



International Students' Perceptions of Social Interaction and Cultural Adaptation in Second Language Acquisition at Universitas Negeri Semarang

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-06-29 Revised: 2026-08-28 Accepted: 2026-09-10 Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, International Students, Social Interaction, Cultural Adaptation DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.11531 Corresponding Author: Vina Qurrota Akyuningrum Vinaqurrotaakyuningrum@gmail.com Universitas Negeri Semarang	<i>This study examines international students' perceptions and experiences of social interaction and cultural adaptation in second language acquisition, particularly in learning Bahasa Indonesia. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study involved eight international students who participated in semi-structured interviews, with two participants also involved in observations. The study draws on Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis to examine social interaction and Berry's (1997) acculturation framework to understand cultural adaptation. The findings identified three themes related to social interaction: communication, negotiation of meaning, and receiving feedback. These themes illustrate how international students described their interactions with Indonesian speakers as opportunities to practice Bahasa Indonesia, clarify meaning, and receive linguistic input and feedback. Regarding cultural adaptation, the findings reflected four acculturation orientations: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Rather than functioning as fixed categories, these orientations represented participants' varying experiences of maintaining aspects of their cultural identities while engaging with Indonesian culture and language. Participants perceived social interaction as supporting their Bahasa Indonesia development by providing opportunities for communication, meaning negotiation, and feedback. Cultural adaptation was also described as shaping their opportunities to engage with Indonesian language and culture in everyday contexts.</i>

1. Introduction

In recent years, Indonesia has situated itself as a developing center for worldwide instruction, with colleges over the archipelago inviting students from around the world. Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) plays a dynamic part in pleasing worldwide students advertising degree programs over different disciplines such as education,

technology, science, and many more. Most of the students come to UNNES using scholarship from Indonesian government, their country government, or UNNES scholarship. This provides them a chance to study undergraduate and/or graduate degree. Studying in new environment especially in different country makes them get challenge to adapt. Culture shock, communication boundaries, and a sense of confinement are common challenges confronted by numerous worldwide learners (Chen, 2020; Zhou, 2021; Prameswari & Hapsari, 2023). These challenges are not limited to students' adjustment to a new cultural environment but may also influence how they participate in social interactions and engage in second-language learning during their studies abroad.

One of the challenges that international students face is language barrier. As international students at UNNES who come from different countries, they are unfamiliar with bahasa Indonesia. That is why they need to learn bahasa Indonesia as the second language to help them adapt in new environment either in academic journey or to communicate with local society in Semarang. Foreign learners try to do social interaction to learn new language (Ishikawa & Takahashi, 2023; Setiawan et al., 2022; Santoso & Pratiwi, 2022). Learning bahasa Indonesia as the second language of UNNES international student encourages them to do social interaction.

However, social interaction in second-language acquisition should not be understood merely as an opportunity to communicate. From the perspective of Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, interaction can facilitate language development through processes such as negotiation of meaning, modified input, and feedback. When learners encounter difficulties in understanding or expressing meaning, interaction may provide opportunities to clarify messages, receive comprehensible input, and notice linguistic forms that can support their language development.

Social interaction with local society at UNNES environment is one of many ways for international students to adapt themselves in Indonesia. Aliyyah and Mulyadi (2021) said that foreign learners try to understand bahasa Indonesia using dialect from the social interaction activity to practice their bahasa Indonesia skill. Communicating with lecturers and friends in academic class, also negotiating with local sellers are the examples of how international students try to do social interaction during their studies. Such interactions provide contexts in which learners can use Bahasa Indonesia beyond formal classroom instruction and engage in meaning negotiation and feedback with Indonesian speakers. Thus, social interaction may create communicative conditions that support second-language learning while also helping international students participate in their everyday social environment.

Besides doing social interaction activity, international students also need to adapt to the new culture in Indonesia that is very different from their cultures. Cultural adaptation is one of the important aspects for the international students during their studies in Indonesia. Adapting new culture effectively advances internationalization and cross-cultural collaboration (Raharjo et al., 2021; Anwar et al., 2022). Bui and Freeman (2022) contend that the advancement of intercultural competence is not their basic integration, but it emphatically connects dialect capability results. In this context, cultural adaptation is not necessarily equivalent to second-language acquisition. Rather, cultural adaptation may create the social and psychological conditions in which language learning can occur by influencing learners' willingness to interact with local people, participate in community activities, and engage with culturally situated language practices.

Berry's (1997) acculturation framework provides a useful perspective for understanding how individuals respond to a new cultural environment. The framework identifies four acculturation orientations: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Integration refers to maintaining aspects of one's original culture while

also participating in the host culture. Assimilation occurs when individuals become more involved in the host culture while placing less emphasis on maintaining their original culture. Separation refers to maintaining the culture of origin while having limited engagement with the host culture. Marginalization describes a situation in which individuals experience limited connection with both their culture of origin and the host culture. These orientations provide a framework for examining how international students experience and respond to cultural differences in their everyday lives in Indonesia.

One of the culture shocks that they face is how Indonesians interact them. This phenomenon makes researcher interested to learn more how international students portray the social interaction and cultural adaptation in learning bahasa Indonesia as their second language acquisition. Previous studies have examined international students' experiences of cultural adjustment, language learning, and social interaction; however, these aspects have often been discussed separately.

Research on international students' language learning has highlighted the importance of interaction, while studies of cultural adaptation have primarily focused on adjustment, intercultural experiences, or students' responses to cultural differences. Similarly, studies concerning Bahasa Indonesia for international learners have provided important insights into language learning and communication, but there remains limited understanding of how social interaction and cultural adaptation are experienced simultaneously as part of international students' Bahasa Indonesia acquisition.

This gap is particularly relevant in the context of international students at UNNES, where students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact with Indonesian lecturers, students, local communities, and members of society in their everyday academic and social environments.

Therefore, examining social interaction and cultural adaptation together can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how international students experience Bahasa Indonesia learning beyond formal classroom contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in examining social interaction and cultural adaptation simultaneously in relation to international students' acquisition of Bahasa Indonesia at UNNES. Rather than treating language learning, social interaction, and cultural adaptation as separate experiences, this study explores how participants perceive and experience the relationship between these dimensions during their studies in Indonesia. A phenomenological approach is employed to capture the meanings that international students assign to their experiences of communicating with Indonesian speakers, negotiating meaning, receiving feedback, and adapting to Indonesian cultural practices.

As emphasized by Duff (2022), SLA investigates progressive move towards understanding learners as socially arranged creatures who bring complex personalities, objectives, and foundations into the learning process. This perspective is particularly relevant to international students because their language learning takes place within social and cultural environments that extend beyond formal language instruction. Their experiences of using Bahasa Indonesia are therefore shaped not only by linguistic encounters but also by their relationships, cultural experiences, and participation in the host community.

Based on this background and the identified research gap, this study aims to investigate international students' experiences of social interaction and cultural adaptation in their acquisition of Bahasa Indonesia at UNNES. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do international students experience and perceive social interaction in their acquisition of Bahasa Indonesia at UNNES?
2. How do international students experience cultural adaptation during their studies at UNNES?
3. How do social interaction and cultural adaptation relate to international students' perceived Bahasa Indonesia learning experiences?

This study is conducted at UNNES as one of the universities in Indonesia that accepts international students. By addressing these questions, the study is expected to contribute to the field of second-language acquisition by providing a contextualized understanding of how social interaction and cultural adaptation are experienced together by international students learning Bahasa Indonesia. The findings may also provide practical implications for universities and local communities in creating meaningful opportunities for interaction between international students and Indonesian students or community members.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design because the researcher aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of social interaction and cultural adaptation in the second language acquisition (SLA) process among international students at one of the universities in Central Java. A qualitative descriptive design was considered appropriate because this study focused on exploring and describing the participants' experiences, perceptions, and perspectives regarding their social interactions and cultural adaptation during the process of acquiring a second language.

According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009), qualitative research involved the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to develop an understanding of particular phenomena. In line with this perspective, the study sought to obtain detailed information from international students about how they experienced social interaction and cultural adaptation and how these experiences influenced their SLA process. Therefore, the qualitative descriptive design allowed the researcher to present a detailed description of the participants' experiences based on the data collected from them.

Subjects and Research Location

The subject of this research are eight international students that are selected from 83 international students at one of the universities in Central Java for the interview, and two from those eight international students for the observation. Those students are coming from different countries and field of study. They are selected based on the criteria; International students who already stay at one of the universities in Central Java minimum one semester, officially enrolled as full-time students not exchange, actively participate in campus life, already learn bahasa Indonesia, and willing to share their experience to this thesis.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the objectives of the study. The participants consisted of eight international students from different countries who were studying at one of the universities in Central Java. They were considered appropriate participants because they had direct experience of living and studying in Indonesia and had experienced social interaction and cultural adaptation while learning bahasa Indonesia. From a total of 83 international students at the university, eight students met the participation criteria and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Their willingness to share their experiences was also considered important because the

study focused on understanding their personal experiences and perceptions of social interaction and cultural adaptation in the SLA process.

All eight participants took part in semi-structured interviews, while two of the eight participants were selected for observation to obtain additional information about their social interaction and language use in real-life contexts. The combination of interviews and observations allowed the researcher to obtain detailed accounts of the participants' experiences as well as observational data related to their social interaction and use of bahasa Indonesia.

The location of the interview will take via Zoom application for the interview, and for the observation it will take at one of the universities in Central Java, the area around one of the universities in Central Java, in the academic class, and in Semarang for general. Since the interview was conducted online, the researcher used Zoom application because this application is familiar among students and easy to access. The interview took online around 30 minutes start from December to February.

For the observation, the researcher took place in Semarang city. The researcher followed the participants activities during the academic class, communicate with the society, hangout with friends, and other activities that those two participants will do on December before the end of the semester.

Data and Data Sources

To take the data for this research, the researcher will take it from the document transcript interview. The transcript is a full answer of the international students at one of the universities in Central Java. While the data sources for this research will take from the online interview with international students at one of the universities in Central Java.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection methods used in this study were semi-structured interviews and observations. The researcher chose semi-structured interviews because this technique was neither fully formal nor informal, but rather combined elements of both approaches, allowing the interviews to develop into in-depth conversations. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to explore themes, meanings, and lived experiences while maintaining some consistency across participants. The interviews focused on the participants' experiences while maintaining a structured approach to ensure that all relevant topics were covered. Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to express their thoughts, experiences, and emotions regarding their social interactions and cultural adaptation.

Besides semi-structured interviews, the researcher also used observation to collect data. The observations were conducted for approximately two weeks. During this period, the researcher observed the participants' interactions in class, how they communicated with their friends, and the activities they engaged in with local communities and their surrounding environment at one of the universities in Central Java. The details of the interview and observation data are presented in the table below.

Table 1 The Interview and Observation Schedule

No	Instrument of Data Collection	Date	Participants	Research Site
1	Interview	Dec, 18th 2025	IA	Zoom Application
2	Interview	Dec, 19th 2025	DL	Zoom Application
3	Interview	Jan, 17th 2026	J	Zoom Application
4	Interview	Jan, 20th 2026	B	Zoom Application
5	Interview	Feb, 14th 2026	G	Zoom Application
6	Interview	Feb, 14th 2026	ME	Zoom Application
7	Interview	Feb, 15th 2026	MRP	Zoom Application
8	Interview	Feb, 15th 2026	AS	Zoom Application
9	Observation	Dec, 19th-25th 2025	DL	UNNES
10	Observation	Dec, 19th-25th 2025	IA	UNNES

Data Validity Techniques

In this study, the researcher used member checking to validate the data. This method was introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985), who defined member checking as one of the essential techniques for establishing credibility in qualitative research.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), member checking helped reduce misinterpretation, enhance accuracy, and strengthen the trustworthiness of qualitative studies. In this study, the researcher sent the findings and interpretations to all participants, who were international students at one of the universities in Central Java, so that they could review the results and confirm whether the interpretations accurately reflected their intended meanings and experiences. The participants were given an opportunity to provide clarification or corrections if any interpretation did not accurately represent their responses. This process helped ensure that the findings remained closely aligned with the participants' perspectives and strengthened the credibility of the study.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis used in this study was thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data. It enables researchers to capture both explicit and implicit meanings across participants' narratives, allowing for a rich and nuanced interpretation of the data. Thematic analysis was considered appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to explore participants' experiences and perceptions of social interaction and cultural adaptation in relation to their second language acquisition process. The researcher followed the six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Research Ethics

This study used research ethics to ensure that all participants were protected. Before conducting the interviews and observations, all participants received information about the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and their rights as participants. The researcher did not use their real names; instead, the researcher used their initials to make them feel more comfortable. All of the information was kept confidential and was used only for academic purposes. These ethical considerations were applied to ensure that the research process respected the participants' privacy, autonomy, and personal integrity.

3. Results

Social Interaction

The frequency of communication may influence the opportunities for international students to practice bahasa Indonesia in their daily lives. Therefore, the researcher analyzed the frequency of communication reported by the participants to identify how actively they interacted with people around them during their study at UNNES. The results of the interview are presented in Table 1

Table 1 Frequency of Communication

No	Participants	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	IA	✓			
2	DL		✓		
3	J	✓			
4	B			✓	
5	G	✓			
6	ME		✓		
7	MRP	✓			
8	AS	✓			

The findings show that participants who frequently communicated tended to have more opportunities to practice bahasa Indonesia in many situations. Through interaction with lecturers, classmates, and local people, they were exposed to different vocabulary, expressions, and communication styles used in everyday life.

Researcher also ask about the second question; "Would you share your experience when you and your interlocutor get confuse or misunderstand the meaning of the word when speak in bahasa Indonesia?". From the interview, researcher found that international students give the example on how they got confuse or misunderstand the word when they speak bahasa Indonesia. The finding is provided in the Table 2 Example of Confuse or Misunderstand.

Table 2. Example of Confuse or Misunderstand.

No	Participants	Pronunciation	Formal and Informal	Vocabulary
1	IA	✓		
2	DL		✓	
3	J			✓
4	B	✓		
5	G	✓		
6	ME		✓	✓
7	MRP	✓		
8	AS	✓		

Pronunciation difficulties are common among second language learners because learners often transfer pronunciation patterns from their first language into the target language. In the context of this study, participants explained that several Indonesian words sounded similar but carried different meanings. However, these experiences also became valuable learning opportunities because they helped students become more aware of the importance of accurate pronunciation in communication.

Based on the interview and observation results, the participants' responses toward feedback can be grouped into 3 categories; appreciation of feedback, practice and application, and language improvement. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Respond to Feedback

No	Participants	Appreciation of Feedback	Practice and Application	Language Improvement
1	IA	✓		✓
2	DL	✓		✓
3	J	✓		✓
4	B		✓	✓
5	G	✓		✓
6	ME	✓	✓	✓
7	MRP		✓	✓
8	AS		✓	✓

Based on the Table 3, one of the most common responses shown by the participants was appreciation toward the feedback they received. There are 5 international students who explained that they felt happy and grateful when lecturers, friends, or other people corrected their mistakes while speaking bahasa Indonesia. Those students are IA, DL, G, ME, and AS. J from Timor Leste gave his statement relate on appreciation of feedback during the interview session.

Extract 6 (J from Timor Leste)

"I am happy when I get feedback from others. You have to know that my bahasa Indonesia sound more natural after I get feedback from my lectures and friends. They help me to increase my skill. Thank you so much for those who help me."

Based on J's statement, it can be seen that he responded positively to the feedback provided by lecturers and friends. He stated that the corrections and suggestions he received helped him sound more natural when speaking bahasa Indonesia. The participant also expressed gratitude toward the people who continuously supported his learning process. This finding indicates that feedback was not perceived as something negative, but rather as encouragement that motivated students to continue learning bahasa Indonesia as their second language.

Similar experiences were also shared by IA, DL, G, and ME. These participants explained that they appreciated the willingness of Indonesian people to help them improve their bahasa Indonesia skills.

They felt that the feedback demonstrated care and support from their social environment. Such positive feelings encouraged them to participate more actively in conversations and reduced their anxiety when making mistakes.

Besides, appreciate the feedback, there are 4 participants who practice and applied the feedback, they are B, ME, MRP, and AS. Those students explained that after receiving feedback, they did not simply listen to the correction but actively practiced and applied the corrected forms in future communication. They believed that repeated practice helped them remember the language more effectively. This experience was described by B from Ghana.

Extract 6 (B from Ghana)

"After I get feedback, I respond it by repeated the word or the sentence that they help me. I mean, I think it is very important to make me not easy to forget the word. The result of it, my bahasa Indonesia is getting better."

From B's statement, it can be seen that he actively responded to feedback by repeating and practicing the corrected words or sentences. For him, repetition was an effective strategy to strengthen memory and improve language retention. Rather than immediately forgetting the correction, he consciously applied it in his daily conversations. As a result, he felt that his bahasa Indonesia gradually improved over time. A similar response was also found in the experiences of ME, MRP, and AS. These participants explained that they attempted to remember corrections and use them again in future interactions.

The interview findings also revealed that international students perceived feedback as an important factor that contributed to their language improvement. All participants explained that feedback helped them improve various aspects of bahasa Indonesia, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and overall communication skills. This experience was clearly explained by DL from Papua New Guinea.

Extract 6 (DL from Papua New Guinea)

"Yes, it improves my bahasa Indonesia skill. I am happy when my friends carry about my bahasa Indonesia. Also, you know, my bahasa Indonesia is getting better especially in grammar."

DL explained that feedback had a direct impact on her language development. She noticed that her bahasa Indonesia improved after receiving corrections and guidance from friends. In addition, she felt that her understanding of grammar became better through the feedback she received during daily communication. This finding indicates that feedback helped learners recognize language mistakes and gradually develop more accurate language use. Therefore, feedback functioned as an important learning resource that supported the participants' progress in acquiring bahasa Indonesia as a second language.

Cultural Adaptation

The findings revealed that international students adapted to Indonesian culture in various ways while still maintaining important aspects of their home culture. The adaptation process was reflected through four categories, namely adopting social norms, participating in local practices, maintaining cultural traditions, and maintaining cultural identity. The data was showed on the Table 4 below.

Table 4 Adaptation Process

No	Particip ants	Adopting Social Norms	Participating in Local Practices	Maintaining Cultural Traditions	Maintaining Cultural Identity
1	IA	✓		✓	
2	DL	✓		✓	
3	J	✓		✓	
4	B		✓	✓	
5	G	✓		✓	
6	ME	✓	✓	✓	
7	MRP		✓	✓	
8	AS		✓	✓	✓

The first category identified in this study is adopting social norms. There are 5 participants, namely IA, DL, J, G, and ME, demonstrated adaptation through adopting Indonesian social norms. This category was identified from participants' responses about following social behaviors and communication styles that are commonly practiced in

Indonesian society, such as smiling, greeting others, showing respect, and engaging in friendly conversations.

The findings indicate that adopting social norms played an important role in helping international students adapt to Indonesian society. By observing and practicing common Indonesian behaviors such as smiling, greeting others, showing respect, and engaging in friendly conversations, the participants were able to interact more comfortably with local people. At the same time, they did not completely abandon their own cultural backgrounds. Instead, they selectively adopted Indonesian social norms while maintaining important aspects of their original cultures.

The second category identified in this study is participating in local practices. 4 participants, namely B, ME, MRP, and AS, demonstrated adaptation through participation in local practices. This category was identified from participants' responses regarding their involvement in activities, habits, and practices that are commonly found in Indonesian society. Through active participation, the participants were able to experience Indonesian culture directly and become more familiar with local ways of life. The example of the interview answer can be seen below.

Extract 8 (ME from Sudan)

"People like to do things together, like eating together, working in groups, and joining events. So, I tried to do the same. When my Indonesian friends invite me to hang out together, I follow them. Yet, I also still use my culture like my clothes style and sometimes cook food from my home culture together with my international friends."

ME explained that one of the cultural differences he noticed in Indonesia was the strong sense of togetherness among people. He observed that Indonesians often eat together, work in groups, and participate in various social activities. Rather than distancing himself from these practices, ME chose to participate in them. He accepted invitations from Indonesian friends to spend time together and became involved in activities that were common in the local environment.

Similar findings were reported by B, MRP, and AS. B explained that he adapted to Indonesian culture by using common expressions such as *permisi*, *terima kasih*, and *maaf* in daily communication. Although these expressions may seem simple, they represent important cultural practices that reflect politeness in Indonesian society. Likewise, MRP participated in Indonesian food culture by trying various local foods such as *nasi goreng*, *pecel*, and *bakso*. Through these experiences, he became more familiar with Indonesian daily life and cultural practices.

The findings indicate that participating in local practices helped international students become more connected to Indonesian society. Through involvement in social activities, communication practices, and local food culture, the participants gained firsthand cultural experiences that supported their adaptation process. At the same time, they continued to maintain aspects of their own cultures, suggesting that participation in local practices did not lead to the loss of cultural identity. Instead, it enabled them to become part of the host society while preserving their cultural backgrounds.

The third category identified in this study is maintaining cultural traditions. Seven participants, namely IA, DL, J, B, G, ME, and MRP, demonstrated efforts to preserve cultural traditions from their home countries while living in Indonesia. This category was identified from participants' responses regarding their continued use of native languages, traditional foods, music, clothing, and cultural practices. Although they actively adapted to Indonesian culture, they also maintained traditions that helped them stay connected to their cultural backgrounds. The example of the interview answer can be seen below.

Extract 8 (J from Timor Leste)

"But I still keep my identity by using Tetum language when I call my family and friends from Timor Leste. I also still listen to Timor Leste music. So, I feel like I can be part of Indonesian society, but I still remember my culture."

J explained that he continued using Tetum when communicating with family and friends from Timor Leste. In addition, he regularly listened to music from his home country. These practices allowed him to maintain a connection with his cultural background despite living in a different cultural environment. At the same time, J participated in Indonesian society and interacted with local people in his daily life.

Interestingly, J's statement shows that adaptation and cultural preservation can occur simultaneously. Rather than choosing between his home culture and Indonesian culture, he embraced both. He adapted to Indonesian social life while continuing to practice cultural traditions that were meaningful to him. This finding reflects the idea that cultural identity can remain stable even when individuals are exposed to new cultural influences.

The findings indicate that maintaining cultural traditions played an important role in the participants' adaptation process. Through language, food, music, clothing, and cultural practices, international students were able to preserve meaningful aspects of their cultural backgrounds while living in Indonesia. These traditions helped them maintain a sense of cultural continuity and identity while simultaneously adapting to the host culture. Rather than creating barriers to adaptation, the preservation of cultural traditions appeared to support the participants in balancing both cultures in their daily lives.

The final category identified in this study is maintaining cultural identity. In this category there is only 1 participant who had an experience on cultural identity, she is AS from Egypt. This category was identified from AS explanation during the interview regarding the preservation of visible cultural markers, such as clothing, language, traditions, and personal characteristics that represented her cultural backgrounds.

Extract 8 (AS from Egypt)

"It is quite strange to do, but I think smile is the culture that I have to practice every day. I mean, Indonesians are very friendly. However, even though I follow Indonesian culture I still use my country culture during my study in Indonesia. For example, I use abaya in the class, but also, I respect Indonesian culture like I use batik in my formal activity."

AS explained that she adapted to Indonesian culture by practicing behaviors that she considered common among Indonesians, particularly smiling and expressing friendliness in daily interactions. Although she viewed this behavior as different from what she was accustomed to in Egypt, she made an effort to incorporate it into her daily life. At the same time, AS continued to wear an abaya, which represented an important part of her cultural identity. Interestingly, she also wore batik during formal activities as a way of respecting Indonesian culture.

The findings indicate that maintaining cultural identity was an important part of the adaptation process experienced by international students. Although participants made efforts to understand and follow Indonesian cultural practices, they also continued to preserve cultural elements that represented who they were.

Language plays an important role in this process because it allows individuals to participate in social interactions, build relationships, and understand the cultural values of the community around them. For international students, being able to communicate in bahasa Indonesia may influence how they see themselves within Indonesian society and how they are perceived by local people. The findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Feeling Part of Community

No	Partici pants	Community Membership	Social Acceptance	Confidence	Social Connection
1	IA	✓		✓	
2	DL	✓		✓	
3	J	✓		✓	
4	B		✓	✓	
5	G	✓		✓	
6	ME	✓	✓	✓	
7	MRP		✓	✓	
8	AS		✓	✓	✓

Based on Table 5, four themes emerged from the participants' responses, namely community membership, social acceptance, confidence, and social connection. The findings suggest that learning bahasa Indonesia influenced not only participants' ability to communicate but also their feelings of acceptance and connectedness within the local community.

The first theme identified in this study is community membership. The example of the interview answer can be seen below.

Extract 10 (IA from Pakistan)

"Definitely, I can say yes. My bahasa Indonesia is getting better day by day, that make me more confident to using bahasa Indonesia. The more I speak, the more I feel like I am part of the Indonesian community."

IA explained that learning bahasa Indonesia helped him feel more connected to Indonesian society. As his language ability improved, he became more confident in communicating with local people. This increased confidence encouraged him to participate more actively in everyday interactions, which gradually strengthened his sense of belonging to the local community.

The second theme identified in this study is social acceptance. The example of the interview answer can be seen below.

Extract 10 (B from Ghana)

"To be honest, sometimes yes. I feel like when I speak bahasa Indonesia, people will be happy and welcome me, so that makes me feel like I am part of the community."

B explained that speaking bahasa Indonesia often generated positive reactions from local people. He noticed that Indonesians seemed happy and welcoming when he attempted to communicate using their language. These responses made him feel more accepted and encouraged him to interact more frequently with the people around him.

The third theme identified in this study is confidence. The example of the interview answer can be seen below.

Extract 3 (IA from Pakistan)

"Definitely, I can say yes. My bahasa Indonesia is getting better day by day, that make me more confident to using bahasa Indonesia. The more I speak, the more I feel like I am part of the community, Indonesia."

IA explained that his growing proficiency in bahasa Indonesia increased his confidence in daily communication. As he became more capable of expressing his ideas and understanding conversations, he felt more comfortable participating in interactions with Indonesian people. This confidence encouraged him to use the language more frequently, which further strengthened his sense of belonging to the local community.

Improved language proficiency can increase confidence, while increased confidence encourages learners to participate in more interactions. Through this process, international students may gain additional opportunities to practice the language and develop stronger social relationships.

Interestingly, the findings shows that confidence was not developed solely through formal language learning. Instead, it emerged through everyday communication experiences. Positive interactions with local people helped participants become less afraid of making mistakes and more willing to use bahasa Indonesia in real-life situations. This process contributed to both their language development and their social adaptation.

The final theme identified in this study is social connection. This category was identified from participants' responses indicating that language learning strengthened their social interactions and increased their connectedness with the local community. The example of the interview answer can be seen below.

Extract 10 (G from Kenya)

"When I don't speak bahasa Indonesia, I just feel like I am a student from Kenya. However, when I speak bahasa Indonesia I feel like I am part of Indonesia. You know Pak Imam? He loves to talk bahasa Indonesia to me, and he make me adapt to Indonesian faster."

G explained that speaking bahasa Indonesia changed the way she experienced life in Indonesia. When she relied only on her identity as an international student, she often felt like a visitor from another country. However, when she used bahasa Indonesia in daily interactions, she felt more connected to the people around her and more involved in Indonesian society.

An interesting aspect of G's response is the role of social relationships in supporting language learning. She specifically mentioned Pak Imam, who regularly communicated with her in bahasa Indonesia. Through these interactions, G received opportunities to practice the language in authentic situations while also developing a closer relationship with a member of the local community. This finding suggests that social connections can support both language development and cultural adaptation.

During the interview and observation, international students explain on how they adapt to Indonesian culture. One of the culture shocks that they face is food.

International student explain that they need to adapt with the Indonesian food quite long rather than other culture shocks. Adapting with food in Indonesia make international student learn about some vocabularies related on food. The way Indonesian society introduce the food to the international students make them learn bahasa Indonesia naturally.

Beside food, international students also explain that language barrier make them need to adapt with bahasa Indonesia. Even though they speak English with classmate and lecturers, but not the same case as society around UNNES. Since most of the Indonesian, especially local society, they cannot speak English, so international student needs to learn as fast as they can. International students explain that they use sign language or google translate to speak with local society because of language barrier. This situation makes international students need to learn bahasa Indonesia.

Besides that, Indonesian lifestyle also became one of the culture shocks that international students face. Not only how to wear clothes but also how to speak. Most of the Indonesian love to speak slowly, easy to smile, and very polite. Moreover, the way they speak with someone older also realized by the international students. Since the moment international students know that most of the Indonesian do that, they try to follow what Indonesian do. They tried to wear more modest clothes, try to smile when they meet people, use polite gestures, and change the way they call someone older. This situation made them

feel like more into the local community. Furthermore, they feel like adapting with Indonesian lifestyle make them more natural when they speak bahasa Indonesia.

The findings also revealed four factors that contributed to participants' preference for interacting with international students, namely shared background, frequent contact, language barrier, and local integration. These findings indicate that while many participants adapted successfully to Indonesian culture, they still tended to feel more comfortable with fellow international students in certain situations.

Table 6. Separation Feeling

No	Participants	Shared Background	Frequent Contact	Language Barrier
1	IA	✓		✓
2	DL	✓		✓
3	J	✓		✓
4	B		✓	✓
5	G	✓		✓
6	ME	✓	✓	✓
7	MRP		✓	✓
8	AS		✓	✓

The first factor identified in this study is shared background. This category was identified from participants' responses regarding common experiences as international students, similar living situations, and mutual understanding of the challenges they faced while studying abroad. The example of the interview answer can be seen below.

Extract 11 (DL from Papua New Guinea)

"I think yes. There are some factors why I am closer with the international students. First, we are coming from the same background, we live together, we spend time together since beginning, also we have same program that make us always connected."

DL explained that she felt closer to international students because they shared similar backgrounds and experiences. As international students, they faced many of the same challenges, such as adapting to a new environment, learning Indonesian culture, and adjusting to university life. In addition, they lived together, spent time together regularly, and participated in the same academic program. These shared experiences created a strong sense of connection and understanding among them.

This finding suggests that common experiences can play an important role in forming social relationships. Since international students often encounter similar challenges while living abroad, they may find it easier to relate to one another. As a result, interactions with fellow international students can provide emotional comfort and a sense of belonging, particularly during the early stages of adaptation.

Similar findings were also reported by IA, G, ME, and AS. IA explained that he spent more time with international students after arriving in Indonesia, which naturally made him feel closer to them. Likewise, G stated that international students often spent time together, traveled together, and shared similar experiences as foreigners living in Indonesia. These shared experiences contributed to stronger social bonds among international students compared to their relationships with local students.

Common experiences, similar challenges, and frequent interactions contributed to stronger emotional connections within the international student community. As a result, many participants felt more comfortable communicating with fellow international students while still maintaining relationships with Indonesian students.

The findings indicate that frequent contact contributed significantly to participants' preference for interacting with fellow international students. Regular communication and daily interactions helped participants develop stronger social connections and a greater sense of comfort within the international student community. As a result, international students often became an important source of social support during their adaptation process in Indonesia.

Based on the finding from the interview and observation, the researcher revealed four themes related to participants' experiences of isolation, namely social inclusion, initial adjustment difficulties, language barrier, and adaptation efforts. The finding is presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Feeling Isolation

No	Participants	Social Inclusion	Initial Adjustment Difficulties	Language Barrier	Adaptation Efforts
1	IA	✓			
2	DL		✓		✓
3	J	✓			
4	B		✓	✓	
5	G	✓			
6	ME		✓	✓	✓
7	MRP	✓			
8	AS		✓	✓	✓

The first theme identified in this study is social inclusion. 4 participants, namely IA, J, G, and MRP, reported that they did not feel isolated or excluded during their study in Indonesia. This category was identified from participants' responses indicating that they had positive relationships with friends, classmates, and members of the local community, which helped them develop a sense of belonging. The example of the interview answer can be seen below.

Extract 13 (IA from Pakistan)

"No, I don't feel it. I really enjoy my time in Indonesia. I like my class, I like my relationship with others, I also like to communicate with others, so I never felt isolated."

IA explained that he never experienced feelings of isolation during his study in Indonesia. He enjoyed his academic environment, maintained positive relationships with people around him, and actively communicated with others. These experiences helped him feel comfortable and connected to the university community. This finding suggests that positive social relationships can play an important role in preventing feelings of isolation among international students.

Similar findings were also reported by J, G, and MRP. J explained that he had many friends and participated in various activities during his study at UNNES. Because of these social connections, he never felt isolated from either Indonesian students or fellow international students. Likewise, G reported that she was surrounded by kind friends who made her feel accepted and included. She stated that her friends never made her feel left behind, which contributed to her positive experience in Indonesia.

ME explained that he sometimes felt isolated when his classmates communicated in bahasa Indonesia or Javanese, particularly during informal conversations and jokes. Although he could use Google Translate or ask for clarification, constantly relying on these strategies was not always practical. As a result, there were moments when he felt excluded from conversations because he could not fully understand what was being discussed.

A similar experience was reported by DL. She explained that she felt isolated when she first arrived in Indonesia because she came from a different country and lived far away from her family. Being alone in a completely new environment was a challenging experience for her. However, she emphasized that these feelings gradually decreased as she became more familiar with her surroundings and developed relationships with other people. This finding indicates that feelings of isolation may be temporary and often occur during the early stages of cultural adaptation.

Likewise, AS reported experiencing feelings of being left out, particularly because of language difficulties. Since she had only recently arrived in Indonesia and was still learning Bahasa Indonesia, she sometimes struggled to understand conversations around her. However, she actively sought ways to improve her language skills, including learning new vocabulary through Indonesian television series. This finding suggests that participants did not simply accept feelings of isolation but actively looked for strategies to overcome them.

The third theme identified in this study is language barrier. The example of the interview answer can be seen below.

Extract 13 (AS from Egypt)

"Yes, I feel left out sometimes, may be because of language barrier. You know, I just move to Indonesia and my bahasa Indonesia is not that good, I still learn. Ow anyway, I also learn a lot of vocabulary from the series like 'Ipar Adalah Maut', this also help me to learn bahasa Indonesia."

AS explained that she occasionally felt left out because her bahasa Indonesia proficiency was still limited. As a newcomer to Indonesia, she was still in the process of learning the language and sometimes struggled to understand conversations around her. This situation made it more difficult for her to participate actively in social interactions, particularly when Indonesian students communicated using language that was unfamiliar to her.

This finding suggests that language proficiency plays an important role in shaping international students' social experiences. When learners have limited understanding of the host language, they may face difficulties joining conversations, expressing their thoughts, and developing closer relationships with local students. As a result, language barriers may create feelings of exclusion even when there is no intention to exclude them.

A similar experience was reported by ME. He explained that he sometimes felt isolated when his classmates used Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese during conversations and jokes. Although he could communicate using translation tools or ask for clarification, he was not always able to follow conversations naturally. Consequently, he occasionally felt disconnected from the interaction because he could not fully understand the meaning being conveyed.

The findings indicate that language barriers contributed to temporary feelings of isolation among some international students. Limited proficiency in bahasa Indonesia reduced their ability to participate fully in social interactions and understand everyday conversations.

The final theme identified in this study is adaptation efforts. This category was identified from participants' responses regarding the strategies they used to cope with challenges during their adaptation process in Indonesia. The example of the interview answer can be seen below.

Extract 13 (ME from Sudan)

"However, I still try to catch with them. I try my best to adapt with this kind of situation. You know, this is only the feeling because everything is a new for me."

Although ME occasionally felt isolated when his classmates used Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese, he did not withdraw from social interactions. Instead, he continued trying to understand conversations and adapt to the new environment. His statement demonstrates an awareness that feelings of isolation were part of the adjustment process rather than a permanent condition. This finding suggests that adaptation involves not only facing challenges but also actively responding to them.

Rather than viewing linguistic and cultural differences as barriers that could not be overcome, ME treated them as challenges that required continuous effort. His willingness to keep interacting with classmates despite communication difficulties indicates a proactive approach to adaptation. Such efforts may help international students gradually become more familiar with the host culture and reduce feelings of exclusion over time.

4. Discussion

Social Interaction in SLA

The findings suggest that social interaction provided an important context for international students to learn bahasa Indonesia through meaningful communication. Rather than being limited to formal classroom instruction, language learning appeared to occur through participants' everyday interactions with friends, lecturers, classmates, and local people. These interactions provided opportunities to practice the language and become familiar with vocabulary, pronunciation, and culturally appropriate ways of communicating.

The findings are broadly consistent with Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, particularly the role of interaction in facilitating second language development. Communication problems encouraged participants to clarify meanings and seek further explanations, reflecting the process of negotiation of meaning. Through this process, unfamiliar input could become more comprehensible and learners could pay greater attention to linguistic forms. Feedback from interlocutors also appeared to help participants notice and remember appropriate language use. Thus, communication, negotiation of meaning, and feedback were interconnected experiences that supported participants' language learning.

However, these findings should not be interpreted as evidence that social interaction directly causes SLA. As a qualitative descriptive study, the research describes how participants perceived and experienced language learning through interaction. The findings therefore suggest that social interaction appeared to support participants' language learning experiences rather than establish a direct causal relationship.

Cultural Adaptation in SLA Process

The findings also indicate that cultural adaptation and language learning were closely interconnected. Cultural experiences provided meaningful contexts in which participants encountered and used bahasa Indonesia. Rather than learning language independently from culture, participants appeared to develop linguistic and cultural knowledge simultaneously through participation in Indonesian social life.

This finding highlights that second language learning involves more than acquiring vocabulary or grammatical knowledge. Participants also developed awareness of how bahasa Indonesia was used appropriately in particular social contexts. Their adaptation to Indonesian ways of communicating, including politeness and interactional practices,

suggests that cultural participation supported the development of communicative awareness.

The findings can also be interpreted through Berry's acculturation framework. Participants' engagement with Indonesian cultural practices while maintaining important aspects of their home cultures demonstrates characteristics of integration. However, these experiences should not be reduced to predetermined acculturation categories. Integration involves both engagement with the host culture and maintenance of the heritage culture, and the participants' experiences suggest that these processes could occur simultaneously.

Similarly, maintaining close relationships with fellow international students should not automatically be interpreted as separation. International-peer relationships may provide social and emotional support while participants continue to engage with Indonesian society. Likewise, temporary feelings of isolation do not necessarily represent marginalization because participants continued to make efforts to participate in Indonesian social life and maintain their cultural identities. These findings suggest that acculturation experiences are more complex than a simple movement from one cultural orientation to another.

Social Interaction, Cultural Adaptation, and SLA

The relationship between social interaction, cultural adaptation, and SLA appears to be reciprocal. Social interaction provided opportunities for participants to use bahasa Indonesia, negotiate meaning, and receive feedback. At the same time, developing familiarity with bahasa Indonesia appeared to support their confidence and willingness to participate in further social interactions.

Cultural adaptation similarly created opportunities for language learning because participation in Indonesian social and cultural practices provided authentic contexts for language use. In turn, increased familiarity with bahasa Indonesia appeared to make participants more comfortable participating in Indonesian society. Therefore, social interaction and cultural adaptation did not function as separate processes but appeared to reinforce participants' experiences of learning bahasa Indonesia.

This reciprocal relationship represents an important finding of the study. Language learning supported participants' social participation, while social and cultural participation created further opportunities for language learning. The findings therefore suggest that SLA among international students should be understood within the social and cultural environments in which language use takes place.

Practical Implications

The findings have practical implications for universities hosting international students. Universities could provide structured opportunities for interaction between international and Indonesian students through peer-buddy programs, Bahasa Indonesia conversation activities, intercultural orientation, and local-community engagement. Such programs could provide authentic opportunities for language practice while also supporting cultural adaptation and social belonging.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. The small number of participants and single-university setting limit the transferability of the findings. Observation was conducted with only two participants, and the researcher's familiarity with these participants may have introduced potential researcher bias. In addition, participants' reported improvement in bahasa Indonesia was based on their perceptions because the study did not include direct language proficiency measurements.

Future research could involve larger and more diverse samples across different universities and cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Longitudinal studies could also examine how social interaction, cultural adaptation, and language development change over time. In addition, combining qualitative data with direct Bahasa Indonesia proficiency measures could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social interaction, cultural adaptation, and second language development.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, the researcher concludes that international students perceive social interaction and cultural adaptation as important factors that help them learn bahasa Indonesia as their second language. Social interaction with friends, lecturers, and local society provides them with opportunities to practice the language in real situations.

Through communication, negotiating meaning, and receiving feedback during interactions, they are able to improve their bahasa Indonesia and speak more fluently and naturally. They also gain a better understanding of how to use vocabulary appropriately in different contexts.

In addition, cultural adaptation supports their language learning process by helping them understand Indonesian cultural norms in communication. For example, they learn when to use formal and informal language, how to speak politely to older people, and how to communicate using friendly expressions, such as smiling and using polite gestures. In conclusion, social interaction and cultural adaptation play a significant role in supporting international students' acquisition of bahasa Indonesia during their study in Indonesia.

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