

Global Education in Non-Native-English-Speaking Countries, Challenges and Opportunities: A Focus on Indonesian Students at a Selected Japanese University

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Abstract

Research has shown that Generation-Z is much more eager to include global education in their lives. The experience of studying in another culture, especially in an international context, is seen as a necessity. The most popular study destination for international students worldwide has traditionally been countries where English is spoken as a native language. In more recent years, however, non-English-speaking countries are also offering global education and have attracted international students. This research aims to reveal the experiences of international students in non-English-speaking countries. Following an empirical viewpoint, six Indonesian undergraduate students at a selected university in Japan were surveyed and interviewed on what attracts them, their motivations, challenges and expectations for studying in Japan. The findings suggest that culture, language, and quality of education are important motivations for choosing to study in Japan. During their first year, these international students face a number of academic, cultural, and linguistic challenges. However they have no reservations about their future careers in the global world despite being educated in non-native English-speaking country. These findings may provide an updated overview of the underlying factors that prompt international students to study in non-English-speaking countries.

Keywords: Global Education, Non-English-Speaking Countries, International Students, Generation Z

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Introduction

Generation Z is the generation that is ready to embrace the wider world. Despite current events that might indicate that the world is not always a friendly place, Generation Z shows that it is necessary to experience the world. By doing that, they will not only travel to other countries for tourism purposes. They seem more inclined to immerse themselves in global experience through education.

Studying abroad and global education are seen as not just merely additional courses or fun projects by Generation Z, but perceived as a necessity. Global education has become an essential platform for this generation to appreciate diverse perspectives, to understand the relationships they have with the wider world, and to communicate and collaborate effectively across cultures and communities.

The globalized outlook of Generation Z has benefitted the increase in the growth of global education. When Generation Z entered tertiary education, studying abroad has never been more popular. According to the 2019 report from UNESCO, the number of international students increased from 4.1 million in 2013, to more than 5.3 million in 2017 (UNESCO, 2019). This number is expected to reach 8 million by 2025.

Indonesia, an attractive market

Indonesia is one of the most attractive markets in the global education sector in the world. Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world, with a large percentage of its population being the younger generation. In fact, in terms of student age population, Indonesia's student age population is the third largest in the world. According to the Indonesian Central Agency of Statistics (BPS) in 2019, the country's population of young people under the age of 24 is more than 42 percent. This large university age population means that Indonesia has a large number of potential international students. In addition, according to UIS-UNESCO, Indonesia urgently needs a more educated population to achieve its development objectives. As a home to a rapidly developing middle class, Indonesia sends 35% more students abroad than ten years ago. A survey conducted by AFS Intercultural Programs (2017) found that 81% of the 5,502 Indonesian teenage respondents had considered studying abroad.

Still according to UIS-UNESCO records, the number of Indonesian students studying abroad for a bachelor's degree has increased by almost 62% since 1998, reaching the highest figure of 47,317 in 2016. This growth makes Indonesia the third largest international student sender among member countries ASEAN in 2017 (UNESCO, 2019). In 2018/2019, around 69,000 Indonesian students study abroad. This data confirms how Indonesia will play a key role in international education in the coming years.

Higher Education Marketing data (2018) shows that Indonesians studying abroad have different preferences for leading English-speaking destinations, such as Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Australia has historically been a major destination for Indonesian students studying abroad, and almost 20,000 were registered with institutions in the country in 2016. The United States has also seen a strong increase in applications and requests from Indonesia over the last ten years,

with an increase in the number of registrations by 14% between 2009 and 2014, and maintaining annual growth of around 7%. At present nearly 9,000 Indonesian students pursue higher education in the United States. Indonesian registration also continues to grow in the United Kingdom. The British Council reports that there has been an increase by 17% in the issuance of student visas for Indonesia.

While English-speaking hosts dominate, Indonesians also fly to non-English speaking countries to study. Asian destinations are getting more attractive for Indonesian Generation Z. Among other Asian countries, Japan has become the number one destination for Indonesian students seeking to study in non-English-speaking countries. UNESCO data shows that almost 6% of Indonesian students studying abroad are in Japan. This is interesting for at least two reasons. One, it is because the number of Indonesian students studying in Japan has recently been higher than the number of Indonesian students studying in the United Kingdom (4.7%), an English-speaking country. Two, there are world-leading universities that are opening up remote campuses in Indonesia's neighboring countries. Yet, the number of Indonesian students studying in Japan continues to rise.

The aim of this study is to investigate what factors attract Indonesian students when they decide to study in Japan. It will also explore the experiences of Indonesian students studying in Japan, with a focus on culture and language. What challenges them, and how they perceive their future career prospects.

The significant numbers of Indonesian students studying abroad has prompted recruiters to actively gain an enhanced understanding of the fundamental factors that motivate young Indonesians to pursue study abroad. There are usually 'push' and 'pull' factors that drive people to leave their home countries and study in another country. Push factors are conditions that operate within a home country, that initiate a student's decision to undertake study abroad. This can include, but not limited to, socio-economic, political and educational conditions of a home country. Pull factors are conditions that attract students to study in the destination country. This can include better conditions in terms of socio-economic, political and educational elements, as well as other elements such as immigration opportunity, other language mastery opportunity, peer or family recommendations and influence, financial support and others.

This study focuses on the pull factors that Japan has in attracting Indonesian students. This is especially interesting because as a non-English-speaking country, Japan has successfully attracted Indonesian students more than the United Kingdom. De Wit (2018) indicated that the United Kingdom and the United States has traditionally become "The Big Two" of destination countries for international students. However, the market share of these countries is slightly declining recently due to political situation, namely the election of Donald Trump and its related anti-immigration policy in the United States, and Brexit in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, de Wit (2018) also indicated that the most crucial pull factor for international student is the English language that the United Kingdom has.

Pull factors from Japan

Many factors influence the decision of international students to study abroad. They are known as the push factors that operate within the home country, and the pull factors that are present in the destination country. World Education News (2019) indicated that some push factors that operate within Indonesia are: skilled labor shortage, limited seats at higher education, unsuited curricula, and financial factors. The pull factors that are usually indicated by Indonesian students studying abroad are: institution reputation, English language, safety, scholarship, geographical proximity, immigration prospects, employment prospects, and family support and referral.

While the push factors for Indonesia are relatively the same for all students deciding to study abroad, the pull factors will depend on and unique for each of the destination country. Japan has a number of pull factors that attract Indonesian students. Some of them are natural pull factors, such as culture, language, geographical proximity, and food. Some others are pull factors that can be conditioned and can change through time, such as political situation, safety, immigration policy, employment prospect, institution reputation, and scholarship.

The Japanese universities have joined universities around the world in competing for a share of the sharp growing international student market. Being the country of the rising sun, Japan has a number of natural pull factors. To start with, foreigners will generally be attracted to Japanese culture. Japan is known to have a fascinating and multifaceted culture. Combining the old traditions dating back thousands of years with modern technology, is one of the most fascinating thing and unique about Japan.

Japanese language has also fascinated many people around the world. Although not usually considered as an easy language, Japanese language is successful in attracting many learners. According to Tsukamoto Norihisa (2017), Director-General of the Japan Foundation in Jakarta, Indonesia has the second largest number of Japanese language learners, second only to China. It shows that Japan has a language pull factor for Indonesian students.

In terms of conditioned pull factors, the Japanese government has initialized a number of policy programs to promote "global education" since 2008 (Doerr, 2020). A key example program is the "300,000 International Students Plan" (2008 – 2020), a planned target to attract 300,000 international students to Japan in 2020. This target has been attained two years ahead of the schedule. Statistics published in January 2019 by JASSO, the Japan Student Support Organization, show it will meet its goal ahead of time, as 298,980 international students are already enrolled in Japanese schools as of 1 May 2018.

In response to government's policy, a number of Japanese universities have taken measures that would draw foreign students. Some Japanese universities - Tokyo University, Sophia University, Hokkaido University, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University to name a few - have started to offer undergraduate English-taught programs. This is one of the most effective ways to attract international students who are drawn to Japan but who want to study in English, as de Wit (2018) indicated that the most important pull factor for international student is the English-language.

Other universities are taking further measures to be able to accommodate international students. Kenji (2019) reported that one reason Japanese universities have not been attractive to foreign students is due to the recruitment schedule and the high language requirements. Many Japanese universities only offer admission in April, the beginning of Japanese academic year, that is different from the rest of the world. Moreover, they require very high competence of Japanese language. Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University is taking extra measures to internalize their recruitment systems by providing admissions twice a year, in spring and fall. As a result, international students from the Northern Hemisphere have the ability to enroll in September, while foreign students from the Southern Hemisphere enroll in April, along with Japanese students. This strategy proves to be effective. As Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University about to celebrate its 20th anniversary, the university has 5468 total enrollment as of 1 November 2019, with 2796 international students and 2852 Japanese / local students. There are 410 Indonesian students, and they are the second largest number of international students at the university, after Korea. It is also interesting to note that 10% of all Indonesian students who study in Japan, study at this university.

Moreover, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University does not require Japanese-language prerequisite upon enrollment (Kenji, 2019). Prospective students must have an IELTS score of 5.5 or higher or a TOEFL iBT of 61 or higher. Upon enrollment at the university, students are expected to take a 12-hour Japanese language course per week for a minimum of one year.

Respondents' Demographic Profile and Data Collection

Data for this study is collected from six Indonesian students studying at a Japanese university, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University. The respondents, who are in their first year university, are at the ages of 17 to 19 years old, consisting of four females and two males. Their mother tongues are all Indonesians, but all respondents can speak English. This is indicated by achievement of formal English language testing score, an IELTS Academic score of 6 or above. It indicates that the respondents are competent users of English. The respondents are enrolled at the Asia Pacific Studies and Asia Pacific Business Management study programs. All of the respondents indicate that their decision to study in Japan is based on their own choices, although some parents have a hand in it.

The study programs that the respondents are enrolled in are international study programs offered by Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University. The medium of instruction in their study program is English. However, it is compulsory for them to do a twelve hour a week of Japanese language course. The respondents live at the university dormitory, and socially communicate with their peers in English, Japanese and Indonesian.

Data is collected by means of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, and conducted between November 2019 and February 2020. The six Indonesian students are questioned on what attracted them the most to decide to study in Japan, their challenges and opportunities of studying Japan. During the data collection, respondents were asked to answer demographic and open ended questions using

google form. It was then followed by semi-structured interviews, in a relaxed and casual fashion. Data was also collected through direct and indirect observations.

The data is analyzed qualitatively. It is aimed to answer what elements that attract Indonesian students to study abroad in a non-English speaking country, and the challenges and opportunities that they perceive.

Findings and discussion

The respondents indicated that culture is the number one draw for them to decide to study in Japan. All respondents suggested that the reason for them to select Japan as a place to study is because they are interested in Japanese culture. Apart from using the word 'culture' as their number one attraction that drew them to Japan, these respondents also indicated other cultural related attraction. The respondents identify discipline and cleanliness as Japan's greatest draw. Thus culture is the strongest factor that has led the students to study in Japan.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that, although the respondents indicate culture as the most attractive factor of Japan, culture has also become the second most common obstacles faced by the respondents. Three respondents, all female, claim that they are challenged by Japanese culture. For international students, studying abroad is indeed inseparable from personal challenges. Not all students can adjust easily in a foreign country. Culture and language are two important elements that might impact international students.

Cultural shock is an experience that someone might have when moving to a cultural environment that is different from theirs. This is also a personal disorientation that a person may feel when experiencing a way of life that is not known for immigration or visiting a new country, a change in social environment, or simply transitioning to other types of life (Macionis & Gerber, 2010). While culture shock is common and can be of great benefit to international students' experience, some students experience extreme cultural shocks. This can lead to fatigue, feeling unwelcome, and other physical and psychological conditions. After a few months, most students will resolve cultural shocks, but some students may never make adjustments.

There are generally four stages of cultural adjustment that people experience when living in other cultures for periods of time (Kohls, 2011), although no two students adapt at the same speed at the same time. Kohls identified the four stages of cultural adjustments as: honeymoon stage - initial culture shock stage - varying levels of acceptance stage - returning home stage/reverse culture shock. The honeymoon stage usually takes place between 0 - 2 months, when the students feel very excited, curious and enthusiastic of exploring the new place. The initial culture shock stage usually happens between 2-4 months, when the student begins to be overwhelmed by the new cultural expectations and difficulties. They might experience boredom, withdrawal, or homesickness. The next stage is acceptance that comes in various levels. This stage can include a number of recurring roller-coasters where students experience highs and lows, happiness and stresses. Then it comes the time for them to return home, and reverse culture shock begins.

Following one semester or six months in Japan, the respondents are highly likely to have undergone all of the culture shock processes that Kohls suggested. After they were excited to explore the sides of Japanese culture that interested them, the respondents started to face some challenges. Three respondents felt overwhelmed by the discipline that they have to follow. The discipline that they indicated is cleanliness related, such as separating garbage.

Language is the next most attractive item for respondents to study in Japan. Four out of six respondents indicated that Japanese language was an attraction that led them to study in Japan. These four respondents were those who took Japanese language lessons before they even decided to study in Japan. They indicated that their level of Japanese proficiency was advanced (1 respondent), intermediate (1 respondent), and basic (2 respondents). Again, interestingly, language becomes the next most challenging element faced by the respondents. Four out of six respondents indicate that Japanese language is difficult or very difficult. The same respondents also indicate that study expectation is a challenge for them. This may be related to language issues.

Besides culture, language is indeed another barrier often faced by international students. Language barriers can affect international students in two ways: language barriers in the classroom can affect students' academic performance, while language barriers outside the classroom can affect students' social interactions and their general adjustments to host culture. For international students who are studying in non-English speaking countries, the language barriers can be doubled. On the one hand, there is an academic language that may use English as an international language, and on the other hand, there are host languages to socialize socially. Without strong academic language, the international students cannot perform maximum in their study. Furthermore, without the mastery of host country language, international students are constrained in trying to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships with the locals.

Moreover, the respondents also listed some other factors that led them to study in Japan. Some of the other considerations are: host-university, family support, finance, distance/geographic proximity, and quality of education. It indicates that the respondents first decided on the country before they decided to select the institution. Besides being attracted to the culture of the host country, the responses also suggest that the host-university is also an important element for them to decide to study in a non-English-speaking country. In their case, the decision to study at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University will give them an ideal situation. While they are attracted to Japan, they can still study in an English-taught program.

Although the respondents reported the above-mentioned challenges of studying in a non-English speaking country, none of the respondents regretted their decision. As mentioned earlier, they have to take a 12-hour-a-week Japanese language course, which will give them mastery of Japanese language in their first year. This third language competence is seen by the respondents as appealing and plus point. In adopting a third language, respondents believe they have the opportunity to think in another system. Practicing how to apply politeness to Japanese, witnessing 'ganbate', and understanding the relationship between words and Japanese way of thinking are interactions that no device can interpret.

Thus, the responses reveal that English-speaking country is not the only drive for these respondents to decide where to study abroad. When these respondents plan to study abroad, culture is the number one pull factor, and that's how they chose to study in Japan. Furthermore, Japanese language also becomes an important pull factor. It is noteworthy to note that even though culture and language are the most significant factors that attract the respondents to their decision to study in Japan, culture and language are also the most difficult issues they have encountered.

Apart from cultural and linguistic challenges, the respondents also face other challenges such as financial, academic, and diet. However, despite all the obstacles, the respondents mentioned that they made the right decision in choosing to study in Japan. Although they have friends studying in English speaking countries and they kept communication with them, none of the respondents expressed their regrets in choosing Japan. They are still very positive and believe that, upon graduation, they will be able to compete with other graduates from English-speaking- countries. They even indicate that their Japanese language ability makes them more advantaged compared to graduates from the English-speaking-countries. They say that being able to master a third foreign language is highly advantageous as it makes them able to think in three different systems. At the end of the respondents' first semester at a Japanese university, retention rate or proportion of students who stay in the course study is still 100%.

Conclusion

This study investigates what motivate Indonesian students to study in Japan, a non-English-speaking country. It further seeks to answer what difficulties they face, and what their future outlook is.

The respondents opted for culture and language as the most interesting elements that led them to study in Japan. Interestingly, culture and language have also become the most daunting elements they have to face when they study in Japan. During their study, the respondents also faced other challenges such as financial, academic and food.

At the end of their first semester none of the respondents regretted their decision to choose a non-English-speaking country to study. Studying abroad has given them the possibility to be prepared to become accomplished citizens. They are confident that they can compete with other graduates from English-speaking countries, and even believe that they have the advantage of being able to speak in third-language language.

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