

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Culture is a dynamic process that assists people in perceiving, interpreting, and relating to the world. On one hand, it constitutes the base for collective belonging, while at the same time, it flows into reshaping itself within globalization and migration processes. In today's interconnected world, migration has emerged as one of the defining features of this era and has inspired varied ways through which individuals interact with and experience cultures. This dynamic nature of culture has been a subject of debate for a long period. As early as 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn analyzed 160 definitions of culture and identified six categories (Ting-Toomey & Tenzin Dorjee, 2019). Culture consists of explicit and implicit behavior patterns acquired and transmitted through symbols, representing the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their expression in artifacts. At its foundation, culture is a set of traditional ideas, history-derived and selected, along with associated values. Culture is thus both a product of human action and a factor that influences future action.

For many, the decision to live abroad offers a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in new environments, where exposure to different cultural norms, values, and communication styles can impact their perceptions and behaviors. Over time, these individuals inevitably absorb elements of the host culture, adopting ways of thinking and interacting that may differ from those of their home country. However, the experience of returning to their homeland can present a set of complex challenges as they attempt to reintegrate into a cultural landscape shaped by longstanding traditions and communication patterns. In the case of Indonesians who have spent extended periods abroad, returning home often involves adapting to local communication practices deeply rooted in Indonesian cultural heritage, which places a high value on harmony, hierarchy, and indirect communication (Kabir & Kabir, 2007).

This research delves into the experiences of Indonesians who have lived abroad,

examining the shifts in their communication styles, behaviours, and perceptions as they navigate the complexities of reintegration into their home culture. Many existing studies and research were stated in *The Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication* (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002). For example, living in foreign countries, particularly in Western societies, often exposes Indonesians to more individualistic and direct forms of communication, emphasizing clarity, personal expression, and low-context interaction. These communication styles starkly contrast with Indonesia's high-context, collectivist communication culture, where indirectness, non-verbal cues, and the preservation of social harmony are important. As a result, when these individuals return home, they may encounter difficulties adjusting to the more implicit communication style prevalent in Indonesian society, which requires sensitivity to social hierarchy and group solidarity (Hofstede, 1991; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Triandis, 1995).

During the adaptation process mentioned here, individuals' sense of self and how they view and define themselves in relation to others undergo changes. Cultures are typically divided into two categories based on self-perception or interdependence. In societies, there is a tendency to cultivate a self-perception where individuals consider themselves independent, distinctive, and self-sufficient. The cultural context of Indonesia, for instance, encourages interdependent self-construals in which people view themselves as closely interconnected with others and emphasize roles and relationships to maintain community harmony. For Indonesians returning home after extended exposure to more independent self-construals abroad, there may well be tension between their emerging selves and the demands imposed by a collectivist environment that insists on conformity with social norms and group demands. This can influence how returning Indonesians approach conflicts/disagreements because most cultural norms encompass conflict resolution methods with the main aim of saving face and maintaining harmony.

Expressions of remorse and courteous acts such as apologies and polite gestures may be utilized to ease relations. However, the root causes of conflicts may not always be fully addressed. In contrast, individuals who have adapted to a different conflict style may expect that offering an apology or discussing the issue openly resolves the problem but often discover that the conflict lingers beneath the surface in Indonesia. For example, in some cases, saying "sorry" might be seen as merely a superficial gesture in Indonesian

contexts, rather than a resolution of the conflict, as emotions like pride and shame continue to influence interpersonal dynamics (Boltivets, 2024).

Pride and shame are two of the most important emotions in how conflict is played out, and reintegration occurs. Indeed, in face-saving cultures such as Indonesia, shame can be one of the serious drivers of communication, while people are geared toward avoiding confrontation or downplaying any disagreement to maintain social standing. This pride may be problematic for returning Indonesians who have gone on to adopt more direct conflict values, the direct handling of issues, or standing up for oneself, thereby creating tension with those who allow conflict resolution to occur more restrained and harmoniously. This complex emotional dynamic can complicate the reintegration process as returning individuals struggle to reconcile their new communication preferences with the expectations of their local counterparts. Another fantastic influential factor in the reintegration process has to do with communities, organizations, and social groups to which returning Indonesians belong or relate. Their network may induce or suppress adaptation depending on the degree to which it supports the individual's identity and communication style in evolution. For example, returning expatriates who are joining some expatriate communities or international organizations will find it easier to maintain the developed communication pattern while abroad. Such groups provide belongingness and validation to the more direct communication styles or independent self-construals (Setti et al., 2022).

While readjustment to the more conservative Indonesian institutions or community groups might be challenging, as such an environment often reinforces the hierarchical and collectivist norms of Indonesian culture. In the case of de Groot et al. (2024), it is a setting for interaction to adaptation. In such settings, returning persons are often expected to repress or alter their communication styles to adjust to the demands imposed by the group, which might result in identity conflict. Social pressures make the feelings of frustration or alienation even more telling as one strives to balance the internalized foreign influences and the demands of one's home culture.

This research focuses on young Indonesian adults who have returned to Indonesia after living abroad for at least five years, during which they experienced prolonged exposure to foreign cultures, communication styles, and parenting approaches distinct

from one another. These individuals, often fluent in English and deeply adapted to the cultural norms of their host countries, face unique challenges in reintegrating into Indonesian society. Their return involves navigating cultural dissonance, re-establishing identity, and negotiating their sense of belonging, shaped by hybrid identities that blend their overseas experiences with their Indonesian roots. The study aims to explore how these experiences influence their communication patterns, attitudes, and adaptation processes, shedding light on broader phenomena such as the impact of globalization and transnational mobility on identity. This issue is timely and significant, as it uncovers returning Indonesians' unique reintegration challenges and contributions, providing valuable insights into identity negotiation and cultural adaptation in an increasingly interconnected world.

The study uses Intercultural communication, self-construals, face concerns, and conflict styles as theoretical frameworks to inform on broader implications for cultural reintegration in a globalizing world with rising international migration and intercultural exchange. Other than that, this research also undercovers the importance of understanding how prolonged exposure to foreign cultures can reshape individuals' perceptions of their own identity and place within society. Returning Indonesians may experience a sense of cultural dissonance, where their evolving communication patterns and attitudes do not align with those of their family, friends, or colleagues who have remained rooted in Indonesian culture. This dissonance can lead to frustration, isolation, or even reverse culture shock as individuals struggle to reconcile the influences of their time abroad with the expectations of their home society. Moreover, the research will examine how these returnees' shifting communication styles and attitudes impact their personal and professional relationships as they attempt to reintegrate into Indonesian social structures.

An existing study on topic analysis by Ozola and Martinson (2023) has several possible research gaps. While both studies do indeed focus on the differences in communication between individualistic and collectivist cultures, this thesis provides more depth since it will research the unique challenges that returning Indonesians face. It points out the issues that have not been sufficiently researched so far, such as reverse culture shock, changes in self-construal, emotional factors like pride and shame, and the role of social networks in reintegration. In particular, this approach provides new insights into

intercultural communication and cultural adjustment by stressing emotional and social dynamics within personal and professional relations.

Another existing study by (Mailin et al., 2023) exploring intercultural communication in Indonesia. Comparing this study with Mailin et al's, both studies head in the direction of intercultural communication in Indonesia's highly diverse cultural setting. The research discusses indirect communication and language barriers, among other issues, with in-depth discourses on the importance of cultural values such as collectivism and respect for authority. The same themes are discussed in my research: investigating how young Indonesian returnees navigate these dimensions of culture, specifically examining their transitioning from individualistic, direct communication styles to the collectivist and high-context norms of Indonesia abroad. Both studies also offer the same way of improving one's communication through heightened cultural awareness and language proficiency.

On the contrary, though the given study has taken a larger view at the intercultural communication between ethnic groups, my research will zoom into a deeper re-integration of young returnees. While the focus of my study returnees uses the same Communication Theory of Identity to describe how returnees negotiate hybrid identities and bridge chasms of identity. My research also covers areas that the given study has not considered, such as conflict management styles and the role of emotions like pride and shame in shaping communication and adaptation. Mine covers more the specific demographic, hence providing an in-depth look at the challenges of reintegration into the modern globalized era.

Overall, the study plans to better understand Indonesians who have lived abroad and their reintegration challenges, especially in dealing with cultural and communicative tensions during the process. This research will expand the intercultural communication field by exploring shifts in communication attitudes, habits, and conflict management that international students experience when they readapt to their country of origin. In a world characterized by high levels of migration and cultural encounters, understanding these processes is essential for creating more integrated, culturally cognizant societies that are able to relate sympathy to the complex life histories of individuals who negotiate multiple identities.

1.2. Research Objectives

This research attempts to understand how returning Indonesians readjust communication upon returning home. Specifically, the study shall look into the adaptive changes within the returning Indonesians' communication style as they balance their use of direct and indirect communication. This objective seeks to establish how such changes align with or significantly collide with the high-context culture and indirect communication that has been the order of the day in Indonesia. It also explores how intercultural experiences abroad influence the returnees. Through a critical analysis of the influence of prolonged exposure to the other culture's ways, this study will find out how returnees' perceptions have changed, especially on social dynamics, conflict resolution, and interpersonal relationships from what is locally expected. Therefore, some key dimensions of research in this reintegration process will include individualism versus collectivism, power distance, and self-construals. These dimensions are critical in explaining how returnees' independence or interdependence and experiences of living with power structures influence their adaptation processes to Indonesian communication practices.

The study also aimed to look into the problems the returnees had during their reentry about adjustment to local norms and conflicts. This objective is purposed to identify concrete challenges to readjustment in Indonesian society, such as diverging expectations toward social behavior and feelings of pride or shame resulting from cultural dissonance. Furthermore, the research will examine how involvement in the community and social groups has an impact on the reintegration process of the returnees. This study shall identify how involvement in local communities or groups upon return impacts communication styles and cultural conflict management. The role played by social networks in making reintegration easy shall be unraveled.

Finally, this study will examine the effect of time spent abroad on communication behavior and reintegration. This objective explains whether more time spent abroad would make the changes in communication more permanent, which could either help or hinder full reintegration into Indonesian society. Together, these provide a complete analysis of the multifarious reintegration journey experienced by Indonesians returning from overseas.

1.3. Research Problem

It is with the increased globalization of the world today that migration and prolonged stays abroad have become frequent, thus exposing individuals to different cultural norms, values, and communication styles than what they are accustomed to (Boltivets, 2024). Indonesians residing abroad often have to plunge into and accommodate cultures that are sometimes very different from their own, especially in terms of communication and conflict management. The issue is that while many studies are concerned with the cultural adaptation of people relocating to foreign countries, less attention has been paid to the challenges faced by those returning to their home country after an extended period abroad.

Upon returning home, they may have difficulty readjusting to the high-context and collectivist cultural norms of the local communication practices, which are predominantly directed toward indirect communication, face-saving, and respect for social hierarchy. Returnees who have adapted abroad to more straightforward, individualistic forms of communication will struggle with accommodating these new ways to what Indonesian society expects of them. This can lead to misunderstandings, conflict, and feelings of isolation that complicate this process.

In addition, returnees must experience complex emotions of pride and shame and reconcile shifting identities and self-construals. The duration of the sojourn abroad, the internalization of specific cultural values, and the engagement with local communities and organizations add further contexts for adjustment. However, less is known about how these factors interlink to impact the communications behaviors and conflict management strategies of the returnees.

The central research problem, therefore, is the lack of understanding of how Indonesians who have lived abroad adapt their communication styles, perceptions, and behaviours once they return to Indonesia. More precisely, there is a need to find out how such returnees adapting intercultural differences in communication, manage conflict in the context of face concerns, and deal with the emotional and social readjustment to life back in their home culture. When this situation is not handled or addressed correctly, it

may lead to returnees being alienated from Indonesian social life for an extended period, resulting in hostile interpersonal relations and well-being.

This research aims to address these gaps by investigating the communication and reintegration experiences of Indonesians who have returned from living abroad. It focuses on how they adjust to local cultural expectations and manage the complex dynamics of returning home.

1.4. Research Significance

1. **Contribution to Intercultural Communication Studies:** This research contributes to Intercultural communication by studying how Indonesians lived abroad and modified their communication style upon returning to a high-context culture. By emphasizing the unique experiences of these returnees, this research contributes a new understanding of how people adjust their communication- a gap in many studies that usually overlook the challenges of coming back and fitting into their home culture.
2. **Understanding of Reintegration Challenges:** This research has shed light on the often overlooked experiences of individuals who have spent extended periods in foreign cultures. It has brought into view the problems and barriers that returnees struggle with in trying to readjust themselves to the patterns of communication at home and cultural expectations. This knowledge is essential for formulating strategies to support returnees in their reintegration process.
3. **Implications for Social and Cultural Policy:** The results of this study prove helpful in real life to government agencies, educational institutions, and organizations that deal with Indonesian expatriates or returnees. By mapping out the challenges faced by returnees, especially in communication and conflict management, the present research could provide information for policies or programs that would help make reentry easier for returnees and help minimize cultural shock and communication breakdowns in reintegration.
4. **Enhancing Organizational and Community Support for Returnees:** This study explores the role of communities, organizations, and social groups in

facilitating returnees' adjustment. It would provide useful suggestions for community leaders and support organizations regarding the establishment of more supportive communities that give attention to the special communicative needs of individuals who are returning to their home culture from abroad. This would help in building improved interpersonal relationships and avoiding misunderstandings.

5. **Broader Impact on Globalization and Cultural Adaptation:** As globalization continues to encourage cross-border movements of migrants, the experiences of communication and reintegration of returnees in their home countries become all the more relevant. This study not only provides a unique focus on Indonesians, but it also carries broader implications for understanding how individuals across cultures negotiate their identities and styles of communication in transitioning between different cultural contexts.
6. **Practical Guidance for Returnees:** On a personal level, such research may help returnees make sense of their experiences and difficulties and thus try to work out the emotional and cultural problems emerging in their readjustment to Indonesian society. By highlighting typical problems and strategies of adaptation, such a study could serve as a source for returnees in their attempts to reconcile the differences between the communication styles they adopted abroad and those expected at home.

1.5. Research Time and Location

- a. **Research Period:** The research period occurs from September to January as a whole. During this time, various methods and researches including in-depth interviews will be arranged based on participants' availability. The interviews will be completed by December, allowing sufficient time for transcription and subsequent analysis.
- b. **Research Method:** This study is a qualitative research which will utilize previous and existing researches and theories as a back-up as well as in-depth interviews with selected individuals fitting the category which will be carried out and done as the primary data collection technique. The interviews will consist of open-ended, exploratory questions designed to gain deeper insights into the participants' experiences.

Table 1. Overview of Research Activity

NO	TYPES OF ACTIVITIES	MONTH					
		1 (Aug)	2 (Sep)	3 (Oct)	4 (Nov)	5 (Dec)	6 (Jan)
1	Preliminary Research						
2	Title Discussion						
3	Proposal Drafting						
4	Proposal Seminar						
5	Data Collection						

6	Data Processing and Data Analysis						
7	Thesis Defense						