

**CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL TRANSITIONS: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF INDONESIAN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN AUSTRALIA
AND ACEH**

THESIS

Submitted by:

Muhammad Qaid Al Aufa

NIM. 220203117

Student of Teacher Training and Education Faculty

Department of English Language Education



**FAKULTAS TARBIYAH DAN KEGURUAN
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI AR-RANIRY**

BANDA ACEH

2026 M/1447 H

THESIS

Submitted to Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan
Universitas Islam Negeri Ar Raniry Banda Aceh
In Partial Fulfillment of The Requirements of The Degree
Bachelor of Education in English Language Teaching

by:

Muhammad Qaid Al Aufa

NIM. 220203117

Student of Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan
Department of English Language Education

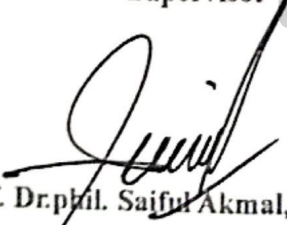
Approved by:


جامعة الرانيري

A R - R A N I R Y

Supervisor

Head of Department


Prof. Dr.phil. Saiful Akmal, S.Pd.L, MA
NIP. 198203012008011006


Syarifah Dahliana, M.Ed., Ph.D.
NIP. 197504162000032001

It has been defended in *Sidang Munaqasyah* In front of the board of the Examination for the working paper and has been accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor Degree of the Education in English Language Teaching

On:

April, 27rd 2026 M

Monday,

Zulkaidah, 9th 1447 H

In Darussalam, Banda Aceh

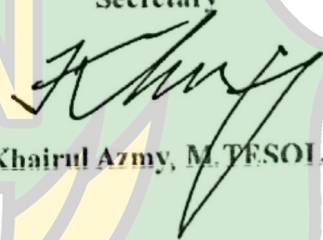
Board of Examination,

Chairperson



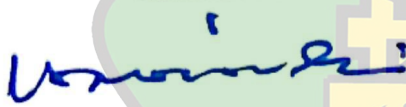
Prof. Dr. phil. Saiful Akbaral, S.Pd.I., MA

Secretary



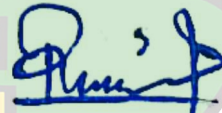
Khairul Azmy, M. TESOL.

Examiner I



Prof. Habiburrahim, M. Com, MS., Ph.D

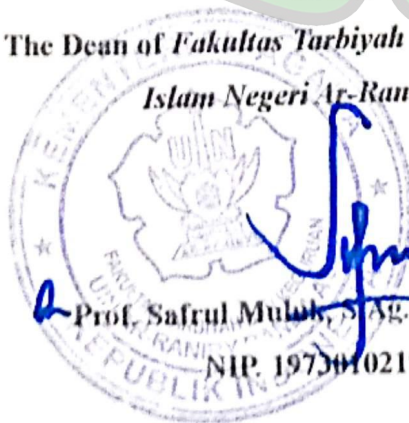
Examiner II



Rahmi, S.Pd.I., M. TESOL., Ph.D

Certified by:

The Dean of *Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh*




Prof. Safrul Mulak, S.Ag., M.A., M.Ed., Ph.D.

NIP. 197301021997031003

SURAT PERNYATAAN KEASLIAN

(Declaration of Originality)

Saya yang bertanda tangan dibawah ini

Name : Muhammad Qaid Al Aufa
Nim : 220203117
Tempat/Tanggal Lahir : Banda Aceh, 14-12-2002
Alamat : Jl. Rawasakti 10, Jeulingke, Syiah Kuala,
Banda Aceh

Menyatakan dengan sesungguhnya bahwa skripsi yang berjudul:

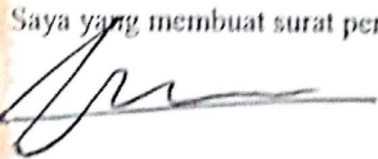
**Cultural and Educational Transitions: A Comparative Study of Indonesian
Students' Experiences in Australia and Aceh**

adalah benar-benar karya saya, kecuali semua kutipan dan referensi yang disebutkan sumbernya. Apabila kesalahan dan kekeliruan didalamnya, maka akan sepenuhnya menjadi tanggung jawab saya. Demikian surat pernyataan ini saya buat dengan sesungguhnya.

Banda Aceh, 13 April 2026

Saya yang membuat surat pernyataan




Muhammad Qaid Al Aufa

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

All praise is devoted to Allah SWT, the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate, for His endless blessings, strength, and guidance that have allowed me to complete this thesis. Without His will, this work would not have come to fruition. May peace and blessings always be upon Prophet Muhammad SAW, his family, and his companions, who have shown the best example for all mankind.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who has contributed to this journey. First and foremost, I am profoundly thankful to Prof. Dr. phil. Saiful Akmal, MA., who has served as both my academic advisor and thesis supervisor. His continuous support, thoughtful guidance, and constructive feedback have been essential in shaping this research. His dedication and encouragement have greatly influenced not only the completion of this thesis but also my academic growth throughout my time in the English Education Department. My sincere appreciation is also extended to Mrs. Syarifah Dahliana as the Head of the English Education Program, and Mrs. Azizah, S.Ag., M.Pd., as the Secretary of the Program, for their commitment in supporting students' academic development at UIN Ar-Raniry.

I would like to dedicate my deepest thanks to my beloved parents, Abi and Ummi, and my dear brothers and sister. Your endless prayers, sacrifices, and unconditional love have been my greatest source of strength. You have always stood by me through every challenge, giving me the courage to continue even when things felt difficult. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my friends and peers who have accompanied me throughout this journey. Your presence, support, and shared experiences have made this process less overwhelming and more meaningful. In particular, I am thankful to my fellow members of EDSA and DEMA FTK, whose cooperation, understanding, and solidarity have contributed positively to both my academic and organizational experiences.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to all the participants who generously shared their time and personal experiences for this study. Their openness, honesty, and willingness to reflect on their journeys have been invaluable to this research. Without their meaningful contributions, this thesis would not have been possible. I am truly grateful for their trust and for allowing their stories to become an essential part of this work.

Finally, this thesis reflects a long process of learning, persistence, and self-development. I am fully aware that this work is not without its limitations, and I sincerely welcome any suggestions for improvement. Nevertheless, I hope that this thesis can offer some benefit and serve as a modest contribution to the field of English education, especially for those who are undergoing a similar academic journey.

Banda Aceh, 13 April 2026
Author,

Muhammad Qaid Al Aufa

ABSTRACT

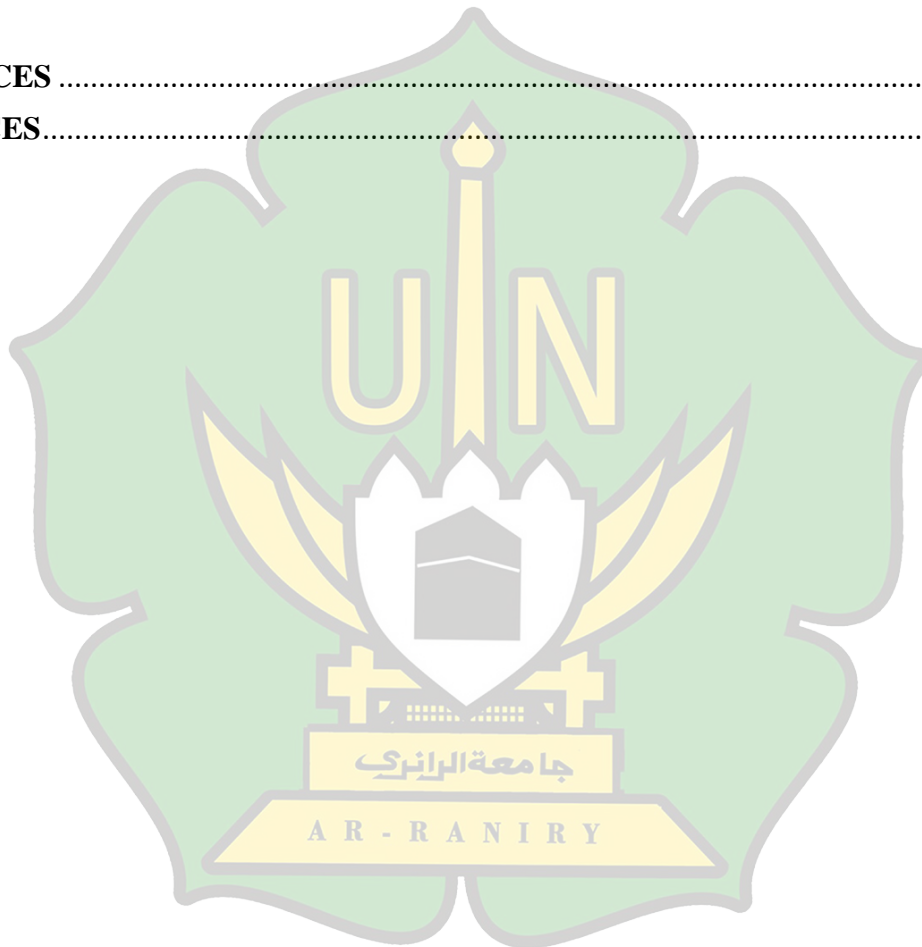
Name : Muhammad Qaid Al Aufa
NIM : 220203117
Faculty : Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan
Major : Department of English Language Education
Thesis Working Title : Cultural and Educational Transitions: a Comparative
Study of Indonesian Students' Experiences in
Australia and Aceh
Supervisor : Prof. Dr. phil. Saiful Akmal, MA
Keywords : Educational transition, Reverse culture shock,
Adaptation strategies, Indonesian Student

This study explored the experiences of Indonesian students in Aceh who returned after studying in Australia, focusing on their academic and cultural adjustment. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explore participants lived experiences of reintegration. The findings showed that participants experienced reverse culture shock, including emotional discomfort, disorientation, and a sense of loss. Differences between the Australian and Indonesian education systems were clearly identified, particularly in teaching methods, classroom interaction, and academic workload. The Australian system was perceived as more student-centred and supportive, while the Indonesian system was viewed as more teacher-centred and exam-oriented, which affected students' motivation and confidence. Cultural challenges, including differences in communication styles, social expectations, and increased attention to physical appearance, also contributed to feelings of insecurity and reduced self-expression. To cope with these challenges, participants adapted by adjusting their behaviour, becoming more independent in their learning, limiting participation, and seeking support from family. Over time, they showed signs of acceptance and personal growth. This study highlights the importance of understanding the reintegration experiences of returnee students and suggests the need for more supportive, inclusive, and student-centred learning environments in Indonesian schools. The findings also contribute to the broader discussion on reverse culture shock and educational transition among school-aged returnees in Indonesia.

Table of Contents

THESIS	ii
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF APPENDICES	xi
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
A. Background of Study	1
B. Research Question.....	3
C. Aims of the Study	3
D. Significance of the Research.....	4
E. Research Terminology	4
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW	6
A. Acculturation and Re-Acculturation Theory.....	6
B. Reverse Culture Shock Theory	11
C. Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory.....	15
D. Educational Philosophy in Indonesia.....	20
E. Educational Philosophy in Australia.....	22
F. Cultural Philosophy in Indonesia.....	25
G. Cultural Philosophy in Australia.....	27
H. Conceptual Framework.....	29
CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	33
A. Research Design.....	33
B. Research Participants	35
C. Data Collection Method	36
D. Interview Procedure	37
E. Data Analysis Techniques.....	38

CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	41
A. Research Findings	41
B. Discussion	52
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION	61
A. Conclusion	61
B. Recommendations	63
REFERENCES	65
APPENDICES.....	71



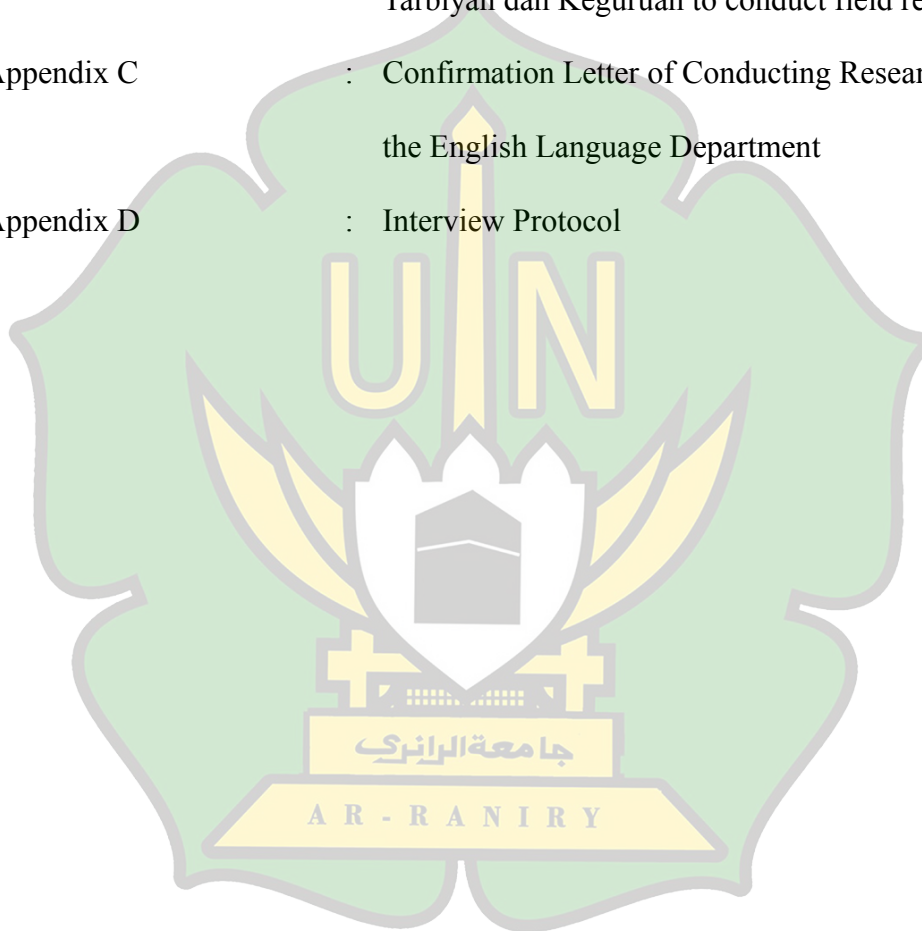
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Participants Profile.....	36
-------------------------------------	----



LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix A : Appointment Letter of Supervisor
- Appendix B : Recommendation Letter from The Fakultas
Tarbiyah dan Keguruan to conduct field research
- Appendix C : Confirmation Letter of Conducting Research at
the English Language Department
- Appendix D : Interview Protocol



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

In an increasingly interconnected world, education often extends beyond national borders. Many Indonesian families pursue opportunities abroad, exposing their children to new educational philosophies and cultural experiences. Australia in particular, has become one of the most popular destinations for Indonesian students because of its proximity, diverse society, and globally recognized education system (OECD, 2022).

However, returning home after several years of studying abroad presents a different kind of challenge. Students who have adapted to Australia's student-centred classrooms where open discussion, independence, and inquiry-based learning are encouraged must suddenly readjust to Indonesia's more teacher-centred, exam-driven environment. This process of readjustment is often accompanied by what scholars describe as reverse culture shock (Ward et al., 2013), a psychological and social disorientation that occurs when individuals return to their home country after adapting to another culture.

The challenge is particularly complex for younger students who are still forming their academic identities and social habits. Having internalized the values of inclusivity and creativity in Australian schools, they may experience confusion, frustration, or even alienation when faced with rigid classroom hierarchies and less interactive teaching methods in Indonesia (Savva, 2017; Brown, 2009). This

transition affects not only their academic engagement but also their sense of belonging and identity within Indonesian education system.

This research emerges from my personal experience of living in Australia for four years while accompanying my mother during her PhD studies. Together with my siblings, I attended Australian schools, where learning was collaborative and student voices were valued. Teachers encouraged us to express our ideas, debate respectfully, and take responsibility for our learning. Upon returning to Indonesia, however, we faced vastly different classroom atmosphere; more formal, more structured, and with limited opportunities for student expression. This personal experience became the foundation for my curiosity about how Indonesian students who have studied abroad, particularly in Australia, experience and navigate the process of returning to Indonesia's educational and cultural setting.

This differences between these two-education system reveal more than just variations in teaching style; they reflect broader philosophical, cultural, and policy distinctions. Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2021) emphasizes inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, and equity in education, while Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka, though recently reformed, continues to face challenges in implementation and teacher readiness (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). By exploring the lived experiences of students transitioning between these two systems, this study seeks to uncover not only the challenges of adaptation but also valuable lessons that can contribute to improving the quality of education in Aceh and Indonesia more broadly.

While global studies on reverse culture shock are abundant, few focus on Indonesian school-aged returnees. Most existing research examines university students or adult expatriates (Ward et al., 2013; Brown, 2009). In Indonesia, limited research explores how returning students interpret and respond to educational differences within their local context, particularly in Aceh. This study fills the gap by offering a narrative exploration of students lived experiences and suggesting practical strategies to support reintegration through culturally responsive teaching and curriculum design.

B. Research Question

This study is guided by one central research question: “How do Indonesian students who studied in Australia experience and adapt to the educational and cultural transition upon returning to Indonesia?”.

This single question allows the researcher to deeply examine both the educational and cultural aspects of the transition while focusing on the personal meaning and adaptation processes experienced by students.

C. Aims of the Study

The main aim of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of Indonesian students who have returned to Indonesia after studying in Australia. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Describe how these students perceive the educational and cultural differences between Australia and Indonesia.
2. Examine the challenges and adjustments they face in adapting to the Indonesian school system.

D. Significance of the Research

This research holds both academic and practical significances. For academic significances, the study adds to the limited literature on reverse culture shock and educational adaptation among school-aged returnees in Indonesia. Most existing studies have focused on university students or adult returnees, leaving a gap in understanding how younger students experience re-acculturation and educational transition (Ward et al., 2013; Szkudlarek, 2019).

For practical significance, the findings will provide insights for teachers and school administrators on how to support students returning from international educational systems. It can also inform the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, particularly in fostering students-centred, inclusive learning environments that acknowledge diverse educational backgrounds.

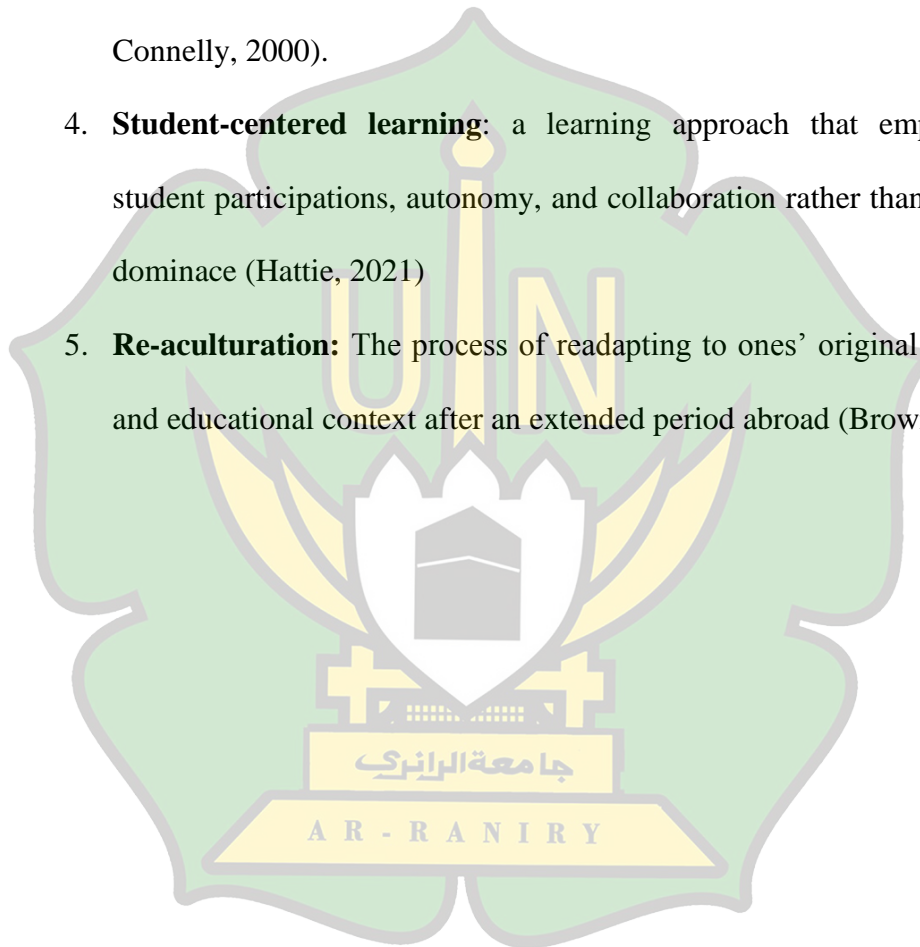
Additionally, by examining the return experiences of students who studied in Australia, this research allows Indonesia to reflect on best practices in pedagogy, classroom interaction, and educational equity that could inspire local reforms.

E. Research Terminology

To ensure clarity and precision in this study, the following key research terms are defined:

1. **Reverse Culture Shock:** the emotional and psychological challenges individuals face when readjusting to their home culture after living abroad (Ward et al., 2013)

2. **Educational Transition:** The process of moving between different educational systems, involving changes in curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom culture (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021).
3. **Narrative Inquiry:** A qualitative research approach that use personal stories to explore experiences and their meanings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).
4. **Student-centered learning:** a learning approach that emphasizes student participations, autonomy, and collaboration rather than teacher dominance (Hattie, 2021)
5. **Re-aculturation:** The process of readapting to ones' original cultural and educational context after an extended period abroad (Brown, 2009)



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Acculturation and Re-Acculturation Theory

Acculturation and re-acculturation theory explains how individuals adjust psychologically, socially, and behaviourally when adapting to a new cultural environment, as well as how they readapt when returning home. In the context of this study, the theory provides an analytical lens to understand the ways Indonesian students who lived and studied in Australia negotiate transformed learning identities, beliefs, and cultural expectations as they transition back into Indonesian society. Their readjustment is not shaped solely by cultural contrasts, but also by markedly different educational approaches, social interactions, and institutional norms. Therefore, this framework is essential for interpreting the students' experiences and guiding this research.

1. Classical Foundations of Acculturation

Berry's acculturation framework remains one of the most influential theoretical foundation in modern adaptation research. Although introduced decades ago, it continues to inform contemporary studies due to its relevance in multicultural and educational contexts (Schwartz et al., 2020; Vishkin et al., 2021). Berry (1997) proposes four major strategies individuals may adopt when adapting to a new culture. The first is assimilation, in which individuals gradually absorb the host culture while reducing attachment to their own cultural background. For Indonesian

students in Australia, assimilation may manifest in adopting Western communication patterns, academic independence, or classroom interaction norms. The second strategy, integration, occurs when individuals maintain their cultural origin while also participating fully in the host culture. This approach has been shown to produce the most positive outcomes and is frequently observed among Indonesian students who are able to balance their cultural identity with the Australian learning system.

The third strategy, separation, is characterized by maintaining one's cultural identity while minimizing involvement with the host culture. Although daily school interactions often reduce the likelihood of complete separation, this may appear in subtle forms, such as social withdrawal or preference for peer groups from the same cultural background. The fourth strategy, marginalization, occurs when individuals feel disconnected from both their home and host cultures, often resulting in emotional distress and disengagement. Recent research affirms that Berry's typology continues to provide a solid structure for analysing current international student transitions. Schwartz et al. (2020) emphasize that his theoretical model still aligns with modern patterns of student adjustment, particularly in diverse school environments.

2. Contemporary Developments in Acculturation Theory

Recent scholarship expands Berry's framework by acknowledging the dynamic and evolving nature of acculturation, a process deeply intertwined with identity formation. Rather than a linear set of stages,

acculturation is now understood as continuous negotiation influenced by emotional well-being, social relationships, and daily learning practices. These modern perspectives highlight three key elements. First, acculturation is reciprocal: individuals reinterpret and sometimes transform their original identity through exposure to new cultural norms. Second, students who study abroad often develop hybrid identities that integrate elements of both cultures. Third, schools play a significant role in shaping the process because educational environments reinforce social interactions, classroom behaviour, and communication norms (Schwartz et al., 2020).

Ward et al. (2013) argue that students who spend substantial time in foreign education systems internalize crucial academic values such as self-regulation, critical participation, and inquiry-based learning. Such values may remain central to their identity even after returning home.

3. Understanding Re-Acculturation

Re-acculturation, often termed reverse acculturation, refers to the process through which individuals reintegrate into their home culture after living abroad. While returnees typically expect familiarity and comfort, the process often leads to unexpected difficulty as individuals find themselves changed in ways that no longer align seamlessly with local norms (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Ward et al. (2013) describe re-acculturation as an identity renegotiation, where individuals experience unfamiliarity, frustration, and even alienation within their own culture. Conflicts may surface when family or peers expect them to behave as they did before

studying abroad, while the returnees themselves now hold new values and habits.

Recent Indonesian studies reinforce this understanding. Arrasyid, Riyanto, and Afdholy (2025) indicate that returnees frequently experience disconnection from peers due to differences in communication style, learning preferences, and worldview. Likewise, Szkudlarek (2010) explains that returnees often encounter institutional resistance upon returning home, which can lead to emotional conflict and a struggle to maintain their transformed professional identities. These findings demonstrate that re-acculturation is neither automatic nor immediate; rather, it involves reconstructing one's place in familiar yet changed social and academic structures.

4. Re-Acculturation Among Indonesian Students Returning from Australia

Re-acculturation among Indonesian returnees' manifests in three interconnected domains.

- a. Cultural readjustment frequently occurs as students shift from egalitarian and open communication norms typical in Australia to more hierarchical and indirect interaction patterns in Indonesia. The newfound confidence to speak openly may be interpreted as inappropriate assertiveness within local contexts (Zhu & Bresnahan, 2018).

b. Educational readjustment arises when returnees move from Australian classrooms that encourage critical thinking and active participation into more teacher-centred environments. Such shifts can trigger frustration or decreased motivation, especially when students feel their overseas academic skills are not recognized (Suryani & Agustina, 2020).

c. Social reintegration challenges emerge when returnees attempt to rebuild relationships with peers who have not shared similar international exposure. This can lead to feelings of being “between cultures,” neither fully fitting into the host nor home environment (Hendrickson, 2020).

These three dimensions indicate that re-acculturation encompasses far more than academic transition; it deeply influences emotional and social well-being.

5. Relevance of Acculturation Theory to This Study

Acculturation and re-acculturation theory offers a comprehensive foundation for analysing the lived experiences of Indonesian students returning from Australia. It supports the interpretation of how students understand changes in their identity, why conflicts arise when their independent learning habits clash with more traditional academic structures, and how cultural expectations shape their transition. This theory therefore informs the thematic analysis of participants’ narratives, helping identify major patterns in their emotional, academic, and social adaptation

processes. In the wider educational context, this theoretical perspective underscores the importance of developing school-based support systems that acknowledge and value international experiences, enabling returnees to apply their global competencies within Indonesia's evolving education system (Deslandes et al., 2022).

B. Reverse Culture Shock Theory

Reverse culture shock theory explains the emotional, psychological, and behavioural challenges experienced when individuals return to their home culture following a period abroad. While culture shock refers to the adjustment process in a foreign environment, reverse culture shock describes the unexpected discomfort that emerges when reintegrating into a once-familiar setting (Ward et al. 2013). For Indonesian students who have spent several years studying in Australia, this framework provides deeper insight into the complexities of returning home, especially when their newly formed values, identities, and academic expectations differ from those around them. Therefore, this theory is highly relevant to understanding their re-entry experiences in both Indonesian society and educational systems.

1. Classical Foundations of Reverse Culture Shock

The initial conceptualization of reverse culture shock can be traced to early cross-cultural psychology, particularly the works of Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) and Gaw (2000). These foundational studies depict reverse culture shock as a form of re-acculturation that involves emotional and psychological disturbance.

Classical scholars emphasize that reverse culture shock may be more distressing than the original culture shock experienced abroad. This is primarily due to three interrelated factors. First, returnees expect familiarity but instead encounter cultural shifts that now feel foreign, creating a sense of dissonance. Second, individuals have undergone substantial personal transformation abroad such as changes in communication style, mindset, and autonomy which they often underestimate. Third, returnees face mismatched expectations, as family, peers, and teachers may expect them to behave as before, ignoring the changes they have undergone (Fanari et al., 2021). Although these early theories emerged decades ago, they continue to provide the foundational concepts referenced in current re-entry research.

2. Contemporary Views on Reverse Culture Shock

Recent scholarship from 2020 onward extends the classical perspective by recognizing that reverse culture shock encompasses multiple domains of functioning: psychological, social, academic, cultural, and identity-based challenges. Ward et al. (2013) describe reverse culture shock as a negotiation of identity rather than a simple readjustment of behaviours. When individuals return home, they bring with them internalized values and habits from the host culture, which may conflict with local expectations and norms. The resulting dissonance can influence daily functioning, impacting motivation, self-expression, emotional well-being, and peer interaction.

Contemporary studies highlight that reverse culture shock tends to unfold in stages, similar to the U-curve or W-curve models used to describe

acculturation. However, unlike initial culture shock, the reverse process often lasts longer because individuals do not anticipate such difficulty. The challenges are typically more pronounced among adolescents, who are still developing their sense of identity, autonomy, and belonging. Recent findings demonstrate that reverse culture shock continues to be a widespread and significant issue for young returnees across diverse educational mobility programs (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2020).

In addition, the experience of reverse culture shock can also be influenced by how culture is represented within educational contexts. Akmal et al. (2023) highlight that cultural content in Indonesian English language textbooks is not always presented in a balanced or diverse manner, which may limit students' exposure to global perspectives. For students who have previously experienced more multicultural and inclusive environments abroad, this limited representation can contribute to a sense of cultural mismatch upon returning home. As a result, the process of readjustment becomes more complex, as students must navigate differences not only in social interaction but also in how cultural knowledge is constructed within the classroom.

3. Reverse Culture Shock in Indonesian Students Returning from Australia

For Indonesian students returning from Australia, differences in educational philosophy and cultural environments strongly influence re-entry outcomes. Educationally, Australian classrooms emphasize autonomy,

creativity, practical learning, and critical participation. Re-entering more teacher-centred classrooms with limited student voice may lead to disengagement or reduced motivation. Suryani and Agustina (2020) reported that returnees often feel academically restricted when active participation is discouraged. Culturally, students may face a shift from egalitarian and direct communication norms to more hierarchical and indirect interactions common in Indonesian social settings. Socially, returnees may encounter misunderstandings related to accents, habits, or interests, which can make them feel disconnected from peers. Identity-wise, they often find themselves caught between two worlds, “not fully Indonesian anymore,” yet also “not fully Australian” highlighting the liminality that defines reverse culture shock.

4. Relevance of Reverse Culture Shock Theory to the Present Study

Reverse culture shock theory provides an essential foundation for analysing the lived experiences of Indonesian returnees from Australia. It helps explain why reintegration can be unexpectedly difficult and how cultural, academic, and social factors contribute to identity transformation (Goldstein & Keller, 2015). In this research, the theory informs the interpretation of participants’ narratives by clarifying the emotional, behavioral, and psychological challenges that accompany re-entry into Indonesian schools. Moreover, the theory supports the identification of patterns related to shifts in motivation, altered learning preferences, and internal conflict. Overall, reverse culture shock theory helps reveal how

students negotiate belonging and identity in a familiar yet transformed environment, positioning their international experiences as both a source of empowerment and a potential challenge.

C. Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory provides a comprehensive psychological and sociocultural framework for examining how individuals adjust to foreign environments and internalize new cultural systems. While acculturation theory focuses primarily on strategies used to navigate cultural differences, cross-cultural adaptation theory emphasizes how adaptation unfolds as a long-term developmental process involving learning, identity transformation, and emotional resilience (Kim, 2017). For Indonesian students who studied in Australia, this theory helps explain how they learned to function effectively in a culturally and educationally different environment and why the process of returning home introduces new challenges. The core components; stress, coping, identity change, and cultural skill development align closely with the academic and cultural transition examined in this study.

1. Classical Foundations of Cross-cultural adaptation theory

Young Yun Kim is the central theorist in cross-cultural adaptation studies. Her foundational work, conceptualized as the stress–adaptation–growth dynamic, continues to shape scholarly understanding. Kim explains that when individuals enter a new culture, they inevitably encounter cultural stress, resulting from misaligned norms, communication barriers, and unfamiliar systems (Kim, 2017). However, through repeated cycles of

coping with these challenges, individuals gradually acquire new cultural competencies and reconstruct their identities. Kim's theory proposes that adaptation is not linear but progresses in a spiral-like manner, where periods of stress are followed by adjustment and personal growth (Kim, 2017). Communication plays a fundamental role because meaningful interaction with the host environment accelerates cultural learning and internalization of new behaviours. Over time, individuals transform internally, developing a hybrid identity that incorporates both home and host cultural patterns. These principles resonate strongly with Indonesian students' experiences in Australia, where they learn new communication norms, independence in learning, and intercultural awareness through consistent interaction in academic and social contexts.

2. Contemporary Developments in Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Recent studies from 2020 to 2025 extend Kim's (2017) model by incorporating insights related to education, identity formation, and global mobility. Modern scholars highlight that adaptation is shaped by psychological resilience, learning environments, motivation, and access to supportive social networks. Hendrickson (2020) show that educational institutions significantly influence adaptation through classroom design, teacher–student interaction, and collaborative learning opportunities. In student-centered systems such as those in Australia, Indonesian students adapt by becoming more autonomous, communicative, and critical in their thinking.

Identity reconstruction is also emphasized in recent scholarship, particularly because students in adolescence are still forming a sense of self. Schwartz et al. (2021) argue that students who study abroad internalize values and behavioural norms that may differ substantially from their original cultural identity, resulting in hybrid identity development. Furthermore, Hendrickson (2020) notes that adaptation is strongly supported by social networks, as relationships with peers and mentors provide emotional safety and belonging. Cultural distance also influences adaptation; differences in communication style, hierarchy, and school expectations between Indonesia and Australia require significant learning and adjustment. Collectively, these contemporary insights illustrate that adaptation is not only cultural but deeply educational and psychological.

3. Key Components of Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Cross-cultural adaptation can be understood through three major components.

- a. Psychological adaptation involves individuals' emotional well-being as they adjust to the new context. Indonesian students may initially experience anxiety or insecurity but gradually develop confidence, independence, and resilience as they gain cultural familiarity. Studies show that psychological adaptation is strongly influenced by social and institutional support, which helps students manage stress and develop a sense of belonging (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

- b. Sociocultural adaptation refers to learning the behavioural norms and expectations of the host society. Students develop skills in direct communication, social participation, and building relationships with diverse peers as they better understand implicit rules of interaction in Australia.
- c. Academic adaptation emerges as students adjust to foreign educational practices, including inquiry-based learning, collaborative projects, and critical engagement with material. Hendrickson (2020) argue that academic adaptation is a core determinant of students' overall sense of belonging and success abroad.

These components operate simultaneously, and positive adaptation in one area often supports progress in others.

4. Cross-Cultural Adaptation Experiences of Indonesian Students in Australia

Indonesian students navigate several layers of adaptation within the Australian context (Sawir et al., 2017). Their initial adjustment often centres on adapting to new teaching and learning methods that encourage open dialogue and personal initiative. Although these shifts may feel uncomfortable at first, students typically become more confident as they learn to express ideas, develop arguments, and take ownership of their learning. Socially, students must understand and accept new norms of politeness, friendship, and equality such as calling teachers by their first name or debating ideas directly in class. Communication challenges also

arise as English becomes the primary medium of instruction and interaction, pushing students to build language proficiency and assertiveness.

These adaptation processes significantly influence identity development. Over time, many students form identities that fuse Indonesian cultural heritage with Australian educational and social values. While this identity enrichment supports personal growth, it may complicate future re-entry into the Indonesian context (Sawir et al., 2017)

5. Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Its Connection to Re-Entry Challenges

Cross-cultural adaptation plays a critical role in shaping reverse culture shock. The deeper students adapt abroad, the more pronounced the challenges may be upon returning home. Students often find that their newly developed independence and communication styles clash with traditional expectations in Indonesia. As their academic and cultural identity evolves, they may struggle to fit into systems that no longer align with their personality or learning preferences (Kim, 2001). Arrasyid et al. (2025) assert that strong adaptation abroad can intensify the cultural gap during re-entry, leading to feelings of misalignment and identity conflict.

6. Relevance of Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory to This Study

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory supports this study by offering a conceptual explanation of how Indonesian students formed new behavioural and learning habits while abroad, and why these changes produce both opportunities and challenges upon their return. This theory contextualizes the re-entry experience as a continuation of the adaptation process rather than

its conclusion. It also provides a framework for analyzing how participants negotiate identity, belonging, and academic engagement within the Indonesian school environment (Ward et al., 2013). Ultimately, this theory helps clarify the developmental impact of studying abroad and underscores the need for educational practices that support returnee students' cultural and psychological transitions.

D. Educational Philosophy in Indonesia

The educational philosophy in Indonesia is grounded in national identity, cultural collectivism, and the formation of moral character. Schooling is viewed not only as a means of academic development but also as an effort to cultivate responsible citizens who embody Pancasila values and contribute to the nation (Anggreni et al., 2024). These ideological foundations influence curriculum implementation, teacher authority, and expected classroom behaviours. For Indonesian students returning from Australia, such philosophical differences become evident in daily learning interactions and can affect how they readjust to home educational contexts.

1. Foundations of Indonesian Educational Philosophy

Indonesian education is shaped by Pancasila as the national ideological framework. The five principles encourage belief in God, humanitarian values, unity, democracy, and social justice. These philosophical commitments guide the national purpose of education: developing individuals who are intellectually capable while upholding strong moral standards. Education is therefore viewed as a collective

responsibility tied to national progress, rather than an individual or personal pursuit (Raihani, 2018; Kemendikbudristek, 2023).

The Profil Pelajar Pancasila articulates the ideals of Indonesian learners, highlighting character, collaboration, independence, global competence, creativity, and respect for diversity (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). Although this framework reflects contemporary educational aspirations, its underlying focus remains aligned with communal harmony and social discipline. As a result, expectations related to student behaviour such as showing politeness, avoiding confrontation, and honouring authority continue to shape classroom dynamics across Indonesia.

2. Teacher-Centered Pedagogy and Hierarchical Norms

Historically, Indonesian classrooms rely on teacher-centered instruction in which teachers serve as primary knowledge holders and decision-makers. Students are expected to listen, absorb information, and fulfill clearly structured academic tasks. While national reforms advocate for more active participation, classroom practices often remain influenced by hierarchical social norms (Raihani, 2018). Suryani and Agustina (2020) note that students may refrain from asking questions or expressing disagreement because such actions can be interpreted as disrespectful toward teachers.

For students who studied in Australia, where open dialogue, inquiry, and assertive communication are valued, this shift can feel restrictive. The expectation to remain silent, follow directions strictly, and show deference

to authority may conflict with the confidence and independence they developed abroad (Hofstede, 2018). Thus, the traditional philosophy embedded in Indonesian classroom culture becomes a significant source of re-adjustment for returnees.

3. Educational Reform and Kurikulum Merdeka

Kurikulum Merdeka, introduced in 2021, aims to modernize Indonesian education through greater flexibility in learning design and more holistic competency achievement. Reform priorities include project-based approaches, differentiated instruction, and expanded formative assessment practices, while maintaining character education anchored in Profil Pelajar Pancasila. In concept, the curriculum brings Indonesian pedagogy closer to student-centered models observed in Australian schools (Kemendikbudristek, 2023; OECD, 2023).

However, implementation remains uneven across regions and school contexts. While student engagement improves when the reform is supported by adequate training and resources, many schools continue to struggle with class size, teacher readiness, and the dominance of exam-focused evaluation (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). These gaps result in inconsistent learning experiences, particularly for students in rural or traditionally structured environments such as those commonly found in Aceh.

E. Educational Philosophy in Australia

Australia's educational philosophy is underpinned by egalitarian values, inquiry-driven pedagogy, student voice, and holistic development. Learning is not

viewed as a one-way transfer of knowledge but as an interactive and empowering process in which every student is encouraged to think critically and participate actively (ACARA, 2021). For Indonesian students who experience schooling in Australia, these beliefs become ingrained in their learning identity and influence their expectations long after returning home.

1. Core Philosophical Values: Egalitarianism and Student Voice

Egalitarianism is a defining feature of Australian culture and is reflected strongly within its education system. Teachers are seen as facilitators rather than unquestionable authorities, and students are encouraged to communicate openly and express differing opinions. Hattie (2021) highlights that classroom dialogue, explicit feedback, and democratic participation are central practices that promote collaborative learning environments. Such experiences nurture student voice as an essential aspect of schooling. Students learn that their ideas matter, gaining confidence to ask questions, challenge assumptions, and take ownership of their learning. When Indonesian returnees re-enter more hierarchical classrooms where communication tends to be indirect and student assertiveness may be misinterpreted, the contrast can become a significant source of adjustment difficulty.

2. Inquiry-Based and Constructivist Learning Approaches

Inquiry-based and constructivist philosophies are embedded in the Australian curriculum, emphasizing learning through exploration and real-

world application. According to ACARA (2021), critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem solving are core competencies developed through project-based tasks, open discussions, and hands-on learning activities. Teachers guide students to construct meaning through reflection and shared inquiry rather than memorizing predetermined answers. Contemporary research supports the effectiveness of this model, linking it with increased motivation, independence, and deeper understanding (Bremner et al., 2022; Kerimbayev et al., 2023). For Indonesian students, the shift toward autonomy and critical engagement is often empowering but may initially be overwhelming due to higher expectations for active participation. These newly developed habits later shape their learning preferences and can contribute to academic dissonance upon returning to Indonesia.

3. Assessment Philosophy: Growth, Reflection, and Feedback

Assessment in Australia prioritizes growth and learning reflection rather than solely evaluating final outcomes. Teachers regularly provide formative feedback aimed at helping students monitor their progress and refine their understanding. Portfolios, rubrics, collaborative assessments, and reflective tasks are widely used to complement traditional testing methods. Hattie (2021) notes that timely and specific feedback is among the most influential factors supporting student achievement. Returnee students who become accustomed to this supportive feedback culture may feel less motivated when reintroduced to Indonesia's exam-driven assessment

systems, where performance is often measured by memorization and standardized scoring.

F. Cultural Philosophy in Indonesia

Indonesia's cultural philosophy is grounded in collectivist values, hierarchical social structures, religious principles, and strong connections to community identity (Raihani, 2018). These cultural foundations shape how individuals communicate, behave, and participate in learning environments. In schooling, cultural expectations influence how students position themselves in relation to teachers and peers, often prioritizing respect, obedience, and harmony over assertiveness or self-expression. For Indonesian returnees who have adapted to Australia's more individualistic and egalitarian norms, these cultural expectations can create friction during the readjustment process.

1. Collectivism and Social Harmony

Collectivism remains a defining feature of Indonesian society, where social cohesion and community well-being take precedence over individual ambition. Students learn early to avoid behaviours that may be perceived as excessive self-promotion or disruptive to group unity. Research shows that Indonesian learners often prefer to wait for teacher cues rather than volunteer opinions publicly, as speaking out too frequently may be viewed negatively (Fitriani & Nurkholis, 2022). For returnee students accustomed to collaborative debate and self-expression in Australia, adapting to classroom norms that favour silence and conformity can feel constraining and emotionally challenging.

2. Hierarchical Relationships and Respect for Authority

Respect for hierarchy influences social interaction throughout Indonesian culture, including education, where the teacher is positioned as a respected authority whose knowledge should not be questioned. Suryani and Agustina (2020) note that hierarchical relationships determine interactional etiquette in Indonesian classrooms, from seating arrangements to how students seek permission to speak. When returnee students apply Australian habits such as asking follow-up questions or initiating dialogue, their intentions may be misunderstood as challenging or disrespectful. This disconnect can lead to negative perceptions and reduced participation.

3. Indirect Communication Norms

Indonesian communication is generally indirect and context-sensitive, emphasizing politeness, emotional restraint, and avoidance of confrontation. Meaning is often conveyed implicitly through facial expressions, tone, and shared assumptions rather than explicit language (Santosa & Pratiwi, 2021). Returnees accustomed to direct communication may unintentionally appear blunt or overly assertive when expressing ideas or opinions. The need to navigate subtle cues and maintain face-saving interactions becomes a learning challenge that influences their social adjustment.

4. Religion, Morality, and Community Expectations

Religious beliefs, particularly Islam in regions like Aceh play a significant role in shaping behavioural expectations, school rules, and moral

education. Character formation is considered a core function of schooling, often guided by religious and community standards that influence curriculum and disciplinary practices (Raihani, 2018). These values strengthen social responsibility but may feel more structured or conservative compared to the greater personal autonomy students encounter in Australia. For some returnees, this shift may create a sense of cultural constraint, especially regarding freedom of expression and identity development.

G. Cultural Philosophy in Australia

Australia's cultural philosophy is fundamentally shaped by egalitarianism, individual autonomy, direct communication, and multicultural coexistence. These values deeply influence classroom interaction, teacher–student relationships, and students' personal identity formation. For Indonesian students who spend several years adapting to this environment, these cultural practices become normalized and integrated into their habits and worldview. Upon returning to Indonesia, the cultural contrast often becomes one of the most significant sources of adjustment challenges.

1. Egalitarianism and Social Equality

Egalitarianism is a central societal value in Australia, reflected in how people interact regardless of age, profession, or authority status. Classrooms tend to be relaxed and democratic, with students encouraged to speak freely, contribute ideas, and challenge assumptions when necessary. Teachers are typically approachable, often addressed by their first names, signalling equality in communication (Hendrickson, 2020). Returnee

students frequently report that this environment boosts their confidence and sense of belonging. Therefore, the shift back to highly hierarchical Indonesian classrooms can feel abrupt and limiting, especially when assertiveness is interpreted as impoliteness.

2. Individualism and Personal Autonomy

As a more individualistic society, Australia emphasizes personal rights, independence, and self-expression. Students are encouraged to develop autonomy through choice-based tasks, projects reflecting personal interests, and opportunities to express diverse opinions. Research by Ward et al (2013) shows that individualistic educational settings enhance learners' agency and assertiveness. Consequently, Indonesian students may internalize habits such as questioning instructions or offering personal perspectives. When returning to Indonesia's collectivist environment where cohesion and compliance are valued, these behaviours may create social tension or misunderstanding.

3. Direct Communication Norms

Directness in communication is widely accepted and valued in Australia. Open disagreement or critique is framed as constructive dialogue rather than disrespect. In learning contexts, students are expected to articulate ideas clearly, debate openly, and ask questions to deepen understanding (Chen & Li, 2022). Returnees who adopt this communication style may later struggle in Indonesian schools, where meaning is often conveyed indirectly to maintain social harmony. Their straightforward

speech can be perceived as abrupt or insensitive, leading to social challenges during readjustment.

4. Multiculturalism and Openness to Diversity

Australia's multicultural landscape supports inclusivity and cultural coexistence. Exposure to multilingual and multiethnic peers promotes intercultural understanding and global awareness. Studies highlight that multicultural schooling nurtures tolerance, adaptability, and a broader worldview (Kerimbayev et al., 2023). Indonesian students returning to less diverse environments such as many regions in Aceh may feel a reduction in cultural openness and freedom of expression. This transition can generate emotional discomfort or identity dissonance.

H. Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that brings together three interrelated constructs: educational differences, cultural transition, and adaptation strategies. These constructs help explain how Indonesian students who once studied in Australia experience their return to schooling in Indonesia, especially in Aceh. Schooling is not only an academic experience; it is also a cultural and social space where students learn what is valued, how to communicate, and who they are as learners (Biesta, 2015). For returnees, the process of reintegration becomes personal, emotional, and relational, far beyond simply adjusting to new classroom routines.

1. Educational Differences and Shifts in Learning Identity

The first construct focuses on the differences between the Australian and Indonesian educational systems. Australia's learning environment encourages independence, inquiry, and active participation, whereas Indonesian classrooms often remain more structured and teacher-directed (Bremner et al., 2022). Students who became used to contributing ideas and questioning content in Australia may feel restricted when they return and are suddenly expected to be quiet, listen carefully, and avoid interrupting.

Such shifts affect more than learning habits. They can change how students see themselves in the classroom, whether they feel confident or hesitant, independent or dependent. Some returnees describe feeling as if their voices no longer matter in the same way. Others struggle to adjust to summative assessment systems after being familiar with continuous feedback and project-based evaluation. Therefore, educational differences serve as the starting point for many of the challenges students encounter once they return (Fanari et al., 2021).

2. Cultural Transition and Identity Negotiation

The second construct examines how students navigate cultural expectations that differ significantly between the two countries. In Australia, egalitarianism and expressive communication are common. Students learn that their ideas are worthy and that respectful disagreement is normal (Chen & Li, 2022). In Indonesia, social harmony and respect for hierarchy guide

school interactions. Speaking too openly or challenging the teacher can be perceived as impolite.

As returnees adjust to these expectations, they may feel as though they must “unlearn” parts of who they became while abroad. Ward et al. (2013) describe this process as identity negotiation, where individuals try to blend past experiences with new social rules. The transition is not simply about behaviour but also about belonging, figuring out how to fit in again while maintaining a sense of self.

3. Adaptation Strategies and Reintegration Efforts

The third construct involves the ways students try to adapt once back in Indonesian schools. Some quietly observe before participating, others seek out peers who are accepting of their communication style, and many find small ways to balance autonomy with conformity. Adaptation becomes easier when teachers acknowledge their unique experiences such as stronger digital skills or confidence in group work and give them opportunities to use those strengths.

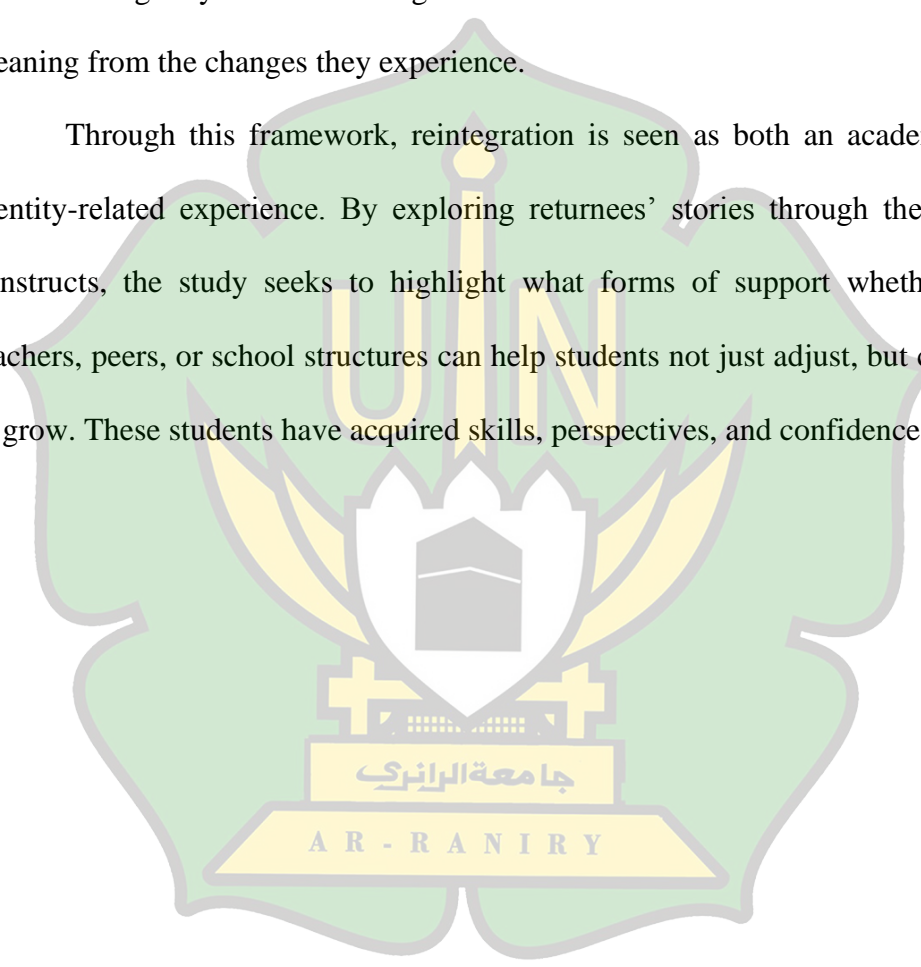
However, if differences are viewed as a problem or a sign of arrogance, students may feel pressured to hide the parts of themselves shaped abroad. This emotional tension can make adaptation slower and more stressful (Fanari et al., 2021).

These three constructs interact continuously. Educational differences create early discomfort, cultural norms shape how students respond to that discomfort, and

adaptation strategies develop as students try to find their place. It is a cyclical, lived process rather than a linear sequence.

This conceptual framework aligns with narrative inquiry, where experiences are interpreted through personal stories. Students' voices become central in understanding why certain challenges feel heavier than others and how they make meaning from the changes they experience.

Through this framework, reintegration is seen as both an academic and identity-related experience. By exploring returnees' stories through these three constructs, the study seeks to highlight what forms of support whether from teachers, peers, or school structures can help students not just adjust, but continue to grow. These students have acquired skills, perspectives, and confidence.



CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

These chapter discusses the research design, research participant, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques.

A. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry design. Narrative inquiry is about understanding people through their stories and how they make sense of their own experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Since this research focuses on students' experiences of studying in Australia and then returning to Indonesia, this approach fits perfectly. The aim is to listen to the students' stories, understand how they view their transition, and explore their feelings, challenges, and reflections. While narrative inquiry guides how the stories are collected, Thematic Analysis will be used to make sense of the data, helping the researcher identify patterns and themes that appear across different students' stories (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In simpler terms, the students tell their stories, and the researcher looks for the common threads that explain what they went through.

A qualitative approach is chosen because this study wants to explore students' experiences deeply, rather than just measure variables or test hypotheses. It allows the researcher to capture emotions, identity shifts, relationships, and cultural meaning-making, things that numbers alone cannot show. As Creswell (2013) points out, qualitative research is best when we want to understand complex social processes from the perspective of the people experiencing them. In this study, returning from Australia to Indonesia is not just about adjusting academically; it is

also a personal, emotional, and cultural journey that unfolds differently for every student.

There are two main reasons for choosing narrative inquiry. First, it is ideal for exploring experiences across time. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that people make sense of their lives through stories, which reflect how they construct their identity and understand change. The participants in this study have lived in two very different countries with distinct educational and cultural environments. Their stories reveal how these experiences shaped their thinking, behavior, confidence, and sense of belonging. Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to capture the “before, during, and after” of their journey, keeping the personal meaning of each experience intact.

Second, narrative inquiry fits the relational and contextual nature of this study. Re-entry into Indonesian schools involves emotions, relationships, cultural negotiation, and sometimes misunderstandings, all of which happen in specific social contexts. Riessman (2008) emphasizes that narrative methods are particularly useful for understanding how people describe transitions, conflicts, and identity reconstruction. Indonesian returnee students often feel a tension between the independence and openness they learned in Australia and the hierarchical expectations back home. Their stories shed light on how they manage this tension and make sense of the changes they experience. Previous research in Indonesia (e.g., Imawati, 2021) also shows that narrative inquiry is effective for studying student identity, cross-cultural learning, and academic adjustment, confirming its suitability for this research.

Overall, using a qualitative approach with narrative inquiry is the most suitable design for this study. It allows for a deep exploration of students' lived experiences, captures the complexities of academic and cultural transitions, and provides a flexible yet rigorous framework for analysing their stories. This approach matches the study's purpose: understanding how Indonesian students who studied in Australia interpret their return to Indonesia and how their personal narratives reveal processes of adaptation, identity negotiation, and cultural reconnection.

B. Research Participants

The participants in this study are four Indonesian students who have experienced studying abroad in Australia and have now returned to continue their education in Banda Aceh.

To be included in this study, participants must:

1. Be Indonesian students who studied in Australia for at least one year.
2. Have returned to Indonesia and currently study in Aceh.
3. Be around 10-23 years old (from elementary to high school and university students).
4. Be willing to participate and share their experiences openly.

The researcher employed purposive sampling to select participants who met the criteria relevant to the study as stated above. In addition, practical accessibility was considered, as the participants were readily available and willing to participate. Therefore, the participant selection also involved an element of convenience sampling.

Table 3.1*Participants Profile*

Participant Initials	Coding	Gender	Age	City of Studied in Australia	Year of Return
AM	Participant 1 (P1)	Male	14	Melbourne	2023
AG	Participant 2 (P2)	Male	13	Melbourne	2023
AZ	Participant 3 (P3)	Male	22	Melbourne	2023
NF	Participant 4 (P4)	Female	20	Melbourne	2023

Although the participants come from the same family and lived in the same host city, they were selected because each had distinct educational experiences during their study period in Australia. They attended different schools and were enrolled at different educational levels, ranging from primary/secondary education to university. As a result, they were exposed to different academic expectations, classroom environments, peer interactions, and adaptation demands.

C. Data Collection Method

The main data for this research were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews use a set of open-ended questions as a guide, but the interviewer can ask follow-up questions or explore new topics that arise during the conversation. Magaldi and Berler (2020) describe semi-structured interviews as a format that provides a balance between structure and flexibility. While there is a general framework to ensure all important topics are covered, the conversation can adapt to the participant's responses, allowing for deeper exploration of their experiences.

A semi-structured interview was chosen for this study for several reasons. First, it allows participants to share their personal stories in their own words, giving them the freedom to highlight what they feel is important, rather than being confined to fixed response options. This is crucial for understanding the nuances of their experiences studying in Australia and returning to Indonesia, which can vary widely among individuals. Second, semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to probe further when participants mention significant experiences, emotions, or challenges. This flexibility helps capture the depth and richness of students' narratives, which is essential for a study using narrative inquiry.

An interview guide was prepared to help direct the discussion while maintaining flexibility. The guide included 10 questions related to the participants' school life in Australia, their experiences returning to Indonesia, the challenges they faced, and how they adapted academically and culturally. All questions were derived from the main research questions, ensuring that the interviews collected relevant data for the study. (For interview guide, see Appendix D)

Semi-structured interviews ensures that participants' voices are at the centre of the research while providing the researcher with enough guidance to gather focused, meaningful data.

D. Interview Procedure

The interviews were conducted by WhatsApp Video Call or face-to-face interviews, whichever is more convenient for the participants. These two methods were chosen to provide flexibility to the participants. WhatsApp Video Call is ideal for individuals who live far away, however face-to-face interviews allow for a better

connection if possible. Each interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. The interviews will be conducted in English.

Prior to the interview, the researcher provided an explanation of the study's goal and the intended use of the data. Consent was verbally requested from the participants.

E. Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected in this study were analysed using thematic analysis, following the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). Thematic analysis is chosen for two main reasons. First, it allows the researcher to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes across participants' stories, making it possible to understand shared experiences while still respecting individual perspectives. Second, thematic analysis provides flexibility to capture the depth and richness of qualitative data without being constrained by rigid categories, which is essential when exploring complex phenomena such as cultural transition, academic adaptation, and identity reconstruction.

Thematic analysis is particularly suitable for this study because it complements the narrative inquiry design. While narrative inquiry focuses on collecting personal stories, thematic analysis enables the researcher to systematically organize and interpret the data to uncover common patterns and insights across participants. This combination ensures that both individual experiences and broader trends are highlighted.

The analysis begins with transcribing the interview data. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, capturing participants' exact words, pauses, and expressions. This process is important to ensure that the participants'

voices are represented accurately and that no significant detail of their experiences is lost.

After transcription, the researcher was engaged in a process of familiarization by reading and re-reading the transcripts carefully. This step allows the researcher to become deeply immersed in the data and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences, particularly in relation to their educational and cultural transition upon returning to Indonesia.

The next step involves generating initial codes. At this stage, significant statements, reflections, and experiences relevant to the research question were identified and labelled. These codes represent meaningful units of data that capture important aspects of the participants' narratives, such as their perceptions of educational differences, cultural challenges, and adaptation processes.

Following this, the codes were organized into broader themes. The researcher reviewed and refined these themes to ensure that they accurately represent the data. Overlapping themes were merged, and each theme were carefully checked against the original transcripts to ensure consistency, coherence, and validity.

Once the themes have been reviewed, they were clearly defined and given descriptive names. This step is essential to ensure that each theme meaningfully reflects the participants' experiences and directly addresses the research question of this study.

Finally, the findings were written in a narrative form. The researcher incorporated direct quotes from participants to illustrate each theme, allowing their voices to remain central in the analysis. This narrative approach aligns with the use

of thematic analysis in qualitative research and supports a deeper interpretation of how participants experience and adapt to the transition from studying in Australia to returning to Indonesia.



CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study, focusing on the experiences of Indonesian students who returned to Indonesia after studying in Australia. It explores how they perceive and navigate the transition, particularly in terms of educational and cultural adjustment. The findings are drawn from in-depth interviews with participants and are presented through their personal narratives to capture the complexity of their lived experiences.

The discussion section then interprets these findings by linking them to relevant theories and previous studies, including acculturation, reverse culture shock, and cross-cultural adaptation. This allows for a deeper understanding of how participants make sense of their experiences and how their identities, learning habits, and social interactions are shaped through the process of reintegration.

A. Research Findings

To answer the research question of this study which is “How do Indonesian students who studied in Australia experience and adapt to the educational and cultural transition upon returning to Indonesia?”, interviews were conducted with Indonesian students who had previously studied in Australia and later returned to Indonesia. The interviews aimed to explore their experiences of transition, focusing on both educational and cultural aspects, as well as how they adapted to the differences they encountered.

During the interviews, participants shared their personal stories of returning, including their initial reactions, the challenges they faced, and the ways they responded to those challenges. The data were then analysed using thematic analysis, which resulted in several key themes emerging from the participants' narratives to find out the ways Indonesian students who studied in Australia experience and adapt to the educational and cultural transition upon returning to Indonesia

1. Background and Initial Experience

The findings reveal that participants experienced a complex and emotionally intense transition when returning to Indonesia. Their experiences indicate that returning home was not simply a physical relocation, but rather a psychological and emotional shift that required significant adjustment.

Participant 4 described the transition in a very expressive way:

Well, you know, it's hard to put it into words because it wasn't just a flight. It was like moving between two different lives. I spent four years in Australia, and that place really changed who I was. I had been waiting and waiting for the day I could come back home to Indonesia, but when the day actually came, it was kind of a reverse culture shock. It was bittersweet. It was not like what I expected. (P4)

This statement suggests that the participant experienced a deep internal conflict between expectation and reality. Although returning home was initially anticipated as something positive, the actual experience created emotional discomfort. The phrase "moving between two different lives" indicates that the participant no longer viewed Indonesia as fully familiar, reflecting a shift in identity.

The emotional attachment to the host country is further emphasized in the participant's statement: "I felt like I was leaving my heart in Melbourne. I knew I wouldn't be going back for a long time, so saying goodbye to that independence and that environment was really painful." (P4)

This highlights that the experience abroad had become an important part of the participant's personal identity. The feeling of "leaving my heart" suggests a strong emotional bond, which made the process of returning more difficult. This can be interpreted as a form of emotional dislocation, where individuals feel partially disconnected from their home environment.

Similarly, participant 3 described the transition as overwhelming due to the sudden change in pace and expectations:

When I first came back to Banda Aceh, it feels like everything is just going so fast... the workload, especially daily homework and university work, it's just really overwhelming sometimes, you know. It's just not good for growth. (P3)

This statement indicates that the participant struggled to adjust not only emotionally but also structurally, particularly in terms of daily routines and academic demands. The phrase "everything is just going so fast" suggests a mismatch between the participant's previous environment and the current one, which contributes to stress.

In addition, participant 2 indirectly reflected adjustment difficulties through their comparison of learning experiences: "I thought that when I came back here it would be just the same, right? But here... there's way more subjects... so many homeworks... all of them are so stressful." (P2)

Although this statement focuses on education, it also reveals an initial expectation that returning would be easy, followed by the realization that the reality is more challenging. This further supports the idea that returning students often experience a gap between expectation and actual experience.

Overall, these findings indicate that the initial phase of returning is characterized by emotional complexity, including mixed feelings, emotional attachment to the host country, and a sense of disorientation. This suggests that reintegration is not an immediate or smooth process, but rather a gradual adjustment that involves both emotional and psychological challenges.

2. Educational Differences

The findings reveal significant differences between the education systems in Australia and Indonesia, particularly in terms of teaching methods, classroom interaction, and academic workload. These differences not only highlight contrasting educational approaches but also have a direct impact on students' learning experiences and academic adjustment.

Participants consistently described the Australian education system as more engaging, interactive, and student-centred.

For example, participant 3 explained: “The teachers are encouraging, they are supportive, they are challenging our thinking. They provoke us to reach the best of our potential, I believe so.” (P3)

This statement suggests that learning in Australia emphasizes critical thinking and active participation. The use of words such as “encouraging” and “challenging our thinking” indicates that students are not only receiving

information but are also actively involved in the learning process. This type of environment appears to support both academic development and personal growth.

Similarly, participant 4 highlighted the active role of students in the classroom: “In Australia, students are active and engaging, and the teacher encourages you to be active, and they really appreciate when you are active.” (P4)

This reinforces the idea that the classroom environment abroad promotes student participation and values students’ contributions. Such an environment may contribute to increased confidence and motivation to learn.

In contrast, participants described the Indonesian education system as more teacher-centred and less interactive. Participant 1 stated: “The teacher aren’t really teaching anything. They just tell us to write this off the page, write this copy that... they just check what the book says, so nothing really gets into your mind.” (P1)

This statement reflects a perception of passive learning, where students are required to follow instructions rather than actively engage with the material. The phrase “nothing really gets into your mind” suggests that this method may limit understanding and meaningful learning.

participant 4 also emphasized the lack of interaction in Indonesian classrooms: “The student are expected to just listen to what the teachers say and say nothing, basically. Like the teacher expected the student to understand it.” (P4)

This indicates a one-way communication pattern, where the teacher dominates the learning process. This lack of interaction may reduce opportunities for students to ask questions, express ideas, and develop critical thinking skills.

Another major difference identified by participants is the academic workload. Participant 2 explained: “There’s way more subjects... and so many homework’s because there are so many subjects doing it at the same time.” (P2)

Similarly, participant 4 described the nature of learning tasks: “It’s not even homework, you know, it’s just like I have to do this because I have to do this. I’m not learning what I’m doing. Basically, I have to memorize for the exam. I don’t even understand what I’m memorizing.” (P4)

These statements suggest that the Indonesian education system places a strong emphasis on quantity of work rather than quality of understanding. The focus on memorization rather than comprehension indicates a surface-level approach to learning, which may negatively affect students’ engagement and motivation.

The differences in educational systems also had a significant impact on participants’ academic adjustment.

Participant 4 shared:

Especially when taking the exam, I was like ‘what is this’, I haven’t even learned this, I haven’t even seen this before. So I had to take extra lessons to keep up to what the Indonesian education is learning. (P4)

This highlights the difficulty of adapting to a different curriculum and academic standard. The need to take additional lessons indicates that students may struggle to bridge the gap between the two systems.

Participant 1 also reflected the difficulty in learning: “It made learning so hard for me to the point that I thought myself that I was dumb because I couldn’t understand anything from the way they teach.” (P1)

This statement is particularly significant as it shows that the impact of educational differences goes beyond academic performance and affects students' self-perception and confidence.

Overall, these findings suggest that differences in teaching methods, classroom interaction, and workload create substantial challenges for returning students. The shift from an interactive and student-centred environment to a more passive and demanding system not only affects how students learn but also influences their motivation, confidence, and overall academic experience.

3. Cultural Transition

The findings reveal that participants experienced various cultural and social challenges upon returning to Indonesia. These challenges are reflected in differences in social behaviour, communication patterns, and classroom environments, which contributed to feelings of discomfort, insecurity, and difficulty in readjusting.

One of the main issues identified is the difference in student behavior and classroom atmosphere. Participant 2 described how students in Indonesia tend to be less attentive during lessons: "Sometimes the students don't listen to the teachers... some of them just do something else when the teacher is explaining... they only focus when the teacher is looking." (P2)

This suggests that the classroom environment is perceived as less disciplined compared to the participant's experience in Australia. Such conditions may affect the overall learning atmosphere and contribute to feelings of discomfort for returning students.

In addition, participant 1 highlighted differences in peer interaction, particularly in language use: “Some of the boys... they speak bad words... in Indonesia, there’s way more of that than in Australia.” (P1)

This indicates that social norms related to communication differ between the two contexts. The increased use of inappropriate language may create an environment that feels less respectful or less comfortable for some students.

Another important difference identified by participants relates to social expectations regarding physical appearance. participant 4 explained: “People start talking about physical... how the beauty standards are so high here... they really focus on that.” (P4)

This statement suggests that appearance plays a more significant role in social evaluation within the Indonesian context. Compared to the participant’s experience abroad, where diversity was more accepted, the stronger emphasis on physical appearance may create additional pressure to conform. This environment can contribute to feelings of discomfort and self-consciousness, especially for returning students who are not accustomed to such expectations.

Furthermore, participant 3 reported experiencing discrimination: “I’ve been discriminated... even in my home country... but when I go overseas as a minority, I didn’t really face such discrimination.” (P3)

This finding is particularly significant, as it shows that the participant felt less accepted in their own country compared to abroad. This experience may contribute to a sense of alienation and difficulty in re-establishing a sense of

belonging. This also helps explain why some participants later reported a decrease in confidence and changes in self-expression.

Similarly, participant 4 described a decline in confidence after returning: “I’m not confident enough to ask questions in class.” (P4)

This suggests that the social and academic environment influences students’ willingness to participate. The lack of confidence may be related to differences in classroom interaction and perceived expectations from teachers and peers.

Overall, these findings indicate that cultural transition involves challenges in adjusting to different social norms, behaviors, and expectations. Participants experienced feelings of discomfort, insecurity, and reduced confidence, which highlight that returning to one’s home country does not necessarily guarantee a smooth or easy adjustment process.

4. Adaptation Strategies and Reflection

The findings show that participants actively employed various strategies to cope with the academic and cultural challenges they encountered after returning to Indonesia. These strategies include behavioural adjustment, avoidance, seeking support, and cognitive adaptation. In addition, participants reflected on their experiences, highlighting both difficulties and personal growth.

One of the most prominent strategies identified is behavioural adjustment, where participants consciously changed themselves in order to fit into their environment. Participant 1 stated: “I just go with the flow... I just change what I am and that’s okay.” (P1)

This indicates that the participant chose to adapt by modifying their behavior to align with social expectations. Such adjustment may facilitate smoother interaction with others; however, it also suggests that adaptation may involve compromising aspects of one's original identity.

Similarly, participant 4 described changes in their approach to learning: "I'm changing myself, the way I study... it's more like okay then I'll just understand it myself if the teacher's not going to help." (P4)

This shows that the participant adapted academically by becoming more independent in their learning. Instead of relying on teachers, they adjusted their strategy to meet the demands of the new system.

Another strategy observed is avoidance, where participants reduced their participation in order to avoid negative experiences. Participant 3 explained: "Most of the time I played safe... I'm not so much being active... I just sit there and do my own business." (P3)

This suggests that the participant intentionally limited their engagement in classroom or social settings. While this may help minimize exposure to judgment or discrimination, it may also reduce opportunities for active learning and interaction.

In contrast, some participants adopted a more proactive strategy by seeking support from others. Participant 2 stated: "When I don't understand... I ask... but if I still don't understand, when I go home I ask my brothers and sisters." (P2)

This reflects an effort to overcome academic challenges through external support. By relying on family members, the participant actively works to bridge gaps in understanding.

In addition to behavioural strategies, participants also demonstrated cognitive and emotional adaptation, where they adjusted their mindset to cope with challenges. Participant 3 explained: “I don’t give a damn about what other people are thinking... it’s me and my own thinking.” (P3)

This indicates a shift toward a more self-focused perspective, allowing the participant to reduce the impact of social judgment. This type of strategy reflects resilience and an attempt to maintain personal goals despite external pressures.

Finally, participants reflected on their overall reintegration experience, showing signs of acceptance and personal growth. Participant 4 stated: “Overall, I just accept the reality... even though I still regret it.” (P4)

This suggests that, over time, participants come to terms with their situation, even if challenges remain. Acceptance appears to be an important stage in the adaptation process.

Similarly, participant 3 reflected: “All these struggles make me stronger.” (P3)

This highlights that, despite the difficulties, the experience of returning has contributed to the participant’s personal development. It suggests that adaptation is not only about coping with challenges but also about gaining resilience and growth.

Overall, these findings indicate that adaptation is a dynamic and multifaceted process. Participants employed different strategies depending on their

situations, ranging from adjusting behaviour and avoiding difficulties to actively seeking support and reshaping their mindset. These strategies demonstrate that reintegration involves continuous negotiation between external demands and internal responses.

B. Discussion

The findings presented in the previous section highlight the complex experiences of Indonesian students returning from Australia. This section discusses these findings by linking them to relevant theories and previous studies outlined in Chapter II. Rather than restating the data, the discussion focuses on interpreting the meaning of participants' experiences, particularly in relation to educational differences, cultural transition, and adaptation processes.

1. Background and Initial Experience

The findings show that returning to Indonesia was not a simple or smooth process for the participants. Although going back home is often expected to feel familiar and comfortable, their experiences suggest otherwise. Instead, the transition was described as emotionally complex and, at times, overwhelming.

This can be understood through the concept of reverse culture shock (Ward et al., 2013), where individuals experience difficulty readjusting to their home environment after living abroad. In this study, participants did not immediately feel "at home" again. Rather, they had to readjust to a setting that felt different from what they remembered.

One possible reason for this is the contrast between life in Australia and Indonesia. Australia was often perceived as more structured, calm, and supportive,

especially in terms of personal growth and independence. Meanwhile, Indonesia felt more fast-paced and demanding, both academically and socially. This sudden shift created a sense of imbalance, making it difficult for participants to adjust in the early stages of their return.

In addition, the participants had gone through personal changes during their time abroad. They developed new ways of thinking, learning, and interacting with others. Because of this, returning home was not just about changing location, but also about adjusting to a place that no longer fully matched who they had become.

This supports the idea of re-acculturation, where individuals need to renegotiate their identity after returning home (Brown, 2020). Even though the environment is familiar, the individual has changed. As a result, participants found themselves navigating between past expectations and their current perspectives.

From a broader perspective, this experience also reflects the stress-adaptation-growth process in cross-cultural adaptation theory. The initial discomfort can be seen as a form of stress, which requires individuals to gradually adapt and find new ways to fit into their environment. Therefore, reintegration should not be seen as an automatic process, but as a gradual adjustment that involves both emotional and cognitive changes.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on student re-entry experiences. Szkudlarek (2010) found that many returnees experience disappointment and emotional confusion because home no longer feels exactly the same as before departure. Similarly, Fanari et al. (2021) reported that students often underestimate the psychological difficulty of returning home, assuming that

familiarity will automatically make adjustment easier. This supports the present study, where participants expected comfort but instead encountered stress, identity tension, and the need to adapt again.

2. Educational Differences and Academic Adjustment

The findings reveal that differences between the Australian and Indonesian education systems played a major role in shaping participants' experiences after returning. These differences were not only about content, but also about teaching methods, classroom interaction, and assessment practices.

In Australia, participants were used to a more student-centered learning environment, where they were encouraged to participate actively, ask questions, and express their opinions. This type of learning aligns with inquiry-based approaches that emphasize critical thinking and student engagement (ACARA, 2021; Hattie, 2021). As a result, learning was often seen as enjoyable and meaningful.

However, upon returning to Indonesia, participants encountered a more teacher-centered approach. In many cases, teachers focused on delivering material, while students were expected to listen and complete assigned tasks. This reflects the traditional structure of Indonesian classrooms, where the teacher plays a central role and students are positioned as receivers of knowledge (Widodo & Fitriani, 2022).

Because of this difference, participants experienced a sense of mismatch in their learning habits. They were used to being active learners, but now had to adjust

to a system that required them to be more passive. This shift affected not only their participation, but also their motivation to learn.

Another important difference relates to workload and assessment. Participants perceived the Indonesian system as more demanding, with more subjects, assignments, and exams. At the same time, learning was often focused on memorization rather than understanding. In contrast, their experience in Australia involved more feedback and continuous assessment, which helped them track their progress and improve over time (Hattie, 2021).

These differences made the learning process feel more stressful and less engaging. Instead of focusing on understanding, students often felt pressured to complete tasks and prepare for exams. As a result, learning became something they had to do, rather than something they wanted to do.

Classroom interaction also played a role in this adjustment. In Australia, communication between teachers and students was more open and flexible. Students could ask questions freely and were encouraged to share their ideas. In Indonesia, however, classroom interaction tended to be more formal and hierarchical. Students were expected to show respect by listening rather than speaking.

This change influenced how participants saw themselves as learners. Some who were previously active became more quiet and reserved in class. This supports the idea that educational environments shape students' learning identity, including their confidence and participation.

Although Indonesia has introduced reforms such as Kurikulum Merdeka to promote more student-centred learning, the findings suggest that implementation is still inconsistent. In practice, many classrooms continue to follow traditional methods, which creates challenges for students who are used to different approaches. Overall, the findings suggest that academic adjustment is not only about understanding new material, but also about adapting to different ways of learning.

Previous studies also support these findings. Suryani and Agustina (2020) found that Indonesian returnee students often experience frustration when moving from participatory overseas classrooms into more rigid learning environments at home. Likewise, Bremner et al. (2022) noted that students who are accustomed to inquiry-based learning may experience lower motivation when re-entering systems dominated by memorization and examination pressure. These studies reinforce the present finding that academic adjustment involves adapting to a different educational culture, not merely learning new content.

3. Cultural and Social Reintegration

Beyond academic differences, participants also experienced challenges in adjusting to the social and cultural environment in Indonesia. These challenges were closely related to how people interact, communicate, and perceive differences.

One of the key issues is the contrast between the more diverse and inclusive environment in Australia and the more homogeneous environment in Indonesia. In Australia, differences in background, appearance, and identity are generally

accepted as normal. However, after returning to Indonesia, participants became more aware of how differences are noticed and sometimes judged.

This is particularly visible in relation to physical appearance and beauty standards. Participants noted that there is more attention given to how people look, which affected their confidence. Compared to their experience abroad, this created a sense of pressure and self-consciousness.

In addition, some participants reported experiencing negative social interactions, including discrimination or unfair treatment. Interestingly, this was not something they experienced while living abroad. This creates a paradox, where individuals feel less accepted in their home country than in a foreign one.

This can be explained through reverse culture shock theory (Ward et al., 2013), where returning individuals may feel out of place due to differences between their current identity and social expectations around them. Having been in an environment that values equality and diversity, participants found it difficult to adjust to situations where differences were more noticeable and sometimes criticized.

This experience may also be related to how cultural perspectives are encountered within educational contexts, where exposure to diverse cultural viewpoints is not always equally emphasized. As a result, students who have previously been in more multicultural environments may find it more difficult to readjust to settings where such diversity is less visible or less integrated into everyday learning experiences (Akmal et al., 2023)

Communication styles also contributed to this challenge. In Australia, communication tends to be direct and open, allowing students to express their ideas freely. In Indonesia, communication is generally more indirect and influenced by social norms such as politeness and respect (Santosa & Pratiwi, 2021).

As a result, participants had to adjust the way they communicate, especially in academic and social settings. This sometimes led to hesitation in speaking, as they were unsure how their words would be perceived.

Another challenge relates to social belonging. Participants found that social groups were often already formed, making it difficult to integrate. This could lead to feelings of isolation, especially for those who were unable to quickly find supportive peers. This experience reflects the idea of being “in-between,” where individuals do not fully belong to either culture. They have adapted to a new way of thinking abroad but struggle to fully reconnect with their home environment. Overall, cultural and social reintegration is not simply about returning home, but about adjusting to differences that affect identity, confidence, and relationships.

These findings are in line with earlier research on returnee identity and belonging. Hendrickson (2020) found that students returning from international environments often experience loneliness and difficulty reconnecting with peer groups who do not share similar global experiences. Similarly, Zhu and Bresnahan (2018) reported that communication habits developed abroad may be misunderstood in home contexts, causing hesitation and reduced confidence. This supports the current study, where participants felt socially disconnected and needed

to renegotiate how they communicated and positioned themselves in Indonesian society.

4. Adaptation Strategies

Despite the challenges they faced, participants did not remain passive. The findings show that they developed different strategies to cope with their new environment and gradually adjust.

One common strategy was changing how they express themselves. Some participants chose to be more careful in speaking and interacting with others, especially in situations where they felt judged. This helped them avoid negative attention, although it sometimes reduced their participation.

Another strategy was becoming more independent in learning. When classroom explanations were not sufficient, participants took the initiative to study on their own or seek help from others outside the classroom. This shows that skills developed during their time abroad, such as independent learning, continued to play an important role after returning.

Social support was also important. Participants tried to find friends who were supportive and shared similar perspectives. These smaller social circles helped them feel more comfortable and less isolated.

In addition, some participants adjusted their mindset as a way to cope. They learned to focus less on what others think and more on their own goals. This helped them deal with pressure and continue moving forward despite the challenges. These strategies reflect the stress–adaptation–growth process (Kim, (2017), where individuals respond to

difficulties by developing new ways of coping. Over time, these experiences can contribute to personal growth and resilience.

However, it is important to note that these strategies also come with limitations. For example, being less expressive may help avoid conflict, but it can also reduce opportunities to participate and develop confidence. Similarly, relying on self-study may increase independence, but also adds pressure on the student.

Overall, adaptation is an ongoing process that involves balancing personal identity with environmental expectations. While participants showed resilience, their experiences also highlight the need for more supportive systems that can better accommodate students with diverse educational backgrounds.

This finding is supported by previous studies on coping and resilience among mobile students. Smith and Khawaja (2011) found that international students commonly rely on self-regulated learning, social support, and cognitive reframing to overcome adjustment stress. More recently, Wattanacharoensil et al. (2020) noted that successful returnees often combine personal resilience with external support networks during re-entry. These studies align with the present findings, suggesting that adaptation is most effective when students are able to draw on both internal strengths and supportive relationships.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

A. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how Indonesian students who had studied in Australia experience and adapt to the educational and cultural transition upon returning to Indonesia. Based on the findings and discussion, it is evident that the process of returning is not simple or immediate, but rather complex and multidimensional.

First, the initial experience of returning is often emotionally intense. Participants described feelings of confusion, disorientation, and mixed emotions, indicating that returning home does not always feel familiar. Instead, it can create a sense of distance, where students feel caught between two different environments. This reflects the presence of reverse culture shock, where expectations of comfort are replaced by unexpected challenges.

Second, significant differences in educational systems play a major role in shaping students' experiences. The Australian education system was perceived as more student-centred, interactive, and supportive, while the Indonesian system was described as more teacher-centred, structured, and demanding. These differences affect not only learning processes but also students' motivation, engagement, and confidence. Some participants even experienced a decline in self-confidence due to difficulties in adapting to new academic expectations.

Third, cultural transition also presents important challenges. Participants reported differences in social behaviour, communication styles, and classroom environments. Issues such as stronger emphasis on physical appearance, differences in peer interaction, and experiences of discrimination contributed to feelings of discomfort and insecurity. These findings suggest that returning students may struggle to re-establish a sense of belonging within their own cultural context.

Finally, participants demonstrated various adaptation strategies to cope with these challenges. These included adjusting their behaviour, becoming more independent in learning, limiting participation to avoid negative experiences, seeking support from others, and developing more resilient mindsets. Over time, some participants were able to accept their situation and even view their experiences as a source of personal growth.

Overall, this study shows that the transition back to Indonesia involves not only academic adjustment but also emotional, social, and identity-related challenges. The findings highlight that reintegration is a gradual process that requires both personal effort and external support.

Limitation of the Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the number of participants is limited, which may not fully represent the experiences of all Indonesian students returning from Australia. Second, the participants come from the same family background and were selected partly based on accessibility. Although they had different educational levels and school experiences, this may limit the diversity of perspectives captured in the study. Third, the data rely on self-

reported experiences, which may be influenced by personal perception and memory. Lastly, the study focuses primarily on students' perspectives and does not include insights from teachers or institutions, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

B. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for different stakeholders.

1. For Teachers and Schools

Teachers are encouraged to be more aware of the diverse educational backgrounds of students, particularly those who have studied abroad. Creating a more supportive and inclusive classroom environment is important in helping returnee students adjust. Teachers may consider incorporating more student-centred approaches, such as encouraging discussion, allowing student participation, and providing constructive feedback. In addition, reducing over-reliance on memorization and promoting understanding-based learning may help improve students' engagement.

2. For Students (Returnees)

Students who return from studying abroad are encouraged to remain open and flexible during the adaptation process. It is important for them to gradually adjust to the new environment while maintaining positive learning habits developed abroad. Seeking support from peers, family members, or teachers can also help ease the transition. At the same time, students should recognize that adaptation takes time and that challenges are a natural part of the process.

3. For Future Researchers

This study focuses on a small number of participants within a specific context. Future research may explore similar experiences with a larger and more diverse group of participants to gain broader insights. Further studies could also examine the role of teachers, school policies, or curriculum implementation in supporting returnee students. Additionally, longitudinal research may provide a deeper understanding of how adaptation develops over time.



REFERENCES

- Akmal, S., Nashriyah, N., Fauza, N., Chamisah, C., & Syahabuddin, K. (2023). Classifying “culture” in Indonesian secondary public education EFL textbooks. *Indonesian Journal of English Education*, 10(1), 83–105. <https://doi.org/10.15408/ijee.v10i1.29924>
- Andrade, M. S. (2006). International students in English-speaking universities: Adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5(2), 131–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240906065589>
- Anggreni, N. L. P. Y., Suastra, I. W., & Pramanta, M. D. (2024). Review of educational philosophy: A critical analysis of the implementation of Pancasila profiles in the school curriculum. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Development*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.59672/ijed.v5i2.3518>
- Arrasyid, M., Riyanto, E. D., & Afdholy, N. (2025). Reverse culture shock shaping personal traits and views: A case study of Malang returnees from Surabaya. *Santhet: Jurnal Sejarah Pendidikan dan Humaniora*, 9(4), 1220–1229. <https://doi.org/10.36526/santhet.v9i4.5649>
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2021). *Australian curriculum*. <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46(1), 5–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>

- Biesta, G. (2015). What is education for? On good education, teacher judgement, and educational professionalism. *European Journal of Education, 50*(1), 75–87. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12109>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Bremner, N. (2022). Learner-centered education in developing countries: A systematic review. *International Journal of Educational Development, 92*, Article 102574. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2022.102574>
- Brown, L. (2009). The transformative power of the international sojourn: An ethnographic study of the international student experience. *Annals of Tourism Research, 36*(3), 502–521. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2009.03.002>
- Chen, Y., & Li, X. (2020). Intercultural communication challenges in academic adaptation. *Journal of International Students, 10*(3), 750–772.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.

- Deslandes, C., Kaufmann, L. M., & Anderson, J. R. (2022). A systematic and integrative review of qualitative research exploring experiences of acculturation and education among African-born migrants. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 86, 240–257. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.12.007>
- Fanari, A., Liu, R. W., & Foerster, T. (2021). Homesick or sick-of-home? Examining the effects of self-disclosure on students' reverse culture shock after studying abroad: A mixed-method study. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 50(3), 273–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2020.1866643>
- Fitriani, F., & Nurkholis, N. (2022). Challenges in implementing student-centered learning in Indonesian secondary schools. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 16(3), 245–256.
- Gaw, K. F. (2000). Reverse culture shock in students returning from overseas. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 24(1), 83–104.
- Goldstein, S. B., & Keller, S. R. (2015). U.S. college students' lay theories of culture shock. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 47, 187–194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.05.010>
- Gullahorn, J. T., & Gullahorn, J. E. (1963). An extension of the U-curve hypothesis. *Journal of Social Issues*, 19(3), 33–47.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge.

- Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D., & Aune, R. K. (2011). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction among international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(3), 281–295. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.08.001>
- Hofstede, G. (2018). National culture and its impact on teaching and learning. In J. C. Shin & P. Teixeira (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of international higher education systems and institutions* (pp. 1–7). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9553-1_317-1
- Imawati, N. (2021). Students' identity negotiation in cross-cultural contexts. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 8(2), 94–108.
- Jindal-Snape, D., Symonds, J. E., Hannah, E. F. S., & Barlow, W. (2021). Conceptualising primary-secondary school transitions: A systematic mapping review of worldviews, theories and frameworks. *Frontiers in Education*, 6, Article 540027. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2021.540027>
- Kemendikbudristek. (2023). *Kurikulum Merdeka: Pedoman implementasi*. Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia.
- Kerimbayev, N., Kultan, J., Abdykhalykova, A., & Akramova, A. (2023). Digital learning environments in higher education: Student-centered approaches. *Education and Information Technologies*, 28(2), 1991–2010. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11277-0>
- Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Sage.

- Kim, Y. Y. (2017). Cross-cultural adaptation. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.21>
- OECD. (2022). *Education in Indonesia: Rising to the challenge*. OECD Publishing.
- Raihani, R. (2018). Education for multicultural citizens in Indonesia: Policies and practices. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 48(6), 992–1009. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1399250>
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage Publications.
- Santosa, D., & Pratiwi, E. (2021). Curriculum changes and teacher readiness in Indonesian secondary schools. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 53(4), 566–583.
- Savva, M. (2017). International schools as sites of identity formation: The role of teachers. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 16(1), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240917694393>
- Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C., & Ramia, G. (2008). Loneliness and international students: An Australian study. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 12(2), 148–180. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315307299699>
- Schwartz, S. J., Unger, J. B., Zamboanga, B. L., & Szapocznik, J. (2010). Rethinking the concept of acculturation: Implications for theory and research. *American Psychologist*, 65(4), 237–251. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019330>

- Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(6), 699–713. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.08.004>
- Suryani, A., & Agustina, R. (2020). Teacher-centered versus student-centered learning in Indonesian classrooms. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 11(4), 34–42.
- Szkudlarek, B. (2010). Reentry—A review of the literature. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2009.06.006>
- Vishkin, A., Horenczyk, G., & Ben-Nun Bloom, P. (2021). A motivational framework of acculturation. *Brain and Behavior*, 11(8), Article e2267. <https://doi.org/10.1002/brb3.2267>
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203992258>
- Wattanacharoensil, W., Talawanich, S., & Jianvittayakit, L. (2020). Multiple qualitative procedures to elicit reverse culture shock experience. *MethodsX*, 7, Article 100766. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mex.2019.12.007>
- Zhu, Y., & Bresnahan, M. J. (2018). Collective face, politeness strategies, and discomfort: Communication of American domestic students and Chinese international students. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 47(2), 141–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2018.1438304>

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Appointment Letter of Supervisor



KEPUTUSAN DEKAN FAKULTAS TARBİYAH DAN KEGURUAN UIN AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH
NOMOR: 022 TAHUN 2026

TENTANG:
PENGANGKATAN PEMBIMBING SKRIPSI MAHASISWA
DENGAN RAHMAT TUHAN YANG MAHA ESA

DEKAN FAKULTAS TARBİYAH DAN KEGURUAN UIN AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH

- Menimbang : a. bahwa untuk kelancaran bimbingan skripsi mahasiswa pada Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh maka dipandang perlu menunjuk pembimbing skripsi;
b. bahwa yang namanya tersebut dalam Surat Keputusan ini dianggap cakap dan mampu untuk diangkat dalam jabatan sebagai pembimbing skripsi mahasiswa;
c. bahwa berdasarkan pertimbangan sebagaimana dimaksud dalam huruf a dan huruf b, perlu menetapkan Keputusan Dekan Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh.
- Mengingat : 1. Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003, tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional;
2. Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2005, tentang Guru dan Dosen;
3. Undang-Undang Nomor 12 Tahun 2012, tentang Pendidikan Tinggi;
4. Peraturan Presiden Nomor 74 Tahun 2012, tentang perubahan atas peraturan pemerintah RI Nomor 23 Tahun 2005 tentang pengelolaan keuangan Badan Layanan Umum;
5. Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 4 Tahun 2014, tentang penyelenggaraan Pendidikan Tinggi dan Pengelolaan Perguruan Tinggi;
6. Peraturan Presiden Nomor 64 Tahun 2013, tentang perubahan Institut Agama Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Menjadi Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh;
7. Peraturan Menteri Agama RI Nomor 44 Tahun 2022, tentang Organisasi dan Tata Kerja UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh;
8. Peraturan Menteri Agama Nomor 14 Tahun 2022, tentang Statuta UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh;
9. Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 492 Tahun 2003, tentang Pendelegasian Wewenang Pengangkatan, Pemindahan dan Pemberhentian PNS di Lingkungan Depag RI;
10. Keputusan Menteri Keuangan Nomor 293/Kmk.05/2011, tentang penetapan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh pada Kementerian Agama sebagai Instansi Pemerintah yang menerapkan Pengelolaan Badan Layanan Umum;
11. Surat Keputusan Rektor UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Nomor 01 Tahun 2015, Tentang Pendelegasian Wewenang kepada Dekan dan Direktur Pascasarjana di Lingkungan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh.
- MEMUTUSKAN
- Menetapkan : Keputusan Dekan Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh tentang Pembimbing Skripsi Mahasiswa.
- KESATU : Menunjuk Saudara:
Prof. Dr. phil. Saiful Akmal, M.A.
Untuk membimbing Skripsi:
Nama : Muhammad Qaid Al Auifa
NIM : 220203117
Program Studi : Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
Judul Skripsi : Cultural And Educational Transition: A Comparative Study of Indonesia Students Experiences in Australia and Aceh
- KEDUA : Kepada pembimbing yang tercantum namanya diatas diberikan honorarium sesuai dengan peraturan perundang-undangan yang berlaku;
- KETIGA : Pembiayaan akibat keputusan ini dibebankan pada DIPA UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Nomor SP DIPA-025.04.2.423926/2025 Tanggal 02 Desember 2024 Tahun Anggaran 2025;
- KEEMPAT : Keputusan ini berlaku selama enam bulan sejak tanggal ditetapkan;
- KELIMA : Keputusan ini berlaku sejak tanggal ditetapkan dengan ketentuan bahwa segala sesuatu akan dirubah dan diperbaiki kembali sebagaimana mestinya, apabila kemudian hari ternyata terdapat kekeliruan dalam Surat Keputusan ini.

Ditetapkan di : Banda Aceh
Pada tanggal : 6 Januari 2026
Dekan,


Saiful Akmal

Tembusan

1. Soljen Kementerian Agama RI di Jakarta;
2. Dirjen Pendidikan Islam Kementerian Agama RI di Jakarta;
3. Direktur Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Kementerian Agama RI di Jakarta;
4. Kantor Pelayanan Perbenkharahan Negara (KPPN), di Banda Aceh;
5. Rektor UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh di Banda Aceh;
6. Kepala Bidang Keuangan dan Akuntansi UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh di Banda Aceh;
7. Yang bersangkutan;
8. Arsip.



Appendix B: Recommendation Letter from Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan to conduct the research



**KEMENTERIAN AGAMA REPUBLIK INDONESIA
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH
FAKULTAS TARBİYAH DAN KEGURUAN**

Jl. Syekh Abdur Rauf Kopelma Darussalam Banda Aceh Telp/Fax. : 0651-752921

Nomor : B-2524/Un.08/FTK.1/TL.00/4/2026

Lamp : -

Hal : *Penelitian Ilmiah Mahasiswa*

Kepada Yth,

Ketua Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh
Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

Fakultas Tarbiyah Dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry dengan ini menerangkan bahwa:

NIM : 220203117

Nama : MUHAMMAD QAID AL AUFA

Program Studi/Jurusan : Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris

Alamat : Jl. Rawa Sakti 10 No. 10 Jeulingke

Saudara yang tersebut namanya diatas benar mahasiswa Fakultas Tarbiyah Dan Keguruan bermaksud melakukan penelitian ilmiah di lembaga yang Bapak/Ibu pimpin dalam rangka penulisan Skripsi dengan judul ***CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL TRANSITIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDONESIAN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN AUSTRALIA AND ACEH***

Banda Aceh, 13 April 2026

An. Dekan

Wakil Dekan Bidang Akademik dan Kelembagaan



Prof. Dr. Buhori Muslim, M.Ag.

NIP. 197508152001121002

Berlaku sampai : 22 Mei 2026

AR - RANIRY

Appendix C: Confirmation Letter from English Education Department



KEMENTERIAN AGAMA REPUBLIK INDONESIA
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI AR-RANIRY
FAKULTAS TARBİYAH DAN KEGURUAN
PRODI PENDIDIKAN BAHASA INGGRIS

Jln Syekh Abdur Rauf Kopelma Darussalam Banda Aceh
Email : pbi.fik@ar-raniry.ac.id. Website : <https://ar-raniry.ac.id>

SURAT KETERANGAN

Nomor: B-158/Un.08/PBI/Kp.01.2/4/2026

Ketua Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Darussalam Banda Aceh menerangkan bahwa yang nama tersebut di bawah ini:

Nama : Muhammad Qaid Al Afa
NIM : 220203117
Prodi : Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
Alamat : Jl. Rawasakti 10, Jeulingke, Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh

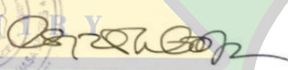
Benar telah melakukan pengumpulan data untuk penelitian pada Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh dalam rangka penyusunan Skripsi yang berjudul:

"CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL TRANSITIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDONESIAN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN AUSTRALIA AND ACEH"

Demikianlah Surat Keterangan ini kami buat agar dapat dipergunakan seperlunya.

Banda Aceh, 16 April 2026

Ketua Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris,


Syarifah Dahliana

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Research Title : Cultural and Educational Transitions: a
Comparative Study of Indonesian Students'
Experiences in Australia and Aceh

Time of Interview :

Date :

Place :

Interviewer : Muhammad Qaid Al Aufa

Interviewee :

Age of Interviewee :

Gender of Interviewee : Female/Male

Position of Interviewee :

List of Questions

1. Can you tell me the story of your transition from studying abroad back to your home country?
2. What were your expectations before returning home, and how did the reality compare to them?
3. Based on your experience, what differences did you notice between the education system abroad and in your home country?
4. How did teaching methods or classroom interaction differ from what you experienced overseas?

5. How did those differences affect your learning experience after returning?
6. How did you feel socially and culturally when you returned home?
7. Did you experience any changes in your identity, mindset, or way of thinking after studying abroad?
8. Were there any challenges in readjusting to social norms, communication styles, or academic culture? Can you describe them?
9. What strategies did you use to adapt or cope with the differences and challenges?
10. Looking back now, how would you describe your overall reintegration experience?

