Challenges Faced by International Students: A Case Study of Jambi's Institute of Higher Learning

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Abstract

Although there have been many studies investigating international students, many of them focused on the students who travel in pursuit of higher education in English countries and/or universities. This current qualitative study is intended to explore the experiences of international students, particularly the challenges, and strategies to deal with the challenges and the culture shock while studying in Jambi, Indonesia. In order to collect the data, a semi-structured interview was employed and guided by an interview protocol to stimulate the participants in answering the questions during the interview. The participants of this study were nine international students who studied at one public university in Jambi. Through thematic analysis, we found that international students faced some challenges living and studying in Jambi, such as language issues, academic issues, individual issues, and living style and related issues. To overcome the challenges, international students employed two main strategies, including self-management strategies and seeking help. Moreover, although the culture of international students is quite similar to the culture of the hosting country, we identified a lack of foreigner sense and physical contact as the culture shocks experienced by one international student. Looking at the challenges and culture shocks experienced by international students, this study suggests that preparation is crucial for prospective international students before pursuing their studies overseas.

Keywords: challenges, experience, international students, overcoming strategies

1. Introduction

Nowadays, globalization has led to profound changes in many aspects of life, including the aspect of education, particularly higher education. Yamada (2021) argues that globalization greatly affects higher education institutions in which many students study abroad, learn foreign languages

and cultures, and involve themselves in international activities which are best known as international in higher education. Internationalization in higher education refers to the process of integrating international components such as intercultural, research, international curriculum, international students, and global dimension into the learning process in tertiary education which is intended to enhance the quality of education and research for both students and staff (de Wit, et al., 2015; Knight, 2008). Therefore, internationalization in higher education could be defined as the process of realizing the practice of internationalization by integrating international elements into teaching practices in tertiary education. This process undeniably brings some positive effects, including improving academic quality, internationally oriented staff and students, diversifying and improving the learning environment, increasing public access, and establishing international networks (Jibeen & Khan, 2015).

One of the attempts done by the government and institutions to internationalize higher education is by recruiting international students. OECD (2007) classified international students as students that left their home country and moved to another country for the reason to study. Moreover, Andrade (2006) defined international students more specifically by emphasizing their characteristics as individuals who are non-native English speakers, on temporary student visas, and registered in higher education institutions. Although Andrade's definition is more specific due to his study being in the context of English-speaking universities, both definitions have something in common international students are students who are receiving education and temporarily residing in another country. Therefore, international students refer to people who go to another country with the intention to pursue education whether in the short-term or long-term, for instance, to complete a degree.

Becoming an international student means getting many opportunities to gain knowledge and new experiences from another country. International students are expected to be able to gain relations with the people in the host country, become more tolerant, appreciate other cultures, and improve both their soft and hard skills. Nonetheless, coming to another country that has a different language, culture, and environment, can be quite difficult. As stated by Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002), in adjusting to the university, international students are likely to face more challenges compared to local students who are also away from home. International students might find themselves in uncomfortable situations due to the differences from their home country. International students need to adjust and cope with them before those challenges become an obstacle to their studies.

The discussion on international students' adjustment has gained a lot of attention from researchers; it can be seen by many studies that investigated this topic. Nonetheless, most of these studies were conducted in English-speaking countries, such as New Zealand (Alsulami, 2018), the United States (Rabia, 2017), Australia (Jackson, 2017), the United Kingdom (Abrar, 2019; Abrar & Mukminin, 2016), and Canada (Liu, 2016). Still, international students who study in non-English-speaking countries are also important and need the same attention because they have the possibility to face the same or more problems.

To date, there are few documented studies exploring international students who study in non-English-speaking countries, especially Indonesia. One of the studies in the Indonesian context is research conducted by Emehinola and Saripah (2020). They qualitatively explored international students' adjustment challenges in Indonesia, particularly international students in the Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. The results showed that participants had difficulty adjusting due to

language barriers, isolation from classmates, financial and technical problems, cultural differences, and problems with punctuality. In a different study, Wahyuningsih (2020) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the challenges of international students' adjustment to studying at the University of Pelita Harapan. The results showed that international students faced some challenges in their adjustment, such as language, weather, food, education system, way of thinking, and social relation. Furthermore, Fauzan and Nadia (2019) qualitatively investigated the challenges of language learning experienced by international students at Islamic higher education in Kalimantan. They revealed that the international students faced various challenges, such as increasing self-confidence, mastering learning material, improving English speaking skills, and adapting to the environment. Their results also indicated that international students perceived studying a language at Indonesian higher education as a positive experience because they got many benefits. Although the studies above (Emehinola and Saripah,2020; Wahyuningshi, 2020; Fauzan & Nadia, 2019) have provided valuable information on international students' experiences in the Indonesian context, their discussion is limited to adjustment challenges. This present study, on the other hand, tried to comprehensively explore international students' experiences by not only investigating the challenges but also exploring the strategies used by international students to alleviate the challenges.

With the fact of limited documented related studies, this research is trying to fill the gap by exploring the experiences of international students who study in non-English-speaking countries, particularly in the Indonesian context. In line with its purpose, this inquiry was intended to answer the following questions: (1). What are the challenges faced by international students during their study at one higher education in Jambi?; (2). How do international students cope with their encountered challenges during their study at one higher education in Jambi?; (3) What are the cultural shocks faced by international students while studying in Jambi?

2. Research Methodology

This study aims to explore international students' adjustment to studying and living in Jambi. This inquiry, specifically, focused on the discussion of international students' encountered challenges and ways to deal with them. To achieve the aim of the study, qualitative research with a case study approach was employed because it is an appropriate research design to comprehensively explore and understand the issue. As it has been separately argued by Stake (1995) and Yin (2016) that a case study is an approach in qualitative which enables the researcher(s) to understand, explore, and analyze a case or a bounded system holistically. Therefore, this design was considered appropriate in the context of the study because it facilitated the researchers to provide robust and detailed data and information related to international students' experiences.

The participants of this research were all the first batch of international students in one public university in Jambi. The participants came from different countries in the Southeast Asian region. To be more specific, the participants were four Thai, two Malaysian, and two Burmese who enrolled at the university in the year 2021. They studied in several departments, three participants in Indonesian Education, four participants in English Education, one participant in Law, and one participant in Islamic Economics. Before collecting the data, the researchers contacted them and asked about their willingness to participate in this research by explaining the purposes and the processes of the research.

To collect the data, the researchers utilized interviews. An interview is a method of collecting information from participants by asking questions related to the phenomenon of interest which can be carried out face-to-face, by telephone, or in group discussions (Creswell, 2009). We as researchers particularly used semi-structured interviews in this inquiry to gain deeper knowledge and understanding regarding the participants' experiences and to give more opportunities for the participants to fully express themselves. Before the interviews, the researchers contacted the participants, in this case, international students, to ask about their willingness to participate in the research. In conducting interviews, the researchers prepared the questionnaire beforehand, but the researchers also asked follow-up questions based on the participants' answers when needed. The researchers interviewed each participant face-to-face, but one participant was interviewed via Zoom meeting due to his tight schedule. The researcher used English for some participants who could not speak Indonesian and used Indonesian and Malay for others. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 20-60 minutes. During the interview sessions, the researcher recorded all conversations between the interviewer and participants by using a voice recorder.

After all, data has been gathered, we used thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) to analyze the data. There were six stages in this data analysis. We started the analysis by familiarizing the data. In this step, we listened to the audio recording, transcribed the data, and read the transcription several times. After that, we generated the initial code by highlighting important points in the transcription. The next step was searching for themes. For this step, we combined similar data and separated the different ones, and decided on the tentative names for themes and sub-themes. After that, we reviewed the themes by looking at the data one by one and ensuring the data matched the themes and sub-themes. The next process of the analysis was defining and naming the themes. In this step, we reconsidered the appropriate name of the themes and subthemes by reviewing the whole data. Lastly, after all, was fixed, we produced the report.

To ensure the accuracy of the findings and improve trustworthiness, we employed member checking. Member checking is a process in which the researcher asks the participants of the research to check the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2012). In conducting the member checking, we asked each participant to check the transcription of their interview before we analyzed the data. In addition, we also complied with ethical procedures by providing informed consent forms before the process of interview and identifiable information of participants and changing them with pseudonyms.

3. Results

The discussion of research results is divided into two main sections. The first section presented the findings of the first research question on the challenges faced by international students in their study. The second section discussed the finding of international students' ways or strategies to deal with the challenges.

3.1 International Students' Challenges Studying in Jambi

According to the participants, they faced several challenges in living and studying in Jambi. Based on the analysis, there are four themes found in this research namely language, academic issues, individual matters, and living style and related issues. The following table summarized the themes and subthemes of international students' challenges identified from the data.

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes of International Students' Challenges

	Theme(s)	Subthemes(s)
International Students' Challenges	Language Issues	Vocabulary
		Grammar
		Fluency
		Pronunciation
	Academic Issues	Study Courses
		Pedagogy
		Academic Culture
		Complicated Procedures and Systems
	Individual Issues	Loneliness
		Personality
		Time Management
		Internal Conflict
	Living Style and Related Issues	Food
		Weather
		Traffic

3.1.1 Language Issues

The first theme of international students' challenges that emerged from the data is language. The results of the analysis from data collection showed that most of the participants have difficulty living and studying in Jambi due to the language barrier. As international students came from different countries, they are not native in Indonesian. Even though seven of nine participants know Malay, which is a language that is similar to Indonesian, they still find it difficult to communicate. There are several aspects of language that were found to be issued for participants including vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation. In terms of vocabulary, four participants mentioned the issue in vocabulary. Two participants from Malaysia stated that they tend to get confused with several Indonesian words because some words in their native language, which is Malay, and Indonesian words are identical but have different meanings. As reported by *P5*

> *"For example the word 'pusing'. In Malaysia, 'pusing' means turn around but here 'pusing' refers to a headache. So sometimes when I say 'Tadi tu saya pusing.', my Indonesian friends will get confused thinking 'pusing' is a headache or what, because I looked fine." (P5)*

With a different context, *P8* shared that she found it challenging to understand English in the classroom due to her lack of English proficiency. She specifically said, "If it is about language, I have issues in English because of the lack of vocabulary so when there is a presentation or the lecturer explaining the material, I only understand a little".

Besides vocabulary, the other challenges in language are grammar, fluency, and pronunciation. Regarding grammar, a participant from Myanmar, *P2*, reported that he had a problem with Indonesian grammar because she had no prior knowledge about the language. She often mixed it up with the structure of the language he is proficient with that is English. She specifically shared his story, "I will say 'saya dress' like that but it's supposed to 'dress saya', right?

Yeah, I really said that so whenever I say it, my friends will be like 'No, dress saya'. That's how I [got] confused with Indonesian". In relation to the fluency issue, two participants raised it. For example, a participant from Thailand, *P4*, could not really understand talking with her local friends because they spoke Bahasa Indonesia really fast. She said, "If I have a conversation with my [local] friends and they speak too fast. I can't understand what they are talking about so I always like 'What? What?" In addition, three participants reported that they had problems with pronunciation. One participant, *P7*, admitted that it is difficult for him to pronounce abbreviated words in Indonesia. He uttered, "For me, it's difficult to pronounce words like a, b, c, f, b, d like … abbreviation. What was before? … PKKMB. I can say it in English, like PKK, but if it is in Indonesian, I must think". From the data, it is clear that language issues sometimes lead to misunderstanding and prohibit international students from actively speaking and engaging in conversation.

3.1.2 Academic Issues

The second theme is academic issues. Based on the analysis, we identified four sub-themes. The first sub-theme is courses offered by the university. Two participants mentioned in the interviews that the course offered was difficult. One participant from Thailand majoring in Bahasa Indonesia education study program, *P4*, revealed that she could not keep up with the drama course because she could not act. She said, "For me, it's a drama course, we don't have that course in Pattani. It's difficult to act like I can't do it". Similarly, *P9* who took the same major also highlighted the same issue. In her interview, she stated, "Some [courses] are difficult, like poetry. I've never read poems, so it's too hard, and the drama is also too hard. In Pattani, there are no courses like that". These data indicated that unfamiliar courses offered by universities could be issues for them from an academic point of view.

The second subtheme is pedagogy. Pedagogy refers to the teaching activity, method, and strategy used by the lecturers in the class. In this issue, the topic is related to all the issues in the learning strategy, learning activity, and the lecturers of the classes. Out of nine participants, six participants reported issues related to this topic. *P6*, for example, found it difficult to understand the lesson because some lecturers only gave assignments to her and her friends. She expressed, ".. there are lecturers who can't go in the Zoom and immediately give assignments like that. So sometimes we don't understand what the assignment is". With a different problem, *P1*, complained and got confused with the way the lecturer gave the score to the students. He mentioned, "There was a course … The lecturer ordered us to do a presentation, some didn't do it but they got a score. Why do they get the score? I said why did they get it? Why? It isn't fair, right". These transcriptions obviously showed that unclear pedagogy could be a reason for international students to get confused with the educational system.

The other two sub-themes in academic issues are academic culture and complicated procedures and systems. In terms of academic culture, four participants acknowledged that the different academic culture between Indonesia's education system and the system of education in their countries made it difficult for them to study. For example, *P3* argued that many students and lecturers are not on time. This culture is really different from the academic culture in her country. She said, "They aren't really on time and when we have class or we have like tutor time, they don't really, they can cancel anytime. Not only students, but the lecturers also do that. So we don't have that kind of trend in our country". With a rather similar story, *P6* shared her experience in class where the lecturer can cancel the class anytime and have a class without any confirmation. These made them confused with the system. She said, "The class is at 9 o'clock, then they say it … is at

half past 8... When we go straight to campus, the class is canceled so we have to go home. Sometimes ... the lecturer said today we have a class and he is on campus already, so we have to hurry to go to campus". Regarding complicated procedures and system issues, two participants mentioned this. They experienced a situation when the procedure was complicated for them as international students. *P3*, for instance, shared that she had to send a copy of her passport several times to the authorities. She said, "... sometimes I think maybe just regarding the system, different systems. They keep asking us about our personal details like can you send me your passport copy? Like that". These data indicated that different academic cultures and complicated procedures and systems may cause challenges for them to study.

3.1.3 Individual Issues

The third theme of international students' challenges that emerged from the data is individual matters. This theme is related to all the personal issues that international students faced during their living and studying in Jambi. The results of the analysis from data collection showed that some of the participants have difficulty living and studying in Jambi due to individual matters, including personality, loneliness, time management, and internal problems. Among them, the most prominent issue is loneliness. Three participants mentioned loneliness due to the difference in religion and identity from others. A participant from Myanmar, *P1*, for instance, experienced the feeling of loneliness because he was discriminated against by some other international students because of his religion. He stated, "Oh, one thing I face ... It happens with others ... cause I'm the only different religion among them like I'm agama ... So, sometimes I feel like I'm facing discrimination because like ..." Another participant, *P7*, mentioned that he is lonely because he is the only male student from her country. He specifically uttered, "... I'm full of loneliness right now because here, I'm the only guy from .... Alone, I have a lot of friends there, every day with friends, but there are no friends here." These data suggested that loneliness can be a struggle for international students to live in other countries.

Besides loneliness, personality seems to be another challenge that international students have to face in their studies as well as living in Jambi. Personality in this case refers to behavior or traits possessed by international students, including shy and emotions. This issue had been highlighted by two participants of the study. For example, *P8* argued that her shyness affected her activeness in-class presentations. She expressed, "When it comes to presentations, I'm a bit of a shy person, so other people look at me in class, ... I am nervous, shaking. I don't know what to do and am lost for words". Another participant, *P2*, revealed that she is quite emotional and it influenced her social life including with her peers. She said, "I am quite [an] emotional person. Whenever I feel something ... I can't ignore the fact. It's hard for me to handle when I am with others (peers)". These data proved that personality in some aspects influences the academic and social life of students.

The other two sub-themes of individual issues are time management and internal conflict. In connection with time management, one participant, *P8*, confessed that her poor time management results in her difficulty to study and review the materials. She uttered, "I can't really manage my time well even though nowadays I'm trying to find time to read a book and review the material". Furthermore, two participants disclosed that internal conflict among them became one of the issues that they had to face and it indirectly influenced their study. *P3*, for instance, mentioned that he could not really focus on his study if he has a conflict with other international students because they share the same place to live. He said, "When I have a problem with friends

like in our house … it affects our study, and we need to have a meeting. The environment is not good, not perfect, not safe, I can't focus". The data from the participants indicated that having good time management and being free from conflict are required to create a good and sound environment to study.

3.1.4 Living Style and Related Issues

The last theme of challenges is living style and related issues. International students come from different countries which makes them have different living styles and environments. Therefore, the results of the analysis from data showed that most of the participants faced challenges in Jambi due to different living styles and related issues. There are four challenges about living style and related issues that were found including food, weather, traffic, and culture shock. Based on the data analysis, the food turned out to be the most stated challenge in this theme. Four participants revealed that food was their concern, especially at the beginning after their arrival. A participant from Myanmar, *P2*, said the food is tasteless compared to the food in her country. He uttered, "At first when I [came] here I thought [the food] it's tasteless. You know because in Myanmar we usually have a lot of strong taste". In a similar vein, a participant from Thailand, *P6*, said that the food is tasteless and too spicy for them. She shared, "… in Pattani, the food it's sour, salty, and sweet. It's also spicy, but not really spicy. Here, it's really spicy and tasteless, not sweet". These interview data transcriptions indicated that some international students had to adjust themselves to the food, especially their adjustment.

The other three sub-themes of living styles and related issues are weather and traffic. Two participants raised the issue of weather as one of their challenges staying and studying in Jambi. One participant from Thailand, *P9*, stated in her interview that the weather in Jambi is really hot and it affected her study activity. She palpably commented, "I'm used to the hot weather but it is really hot here. So every time I go to campus in the morning, and finish afternoon, I will go back home in the late afternoon". In relation to the traffic issue, one participant from Malaysia, *P3*, surprisingly shared her tough experience going to the campus with a motorbike because not everybody follows traffic rules. She noted, "Each time we go to the campus the traffic is really tough for us. We never drive or ride a motorbike like that. Our traffic is way different from here. We follow the rules… but here almost everybody breaks the rules". These data transcriptions clearly indicate that the issues of weather and traffic could potentially affect the students' mobility.

3.2 International Students' Strategies to Overcome the Challenges

According to the participants, they employed some strategies to overcome the challenges of living and studying in Jambi. Based on the analysis, there are two themes found in the data collection namely self-management strategies and seeking help strategies. Each theme consists of several sub-themes which can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. International Students' Strategies to Overcome the Challenges

	Theme(s)	Subthemes(s)
International Students' Strategies	Self-management	Practicing
		Positive Activities
		Leisure Activities
	Seeking-help	Study Courses
		University Staff
		Friends and Relatives
		Technological Applications

3.2.1 Self-management Strategy

Based on the interview data, one of the strategies employed by international students to alleviate the challenges is self-management. This strategy refers to any effort or action that international students do to overcome and manage the challenges by relying on them. Among the three sub-themes (see Table 2), doing positive activities was the most prevalent activity in this strategy. Four participants mentioned that doing positive activities helped them alleviate some challenges. For instance, *P5* explicitly shared that self-reflection was a very helpful way to overcome the problem she faced. She particularly said, "When I'm alone in my room and have a problem with my study or whatever, I often wake up at three in the morning... I do self-reflection, thinking about my problem, and how to solve it. It's helpful because it can identify the source of the problem". With a different story, *P3* told the interviewers that doing some sport helped her manage her problems, particularly those related to individual issues. She said, "I do sports but not that much so every morning I go jogging. So it's really helpful. It helps a lot to manage myself so I don't really have emotional feelings". Besides doing self-reflection and sports, other participants also said that cooking, worshiping, and maintaining positive motivation were very helpful to deal with the challenges. These showed that doing positive activities may bring positive impact and at the same time alleviate the encountered challenges.

The other two sub-themes of self-management strategy are practicing and doing leisure activities. In terms of practicing, two participants admitted that practice is one of the best solutions to cope with the challenges, especially in individual and language issues. *P8*, for instance, always came to campus early and practiced the presentation to overcome her shyness. She commented, "When I had a schedule for a presentation, I went to class early and practiced like a real presentation in front of the class. I could at least not be very shy and am satisfied with the result". Regarding doing leisure activities, three participants acknowledge that these activities, e.g., having a vacation and watching movies, are quite effective in temporarily alleviating the challenges. One participant, *P5*, narrated her experience when she had an internal problem with other international students. She even argued that having a vacation was very the best option to avoid bigger problems. She stated, "There was a time when we had problems among international students and ... I went to Riau for vacation ... When I was in Riau, it was really nice, and I felt like I didn't have any problems. It's good to get rid of the problem for the time being". These data suggested that practice and leisure activities are fruitful strategies to lessen and even overcome the encountered challenges.

3.2.2 Seeking-help Strategy

Another strategy utilized by international students when facing challenges is seeking-help. This refers to any efforts or actions that international students do to overcome the challenges by asking for help from others. As reflected in Table 2, they sought help from university staff, friends and relatives, and technological applications. Among the sub-themes, a technological application was the most frequent sub-theme mentioned by the participants. In particular, seven participants benefited from technology to cope with the challenges they faced. One participant from Thailand, *P8*, used many applications to help her overcome language issues. She, in particular, expressed, "For language difficulties, I use Google Translate, of course. Then, Cake, the pink one, and Duolingo to learn (English) vocabulary". Another participant, *P7*, used YouTube and Blog as sources for his study. He mentioned, "To study, I kind of like to study in the form of narrating. So, I use YouTube and Blog ... Not just reading books". Except for study purposes, some participants

also benefited from technology to alleviate their individual issues, such as loneliness. **P3**, for instance, called her parents by using WhatsApp and Zoom applications. She confessed, "... for the call, I always video call my family through WhatsApp. Sometimes we even like pretending we have a serious meeting so we make a Zoom link for the family". These data suggested that technology application plays a pivotal role in helping international students cope with challenges both in academic and non-academic contexts.

Besides technology, the participants also asked for help from university staff, friends, and relatives. Two participants described in the interviews that they did not hesitate to ask for help from university staff, including lecturers and administrative staff. **P1** explained in his interview that whenever he had difficulties, he usually asked the lecturers. He specifically said, "I used to discuss my problem with lecturers, especially lecturers from the International Office... I try to discuss with them my academic, personal, and financial problems". Regarding asking for help from friends and relatives, four participants admitted that they did this. **P2** told in her interview that her local friends are the place for her to ask questions whenever she had a problem with the lesson. She uttered, "... I usually ask my friend about what the material is, ... and I would ask them to translate the material that the lecturer gives in Indonesian so that you know I will not have a problem in the exam or anything." Moreover, **P4** admitted that she always asked her family to give her suggestions and motivations when she faced difficulties. That is because it was her habit to always share her problems with her family since she was young. She revealed, "Since I was young, I liked sharing with my father and mother. If there are problems or something here, I'll share... They give me motivation, such as cheer up! and you must be strong!". These data obviously indicated that asking for help from lecturers, friends, and family is a good support system for international students.

3.3 Cultural Shocks Faced by International Students While Studying in Jambi

Culture shock refers to uncertainty, confusion, and shocked feelings that international students may face when experiencing a new culture in their host country. Going through the process of analysis, we identified two main culture shocks faced by one of the international students while studying in Jambi. One international student, **P3**, shared that she was shocked by some of her local friends because they lacked the sense of a foreigner communicating in social media, especially WhatsApp groups. She specifically said,

> *"It's quite shocking me... in social media, Indonesians [are] quite ... they will just use their language, although they have us in a group and I don't understand at all what they say in the group, using a short form and everything, that's quite a barrier and we misunderstood what they were saying. The information delivered to us, wrongly delivered, we tend to [misunderstand] a lot. And some more, when we go to any tourist attraction when we meet the tourist guide, they will speak [Jambinese]. So we have some barrier to understand about the information, really lack of sense on us foreigner like that."*

Besides the lack of foreigner sense in social media, *P3* also experienced another culture shock which is psychical contact between the opposite genders (e.g., shaking hands when meeting). At first, she thought she would adjust to the culture easily because the culture of the host country is very much similar to her home country, but it was not the case. She further argued that such culture, shaking hands between men and women, is not that open in her home country *Malaysia*.

Therefore, she tried to adjust to the cultural difference by giving a sign not to be able to have physical contact. She commented,

> *"We are having culture shock when, especially the lecturer or students, I mean boy, sometimes touch. We don't really do that in Malaysia so we have culture shock at how the lecturers touch me. Something like that. But we learn how to adapt to that one. Not having handshakes with men."*

The participant's data transcription above showed that she still had to deal with some culture shocks while studying in Jambi although the culture of her home and host countries is quite similar.

4. Discussions

This qualitative inquiry was intended to explore international students' experiences living and studying in Jambi, particularly their challenges and ways to overcome the challenges. This research was guided by three research questions: 1) What are the challenges faced by international students during their study at one university in Jambi? 2) How do international students cope with the challenges? 3) What are the culture shocks faced by international students while studying in Jambi. From the data analysis, we identified some challenges, such as language issues, academic issues, individual issues, and living style and related issues. In addition, international students employed some strategies, including self-management strategies and seeking help strategies. Moreover, the lack of foreigners' sense and physical contact between the opposite genders were found to be two main culture shocks faced by international students.

The findings of this research showed that international students have difficulties in living and studying at one higher education in Jambi due to the language barrier. These results confirm other studies which find that language is one of the challenges for international students (Gong et al., 2020; Emehinola et al., 2020; Husain & Shen, 2019; Tsevi, 2018; Abrar & Mukminin, 2016; Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016; Liu, 2016; Li, 2016; Basri, 2015). Out of nine participants, four participants reported the issue in vocabulary. According to Neuman and Dwyer (2009), vocabulary refers to the collection of words in a language that an individual must know in order to be able to communicate effectively with a group of people who speak in that language. Two participants reported identical words but different meanings between Indonesian and Malay is one of the issues when they speak to local people. The others explained the limitation of vocabulary in English, which is related to their major, is one of their challenges. This finding has the similarity to the study conducted by Abrar & Mukminin (2016) who showed that limited vocabulary is one of the challenges for international students. Furthermore, another issue faced by international students in a language is fluency. Fluency is the ability to speak at an adequate pace with minimal hesitation (Tavakoli, et. al., 2020). Moreover, Chambers (1997) defined speed and ease as two main characteristics of fluency in speech. The issue of fluency faced by international students is the speed or the speech rate of local people. They reported that local people speak too fast which makes them ask for repetition. This finding is in line with the study by Baklashova & Kazakov (2016) and Li (2016) which showed that international students face language issues due to the speech rate of local people. The other challenges encountered by international students in language issues were grammar and pronunciation.

The second challenge faced by international students during their studies is academic issues. Out of nine participants, six participants stated the issues of pedagogy in academics. Pedagogy is

any conscious action by individuals that aims to enhance the learning of others (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999). According to Westbrook, pedagogy consists of the teachers' views, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and understanding of the curriculum, teaching, and learning process, as well as their students. These influence their teaching practices, such as what the teacher thinks, does, and says during the learning and teaching process (2013). In short, pedagogy includes the teaching methods, strategies, activities, and practices used by the teacher to help students learn. The participants reported several issues related to pedagogy including how the lecturers always give assignments without explaining the material; unfair in giving grades; setting tight deadlines for assignments; giving pressure because of their high expectations to international students; having no sequence in teaching material; and giving the same assignment as the local students without considering their advantages. These results had similarities to other studies which found pedagogy is one of the challenges for international students (Husain & Shen, 2019; Alsulami, 2018; Rhein, 2018; Liu; 2016; Li, 2016).

The finding also revealed that international students faced challenges related to individual issues. This challenge is related to the personal issues that international students faced during their living and studying in Jambi. From the sub-themes, the most prevalent is the feeling of loneliness. This result provides further evidence to the findings of other studies which find loneliness is one of the challenges to international students (Alsulami, 2018; Calikoglu, 2018; Tsevi, 2018; Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016; Li, 2016). Loneliness is not always about being physically alone, but rather a mental state of feeling alone and isolated (Tiwari, 2013). The data findings revealed that loneliness occurs due to differences in religion and identity from others. A participant shared that he feels lonely because he is the only male from his country and he has no friends that he can ask to hang out with in Jambi. Another participant reported that he feels that his friends tend to be closer to others who have the same religion. Therefore, he feels lonely because sometimes they just do some activities together, without inviting him. This result has similarities with the findings by Li (2016) which also revealed that the participants feel loneliness because they are not close to their classmates.

Another challenge that international students encounter during their study at one higher education in Jambi is living style and related issues. Some participants reported issues related to the food of the host country. This finding supports other studies which revealed food is one of the challenges for international students (Wahyuningsih, 2020; Fauzan & Nadia, 2019; Alsulami, 2018; Tsevi, 2018; Rabia, 2017; Alazzi & Al-Jarrah, 2016). The data finding revealed that sometimes the participants missed their native food and had difficulty adapting to the food of the host country because the food is too spicy for them. Apart from food, participants reported issues related to traffic. Traffic refers to the passage of people or vehicles along a transportation route. Participants reported the issues of the traffic condition in Jambi, in this research; they refer to the traffic in land transportation such as motorbikes and cars. The traffic is tough for them because there are many traffic jams, trucks, and people who break the rules on the road.

In terms of strategies to overcome the challenges, the finding of this research revealed that international students used self-management strategies as one the strategies to overcome their challenges. Self-management implies that the person is actively taking active roles and actions that potentially give a positive impact on the desired outcome (Nicholas & Blyth, 2016). Therefore, self-management strategies refer to any effort or action that international students do to overcome and manage challenges by relying on them. The most used strategy by participants was

doing positive activities. Out of nine participants, four participants reported engaging in positive activities to overcome and reduce the feeling of homesickness, stress, loneliness, and sadness. The participants stated several activities, including sports or exercises, cooking, reading and listening to Al-Qur'an, reading books, self-reflection, and maintaining motivation. These results turned out to have similarities with the result findings of several studies which revealed similar activities used by international students, such as exercise (McLeod et al., 2021; Saravanan et al., 2019; Yan, 2017; Fan & Yeoh, 2012) and religious activity (McLeod et al., 2021; Saravanan et al., 2019; Park et al., 2016).

Another strategy used by international students to overcome challenges is seeking help strategies. Seeking help strategies refer to any effort or action that international students do to overcome challenges by asking for help from others. The most prevalent sub-theme, based on the analysis, was using technology help. This finding provides further evidence of the use of technology to help international students overcome challenges (Cao et al., 2018; Fan & Yeoh, 2012). Out of nine participants, seven participants reported the use of technological applications for learning, communication, and entertainment purposes. For learning purposes, participants use the applications (Google, Google Translate, Cake, Duolingo, KBBI, YouTube, and Blog) mostly to overcome their challenges in language and academic issues. For communication purposes, two participants reported using WhatsApp to communicate with their friends and relatives in the host country or their home country.

Related to the culture shock issue, based on the data from a participant, the lack of foreigners' sense is one of the culture shocks experienced by an international student while studying in Jambi. Luckily, this only lasted for a while. If this occurred continuously, there was a greater possibility for international students to experience social isolation. Some studies (Girmay & Singh, 2018; Hurem, et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2014) have consistently reported that international students experienced social isolation and one of the reasons is the absence of connectedness with peers.

5. Conclusions

The result of the research revealed that international students had several challenges during their study at one higher education in Jambi. Based on the data obtained, the researcher concluded that international students encountered sixteen challenges such as vocabulary, grammar, fluency, pronunciation, courses, pedagogy, academic culture, complicated procedure and system, personality, loneliness, time management, internal problem, food, weather, traffic, and culture shock. Furthermore, the researcher concluded that international students used several strategies to overcome their challenges during their study in one university in Jambi, such as practicing, positive activities, leisure activities, seeking help from university staff, friends and relatives, and technology applications.

Although this study comprehensively discussed international students' challenges and the strategies to overcome the challenges in higher education in Jambi, it is not to say that this study has no limitations. First, this sample of the study is relatively small and limited to nine international students. Further researcher(s) can expand the research by increasing the number of participants in order to provide a more in-depth and comprehensive exploration of the topic. Second, this inquiry exclusively explored international students' perspectives, and university staff was excluded. Further study can explore university staff experiences communicating and dealing with international students.

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