

## The Learning Difficulties of International Students in Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi and its Implication of the Role of Guidance and Counseling

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**Abstract:** Learning difficulties is used to describe a variety of academic issues. It consists of poor academic performance and general learning deficiencies. International students who study abroad have learning difficulties adjusting to the Indonesia's academic and social systems. Learning difficulties of international students encompass the range of barriers that international students face while striving to succeed in their academic pursuits within the Indonesian higher education system. This research is a comparative descriptive type research with the quantitative method. The population of this research is international students from Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi. The number of samples is 30 international selected using Total Sampling Method. The research instrument used was Google form survey questionnaire with Likert Scale type. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical technique and Mann-Whitney technique with the help of the SPSS 25 program. The results of the study revealed that (1) the learning difficulties of international students were in the very high category (2) language barrier aspect was in the high category whereas social barrier and dissatisfaction of lecturers were in the very high category, and (3) there was no significant difference between the learning difficulties faced by international students from Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi. Based on the research findings, it is suggested to counseling teachers or counselors to be able to provide guidance and counseling services which are information services, individual counseling services, and group guidance services to international students, in order to help them overcome their learning difficulties..

**Keywords:** Learning Difficulties, International Students, Guidance and Counseling

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## Introduction

International students who study abroad have learning difficulties adjusting to the Indonesia's academic and social systems (Wilton et al., 2003). In addition to adjusting to their new lives, international students experience uncertainty as a result of leaving their home countries and feeling uncomfortable in their new environments (Sawir et al., 2005). Other frequently stated problems include learning a second language, social isolation, cultural norms, fees, visa requirements, and prejudice (Lee, 2017). It may be inferred from what occurred in Indonesia regarding the academic adaptation process of international students that these students typically encounter a variety of learning difficulties as they transition to a new educational environment (Wang et al., 2014). While studying in Indonesia, international students encounter a number

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of learning difficulties. Ellis & Van Art (2013) confirmed that three of the most significant concerns about studying abroad are (1) the academic, which includes professors, lessons in different languages and methods used; (2) the city and culture, including the location and its atmosphere; and (3) university services, including housing, counseling, information desks, and integration activities. Language and cultural hurdles, academic and financial difficulties, interpersonal issues, a loss of social support, alienation, and homesickness are just a few of the difficulties that international students may face (Yeh et al., 2003).

One of the biggest challenges experienced by international students pursuing higher education in Indonesia is language barrier. The inability of lecturers to communicate effectively in English with international students has been identified by Son and Park (2014) as a major barrier for international students to adjust to life in Indonesia. International students from Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP) and Universitas Jambi (UNJA) who do not speak Indonesian have frequently shown that they struggle with academic reading, writing, and oral presentations. The students' poor academic achievement is a result of their limited Indonesian language competence. When Indonesian language is used as the teaching language, it can be challenging for international students with limited Indonesian language competence to keep up with the learning process (Mei, 2017). Researchers claim in a study by Gebhard (2012) that because of language barriers, international students frequently struggle with taking lecture notes, expressing their knowledge on essay exams, reading textbooks promptly, understanding professors, and giving oral presentations, as well as asking the professor questions and participating in seminar discussions. In addition, the language barrier makes it difficult for international students in Indonesia to assimilate into society (Andrade, 2006). Due to the staff's unwillingness to help international students, particularly with academic concerns, international students do not profit from the International Office (IO) at Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) (Arief & Melati, 2017).

Coward (2003) looked at how Indonesian and international students interacted in class and came to the conclusion that both groups of students were always trying to figure out what was going on, when they could speak, and what role they should play. International students from Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP) and Universitas Jambi (UNJA) are more likely to ask for assistance from members of their current sociocultural group. Lack of these networks raises concerns that they may experience social isolation or social barriers. Additionally, international students from the department of early childhood education at Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP) who do not receive adequate social, cultural, or financial assistance may be at risk of being exploited or socially excluded. This impact will eventually result to high risk of academic stress. International students frequently experience extreme loneliness in their new setting. In addition to the absence of familiar friends and social networks, this loneliness can also result from being in an unfamiliar cultural or language setting (Adelman 1988; McClure 2007; Sawir et al. 2008; Zhao et al. 2008; Ip et al. 2009).

Based on the interview of international students from Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP) and Universitas Jambi (UNJA), especially at the English department at Universitas Jambi and the department of early childhood education at Universitas Negeri Padang, the inability of several lecturers to speak English fluently caused the international students to have trouble adjusting to academic life. Because of their inadequate English proficiency, they assumed that their professors did not implement the participatory concept in the classroom. Some lecturers are rigid, some don't take things seriously, and some are tardy for class. Even worse, the majority of the lecturers utilize Indonesian as their primary language of instruction in the classroom, making it impossible for the international students to effectively communicate the lecture's subject. Late syllabus creation by the lecturers causes the international students to show little interest in what is being taught, which also negatively affects their GPA score.

International students require full assistance while studying in universities of Indonesia, especially at Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP) and Universitas Jambi (UNJA). The learning difficulties that they encounter impact not only in academic but also in their social and mental aspects. Mostly, the international students from these mentioned universities face learning difficulties such as language barrier, social barrier, and dissatisfaction of lecturers. These three aspects lead to the student disinterest in classroom discussions and lectures, average GPA, academic stress and lack of teamwork.

This study aims to: (1) describe the learning difficulties of international students in Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi, (2) determine about how can the three aspects which are language barrier, social barrier and dissatisfaction of lecturers affect the international students of Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi, and (3) analyze the differences of the learning difficulties of international students in Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi.

## Method

This research uses comparative descriptive research with a quantitative methodology. The population of this study consisted of 30 international students from other countries who are attending Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi to pursue their studies. Therefore, the sample in this study is international students from Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi and the Total Sampling method was employed to calculate the required number of samples for the study. The researcher used data that was gathered directly from international students of Universities Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi in this study. According to this research, primary data were used as the study's data source because that is where the information was gathered. International students at Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi are the source of the data.

The research tool was a Likert scale-based questionnaire about the learning difficulties faced by international students. In this study, a questionnaire was employed as the instrument to collect information on the respondents' attributes. The Likert scale is utilized in this questionnaire (Furr, 2011). This Likert scale asks respondents to select from a range of replies after being presented with a series of statements that describe the attitude or behavior that the researchers are looking for. Five (5) answer options—very often, often, sometimes, rarely, and never will be provided for each statement. The questionnaire used in this study is a Google form questionnaire. Questionnaires are used because they are able to reveal more information much in a relatively short time at a lower cost compared to other instruments.

Descriptive Analysis method was employed and the information will be gathered, analyzed, and used to describe the learning difficulties of international students in Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi. Additionally, the interval is determined in order to determine the category for scoring. Firstly, the overall learning difficulties was determined and since there are three aspects of learning difficulties which are language barrier, social barrier, and dissatisfaction of lecturers, each aspect was determined in the category for scoring. And lastly, this study used Mann-Whitney U test since the data is non-parametric and for the completion of the Mann Whitney U test, this study uses the SPSS 25 program.

## Results

The general level of learning problems of international students in UNP and UNJA is known to be categorized as "Very high" as evidenced by 17, which is based on table 1. The percentage of international students who report having "Very high" levels of learning difficulties is 56.7%. Following that, 6 foreign students are classified as "Moderate" with a proportion of (20%). Then, 3 international students are classified as having "Low" level learning difficulties with a percentage of 10%, while 4 international students are classified as having "High" level learning difficulties with a percentage of 13.3%. No international students are classified as having "Very Low" level learning difficulties.

**Table 1:** Description of Data for Learning Difficulties of International Students in Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi (N=30)

Category	Interval	F	%
Very high	$\geq 80$	17	56.7
High	79-71	4	13.3
Moderate	70-62	6	20.0
Low	61-53	3	10
Very low	$\leq 52$	0	0
<b>Total</b>		30	100

Based on Table 2, it is known that 15 international students are classified as having "High" level learning difficulties with the percentage (50%) and that the learning difficulties of international students in UNP and UNJA from the language aspect is in the "High" category. Then, with a percentage (36.7%), 11 international students are classified as having "moderate" learning difficulties. Then, only one international student is classified as having "Very High" level learning difficulties with a percentage (3.3%), followed by 3 international students with "Low" level learning difficulties with a percentage (10%), and none of the international students have "Very Low" level learning difficulties with regard to the language aspect.

**Table 2:** Description of Learning Difficulties Data of international students based on Language Barrier Aspect

Category	Interval	F	%
Very high	$\geq 39$	1	3.3
High	38-30	15	50.0
Moderate	29-21	11	36.7
Low	20-12	3	10
Very low	$\leq 11$	0	0
<b>Total</b>		30	100

According to table 3, international students from UNP and UNJA experience “Very high” levels of learning difficulties due to social barriers. 17 international students are classified as having “very high” level learning difficulties (56.7%), followed by 3 international students having “moderate” level learning difficulties (10.0%), 8 international students having “high” level learning difficulties (26.7%), and finally 2 international students having “low” level learning difficulties with the percentage of (6.7%).

**Table 3:** Description of Learning Difficulties Data of international students based on Social Barrier Aspect

Category	Interval	F	%
Very high	$\geq 23$	17	56.7
High	22-19	8	26.7
Moderate	19-16	3	10.0
Low	15-12	2	6.7
Very low	$\leq 11$	0	0
<b>Total</b>		30	100

Based on table 4, it is known that international students at UNP and UNJA experience “Very high” levels of learning difficulties in terms of their dissatisfaction of lecturers. With a percentage of 13.3%, 4 international students are classified as having “High” level learning difficulties, while 23 international students are classified as having “Very high” level learning difficulties. Only 1 international student is classified as having “Moderate” level learning difficulties with a percentage of 3.3%. The percentage (6.7%) that classifies 2 international students as having “Low” level learning difficulties follows, while none of the international students are classified as having “Very Low” levels of dissatisfaction of lecturers.

**Table 4:** Description of Learning Difficulties Data of international students based on the Aspect of Dissatisfaction of Lecturers

Category	Interval	F	%
Very high	$\geq 25$	23	76.7
High	24-21	4	13.3
Moderate	20-17	1	3.3
Low	19-16	2	6.7
Very low	$\leq 15$	0	0
<b>Total</b>		30	100

Based on basic concepts about Mann-Whitney U test, if significance is 2-tailed  $\leq 0.05$ , it is different and if significance is 2-tailed  $\geq 0.05$ , then it is not different.

**Table 5:** Mann-Whitney U test

<b>Test Statistics<sup>b</sup></b>	
	<b>Score</b>
Mann-Whitney U	80.000
Wilcoxon W	251.000
Z	-1.186
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.236
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.249 <sup>a</sup>

a. Not corrected for ties.

b. Grouping Variable: Student

Based on table 5, it indicates that the significance value can be concluded as  $0.236 \geq 0.05$ , this means that there is no significant difference in learning difficulties experienced by international students at Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi.

## Discussion

Based on the results of the research data analysis conducted obtained the overall average score of the learning difficulties of international students in Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi is in the “Very high” category (56.7%). International Students are having language difficulties and interacting with their local classmates is a huge obstacle for them. They have problems in having conversations in Indonesian language, due to that, whenever they attend their classes in campus, they cannot communicate with their local classmates and their lecturers. Additionally, the international students who cannot speak Indonesian language, face lack of social interaction. Some of them do not have friends or peers to socialize with and they seem lonely and isolated. Moreover, they find it hard to reach out to the lecturers to ask for feedback and any academic assistance. Learning difficulties of international students in Indonesian universities encompass the range of barriers that foreign students face while striving to succeed in their academic pursuits within the Indonesian higher education system. These challenges may arise from language barriers, differences in teaching and assessment methods, cultural adaptation issues, limited access to support services, and various personal and social adjustments, all of which collectively hinder the students’ optimal learning experience and academic achievement (Widiasih et al., 2020). According to Ellis & van Aart (2013), learning difficulties of international students refer to the challenges, barriers, and obstacles that students from foreign countries encounter while pursuing their education in a new and unfamiliar academic environment. These difficulties can encompass a wide range of factors that impede the students' ability to effectively engage with their studies and adjust to the educational and cultural contexts of the host country. Such challenges can include language barriers, differences in teaching and learning styles, cultural adaptation issues, limited access to support services, and various personal and social adjustments. Overall, learning difficulties of international students highlight the complex process of transitioning into a new educational system and society while striving to achieve academic success.

According to the results of data analysis conducted on research findings, the percentage of international students who report having a “high” language barrier, as indicated by 15 of them, is 50%. The fact that foreign students find it challenging to comprehend lectures, reading materials, and assignments that are provided in a language they do not speak is proof enough. This may make it more difficult for them to comprehend difficult ideas, participate in conversations, and do well on tests. The language barrier aspect of the learning difficulties of international students refers to the challenges and obstacles that international students encounter due to differences in language proficiency between their native language and the language of instruction (Indonesian) in Indonesian higher education institutions. These language-related challenges can hinder international students’ ability to effectively engage in academic activities, understand course materials, interact with peers and instructors, and express themselves confidently. The language barrier aspect underscores the difficulties these students face in comprehending lectures, participating in discussions, completing assignments, and navigating various academic and social situations in an environment where the primary language of communication and instruction is different from their own (Sawir, 2005).

Based on the results of the analysis of the research data, it can be concluded that there is a “Very high” level of social barriers faced by international students, as evidenced by the percentage of 17 international students (56.7%). The fact that it may be difficult for international students to adjust to Indonesian social norms, traditions, and customs serves as evidence. These distinctions may cause miscommunications, discomfort, and a challenge in connecting with others in the area. International students may find it difficult to strike up conversations or share interests with local students, which can make them feel alone. The social barrier aspect of the learning difficulties of international students refers to the set of challenges and obstacles that international students encounter due to cultural disparities, unfamiliar social norms, and difficulties in forming social connections within the Indonesian university environment. These social-related challenges can hinder international students’ ability to effectively integrate into the social fabric of the university community and the broader society. The social barrier aspect highlights the difficulties these students face in building friendships, participating in social activities, and adapting to the cultural dynamics of Indonesia, leading to potential feelings of isolation and a sense of being disconnected from their peers and the host country’s social context (Sherry et al., 2010).

According to the analysis of research data, 23 international students, or 76.7% of them, reported having “Very high” levels of dissatisfaction of lecturers. This rating was based on the results of the study. The evidence suggests that confusing instructions, particularly in assignments and assessments, cause confusion for international students and have an adverse effect on their capacity to complete academic obligations. Due to linguistic or cultural limitations, lecturers could unintentionally miss international students during class discussions. International students may feel left out as a result, which will lower their motivation to participate. The aspect of dissatisfaction of lecturers of the learning difficulties of international students refers to the specific challenges and concerns that arise when international students’ express discontentment with the teaching methods, communication, and interaction with their university lecturers or professors within the Indonesian higher education system. These issues can be rooted in cultural differences, language barriers, and variations in educational practices. The aspect of dissatisfaction of lecturers underscores the difficulties international students face in engaging with course content, understanding instructions, receiving effective feedback, and feeling included in the classroom due to perceived shortcomings in the teaching approach. This can lead to a sense of frustration, hindered academic performance, and an overall negative impact on the students’ educational experience (Hellstén et al., 2004).

As for the differences of the learning difficulties of international students in Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi, according to Mann-Whitney U test and based on the completed research, it can be concluded that there are no differences between Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi in the degree of learning difficulties experienced by international students because the significant value is determined to be  $0.236 \geq 0.05$  which means that both of the universities have the similar problems regarding learning difficulties of international students.

According to the study’s findings, there is no difference between international students from Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi in terms of their learning difficulties. However, it is the counselor’s responsibility to aid these international students with guidance and counselling services. The purpose of offering service assistance is to aid overseas students who are struggling in their studies. According to Prayitno (2004), firstly, all international students are targeted by the provision of information services. The purpose of this service is to assist international students with their learning difficulties by providing knowledge and information on learning issues, especially for those international students who experience these difficulties while enrolled in UNP and UNJA. Specifically, “How to overcome and handle learning difficulties” is a topic that can be covered in information services. Secondly, in this study, international students who experience learning difficulties can receive individual counseling services. Counseling teachers can support international students in overcoming their learning difficulties through this one-on-one counseling, and they can also give them guidance and inspiration to assist them overcome the challenges they encounter. Thirdly, international students might realize there are other students like them and that they are not alone by participating in group guidance service. Additionally, they can learn to interact with others and become brave enough to face any challenges that may come their way. With the group guidance service, international students who face learning difficulties can be trained to overcome any challenges and express opinions about the problems discussed.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the results of this study, which involved statistical analysis and Mann-Whitney U tests that were conducted and examined before being used to the discussion, it can be said that the learning difficulties of international students is seen from the language barrier aspect, social barrier aspect, and the aspect of dissatisfaction of lecturers which are in the “very high” category with an average percentage score of 56.7. Even so, there are a few international students who face learning difficulties in the “high” category and “moderate” category. Since the significance value for the Mann-Whitney U test is  $0.236 \geq 0.05$ , it may be stated that there are no variations in the learning difficulties of international students. Therefore, it can be concluded that the international students from Universitas Negeri Padang and Universitas Jambi experience comparable learning difficulties.

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