THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND ADAPTATION EXPERIENCES OF AN INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT OPTING FOR INDONESIA AS A STUDY DESTINATION

A THESIS

By

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Magister Program in Language Education

MAGISTER PROGRAM IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION

SRIWIJAYA UNIVERSITY

PALEMBANG

2024

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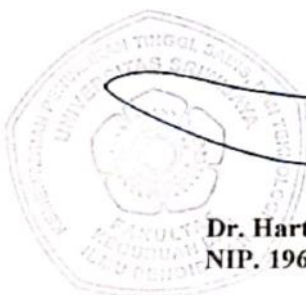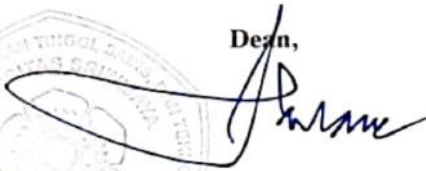Advisor 2,

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned,

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Certify that the thesis entitled "The Decision-Making Process and Adaptation Experiences of An International High School Student Opting for Indonesia as A Study Destination" is my work, and I did not do any plagiarism or inappropriate quotation against the ethics and rules commended by the Ministry of Education of Republic of Indonesia Number 17, 2010 regarding plagiarism in higher education. Therefore, I deserve to face court if I am found to have plagiarized this work.

Palembang, December 30, 2024

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents, Hendri and Ita. You have been my unwavering pillars of support, and I owe so much of who I am today to your sacrifices, guidance, and unconditional love. From my earliest memories, you have always been there to encourage me to dream big and to face challenges with courage and determination. You taught me the value of hard work, the importance of kindness, and the strength to persevere even when times were difficult.

To my father, Hendri, your wisdom and quiet strength have been my compass. Your constant reminders to stay grounded and your belief in my abilities have been a source of reassurance through every step of this journey. To my mother, Ita, your boundless love, patience, and encouragement have been my greatest comfort and motivation. You have been my role model in so many ways, and your sacrifices, often silent but deeply felt, have never gone unnoticed.

This thesis stands as a testament to your endless prayers, your unyielding faith in me, and the countless hours you have spent nurturing my ambitions and aspirations. It is as much your achievement as it is mine, and I am eternally grateful to call you my parents.

MOTTO

"Success does not belong to the smart.
Success belongs to those who always strive."
B.J. Habibie

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, the greatest praise and gratitude to Allah Subhanahu Wata'ala, the most Generous and the most Merciful, the Almighty, the Ruler of all creation, for bestowing upon the writer the ability to fulfil her educational responsibilities. The writer also presents greetings upon the Prophet Muhammad SAW, may peace and blessings be upon him.

This thesis was composed with the purpose of fulfilling one of the requirements for achieving a master's degree in the Magister Program in Language Education at Sriwijaya University. The writer also extends her utmost appreciation and profound gratitude to:

1. Prof. Soni Mirizon, M.A., Ed.D. and Sary Silvhiany, M.Pd., M.A., Ph.D., the writer's advisors, who provided comprehensive feedback and valuable advice throughout the entire process of writing this thesis.

2. All lecturers and staff of the Magister Program in Language Education at Sriwijaya University, who have generously shared knowledge, guidance, and encouragement throughout this academic journey.

3. The participant, who voluntarily contributed her time and effort by participating in this study, enriching the research process.

4. Me, myself, who persisted through every challenge, late night, and moment of self-doubt to complete this thesis. I am proud of the growth, resilience, and discipline I have cultivated along this journey. This work is a testament to the power of perseverance, even when the road seemed uncertain. Every sleepless night, every cup of coffee, and every sacrifice reminded me that I am capable of achieving what I once thought was impossible.

Palembang, December 30th, 2024

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THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND ADAPTATION EXPERIENCES OF AN INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT OPTING FOR INDONESIA AS A STUDY DESTINATION

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the interconnected relationship between decision-making processes and adaptation experiences of an international high school student choosing Indonesia as a study destination. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research examines the case of a seventeen-year-old Italian exchange student enrolled in one of prestigious public high schools (*SMA Unggulan)* in Palembang, Indonesia. Through in-depth interviews and supporting documentation, the study explores how initial decision-making factors influence subsequent adaptation experiences and how these experiences shape future decisions. The research employs Herbert Simon's decision-making theory, Lysgaard's U-Curve theory of cultural adjustment, and Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour as theoretical frameworks. The findings reveal that the decision to study in Indonesia was influenced by a desire for geographical distance, cultural novelty, and personal growth opportunities. The adaptation process encompassed various challenges including language barriers, cultural differences, and academic adjustments. Despite initial difficulties, the participant developed effective coping strategies and experienced significant personal growth. This study contributes to the understanding of international student mobility by highlighting the dynamic relationship between decision-making and adaptation processes. The findings provide valuable insights for educational institutions and policymakers in developing targeted support systems for international students in Indonesia.

Keywords: International students, decision-making process, adaptation experience, cultural adjustment

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses: (1.1) background of the study, (1.2) problems of the study, (1.3) objectives of the study, and (1.4) significance of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

The trend of international students selecting Indonesia as their study destination has been steadily increasing, marking a significant shift in the global education landscape. This phenomenon, known as transnational education, encompasses educational experiences abroad during both secondary and post-secondary schooling (Waibel et al., 2017). It is widely believed that such experiences enhance one's international CV, thereby improving prospects for university admissions and rewarding career opportunities. However, despite these perceptions, the tangible benefits of transnational education may be minimal or even absent.

According to UNESCO data, the number of international students worldwide rose from two million in 2000 to five million three hundred thousand in 2017. The six countries hosting the highest number of international students are the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany, and Russia (UNESCO, 2019). Traditionally, North America, Europe, and Australia have dominated as preferred study abroad destinations. However, Indonesia's emergence as a sought-after choice for international students is noteworthy. Developing nations like Indonesia also provide opportunities for students from less prosperous countries to pursue higher education (Roshima & Yohana, 2017).

Indonesia offers international students the chance to study at both public (PTN) and private (PTS) universities. Each year sees an increase in the number of international students studying in Indonesia, although it remains lower than the numbers attending institutions in the aforementioned developed countries. For instance, from 2006 to 2021, a total of 1,608 foreign

students from 101 countries were awarded the Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) Scholarship to study at 23 top universities in Indonesia. As of 2022, there are currently 359 ongoing KNB scholarship recipients, with plans to select an additional 150 new scholarship recipients in early 2023 (Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education, 2022).

This shift can be attributed to various factors including Indonesia's rich cultural heritage, its strategic geopolitical position in Southeast Asia, and concerted efforts to enhance the quality of its higher education system. Indonesian universities are increasingly offering programs in English, which fosters a more inclusive learning environment for non-Indonesian speaking students. Moreover, the Indonesian government has launched initiatives aimed at internationalizing its higher education sector through scholarship programs for foreign students and partnerships with universities worldwide. These efforts not only enhance Indonesia's academic appeal but also position it as a vibrant place for cross-cultural learning and personal growth.

The rising trend of international students choosing Indonesia as a study destination is intricately linked with their decision-making processes and adaptation strategies. The decision-making process can be divided into three phases such as predispositions, search, and choice (El Nemar et al., 2020). This framework is supported by Herbert Simon's theory of decision-making which suggests that it is a rational process characterized by stages such as intelligence gathering, design formulation, and choice execution (Koumakhov & Daoud, 2021). This model provides a structured approach to understanding how students navigate their options when selecting a school.

In terms of talent recruitment management, writers often conduct empirical analyses based on student characteristics and background factors to discuss conditions affecting their education at all stages and factors influencing their school decision-making processes. Decision criteria play a significant role in this process such as students prioritize factors related to economic stability, political or security considerations, and academic quality (Le & LaCost, 2017). Economically, they not only cover educational and

living costs but also engage in research activities that enhance the host country's global competitive edge (Chirat et al., 2023). Politically, these students foster cultural understanding within the host community and often return home with positive perceptions that can influence future leaders (Perna et al., 2014). Academically, their presence enriches cultural diversity and introduces competitive dynamics that benefit both domestic and international students (Arthur, 2017).

Indonesia's efforts to attract international students through English-language programs and scholarships aim to enrich its educational landscape by offering unique cultural experiences that broaden career opportunities from an international perspective. Adaptation to a new educational and cultural environment is another critical phase for students who choose Indonesia. This involves adjusting to new cultural contexts where Indonesia's rich heritage offers unique opportunities for personal and academic growth. However, one major challenge for international students is their ability to adapt to foreign environments. They must learn to socialize effectively while overcoming various life challenges (Zuhroh et al., 2022).

Lysgaard's U Curve theory (1955), which outlines stages of cultural adjustment including initial excitement followed by culture shock and eventual adaptation (Larasati & Mayagita, 2021), is invaluable for understanding how international students adjust to life in Indonesia. Initially experiencing excitement about their new surroundings may lead to culture shock as they grapple with unfamiliar customs and challenges. However, with perseverance, they eventually settle into their new environment (Rosenthal & Baldwin, 2015). Incorporating this theory into the study helps identify key challenges and opportunities for support that can ultimately enhance the experience of international students in Indonesia.

Academic adaptation is crucial. Students must acclimate to Indonesian universities' academic standards and teaching styles. Institutional support should include campus orientation programs alongside language services such as *Bahasa Indonesia untuk Penutur Asing* (BIPA) to facilitate academic

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integration. Social support from local friends within campus and residential settings plays a crucial role in aiding communication and socio-cultural integration (Blagojević & Dumančić, 2021; Shin & Jeon, 2018).

In this context, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1991) serves as a significant theoretical framework to understand the interconnectedness between decision-making processes and adaptation experiences among international students choosing Indonesia as their study destination. TPB posits that an individual's behaviour is driven by three key components such as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 2020).

Firstly, attitudes towards studying in Indonesia play a crucial role in the decision-making process. These attitudes are shaped by students' beliefs about potential outcomes such as educational quality and personal growth (Abe & Chikoko, 2020). Positive evaluations strengthen their intention to study in Indonesia while concerns about challenges like language barriers may negatively impact their attitudes (Yilmaz & Temizkan, 2022).

Subjective norms refer to perceived social pressures from significant others regarding studying abroad (Wang et al., 2023). When students believe that important people support their decision to study in Indonesia, they are more likely to pursue this path. Perceived behavioural control reflects students' confidence in their ability to manage challenges associated with studying abroad (Arghode et al., 2021).

Upon arrival in Indonesia, these TPB components continue influencing adaptation experiences. Students' attitudes towards adaptation involve their expectations regarding adjustment processes (Can & Kalkan, 2021). Positive attitudes towards cultural integration facilitate smoother adaptation (El Boubebkri & Saidi, 2022), while subjective norms provide ongoing support from family and peers during cultural transitions (Khuram et al., 2021). Lastly, perceived behavioural control over adaptation includes confidence in coping with cultural differences and managing academic demands (Yilmaz & Temizkan, 2022).

By integrating TPB with elements of cultural adaptation into this study framework, it can analyze how initial attitudes and social norms not only drive the decision to study in Indonesia but also shape students' experiences as they adapt to their new environment. This comprehensive approach provides valuable insights for educational institutions and policymakers aiming to develop targeted support systems that facilitate informed decisions and effective adaptations for international students.

The reviewed studies collectively shed light on the multifaceted experiences of international students transitioning to Indonesian universities from diverse cultural backgrounds. The studies by Wahyuni et al. (2023), Zinaida (2022), and Sulaiman and Saputri (2019) collectively illuminate the challenges and coping mechanisms of international students transitioning to Indonesian universities. They reveal hurdles such as emotional anxiety, loss of English proficiency, and cultural identity issues, underscoring the need for tailored support programs. The findings emphasize the significance of cultural sensitivity in facilitating smoother adaptation experiences, particularly in contexts where students maintain strong ties to their heritage culture. By recognizing the complexities of adaptation and culture shock, these studies contribute to enhancing support mechanisms for international students in Indonesian academic environments.

The study by Fajarwati and Suyanto (2019) explore factors influencing foreign students' decisions to study in Indonesia, revealing two new factors: academic quality and scholarship availability, and geographic and bilateral relationships. In line with previous study, Nur et al. (2021) examine cultural shocks among Darmasiswa students in Makassar, highlighting surprises in eating customs and appreciation for local warmth. Despite disparities, adaptability is emphasized. Turistiati et al. (2024) delve into Tajik students' adaptation to Indonesian culture, noting the importance of language proficiency and shared Islamic beliefs in facilitating integration. Assigned student companions play a vital role in the adaptation process, providing

valuable insights for nurturing cultural integration among international students in Indonesia.

The study by Ahmed (2024) explores how international students adapt to cultural shock in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, highlighting challenges such as changes in food and societal norms. Coping mechanisms include maintaining communication with locals and engaging in local culture, emphasizing the need for pre-departure education and integrating cultural education into academic curricula for smoother transitions. In contrast, Li and Zizzi (2018) investigate how international students develop multicultural friendships through physical activity, revealing that engagement in such activities fosters peer-to-peer social interactions. Nicholls (2018) examines influences on international student choice of study destination in the United States, finding that factors like education quality, reputation, safety, and cost outweigh the importance of school location, with variations observed across demographics. These studies collectively provide insights into the multifaceted experiences and decision-making processes of international students, informing strategies for smoother transitions and academic success.

However, these studies aim to bridge the significant gap by examining the interconnectedness between the decision-making process and adaptation experiences of an international student choosing Indonesia as a study destination. While some previous studies have explored aspects of adaptation experiences and decision-making independently, this study seeks to explain how these two processes interact and influence each other. By understanding the dynamics between decision-making process and the following adaptation journey in the Indonesian context, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of an international student's experiences. Essentially, an international student navigates these challenges is influenced by their initial decision-making process.

On the other hand, differences between initial expectations and the realities of the host country can pose additional hurdles to adaptation. Furthermore, adaptation experiences provide feedback that can shape future

decision-making. Overall, understanding this dynamic relationship is essential for providing valuable insights into factors shaping international student's choices while enhancing her experiences studying abroad in Indonesia.

1.2   The Problems of the Study

Concerning the background of the study, the problems are formulated into research questions as follows:

1. What are the primary factors influencing an international high school student's decision to choose Indonesia as a study destination?
2. How does an international high school student adapt and navigate the new social-cultural space?

1.3   The Objectives of the Study

Referring to the problems above, the objectives of this study are:

1. To determine the key factors influencing an international high school student's choice of Indonesia as a study destination.
2. To find out how an international high school student adapts and navigates her new social-cultural environment in Indonesia.

1.4   The Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform educational policies regarding international student recruitment and support within Indonesia. By identifying key factors influencing international student choices regarding studying in Indonesia while examining their adaptation experiences—findings can guide policymakers and educational institutions toward enhancing the country's attractiveness as an educational hub.

Insights gained will also facilitate developing tailored support systems aimed at improving academic integration while enriching overall educational experiences for international students. Additionally, this study contributes valuable insights into academic literature concerning international

education—providing groundwork for further study endeavors. This revised introduction aims to enhance clarity while maintaining coherence throughout your thesis draft. Consider reviewing it further for any specific adjustments you may want based on your focus or style preferences.

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