A Phenomenological Study of the Intercultural Experiences of Indonesian International Mobility Students

Jonathan Rante Carreon[1]
Andi Rustandi[2*]
Iskhak[3]
[1]Faculty of Liberal Arts, Huachiew Chalermprakiet University
[2-3] Faculty of Education, Universitas Galuh
[*]Corresponding Email address: andru.unigal@yahoo.co.id

Abstract

The main goal of this paper is to investigate the intercultural experiences of the Indonesian students while attending a student exchange program in Thailand. Informed by Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day's Four-dimension Change (2010), and Zhai's Adjustment Issues and Social Support, the transcript of the semi-structured in-depth interviews from five international Indonesian students were iteratively examined for the nature and conditions that may have influenced the students' intercultural experiences, the challenges they met during their stay in the host university, and the strategies they used to cope with these challenges. The findings revealed that the international Indonesian students' experiences in their host universities and in Thailand were mostly influenced by (1) positive information (N=38; 51.35%), and (2) positive emotion (N=16; 21.62%) with a substantial inter-rater agreement (kappa= 0.837). Throughout their stay in their host university and in Thailand, the participants encountered three main challenges: cultural differences (N=36; 62.07%), language (N=9; 15.52%), and pre-departure preparations (N=8; 13.79%) and disclosed that experiences related to education (N=4; 6.90%) and environment or weather (N=1; 1.72%) were less challenging with substantial inter-rater agreement (kappa= 0.789). As coping strategies to the challenges, the participants mainly opted to (1) stay quiet/away (N=26; 36.62%), consult fellow international students (N=20; 28.17%), contact their friends and families at home (N=11; 15.49%), and use communication strategies such employing verbal and non-verbal communication, and initiating dialogs (N=8; 11.27%), while consulting teachers and/or assigned advisers (N=6; 8.45%) was the least used coping strategy. While limited in terms of data, the findings point to the indispensability of conducting pre-departure orientations by the home university that includes cultural know-how, institutional policies and regulations, and coping strategies in case participants meet challenges.

Keywords: *conditions intercultural experiences, coping strategies; international student mobility; international student mobility challenges; intercultural experiences; nature of international students' experiences*

1. Introduction

International student mobility is defined as the movement of people (students and faculty), knowledge, educational materials which may be unidirectional or bidirectional, with the ultimate goal of participating in international knowledge flows, being exposed to new ideas or technologies, including the tacit knowledge associated to their use (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development or OECD, 2010). Regardless of whether it is mutual or non-mutual exchange is not as interesting as learning from the experiences of people who are involved in the student mobility project. Record shows that the main source of international student mobility, especially in the US, is Asia (Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014; Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007) as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Top 15 Countries of Origin for International Students in the US in 2016-17 (Dhiraj, 2017)

Rank	Country	2015-16	2016-17	% of total	% change
1	China	328,547	350,755	32.5	6.8
2	India	165,918	186,267	17.3	12.3
3	South Korea	61,007	58,663	5.4	−3.8
4	Saudi Arabia	61,287	52,611	4.9	−14.2
5	Canada	26,973	27,065	2.5	0.3
6	Vietnam	21,403	22,438	2.1	4.8
7	Taiwan	21,127	21,516	2.0	1.8
8	Japan	19,060	18,780	1.7	−1.5
9	Mexico	16,733	16,835	1.6	0.6
10	Brazil	19,370	13,089	1.2	−32.4
11	Iran	12,269	12,643	1.2	3.0
12	Nigeria	10,674	11,710	1.1	9.7
13	Nepal	9,662	11,607	1.1	20.1
14	United Kingdom	11,599	11,489	1.1	−0.9
15	Turkey	10,691	10,586	1.0	−1.0
World total		**1,043,839**	**1,078,822**		**3.4**

The exodus of people from East to West is the classic model of international student mobility, since higher education institutions in the latter are known to offer excellent quality tertiary education as evidenced by their high academic rankings (Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014). The most commonly cited reasons for increased mobility among Chinese and other Asian students are "the growing supply of high school graduates whose families can afford a US education and the unmet demand for high-quality education at home" (Choudaha & Chang, 2012, p. 10). Kalantzis & Cope (2000) argued that the changes to the student population resulting from increasing student mobility are a valuable resource for the creation of an "open, tolerant and cosmopolitan university experience" (p.31). Since Altbach & Knight (2007) noted that most of the world's international students are self-funded or their families pay for their own academic work, so "students are therefore the largest source of funds for international education—not governments, academic institutions, or philanthropies" (p.294). Despite this reality, there is not much research conducted on what really happens when students arrive in their host institutions particularly on the influences that may change the nature of students' experiences and the conditions that may imbibe the changes.

Over the last decade, the literature on international student mobility (ISM) has increased markedly (e.g. Altbach & Knight, 2007; Guruz 2011; Solimano 2008; Varghese, 2008; Williams & Balaz, 2008). However, these studies are confined to "a framework that separates study abroad from the wider life-course aspirations of students" (Findlay, King, Smith, Geddes & Skeldon, 2012, p.118).

On intercultural studies related to international student mobility, Ward and Kennedy (1993: 222) suggest that there are two major types of reactions to intercultural stress: "psychological adjustment, which refers to the psychological wellbeing or satisfaction that is interwoven with stress and coping process, and socio-cultural adaptation, which refers to social skills and predicted on cultural learning". Research studies also show that intercultural experience can be a transformative learning process which leads to a journey of personal growth and development (Anderson, 1994; Furnham, Petrides, Tsaousis, Pappas & Garrod, 2005). Gu, Schweisfurth and Day (2010) noted that some research studies "attempted to predict patterns of adaptation and factors that determine the observed patterns" (p.6). Thus,

they fail to explain and present the "richness and fragmentation" of intercultural adaptation (Kim & Gudykunst, 2005, p.376; see also Kim, 2001) processes in which international students are part of a continuous negotiation and mediation with the surrounding immediate environment and therefore interesting to investigate.

2. Objectives
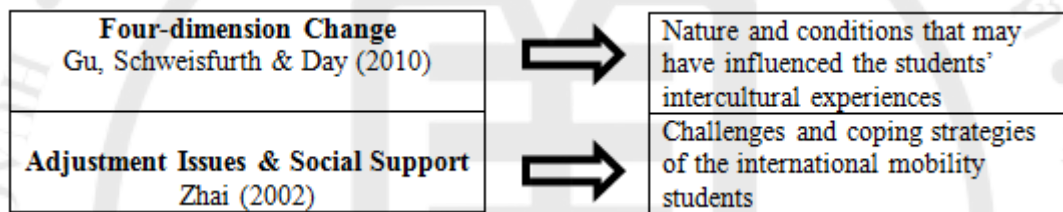Specifically, the study has a two-fold objective:
2.1 To explore nature and conditions that may have influenced the students' intercultural experiences
   2.2 To identify the students' challenges and coping strategies of the international students

3. Conceptual Framework
To shed light on the objectives of this research study, the conceptual frameworks of Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day's Four-dimension Change (2010), and Zhai's Adjustment Issues and Social Support as shown in Figure 1 below were employed.

Figure 1 Four-dimension Change Model (Gu, Schweisfurth & Day, 2010)

   In their research study, Gu *et al.* (2010) examined the responses to the questionnaire survey and to the semi-structured interview obtained from 1,288 first-year international undergraduates at four UK universities and found that the nature of international students' intercultural experiences has four main components: (1) At University, (2) At Home, (3) Student Life, and (4) In Yourself. Their findings reveal that "the extent to which adaptation to the academic environment became the greater preoccupation than adapting to a different cultural and social environment" (pp.10-11).   They argued that this is 'unexpected' worry point to areas in which early university support is mostly required particularly on targeted university training on pre-departure preparations, which could help smooth international students' initial transition into their new learning and living environments" (p.13). As for the conditions of change, they found that academic and social conditions may have influenced their students' intercultural experience aside from initial uncertainties, patterns and influences of organizational and academic tutor support, friendship patterns and peer culture that were reported by Schweisfurth and Gu (2009).

   This framework is used in tandem with Zhai's (2002) Adjustment Issues and Social Support Framework. In this framework, the challenges of 10 international students enrolled at the Ohio State University (OSU) in the US were gathered from interviews to shed light on their adjustment problems and coping mechanisms. The investigation revealed that the main challenges the international students encountered were the US education, cultural differences, and language challenges while the main coping strategies employed were contacting their friends and families. Other coping strategies include those relating to consulting fellow international students, consulting teachers and/or assigned advisers, staying quiet/away, consulting a guidance counselor, and using communication strategies (e.g. Nanta-umpond & Soontornwipat, 2016).

The Four-dimension Model of Gu *et al.* (2010), and Zhai's (2002) Adjustment Issues and Social Support Framework were applied in this current research to examine influences on the nature of international students' intercultural experiences and the conditions of change of the students' intercultural experiences, and the international students' challenges and coping strategies, respectively, during the student exchange program in two Thai universities (one government and one private), attended by five Indonesian students. The authors assumed that while the participants are international students, they are from the ASEAN region, so the nature of student intercultural experience and the conditions that may change this nature may be associated with cultural differences and communication problems given the difficulty of most Thais to communicate in English; therefore, they may easily adjust to their new academic environment but social adjustment may pose some challenges.

4. Materials and methods

4.1 Participants

The participants of the research study are five undergraduate Indonesian students (4 females; 1 male) from the University of Galuh – a tertiary education institution located in Ciamis Regency, West Java, Indonesia. The students are from different areas of specialization. They travelled to Thailand to join both private and state universities. Three of the students joined a private university as their host institution while the other two joined a state university. Those who joined the private university studied courses for credit transfer for a period of 15 weeks or one semester for credit transfer while those who joined the state university stayed only for two weeks.

4.2 Data

The data of the study was taken from the responses of the participants in the semi-structured interview conducted after the student exchange project. All of the five participants agreed to be interviewed.

4.3 Research Instrument

The main research instrument of this phenomenological research study is semi-structured interview. Orbe (2009) argued that a phenomenological approach, while subjective, is insightful in analyzing daily human behavior because persons can be understood through the unique ways they reflect the society they live in and these are expressed in their conscious experiences rather than traditional data. Orbe argued further that phenomenology is far less restrictive than in other sciences, so it allows in-depth exploration of authentic experiences which cannot be done in quantitative analysis.

In this research, semi-structured interview was useful since the objectives of the study were clear from the start and there is a need to probe deeper into the experiences of the participants so that the researchers can examine the intercultural experiences they had while joining the activities. Following the Four-dimension Model of Gu *et al.* (2010), the participants were asked to describe the nature of their experiences and the conditions that may have influenced their intercultural experiences in four components: (1) At University [ways and styles of teaching, lecturer's support, learning resources, educational facilities, assignments and projects, etc.]; (2) At Home [friends, family relationships, family support, etc.]; (3) Student Life [classroom friendship patterns, accommodation, acquaintances, food and beverages, leisure, finances, etc.]; and (4) In Yourself [level of English, positive/negative attitude to life, personal concerns, etc]. Then employing Zhai's (2002) Adjustment Issues and Social Support Framework, the participants were asked to explain and discuss the challenges and coping strategies they encountered during their stay in the host universities. Each of the

participants was interviewed for about 15 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed before they were examined by the researchers.

4.4 Data Analysis

The responses of the participants' nature of their experiences and conditions that may have influenced them were independently and iteratively categorized by the three researchers as follows:

- responses relating to positive information
- responses relating to positive emotion
- responses relating to pre-departure activity
- responses relating to family and friends' support

The challenges encountered by the participants were separately categorized as to

- responses relating to education
- responses relating to cultural differences
- responses relating to language challenges
- responses relating to pre-departure preparations
- responses relating to weather or environmental conditions

All categorizations were checked for inter-rater agreement using Fleiss' kappa (Shrout & Fleiss, 1979), a statistical measure of inter-rater agreement for qualitative (categorical) items, which is more robust when compared to simple percentage calculations as it takes into account agreements occurring by chance. Inter-rater agreement is interpreted as proposed by Landis and Koch (1977):

< 0	Poor agreement
0.01 – 0.20	Slight agreement
0.21 – 0.40	Fair agreement
0.41 – 0.60	Moderate agreement
0.61 – 0.80	Substantial agreement
0.81 – 1.00	Almost perfect agreement

5. Results and Discussion

This section discusses the qualitative findings obtained in the study are discussed according to the research objectives.

5.1 Nature and conditions that may have influenced the students' intercultural experiences
The nature and conditions that may have influenced the students' intercultural experiences during the international exchange program while staying in the host universities almost perfect inter-rater agreement (kappa= 0.736) are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Percentages of the conditions that may have influenced the nature of the participants

Conditions	N	Percentage
positive information	38	51.35%
positive emotion	16	21.62%
pre-departure activity	11	14.86%
family and friends' support	9	12.16%
TOTAL	**74**	**100.00%**

The thematic categorization of the conditions that may have influenced the nature of the international Indonesian students' experiences showed that the students' experiences in

Thailand were mostly influenced by (1) positive information (N=38; 51.35%), and (2) positive emotion (N=16; 21.62%). Student A and Student B, who were hosted by a public university, claimed that the positive information that influenced them most was related to the components *Student Life*. Student A, on the one hand, claimed that she *had made several friends, friends were from the international programs of the university, classmates communicate well in English,* and *friends inside and outside the classroom can communicate in English even though they were of different nationalities*. On the other hand, Student B *mingled easily with Thai classmates; Thai classmates spoke English quite well, so no communication problem with them; enjoyed doing activities with friends in-campus and off-campus;* and *Thai friends helped us learn Thai culture more*.

As for Students C, D, and E, who were hosted by a private university, while their experiences were influenced by the component *Student Life*, this influence was not as strong as the influence they got from their host *University*. For instance, Student C revealed that *the university was really cool because it was very clean; talking to teachers was comfortable and convenient because everyone speaks English well; I was able to join cultural activities like Loy Krathong; staff in the university offices is very helpful and understanding; and became part of the new environment*. Student D disclosed that *the university was a good and tidy place; host dormitories are extremely clean and tidy; classroom language is not problematic (since) the teachers and the students speak English so communication went smooth;* and *a clean and tidy prayer room was available*. Student E stated that host university is *beautiful place with friendly people*; has *good food, the university facilities were up-to-date and facilities were very clean*; *signs were written in three languages: Thai, English and Chinese and there were enough signage; free bicycles rides;* and *classroom activities like lectures and presentations went smoothly.*

Aside from experiencing positive information, the international Indonesian students also had positive memorable experiences as evidenced by their positive emotions. Students A and B's positive emotions were influenced by the component University. Student A stated that *she enjoyed much; she loved the daily singing of the Thai national anthem; she was honored to see a big poster of King Rama IX; and the presence of friendly people*. Student B disclosed that her positive emotions were due to *fun classroom and non-classroom activities; and really looking forward to see Thailand and visit again the host university because she loves traveling*, and *traveling is filled of excitement.* For Students C, D, and E, positive emotion came also from their experiences in the component *University*: Student C claimed that university activities were really fun and felt proud and welcomed. Student E stated that wearing the school uniform made him feel that he belonged to the community. Student D did not share any positive emotion.

The findings are in concord with Gu *et al*., (2010) that academic and social conditions may influence students' intercultural experiences. In this research, these academic and social conditions came from the components *University* and *Student Life*, respectively.

5.2 Challenges and coping strategies of the international students

The challenges encountered by the international students and their respective coping strategies during the project with substantial t inter-rater agreement (kappa= 0.789) are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Percentages of the challenges encountered by the international students

Challenges	N	Percentage
cultural differences	36	62.07%
language	9	15.52%
pre-departure preparations	8	13.79%
education	4	6.90%
environment	1	1.72%
TOTAL	**58**	**100.00%**

5.2.1 Challenges met by of the international students

The thematic categorization of the challenges encountered by the international Indonesian students produced three main challenges: cultural differences (N=36; 62.07%), language (N=9; 15.52%), and pre-departure preparations (N=8; 13.79%). They also reported that experiences related to education (N=4; 6.90%) and environment or weather (N=1; 1.72%) were less challenging. Students A and B, who were hosted by a government university claimed that the main challenge was cultural differences. For instance, Student A disclosed that she had *difficulty in finding halal food especially on weekends; the prayer room is inconveniently unclean; other Thai friends had difficulty speaking in Thai; homesickness; culture shock; missed home country, food and friends; and missed regular activities at home.* Student B mentioned that *a prayer room was provided but not conducive since it is on the sixth floor and was a bit dirty; halal food claimed fine by the locals was unsure whether authentic or not; transportation a big problem on weekends and difficulty in finding halal food especially on weekends; homesickness;* and *missed friends and classmates in Indonesia.* This was followed by language issues. For example, Student A stated that *there was communication barrier due to difficulties of most locals to use English.* Student B said that *she had difficulty making friends outside the international program because others couldn't speak English,* and (while listening to her friends she summed up that) *Thai language was difficult to learn and understand.*

For the students hosted by a private university they have mixed reactions regarding the challenges they encountered during their stay. Although like Students A and B, they stated that cultural difference is one of the challenges, Students C also had some issues regarding pre-departure preparations claiming that *there was not enough time to practice; preparation time was too short especially psychological preparation; information found or given by the coordinator (about the host university) was not enough; difficulty in finding information and (if given by the coordinator), the information provided was limited; and not enough time to access host information.* All of the three also met challenges related to language. For instance, Student C had some *difficulty in communicating with non-academic staff*; Student D *experienced communication breakdown due to language problems (e.g. I wanted to buy two plates of rice plus one viand, but they gave me two viands despite using verbal and non-verbal explanations)*; and Student D, like the other students, also claimed that *majority of Thais don't speak English.* These results support the Gu *et al.* (2010) and Zhai (2002) findings that the main challenges faced by the students are cultural differences, and language challenges. In addition, the status of institutional ownership of the two different university contexts as the the hosts seemingly indicated no influential accounts for the sake of challenges they had faced as the the present study tried to infer. Rather, the more essential and relevant efforts in encountering those challenges are concerned with the intensity of getting involved in real context of communication (cf. Spies, 2012).

There was an isolated case on challenges related to education worth mentioning here. We call it an isolated case because it only happened in one of the classes of Student D and only in one of the 15 meetings. Student D claimed that she experienced "a bit of culture" in

one of her classes. She said that "a lot of things were done on day 1 of the classes". She said further that "I [sic] forced to speak in Thai language since it is one of the requirements of a course". She also disclosed that "I was also required to join a make-up class on Saturday and Sunday when these days are my holidays". Then she concluded that "there were some differences in teaching style and classroom management compared with her classes in Indonesia (e.g. teacher is very strict on attendance and time). This isolated case supports Zhai (2002) whose research study found that education, particularly US education was as a challenge. We argue, however, that it was only a minor case for the five international Indonesian students, who thought that attending classes and joining classroom activities were fun even if some of their friends and classmates had difficulties in expressing themselves in English. Our argument pivots in our earlier assumption in this paper that while the participants are international students, they are from the ASEAN region, so the nature of student intercultural experiences and the conditions that may change this nature may not focus much on the delivery of educational services but on cultural differences and communication challenges given that Thailand is country where English is spoken as foreign language, and therefore social adjustment may still be an issue but not those related to the provision of educational services.

5.2.1 Coping strategies used by the international students

As coping strategies, the participants mainly used four coping strategies: (1) staying quiet/away (N=26; 36.62%), (2) consulting fellow international students (N=20; 28.17%), (3) contacting their friends and families at home (N=11; 15.49%), and (4) using communication strategies such employing verbal and non-verbal communication, and initiating dialogs (N=8; 11.27%). (5) Consulting teachers and/or assigned advisers (N=6; 8.45%) was the least used coping strategy. These coping strategies are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Percentages of the coping strategies of the international students

Coping strategies	N	Percentage
staying quiet or away	26	36.62%
consulting fellow international students	20	28.17%
contacting their friends and families	11	15.49%
using communication strategies (verbal & non-verbal, initiate dialogs)	8	11.27%
consulting teachers and/or assigned advisers	6	8.45%
TOTAL	**71**	**100.00%**

Main Coping strategy 1: *Staying quiet or away*

Staying quiet or staying away is the most common coping strategy used by all students. The students chose to stay quiet or stay when they were confronted with challenges related to cultural differences, language and pre-departure preparations. For example, Student A chose to keep her thoughts when she saw issues on cultural differences such as *the prayer room is inconveniently unclean*, and *culture shock*. Student B chose to keep quiet or leave the situation when she met challenges on cultural differences such as *language becomes a barrier*, *halal food claimed fine by the locals was unsure whether authentic or not*, *transportation became a big problem on weekends*, and *food sources were limited on weekend.* Student C stayed quiet when she met the following challenges: *difficulty [sic] in communicating with non-academic staff*, *food and beverages were unsure if they are really halal or not, preparation time was too short especially psychological preparation* related to language, cultural differences, and pre-departure preparations, respectively. Student D chose to keep quiet when confronted mainly by issues relating to cultural differences (e.g. *I had a*

bit of culture shock and *bringing food inside not allowed in the dormitory*), and pre-departure preparations (e.g. *preparation was not enough despite what I did* and *time was still insufficient despite reading information on Thailand early*). She also had an isolated challenge relating to education where *a lot of things were done on day 1 of classes*, *was forced to speak in Thai language since it is one of the requirements of a course* and *some differences in teaching style and classroom management (e.g. teacher is very strict on attendance and time)*. As for Student E, he kept quiet mainly when confronted by issues related to cultural differences (e.g. *friends used a mixed of Thai and English languages so there were times I couldn't understand what was being discussed and affected my interactions with other people* and *I worry about halal food especially early in the morning and on weekends and when traveling around: too few shops offering halal food could be found*.

Main Coping strategy 2: *Consulting fellow international students*

Aside from keeping quiet or staying away, the international also chose to consult fellow international students as another main strategy to cope with challenges they encountered. For instance, all students opted to contact local students enrolled in the international program when they had issues relating to cultural differences (e.g. *difficulty of finding halal food especially on weekends* and *homesickness*). When communication issues were not solved by verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, all students also chose to contact their international student counterparts for help *(e.g. I was forced to speak in Thai language since it is one of the requirements of a course* and *language communication barrier especially in canteens and some offices since most Thais don't speak clear English).*

Other Coping strategies: contacting their friends and families, using communication strategies (verbal & non-verbal, initiate dialogs), and consulting teachers and/or assigned advisers.

All of the students contacted their friends and families in Indonesia when they had *homesickness such as when they miss their home country, food served at home,* and *Indonesian friends and classmates.* They used verbal and non-verbal communication strategies and initiated dialogs when they were confronted by communication problems due to difficulties of most locals to use English. Student E moved one step further by taking the initiative *to start a conversation with people in the university because most locals keep quiet when they are with people they don't know well.* As for consulting teacher and/or assigned advisers, all of the students, except Student A and C, used this coping strategy. Student B consulted a teacher at the host university about the *strict university policy such coming on time and discipline.* Student D sought help from her program adviser regarding pre-departure preparations (e.g. *preparation was not enough despite what I did* and *time was still insufficient despite reading information on Thailand early*). Student E consulted his exchange program coordinator about studying basic Thai language although he was not able to get one.

6. Conclusion

The ultimate goal of this paper is to investigate the intercultural experiences of the Indonesian students while attending a student exchange program in Thailand. Overall, the main findings revealed that the conditions that may have influenced the nature of the participants' intercultural experience include receiving any positive information about the project and feeling positive about experiences they had during their stay. While the participants encountered several challenges such as cultural differences, language barrier and insufficient pre-departure preparations, they readily adjusted using a number of coping strategies such as staying quiet/away, consulting fellow international students, contacting their friends and

families, and using communication strategies (e.g. verbal & non-verbal and initiating dialogs). While Zhai (2002) and Gu *et al.* (2010) found in their research studies that the main challenges faced by the students are cultural differences and language challenges and (U.S.) education, the findings of this research study only agreed with the first two challenges. All of the international students who participated in the exchange program, regardless of whether their host is a government or private university, thought that the nature of education in the host country was not as challenging as the cultural differences and language barrier, and they thought that attending classes and joining classroom activities were fun even if some of their friends and classmates had difficulties in expressing themselves in English. The nature, conditions, challenges and coping strategies in any international student mobility projects are "'unexpected' worry point to areas in which early university support is mostly required particularly on targeted university training on pre-departure preparations, which could help smoothen international students' initial transition into their new learning and living environments" (Gu et al., 2010, p.13). Most research studies on international student mobility focus on inferential statistics to shed light on intercultural experiences of the participants. We hope that this phenomenological approach perspective another insightful way of looking at intercultural experiences.

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Appendix A Interview Transcript: Nature and conditions of students' intercultural experience

	Nature
Components	***Student A***
University A	I enjoyed much
	The host university is big
	I love the daily singing of the Thai national anthem
	I am honored to see a big post of King Rama IX
	I met friendly people and became friends
	The classroom activities were fun
	The non-classroom activities were fun
Home	I communicate to my home and friends at home regularly
	My parents are supportive
Student Life	The student life at the host university was fun
	I had made several friends from the international programs of the university

	My classmates communicate well in English
	The student life at the host university was fun
Yourself	My initial preparation as suggested by the home university was especially on reading about Thai culture and traditions
	I also had to prepare psychological preparation –condition my mind
**Student B**
University A	My initial preparation as suggested by the home university was especially on reading about Thai culture and traditions
	I also had to prepare psychological preparation –condition my mind
	My initial preparation as suggested by the home university was especially on reading about Thai culture and traditions
	I also had to prepare psychological preparation –condition my mind
	My initial preparation as suggested by the home university was especially on reading about Thai culture and traditions
	I also had to prepare psychological preparation –condition my mind
Home	I communicate regularly with people at home, with my classmates and friends at UniGal
	My parents are supportive in financial and moral [*sic*]
Student Life	I mingled easily with Thai classmates because they are friendly.
	My Thai classmates spoke English quite well, so I'm happy that no communication problem with them [*sic*]
	I enjoyed doing activities with in-campus and off-campus
	Thai friends helped us learn Thai culture more
Yourself	I prepared myself about Thai culture
**Student C**
University B	The university was really cool
	The university was very clean
	Talking to teachers was comfortable and convenient
	Everyone in the faculty and in the class speaks English
	I [*sic*] joined cultural activities like Loy Krathong with my friends
	Loy Krathong was really fun
	Staff in the university offices were very helpful and understanding
	I felt proud and felt welcomed
	I became part of the new environment
At Home	My parents are supportive parents
	I also have supportive friends and classmates at UniGal
	The host university was like home because of friendly people
Student Life	I met a lot of good friends
	I also had happy memories with friends
	Being with my Thai friends, help me forget the students' problems
Yourself	I practiced English language since we were told that English is the medium of instruction
	I read about host country's food and others
**Student D**

University B	The university is a good and tidy place with facilities
	The host's dormitories are extremely clean and tidy
	Classroom language is not problematic
	I'm glad that the teachers and the students speak English
	This makes communication went smooth [*sic*]
	Clean and tidy prayer room was available
Home	I got full moral support from my parents and friends in Indonesia
Student Life	My friends inside and outside the classroom can communicate in English even though they were of different nationalities, so it's easy to discuss issues and others and we can go around
Yourself	I did a lot of preparations such as psychological
	I read socio-cultural information
	I also read traditions of host country
	I practice my English language
Student E	
University B	The university is a beautiful place with enough facilities
	The people are friendly, so it's not serious
	The canteen serves good food and clean but sometimes limited shops.
	The university facilities were up-to-date and clean
	The signs were written in three languages: Thai, English and Chinese
	There is enough signage in buildings
	There are free bicycles from exploring the campus
	Classroom activities like lecture and presentations went smoothly
	Wearing of the school uniform made me feel that I belong to the community
Home	I call or send messages sometimes to my friends at UniGal and I sometimes call my family
Student Life	There are possibilities of traveling around for leisure but only explored some;
	The way of life in Thailand is quite similar to way of living in Indonesia which is advantage [*sic*]
	I was able to travel in different places in Thailand with Thai friends as guide
Yourself	I read some information about the host country
	I did some preparations

Appendix B Challenges and coping strategies of the international students

Transcript
Student A
There was language communication barrier due to difficulties of most locals to use English
I had difficulty of finding halal food especially on weekends
The prayer room is inconveniently unclean
I had less time for contacting home since too many assignments given
Other Thai friends had difficulty speaking in Thai
I had homesickness
I felt culture shock

I missed [*sic*] home country
I missed the food at home
I missed friends at home
and missed regular activities at home
Student B
The prayer room was provided but not conducive and it was a bit dirty
English language was a barrier to communication
The halal food claimed fine by the locals was unsure whether authentic or not
Transportation a big problem on weekends
And food sources [*sic*] a big problem on weekends
There was difficulty finding halal food especially on weekends;
The university is [*sic*] strict policy such coming on time and discipline
I was homesick several times
I missed friends and classmates
There was difficulty to make [*sic*] friends outside the international program because others couldn't speak English
Thai language was difficult to learn and understand
Student C
The weather in Thailand and in the university was much hotter even during the rainy season
Some difficulties in communicating with non-academic staff
I was homesick during the first few weeks
I missed local (Indonesian) food
There was language communication barrier especially in canteens and some offices since most Thais don't speak clear English
Food and beverages were unsure if they are really halal or not
Some Thai friends do not speak in English
There was not enough time to practice
Preparation time was too short especially for psychological preparation
It was difficult to find information and the coordinator gave limited information
Also, there was not enough time to access host information
Student D
I had a bit of culture shock
A lot of things were done on day 1 of the classes
I [*sic*] forced to speak in Thai language since it is one of the requirements of a course
Some differences in teaching style and classroom management (e.g. teacher is very strict on attendance and time)
The university dormitory of host had very strict policy on time and discipline which made me wanted to go back home on day 1
Bringing food inside not allowed in the dormitory
I had homesickness
I felt a bit of culture shock
There was strict policy of the dormitory like the gate closes at midnight
Food and beverages were sour and spicy although spicy is fine
But sour is a big no because in my home country food tastes sweet
Halal restaurants closed early in the morning, so my friends and I either ate noodles or skipped our breakfast
I experienced communication breakdown due to language problems (e.g. I wanted to buy two

plates of rice plus one viand, but they gave me two viands despite using verbal and non-verbal explanations)
Preparation was not enough despite what I did
Time was still insufficient despite reading information on Thailand early
Information provided was not enough
I had read information but not the main things to know like taboos, rules and regulations, teachings styles and classroom management
Student E
The majority of Thais don't speak English
People in the classroom and even outside didn't want to initiate a conversation
Different nationalities in the classroom was a challenge (teacher is Filipino who worked and spent most his time in America, Chinese and Thai classmates and I am Indonesian) especially in combining ideas during discussions since we brought with us our unique culture and way of thinking
Homesickness was a big challenge
I was craving for Indonesian food
My friends used a mixed of Thai and English languages so there were times I couldn't understand what was being discussed and affected my interactions with other people
I worry about halal food especially early in the morning and on weekends and when traveling around: too few shops offering halal food could be found
There were many strict regulations and policies
I could have studied basic Thai language, but my home university didn't have anyone who knows Thai language