

**“I want to have their research culture”: Challenges and Strategies among Indonesian Doctoral Students at Overseas Universities**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to explore the challenges and strategies through meaningful experiences from their narratives of four Indonesian doctoral students studied at overseas universities. The main focus was to explore four Indonesian doctoral students' lived experiences overseas in several aspects such as personal, social, and academic life. This study also described the students' challenges in conducting their research overseas as well as the strategies they used to face the challenges and the supports they received during their study. This study employed a narrative inquiry method with three-dimensional narrative inquiry space; interaction, continuity, and situation to better understand lived experiences and research journey of each individual in an educational context. The main source of data was an in-depth-interview series developed by Seidman (2006). The interviews were analyzed by using thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clark (2006). The findings showed that several themes emerged from the interviews. They were an adaptation to a new environment, research topic and research problem, relationship with supervisors, access to research facilities, and supports from universities.

**Keywords:** *Indonesian doctoral students, narrative inquiry, lived experiences*

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## **"Araştırma kültürlerine sahip olmak istiyorum": Denizaşırı Üniversitelerdeki Endonezyalı Doktora Öğrencileri Arasındaki Zorluklar ve Stratejiler**

### **Öz**

Çalışmanın amacı, denizaşırı üniversitelerde okuyan dört Endonezyalı doktora öğrencisinin anlatılarından anlamlı deneyimler yoluyla zorlukları ve stratejileri keşfetmektir. Ana odak noktası, dört Endonezyalı doktora öğrencisinin yurtdışında yaşadıkları deneyimleri kişisel, sosyal ve akademik yaşam gibi çeşitli açılardan keşfetmektir. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda öğrencilerin yurtdışında araştırmalarını yürütürken karşılaştıkları zorlukların yanı sıra zorluklarla yüzleşmek için kullandıkları stratejileri ve çalışmalarını sırasında aldıkları destekleri açıkladı. Bu çalışmada, üç boyutlu anlatı sorgulama alanı olan bir anlatı sorgulama yöntemi kullanılmıştır; eğitim bağlamında her bireyin yaşanmış deneyimlerini ve araştırma yolculuğunu daha iyi anlamak için etkileşim, süreklilik ve durum. Ana veri kaynağı, Seidman (2006) tarafından geliştirilen derinlemesine görüşme serisidir. Görüşmeler, Braun ve Clark (2006) tarafından geliştirilen tematik analiz kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, görüşmelerden birkaç temanın ortaya çıktığını gösterdi. Yeni bir ortama uyum, araştırma konusu ve araştırma problemi, danışmanlarla ilişki, araştırma tesislerine erişim ve üniversitelerden gelen desteklerdi.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Endonezyalı doktora öğrencileri, anlatı araştırması, yaşanmış deneyimler

## Introduction

There are more than 35,000 Indonesian studying overseas every year. Indonesia makes up 1% of international students in the world. Australia has become the number one destination for Indonesian students followed by the USA, Malaysia, Germany, and Japan (DGHE, 2017). The number of international students overseas increases every year because more countries offer full scholarships for students who want to study in their country. The Indonesian government has also provided more scholarships for Indonesian students especially for lecturers who want to study doctorate. According to the Directorate General of Higher Education (DGHE), in 2017 there were about 237,837 Indonesian lecturers; only 18% (around 21,872 lecturers) of them hold doctorate degrees. These numbers are still far from the target of the Ministry of Education and Culture which determines that at least 30 % of Indonesian lecturers hold doctorate degrees. Susanto (2012) points out that there are several reasons why studying overseas becomes more popular. One of the reasons is that studying overseas will open someone's mind and will see the world from a different paradigm. Studying overseas will also benefit in terms of excellent access to the knowledge provided by world-class universities.

Several studies on Indonesian students studied overseas have been conducted. Hasanah's (1997) study focused on learning-teaching experiences and social-cultural experiences of 26 Indonesian postgraduate students who studied at the University of Adelaide, Flinders Universities, and the University of South Australia. Twelve of them were Ph.D. students and 14 were masters. Nine were government employees and 17 were lecturers. Hasanah's (1997) study used an open-ended questionnaire and interviews for her data collection. It revealed that Indonesian postgraduate students had various motivations in learning because of the employment background in Indonesia. The result of the study also found that those who had experience studying overseas before had no problem in academic adjustment. Language difficulties were considered as the main challenges for most participants. However, this study did not mention if participants' previous employment influenced their study in Australia.

Another study by Kiley (1999) involved 33 Indonesian postgraduate students studying in South Australian universities. She explored the impact of expectations and experiences on students' lives and their research. This was a longitudinal study. Kiley used survey and interview methods in her research. The result showed that the changes in expectations and experiences

of the students were influenced by their age, previous academic experience, the award being undertaken, and their employment in Indonesia and to some extent, the students' English proficiency. Additionally, Novera (2004) investigated the adjustment experiences of 25 Indonesian postgraduate students studying in Victoria, Australia. Novera (2004) used an open-ended questionnaire as a method of collecting his data. It concluded that the adjustment process of Indonesian students was influenced by cultural issues specifically concerning classroom interaction and student-teacher relationships. This study recommended that there is a need for improvements in pre-departure training programs. Kiley's (1999) study might provide some insight into Indonesian students' lived experiences studying in Australia, however, in twenty years many things have changed. The number of Indonesian students studying in Australia has increased dramatically since 2000 after the economic crisis hit Indonesia in 1998 when Suharto's regime fell. The reform era in Indonesia has made a big difference in many country strategic policies including the Indonesian policy on higher education (Brodjonegoro, 2002). Mukminin (2012) conducted a phenomenological study of Indonesian graduate students' experiences on the acculturation process at an American public research university. He collected the data by using surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with 13 students. The result revealed that four themes emerged in the students' experiences in the acculturation process. They were academic shock, adjustment, crisis, and resolution. Mukminin (2019) conducted another study on 24 Indonesian master's students studied in the Netherlands. Data were gathered through surveys and interviews. The result was there were four common issues experienced by the students. They were unanticipated educational stressors, unimagined social stressors, language issues, and loneliness/isolation.

Most of the research discusses the problems, adaptation to the new cultures and new language (Hasanah, 1997; Kiley, 1999; Novera, 2004). However, only a few studies on the challenges and strategies on Indonesian doctoral students studied overseas and look at the impact on their life after studying overseas. This current study is trying to address the challenges, the strategies, and the impacts of the long journey of Indonesian doctoral students on their life after finishing their study by telling stories of their lived experiences and research journey. This current study aims to explore the challenges and strategies through meaningful experiences from their narratives of four Indonesian doctoral students studied at overseas universities. The research questions are formulated as: (1) What are the narratives of Indonesian doctoral students studied in overseas universities? (2) What were the challenges the Indonesian doctoral students face

when they were studying overseas? (3) What were the strategies the Indonesian doctoral students employ in facing the challenges? (4) What kind of knowledge, skills, and attitude did Indonesian doctoral students believe to be critical to complete their research? (5) What were the impacts of studying overseas for Indonesian doctoral students on their life and their career?

### Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework affects the entire research process from formulating research questions to data analysis (Ravitch & Rigan, 2012, Anfara & Mertz, 2006). This study is developed from a framework of research paradigm, research method, theories, and literature regarding the topic. The theoretical perspective that suits our view of the world as a researcher and this study is the *Interpretivist* paradigm because the process of this research is constructed and influenced by us as researchers and the former Indonesian doctoral students as participants. We want to see the world from the participants' views. Our main goal of the research is to understand the lived experiences and research journey of four Indonesian students who studied overseas from their perspectives.

The research questions of the study are aimed to explore the lived experiences of Indonesian doctoral students both their research journey and their reflections on professional and personal life. Therefore, this study adopted the theoretical perspective of *social constructivism* in which "The central assumption of this paradigm is that reality is socially constructed, that individuals develop subjective meanings of their personal experience, and that this gives way to multiple meanings" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). As can be seen in table 1, that *social constructivism* believes that reality or knowledge is co-constructed between the inquirer and the participants. This belief fits this study.

Table 1  
*Interpretive Framework: Social Constructivism*

Ontology Beliefs (the nature of reality)	Multiple realities constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others
Epistemological Beliefs (how reality is known)	Reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences
Axiology Beliefs (role of values)	Individual values are honored and are negotiated among individuals
Methodological Beliefs (approach to inquiry)	Use more of a literary style of writing. Use of an inductive method of emergent ideas (through consensus) obtained through methods such as interviewing, observing, and analysis of texts

Source: Adapted from Creswell (2013, p. 26)

## **Narrative Inquiry Framework**

Three common places differentiate narrative inquiry from other methodologies; temporality, sociality, and place. These three common places enable researchers to investigate the complexity of the participants' lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). From the three commonplaces above, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed a framework which is called “a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework.” The three main dimensions are *interaction*, *continuity*, and *situation*. These three dimensions have four directions; *inward*, *outward*, *backward*, and *forward*. The following outline is the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework by Clandinin and Connelly (2000):

- I. Interaction
  - a. Personal – look inward to the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions
  - b. Social – look outward to the existential conditions, that is, the environment.
- II. Continuity
  - a. Past – look backward to the past experiences
  - b. Present – current stories
  - c. Future – look forward to implied and possible stories.
- III. Situation
  - a. Place – look at the context time and place situated in a physical landscape with others' intentions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.49-51)

## **Experiential Learning Theory**

According to Kolb (2015), knowledge is continuously gained through both personal and environmental experiences. Kolb states that to gain genuine knowledge from an experience, the learner must have four abilities: First, the learner must be willing to be actively involved in the experience; second, the learner must be able to reflect on the experience; third, the learner must possess and use analytical skills to conceptualize the experience; and the fourth, the learner must possess decision making and problem-solving skills to use the new ideas gained from the experience.

### **Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy)**

Knowles (2014) points out that adults have different ways from children in gaining knowledge. He proposed several characteristics of adult learners. These characteristics are considered as the strength that adult learners have compared to children. The use of adult learning theory also helps this current study find its root. This theory was used in developing research questions and interview questions of this study. Knowles's theory of andragogy identified six assumptions on adult learners. The first assumption is *the need to know* – adults need to know why they have to learn before they decide to learn something. The second is *Self-Concept* – adults have their concept about themselves which makes them different from children in learning something. The third is *Past Learning Experience* – adults have some experiences in their previous phase of life which helps them understand more about their purpose of learning things. The fourth is *Readiness to Learn* – Adults understand the importance of education in their life. This understanding allows them to be serious and focus on the learning process. The fifth is *Practical Reasons to Learn* – adults have certain reasons to return to their education because of practical reasons. The sixth is *driven by Internal Motivation* – Adults' motivation to learn is coming from their internal factors not external like children (Knowles, 2014). All of the assumptions above can be seen from all the participants in this study.

### **Methodology**

According to Creswell et al. (2007), an interview is the most common instrument for data collection in narrative inquiry. Therefore, for the study, we employed an interview in collecting data from the participants. To collect the data, we interviewed the four participants regarding their research journey, lived experiences, and reflections on their research journey as postgraduate research students overseas. In-depth interviewing was the primary source of the data because it fitted with the research questions. In-depth interviewing can be defined as a conversation between the researcher and participants to get detailed perceptions from the participants about their life and experiences (Mishler, 1986). For this study, we employed semi-structured interviews in which the main issues are from the research questions (Minichiello et al., 2000). We prepared a list of topics that were focused on our research questions. To add information on the participants, we also observed the participants' profiles from the internet. We found several documents about the participants through news, university website, participants' blogs, Facebook, and journal articles.

## **Design of the Study**

Creswell (2013) mentions two approaches that can investigate participants' lived experiences; phenomenology and narrative inquiry. We explored the lived experiences of Indonesian postgraduate students. However, we did not reduce the experiences of each student and focus on what all students have in common as the basic purpose of phenomenology. The experiences of each participant were unique and enriched the findings. Therefore, we employed a narrative inquiry. The narrative inquiry also suits our research questions. Narrative inquiry enabled us to answer our research questions because our research questions are focused on the life experiences of one or more individuals (Creswell, 2013).

## **Research Site and Access**

The site of this current study was at one of the public universities in Jambi province, Indonesia. There were 1088 lecturers at this university, and 267 of them had doctoral degrees (dss.unja.ac.id, 2020). But, only a few of them graduated from overseas. We approached our participants personally. After they agreed, we gave them invitation letters for participating in our research and asked for their agreement.

## **Sampling Procedure and Participants**

Four Indonesian doctoral students were participating in this study. The participants are permanent lecturers in Indonesia. The participants were selected by using purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, all participants are selected based on certain criteria predetermined by the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The criteria that we used ; (a) they studied postgraduate degrees in overseas universities within the last ten years, (b) they are permanent lecturers in Indonesian universities, (c) they have taught in Indonesian universities in the last five years after finishing their doctoral degree.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

A convenient time and place for the interviewees were chosen for conducting the interview. We used open questions to gain as much information as possible (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Each participant was interviewed three times in obtaining detailed information (Seidman, 1998). A framework from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) was used in the interviews. We introduced a question that generated a story to be told (Thomas et al., 2014). Therefore, the



areas that were discussed in the interviews were generated from the interviews themselves (Foddy, 1993). We did not follow a list of specific questions to be answered during the interview (Rubin and Rubin, 2012)

After finishing the first interview, we transcribed them and then discussed them with the participants before the next interviews. If there was a change, we discussed it with the participants. If everything was fine, we continued to the next interview. The length of each interview was around forty minutes for each interview. All interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian language). It was easier for the participants and us to communicate in our mother tongue. By using the Indonesian language they should feel more comfortable telling their stories without thinking of grammar mistakes or vocabularies (Mann, 2016). It also avoids misunderstandings or not telling particular things just because of language barriers (Birks et al, 2007). All interviews were recorded and translated into English. After transcribing the interview, we stored the data into computer files to be analysed.

### **Trustworthiness and Limitations**

Creswell (2013) points out that there are various ways of ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. He calls them trustworthiness strategies. We employed several strategies of Creswell regarding trustworthiness in the process of this study. The first strategy is called *prolonged engagement* (Creswell, 2013). This means we built trust with participants during the research process especially during collecting the data. The second strategy is called *an external audit* (Creswell, 2013). In this strategy, we invited an external person who is not involved in this research to verify the data that we collected included the translation. The third strategy is *member checking* in which we asked each participant to check the interview's result (Creswell, 2013). The fourth strategy is *a rich and thick description* in which we provided information in detail (Creswell, 2013). The fifth strategy is *clarifying researcher bias* (Creswell, 2013). In this strategy, we gave comments on our own stories, biases, and prejudices that might influence our interpretation of the research process. Therefore, we acted as a participant-observer. This is very important since we share some similarities with the participants. We speak the same language, similar culture, and we were also overseas students; however, our lived experiences as overseas students are probably not the same as the participants'. The strategies we just mentioned are an attempt to reduce the biases in this study (Miles et al, 2014). There are some limitations to this study. The findings of this study are not aimed to be generalized to all of the

doctoral students studied overseas. The stories from participants of this study do not represent the views of all of the doctoral students studied overseas. We are also aware that the participants may not be willing to share their problems with us in the interview sessions.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data, we used the thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clark (2006) and Thomas et al. (2014). We also employed the framework from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to guide us in analyzing the data. Therefore, the themes are based on the participants' personal and social experiences in the past, present, future in temporary places (Indonesia and overseas). According to a thematic analysis by Braun and Clark (2006), there are six phases in analysing the data. The first phase is familiarisation with the data. We read and re-read the data to familiar with its content. The second phase is coding. We made coding by identifying and labelling the important features of the interviews that might answer our research questions (Saldana, 2016). In the third phase, we examined the codes and started to make some potential themes. In the fourth phase, we checked the temporary themes and reviewed them by comparing them to the research questions. We made sure that the themes have answered our research questions and generated convincing stories (Silverman, 2010). Then, in the fifth phase, we defined and named the themes. The themes were arranged into chronological order. Finally, in the last phase, we wrote the report by considering the research questions and the literature (Oliver, 2012).

### **Ethical considerations**

Participants' involvement in this study was voluntary. We provided them with an informed consent form. We also masked the names of participants to protect them.

## **Findings**

The main theme that emerges from this research question was the adaptation to a new environment. This theme is consistent with Kolb's theory of experiential learning (2015) that learning is a holistic process of adaptation. Two participants had experienced studied overseas before (Fandy in Australia and John in Thailand). However, from their stories, we can conclude that they still need to adapt to the new environment. They still had a kind of cultural shock even if for a very short time. Evan and Mardy, need more time to adapt that was because they never had any experience studied overseas before. All of the participants admitted that the first

sixth months of their research journey and lived experiences were the biggest challenges. For Evan, language, food, weather, and culture were the real challenges. He said:

*(My biggest challenge was to adapt to a new environment... a new language, a new academic system, new people, new culture. Everything was new to me. The first challenge was language. However, it lasted only for a few weeks. When I got used to it, everything became easier. The second challenge was food. At first, I didn't know how to find Asian food, so I just shopped in the Australian mini market. There were only potato, bread, meat, and chicken. But I didn't know whether they were halal or not. As a Muslim, I had to be careful. For some time, the only things I could consume at that time were eggs, bread, and milk.*

*The third biggest challenge was how to adapt to western people. The social lifestyle. It was very hard for me to understand. I still stayed in the dorm at that time. Most of my neighbors were western people. They brought their girlfriends to their home and stayed there. At night, they were noisy which made me stay up until late at night. Sometimes, I couldn't study at night because of their sounds. It took more than seven months until my family arrived. Some of the students there also consumed drugs. It was very common and nobody cared about that.)*

For Fandy, learning a new language was the biggest challenge. He had to learn German for daily conversation with people in Germany. He followed a German course both in Indonesia and in Germany for six months.

*(After I was awarded the scholarship, I started to follow some steps. First of all, I had to join a course in Germany. Even though the university that I studied use English as language instruction, foreign students still need to understand German for daily life purposes. I had no ideas about German at all. So, I had a German course for two months in Jakarta and four months. German is a very complicated language, I think. It is different from English. In that year I just finished my study in Australia where I used a lot of English. Then, I had to learn German. That was very struggling. I remembered when I entered German, I was very confused about using English and German. I preferred to use English in Germany when I talked to friends from other countries. Even when I talked to my German friends or supervisors, I still used English. However, when I bought things in the supermarket or talked to bus drivers, I had to use German. But, in general, I think I had no problem with language.)*

The weather was another challenge for Fandy. He found it quite hard in the wintertime.

*Another big challenge was the weather. In Australia, the weather was not a problem. I could still face it. But not in Germany, it was very hard to adapt. Can you imagine that in winter it reached minus seven or minus eight? That was just very cold. It was hard for the first week's winter there.*

Like Fandy, John had the advantage that he had experience studying overseas before. So, he had no difficulties in adapting to a new environment. However, as an Indonesian government scholarship awardee, he did not get any pre-departure training about living in Australia. He did

not get information that nobody would pick him up at the airport and he had to find his temporary home by himself. He took things for granted.

*(I had experienced studying overseas before in Thailand so I thought the life of foreign students in Bangkok and Australia would be the same. But I was wrong. I was very surprised when I arrived. Nobody picked me up and took me to the dormitory. I was so confused at that time. So, I talked to the language center officer about my problem. She was very helpful. She contacted someone and finally, I got a landlord. He picked me up from university and took me to his rented house. So, I was saved by the bell. Finally, I stayed at his house.)*

John also had another problem. He found it hard to get food.

*(Another problem came. I did not prepare anything for my meal. I asked the landlord to find a place to buy rice. I cannot cook. For the first three days in Australia, I hadn't eaten rice. I only ate kebabs because that was the only thing that I could find. After three days, I met an Indonesian friend. He helped me find Asian food. Then, the problem is solved.)*

Just like the other three participants, Mardy found the biggest challenge was the adaptation to food. He could not cook by himself. However, it did not last long.

*(Another biggest challenge was food. Living alone by myself was not easy. My wife usually prepared everything for me. But that did not last long. Finally, I met a friend who could cook so we shared and problem solved.)*

### **Challenges for the Research**

According to Wisker (2008), one of the hardest things for many doctoral students is determining the topic for their research. This problem was also the biggest challenge for Evan. He even did not decide yet what kind of methodology that he was going to do for his dissertation. His knowledge of his topic was also very limited. As a result, his supervisor asked him to take a methodology research class. He joined the class together with some other masters' students.

*(The first six months were a very difficult time for me. My first discussion with my supervisors was about the topic of my research. I told them that I was very interested in inquiry-based learning. The implementation of this model of learning in Indonesia was not right. I believed there was something wrong. And after telling them my research problem, they asked me the methodology that I was going to use. I just could not answer that question because honestly, I had no idea. After that first meeting, I read a few dissertations and tried to understand the research methods used in those dissertations. I also read some instruments used in research and how they would fit my research. I was very lucky because my supervisors did not ask me for the first draft of my research proposal because I didn't have it.)*

Just like Evan, Fandy also found for his first six months writing his dissertation. However, in my opinion, Fandy seemed more confident in everything he did during their first six months in Germany. He knew what should he did to find support. He built good communication with his supervisors and his Ph.D. students' friends. He used the university's facilities. His experiences of studying in Australia helped him a lot in adapting to a new environment (Kolb, 2014).

*(When I arrived in Germany, the first six months were the time when I had to discuss very intensively with my supervisors regarding my research proposal. We needed to find out where this proposal would focus on. We did not have any particular schedule that we should follow. The meetings between me and my supervisors were based on the progress of my proposal. So, if I thought I found something new in my progress, I contacted them for asking them for their availability. I worked alone. I read a lot, browsed a lot, and wrote a lot. I had to send reports about what I had read.)*

*(Another big challenge was the adaptation with my supervisor. That was quite hard for me, especially for the first few weeks. I still lived in the dormitory. It was around three kilometers from campus. I had to go to campus on foot because the bus didn't the dormitory. At that time, I had to do everything by myself such as cooking, washing, and everything. I did not get used to everything yet. As a result, I often came late to the meetings with my supervisors. I think it was just a matter of a different culture. However, I believe that was the real problem when Indonesian students studied overseas. Culture shock. Not only in daily life but also in academic life.)*

John:

*(My biggest challenge was to select the topic that I believed suit my interest and would have maximum benefits for my career later in Indonesia. However, my main supervisor had a different point of view in looking at the topic. He tended to see the weight of the research for a doctoral degree.)*

Mardy:

*(In academic life, the first six months were the most difficult ones. To determine a topic that I wanted to develop was the toughest one. And then the study plan, something that I did not recognize before. I was really confused. I made a study plan and then suddenly I changed it. It happened several times. I kept reading some journal articles to make myself understand what I was going to do in my research plan. And then I made another study plan and then revised it again and again.)*

### **Strategies in Facing Challenges Overseas**

The role of supervisors is very important in doctoral students' research journey (Delany, 2009; Wisker, 2012). The relationship between doctoral students and their supervisors will affect the

time to completion of the dissertation (Delany, 2009). Evan also reported that his supervisors helped him in every step of his research journey including giving him access to observation in a Senior High School in Australia.

*(My main supervisor asked me to take an Educational Research subject that semester. He said that it would help me understand the research method very clearly. So, I took that subject. I joined the class together with the masters' students. The class was held twice a week. I got a lot of things to do as assignments. I was asked to write a 5000 words essay. The essay was about how I used a research instrument in my dissertation. One of the instruments was an observation. To write the assignment, I needed to do an observation. So, I asked my supervisor if I could do an observation in high school. Then, he introduced me to his friend who taught in a senior high school in Australia. And one of my great journeys started.)*

Support from the university is always helpful for doctoral students whose first language is not English. Any pieces of training provided by the university have a big impact on students in completing their dissertation. Evan felt very lucky that he had not had to worry too much about writing an essay or dissertation in English because he could find support from the university. It means that he just focused on the content of his research.

*(The second semester was writing a dissertation. That was another challenge for me. I am from science. I never wrote any proposal in English before. I didn't understand types of writing, terms like cohesion, phrases, compound sentences, etc. I struggled with academic writing but I learned a lot. The great thing was that you always can find help with any problem with your research. I joined the academic writing training which was provided by the university.)*

Fandy:

*(One of the biggest supports that I had was in writing my reports and my dissertation. We had a group of several Ph.D. students. Each group was supported by several native speakers from Australia or the US. The native speakers were also Ph.D. students. We discussed it regularly. I think our university should adopt this kind of support. We can form a support group in writing or research method.)*

Fandy had a unique learning doctoral system. He had a group of doctoral students from the same department who had a regular meeting to discuss their research. There were two or three English native speakers in that group. Their job was to help other international students dealing with their English. The native students also got help with the content of their research. Fandy said that it was very helpful for him and some doctoral students. The way Fandy solved his challenges was to avoid isolation. He used the group discussion as a way to the solution for his research (Phillips and Pugh, 2010).

*(The unique thing was that my writing had to pass several steps before submitting it to my supervisors. The first step was checking grammar and diction by my native friends. The second step was evaluating the content of my research by some of my friends in the postdoctoral program. Then, after both steps, I met my supervisors to submit and then they add and reduce the here and there, correct things, and gave it back to me to fix or to go on with the next step of my research. This kind of system worked for many international students like me and some friends. It was very effective so I could finish my Ph.D. on time. I could focus on my research only. After a year, I completed my proposal and also several optional subjects. Then I had a seminar about my proposal. I received some suggestions from the reviewers and several audiences.)*

John found similar things. He received full supports from the university. He also got support from his friends from many different countries. Joining with his friends helped him a lot in conducting his research.

John:

*(During my research, I did not find any serious problem, especially in literature because my university had unlimited access to many journals. Even if I had a problem finding certain journal articles, my university helped me by giving me access to other universities that had access. So, that was something we should apply here at this university.*

*Another support that I got during my research journey was from the other doctoral students from different countries. I loved to join them because I believed I got many things to share and made me focus on my research. If I chose to hang out with my Indonesian friends, I would get a little feedback or nothing at all because mostly we talked about something else rather than research. Besides, I could practise my English more with my international friends.)*

For Mardy, supports also came from his supervisor and his universities both in Australia and in Indonesia when he researched Indonesia.

Mardy:

*(It took one year for me to write a proposal for my Ph.D. research. Then, I had an informal proposal seminar. Then, my status changed. I became a doctoral candidate. The next step was to collect data. So, I had to go to Indonesia. My research involved many parties; lecturers, students, alumni, and also schools. I collected various data; quantitative and qualitative. I distributed questionnaires, conduct several interviews and some group discussions. I was very lucky that during collecting the data for my research I received full supports from campus in Indonesia. I believe this kind of support is very important for a researcher.)*

### **Critical Knowledge, Skills, and Attitude to Completing Doctoral Research**

The role of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in completing doctoral research is another important thing for the participants. They admitted that they needed to learn a lot about their field of study. Reading books, journal articles, and joining some pieces of training helped them to understand their field of study better. Meeting different people from different countries developed their skills in dealing with people. Having positive attitudes during their research journey and lived experiences were also very crucial in completing their research. Evan believed that one of the biggest lessons he got from his research journey was being tolerant of other people. He admitted he could see things from a different point of view. That was the result of his experience living in a dormitory for the first six months and contacting many students from around the world during his research journey.

Evan:

*(There are many lessons that I can learn from my lived experiences and research journey in one of the public universities in Australia. In the first lesson, in daily life, we need to be tolerant. For me, this is the biggest lesson. I once lived in a dormitory where students from Europe, Asia, Africa, the USA, and Australia itself can live in harmony. We appreciated each other. We helped each other. I had a habit in Australia that I preferred to have friends from international students. I aimed to expand my understanding of other people's cultures as well as to maximize my use of English. This also expands my point of view in looking at the world.*

*The second lesson is that in doing research, we need to make it clear what we are looking for. This is important in my opinion. Most students just do not understand what they are looking for in conducting their research. They just do step by step of the research process without knowing the main purpose of the research itself.*

*The third lesson was that many people are ready for us to help only if we ask them for help. If you had a problem, just admit it and ask for help. My research was a journey of many bits of help from many different people. I just could not do it by myself.)*

Fandy also had a similar point of view to Evan. Fandy found that his habit of joining international students made him realize the importance of communication skills. Regarding knowledge, Fandy also realized that there were many things that he did not know about his field, agriculture. He used to take things for granted. The more he read about agriculture, the more he believed there would be more he needed to learn about his field of study.

Fandy:

*(For me, the most significant skill is communication skills. If you want to succeed in your studies in Germany, I believe you need to develop your communication*



*skills with your new friends, supervisors and other people who often you meet with. Another skill is the research method skill because we use it the whole time during our study.*

*A positive mind, unselfishness, persistence, and understanding are very important attitudes to be successful in life and also in studying Ph.D. overseas. We met a lot of people from many different cultures. That was not easy. We must be aware that different cultures see things differently. However, there were several common things for humans to be able to live in harmony. For example, all humans are happy to be respected and to be treated fairly. My experiences lived in Australia had helped me deal with culture shock in Germany.*

*The main thing is to prepare everything in academics or knowledge of your field. Read everything regarding your topic. This is important. Unfortunately, many doctoral students ignored this before they studied overseas. I was one of them. The language was not a problem anymore if you studied overseas. As long as you passed the minimum score of English at your university, you'll be okay.)*

Interestingly, John admitted that he always preferred to get involved in international students' events. They taught him many lessons, especially regarding his research.

### **Implications to Doctoral Life and Career**

Evan reported that his doctoral research journey has given him a personal impact and also for his career as a lecturer. Six years after finishing his doctoral degree, he has had registered five patents in his field. He is also a journal reviewer for two international journals and has published several articles in some international reputable journals. He has also had a clear framework in supervising his students doing their research. We noticed that when we had an interview. He scheduled Saturday morning as a time when he was available for supervising. This never happened before. We think this is one of the impacts of studying overseas. Evan also found that his study overseas makes him more tolerant of people who have a different cultural background from him. He always tries to see things from other people's perspective and understand it.

Fandy admitted that his experiences in Australia and Germany changed his way of thinking and his effort to do something new in his field, agriculture. After finishing his studies in Germany, Fandy built a community of learning in his university. We searched on his social media and also from news about him. He had succeeded in building a new system of planting vegetables by using new technology. He had also collaborated with some farmers in developing the new technology. He was awarded by his current university for his innovation projects.

*(Currently, I am developing smart planting technology. This is a kind of agriculture that uses the Internet of Things as a basis. We have produced vegetables which are already available in a supermarket. We are in collaboration with some potential investors so that the products can be produced on a bigger scale.*

*These are some of the things that I can do for my university, and my community. I believe that is the impact that I told you about. Knowledge developed in universities should be able to reach all of the community levels and can give benefits to as many people as possible.)*

When we asked John about the impact of studying overseas for him, he mentioned three effects. For his mind, as a person, he admitted that studying overseas has given him a new way of looking at things. He always believes that if he does something, he will do it in the best way that he can. Just like what he has seen overseas. This can be applied in daily life or academic life. Another impact is that he has made a big difference for his institution when he was appointed head of an institution. He has developed something that has never been done before. He also mentioned that his English has helped him in keeping updating on any development of new technology in the world.

*(There are two biggest impacts of my experiences and research journey as Indonesian doctoral students studied overseas. First of all, the way I am thinking of academicians. The second is the way I see how we organize an institution. I have seen many excellent implementations in a world-class university so I can see what we can do better to achieve our goal and mission as a good institution. I always think that if we do something, we should do it in the best way.*

*So far, I have done my part since I graduated from my overseas university. I had implemented several things that I got from overseas in improving my teaching, my job as the head of the computer laboratory, etc.)*

The reflection of his studying overseas for Mardy was the way he saw the relationship between supervisor and students. He believed that was the key factor to success in conducting research. That changed his way treated his students. He also emphasized the support system in an overseas university. That was also an important factor in the completion of doctoral research overseas. Talking about the impact of studying overseas, Mardy has had published several articles in some international journals.

*(In my opinion, the support system is the most important thing in a university. From facilities, supervisions, training for research skills, and language assistance for international students. I think we need this system at our university now. It's just impossible to let our research students do their research by themselves without supports from the university. When I conducted my doctoral research, I just focused on it. Everything was arranged for me. Writing workshops, statistics*

*training, references, journal articles were available and could be accessed very easily.)*

### **Discussion in Relation to Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study is developed from the research paradigm, research approach, theories used to guide the research, literature, and previous studies. After analyzing the data, we found that there were five common themes in the participants' stories:

#### **1. Adaptation to a new environment**

This theme is consistent with Kolb's theory of experiential learning (2015) that learning is a holistic process of adaptation. Two participants had experienced studied overseas before (Fandy in Australia and John in Thailand). However, from their stories, we can conclude that they still need to adapt to the new environment. They still had a kind of cultural shock even if for a very short time. Evan and Mardy, need more time to adapt that was because they never had any experience studied overseas before.

#### **2. Research topic and research problems**

As Wisker (2008) mentioned that the biggest challenge for doctoral students was to determine the research topic and the research problems. It took longer than many students thought. This was what happened to all the participants. All of their topics were changed after discussing them with the supervisors. Some need one to two months to find the fixed topic for their research. The other need longer. This varied depended on their understanding of their topic and their basic knowledge about the topic. John, for example, admitted that his background knowledge for his previous studies in masters and bachelor's degree had influenced his decision in determining the fixed topic. This fact is consistent with the adult learning theory of Knowles (2014) which points out that previous learning experience will influence the current understanding of adult learning.

#### **3. Relationship with supervisors**

All the participants admitted that their relationship with their supervisors is one of the key factors of their success in their doctoral study. A good supervisor will determine students' points of view of their research (Wisker, 2012). Students' satisfaction with their research is also determined by their supervisors. John admitted that there was something that he regretted

about his first supervisor. He gave John too much power in controlling the topic while John said that he wished that his supervisor interfered more on the topic because John's background knowledge of the topic was not enough. However, in general, John found that his supervisors were very helpful.

#### **4. Access to research facilities and subjects**

This theme is consistent with several pieces of literature that we reviewed in chapter two. Wisker (2008) mentioned that access to research facilities and research subjects is very important and to some doctoral students became a big problem. Evan, Fandy, And Mardy conducted their research in Indonesia. They found relatively easy access both to facilities and to subjects. They received a lot of supports from their university in Indonesia. John didn't do any field study. He just used the library as his main source of research. He was looking for answering questions through a mathematical formula. His research involved particular tools and equipment, not humans.

#### **5. Supports from universities**

This theme is a big concern of all of the participants in this current study. All of them concluded that the facilities played a very important role in their research process. They wished that if there was a possibility that their university where they are teaching now had those facilities. They believed that facilities are one of the significant factors in helping doctoral students studied well. This statement is also consistent with the literature (Wisker, 2008).

### **Discussion in Relation to Research Questions**

All the five research questions mentioned earlier above have been answered through the stories of four participants. The first question was answered by the story through a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). All four stories were based on the personal and social experiences of participants (interaction dimension). The stories were also told in chronological order from past, present, and future. The stories were also based on the context of time and place. The second research question was answered through the challenges that participants faced and how they coped with the challenges. All of them received full supports from universities, other doctoral students, friends, and their family members who joined them overseas. The third question was answered through different contexts. The participants used different strategies in facing different

challenges. They used their previous experiences to learn new knowledge. They used four abilities as strategies in facing the challenges as mentioned by Kolb (2014) in experiential learning theory. In answering the fourth research questions, all participants believed that knowledge, skill, and attitude which critical to complete their research are:

- Understanding their field (Evan, Fandy, John, & Mardy)
- Reading a lot of things related to the field (Evan, Fandy, John, & Mardy)
- Good communication skill with different people from a different culture (Evan, Fandy, & John)
- Positive thinking, persistent, and tolerant (Evan, Fandy, & John)

All participants also believed that their study overseas contributed to their career as academicians in their institutions in Indonesia. What they are doing now in their current university is a reflection of their previous doctoral study experiences. Fandy has developed a great innovation based on current technology in agriculture. John has developed many new computer systems in his university. Evan has four copyrights for his findings in the model of learning. Mardy has produced several papers in international reputable journals.

### **Discussion in Relation to Previous Research**

Compared to previous studies, the finding of this research is different in a way that language is not a barrier for the participants. Unlike studies by Hasanah: 1997, Kiley: 1999, Novera: 2004 which found that language was the main problem for Indonesian students studied overseas. However, this current study support previous research on how Asian students struggle in a new environment and face culture shock even if some of the participants already had experience studied overseas (Turcic: 2008, Zeng:2010, Mukminin: 2013, Vu: 2013). The finding of this study is also consistent with previous research regarding how international students coped with their problems. They tended to find the solution by getting supports from their peers, supervisors, and universities (Sonari: 1994), Poyrazli et al: 2001, Poh: 2006, Mujtaba: 2008).

### **Conclusions, Suggestions, and Implications**

This study is aimed to explore the lived experiences and research journey of Indonesian doctoral students studied overseas. The stories of the participants through narrative inquiry

have revealed five common themes. Although the participants went to four different universities overseas, they faced several common problems as mentioned by Wisker (2008). As adult learners, the participants had their ways to cope with the problems (Knowles, 2014). They realized that the strategies they used were based on previous experiences they had in the past (Kolb, 2015). Several suggestions can be addressed to future students who plan to continue their doctoral degrees overseas. The first and most important one is that those who planned to study overseas should understand very well the topic of their research. Not only have enough knowledge on the topic but also have enough understanding of how to formulate research questions, purposes of the study, and the significance of the study. The second is that if doctoral students planned to conduct their research in Indonesia, they should consider the supports that they might have.

For further researchers, this study only focused on four participants who studied in Australia and Germany. Doing similar research but using participants who studied from other countries would give various insights on study overseas for Indonesian doctoral students. The implication for the scholarship provider, three of four participants studied overseas by using DIKTI scholarship. They admitted that the management of the scholarship provider was not satisfied. There was no sufficient pre-departure training, therefore, many students who never studied overseas before finding several difficulties especially in their first six months of study. Everything had to be handled by themselves without any supports from the scholarship provider. All the participants had to work because of the lateness of the money transfer from the provider. The scholarship provider should also consider the length of the study. Doctoral programs from different universities have a different policies on the length of the study. The scholarship provider cannot limit to three years only and give an option of extension with several conditions. For Jambi University, where all the participants work as lecturers, one participant complained about the lack of support from the university when he needed a special letter for bringing his family overseas, he did not get it. It delayed his family to arrive in the destination country for six months. For supervisors, one participant in this study reported that his supervisor gave him too much authority so that he was confused with the work he was doing. He wished that his supervisor could interfere a little bit more. He believed he could do better in his research if his supervisor guided him more than he received during his study.

## Statements of Ethics and Conflict of Interest

“I, as the Corresponding Author, declare and undertake that in the study titled as “*I want to have their research culture*”: *Challenges and Strategies among Indonesian Doctoral Students at Overseas Universities*”, scientific, ethical and citation rules were followed; Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry Journal Editorial Board has no responsibility for all ethical violations to be encountered, that all responsibility belongs to the author/s and that this study has not been sent to any other academic publication platform for evaluation.”

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