

---

**Intercultural Communication Life of Transnational Indonesian PhD Muslim Female Students in the USA and Australia**

---

**Win Listyaningrum Arifin**

Universitas Gadjah Mada

[arifinwiwin@gmail.com](mailto:arifinwiwin@gmail.com)

*Naskah diterima: 13-10-2020, direvisi: 30-12-2020, disetujui 27-01-2021*

---

**Abstrak**

Studi ini menginvestigasi kehidupan komunikasi intercultural mahasiswa PhD muslim Indonesia di Amerika Serikat dan Australia sebagai transnasional. Mereka tidak hanya menghadapi masalah bahasa tetapi juga tantangan lingkungan baru baik secara akademis maupun sosial. Stereotip, stigmatisasi, diskriminasi, dan bentuk opresi lain muncul yang berhubungan dengan identitas visual mereka. Menerapkan Teori Negosiasi Identitas Stella Ting-Toomey untuk menjawab pertanyaan: (1) Seberapa jauh pengaruh komunikasi interkultural mahasiswa ini selama tinggal di negara tersebut? dan (2) Sejauh mana pengaruh kompetensi komunikasi interkultural terhadap kesuksesan mahasiswa ini? Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif berdasarkan hasil rekaman video/audio maupun catatan yang diberikan oleh responden di Amerika Serikat dan Australia. Perlakuan sama digunakan dengan meminta responden membuat video atau catatan tentang isu yang diambil dalam penelitian ini. Berdasarkan rekaman video/audio atau catatan menunjukkan bahwa kesuksesan komunikasi interkultural dari mahasiswa PhD muslimah Indonesia ini dipengaruhi oleh pengetahuan, motivasi, dan keterampilan yang diperoleh dari tantangan kehidupan keseharian baik di lingkungan akademik maupun sosial. Ketiga elemen tersebut merupakan komponen yang sangat esensial dalam keberhasilan komunikasi interkultural. Komponen tersebut menjadi kompetensi untuk membentuk strategi adaptif. Kompetensi ini membantu dalam mengatasi masalah internal dan eksternal yang menghambat keefektifan komunikasi interkultural. Proses komunikasi interkultural sangat menantang. Tetapi, kompetensi selama tahun pertama tinggal dapat menjadi solusi dalam menghadapi masalah atau meminimalisir situasi-situasi yang sulit di tahun-tahun berikutnya.

***Kata Kunci:*** komunikasi interkultural, perempuan muslim terdidik, transnasional

**Abstract**

This study aimed at investigating the intercultural communication life of Indonesian PhD Muslim female students in the USA and Australia as transnationals. They face not only the language hardship but also the newest environments challenge both in academic and social setting. Stereotype, stigmatization, discrimination, and other forms of oppressions appear in relation to their visual identity. Applying Stella Ting-Toomey' Identity Negotiation Theory, the study is to answer questions: (1) How far is the influence of the intercultural communication of these students living in a country? and (2) To what extent does intercultural communication competence influence the success of these students? This study is a qualitative descriptive based on the video/audio or diary tape of the respondents in the USA and Australia. To sum up, the video/audio or diary tape revealed that the success of intercultural communication on the these Indonesian Phd Muslim women students is influenced by knowledge, motivation, and skill obtained from the challenges in daily experiences both in academic and social life. Later, those three elements are very essential components in

the 'mindful/effectiveness intercultural communication'. Those elements become competence for Indonesian PhD Muslim women students to form adaptive strategies to overcome their internal and external situation. The process of intercultural communication might be challenging. However, the competence reveal during their first year living in a new country will be solution in facing problems or minimizing difficult situations in future years ahead.

**Keywords:** *Intercultural communication, Educated Muslim women. Transnationals*

## **Introduction**

Globalisation has influenced people's ways of thinking. Among its positive global effects, it has motivated people particularly educated individuals to get involved in international education system by obtaining scholarships to pursue study outside their home countries. As a result, it also opens wide opportunities for both males and females. This has enabled people from developing countries such as Indonesia to obtain scholarships in affluent countries like the USA and Australia. They challenge themselves to secure donors from the host countries or from the Indonesian government especially from the ministries such as: Religious Affairs Ministry of Indonesia through MORA; Finance Ministry of Indonesia; Communication and Information Ministry of Indonesia; and Indonesian's institution such as: Bank of Indonesia and LPDP.

To journey from a developing country like Indonesia to pursue study in developed and well-known countries such as the USA and Australia is a blessing. Applicants must be academically and mentally prepared to pursue qualifications. Aside from financial benefits, to be graduated from a wealthy nation's universities helps secure future employments for the awardees. They have more bargaining positions in sectors they choose. For both parties, the host universities and the awardees, the international scholarship creates financial reward.

This also challenges the Indonesian Muslim women to compete in obtaining scholarships. As part of South East Asia countries with the urge to attain a better level of national education, Indonesian Muslim female students become a certain cohort of students from developing country to seek equality under the name of education. In Australia for instance, Indonesian students both males and females occupy a higher proportion of student numbers than other SEA countries. The feature seems different in the USA.

Indonesian PhD Muslim female students as international students (transnationals) represent communities who live temporarily in a culturally different country. Transnational refers to people who live temporarily in a new country by which they have to negotiate their cultural identity to accepted in the new environment. Later, these Indonesian PhD Muslim women students are called as educated transnationals. Nevertheless, like other international

students, they face problems concerning their personal, cultural, and social identity that force them to engage in mindful intercultural communication to be accepted in the host country. But due to their cultural background as Muslim women and Indonesian, they face challenges that many other international students do not.

Previous studies reveal only the narrative life of international students as being conducted by (Mukminin, 2012) where Indonesians might be participants of these studies, but there are no other studies that focus exclusively on Indonesian Muslim female students as the respondents. Further, those studies do not show how communication problems may influence the success of Indonesian Muslim women in both academic and social life.

Problems arise when students lack capacity for language competence in the field of intercultural communication. Respondents can also lack awareness and skill dealing with the communication gap. Thus, this study explores the problems that result from the internal and external challenges faced by these specific students. I examine the influence of intercultural communication knowledge, motivation, and skill on the success of the students in both academic and social life while they stay in a center of question when Islam is globally stigmatized. Furthermore, I investigate the strategies revealed by those students in dealing with problems.

To initiate this study, I proposed the following questions: how far is the influence of the intercultural communication of these students living in a country? and to what extent does intercultural communication effectiveness influence the success of these students? To get a clear picture on problems faced by these international students, I argue that the most significant problems faced by these PhD Indonesian Muslim women students in the USA and Australia in dealing with their intercultural communication come from internal causes (personal matters) rather than from the external (the environment), and competence in intercultural communication helps students to succeed.

### **Research Method**

This study is a qualitative descriptive study to investigate the problems experienced by Indonesian PhD Muslim women students in the USA and Australia dealing with their first-year intercultural communication processes during their stay in both countries and problems both in the academic and social settings.

Video/audio or diary tape were sent back by the respondents in both countries via *email* and *WhatsApp video*. The respondents were firstly asked permission to get involved in the research by approving the consent forms sent by the researcher. The research protocol was sent along with the *email* contained about sort of stories of the respondents. These

respondents were freed to make either video/audio or notes. This was applied due to certain consideration e.g. time availability of the respondents aside from the busy work as students. The participants were pseudonymous to meet code of ethics. I selected students in each university using a purposive sampling technique to explore the dynamics of individual exposure during their study in overseas' university. The targeted students were those who were active socially and academically.

Indonesian PhD Muslim female students' personal life was inserted in their social situation as part of their individual condition. Some of them were married with children, some were married with no children, and the rest were single. These married students' conditions were also varied. Some were accompanied by the husband while others were not. This range of students' characteristics presented different strategies for dealing with their intercultural communication.

The choice to use these students was because they represented unique temporary transnationals with double responsibilities both as students and as mothers (or single) who were responsible for managing domestic lives. In most of families in Indonesia, husbands and wives go hand in hand in the child-rearing and domestic duties. In modern families, though the wives decide to have career, the husbands support them as long as the domestic duties are handled well. Thus, good and well-maintained communication between husbands and wives are very important. In the child-rearing. However, these students who are married with no children also describe different features. In addition, the contradictory situation is seen from students with single status.

Many respondents involved in this study experienced obstacles in both university and social lives during the first year living overseas made it difficult for them to fully participate in this study.

### **Perspective**

Many studies investigate the experiences of international students overseas. Typically, findings are generalised for males and females, but they did not specifically investigate the lives of Indonesian Muslim women students.

Studying overseas does not mean that these international students are ready for the exposure to new environment situations. Most of these students are still bound to their nations and not ready to embrace their status as transnationals. This is consistent with what has been found by (Weiss et al., 2011). First year experience of pursuing studies overseas is always described as the toughest time. (Thurber et al., 2012) point out that first year college or university students face significant transition issues from living in home countries to host

countries. Though this situation may not be experienced by all foreign students, I concur that most of them have been in this situation no matter the level of preparation.

The situation of these students should be taken into account. Many reports state that host countries' students do not like to communicate with international students (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013). This makes these transnationals feel alienation (Klomegah, 2006), marginalisation (L., 2009), discrimination, and other forms of rejection that drive them to feel loneliness (Sawir et al., 2008) which can escalate to feeling of helplessness (Klomegah, 2006).

The unknown situations lead these students to find comfort by only developing conational engagement with friends from similar countries to form mono-cultural interaction (Li & Zizzi, 2018). Most of them choose this tight-knit home community to reduce homesickness. To note, homesickness is a severe problem faced by most international students. Thurber and Malton (2012) state that all people who live far from home will miss something about home. They add that this feeling may be painful and debilitating. However, this may generate another problem as the pupils will not be able to get along with people from different backgrounds. Hendrickson et. al. (2011) state that having conational interaction will cause the students to miss out on opportunities for intercultural communication and hinder their acculturation. Their attachment with host students, in fact, will give benefits to these students in terms of improving language and social communication, adjustments that lead to meaningful overseas experiences (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Language gap, even though the international students have passed the English proficiency test, also becomes a primary factor in why some sojourners fail in the communication phase within the campus and social life. Lack of English competence, especially in the daily communication, may indicate the failure of the students' progress (Yanhong Li & Kaye, 1998). Though this is not a generalisation, I argue that one major cause for this is because these students, are not used to initiating conversations with speakers of other languages. This is not a matter of gender but it closely relates to the cultural intake.

Culture shock is mostly experienced by these sojourners when they stay in unfamiliar environments. (Zhou et al., 2008) added that most students experienced this culture shock in English speaking countries. In their conclusion, they state that there should be institutional policies to guide and support these students that accommodate them into good practices in very different culture in the form of *pre-* and *post-*departure preparation. The preparation positively helps the students to maintain situations caused by culture shock. The question on

the personal background relate to their religion as Muslim and veiled women should also be taken into account as they spent days in countries where Islam is negatively perceived. This challenge also supports the culture shock as they must clarify many questions that drive to other forms of social rejections as discrimination, stereotype, alienation, and so on.

Later, the success of these students in both academic and social life should also be supported by the local students. Local students may help these educated transnationals by supporting the social integration. Research by Snell and Zhou (2015) indicates how the acculturation between the host and foreign students through *Facebook* (or other forms of social media) becomes the bridge to communication as this social media is the dominant means of communication between youths. I strongly support this finding. Social media becomes a form of effective language practice through chatting and providing comments.

The cultural, the socio-cultural, the psycho-cultural and the environment influence the effectiveness of intercultural communication. The effectiveness/success of intercultural communication depends on the motivation, knowledge, and skill of the students in the forms of strategies they have found during the interaction. In addition, to get a clear understanding about the issues in this paper, some operational definitions from the literature are provided.

### **Educated Transnational Indonesian PhD Muslim women**

Most of Muslim women wear veil to cover their hair. Unfortunately, Islamophobia has influenced the position. The choice to have veil on them may create many narratives either pros or cons. For these veiled Muslim women, they have practiced the schema as religious women who try to fulfill the command from Allah. Mahmood in Rinaldo (2014) states that religious practices such as veiling are not a means of gaining something outside religion but are done to fashion oneself as a good religious subject. Mahmood perspective invites feminists to rethink on their view about veil for Muslim women. As people understand in general, many feminists state that forcing Muslim women to put on veil means break these women freedom toward their own body.

The recent phenomenon in Indonesia, many Muslim women put on veils is not only about fulfilling religious call but also veil becomes trend of fashions in both cities and villages. Modern veil fashion in Indonesia gains popularity after many Indonesian veil designers have involved in many fashion exhibitions both nationally and internationally. Moreover, Indonesian veil fashion has become the center mode for Muslim women fashion in the world. This is a blessing for Indonesia as the first majority Muslim community in the globe.

Though the previous scene is not the cause of the birth of Muslim feminist, this special feminist tries to interpret the call to have veil for Muslim women by using an emphasis on contextual interpretation (Rinaldo, 2014, p. 833). The shift of veil interpretation has opened the public eye about Islam and women. The dynamics of the world has also given opportunities for Muslim women to show their potentials that can be mutually done in many aspects of life. Generally, making good clarification using good language and gesture is one of them. Showing good deed in the community is also one of examples to open public eye that Islam in general and Muslim women is specific is not to their narrow understanding. This is actually the task of Muslim women who get involved in international education as the agents for Islam maintenance.

By pursuing education in a new country, the international students are engaging intercultural connection with new people and places. Weiss and Ford (2011) define international students as unusual form of diaspora. They argue that international students negotiate national and international identities in complex ways. They may best be described as “cosmopolitan locals” for their mix of agency as (upwardly) mobile, educated citizens and liminality in inherently temporary, subject positions, clearly identified with a nation-state in which they choose not to reside presently. Products of a particular stage in global economic neo-liberalism, the rapidly expanding ranks of international students present a distinctive diasporic community, important not just for education and employment markets, but for their particular mobilisational potential – a potential that is not, however, at least for Southeast Asians studying in the USA and Australia necessarily always reached. Thus, I agree with their statement about the situation of these students - whether they are merely transnational, truly internationalist or something in between - and how that placement affects their capacity for activism. Transnational relationships are viewed as important factors for the international students both for their well-being and learning in the host country.

### **Intercultural communication**

Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2015) state that communication competence or effectiveness has been investigated in multiple intercultural communication contexts. With another colleague, Ting-Toomey and Chung (2004) state that understanding Intercultural communication offers a comprehensive look at the foundational concepts of the discipline. They offer a more practical nature of the intercultural communication field by encouraging

students to think critically by asking thought-provoking questions and posing intercultural ethical dilemmas for students to ponder.

Ting-Toomey (2007) suggests that a competent intercultural communicator should have four abilities, i.e. ability to manage change and transition; ability to be reflexive about self and also organizational ethnocentric tendencies; ability to develop dynamic, hybrid, and communication styles; and ability to code verbal switching verbal and nonverbal styles within particular cultural and workplace (here university lives) situations and interaction goals' analysis.

Ting-Toomey (2019) then differentiates identities into two which are primary identity and secondary identity. Some examples of primary identity are race, ethnic, cultural identity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, spiritual identity, physical/mental abilities, generation, language, age, social class, family role, relationship identity, professional role, and salient individual attributes passions, etc. Meanwhile, she mentions some examples of secondary identity include personal habits, recreational habits, educational experience, and secondary work role.

She adds also two approaches in intercultural communication which she divides into a monologue approach that covers self-interest focus, emphasize positional difference, fixed objectives, and win-lose to lose-lose outcome. The monologue approach should be altered into a dialogue approach that covers mutual-interest focus, emphasizes common ground and reframe, and creates creative options and win-win synergetic outcome (Ting-Toomey & BsTan-'dzin-rdo-rje, 2019).

Later, she proposes how to be a mindful intercultural communicator who should be able to develop appropriate and effective intercultural verbal and nonverbal interaction skills; flows with adjustment changes, transition, and ambiguities in the unfamiliar cultural community; understands deeply the unfamiliar cultures' beliefs, value systems, and communication styles; deepens cultural/ethnic self-awareness and other awareness and systems-level communication issue; and is fully-Present and In-the-moment (Ting-Toomey & BsTan-'dzin-rdo-rje, 2019).

### **Problems in The Intercultural Communication**

As has been noted for many years, language is the core point of communication. This has been universally declared by people who engage in communication. The communication

may often fail when the understanding and the message of the communication is lack of language competence. Communication is not always easy even when the participants come from a similar culture. Thus, communication will be more difficult if the participants come from a different background. This is why knowing barrier in intercultural communication is the first and the best way to overcome the rising problems. Problems which exist in intercultural communication are: language difference; body language; level of context; negative stereotypes and prejudices; and feeling and emotions. However, there are many other barriers highlighted by other scholars.

Language difference is the common prevailing feature of communication gap. Participants of the communication will not achieve similar message when they stand with different language. To be noted, language is a part of distinguished cultural identity of a person who stays in a certain place and it is impossible to expose the use of similar language to others whose cultural identities are quite different. In order to have a similar picture during the communication, the utilize of similar language is very highly recommended.

Some experts state that the different language competence during the communication can be minimized by using body language. But again, only few body languages have similarities in meaning among many different languages in the world. Common body languages only help a little amount of the meanings in the communication. Cultures in most English-speaking countries such as the USA and Australia have low level of context to state explicit meaning while most of Asian cultures are more high level in context. Low context level is a straightforward and honest gesture and meaning about certain message in communication.

The most common feature on culture difference is on negative perspective/stereotypes. People from certain culture might be too offensive and proud of self-belief. This is then what is called ethnocentrism that states someone's culture is superior to others. In terms of communication, English deficiency will lead people from English speaking countries to make an unfair prejudice to people outside the culture. This might result in anxiety for lack of strong English competence to get involved in communication and try to pull back themselves from any communication situation that forces them to speak up in the language. They are less likely use the language as they still face the language gap.

### **Research Finding**

I asked permissions by sending consent forms to the respondents to make their daily live diary audio-video tape via *email*, *Facebook messenger*, and *WhatsApp*. They shared information about their situation in their first year. Through the video/audio or diary tape also showed features of their daily lives. As a partial student at ANU was also beneficial. At least, my living here as a temporary student for one year helped me to understand my respondents' situations. Sometimes, we shared similar experiences about friendship with other international students when we discussed about the research themes, obstacles in a new environment, communication gap with other students, and the community.

This paper only focused on the results from the video/audio or diary tape sent by the respondents based on the research guidelines concerning about their mindful/effective intercultural communication during their first year stay. The results showed some internal and external problems they faced during this time along with their triggering factors. After sending some consent forms and guidelines to several respondents in the USA and Australia, some respondents had returning back their responds in videos/audios and notes. The respondents were reached by some friends from similar scholarship and colleagues.

Nurul who sent her video was from Central Java studies in the USA. When she first came to the USA, she felt confused by the language though her English proficiency test was very high. She felt lost in translation when she had to open a conversation about some information with her new American friends. During the first two months of academic life, she only went out to sit in the class. She preferred to stay in her room and started feeling lonely (Sawir et al., 2008) and homesick (Thurber et al., 2012). She thought that she was not in the right place while the scholarship salary was still limited for her daily needs. She did not know who and where to ask for help as there were no other Indonesians in her department, hence she felt of helpless (Klomegah, 2006). She only kept smiling with everyone she met without words. She often doubled the prayers as she did not know the place to perform prayers. She felt of being alienated (Klomegah, 2006), marginalized (L., 2009), discriminated (Sawir et. al., 2000) as she had no friends in the campus who wanted to open communication with her. She then met some other Indonesians to get social support as they came from similar country (this situation is called mono-cultural interaction by Li & Zizzi (2018). She then found out that all the feelings she had were caused by her own interpretation of her new environment. Some Indonesians advised her that those feelings were common during the first-year experience living overseas (Thurber et al., 2012). Those feelings were part of culture shock (Zhou et al., 2008). She then found out that the importance of attachment and interaction with other local students and values to solve her

discomfort situation. She found that stigmatization was only her own unpredictable thinking as the people in the host country were no longer concern about the difference on race, religion, ethnicity, etc. The people there were quite moderate. Though there were some friends asked her about having veiled for Muslim women, she had answered diplomatically that it was not only about a duty but also about to have safety as a woman. It was also her challenge to answer the question about Islam and women, even about her country Indonesia, as she was the only Indonesian in her department.

Nurina who handed in audio was studying in the USA. She was fortunate as her family accompanied them. Her husband was a freelance consultant in Indonesia that allowed him to accompany his wife and children. Both Nurina and her husband shared responsibility to take care of domestic chores and children raising. Fortunately, Nurina's husband was graduated from well-known university in Singapore. This became a social capital for him to have a new life in the USA. However, this was Nurina's first time to study in the USA. Her husband always gave her supports of what sort of problems might be experienced by the international students. Though, he worked in the USA, he took care of house and children's school time while Nurina should concentrate with her education. He taught her about his previous experiences about academic and social life. Though, the situation was slightly different, but this helped Nurina to make strategies when she was in a troubled situation due to her studying and social life. She felt fortunate to have a supportive husband and wonderful children who were easily adjusting with the new environment. Indeed, she faced a bit stressful with her financial matter that forced her husband to work. She also felt to have communication gap that made her academic record failed. Her lack of exposure in using English drove her to have bad student's progress (Yanhong Li & Kaye, 1998). Fortunately, she came to her supervisor about her academic profile. She also asked some other students who had similar condition. Her open communication helped her to solve her problems. She had many friends from different backgrounds after she was success with her intercultural communication problems. During the discussion, some friends asked her personal background as Muslim women and Indonesia. She thought that stigmatization on Islam from the West did not occur in her environment though the question for her about being veiled educated woman once happened during her conversation with local people. Indeed, she could explain the question by giving good response.

Salma who sent her notes was studying in a well-known university in the USA. Once she reached the USA, she should stay in a student accommodation while she was seeking a house to bring her children and husband. After staying for 3 months, she brought her family

in a house. She has two teenagers children. Unfortunately, her husband and two children found it difficult as they lack of English competence. She felt of having negative attachment to the situation as her family was not ready for the overseas exposure. She was struggling to prepare her family to get along with the situation that sometimes drove debates with her husband. She felt guilty that this also influenced her academic progress (Yanhong Li & Kaye, 1998). She realized that her family was her big concern that both academic and social life as well as her family's condition must be in balance situation. She told me that the children's teenage life also influenced her as she found out that the children imitate their friends at school whereas to her it was like rebel deeds. She then discussed with her husband and then went to some friends They then came to a solution that the communication between parents and children should be reshaped. This took several months that also influenced Salma's academic progress. She came to her supervisor, lecturers and academic staffs to manage her academic results and to have chances to remake her records. She once experienced the situation on being stigmatized by other Asians, not Americans, of being Muslim. However, she was able to answer about terrorists, bombs, gun shooting, circumcision for women, veil, and the like. She answered the questions properly and the discussion never ended to such long and bothering one.

Meanwhile, Nuril who sent her video was from South Sulawesi. She was studying in Australia. She got a scholarship in a big and well-known university in Australia after finishing her master in the USA. But still, being far from home was a matter as she left her two children at home while her husband couldn't leave his work. She then became frustrated and started blaming herself. She felt homesickness (Thurber et al., 2012), and loneliness for feeling guilty over her children (Sawir et al., 2008). She thought that she was too egoistic that made a negative place attachment. It happened until one year that she had to return to Indonesia to ask the family to Australia. Again, her husband refused. She then, asked a relative to accompany her in the child-rearing. This was not simple as she had to train the children and the relative about Australia life while she was still struggling. This made her depressed as her academic and social life became bad (Yanhong Li & Kaye, 1998). She tried to make list of problems she had and asked many friends and her supervisor. She was then able to figure out her unstable academic life. To her, living in Australia is better than in the USA where the people were not suspicious with her dress. It was also easier to get *musalla* and Islamic gathering and halal food. There were many Indonesian who became her conational support system. The Islam stigmatization was not a big matter as there were many other Indonesian veiled Muslim women who were taking education in this country.

Another story was revealed by Nurma who was single who had sent her notes. She received her master's degree in the USA. Now, she is enrolling her PhD education in Australia. To her, living overseas without any family support is something common. Once she reached Australia, she felt excited as she could find many other Indonesian students. She followed Indonesian gathering, but she then realized that her study was totally important. She then challenged herself not to rely on the support from other Indonesians. She declined to participate in social gatherings as many Indonesians asked about her status which made her uncomfortable. Though, she has experiences living in the USA, but she still felt loneliness (Sawir et al., 2008) and homesickness for two months (Thurber et al., 2012). Dealing with her intercultural communication, she applied her understanding about living overseas as international student. She followed many seminar and workshops that delivered her to meet other local and international students. However, she felt that what she had done was not enough as she has low self-confidence to engage in communication. She felt that she needed to formulate her situation. Then, she always went to her lecturers and supervisors when she had problem concerning about her study. To her, the education system in Australia is similar to in the USA. Thus, she did not find any academic difficulty. She stated that challenges were something beneficial for the future of the students as mental exposures. She informed that Islam in Australia was not a big issue as there were many Muslim immigrants who stayed in many big cities in Australia especially in Lakemba, Sydney, NSW. Australians were quite permissive toward veiled Muslim women that made these special women were confidence in both academic and social life.

### **The internal and external problems faced by the students.**

Internal problems with social life on campus and in the wider society at the beginning were: the feeling of being discriminated against, self-isolation, language gap, and low self-confidence. Meanwhile, internal problems in academic life were caused by the language gap: among students, student-lecturers, student-supervisors, student-academic staff, and dealing with a different education system.

The readiness of the students to study abroad that meets the psychological exposures is very crucial matter that should be taken into account. The psychological exposures here are like obstacles that might be faced by the psychological students' situations as fears of being discriminated, alienated, and so on.

Meanwhile, the external problems as Muslim women included: finding prayer sites (specifically finding proper place to take ablution); halal food availability; being forced to answer questions on the jilbab as symbol (not so much in campus life but in the broader society), on being pious Muslim women, and on being educated Indonesian Muslim women.

These female students who were married also face problems. Their spouses and children mostly lacked English language proficiency. They had to provide understanding to the families about the importance of communication. This situation also influenced these students' achievement. There were also some female students whose husbands could not accompany them while the children were with them. They also had problems with their children. The children found it difficult to make adjustments that asked them to always communicate with the teachers.

Some children also tended to pay little attention during the religious gatherings. They rarely stayed calm during the prayer congregation and other types of Islamic activities. Meanwhile, the Islamic gatherings were successful to make the parents (the female students), whilst the children seemed unhappy during the gatherings. This showed that the Islamic transmission to the children living overseas seems a contrast picture with their life before. The children have friends to interact with and engage with different values and attitude which may be not be in line with the Islamic values as advocated in the Islamic religious context and doctrines and in the teaching of the parents. Though the recent situation in host country cannot be stated as something negative, the parents are not well-prepared with this situation that may lead to negative child-rearing process.

### **The success of intercultural communication of the students.**

The Indonesian Muslim female students were able to develop strategies to address intercultural communication problems after they experienced their situation while studying abroad. The experiences drove them to acknowledge skills they had to use in dealing with problems such as finding some friends to talk with including both Indonesian friends and local friends, communicating about academic matters with lecturers, supervisors, and academic staffs, opening communication with local people to ask sort of information in the society such as the halal food court, the prayer site, or the recreational place, the good educational institution, and so on. Their engagement in religious and social activities gave them support that impacted on their academic and social life. They stated that the first year was always difficult especially for the students who brought their family.

From the diary tape it can be concluded that the following general problems are faced in the beginning phase: homesickness, loneliness, negative place attachment, culture shock, and financial problems. Their internal problems with social life on campus and in the wider society at the beginning were: the feeling of being discriminated against, self-isolation, language gap, and low self-confidence. Moreover, internal problems in academic life were caused by the language gap: among students, student – lecturers, student – supervisors, student – academic staff, and dealing with a different education system.

On the other hand, external problems as Muslim women included: prayer sites (including taking ablution); halal food availability; answering questions on jilbab for pious Muslim women, and on being educated Muslim women.

To sum up, based on my observation toward the video/audio or diary tape sent by the respondents revealed that the success of intercultural communication of these Indonesian PhD Muslim women students is influenced by the knowledge, motivation, and skill. These three elements are the component of ‘mindful intercultural communication’. The knowledge can be obtained from the challenges in daily experiences both in academic and social life that forced these students to overcome those. The motivation derived from both the internal situation and external situation that might influence the success of intercultural communication. Both the situations might bear problems that must be solved as soon as possible in order not to distract the following years of stay. The skill depends on the knowledge and motivation owned by these Indonesian PhD Muslim women students in forms of strategies. Those knowledge, motivation, and skill in intercultural communication become competence for Indonesian PhD Muslim women students to be success in both academic and social life. This competence assists these students to overcome problems that struck their internal and external situation and bear adaptive strategies. The process of intercultural communication might be challenging. However, the competence reveals during their first year living in a new country will be solution in facing problems or minimizing difficult situations ahead.

As Muslims, these Indonesian PhD Muslim women students were also assisted by their religious teaching in facing problems. The minimum facilities for them to have a proper praying place (including *wudhu*/to take ablution) and to have *halal* food in restaurants were not regarded as big problems as they could use empty classes or a place of worship (as if there is no *musholla*) to perform praying. During their first months in their first-year living, some students saved their *wudhu* and doubled their praying. To them, these were also

solutions to show their obedience as pious Muslims. The recitations and other forms of religious meeting with other Muslim Indonesians also helped them to maintain their faith and understanding about good Muslim. This became strength for them when other people from other religions asked them about being pious Muslim women. However, the status of the respondents (married or unmarried) along with their personal problems will also bear different strategies as the challenges will also be varied,

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, Indonesian Muslim female students tend to construct their understanding on different cultures by undertaking acculturation, socialization, interaction, and other forms of social exposure with the host countries. These can be achieved when these students can accomplish communicative competence through language exposure. Again, all problems can be communicated. Dorjee and Ting Toomey (2015) suggest Intercultural communication competence is achieved by making internal frame and external code switching to gain a productive and satisfied message between communicators. The competence of the sojourners will also be noted by strategies they make after getting along with the local people that force them to internalize knowledge and skill of communication during the interaction. Creative strategies resulted from problems by the students are the implementation of knowledge, awareness, and skill they achieved after experiencing intercultural communication exposures.

Language is a crucial element of communication. People will fall through the gaps if they do not start to communicate their difference with other people from different backgrounds. This is the aim of intercultural communication. Language is utilized to answer all questions regarding their cultural identity as Muslims and Indonesians. In addition, Indonesian female Muslim students who study overseas are also agents of transnational who can voice what Muslims and Indonesians are. The problems, both internal and external, can be diminished if they start thinking about the importance of mindful intercultural communication competence to negotiate their identities in the forms of adaptive communication strategies.

### **Bibliography**

Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D., & Aune, R. K. (2011). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(3), 281–295.

- Hotta, J., & Ting-Toomey, S. (2013). Intercultural adjustment and friendship dialectics in international students: A qualitative study. *IJIR International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 37(5), 550–566.
- Klomegah, R. Y. (2006). Social Factors Relating to Alienation Experienced by International Students in the United States. *College Student Journal*, 40(2), 303–315.
- L., B. (2009). An ethnographic study of the friendship patterns of international students in England: An attempt to recreate home through conational interaction. *Int. J. Educ. Res. International Journal of Educational Research*, 48(3), 184–193.
- Li, S., & Zizzi, S. (2018). A Case Study of International Students' Social Adjustment, Friendship Development, and Physical Activity. *Journal of International Students*, 8(1), 389–408.
- Mukminin, A. (2012). *Florida State University Libraries From East to West: A Phenomenological Study of Indonesian Graduate Students' Experiences on the Acculturation Process at an American Public Research University*.
- Rinaldo, R. (2014). Pious and Critical: Muslim Women Activists and the Question of Agency. *Gender & Society*, 28(6), 824–846. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243214549352>
- Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C., & Ramia, G. (2008). Loneliness and International Students: An Australian Study. *Journal of Studies in International Education Journal of Studies in International Education*, 12(2), 148–180.
- Snell, K., Zhou, C., Snell, K., & Zhou, C. (2015). Predicting Acculturative Orientations of American College Students toward International Students Predicting Acculturative Orientations of American College Students toward International Students. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 44(3), 179–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2015.1057860>
- Thurber, C. A., Walton, E. A., Thurber, C. A., & Walton, E. A. (2012). *Experiences From the Field. 8481*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2012.673520>
- Ting-Toomey, S. (2007). Intercultural Conflict Training: Theory-Practice Approaches and Research Challenges. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 36(3), 255–271.
- Ting-Toomey, S., & BsTan-'dzin-rdo-rje. (2019). *Communicating across cultures*.
- Ting-Toomey, S., & Dorjee, T. (2015). 20. *Intercultural and intergroup communication competence: Toward an integrative perspective*.
- Weiss, M. L., Ford, M., Weiss, M. L., & Ford, M. (2011). *Temporary Transnationals : Southeast Asian Students in Australia Temporary Transnationals : Southeast Asian Students in Australia*. 2336. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2011.553042>
- Yanhong Li, R., & Kaye, M. (1998). Understanding overseas students' concerns and problems. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 20(1), 41–50.
- Zhou, Y., Jindal-snape, D., Topping, K., & Todman, J. (2008). *Studies in Higher Education Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education*. 5079(May). <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070701794833>

