

Culture Shock Experiences of Cambodian International Students in West Sumatra: A Phenomenological Study

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Article History: Submitted date April 17th 2025; Revised date June 15th 2025;

Accepted date June 17th 2025; Published date June 30th 2025

ABSTRACT

This study explores the cultural adaptation experiences of Cambodian international students in West Sumatra, focusing on affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of culture shock. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected from 14 Cambodian students enrolled at three universities in Padang and Batusangkar. In-depth interviews, observations, focus group discussions (FGDs), and documentation provided a comprehensive view of their adaptation journey. Findings reveal a spectrum of emotional reactions, from enthusiasm to confusion; cognitive dissonance related to religious, culinary, and social norms; and behavioral challenges linked to language and social etiquette. Despite these challenges, students employed various strategies—peer support, cultural observation, language learning—to navigate cultural differences. The study underscores the importance of intercultural communication training and inclusive campus environments to support international student integration in Indonesia.

Keywords: Cultural Shock; Adaptation; International Students; Cambodia

INTRODUCTION

Culture shock is a common phenomenon in the era of globalization characterized by increasing mobility and cross-cultural interaction, including in the world of international education. This term was first introduced by (Oberg, 1960), who described it as anxiety due to the loss of familiar social symbols, such as body language, cultural norms, and facial expressions. This phenomenon not only occurs in international tourists or workers, but is also

How to Cite (in APA 7th Edition):

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significantly experienced by international students studying abroad. Reactions that arise due to culture shock are generally in the form of confusion, anxiety, stress, and even a sense of awe of a new culture that is difficult to understand. Various studies have shown that culture shock involves affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects, which arise due to the mismatch between individual expectations and the reality of the new culture faced (Pitts, 2009; Zhang, 2014; Qun et al., 2018; Jurásek & Wawrosz, 2023).

In this context, the process of cultural adaptation is not only related to the introduction of new elements, but also includes changes in the meaning and perspective of individuals towards their new environment. According to various studies (Xia, 2020; Shannon-Baker, 2015; Alsaleh & Moufakkir, 2019), culture shock reflects the psychological tension experienced by individuals when they lose the reinforcement of their home culture and are faced with foreign or meaningless cultural stimuli. This tension can be exacerbated by the gap in expectations of the destination culture, the greater the difference, the more severe the impact on the adaptation process (Berg, 2007). The reactions that arise are not only emotional such as stress and anxiety, but can also be in the form of withdrawal, depression, and resistance to new cultural values (Ling & Lei, 2024).

Culture shock is a real challenge faced by international students when studying abroad. The transition to life in a foreign cultural environment often causes psychological stress, personal disorientation, and communication difficulties, especially for those who have not had previous cross-cultural experience. International students are not only required to adjust to a different academic system, but also have to face language barriers, social norms, and unfamiliar customs (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Anjalin et al., 2017; Wicaksono & Hassan, 2024). At the beginning of their arrival, interest in the uniqueness of the local culture can provide positive encouragement, but in deeper and more ongoing interactions, many students experience anxiety and stress due to a lack of understanding of the social communication symbols used by the local community (Jurásek & Wawrosz, 2023). The adaptation process is complex because it includes not only cognitive aspects, but also emotional and social aspects, all of which are greatly influenced by personal readiness and environmental support.

The success of international students' adaptation is greatly influenced by various internal and external factors, such as cultural identity, personality traits, self-efficacy, and the availability of social and institutional support. Individuals with cultural flexibility, interpersonal skills, and motivation to communicate are more open to the adaptation process and tend to be able to manage the stress of culture shock more effectively (Chen et al., 2011; Sims & Schraeder, 2004; Rozin & Herminingrum, 2016). Demographic factors such as age, family status, and previous international experience also contribute to the extent to which an individual is able to adjust to a new environment (Maddux, 2017). Often, failure to understand verbal and non-verbal communication is the root of feelings of alienation and discomfort

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experienced by international students. However, when responded to positively, the experience of culture shock can strengthen self-confidence and enrich personal and professional learning processes (Guru et al., 2012; Lina & Setiawan, 2017).

Culture shock is a complex process that occurs when individuals are exposed to a foreign cultural environment, involving interrelated affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses (Ward et al.; 2001). In the early stages, many individuals experience a “honeymoon” phase, a period of euphoria and enthusiasm for the novelty of the foreign culture they encounter (Guru et al., 2012). However, after this initial phase passes, feelings of disorientation, anxiety, and frustration begin to emerge as the different cultural realities become more apparent and challenging to navigate (Jurásek & Wawrosz, 2023). The inability to understand the language, social symbols, and norms that apply are often the main causes of feelings of alienation and helplessness, especially for those who have not had cross-cultural experiences or experience cultural myopia (Alsaleh & Moufakkir, 2019; Xia, 2020). Emotional reactions such as confusion and discomfort, difficulty in interpreting new cultural values, and changes in social behavior are key indicators of culture shock experienced by international students (Chen et al., 2011). If not handled properly, this condition can affect a person's motivation, mental health, and social adaptation in everyday life and professional contexts Alkubaidi & Alzhrani, 2020, Lombard, 2014). However, individuals who are able to develop appropriate adaptation strategies have the opportunity to strengthen self-efficacy and build better cross-cultural competence, making culture shock a personally and professionally enriching experience (Shannon-Baker, 2015; Zaidah et al., 2023).

West Sumatra is known as a region with a strong culture and a unique value system, namely adat basandi syara', syara' basandi Kitabullah, which combines Minangkabau customs with Islamic teachings. This cultural uniqueness makes West Sumatra an attractive learning environment for foreign students, but it can also be a challenge in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. The phenomenon of culture shock is often experienced by international students when faced with a social and cultural environment that is very different from their original background. Data from the West Sumatra Provincial Language Center noted that in 2023 there were 56 foreign students studying in the region, the majority of whom came from Cambodia. Cambodian students, most of whom have a Hindu background, are faced with striking differences with the social and religious norms of the West Sumatran community which are based on Islam. Although many previous studies have discussed culture shock in general, very few studies have specifically examined the experiences of Cambodian students in West Sumatra, either from an emotional, cognitive, or behavioral aspect. The absence of studies that address this local context is an important gap that needs to be bridged to enrich understanding of the dynamics of cross-cultural

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adaptation in Indonesian higher education environments.

This study aims to explore the forms of affective, cognitive, and behavioral culture shock experienced by Cambodian students during their adaptation process in West Sumatra. In addition, this study also seeks to understand how differences in language, culture, and religion influence emotional experiences, interpretations of social norms, and behavioral responses of students in a new environment. This study offers an important contribution by presenting a contextual perspective of the experiences of international students in an area with strong social and religious norms. By exploring the forms of culture shock they experience, as well as the adaptation strategies they develop, the results of this study are expected to provide practical insights for educational institutions and local communities in creating a more inclusive environment for international students. Based on these objectives, the research questions raised are: (1) What are the forms of affective, cognitive, and behavioral culture shock experienced by Cambodian students in West Sumatra? (2) How do Cambodian students interpret and respond to cultural and religious differences during the adaptation process? (3) What strategies do Cambodian students use to overcome cultural challenges in academic and social environments? These questions will be the basis for exploring an in-depth understanding of the cross-cultural experiences of international students in a local context that has not been widely revealed before.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. This approach was chosen to explore the in-depth experiences of foreign students, especially Cambodian students in West Sumatra, who experience the phenomenon of culture shock. Through direct interaction with informants, researchers attempt to identify, understand, and explain the phenomena experienced by students related to emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects in adapting to a new culture in their learning environment. This method allows researchers to directly observe and confirm findings from interactions during the research process. This research was conducted in three universities in West Sumatra, namely Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar State Islamic University, Padang State University, and Imam Bonjol Padang State Islamic University. The selection of the location was based on the high number of Cambodian students in the three universities, making it a strategic location to obtain research data. In addition, the three campuses also reflect the diversity of academic and social environments in West Sumatra, ranging from Islamic-based institutions to general institutions, allowing researchers to obtain a more comprehensive perspective on cross-cultural adaptation experiences. The research informants consisted of 14 foreign students from Cambodia spread across the three universities (In this article, the terms P1-P14 will be used). The informants were selected purposively with the

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following criteria: (1) having studied for at least one semester to ensure they have sufficient experience in the adaptation process; (2) being active in academic and social activities on campus; and (3) being willing to provide in-depth information. The selection of these informants aimed to obtain authentic and diverse data regarding the dynamics of culture shock experienced by Cambodian students in the higher education environment of West Sumatra. This research lasted for four months, namely April to July 2024.

Data collection techniques in this study include observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and documentation ([Link](#)). Observations were conducted to identify forms of affective, behavioral, and cognitive culture shock experienced by students, such as emotional expression, adaptive behavioral responses, and how they adjust to local culture. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with a duration of 45–60 minutes per session, using an open-ended question guide that explored the informant's personal experiences in dealing with differences in values, norms, and cultural customs. This interview provided space for informants to tell their experiences freely and reflectively, while allowing researchers to explore aspects that emerged spontaneously. The interview process was conducted voluntarily, maintaining the confidentiality of the informant's identity and referring to the principles of research ethics, such as informed consent, the right to withdraw at any time, and protection of personal data.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) involved 4–5 informants per session and were intended to confirm and enrich the findings from individual interviews through interaction between participants. Documentation was conducted to complement field data with written information from academic archives, photos of activities, and official documents from the university. Data saturation is determined when no new information or variation is found in the informant's answers to the main themes, which is indicated by the repetition of data from interviews and FGDs. This process helps ensure that the data obtained is sufficient to comprehensively describe the phenomenon being studied.

Data analysis was carried out by reducing, organizing, and interpreting data based on the established theoretical framework. Researchers also used a self-reflection approach and feedback from informants and external parties to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. To ensure data validity, researchers conducted triangulation by collecting data from various sources and methods, such as interviews, observations, and documentation. With this methodology, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of culture shock in Cambodian foreign students in West Sumatra, as well as identify factors that influence their cultural adaptation in academic and social environments.

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FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study discusses the Culture Shock of Foreign Students in West Sumatra, especially Students of Padang State University, Imam Bonjol State Islamic University Padang and Mahmud Yunus State Islamic University Batusangkar. Interviews and FGDs were conducted twice. First, on June 29, 2024 with UNP and UINIB Students. Second, on July 27, 2024 with UIN MY Batusangkar Students. The explanation of the following research results is explained as follows.

1. Affective Culture Shock

The results of the study on affective culture shock of foreign students in West Sumatra, conducted through interviews and FGDs with 14 students from Cambodia, revealed a spectrum of diverse emotional reactions when interacting with a new culture. Respondents involved in this study came from two universities in West Sumatra, namely Padang State University (UNP) and Imam Bonjol State Islamic University Padang. This study aims to understand how foreign students feel and experience cultural differences, as well as the challenges they face during the adaptation process. Based on the FGD conducted, the results of this research can be seen in the following table 1.

Tabel 1.

<i>Affective Reactions of Foreign Students to New Culture in West Sumatra</i>		
Main Theme	Subtheme Affective Emotion	Representative Quotes
Positive Affective Reaction	1. Joy and Excitement in Getting to Know New Cultures	"I am happy and excited to learn about new cultures and the geographical conditions in Padang and its people." (P1)
	2. Amazement of Natural Beauty and Culinary	"I feel happy, fascinated by the beautiful scenery and delicious cuisine." (P2)
	3. Curiosity in the Wealth of Traditions and Cultural History	"I am happy and curious about new cultures such as traditions, folklore, and the cultural history of the Indonesian people." (P3)
	4. Enthusiasm in Exploring the Diversity of Indonesian Culture	"I am happy to learn experiences and learn more about the diversity of cultures in Indonesia." (P4)
	5. Happiness due to Social Support and Warmth of Relationships	"I am happy about new cultures and being able to meet good people and friends." (P5)
	6. Comfort in the Physical Environment	"I am happy in Batusangkar because the air is cool and cold." (P6)

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	(Climate and Atmosphere)	
	7. Appreciation of the Hospitality of the Local Community	"I am happy living in Batusangkar because the people are friendly." (P7)
Negative Affective Reactions	1. Confusion about Different Social Behaviors	"I feel confused and surprised by the new culture such as the way Padang people drive and their wedding traditions." (P8)
	2. Discomfort in Social Interactions and Language Challenges	"I feel confused when interacting with friends, and it is difficult to adapt to food." (P9)
	3. Emotional Reactions to Cultural Inconsistencies	"I feel confused about the new culture." (P10)
	4. Shock to Different Religious Practices	"I feel strange because I see a culture that is different from Cambodian culture such as practicing religion." (P11)
	5. Strange Feelings about Local Food and Culture (Minangkabau Culture)	"I feel strange about the new culture, especially spicy food and Minangkabau culture." (P12)
	6. Feelings of Alienation and Unacceptance by the Surrounding Community	"I feel uncomfortable because I am considered a foreigner by the community." (P13)
	7. Lack of Understanding of Local Social Norms (such as small talk)	"I feel confused because I can't make small talk while people here make small talk a lot, and I'm confused about learning it." (P14)

It is important to note that although international students in West Sumatra experience a variety of emotional reactions to cultural differences, these positive and negative experiences are interconnected. The enthusiasm and passion they have when interacting with a new culture can help them overcome the challenges they face. Through this complex adaptation process, they learn to deal with the confusion and discomfort that arises in a more constructive way. This shows that the adaptation process is not linear, but involves a cycle of emotions that influence each other between positive and negative experiences.

Based on the Affective Culture Shock theory, Cambodian students experienced various forms of emotional discomfort that arose due to cultural differences while studying in West Sumatra. Their efforts to overcome these feelings are explained as follows. In the early stages, the researcher observed several students (such as P2 and P6) who were discussing lecture material that

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they did not understand. In this situation, they tended to gather with friends from West Sumatra who helped explain the local context. This shows that social support is very important for overcoming emotional discomfort when facing a new culture. P2 stated that feelings of discomfort can be overcome by being open-minded and patient in learning new things. This is in line with the experiences of P1 and P4 who admitted that they were very helped when they found discussion partners from the local area. This experience shows that social interaction with individuals who understand the local culture can facilitate the emotional adaptation process.

P8 added that observing the daily lives of the surrounding community—such as social customs, ways of communicating, and local traditions—is an effective way to foster a sense of familiarity. This approach emphasizes that active observation of culture can reduce feelings of foreignness or alienation. Likewise, P3 and P4 stated that making friends with local students allowed them to ask open questions so that they could understand the culture more deeply. They also emphasized the importance of open communication, such as smiling and greeting, in creating positive interactions with the community. However, not all students immediately chose to interact with the local community. For example, P12 preferred to gather and chat with friends from the same country, as a mechanism for adjusting through familiarity with the culture he was already familiar with.

In the second FGD conducted at UIN MY Batusangkar, students such as P7 stated that patience and enthusiasm for learning were very important in managing feelings of discomfort. P14 admitted that language barriers were a challenge in themselves, but continued to try to learn and ask classmates. This shows that determination to learn and personal resilience are key in dealing with emotional shocks due to cultural differences. P6 emphasized the importance of practicing Indonesian with local friends to strengthen communication skills and accelerate adaptation. Meanwhile, P5 explained that independent learning and searching for information via the internet helped him understand the new culture better. This shows that the ability to utilize information technology is also an important tool in overcoming cultural discomfort.

From the students' narratives, it is clear that affective culture shock—the emotional response to unfamiliar cultural norms and customs—appears in various forms, such as confusion, alienation, or even enthusiasm. However, this study found that students who engage in open communication, build social relationships, observe their environment, and engage in independent learning tend to adapt emotionally faster. Some students even said that enjoying local cuisine and culture was a fun way to build a sense of familiarity with their new environment. In conclusion, Cambodian students' affective reactions to cultural differences are diverse, but most are able to manage their discomfort through a combination of interpersonal strategies and self-effort—suggesting that emotional adjustment in cross-cultural experiences is complex but possible to achieve in adaptive ways.

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2. Cognitive Culture Shock

Cognitive culture shock is a phenomenon experienced by individuals when they are confronted with fundamental differences in values, beliefs, and ways of thinking due to cultural shifts. This study examines the experiences of Cambodian international students studying in Padang and Batusangkar, West Sumatra. In this study, researchers collected data through interviews and observations to understand how they responded to significant cultural differences. The results showed that Cambodian students experienced cognitive dissonance when faced with cultural norms and practices that were different from those they were previously familiar with. This created confusion and challenges in how they understood the world and interacted in a new context.

Tabel 2.

<i>Cognitive Reactions of Foreign Students to New Culture in West Sumatra</i>		
Theme	Subtheme	Cognitive Reactions
1. Greetings and Social Norms	Greetings and respect for others	Surprised to have to use “Assalamualaikum” as a greeting; different from the Cambodian custom of using “good morning” or “welcome” (P8)
2. Food and Culinary Taste	Spicy food taste	Surprised by the spicy and strongly spiced taste of Padang food; different from the sweet and clear Cambodian food (P2, P12, P13)
	Adaptation of eating habits	Overcome the spiciness by sprinkling sugar on instant noodles and fried eggs (P11)
3. Wedding Attire and Ceremony	Wedding dress	Surprised to see the bride in Padang wearing Malay clothes, white robes, robes, and kebaya; different from the wedding attire in Cambodia (P9)
	Singing at a wedding	Surprised because in Indonesian wedding receptions there is a singing event; in Cambodia singing at weddings is only done by non-Muslims (P14)
4. Traditions and Entertainment	Dance at a wedding event	Surprised because there were many traditional dances such as plate dance, offering dance, and umbrella dance at wedding receptions; this is not found in Cambodia (P6)
5. Transportation and Customs	Bus payment system and car steering wheel position	Surprised that the bus payment system and driver position in Indonesia are different from those in Cambodia (P11)

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6. Customary Ceremonies and Traditions	Diversity of traditional ceremonies in Indonesia	Impressed and surprised by the many unique traditional ceremonies such as weddings and funerals in Indonesia (P4)
7. Religion and Belief	Diversity in religious practices	Surprised because Indonesia is predominantly Muslim but still has diverse beliefs and diverse religious celebrations (P10)
8. Religious Norms and Social Life	Keeping dogs and wearing the hijab	Confused to see Muslims keeping dogs for hunting; also surprised to see Muslims not wearing the hijab in some places (P7)

Based on the cognitive culture shock data, the experiences of foreign students from Cambodia studying in West Sumatra, related to their acceptance and rejection of local cultural identities are explained as follows. Some students showed positive attitudes towards various cultural elements, such as wedding traditions, religion, and local arts and music, while others expressed rejection of several practices that they considered inconsistent with the norms and values they adhere to.

The results of interviews with students, such as P11, P1, and P5, showed that they accepted a new cultural identity that included marriage and religion. According to them, marriage in Padang has unique traditions, while the majority of the population is Muslim. This indicates that certain cultural values, such as the importance of the institution of marriage and religion, can be easily accepted by them. In addition, students also expressed their interest in Padang arts and culture, such as traditional clothing and traditional dances, which are considered to have their own uniqueness.

Furthermore, students such as P4 and P3 expressed their interest in traditional dances, especially the plate dance, which is considered interesting because of the dancers' skills in being able to step on plates without getting hurt. This experience left a deep impression and demonstrated their ability to appreciate differences in artistic expression. In addition, they also appreciate the good and friendly attitude of the Padang community, which is considered a reflection of good morals. P04 even expressed her joy towards the coffee drinking culture in Padang, which has become an integral part of the community's social life.

On the other hand, there are several students who experienced cognitive culture shock that led them to reject some aspects of local culture. For example, P4 rejected the habit of smoking carelessly that she found in her surroundings. According to her, this habit is not in accordance with the health norms that she holds. This experience illustrates how differences in social norms and behavior can create discomfort for individuals who come from different cultures.

The results of the second FGD at UIN MY Batusangkar highlighted students' rejection of certain practices, such as seeing beggars in the market.

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P9 raised concerns about young buskers who, according to him, should be looking for other, more decent jobs. This rejection reflects the cognitive dissonance experienced by students, where the values they hold conflict with the social realities they face in West Sumatra. P7 added her rejection of women sitting mixed with men, as well as Muslims who keep dogs, as examples of norms that are considered inappropriate in their cultural context.

This study also shows that rejection of smoking habits and the presence of beggars is related to the more conservative cultural background of Cambodian students. These habits are considered disruptive and contradict their views on appropriate behavior in public spaces. In addition, the rejection of the practice of keeping dogs by Muslims reflects the discomfort experienced by students with cultural realities that conflict with their religious beliefs.

Overall, this study highlights that the experiences of Cambodian foreign students in West Sumatra represent a complex adaptation process. On the one hand, there is a broad acceptance of the local culture that is considered positive and interesting. On the other hand, there is significant rejection of cultural elements that are considered contrary to their values and beliefs. This shows that cognitive culture shock can trigger a variety of responses, from acceptance to rejection, depending on the social and cultural context of each individual.

3. Behavior Culture Shock

The results of this study explore the phenomenon of behavioral culture shock experienced by foreign students in West Sumatra, especially related to difficulties in communicating and interacting socially with the local community. Behavioral culture shock is one dimension of culture shock that occurs when individuals must adjust their behavior to different social norms and customs. In this context, foreign students often face challenges in adapting, especially related to differences in language and applicable social etiquette. Through interviews and FGDs with foreign students at Padang State University (UNP) and Imam Bonjol State Islamic University (UINIB), as well as observations, researchers identified various experiences related to difficulties in communicating in a new environment.

Tabel 3

<i>Behavior Reactions of Foreign Students to New Culture in West Sumatra</i>		
Theme	Subtheme	Behavior Reactions
Language and Communication	Difficulty communicating with friends	It is very difficult to communicate with new friends because it is difficult to understand each other, especially with lecturers who use Indonesian. (P5) There is no difficulty in communicating with new friends

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	because Padang people are friendly. (P1)
Language becomes a barrier to friendship	There was no difficulty because friends tried to understand and teach. (P12) It is very difficult to make friends because of different languages. (P3) It is very difficult to make friends in Padang because of the language barrier, even though the people are friendly. (P4)
Difficulty understanding local language	It is difficult to communicate with new people because they do not know or do not understand the language. Many speak Minang, so it makes it difficult to speak. (P6, P7, P8)
Progress in learning a language	At first it was very difficult to communicate because he did not understand Indonesian, but now his language skills have improved. (P9)
Language as inspiration	Even though it is difficult, it is used as inspiration and continues to learn to understand. Because it can open up insight into the perspective of foreigners. (P10)
Difficulty communicating with local speakers	Having difficulty communicating with new friends because many still use Minang language. But still enthusiastic to continue learning to understand. (P11, P12, P13, P14)

Throughout this study, behavioral culture shock in foreign students in West Sumatra is greatly influenced by language challenges and social interactions. Those who are not familiar with the Minang language experience confusion in communicating, which often results in feelings of isolation. However, the friendliness of the local community and support from campus friends play an important role in helping them navigate these difficulties. The supportive attitude of the surrounding environment creates a more conducive atmosphere for foreign students to learn and adapt. This shows that success in overcoming behavioral culture shock does not only depend on individual efforts, but also on the response and support from the community around them.

The adaptation process undergone by these international students not only affects their communication skills but also enriches their cultural experiences. Despite the challenges, international students can find ways to interact with the local community through a desire to learn and be open to new experiences. Difficulties in communication, which is one aspect of behavioral culture shock, can be overcome with a proactive approach and

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support from the environment. This study underlines the importance of understanding different social behaviors in a new culture and the need for ongoing support for individuals in similar situations.

Based on behavioral culture shock, behaviors and situations that are considered impolite or disliked by international students in West Sumatra, especially students from Cambodia, were identified. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with a number of students studying at the State Islamic University (UIN) Imam Bonjol and the State University of Padang. Interviews were conducted on June 29, 2024 and July 27, 2024, involving various student perspectives on social behaviors that they considered disruptive while in this new environment. The results of the interviews showed diverse experiences related to behavioral culture shock, with some students expressing significant discomfort, while others reported positive experiences.

One of the main findings of this study was the presence of complaints about security and negative social behavior in West Sumatra. Students mentioned criminal acts such as mugging as their least favorite thing. P8, a student, noted that "the presence of bad people, like muggers and others" created a sense of fear and discomfort in public spaces. This perception reflects differences in safety expectations between the students' home culture and the local culture, which may not have the same experience with criminal threats.

Another aspect highlighted was behavior in public spaces, such as the presence of beggars and buskers who were considered disturbing. P7 and P10 stated that the presence of beggars in food stalls disrupted their atmosphere while enjoying their food. In addition, complaints about loud motorbike exhausts and public transportation that stopped carelessly also emerged. This shows that foreign students feel uncomfortable with social interactions that they are not used to in their home countries, as well as showing differences in safety standards and traffic order.

Environmental cleanliness is also a source of discomfort for foreign students. P4 expressed her concern about the habit of littering on the beach or sea. In their home culture, there is a higher awareness of the importance of maintaining environmental cleanliness. Therefore, such behavior is considered highly inappropriate and disruptive, creating a deeper culture shock regarding environmental norms and cleanliness. Interaction with traders in the market is also a concern. P3 expressed discomfort when shopping in the market, where there are sellers who forcefully buy their goods. This behavior is considered invasive and reflects a difference in sales ethics. Foreign students are often accustomed to a more relaxed and non-pushy way of interacting in the transaction process, so this situation causes feelings of discomfort.

Interestingly, not all foreign students experience negative behavioral culture shock. In the second Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted on July 27, 2024, UIN Mahmud Yunus students, such as P11, P12, P13, P14,

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revealed that they did not find any impolite behavior in West Sumatra. They actually considered the local people to be very friendly and kind. This shows that the experience of behavioral culture shock can vary greatly depending on individual perceptions and their interactions with the local community.

Overall, this study reflects that behavioral culture shock among foreign students in West Sumatra involves their reactions to various social behaviors that are different from what they are used to. The sources of this discomfort revolve around aspects of security, behavior in public spaces, environmental cleanliness, and social interactions. Although some students experienced significant discomfort, there were also positive experiences, which emphasized the importance of good social interactions in reducing anxiety and increasing adaptation. This implies that the social adaptation of foreign students is greatly influenced by individual factors and the social context they face.

These findings highlight the importance of a deeper understanding of the experiences of foreign students in Indonesia, especially in West Sumatra, to facilitate their integration into the local community. By understanding what behaviors and attitudes are considered objectionable, educational institutions and communities can work together to create a more welcoming and supportive environment for international students.

The results of this study are in line with the findings of various previous studies that also explored the phenomenon of culture shock among migrant students. Research by Mahennaro & Mahendra., (2022) showed that Lampung students in Yogyakarta experienced culture shock originating from internal and external factors. This is in line with other studies that also highlight the process of student adaptation in a new environment. With a descriptive approach, this study describes how students respond to various challenges that arise due to cultural and environmental differences, and relates them to their adaptation process.

One important aspect of this study is the shift in perspective towards individuals who experience culture shock. Previously, many studies, such as those conducted by Sari & Rusli (2019), categorized individuals as passive victims of the situations they face. However, with the increasing understanding of intercultural culture, individuals are now considered more proactive actors who are able to prepare themselves to face these challenges (Zhou et al., 2008). This study emphasizes that students have the capacity to manage and adapt to new situations, thus providing a more positive picture of their experiences in a foreign environment.

The results of Handayani & Yuca (2018) study showed differences in the level of culture shock based on region of origin and gender. This study found that students from outside West Sumatra experienced moderate culture shock, while those from within West Sumatra experienced lower levels. These findings suggest that cultural background and location of origin can influence an individual's level of resilience to culture shock. This study seeks to add a new dimension by exploring how students from outside West

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Sumatra, regardless of gender, respond to their new experiences in different regions, and relate them to existing social dynamics. Sari & Rusli (2019) also highlighted the influence of culture shock on the adjustment of new students. This study found that there was a significant relationship between culture shock and the ability to adapt, where the greater the culture shock experienced, the more difficult it was for students to adapt. This is in line with the findings in this study, where students who experience cultural shifts are more likely to experience difficulties in social interaction, indicating that social adaptation is a challenge in itself. Therefore, it is important to further explore the adaptation strategies implemented by students in order to provide more appropriate recommendations to help them adapt to a new environment.

From the research of Adiprawira et al., (2023), which examined students in exchange programs, it was found that there were stages that students went through in dealing with culture shock. These stages include the optimistic phase, cultural problems, recovery, and adjustment. This study underlines the importance of being aware of these phases so that students can be better prepared to face the challenges that exist. This study also highlights the communication accommodation actions needed to interact effectively, which is one of the important focuses of this study, especially considering that students who adapt to a new environment often need help to understand the nuances of the local culture.

In comparing this study with previous studies, it is clear that there is a need to dig deeper into how cultural shifts can create anxiety for individuals who migrate. As stated by Lin (2006), international students often experience culture shock even before they leave their home country. This study also confirms that social interaction with students from their home country can be an effective strategy in adjusting to a new culture. This suggests that social support is very important in helping individuals overcome difficulties arising from cultural differences, which is a key element in their adaptation.

Furthermore, it is important to note that although each study has a different focus, there is a similarity in highlighting the importance of analyzing internal and external factors that influence the experience of culture shock. For example, this study found that both local and international students have to face similar challenges in adapting to new cultural norms and values. In this context, support from educational institutions is essential to create an environment that supports intercultural interaction, as well as providing training or programs that help students manage their expectations and adaptation strategies.

Overall, this study attempts to provide a deeper contribution to the phenomenon of culture shock by exploring students' experiences in a broader context. Referring to previous studies, it is clear that culture shock is not only experienced by foreigners, but also by local individuals who migrate to a new area. This underlines the importance of an inclusive approach in understanding cultural adaptation and encouraging collaborative efforts to

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create a welcoming environment for all students, regardless of their cultural background.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Cambodian students studying in Padang and Batusangkar encounter various forms of culture shock, including affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. On the affective level, participants reported feelings of alienation, awkwardness, and discomfort, particularly during their initial interactions with local communities. Cognitively, they struggled to understand social norms, communication styles, and the academic expectations of Indonesian higher education. Behaviorally, differences in daily habits—such as dress codes, classroom etiquette, and interpersonal interactions—posed significant adaptation challenges. The study contributes practical recommendations for educational institutions in Indonesia. Universities are encouraged to design more comprehensive orientation programs that go beyond administrative briefings and include intercultural communication workshops, local cultural immersion activities, and sustained peer mentoring. These efforts are vital to help international students navigate both academic and social life successfully. In addition, institutions should cultivate an inclusive campus climate where diversity is acknowledged and celebrated. The findings underscore the importance of shared responsibility between international students, host institutions, and local communities in fostering successful cultural integration. Enhancing intercultural literacy and providing consistent support mechanisms can significantly improve international student experiences. Moreover, recognizing their presence as a catalyst for social and cultural enrichment encourages mutual respect and promotes the development of inclusive, globally-oriented educational environments in Indonesia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank UIN Imam Bonjol Padang for the research funding that has been provided. We would like to thank the international students from Cambodia who were willing to participate in data collection for this research.

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