


Chapter 5

Academic Expression and Emotional Suppression of an Indonesian Student in China: Stress in Translation

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ABSTRACT

An Indonesian master's student studying civil engineering in China has emotional and linguistic hurdles. This study focuses on how academic expression and translation stress affects study abroad. The autoethnographic narrative inquiry study collects data from academic presentations, group projects, supervisor interactions, and classroom experiences. These personal stories demonstrate how emotions, language, culture, and academics create identity and self-perception. Academic expression is often challenging due to the need to articulate complicated concepts in English and the incapacity to communicate them in Mandarin for everyday encounters. Emotional suppression helps negotiate hierarchical academic relationships, but it increases stress and loneliness. The study shows how language, emotion, and identity are linked: modest communication successes boost confidence and belonging, while linguistic failures shame and anxiety. Imaginary communities, translanguaging, and peer support provide short-term relief but show the limits of emotional health.

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INTRODUCTION

Studying overseas has grown in popularity in recent years, especially among Indonesian students. It is regarded as a prestigious achievement that promises enhanced academic quality, global competitiveness, and intercultural experience. For most students, studying abroad is also interpreted as a form of escape from social, educational and economic pressures at home. The phenomenon known in popular Indonesian discourse as “kabur aja dulu” or “running away” reflects the adaptive strategy employed by the younger generation in response to structural stagnation and limited access in their home environment (Azilla, 2025).

China has emerged as one of the main study destinations, especially for students from developing countries such as Indonesia. The country offers full scholarships through the Chinese Government Scholarship under the Belt Road Initiative (BRI). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a leading factor in the growth of international education in China. This policy aims to enhance not only economic cooperation, but also education, with a focus on BRI member countries (such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Nigeria, and Kenya). They also provide an increasingly modern and international higher education environment. This is reinforced by bilateral education cooperation between Indonesia and China, which places China as one of the most popular study destinations for Indonesian students. The growth in the amount of international students has reached more than 500,000 people in 2023 (Zhu et al., 2025).

The truth underlying these academic prospects is often disregarded. Some overseas students find this experience difficult, especially when language hurdles, academic demands, and emotional pressure are combined (Andrade, 2006; Sawir et al., 2008). Translation stress is not just a linguistic issue; students must also grasp academic expression restrictions and the need to conceal or gauge their emotions. International students studying in China face unique dynamics. They must navigate three languages simultaneously: their first language as their language of thought, English as their academic medium, and Mandarin as their social and administrative language. This shift is not only technical, but also emotional. Many students experience language anxiety and identity confusion as they adjust to new academic and cultural standards.

International students must be able to adapt to rigorous academic pressure, high performance expectations, and multilingual communication dynamics. This is exacerbated by the imbalance between academic fluency and the ability to communicate emotionally in a foreign language (Pavlenko, 2005). Although there are several other Indonesian students on campus, they are in different departments and therefore cannot be a direct support system in the learning context. English is used

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