


Chapter 2


From Situbondo to the Netherlands: A Narrative Study of Intercultural Learning and Identity Negotiation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines intercultural adaptation as negotiation of communicative norms, cultural values, and identity positions in secular and multicultural contexts. It focuses on a rural-origin Muslim student in the Netherlands, showing how religious identity, linguistic resources, and social positioning influence adaptation. Data from interviews and documents were analyzed using transitivity and appraisal frameworks. Findings show shifts in participation, negotiation of religious accommodation, and adjustment of interactional norms, extending research by considering rural background and limited pre-departure exposure. The chapter recommends

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tailored preparation, peer mentoring, and recognition of religious practices while demonstrating the value of integrating identity and acculturation perspectives with linguistic analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Coming from Situbondo, a rural city with limited exposure to global opportunities, the journey of an Indonesian Muslim student to the Netherlands as a master's student was nothing short of a transformative experience. Growing up in an environment where English was rarely spoken outside of classrooms, the mastery of English, which was initially developed as an academic necessity, emerged as a powerful tool for cultural navigation and academic success. The ability to communicate in English became a form of capital that facilitated engagement with a diverse academic community and enabled participation in international discourse. This experience aligns with the finding that linguistic competence significantly shapes students' participation and identity negotiation during study abroad experiences (Cai et al., 2022).

Building upon this linguistic foundation, the university facilities in the Netherlands presented a striking contrast to those in Situbondo. The Dutch academic environment, with its advanced libraries and well-resourced student dormitories, was designed to nurture learning in a holistic manner. Living in a student dorm was not merely a housing arrangement but a meaningful experience that enabled connections with peers from across the globe and fostered the expansion of social networks. This environment stood in contrast to the limited educational and social infrastructure in the student's hometown. These interactions were shaped by linguistic capital, as the ability to communicate in English provided access to valuable academic and social opportunities. As highlighted by Smith et al. (2011) and Thoyib et al. (2024), the use of social capital through networks is essential in language acquisition and cultural integration during study abroad.

As academic and social experiences deepened, the student also began to navigate the complexities of identity in this new cultural setting. Negotiating identity involved confronting differences in social and academic norms. In the Netherlands, informal discussions between professors and students during lectures were common and initially perceived as unfamiliar and unstructured. Over time, the student learned to adapt, using the identity of an international student as an asset to navigate and participate in these new academic conventions. This adaptation process reflects Diao's (2017) and Thoyib et al.'s (2025) argument that study abroad programs offer spaces in which learners reinterpret and renegotiate their identities, particularly in relation to linguistic norms and cultural practices. These evolving experiences

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