



EXPLORING NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS OF INDONESIAN ACADEMIC RETURNEE: EXPECTATION VS REALITY

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ABSTRACT

Academic returnees have become a trending issue recently. One issue concerns the reported challenges when they returned to their home country and re-integrated into their academic environment. This research aims to better understand the Indonesian academic returnee returning to the Indonesian academic sphere, particularly the returnee who teaches English in higher education. This study is grounded under narrative inquiry. Narrative interviews with four English lecturers, three women, and a man, were used to unpack their challenging experiences. The present research shows two types of challenges faced by Indonesian academic returnees, academic and social culture. Concerning academic culture, the returnee often experienced different conceptions of the current English language teaching methods. Social culture is closely related to their inconvenience of being on-time and disciplined persons. This research is expected to provide more nuanced about the challenges of academic returnees re-integrating into the academic milieu.

Keywords: narrative accounts, Indonesian academic returnee, reverse culture shock

INTRODUCTION

Academic returnees are defined as people who study abroad to get their degree and then return to work in their home country (Conway et al., 2012). Research has reported that academic returnees often experienced difficult situations re-integrating into their home country. Xu (2009), for example, shows that Chinese academic returnees, particularly those who possess a Western Ph.D. degree, often experienced conflictual conditions due to different conceptions of academic credentials. In the context of Turkey, Karakaş (2020) also demonstrates that Turkey's returnee scholars are often dissatisfied with the local educational values in which the institutions, programs, and colleagues often disregard their global values and skills obtained during overseas educational training. In many cases, Turkey's academic returnees are often despair due to the administration work and academic work, which are not relevant to their global competencies and skills.

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Another research conducted by Ai and Wang (2017), through his self-reflection, identifies that he was struggling to re-adapt his origin culture as a Chinese returnee. He often felt depressed, angry, and lonely in his office for two years after return (Ai, 2019). In addition, Ma and Pan (2015), in their study about the social challenges of Chinese academic returnees, found that many returnee scientists and scholars complain of high pressure, such as the high expectations of the returnee. The noticeable factor is that many Chinese academic returnees often feel that they face difficulties re-adapting the academic system and academic culture when they return to their home country (Lei, 2020). In addition, the significant challenges faced by Chinese returnees are recognized as lacking in-depth understanding of China's culture, inappropriate knowledge transfer, and their competitive counterpart (Hao et al., 2016).

Besides the challenges faced by Chinese academic returnees, Vietnamese academic returnees also experienced similar situations in that they often facing difficulties in working adaptation (Hoang & Ho, 2019). Meanwhile, American returnees often feel that the cultural and social interactions of the host country are more familiar compared to their home country after their return (Haines, 2013). In addition, Japanese returnees also face personal readjustment. They often felt social awkwardness, shyness, depression, insecurity, alienation, and speech anxiety. They also experienced teasing and bullying after return (Szkudlarek, 2010, Ono, 2018). In the Indonesian context, Rifai & Thamrin (2020), using an autoethnographic approach in their study, indicate that academic reverse culture shock is noticeable for Indonesian academic returnees re-integrating into their academic sphere.

Tracing back to the motivation of individuals pursuing higher degrees overseas, Cebolla-Boado et al. (2017) indicate that enhancing the labor market and career positioning are the most prevalent factors for Chinese students studying overseas. In addition, Green et al. (2015) assert that cultural, social, and economic capital is the orientation of Australian students participating in study abroad. Belhadi & Ayad (2017) show that Malian students, as academic sojourners, perceive that they will receive excellent jobs when they are back to their home countries after studying abroad. Hence, studying abroad from the viewpoint of academics is very beneficial for their future careers. They also said that the better conditions of the host country are a consideration for Malian students to study abroad.

Besides cultural, social, and economic capital as a primary orientation for overseas education, educational quality and English language acquisition are also significant determinants for sojourners to pursue higher degrees overseas. Korean sojourners believe that they will receive a better education when they could study in the UK. A more specifically, they thought that their English proficiency would improve significantly, and they believe that the British education system will be less problematic than the Korean education system. As a result, Korean sojourners leave their home country to get a better education by studying abroad (Moon, 2011). Furthermore, Chinese sojourners also speculated that their foreign language skills would be increasing when they are studying abroad, and they could get a better job in the future (Sánchez et al., 2006). Besides, Chinese students also feel dissatisfied with the English proficiency they get from their homeland, which is why they chose to study abroad (Click, 2016). In addition, Brazilian students' biggest motivation to study abroad is to improve their English. They realize the benefits of the cultural experience of studying abroad that make them intend to study overseas (Foster, 2014).

Although academic sojourners see the positive and supportive environment to study and find a new job, they incline to return to their home country after their studies. Fanmeng (2018) shows that family, economic, and cultural aspects are prominent factors for sojourners returning to China. However, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, when academic sojourners return to their home country, they often face various challenges that possibly disrupt their positive perception of the values of studying overseas. This research, therefore, seeks to explore Indonesian academic returnees' experience re-integrating into their academic, particularly returnees who teach the English language at Higher Education.

METHOD

This research is grounded under narrative inquiry as a research design. In this regard, CSU (2019) writes that narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for research through storytelling. In addition, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) assert that the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world. Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Moreover, they explain that narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through collaboration between researcher and participants.

On the other hand, Creswell et al. (2007) said that narrative research studies the life experiences of individuals over time. Narrative research is a type of research that consists of obtaining and then reflecting on people's lived experiences (Josselson, 2007). Since this research utilized participant's stories based on their life experience, a narrative inquiry was chosen as the research design. The participants told about their experiences when they returned, like their burdens. From the story, the authors could understand the challenges faced by the participants. The research question is "What academic returnees challenge the experience of English language lecturers, and what strategies do they use to deal with their challenges?".

This research used narrative accounts of Indonesian academic returnees who teach the English language at Higher Education. Initially there were eight participants willing to get involved in the research, but due to unforeseen situation, four participants withdrew from their participation without any notification. In other words, the participants' accessibility is the ultimate reason of selecting the participants. The participants were four English lecturers who completed their degrees overseas. The first author interviewed them through the WhatsApp application and selected voice notes as the primary means to record and get the information from the respondents. WhatsApp was chosen because of the pandemic of COVID-19 that not allowed people to gather around to reduce the spreading virus. The data was validated by using triangulation participants and supported by using probing questions.

Table 1. Subjects' profile

No.	Name	Degree & Study program	University	Country
1.	Ani	Ph.D. in Cultural Studies	University of Sydney	Australia
2.	Vita	Master in TESOL	Saint Michael College	United State
3.	Komar	Master in TESOL and Linguistics (Double degree)	Southeastern University	United State
4.	Novi	Master in TESOL	University of Birmingham	United Kingdom

*All names are anonymized

There are several steps for data analysis. First, the first author interviewed respondents one by one at different times. She interviewed through the WhatsApp application and selected voice notes as the primary means to record and get the information from the respondents. WhatsApp was chosen due to the pandemic of COVID-19 that not allowed people to gather around to reduce the spreading virus. The participants are coming from different cities, two of the respondents stayed in Makassar, and the other stayed in Bekasi, while the first author lives in Surabaya. One respondent chose to write down the answer during the interview, while other respondents were happy to be interviewed via voice note. The data collected from the interview through WhatsApp's voice note was transcribed verbatim. The first author listened to the voice note many times while typing it into a word document. After that, she listened again to the voice note and re-read the transcription to ensure that what she typed was correct. The next step is that the data is sorted according to the research question. The first author read and re-read several times to get the highlight of the data. Then, she sorted the highlights based on the research question. Finally, the data was analyzed and concluded to be presented in the results and discussion section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis showed that there are two prominent challenges of Indonesian academic returnees re-integrating into their home universities. These challenges were primarily about academic and social-cultural aspects.

The challenges of applying teaching methods in Professional Academic Environment

The data finding shows several hinder factors to apply the teaching method that academic returnees expect to use when returning. The factors are facilities and infrastructure and learning sources. Thus, factors did not support their plans to teach in an 'overseas' method. One of the interviewees, named Vita, for instance, said that she could not be creative like her training when she studied overseas than in her home university. The reason is the lack of infrastructure and the facilities in her home university and limited source of learning.

Extract 1.1

Vita: *... when I was there (overseas), I felt I really could be really creative and made the atmosphere of learning so fun because of the infrastructure and facilities there are complete and have a lot of learning resources to supports my teaching plan and have many facilities to prepare the lesson and it is free. (Vita, personal interview)*

However, another interviewee named Ani said that some of her teachings plan works and some do not. It is caused by the lecturers' belief that they do not know same each other. In addition, Vita, for instance, said that many of her lesson plans did not work because of the financial support. She has to pay a lot of money to bring a handout for each student. She has 40 students in one class, and she has several classes to teach. To deal with it, the participants try another method that suits their home university facilities.

Another participant named Novi teaches students how to be critical and how to write in structural sentences. Novi explained that her teaching method did not work in the

beginning. For example, Novi required her students to write structural paragraphs. However, the students did not understand what Novi means about structural paragraphs. Her students just stay quiet and do not know what they will do with the instruction given by Novi. Therefore, Novi often repeats her explanation until her students understand.

Besides the challenges to applied teaching methods, the data analysis found that Indonesian academic's burden is the differences experienced between overseas culture and Indonesian culture.

Challenges in Academic Culture

Apart from the academic environment, respondents faced reverse culture shock in academic culture as well. One of the interviewees named Komar assumed that his method, particularly the method which depends on the lecturer, is successfully applied in his class. However, he has some challenges to make it. The challenges are the lack of awareness in literature and the characteristic of the students. Regarding lack of awareness in literature, Komar's students do not read the book that he recommended to read, as a reference, before the class began, and they lack critical thinking.

Extract 2.1

Komar: *First is critical thinking because critical thinking is not our habit, so when I open the discussion section in the class, I hope I get many questions from students, but it does not happen. That also happened when I suggest my students read several books before our class begins; some of them just read, some do not read. The second is discipline. Some of the students often come late to my class. (Komar. Personal interview)*

Komar used a quiz before the class began to deal with his situation, so his students will come earlier to get extra points from the quiz. Through the quiz, Komar hopes that working students who are often late become on time and are not late anymore.

In a similar vein, one of the respondents named Novi speculated that the most challenging factor to apply her plan is the characteristics of the students, mainly their laziness. Novi believes that there are no stupid students, yet there are lazy students. She shows that many students lack the motivation to increase their quality. The students expect their lecturers to feed them with no effort to search for knowledge by themselves. Furthermore, Novi assumed that Asian's academic culture always gave students without any questions. So, the students just receive the knowledge from the lecturer. This condition can be associated with the anecdotal evidence in Asia that teachers are expected to be a moral model who should be able to taking good care of the students (Zhou et al, 2008). To make her students active and have more excitement in their studying, Novi said she gave her students presents to get the best result. In addition, she often gave her students motivations to raise student's learning spirit. She shared her authentic experience about her who is not rich, not that smart, but could study abroad and get her overseas degree. Besides her authentic experience, she shared about others' stories who are competent in education.

Challenges in Social Culture

Besides the hinder factors and academic culture faced by Indonesian academic returnees, reverse culture shock in social culture is one of the challenging experiences that Indonesian academic returnees have to face. Ani, for example, was faced social and daily activity culture shock when she returned from her study abroad. When she was in Australia, the day-to-day needs price was always stable, and the garbage collector always took the trash on time. In Indonesia, she was surprised caused of the daily needs price is not stable, and the garbage collector, sometimes, did not take the trash so that the waste

will pile up for several days. On the other hand, Ani has shocked social culture as well. In Australia, people live individually without having attention to someone's personal life, but in Indonesia, people around her often talk about somebody's personal life in their back.

Extract 3.1

Ani: *In Australia, I don't have any problem with electricity, water, garbage, and the price of daily needs. (Ani. Personal interview)*

Extract 3.2

Ani: *Since I was used to living in Sydney as an individual, I was a little surprised by the gossiping mothers. (Ani. Personal interview).*

Furthermore, Komar and Novi were shocked about the characteristics of Indonesian, particularly about discipline. Komar illustrated that he was not used to riding motorcycles when he returned, so he rented a car to drive him anywhere. Unfortunately, the car rent was always late to pick him up. The driver took an hour until two hours to come to the pick-up point. This situation did not happen once or twice but habitually. Although his lack of punctuality, the driver did not regret it and assumed it was an everyday habit. All participants have a similar way of dealing with their challenges regarding social culture. They try to accept and re-adapt their home country's culture, and they know that it is all a matter of time to become "normal" again. Li (2020) shows that Chinese' returnees need at least three years to re-establish in academic environment.

The data above shows several challenges that experienced by academic returnees based on their narrative interview. Academic returnees have obstacles applying the insight they obtain from abroad into their home universities, such as educational administrations, various teacher beliefs, financial support from universities, the lack of infrastructure and facilities, and limited resources. Regarding the obstacles of applying the teaching plans, returnees were not satisfied with the learning sources and university facilities. Karakaş (2020) showed that academic adjustment being a burden for academic returnees. Moreover, the university's lack of facilities and learning resources affects the lecturers' academic performance and eventually impacts the quality of the outputs (Singh & Singh, 2014 and Kolber & Rice, 2019).

On the other hand, the same way of teaching from generation to generation, the laziness of students, and the lack of awareness of literature are the main reasons for a challenge in academic culture. Furthermore, Indonesian academic returnees faced reverse culture shock in social culture as well. They are disciplines, gossiping, and behavior of garbage collectors. However, reverse culture shock is one of the challenges faced by academic returnees. Intercultural reintegration is primarily an issue from the interviewee, such as the people's attitude of discipline and the social environment. This type of reverse culture shock is the intercultural identity that academic returnees had when they went back to their home country. This idea is supported by Haines (2013) that returnees have a "multi-cultural identity" that they get from living abroad in temporal time and the unsuccessful to re-adapt their home culture (Lei et al., 2020).

On the other hand, respondents need to deal with their challenges to successfully re-adapt their homeland culture. Respondents used several strategies based on their challenges. One of the respondents used to call the memories when she was living abroad through friendship with the foreigner in her home village. However, almost all respondents did similar strategies. The strategy is being patient and accepting the fact of their home culture. This strategy also shows in Alkubaidi & Alzhrani's (2020) journal. In their journal, their respondents did to be patient about their environment and try to understand it.

CONCLUSION

This research indicated that Indonesian academic returnees have challenges applying teaching methods in Indonesian universities in their first year as lecturers. They have many obstacles to use their "expect-method." The obstacles are academic administration, financial, incomplete facilities and infrastructure, and limited sources. Moreover, they faced challenges in their personal lives and academic culture, and social culture. The burden that they have in academic culture is unaware of literature, students do not have the critical thinking, and the method of "conventional teaching" that being students' mindset. Concerning social culture, Indonesian academic returnees faced intercultural identity that did not successfully transform to national cultural identity yet. They complained about disciplines, like did not being on time and did not queue and about social activity, such as gossiping about mother and the compliance with regulations, such as inconsiderate on the road. Based on their challenges, Indonesian academic returnees have their strategies to deal with them. They are patient about their environment and try to understand their social culture and improve their personal insight.

This study suggests that there should be a preliminary departure training for sojourners which concerned with the issue of reverse culture shock. By this way, it is expected that academic returnee will be more prepared when they re-integrate into their academic environment. In addition, an analysis of results from this study also suggests that the home universities should recognize and provide a more space for the returnee to transform their global values into Indonesian academic sphere so that it can help support the Indonesian Government's orientation of internationalization of higher education.

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