The Reintegration Experiences of Young Indonesian Returnees in a Globalizing World

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Abstract
This study, The Reintegration Experiences of Young Indonesian Returnees in a Globalizing World, examines differences in communication styles, message interpretation, and attitudes between Indonesians living abroad and those in Indonesia. As globalization drives migration and cultural exchange, understanding intercultural communication nuances becomes increasingly vital. The research explores reintegration challenges faced by returning Indonesians, emphasizing shifts in communication dynamics, conflict management styles, and emotional experiences. Using a qualitative approach based on Cultural Communication Theory, in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals who have lived both overseas and in Indonesia. These interviews reveal how cultural identity evolves through expatriate experiences, significantly influencing interpersonal communication. Participants shared narratives highlighting notable changes in self-construal and interaction styles upon returning. The study identifies key differences as potential sources of misunderstandings and conflicts when reengaging with local communities that have evolved in their absence. The findings illustrate the complex interplay between cultural context and individual identity, offering insights into the emotional aspects of reintegration.This research contributes to intercultural communication discussions while providing practical recommendations for individuals, families, and organizations to facilitate smoother transitions. Ultimately, it promotes a deeper understanding of cultural adjustment, fostering greater tolerance and harmony within Indonesian society.
Keywords— Cultural Reintegration; Inter-Cultural Communication; Indonesian Returnees

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I. INTRODUCTION

Culture has numerous definitions. As early as 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn analyzed 160 definitions of the concept, concluding that they could be categorized into six main groups (Ting-Toomey & Tenzin Dorjee, 2019). Culture comprises both explicit and implicit behavior patterns, acquired and transmitted through symbols, representing the unique achievements of human groups, including their manifestation in artifacts. At its core, culture consists of traditional ideas, which are historically derived and selected, along with the values associated with them. Culture systems can be viewed both as products of human actions and as factors that influence future actions. In an increasingly interconnected world, migration has become a defining feature of globalization, profoundly impacting how individuals experience and engage with diverse cultures. For many, the decision to live abroad offers a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in new environments, where exposure to different cultural norms, values, and communication styles can leave a lasting impact on their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. Over time, these individuals inevitably absorb elements of the host culture, adopting ways of thinking and interacting that may differ from those of their home country. However, the experience of returning to their homeland can present a set of complex challenges, as they attempt to reintegrate into a cultural landscape shaped by longstanding traditions and communication patterns. In the case of Indonesians who have spent extended periods abroad, the return home often involves adapting to local communication practices that are deeply rooted in Indonesian cultural heritage, which places a high value on harmony, hierarchy, and indirect communication (Kabir & Kabir, 2007).

This research focuses on young Indonesian adults who have returned to Indonesia after living abroad for at least five years, during which they experienced prolonged exposure to foreign cultures, communication styles, and parenting approaches distinct from one another. These individuals, often are fluent in English and deeply adapted to the cultural norms of their host countries, face unique challenges in reintegrating into Indonesian society. Their return involves navigating cultural dissonance, re-establishing identity, and negotiating their sense of belonging, shaped by hybrid identities that blend their overseas experiences with their Indonesian roots. The study aims to explore how these experiences influence their communication patterns, attitudes, and adaptation processes, shedding light on broader phenomena such as the impact of globalization and transnational mobility on identity. This issue is timely and significant, as it uncovers the unique reintegration challenges and

contributions of returning Indonesians, providing valuable insights into identity negotiation and cultural adaptation in an increasingly interconnected world.

Using inter-cultural communication, self-construals, and conflict styles as theoretical frameworks the study seeks to inform on wider implications for cultural reintegration in a globalizing world with rising international migration and intercultural exchange. Other than that, this research also undercovers the importance of understanding how prolonged exposure to foreign cultures can reshape individuals' perceptions of their own identity and place within society. Returning Indonesians may experience a sense of cultural dissonance, where their evolving communication patterns and attitudes do not align with those of their family, friends, or colleagues who have remained rooted in Indonesian culture. This dissonance can lead to feelings of frustration, isolation, or even reverse culture shock, as individuals struggle to reconcile the influences of their time abroad with the expectations of their home society. Moreover, the research will examine how these returnees' shifting communication styles and attitudes impact their relationships, both personal and professional, as they attempt to reintegrate into Indonesian social structures.

An existing study on topic analysis by Ozola and Martinsone (2023) has a number of possible research gaps. While both studies do indeed focus on the differences in communication between individualistic and collectivist cultures, this thesis provides more depth since it will research the special challenges that returning Indonesians face. It points out the issues which have not been sufficiently researched so far, such as reverse culture shock, changes in self-construal, emotional factors like pride and shame, and the role of social networks in reintegration. In particular, this approach provides new insights into intercultural communication and cultural adjustment by stressing emotional and social dynamics within personal and professional relations.

Overall, the study plans to make contribution in a better understanding of Indonesians who have lived abroad with regards on their challenges of reintegration especially dealing with cultural and communicative tensions during process. This research will expand the intercultural communication field by exploring shifts in communication attitudes, habits and conflict management that international students experience when they readapt to their country of origin. In a world characterized by high levels of migration and cultural encounter, understanding these processes is essential for creating more integrated with culturally cognizant societies which are able to relate sympathy the complex life histories of individuals who negotiate multiple identities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW
A. Inter-Cultural Communication

The literature on inter-cultural psychology highlights the dynamic evolution of cultures driven by globalization and technological advancements, challenging traditional views of static, geographically bounded cultures (Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Shiraev & Levy, 2021). The concept of "cultural mixtures" reflects the blending of influences on bicultural or multicultural individuals living in diverse environments (Ng & Lai, 2009). Cultural metacognition, critical for cross-cultural competence, helps individuals adapt communication styles to varied cultural contexts, reducing misunderstandings and fostering collaboration (Chen et al., 2020). Studies on cultural re-entry shock, such as those by Geeraert, Ward, and Hanel (2022), show that returnees often face stress and disconnection but adjust better when expectations are managed. Digital platforms further influence cultural exchange by increasing access to content while also creating "filter bubbles" that limit exposure to diversity (Mihelj et al., 2019). Initiatives like the UK's "Culture is Digital" emphasize the need for inclusivity to harness the potential of digital media for bridging cultural gaps. These insights underline the importance of cultural awareness and adaptability in communication, particularly in a globally interconnected world, offering a foundation for understanding how Indonesians navigate cross-cultural environments.

B. Self-Construals and Identity

Self-construal refers to the way an individual views him- or herself in relation to others, always within an influential cultural context. Markus and Kitayama (1991) in Li, Wang, and Pi (2024) described two predominant self-construal types: independent and interdependent. The independent self-construal valued in most Western cultures suggests emphasis on individuality or individual uniqueness. On the other hand, interdependent self-construal among Asian cultures powerfully underlines interconnectedness with others and role relations in society. These cultural differences give insight into how people define themselves and then interact with the world.

C. Conflict Management Styles

Intercultural conflict arises from differences in cultural backgrounds affecting values, norms, and behaviors (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). It transcends disagreement to include cultural group effects on perception and response. Negotiation is at the core of resolving such conflicts, with cultural values shaping strategies (Caputo et al., 2019; Adair & Brett, 2005). Harmony is more valued in collectivist cultures, while competitive strategies are favored in individualistic cultures (Hofstede, 2001; Brett & Okumura, 1998). Power distance and uncertainty avoidance variables affect conflict styles (Graf et al., 2012; Saorín-Iborra & Cubillo, 2016). Cultural intelligence

(CQ) helps the negotiators to adapt, combining competitive and cooperative styles for effective cross-cultural interaction (Earley & Ang, 2003; Sharma et al., 2013).

D. Communication Theory of Identity

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), credited to Michael Hecht and further developed by Jung and Hecht (2004), views identity as a dynamic social phenomenon, shaped through relationships and communities. It organizes identity into four interrelated frames: personal (self-concept), enacted (identity in actions), relational (identity shaped by relationships), and communal (group-based identity). These frames interact dynamically, and discrepancies or "identity gaps" between them can lead to negative communication outcomes, such as reduced satisfaction and understanding (Jung, 2011). Research by Wadsworth, Hecht, and Jung (2008) shows that larger gaps, such as those stemming from concealing sexual orientation, lead to profound communication challenges. Additionally, identity gaps can contribute to psychological issues, aligning with theories like Higgins' Self-Discrepancy (1987) and Jack's research on self-silencing (1991, 1999). CTI has broad implications for understanding identity negotiation in diverse social and cultural contexts, making it highly relevant in an increasingly globalized world.
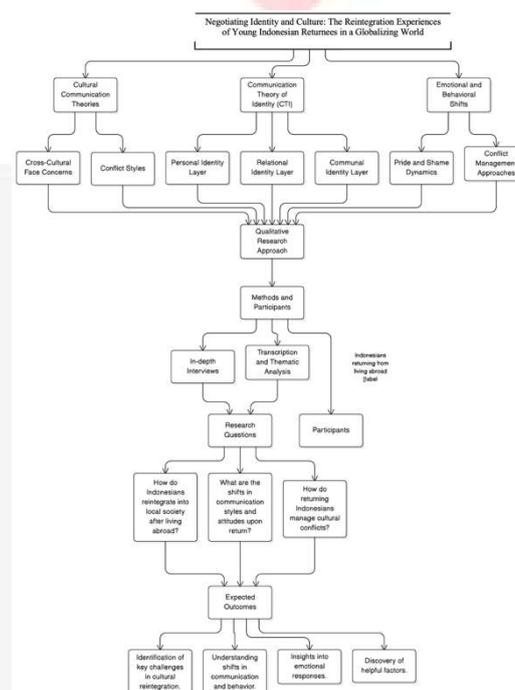
Theoretical Framework

Fig. 1 Research Framework

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative design focused on semi-structured, in-depth interviews to explore the reintegration experiences of Indonesian returnees. This approach is ideal for understanding the complex, individual nuances of participants' adjustments, particularly regarding communication style, identity negotiation, and cultural adaptation. The flexibility of the semi-structured format allows participants to express their thoughts in a conversational manner, ensuring openness while also covering key themes. Interviews are planned for a two-month period, with data collection being flexible enough to accommodate both in-person and virtual meetings to overcome geographical barriers. Data will be transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis, which helps to identify and organize recurring patterns or themes in participants' narratives.

Participants are carefully selected through purposive sampling to ensure their experiences are relevant and recent, particularly focusing on those who have spent considerable time abroad and returned to Indonesia within the last five years. The research uses triangulation and member checking to enhance data validity, along with peer debriefing to refine the findings. A reflective journal is maintained throughout the study to ensure objectivity and transparency in the data analysis process. This methodology is designed to provide a rich, detailed understanding of the challenges faced by returnees as they navigate their reintegration into Indonesian society, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of communication, identity, and cultural adaptation.

II.   RESULT FINDINGS

A. Communication Adaptation

Informants who had lived overseas struggled to adjust to Indonesia's high-context communication style. According to Hermans & Kempens' 'cultural mixtures' theory (Shiraev & Levy, 2021), biculturals find contrasting communication norms challenging. Aisha Kirana, used to the directness of Qatar, struggled with Indonesia's indirectness—grounded in subtlety and body language (Heyes et al., 2020). Similarly, Yasmine Rahmiandary and Dinia Octaviani also initially had to contend with over-interpreting and underlying meanings (Geeraert et al., 2022). Sabrina Aulia Putri faced language issues at the university level but managed by learning Bahasa and cultural protocol (Varga et al., 2020). Aisyah Rizka also concentrated on language and cultural understanding, managing through daily interactions. Informants identified the need for flexibility, observation, and sensitivity to navigate Indonesia's culture of respect and politeness.

B. Self Perception and Identity

Living abroad shaped the informants' self-consciousness, as they had to balance individualistic traits and Indonesia's collectivist culture (Li et al., 2024). Aisha Kirana was more self-assured in Qatar's open society but had to adjust to Indonesia's harmony-oriented culture, compromising personal growth with group activities. Sabrina Aulia Putri struggled more to communicate abroad but was more comfortable in Indonesia, illustrating the necessity of a balance between teamwork and autonomy (Fleischmann & Verkuyten, 2016). Aisyah Rizka and Aisha Kirana gained a broader view of identity, illustrating "proculturation"—identity negotiation through cultural interaction (Gamsakhurdia, 2018). Yasmine Rahmiandary and Dinia Octaviani faced tensions between collectivist values and autonomy and learned to combine both aspects contextually (Verkuyten et al., 2019).

C. Conflict Management

Conflicts are unavoidable in reintegration but can be managed through adaptation (Ting-Toomey et al., 2001). The informants' conflict styles were shaped by pride and shame feelings and life experiences in individualistic societies. Aisha Kirana prioritized harmony, kept quiet and compromised for peace's sake, reflecting Indonesia's collectivist norms (Caputo et al., 2019). Yasmine Rahmiandary avoided conflicts that would harm relationships, whereas Dinia Octaviani blended assertiveness with Indonesia's indirect norms. Sabrina Aulia Putri shifted from conflict avoidance abroad to self-defense strategies in Indonesia. Aisyah Rizka had to contend with Indonesia's emotional sensitivity, in which her directness was at times viewed as brutal. Overall, the informants managed cultural expectations, emotions, and adjustment to maintain harmony.

D. Social and Community Influence

Social networks played a crucial role in the rehabilitation of informants, providing emotional support and cultural adjustment. Aisha Kirana relied on university and community organizations for guidance and stability (Pranasari & Iskandar, 2022). Sabrina Aulia Putri established her social networks gradually, which made it simpler for her to adapt and feel at home. Aisyah Rizka enjoyed common interests in social groups for reconciling past and present lives. Yasmine Rahmiandary and Dinia Octaviani also received support from international communities while balancing their international identity with domestic reintegration. Generally, international and expatriate networks supported the informants in reconnecting, adjusting, and overcoming cultural challenges easily.

E. Parental Influence and Duration Spent

Parental upbringing and foreign time shaped the informants' cultural identity and adaptation. Aisha Kirana's bilingual family and parental values helped her balance Indonesian heritage with diverse experiences (Pranasari & Iskandar, 2022). Sabrina Aulia Putri had reintegration challenges but maintained contact with foreign friends for continuity, while her parents indirectly imparted Indonesian values (Hartley et al., 2022). Yasmine Rahmiandary and Dinia Octaviani stayed connected to their origins through celebrating their culture, while Aisyah Rizka, while being less surrounded by Indonesian culture, shared some connections in language and traditions. Parental influence emerged as a significant force in identity development and reintegration across all informants and resonates with broader cultural adaptation themes (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Inter-cultural Communication challenges of returning Indonesians

Returnees struggle most to adapt to the high-context communication of Indonesia from direct, low-context foreign exposure. This adaptation involves the capacity for accepting implicit meaning, nonverbal communication, and sensitivity to people. There are plenty of biases, therefore, encouraging close attention and suppleness. Language can also serve as a barrier, with individuals used to communicating in English adapting to Bahasa Indonesia and regional dialects, as well as rules of politeness. Shared values, hierarchy, and "saving face" also define expression, which requires careful self-modulation. Indonesia's cultural diversity adds extra complexity, therefore flexibility and active learning become necessary. Softening language, not over-explaining, and reading social cues are some strategies that ensure ease of reintegration and relationship building.

B. Self-Perception and Identity Complexes Faced by Diaspora's Back Home

The experiences of returnees overseas greatly influenced their self-concepts and identities in negotiating the tension between the individualistic cultures encountered overseas and the deeply entrenched collectivist values of Indonesian society. The negotiation that this entailed-between aspirations for independent decision-making and communal expectations-underscores how exposure to cultural diversity shapes one's sense of belonging and self-perception. While living abroad enhanced their self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and independence, returnees often struggled to readjust to societal norms that emphasize interdependence and group-oriented values. Many addressed this by integrating personal growth into communal activities, fostering an understanding of both individual and collective identity. The reshaping of identity, coined "proculturation," involved a constant refining of the self through the diversity of cultural interactions, which both empowered and challenged the returnees to balance their expanded sense of self with societal expectations for conformity and emotional sensitivity. It was crucial to find a balance between personal independence and active participation in community life, thus enabling returnees to avoid alienation while maintaining individuality. For some, the return home was a conduit for self-expression, but again, the collectivist culture required some adjustment with its emphasis on teamwork and collaboration. These influences of individualistic and collectivist frameworks on returnees were thus not contradictory but complementary in the multidimensionality of identity negotiations influenced by the interplay of personal agency and societal norms. This is an ongoing process of integration and self-discovery that underlines the transformative impact of inter-cultural experiences, supporting research that identity negotiation, though challenging, fosters personal growth, cultural adaptability, and opportunities for self-realization.

C. The Differences in Conflict Managements Home and Abroad

Conflict is unavoidable in reintegration, as returnees make the shift from direct, individualistic conflict styles to Indonesia's indirect, harmony-focused style. Such a shift requires patience, flexibility, and social sensitivity. To maintain group harmony, returnees employ strategies like compromise, apologizing, and indirect communication, even though this can create internal conflict between honesty and cultural expectations. Pride and shame also influence responses, with assertiveness occasionally coming into conflict with conflict avoidance. Misunderstandings can occur when straightness is interpreted as insensitivity, calling for a balance between frankness and compassion. The returnees are assisted in dealing with these challenges by supportive groups, promoting adjustment and affiliation.

D. The Importance of Social and Community Influence

Social networks and community support systems are very instrumental in the reintegration of returnees into their home country by closing the cultural gap, providing emotional support, and guiding them through societal expectations. According to Pranasari and Iskandar (2022), such networks encourage adaptation and emotional resilience by providing practical resources: updating on culture, networking opportunities, and how to overcome challenges in reintegration that reduce psychological stress and promote stability. Supportive networks at the levels of local community organizations and university collectives engender a feeling of fit while enabling the returnees to deal with ambiguous cultural dynamics based on mutual understanding, shared experience, and empathies. The quality of the relationships involved is particularly considerable: small, supportive circles make the returning feel valued and build their emotional resilience. Shared interests within these networks, be it hobbies or professional aims, thus enable deeper contact and a safe space for returnees to express hybrid identities, fusing individualistic and collectivist cultural values. In this way, these networks serve more as an emotional anchor than as a source of practical help in finding solidarity and guidance to reconcile cultural conflicts and dilemmas, especially with the collectivist ways of Indonesian society. Social networks will, therefore, be indispensable in tackling the emotional and practical challenges of reintegration, while a smoother, more fulfilling transition forms the bedrock of successful return.

E. How Parental Influences and Duration Spent Affects Reintegration Process

Parental socialization and length abroad impact returnees' cultural identity as well as reintegration. Being betwixt cultures encourages flexibility yet also complicates readjustment to Indonesia's collectivist environment. Parents play a significant role in grounding returnees in Indonesian culture yet encouraging openness toward foreign influences. Bilingualism, cultural practices, and parental socialization ease reintegration, while prolonged exposure abroad can make adjustment more complicated, especially for younger returnees. Maintaining foreign friendships provides support but is harmful to indigenous relationships. Cultural immersion and language use promote reintegration, requiring balance between individualism and collectivist values. Lastly, upbringing and inter-cultural experience shape identity and adjustment.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The challenges faced by Indonesians returning home after long periods abroad, particularly in adapting to local cultural norms, communication styles, and conflict resolution methods, highlight the difficulties of reintegration. These challenges are particularly evident for returnees from individualistic, low-context communication environments adjusting to Indonesia's more collectivist culture. However, factors such as exposure to new cultural environments, strong social networks, parental influence, and the time spent abroad are key solutions that facilitate smoother transitions. Exposure to diverse cultural environments helps returnees become more adaptable and open-minded, blending elements of both international and Indonesian cultures, which eases their return. Social networks, especially those with fellow returnees or expatriates, offer emotional support, understanding, and practical advice, making reintegration less overwhelming. Parental influence, through continued cultural traditions and a bilingual environment, helps maintain the returnees' connection to their roots and reduces culture shock. Lastly, the longer the time spent abroad, the greater the challenges faced, but this also fosters greater adaptability in the long run. Together, these factors help returnees reconcile their international experiences with their Indonesian heritage, facilitating a smoother reintegration process and a sense of belonging.

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