

Exploring Cross Cultural Understanding of an Indonesian Student Learning Abrod in Pakistan: A Narrative Inquiry

Aulia Dzulqoidah¹, Desy Rusmawaty², Ventje Jany Kalukar³

Universitas Mulawarman

e-mail address: aulia.dzulqoidah304@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The number of words in the abstract is 150-250 words and comes with several keywords. This narrative inquiry study explores the experiences of an Indonesian student who studied abroad in Pakistan. This research aims to investigate the cross-cultural understanding of an Indonesian student studying in Pakistan through a narrative inquiry study. The study seeks to comprehend how their educational journey in a foreign country influences their perceptions of different cultures and how they navigate the process of cross-cultural adaptation. The study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews and reflective journal entries as primary data sources. Thematic analysis reveals that the student faced challenges such as culture shock, language barriers, and discrimination. However, the overall experience was positive, leading to a profound understanding of Pakistani culture and society. The study highlights the positive impact of intercultural experiences on personal growth, self-discovery, and the development of skills for effective collaboration with people from diverse cultures. The findings suggest avenues for further research, including enhancing intercultural competence, promoting effective collaboration in multicultural teams, managing culture shock, addressing stereotypes and misconceptions, fostering personal growth, and designing study abroad programs this research aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on cross-cultural understanding and adaptation among international students.

Keywords: Narrative inquiry, Culture Shock, understanding Pakistani culture, Study abroad.

BACKGROUND

In the ever-evolving global landscape, studying abroad has emerged as a pivotal undertaking for students, offering a precious opportunity to immerse themselves in the vibrant tapestry of diverse cultures and expand their horizons beyond the confines of their native societies. However, for international students, this immersive experience in an unfamiliar milieu can be a daunting endeavor, as they often grapple with the disorienting effects of culture shock in both academic and non-academic settings, posing a formidable challenge to their academic and personal pursuits. Furthermore, as Milton (2005) observes, the severity and magnitude of culture shock tend to increase with prolonged exposure to a foreign culture, exacerbating the difficulties faced by international students.

Therefore, the process of studying overseas involves dealing with culture shocks that can significantly impact the lives of international student. Apart from the academic benefits, studying abroad also promotes cultural immersion and language proficiency (Larrinaga & Amurrio, 2015; Moore, 2016, as cited in Gong et al., 2021). Education abroad encompasses various aspects, such as language acquisition, living arrangements with host families or in dormitories, internships, and community service (McKeown, 2009, p. 12, as cited in Costello, 2015). These experiences contribute to personal growth and facilitate the development of cross-cultural understanding and adaptation. Sri Hartiningsih (2017) highlights the significance of comparative analysis of societal aspects, particularly women's actions, across diverse cultures, to establish connections between different societies. Effective communication with individuals from other cultures necessitates not only overcoming language barriers but also comprehending their cultural values.

This research aims to investigate the cross-cultural understanding of an Indonesian student studying in Pakistan through a narrative inquiry study. By exploring the experiences of this student, the study seeks to comprehend how their educational journey in a foreign country influences their perceptions of different cultures and how they navigate the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

The exchange of knowledge and ideas on a global scale has transformed international education, attracting students from diverse cultural backgrounds to pursue educational opportunities in foreign countries. As students embark on this cross-cultural journey, they encounter new languages, customs, and social norms, requiring them to adapt and navigate unfamiliar territories. Understanding the experiences of international students and their process of cross-cultural adaptation is crucial for educational institutions and policymakers in facilitating successful integration and providing adequate support systems.

To accomplish this, the study will employ a narrative inquiry approach, focusing on the personal stories and lived experiences of an Indonesian student learning abroad in Pakistan. By adopting this approach, the study aims to delve into the unique journey of the student, exploring the challenges they face, their personal growth, and the strategies they employ to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural understanding and adaptation. The research questions guiding this study are twofold: *Firstly, how does the experience of an Indonesian student learning abroad in Pakistan shape their cross-cultural understanding? Secondly, what are the students' experiences of cross-cultural adaptation?* By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on international education, with a specific focus on the interplay between culture, education, and personal development.

This research explores the experiences of an Indonesian student studying abroad in Pakistan. The study aims to understand how this experience has influenced the student's perceptions of different cultures and their way of adapting to a new culture. The study uses a narrative inquiry approach, focusing on the student's personal stories and lived experiences. By adopting this approach, the study aims to investigate the student's unique journey, explore the challenges they faced, their personal growth, and the strategies they used to adapt to a new culture.

The two guiding research questions for this study are:

- How has the Indonesian student's experience of studying abroad in Pakistan shaped their intercultural understanding?
- What experiences have the student had in the process of intercultural adaptation?

By answering these questions, the study aims to contribute to existing knowledge on international education, with a specific focus on the interaction between culture, education, and personal development. Gain valuable insights into the diverse nature of intercultural understanding and adaptation, which can inform educational institutions and policymakers in creating inclusive and supportive environments. In conclusion, this study aims to contribute to increased knowledge about intercultural understanding and adaptation among international students. Through a narrative inquiry study of an Indonesian student studying abroad in Pakistan, the study seeks to uncover transformative experiences, challenges, and strategies used in navigating the complexities of intercultural understanding. The findings of this study can provide benefit in the form of insights and recommendations for educational institutions, policymakers, and support systems to promote successful intercultural integration and enhance the educational experiences of international students.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research design for this study is narrative inquiry, which was formally recognized as a research method in 1990 when Connelly & Clandinin coined the term. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach that explores the fundamental role of storytelling in human nature, allowing individuals to comprehend their own experiences and contribute to our understanding of sense-making. The perspectives of Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou (2008) and (Riessman, 2008) further support the significance of narrative inquiry. By seeking first-person stories or narratives from participants, researchers aim to gain a deeper understanding of their life experiences. This approach has gained recognition in recent decades and offers a valuable means to explore the complex and nuanced nature of individual narratives (Sharan B. Merriam, 2015).

The participants in this study were undergraduate students enrolled in their third year at the International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan. The primary data collection method used in this qualitative research study was interviews. The author conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with the participants, including the specific participant named Aina. The interviews were designed to gather qualitative data directly from the participants. During the interviews, the researcher used an interview guide that contained a list of open-ended questions and was adopted by (Sobkowiak, 2019). The interviews were conducted using a digital platform, specifically a Google Form shared via WhatsApp. This allowed for convenient and remote participation, accommodating the language preference of the participants by providing the questions

in both Bahasa and English. The responses provided by the participants were collected through the online form for further analysis.

DISCUSSION

A. FINDING

Results and discussion are written in the same section. Write down the main results / findings in the research which are then followed by discussion or discussion based on relevant reference sources. Writing the results and discussion can be completed with tables or graphs that are used as a reference in writing.

The findings of this study were presented by employing the generated themes. The findings are represented as follows:

Expectations

Aina, currently in her third year at the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan, is an international student pursuing a four-year bachelor's degree. She made a conscious decision to study in Pakistan, fully embracing the country's culture and educational atmosphere. When reflecting on her journey and the fulfilment of her study abroad goals, Aina recollects the following experience:

'Yes, absolutely. It's been my dream since I was in senior high school to continue my study abroad. I feel like when i study abroad, it will increase my point of view and it develop how i see the world. And it's true, now i feel i found the new me by such experiences that i received for these few years living in Pakistan. I really do achieve my goals when i study abroad, just like what I've imagined and planned before.'

Aina, who had aspired to study abroad since high school, expresses her belief that she has successfully attained her goals associated with studying in a foreign country. She emphasizes the transformative effect of her time spent in Pakistan over the past few years, highlighting how it has broadened her perspective and allowed her to develop a new understanding of the world. Aina feels that her experiences abroad have enabled her to discover an altered version of herself, closely aligning with her initial visions and plans. While a comprehensive analysis would require more specific details, Aina's statements reflect her confidence in accomplishing what she set out to achieve through her study abroad journey.

Intercultural experience

Researchers inquire about the interactions with locals and foreigners during her time studying abroad, Aina responds by stating the following:

"As long as i live and study here, i always interact with locals and other foreigners. I always being interactive in my class since day 1, always make a friend and socialize with my classmate even it is locals or other foreigners such as Somalians, Afghanis, Chinese, Thais and other else. And they're also happy for knowing me. Me and my humble makes everything easier to socialize with others. I ever had an Afghani roommate, her name is Hashima. She was so nice and kind, she was my senior here. Our relationship is good, we always help each other whenever one of us gets sick, or needed any help. It was so nice to meet her"

She emphasized that throughout her time living and studying abroad, she actively engaged with both locals and individuals from different nationalities. From

the very beginning of her classes, she enthusiastically participated, forming friendships and socializing with her classmates, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Aina mentioned specifically connecting with people from Somalia, Afghanistan, China, Thailand, and more, and expressed satisfaction in knowing that her classmates also appreciated her presence. Furthermore, she highlighted her close bond with her roommate, Hashima, who was from Afghanistan and a senior student. Aina described their relationship as positive and supportive, as they were there for each other during sickness or whenever assistance was needed. Aina concluded by expressing her gratitude for meeting Hashima and the wonderful experiences they shared.

Overall, Aina's account showcases her proactive approach in engaging with diverse individuals, her ability to form friendships across cultures, and the meaningful connections she established during her intercultural journey. When it comes to working on assignments on campus, there are indeed some differences in how we work and communicate compared to other settings. Aina Narrating her experience:

“Oh of course, in campus we always got an assignment to work together as a team between locals and foreigners. And it is a bit challenging. Yes, I do notice the difference on how they work, they communicate. It's important to always divide the assignment equally for each member. Cause some of them are super active and interactive, and some of them are super introvert and passive so we need to explain details what they need to do, and it is fun working with them as a team.”

She recognized that these projects presented unique challenges, particularly in terms of the different work styles and communication approaches of the two groups. Understanding the importance of ensuring equal participation, Aina emphasized the need to divide the assignment fairly among team members. Some individuals were highly active and interactive, while others were more introverted and passive. To promote clarity, Aina and her team made a conscious effort to provide detailed explanations of each member's responsibilities.

During their collaborative efforts, Aina observed that cultural factors played a significant role in shaping communication patterns. It was not simply a matter of language proficiency, but rather how cultural influences affected the way team members interacted. Some individuals tended to assert themselves strongly, while others preferred a more reserved approach. To address this challenge, Aina and her team aimed to create an inclusive environment. Aina took the initiative to have a thoughtful conversation with one of her teammates, expressing her observations and concerns. She stressed the importance of equal participation and the value of considering diverse perspectives.

Aina's teammate received her feedback positively, showing gratitude for raising the issue. They acknowledged their unintentional dominance in conversations and expressed a genuine desire to address the situation. Together, the team members agreed to foster an inclusive atmosphere where everyone's ideas would be heard and valued. They implemented a structured approach during team meetings, ensuring that each member had the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions before making decisions. This approach aimed to create a fair and collaborative working dynamic, where no individual's ideas were overshadowed.

Throughout the project, the team maintained open and honest communication, addressing any challenges arising from cultural differences. By actively engaging in dialogue and working towards a more balanced and inclusive environment, they successfully bridged the gaps and created a cohesive team atmosphere.

culture shock, Cultural knowledge, diverse lifestyles, similarities and differences with Indonesia

'First, about the culture. As long as I live here, I could see a bit of their cultures such as always using ethnic clothes called "Shalwar Kameez", It is like every time you see Pakistani people everywhere and every time, they use that "Shalwar Kameez" as their clothes. No matter what happened. It is rare to see them using other model of clothing.'

Aina's experience of culture shock upon arriving in Pakistan revolved around the distinct cultural practices she encountered. She immediately noticed the prevalent use of traditional attire called "Shalwar Kameez" among the local people. It seemed that Pakistani individuals consistently donned this ethnic clothing, regardless of the situation or occasion. This stark contrast to the diverse fashion styles she was accustomed to in Indonesia caught her attention and contributed to her culture shock. However, instead of feeling alienated or resistant to the new cultural norms, Aina embraced the local clothing and fully engaged with the vibrant Pakistani fashion culture.

"And also, I've known that Pakistani girls and ladies are rare to go outside from their home. It is strict and almost impossible for them to go outside without their mahrom (husband, brother, or father, or uncle). Most of the time they spend only at home. Since that culture, it is rare for me to see a girls hang out together to the malls, cafes, restaurants. They will go outside with their families. It is different from my own country, Indonesia".'

Another aspect that surprised Aina was the limited mobility of Pakistani women. She observed that they rarely went out alone and were typically accompanied by a male guardian. This cultural practice, called purdah or pardah, was a new experience for Aina, who was used to more freedom for women in her home country. Aina was deeply touched by the warmth and generosity of the Pakistani people. Aina recalled: *"The local people are so precious and kind, kindest that I've ever known. They love to help us as a foreigner whenever we feel lost somewhere, they will direct us."*

They were always ready to assist her as a foreigner, whether she was lost or visiting someone's home. These interactions helped Aina feel more comfortable in her new environment. The food culture in Pakistan was a pleasant surprise for Aina, she said:

'They love to serve everything whenever we go to their houses, they will serve the best food that they could. The food is nice, i like to go down the street and taste their street food. I really love Sheekh Kabab, Biryani rice with Raita, Chicken Karahi, Chicken Tikka, and else. It tastes SOOO good. There are no nightlife habits, since Pakistan is Islam country, it is haram to drink alcohol here. Everything here would be inside a path of Islam.'

Aina was pleasantly surprised by the food culture in Pakistan, where she discovered a strong inclination to serve a wide variety of delicious dishes whenever guests visited someone's home. She thoroughly enjoyed immersing herself in the vibrant street food scene, indulging in flavoursome delights like Sheekh Kabab,

Biryani rice with Raita, Chicken Karahi, Chicken Tikka, and more, all of which left a lasting impression due to their exceptional taste.

Furthermore, Aina acknowledged the cultural influence of Pakistan being an Islamic country, which played a significant role in shaping various aspects of daily life. She noted that the absence of a nightlife culture and the prohibition of alcohol consumption, in line with Islamic principles, were key characteristics of the cultural practices and lifestyle in Pakistan.

In summary, Aina's experience with the food culture in Pakistan brought her great pleasure, as she encountered a strong tradition of serving delicious food when visiting people's homes. She enthusiastically explored the diverse street food offerings, relishing in the Flavors of dishes like Sheekh Kabab, Biryani rice with Raita, Chicken Karahi, and Chicken Tikka. Aina also acknowledged the cultural impact of Pakistan's Islamic identity, which influenced aspects such as the absence of nightlife and the prohibition of alcohol consumption. Aina admitted that the stay abroad helped them reject some stereotypes: "*Pakistan is a conflict and unsafe country.*" The following narratives:

'God blessings. Yes, it is, I always heard the rumours and stereotypes ever since i haven't come here, the stereotypes that says. I've found the answer here. It is not totally true, yet not totally false also. Because of it is true that in the borders of Pakistan and other country it is strict and there are many guns there. Even whenever we travel across Pakistan, there would be a securities and policemen that accompany us until we arrived to the destination.'

Aina expressed her perspective on the prevailing stereotypes and rumours she had heard about Pakistan before actually visiting the country. She mentioned that there were often misconceptions surrounding Pakistan, and she had the opportunity to personally explore and understand the reality during her time there. Aina acknowledged that while some aspects of the stereotypes held truth, they were not entirely accurate, nor entirely false. She specifically highlighted the strictness and presence of security and guns at the borders between Pakistan and other countries.

Aina also mentioned that when traveling across Pakistan, there was a notable presence of security personnel and policemen who accompanied them until they reached their intended destination. Reflecting on her study abroad experience, Aina acknowledged encountering moments of culture shock. The differences in clothing, limited mobility for women, the absence of a vibrant nightlife, and heightened security challenged her preconceptions and expanded her understanding of Pakistani culture. Ultimately, Aina learned to embrace and appreciate the diverse world we live in.

Cultural different and adaption

Aina, initially feeling different, unfamiliar, and somewhat overwhelmed, embarked on a journey of self-discovery when she arrived in Pakistan. Aina stated:

"Yes of course, I have stated above that it feels different between life in Pakistan and my own country. Since every country has their own characteristic and unique things that they have. The way people dress I've mentioned above. It might be difficult at first, moreover when i just came over here as a new student. But as the time flies, I could finally adapt and enjoy every inch moment i live here. Cause it never repeat for twice. Now, in my third year living in Pakistan, I feel enjoy and happy for the way Pakistan be."

Beyond the cultural and food differences that led to culture shock, she sensed a distinct separation from her own country. The way people dressed, as she mentioned earlier, served as a constant reminder of the cultural disparities she faced. As a new student in an unfamiliar land, she found it particularly challenging to adapt. However, with the passage of time, Aina gradually acclimated to her new surroundings. Day by day, week by week, and month by month, she immersed herself in the vibrant tapestry of Pakistani life. Each passing moment brought something novel and unfamiliar, evoking a blend of trepidation and exhilaration as she navigated through uncharted territory.

Now, after three years have elapsed since her arrival, Aina's perspective has undergone a remarkable transformation. She not only adapted to her surroundings but also developed a deep appreciation for them. The aspects that once felt strange and foreign now bring her joy and a sense of admiration. Aina has come to embrace the unique characteristics of Pakistan, recognizing their contribution to the rich cultural fabric of the country. Aina acknowledges that every country possesses its own special charm and a distinctive way of life. Pakistan, with all its complexities and idiosyncrasies, has become an integral part of her personal journey. Reflecting on her experiences, she realizes that the initial struggles she encountered were stepping stones that propelled her personal growth and self-discovery.

In her third year in Pakistan, Aina finds herself enveloped in contentment and happiness. She has learned to seize each moment, understanding that it will never be repeated. Aina's narrative serves as an exemplification of the power of adaptation and the resilience of the human spirit in finding joy and fulfilment in unexpected places. As she reminisces about her early days in Pakistan, Aina can't help but smile at the remarkable transformation she has undergone. She has evolved from a hesitant newcomer to a confident individual who wholeheartedly appreciates and embraces the beauty of Pakistan. Her story stands as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of embracing new experiences.

Aina also narrating about her experienced about behaviours from the local people, and she said:

Yes, I did, but as long as we understand the main thing; that everyone is created different, we certainly have a difference, it is a certain thing that we face every day we socialize with other people, especially with local Pakistani people. I didn't try to analyse since u have the mindset that I've mentioned before. "

She understood the inherent diversity among individuals and the importance of accepting these differences. However, she did not actively analyse or seek to understand the reasons behind their actions due to her predetermined mindset. Aina recognized the individuality of the local Pakistani people she interacted with, even without conducting a thorough analysis. While she didn't delve into the underlying motivations, she acknowledged that their behaviours were influenced by their unique cultural perspectives and identities. Although she missed the opportunity for personal growth and cultural learning through analysis, Aina still observed and learned from the behaviours, gaining insights into the cultural nuances specific to Pakistan. Despite her choice not to analyze, Aina respected the differences and engaged with the local community, reflecting an open-minded and accepting approach. While she may have missed a deeper understanding, her willingness to interact and appreciate the diversity demonstrates her acceptance of individual differences.

Conflicts and Resolving Differences: Dealing with Divergent Norms, Beliefs, and Values

Aina had issues with her roommate, as she said in her narrative when talking about an experience in her study:

"I ever did, face such problem with my own roommate, the afghani girl. we have a certain difference in religion thing. She questioned why did I choose Islamic Studies, meanwhile she thought that it is useless to study that subject in university, she stated that it is better to choose another carrier-goal subject, like hers; it was International-Relations. Peacefully, I answered her opinion with my own opinion. But with no offense, instead of debating, we prefer like some discussion. Difference is beauty as long as we have a good mindset along with it. That is how i solve my problem on facing the difference, by tolerance, and respect each other, with no offense at all."

Aina encountered a challenge with her roommate due to their differing religious beliefs. The roommate questioned the practicality of Aina's decision to pursue Islamic Studies as opposed to a more career-oriented field like International Relations. Despite this disparity, Aina responded in a composed manner and opted for a constructive conversation rather than an argument.

This situation shed light on the clash between Aina's religious viewpoint and her roommate's perspective. The roommate expressed scepticism about the value of studying Islamic Studies in college and favoured a subject with more tangible career prospects. Rather than reacting negatively, Aina embraced the diversity of opinions and resolved the issue through tolerance and respect. Aina's approach emphasized the significance of open dialogue and mutual comprehension. She acknowledged that everyone holds unique beliefs and viewpoints. Instead of escalating the disagreement, Aina chose to foster a positive mindset and engage in peaceful discussions.

Aina also shares her personal experience regarding feeling uneasy in the presence of someone with unconventional behaviours, opinions, beliefs, conventions, or values.

she shared her experience below:

'No, I did not. God blessings, with building and developing such mindset as I've mentioned above, it could make me living within a difference by peacefully. '

Aina denies having the mindset mentioned earlier, but expresses gratitude for the potential benefits of developing such a mindset. Aina believes that by cultivating this mindset, she can lead a more peaceful life and navigate differences more effectively. The mention of divine blessings highlights her spiritual perspective in seeking personal growth. Overall, Aina hopes that adopting this mindset will enable her to peacefully coexist with those who have differing views or behaviours.

Aina discussed how people typically respond when they come across behaviour's that contradicts their cultural norms. She also explored the potential effects of encountering unfamiliar values, beliefs, and norms on an individual's self-reflection, perception, and ability to understand different cultures. Saying:

" Since I've mentioned above i have such mindset, i never face this difficulty to face something strange or different. Cause what we have in mindset, would lead us into a certain way of living. "

Aina's response reflects her personal experience and perspective when faced with behaviours that goes against her cultural norms. She acknowledges that her

mindset enables her to handle unfamiliar or different situations without difficulty. This mindset, as previously mentioned, guides her in leading a specific way of life. When encountering foreign or strange values, beliefs, and norms, Aina indicates that it serves as a catalyst for introspection and self-analysis. She suggests that these encounters prompt her to reflect on her own values, beliefs, and norms and how they shape her perception of others.

Aina, a curious and open-minded individual, embarked on a journey to an unfamiliar country. With a desire to embrace the local culture, she engaged in conversations with both locals and foreigners she encountered. Aina approached each encounter without judging or evaluating others based on their appearance, values, beliefs, or behaviour's. She embraced the diversity she encountered, recognizing the value in the differences as opportunities for personal growth.

Aina became more involved in the local community, she realized her acceptance went beyond mere tolerance. She found beauty in the various appearances, values, beliefs, and behaviours she encountered, appreciating the authenticity they brought to her interactions. Aina fostered an atmosphere of acceptance and respect, forming connections with individuals from diverse backgrounds and finding common ground despite their dissimilarities.

Throughout her journey, Aina remained steadfast in her commitment to diversity and acceptance. She understood that celebrating differences could contribute to a more inclusive society. Aina's experiences with both locals and foreigners reinforced her belief in understanding, appreciating, and accepting others without prejudice as essential for harmonious coexistence. In addition, Aina's experiences taught her that normality is subjective, and what truly matters is treating others with kindness, empathy, and an open heart.

Aina's also response to the question shows that she has a *non-judgmental* attitude towards other cultures. She doesn't see the people she meets as different from herself, and she doesn't believe that one culture is superior to another. She simply accepts people for who they are, and she enjoys learning about their cultures.

Aina's use of the phrase "*they are just they are*" shows that she doesn't see the people she meets as being strange or abnormal. She simply accepts them for who they are, without making any judgments about them. This is a very important attitude to have when interacting with people from different cultures, as it allows us to learn from each other and build bridges of understanding. Aina's statement that she "*enjoys living with them*" also shows that she has a positive attitude towards other cultures. She doesn't see living with people from different cultures as being a challenge or a burden. Instead, she sees it as an opportunity to learn and grow.

This is a very valuable attitude to have, as it allows us to see the world through new eyes and to appreciate the diversity of human experience. In addition, Aina's narrative shows that she is an *open-minded* and *accepting* person. She doesn't judge people based on their appearance, values, beliefs, or behaviour. She simply accepts them for who they are, and she enjoys learning about their cultures. This is a valuable attitude to have, as it allows us to build bridges of understanding and to create a more peaceful and accepting world.

Aina, also expresses that her interactions with both locals and foreigners have not influenced her perspective or approach towards otherness. She emphasizes that:

"Of course not. especially I'm living in Pakistan, Islam country. It is impossible to find alcohol, free sex life, nightlife, or anything against my own religion here. Instead of change anything of my opinion on my religion, it is more like developing what i have

inside the religion, it makes it stronger and stronger. My mind is becoming wiser than before, cause everything that happen here lead me into developing my religious strength."

Regarding the narrative analysis, several themes can be derived from Aina's response: Influence of religious and cultural context: Aina's viewpoint is melded by the prevailing Islamic environment in Pakistan, where there is a strong adherence to Islamic values and a lack of acceptance for behaviours or lifestyles that deviate from those values.

Limited exposure to diversity: Aina's exposure to individuals who express themselves in unconventional ways, same-sex couples, people from different religious denominations, or those with differing political orientations is limited due to the cultural and religious climate in Pakistan.

Strengthening of religious beliefs: Aina's encounters within her conservative environment act as reinforcement, strengthening her existing religious beliefs and leading to personal growth and an increased perception of wisdom.

Changes in attitudes, views and behaviour

Aina's self-consciousness regarding her metamorphosis is evident from her narration. Her time studying abroad in Pakistan has not only cultivated patience but also fostered self-reliance, both of which are positive traits. Sharing further details, Aina explains,

"As I mentioned earlier, I have finally discovered a new version of myself since studying abroad in Pakistan. My experiences here have made me realize that I am just a human who needs God by my side. I have come to understand that I cannot make any plans except with His guidance. This mindset has become deeply ingrained in my mind and heart, allowing me to live a life filled with peace and blessings. I no longer complain about the difficulties I face. Prior to coming to Pakistan, my old self was plagued by overthinking, pessimism, and constant negativity. However, since my time in Pakistan and throughout these six semesters of study, I have transformed into a new version of myself that is more relaxed, free from overthinking or negative thoughts. It is a state of peacefulness and blessings from God."

Aina, a young woman who has been studying abroad in Pakistan for six semesters, has learned a great deal about herself during this time, leading to a newfound perspective. Before arriving in Pakistan, Aina struggled with overthinking and had a pessimistic outlook. She was constantly worried about the future and always expected the worst. Additionally, she found it challenging to let go of control and often tried to meticulously plan every aspect of her life.

The study conducted by (Shu et al., 2017) supports the notion that personality traits influence individuals' adaptation to new cultures. Specifically, individuals with extroverted and conscientious traits are more likely to adjust easily compared to introverts. Extroverts' inclination towards seeking social interactions and experiences contributes to their smoother adaptation, whereas introverts tend to withdraw from unfamiliar situations.

However, Aina's experiences in Pakistan have challenged her previous way of thinking. She has personally witnessed the power of faith and the importance of living in the present moment. She has also learned to let go of some of her worries and to trust that things will work out in the end. As a result of these changes, Aina has become a much more relaxed and positive person. She is no longer burdened by constant

worries and is able to fully embrace and enjoy life. Moreover, she has developed resilience and can face challenges without being overwhelmed by negativity.

Aina attributes her shift in mindset to various factors. Firstly, she has learned to rely more on her faith. She firmly believes that God has a plan for her life and will guide her through any difficulties she encounters. Secondly, she has learned the importance of living in the present moment, recognizing that dwelling on the past or worrying excessively about the future is futile.

Finally, she has realized the need to let go of control, accepting that not everything in life can be controlled and that she must embrace things as they come. Aina's transformation serves as a powerful reminder that personal growth and change are possible for everyone. By letting go of old thought patterns and being open to new experiences, we can all evolve into the individuals we are meant to be.

B. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study do answer the research questions. The research questions were as follows:

1. *How does the experience of an Indonesian student learning abroad in Pakistan shape their cross-cultural understanding?*

Aina's experience in Pakistan has significantly influenced her cross-cultural understanding in multiple ways. Firstly, it exposed her to new cultural norms and values, contributing to the development of a more nuanced worldview. Secondly, it challenged her preconceived cultural assumptions, leading to personal growth and self-discovery. Lastly, it provided her with opportunities to interact with people from diverse cultures, fostering a more open-minded and accepting attitude.

For instance, initially, Aina found it difficult to comprehend why Pakistani women were expected to dress modestly and were not allowed to go out alone. However, as she gained more knowledge about Pakistani culture, she began to appreciate the reasons behind these norms. Furthermore, she learned to question her own assumptions about Pakistani culture, including the misconception that all Pakistani people are religious extremists.

2. *What are the students' experiences of cross-cultural adaptation?*

Aina's cross-cultural adaptation experience in Pakistan has been a mix of challenges and rewards. She encountered various difficulties such as culture shock, language barriers, and differences in social norms. However, she also reaped several benefits, such as forging new friendships, acquiring knowledge about a new culture, and personal growth.

For instance, upon her arrival in Pakistan, Aina initially experienced culture shock, feeling overwhelmed by the stark contrast in culture and language. She also missed her family and friends back home. However, with time, she gradually adapted to her new environment and started embracing her experiences. She made new friends, immersed herself in Pakistani culture, and even took the initiative to learn Urdu.

In summary, Aina's experience as an Indonesian student learning abroad in Pakistan has played a significant role in shaping her cross-cultural understanding. It exposed her to new cultural perspectives, challenged her assumptions, and fostered an open-minded outlook. Moreover, her journey of cross-cultural adaptation, although

accompanied by challenges, ultimately resulted in personal growth and a deeper appreciation of the differences between her own culture and Pakistani

Aina's narrative provides valuable insights into the study abroad experience and the intercultural interactions she encountered in Pakistan. Her story highlights the importance of engaging with diverse individuals and embracing cultural differences. Aina's proactive approach in forming friendships and establishing connections demonstrates the positive impact of intercultural experiences on personal growth and self-discovery.

One notable aspect of Aina's experience is her ability to navigate challenges in working on assignments with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. She emphasizes the importance of equal participation, communication, and creating an inclusive environment. This demonstrates the need for cultural sensitivity and effective teamwork skills when collaborating with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Aina's encounter with culture shock sheds light on the differences she noticed in clothing, limited mobility for women, and the influence of Islam on daily life. Her acceptance and appreciation of these cultural differences showcase her open-mindedness and willingness to embrace new experiences. Aina's positive attitude and respect for the local culture contribute to meaningful connections and a deeper understanding of Pakistani society.

Furthermore, Aina's ability to reject stereotypes and challenge preconceptions about Pakistan is noteworthy. Her experiences have allowed her to see beyond the stereotypes and understand the complexities of the country. Aina's acceptance and appreciation of Pakistani culture have contributed to her personal growth and have enabled her to form a more nuanced perspective. Aina's adaptability and growth mindset have been pivotal in her study abroad journey. Her willingness to embrace differences and learn from diverse experiences has transformed her into a more relaxed and positive individual. Her focus on faith, living in the present moment, and letting go of control demonstrates the importance of personal growth and self-reflection in adapting to new environments.

Overall, Aina's narrative provides valuable insights into the study abroad experience, intercultural interactions, and personal growth. Her story serves as a reminder of the transformative power of embracing diversity, challenging stereotypes, and cultivating a positive mindset. Aina's journey exemplifies the potential for intercultural experiences to broaden perspectives, foster meaningful connections, and shape individuals into more open-minded and accepting global citizens.

CONCLUSION

Aina's study abroad experience in Pakistan has been a life-changing one. She has learned to be more open-minded, accepting, and adaptable, and she has developed a deeper understanding of Pakistani society and culture. She has also learned to navigate culture shock and to appreciate the uniqueness of each culture. Her story highlights the importance of engaging with people from different cultures and embracing cultural differences. She has learned to reject stereotypes about Pakistan and to find a balance between acknowledging the challenges and recognizing the misconceptions.

The author also suggests that further research on the study abroad experience and intercultural interactions could focus on the following areas: the impact of study abroad on intercultural competence, how to collaborate effectively in multicultural teams, how to manage culture shock and adaptation, how to address stereotypes and

cultural misconceptions, the benefits of study abroad for personal growth and self-reflection, intercultural learning strategies in education, and how to design and evaluate effective study abroad programs. This research would help us to better understand the study abroad experience, its influence on individuals' intercultural development, and its potential for fostering global citizenship.

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