


Chapter 1

The Hybridity of Identities in the Third Space: A Voice From Central Asia Students at Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang

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ABSTRACT

The increasing number of International students at Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang, Indonesia necessitates special attention to their existence on campus. It's undeniable that their lives in a new place require identity negotiation. A new identity should ideally be forged in a place called "the third space"; a concept which Homi K. Bhabha Described as a meeting point where two different cultures converge. Using Narrative inquiry research methodology, this research comprised two international students from Central Asia, specifically from Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The result stated that the Central Asian students having two main reasons beyond their decision to study in Indonesia: the scholarship and the Islamic-majority population. on the other hand, in their first coming to Indonesia, one informant experienced feeling of loneliness, while the other felt a sense of togetherness. Regarding the negotiation of identity in the third space, this research identified two original learning identity: memorize learner and logical and critical thinker learner.

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INTRODUCTION

Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang, Indonesia endeavors to achieve international reputation and recognition. This aspiration to get international reputation aligns with Indonesia's vision to become a source of education internationally and signifies the presence of Indonesian education on the world stage (Simek & Stewart, 2024). Consequently, the enrollment of international students within Indonesian context or the internalization of Indonesian's universities is in line with this broader vision. A key indicator of a university's internationalization is the continuous increase in its international student population. In 2021, the university was recognized as the state Islamic university with the highest number of foreign students in Indonesia (Abadi Wijaya, 2021). Indeed, this institution has observed a consistent growth in its international student enrollment over the years (Rosi, 2017). For instance, in 2023-2024, 52% of international students are originally from Arabic Speaking Countries and 48% are coming from non-Arabic speaking countries (Rosi, 2023). Interestingly, in 2024-2025, students from Arab countries continue to form the majority, yet the number of students from non-Arabic speaking countries has remained stable. Notably, from 2023 to 2024, there has been a noticeable increase in students from Asian countries.

Majority of researchers chosen Chinese students as representative of Asian international students due to their amount and identity (Li et al., 2015). However, the voices of many other international students from Asia have yet to be heard. Therefore, this study adopts a different focus from majority of researchers who primarily focus on Chinese students. This research specifically examines international students from two Central Asian countries: Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Tajik Students (hereafter referred to as "Tajiks") were selected because of the significant increase in their enrollment in Indonesia since 2022, a trend driven by the local government's opening of more opportunities for studying abroad. This policy has been leveraged by Tajiks to pursue education overseas, including Indonesia (Turistiati et al., 2024). Afghanistan on the other side was selected due to a significant increase in international students from the country, a trend driven by the Indonesian government's provision of scholarships as part of its 'business for peace' initiative on the global stage (Angeli & Maksum, 2025; Farizan & Heryadi, 2021). Therefore, the increasing number of Tajiks and Afghans studying in Indonesia necessitates continuous research in order to contribute to the learning enjoyment of International students and achieve the aforementioned vision of Indonesia's presence in the global world of education.

Research on international students is increasingly important because several previous studies have revealed that they often experience acculturative depression (Li et al., 2015; O'Reilly et al., 2010), cultural shock (Ahmed & Shahzeb, 2024; Widiasih et al., 2020), homesickness and loneliness (Ahmed & Shahzeb, 2024; Ali

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