Cooperation Directorate and is reachable at the address <http://international.unpad.ac.id>. Despite the availability of the services for foreign students mentioned in the web, some informants mentioned that they were having difficulties in gaining some information, such as information on dormitory room around campus. Especially those who do not stay at campus accomodation, they have to search their own accomodation which often resulting unease and scary feelings. Another issue is that foreign students sometimes do not have time to meet face to face with assistant from the international office, thus make it hard for them to consult their difficulties during their stay at Indonesia.

Other than that, little information on surrounding society's custom also made the foreign students felt uncomfortable, because they believe that information on society's custom around campus would be beneficial for them to adjust the cultural and social environment. The availability of information regarding custom and cultural on Sundanese people are believed to be helpful for foreign students in studying at Universitas Padjadjaran.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results, it can be concluded that foreign students at the Padjadjaran University feel that even though they had been settled for more than one to two years, they still felt ashamed because of their inability to use Indonesian to talk to the locals. This problem has affected their interactions in the academic, social, and cultural aspects of their lives at the Padjadjaran University. For the academic aspect, the foreign students have access to apply for the services of the International Cooperation Unit and the majority of informants were satisfied with the assistance given by the International Cooperation Unit (UPT) of the Padjadjaran University. For the aspects of social life, the foreign students at the Padjadjaran University still feel constrained by the ability to use Bahasa Indonesia in everyday conversation, so they expect the Language Unit to help them improve their language skills. Besides expecting support from UPT Language, the results showed that foreign students can make new friends by participating in Student Activity Unit in the Padjadjaran University. Often the foreign students will get information about activities from the SMEs by word of mouth, thus in the case of they do not actively ask, they are not able to follow the activities. The foreign students believed that the SMEs should actively offer or inform them about their activities, so that the foreign students can obtain precise and accurate information regarding activities that may be of interest to them. For the cultural aspects, the research revealed that foreign students at the Padjadjaran University are often the victims of petty crime by the local population, so they should be more careful in interacting with the surrounding community of Padjadjaran University. Even so, they still assume that in the majority of cases, the local population is very welcoming and friendly. The majority of foreign

students who became informants in this study hoped that Padjadjaran University would facilitate their interaction with the local community, such as learning programs through Community Service Program in collaboration with local students, foreign students, and local residents; and hold programs every month to provide a means for local communities to recognize the presence of foreign students further, such as through cultural exchanges in sports and arts festivals.

Some aspects need to be addressed by Universitas Padjadjaran in connection with social service management, such as the availability of information technology in social service delivery, risk management, community relations, and service delivery systems. As a higher education body, although university is a formal organization in shape, but different from other formal organization, which is focusing at the educational aspect. The objective of education is not only making people clever, but aiming at graduating wise people. Thus in order to support the objective, then the management of university as human service should be the people who have wisdom on human being, especially as social being. Theoretically, human relations management provide the possibility as mentioned by Wibhawa (2016) that this theory is emphasize on problem solving and decision making based on manager's understanding on determinant factors, either rational or irrational (such as social factors, affective) in human behavior within the organization.

For university as human service organization, the human relations approach seem relevant with the character of the organization to achieve its goals. Even David Sun said that "Business is not about money, ...it's about relationships" (in Daft, 2007:260). Thus, the existing and incoming services from Universitas Padjadjaran should put the relationship between foreign students with their surrounding as the priority. Thus, completing and existing various services are expected to provide safety and comfortable feeling for foreign students in studying at Universitas Padjadjaran and the university itself can achieve the qualification as one of world class university.

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