



Culture Shock and Heritage Return

(A Case Study of Students of Indonesian-Japanese Descent at an International High School)

**Aliffati Muarifa^{1*}, Djoko Saryono², Shirly Rizki Kusumaningrum³, Adi Atmoko⁴,
Radeni Sukma Indra Dewi⁵**

¹⁻⁵ Department of Master's Program in Indonesian Language Education for Speakers of Other Languages,
Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia

*Penulis Korespondensi: aliffati.muarifa.2402158@students.um.ac.id

Abstract. Globalization has increased the mobility of international students, who often experience culture shock while studying in a new environment. This study aims to analyze the culture shock experienced by a Japanese student of mixed heritage (mother is an Indonesian citizen, father is a Japanese citizen) who is studying at an international high school in Malang. This study employs a single qualitative case study approach, with the participant selected through purposive sampling based on his firsthand experience adapting to a new cultural and educational environment. Data were collected through a single semi-structured interview conducted in Indonesian and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, encompassing data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results revealed three main aspects of culture shock experienced by the participants. Linguistic culture shock included difficulties learning and writing Indonesian, understanding academic material, understanding peer slang, and adjusting to the speaking pace of conversation partners. Sociocultural culture shock included differences in food, eating habits, toilet use, punctuality, and the culture of waiting in line. Educational system culture shock included differences in grading systems, school activities, and classroom participation.

Keywords: Cultural Adaptation; Culture Shock; Educational System; International Students; Sociocultural Culture Shock.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of globalization has significantly increased cross-cultural interaction around the world. Globalization has made national borders increasingly open, making it possible for more intensive exchanges of people, information, and culture to take place (Widianti, 2022). As a result, activities that were previously limited to the national level have now expanded beyond national borders (Hafizah, 2023). One phenomenon arising from this situation is the increasing mobility of individuals from one country to another across various aspects of life, including education (Suciawati et al., 2025).

International mobility in the field of education has become one of the most prominent forms of intercultural interaction. Many students choose to pursue their education abroad to gain a broader academic experience, expand their international networks, and learn about different cultures and educational systems (Jin et al., 2024). This phenomenon is reflected in the steadily increasing number of international students worldwide. Data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics shows that more than 6 million international students were studying outside their home countries in 2021, indicating a high level of global educational mobility (IOM, 2024). Indonesia is also a popular destination for international students. Foreign students can be found at various educational institutions in Indonesia (Mustofa & Defiana, 2024). The presence of international students not only enriches the academic environment but also fosters

more intensive cross-cultural interactions within the educational setting (Kılınç, 2025). One educational institution that accepts international students is an international high school in Malang. The school aims to become a globally competitive educational institution and provides opportunities for students from various countries to pursue their education there. The presence of international students contributes to the development of a multicultural learning environment within the school (Ahmed & Shahzeb, 2024).

One of the international students enrolled at the school is from Japan. Interestingly, the student was born in Indonesia to parents of different nationalities, with an Indonesian mother and a Japanese father. However, he has lived and grown up in Japan since the age of three. As a result, his Indonesian language proficiency and cultural connection to Indonesia have gradually weakened. This background makes his experience theoretically relevant to the concept of a Third Culture Kid, which refers to an individual who spends a significant portion of their formative years outside the culture associated with one or both of their parents (Waal et al., 2020). Thus, their experience of returning to pursue education in Indonesia has the potential to reflect not only the culture shock typically experienced by international students, but also the dynamics of a “heritage return” accompanied by a dilution of their native language and culture (Černigoj et al., 2024).

Moving from one country to another often presents challenges in the process of cultural adaptation. One common phenomenon experienced by individuals in such situations is culture shock. Culture shock refers to the disruption or difficulty experienced in various aspects when what is familiar in one’s home country feels different from what is encountered in a new environment (Maizan et al., 2020). Pedersen (1995) explains that culture shock occurs when individuals encounter significant differences in values, norms, and cultural practices compared to their culture of origin.

In the field of intercultural communication, one of the most frequently cited theoretical models for explaining the phenomenon of culture shock is the model proposed by (Oberg, 1960). Oberg describes culture shock as the adjustment process that individuals experience when entering a new cultural environment that differs from their own. This process is often characterized by feelings of confusion, tension, and uncertainty when confronted with unfamiliar value systems and cultural practices, as reflected in various aspects of an individual’s life in their new environment, including communication, social interaction, and daily routines. Japanese students studying at the school may also experience these challenges. Differences in communication styles, social norms, educational systems, and daily habits between Japan and Indonesia have the potential to create various challenges in the process of

cultural adaptation. These differences can lead to feelings of awkwardness, confusion, or stress as students adjust to their new environment. Several previous studies have examined the phenomenon of culture shock among international students in Indonesia. Mustofa and Defiana (2024) found that international students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta experienced culture shock due to differences in time, climate, culture, and communication patterns. Faizin and Isnaini (2020) reported that South African students studying in Malang encountered culture shock related to local social norms and practices, including limited access to alcoholic beverages, smoking in public spaces, and sensitivities surrounding race, ethnicity, and religion. In addition, Nur et al (2021) found that participants in the Darmasiswa BIPA program experienced culture shock related to Indonesian eating habits, local cuisine, the hospitality of Indonesian people, and the social acceptance of women riding motorcycles.

Many studies have examined culture shock among international students. However, most of these studies have focused on college students and learners of Indonesian as a foreign language at the higher education level. This is evident in a systematic review Pitriyani et al (2024) which summarizes various studies on culture shock and social adaptation strategies among international students in Indonesia, all of which were conducted in a higher education context. Meanwhile, research on culture shock experienced by international students at the secondary education level remains limited. Studies specifically examining culture shock among Japanese students in Indonesia are also still very rare.

This research gap becomes even more significant because some international students may have backgrounds as Third Culture Kids or be experiencing a “heritage return.” Theoretically, the experience of culture shock among individuals with such backgrounds may differ from that of international students in general, as they possess cultural ties, cross-national life experiences, or specific expectations regarding the cultures they encounter. Nevertheless, studies on culture shock within the frameworks of Third Culture Kids and heritage return remain very limited, particularly in the context of education in Indonesia.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies not merely in providing additional empirical data on culture shock, but in demonstrating that culture shock and heritage return, although often treated as separate constructs in the literature, can occur simultaneously and mutually shape one another within a single individual’s adaptation process. By documenting a case in which linguistic, sociocultural, and educational adjustment intersects with the weakening and subsequent reclamation of a heritage identity, this study extends the predominantly host and home culture binary found in existing culture shock models, such as those proposed by Oberg (1960) and Pedersen (1995), to account for situations in which the

host culture is also ambiguously a heritage culture. This perspective offers a more nuanced theoretical lens for understanding adaptation among Third Culture Kids and heritage returnees, a population that remains largely absent from culture shock scholarship in Indonesia, which has focused almost exclusively on international students with no previous cultural or familial connection to the host country.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the culture shock experienced by a Japanese high school student studying in Indonesia. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's experience and to provide a contextual description of this phenomenon within an educational setting.

The participant was selected using purposive sampling, which involves intentionally selecting participants based on criteria relevant to the research objectives. The participant in this study is a Japanese high school student studying at an international high school in Malang. The participant was born in Indonesia to mixed-nationality parents—an Indonesian mother and a Japanese father. He lived in Indonesia until the age of three before moving to and settling in Japan, where he acquired Japanese citizenship. The participant briefly returned to Indonesia at around the age of six, but by that time, his ability to speak Indonesian had almost completely faded. This background places the participant in a position that is theoretically relevant to the concept of a Third Culture Kid (TCK)—an individual who spends most of their formative years outside the culture of one or both parents' nationality, thereby forming a cultural identity that is not entirely tied to any one specific culture (Waal et al., 2020).

The selection of this case was based on theoretical considerations, as a single-case study can be used to examine cases that are rare, rich in information, and difficult to find in a general context. The participants are students of Japanese and Indonesian descent who grew up in Japan, experienced a decline in their Indonesian language proficiency, and then returned to Indonesia to pursue secondary education. This profile combines three conditions that are rarely studied together: Third Culture Kids, the erosion of a heritage language, and returning to the country of heritage during the secondary school years. Unlike research on culture shock in Indonesia, which generally focuses on international students without prior cultural or linguistic ties, this case allows for an examination of experiences in which the host culture is simultaneously the heritage culture. Therefore, participants were selected purposefully based on their theoretical relevance, rather than to represent international students in general.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews in Indonesian to explore the participants' experiences of culture shock within the school environment. The participants' proficiency in Indonesian at the time of the interviews was limited and still required improvement; therefore, the researcher needed to take this into account as a factor that could potentially affect the depth and accuracy of the data obtained. The researcher used simple sentences, repeated or clarified questions, or occasionally switched to English when participants had difficulty understanding. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allowed the researcher to explore participants' experiences in depth while maintaining flexibility throughout the interview process. This approach also enabled participants to express their views freely and describe their experiences in detail. The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and were audio-recorded with the participants' permission. Before the interviews took place, participants provided informed consent and agreed to voluntarily participate in this study. Since the participants were students under the age of 18, consent was also obtained from their parents or guardians before data collection began.

The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction was conducted by selecting and focusing on interview data relevant to the research objectives. The reduced data were then organized and presented in tabular form to facilitate the identification of patterns and themes. In this process, the researcher performed thematic coding to identify recurring patterns in the participants' responses. The codes derived from the interview data were then grouped into broader themes representing the participants' experiences with culture shock.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, the researcher conducted member checking by confirming the interview results with the participants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations accurately reflected the participants' experiences.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were obtained from an interview with a Japanese student attending an international high school in Malang. Data analysis was conducted through interview transcription, coding, categorization, and identification of main themes. Through this process, the participant's experiences with culture shock were categorized into three main aspects: linguistic, sociocultural, and educational system culture shock. These categories were derived from the coding of the interview transcripts, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the Coding of the “Cultural Shock” Theme.

Theme	Aspect	Interview Transcript
Cultural Shock in Language	Difficulties in Learning Indonesian	<i>“When I was 6 years old, I actually visited Indonesia once, but I had already forgotten about it by then. I had forgotten Indonesian and couldn’t speak in Indonesian.”</i>
	Difficulty understanding the language in academic materials	<i>“I can introduce myself in Indonesian, but I still have difficulty understanding specialized vocabulary, particularly scientific and academic terminology.”</i>
	Difficulties in Writing in Indonesian	<i>“I’ve always learned through spoken language. Spoken language is words, right? Not through notes. That’s why it’s easier for me to express my opinion or say something. So when it comes to writing, it’s hard.”</i>
	Peer slang	<i>“Because people here often abbreviate their words like that. For example, “Y” means “yes,” and “G” means “no.” So at first I was confused, because my mom doesn’t know slang.”</i>
Sociocultural Shock	Speaking speed	<i>“Here, people speak quickly. It’s different when I speak, the speed is different. The speed of Indonesian is different from that of Japanese.”</i>
	Food	<i>“So many fried foods. I was surprised. Everything is fried. That’s because over there, a lot of things are boiled or grilled. But here, even snacks are fried, and even side dishes are fried.”</i>
	Eating habits	<i>“Here, it’s all on one plate. One plate has rice, a side dish, vegetables, and another side dish. Over there, they’re served separately. This is for the side dish, this is for the soup, and this is for the rice.”</i>
	Toilet	<i>“The toilet has a dry toilet. It has a bidet.”</i>
A Cultural Shock in the Education System	Punctual	<i>“I find Japanese people generally more punctual. In contrast, Indonesians tend to have a more relaxed and flexible attitude toward time.”</i>
	Queuing Culture	<i>“There should be a line, but here there isn’t a line.”</i>
	Assessment system	<i>“Here, it’s easy to get good grades, in my opinion. Because over there, for example with the minimum passing grade, if the grade is low, well, they just let it slide.”</i>
	School Activities	<i>“There are lots of activities here. It’s not just about lessons.”</i>
	Student Participation	<i>“In my opinion, Indonesian students are more active in class. For example, when the teacher asks a question, they are usually not shy about responding, asking questions, or expressing their opinions. In contrast, students in Japan may think more carefully before speaking because they consider many factors. Even when they have a good opinion, they may choose to keep it to themselves or share it only with their friends rather than with the whole class.”</i>

Language Culture Shock

Language emerged as one of the main sources of culture shock experienced by the participants. It is natural for people entering a new environment to experience language culture shock. These challenges included difficulties in learning Indonesian, understanding the language in academic materials, writing in Indonesian, the slang used by peers, and the speed of speech.

Difficulties in Learning Indonesian

The participants were born and raised in Indonesia and used Indonesian to communicate until the age of three. However, after living and growing up in Japan, their proficiency in Indonesian declined significantly. “When I was 6 years old, I actually visited Indonesia once, but by then I had already forgotten it. I had forgotten Indonesian and couldn’t speak in Indonesian.”

This statement indicates that early exposure to a language is not sufficient to maintain proficiency when the language is not used for an extended period. This finding provides empirical evidence of heritage language attrition, a phenomenon commonly experienced by Third Culture Kids. Although the participant had direct ties to Indonesia through her mother and family background, the interruption of Indonesian language exposure from the age of three resulted in an almost complete loss of proficiency. Consequently, the participant had to relearn Indonesian from the beginning upon returning to Indonesia. In preparation for entering high school in Indonesia, she began relearning the language with her mother, who is a native speaker of Indonesian. “My mother started training me to use Indonesian but mixed with Japanese.” This strategy reflects an informal language learning process through daily interactions. However, the simultaneous use of two languages also indicates that the participant is still in the early stages of mastering Indonesian.

Difficulty Understanding Language in Academic Materials

“I can introduce myself, but specialized language for example, scientific language or subject-specific terminology is still hard to grasp.” This evidence points to a gap between everyday communication skills and academic language proficiency. The participant is capable of basic communication but still struggles to understand the terminology and linguistic structures used in classroom instruction. Difficulties in understanding Indonesian in an academic context remain evident, as reflected in the following statement.

“When the teacher presents the material. I understand this part, but suddenly I don’t understand this part, so I don’t understand any of it.” This statement indicates that participants struggle to follow the flow of instruction delivered in formal and academic language. When one part is not understood, it affects the participants’ comprehension of the entire lesson.

Difficulty Writing in Indonesian

“I’ve always learned through speaking. Speaking is about words, right? Not through notes. That’s why it’s easier for me to express an opinion or say something. So when it comes to writing, it’s hard.” Participants also experience difficulty writing in Indonesian. This

statement indicates that a learning process focused on oral communication has led to underdeveloped writing skills. As a result, participants struggle to express their ideas in writing.

Peer Slang

Interactions with peers also pose a challenge. Participants have difficulty understanding the language their friends use, as it often involves informal expressions and abbreviations that are unfamiliar to them. “Because people here often abbreviate their words like that. For example, ‘Y’ means ‘yes,’ and ‘G’ means ‘no.’ So at first I was confused, because my mom doesn’t know slang.” “As for friends, they rarely use standard Indonesian.” This indicates that variations in everyday social language act as a barrier to communication. The language participants had previously learned did not include informal expressions or slang, making it difficult for them to understand the context of conversations.

Speech Rate

“People here speak really fast. It’s different from how I speak the ‘fast’ is different. Fast in Indonesian versus Japanese.” Differences were also found in speaking style. Participants felt that people in Indonesia speak at a faster pace compared to Japan, their home country. This difference in speaking speed affects the participants’ ability to comprehend spoken information, especially when combined with limited language proficiency. Since their command of Indonesian is not yet sufficient, students need speakers to pronounce words slowly so they can understand more easily. This aligns with the well-known observation that at the beginner level, students’ listening skills need to be accommodated with a slower pace. This situation requires the participant to adapt to a faster speaking pace despite still having limited proficiency in Indonesian.

Overall, these findings indicate that linguistic culture shock is not limited to differences in the language itself. Rather, it also encompasses differences in language use across contexts, both in everyday communication and in academic settings.

Sociocultural Culture Shock

Culture shock also arises in sociocultural aspects. The findings show that differences in social practices between Japanese and Indonesian cultures are one of the main sources of sociocultural culture shock experienced by the participants. This includes food, eating habits, toilet use, punctuality, and the culture of waiting in line.

Food

“There’s a lot of fried food. I was surprised. Everything is fried. Because back home, most things are boiled or grilled. Here, even snacks are fried, and side dishes are fried too.” Participants experienced culture shock related to food. They were surprised by the way food is

prepared in Indonesia, which often involves deep-frying. The student noted that food in Japan is predominantly prepared by steaming, boiling, or grilling. Meanwhile, much of the food in Indonesia is deep-fried, resulting in high oil content. Based on the participant's perception, this highlights a significant difference in food preparation practices between the two cultures, requiring the participant to adapt to new eating habits.

Eating Habits

Cultural differences were also observed in eating habits. Participants explained that certain differences caused feelings of discomfort, particularly regarding food arrangement, the use of the right hand while eating, and the way soup is consumed. The following are the participants' statements. "Here, it's all on one plate. One plate has rice, a side dish, vegetables, and another side dish. Back home, they're served separately. This is for the side dish, this is for the soup, and this is for the rice." "So back then, I was already used to using both hands without even thinking about it." "Here, it's considered rude to lift the bowl and drink the soup directly from it. At first, a friend told me, 'That's not polite'."

The cultural practice of eating with the right hand also came as quite a surprise to the student from Japan. In Japan, there are no rules or norms requiring people to eat with their right hand, whereas in Indonesia, eating with the left hand is considered dirty or improper. In fact, in Japan, people can use either their right or left hand to eat. Additionally, slurping food directly from a bowl is a common practice in Japan, especially when eating ramen. In Indonesia, eating by slurping directly from a bowl is also considered impolite.

Toilets

"The toilets there have a dry design. They have bidets." Another form of sociocultural culture shock experienced by the participant relates to toilet facilities. According to the participant's perception, toilets in Indonesia generally use water and a dipper in a wet bathroom setting, whereas the toilets in Japan that he usually uses are generally dry and equipped with toilet paper. This difference was a new experience for the participant.

Punctuality

"What are Japanese people like, they're more time-conscious. Whereas in Indonesia, when it comes to time, well, it's just whatever works." Regarding punctuality, the participant felt there was a significant difference in values between Indonesia and Japan. Participants expressed frustration with the perception of time commonly referred to as "rubber time" in Indonesia. This indicates that differing time orientations are a source of discomfort, particularly due to differing values regarding discipline and punctuality. For Japanese people, punctuality is seen as a way to value others' time and show respect toward them. Punctuality is regarded

as a measure of politeness and is taught from an early age. Japanese people are known for their discipline. In Japan, punctuality is highly valued. For Japanese people, time is considered very important, and frequent tardiness is viewed negatively by society.

Queuing Culture

“There’s supposed to be a line, but here there’s no line.” Differences in social practices are also evident in queuing behavior. This indicates that differences in everyday social practices, such as queuing culture, influence participants’ perceptions of social order and organization. Participants perceive queuing practices in Indonesia as less orderly compared to Japan, their home country, primarily because some people do not consistently wait their turn or try to cut in line.

Culture Shock Regarding the Education System

Participants experienced culture shock related to the education system implemented in schools. The findings show that differences in the education systems between Japan and Indonesia influence how participants understand the learning process, the grading system, and classroom dynamics, which ultimately lead to feelings of anxiety.

Grading System

“Here, it’s easy to get good grades, in my opinion. Because back there, for example with the Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM), if the grade is low, well, they just let it slide.” The participant explained that this ease is related to the implementation of the Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM) system along with opportunities for grade improvement (remedial work) at their school, which gives students the chance to meet certain academic standards. This differs from the participant’s previous experience in Japan, where grades generally reflect the results of initial evaluations without similar remedial opportunities. The participant explained that the system in Japan requires students to work hard from the start to achieve good grades, as there are no mechanisms for grade improvement afterward.

School Activities

The participant also observed differences in school activities. Schools in Indonesia were found to offer a wider variety of activities compared to schools in Japan. This indicates that the school environment in Indonesia provides more opportunities for students to develop their potential beyond academic activities. This kind of diversity was a new experience for the participants, who were previously accustomed to an education system that focused more on classroom learning as mentioned earlier, students were required to work hard to achieve the best grades. Here is a participant’s statement “There are lots of activities here. It’s not just about lessons.”

Student Participation

Another notable difference was found in the level of student participation during classroom instruction. Participants observed that students in Indonesia tend to be more active in asking questions and expressing their opinions. “Indonesian students are more active in class. That’s my take on it. For example, if the teacher asks a question, here they aren’t shy about asking, and they aren’t shy about sharing their opinions. Over there, though—well, they might think it over first; there are a lot of factors to consider. Even if their opinion is good, they hold back. They’ll only share it with their friends, not with the whole class.” “Here, kids might ask their friends right away, or their teacher, you know. Over there, they keep it to themselves and figure it out on their own. At home, for example, they’ll search on Google, or since many of them go to tutoring classes, they’ll ask there.”

This statement indicates that the learning culture in Indonesia encourages active student participation in the classroom. This contrasts with the participant’s experience in Japan, where students tend to be more reserved when expressing their opinions and prefer to seek answers independently outside the classroom. These differences in classroom participation posed a distinct challenge for the participant during the adaptation process. The participant needed to adjust not only to the academic content but also to more open patterns of interaction between students and teachers.

Overall, the three identified aspects of culture shock, namely language, sociocultural factors, and the education system, did not occur in isolation. Instead, they were interconnected in the participant’s daily experiences. Limited understanding of academic language, for example, affected the participant’s confidence in participating in classroom activities. Meanwhile, differences in social norms, such as punctuality and queuing practices, reflected values that also shaped the participant’s understanding of discipline within the education system.

Among the three aspects, sociocultural culture shock covered the widest range of daily challenges identified in the interview, followed by language related culture shock and education system related culture shock. This pattern indicates that the adjustment of international students at the secondary education level cannot be understood solely as a matter of language proficiency, as discussed further in the following section

The findings of this study indicate that Japanese students experience culture shock in linguistic, sociocultural, and educational aspects. These results confirm that culture shock is a multidimensional phenomenon that arises when individuals encounter differences in language, values, social norms, and daily life practices in a new cultural environment. In this study, these

differences were evident in the use of academic language, classroom communication patterns, eating habits, the culture of waiting in line, the use of public facilities, and attitudes toward time.

These findings align with those of Mustofa and Defiana (2024), who found that international students in Indonesia experience culture shock due to differences in geographical conditions, social life, and lifestyle, all of which influence their academic activities. Similar results were found by Amanah (2018), namely that international students experience culture shock regarding food, weather, language, social interactions, lifestyle, and religious and social activities. Thus, culture shock is not only related to the learning process but also to the social practices participants encounter in their daily lives.

The participants' difficulty in understanding academic language indicates that the ability to communicate in everyday conversation does not necessarily translate to the ability to understand the terminology used in learning. This situation can affect their comprehension of course material, their willingness to ask questions, and their interactions with teachers and peers. These findings align with those of Wilczewski and Alon (2023), who emphasize that language proficiency and communication with the local community play a crucial role in the academic and sociocultural adaptation of international students.

In the learning context, participants observed that Indonesian students were more active in asking questions and expressing opinions, whereas Japanese students tended to weigh various factors before speaking in class. These differences suggest that communication norms and patterns of classroom participation can be sources of culture shock in educational settings. However, these observations represent the participants' personal experiences and cannot be generalized to all Indonesian or Japanese students. Findings regarding eating habits and daily social practices also support the research by Nur et al (2021). A study of international participants in Makassar found cultural shock related to eating habits, Indonesian food, the hospitality of the local community, and local social customs. This indicates that habits considered ordinary by the local community may be perceived differently by individuals from other cultural backgrounds.

When related to Ober (1960) states of culture shock, the participants appear to be transitioning from the "crisis" phase toward "recovery." Expressions such as "shocked," "confused," and frustration regarding time-related customs indicate that the participants are still experiencing tension in adapting to the new culture. However, their ability to reflectively explain differences in language, the education system, and communication patterns indicates a process of understanding and adaptation. These findings align with Devinta (2016), who

explains that culture shock is a normal experience that can progress from the phase of cultural problems toward recovery and adaptation. Nevertheless, this study relied on a single interview and thus cannot yet describe the participants' adaptive development over time.

In terms of adaptation strategies, family support, particularly the role of the participant's mother as a native speaker of Indonesian, helped the participant relearn Indonesian through informal communication that combined Indonesian and Japanese. However, the interview data did not reveal much about the participant's strategies for dealing with cultural differences related to queuing, attitudes toward time, the educational system, dormitory life, and religious practices. Therefore, future research should examine the roles of family members, teachers, peers, and the school environment in supporting the adaptation process of international students.

The participants' experiences can also be understood through the concept of the "Third Culture Kid." Although of Indonesian descent, the participants grew up in Japan and lost most of their proficiency in Indonesian. This situation demonstrates that a genetic connection to a culture is not always accompanied by language proficiency or a sense of belonging to that culture. This aligns with Fail et al (2004), who explain that individuals raised across multiple cultures may experience identity issues and a lack of belonging because they do not fully feel part of any single culture.

While the linguistic, sociocultural, and educational patterns identified in this study broadly resemble those reported among international students in general, as discussed by Mustofa and Defiana (2024), Amanah (2018), and Nur et al (2021), the present findings differ from previous research in one crucial respect. The participant's culture shock did not arise from encountering an entirely foreign culture, but from reentering a culture to which he was ancestrally and legally connected yet experientially estranged. This distinction is theoretically important. Existing culture shock literature generally explains the phenomenon as an encounter between a clearly defined home culture and host culture. However, the participant's experience complicates this distinction because Indonesia functioned simultaneously as his host culture in terms of lived and formative experience and as his heritage culture in terms of parentage and citizenship. His difficulty with academic Indonesian, for example, cannot be classified as ordinary foreign language acquisition because it involved relearning a language that had once been acquired naturally and was later lost. This pattern is more consistent with heritage language attrition as described by Waal et al. (2020) than with second language culture shock commonly discussed in literature unrelated to Third Culture Kids. These findings suggest that culture shock frameworks developed for international students may require adjustment when

applied to heritage returnees because their adaptation process is closely connected to identity reclamation rather than solely to cross cultural adjustment. This relationship has received limited empirical attention, particularly at the secondary education level and among Third Culture Kids of Japanese Indonesian descent. Therefore, this study provides an early empirical account of how culture shock and heritage return interact within a single individual's adaptation experience.

Overall, this study shows that culture shock among international students encompasses language, social interaction, daily life practices, and the educational system. These findings also indicate that culture shock can still be experienced by individuals with family ties to Indonesia if the majority of their growth and identity formation takes place within a different cultural environment.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, sociocultural culture shock emerged as the aspect involving the most diverse range of daily adaptation challenges, followed by linguistic culture shock and educational system culture shock. It should be emphasized that this broader scope does not necessarily indicate greater severity or psychological impact than the other aspects because this study used data from semi structured interviews with a single participant. Therefore, determining the relative severity of each aspect requires additional data beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, these findings indicate that the sociocultural dimension plays a significant role in shaping the experience of culture shock and should not be overlooked.

The findings of this study have practical implications for schools, teachers, curriculum designers, counselors, and education policymakers supporting international students and heritage returnees. Schools should provide structured bridging programs that introduce academic Indonesian, grading systems, extracurricular expectations, and informal peer communication, supported by peer buddy arrangements during the initial adjustment period. Teachers should check comprehension gradually, provide key vocabulary before lessons, and create low pressure opportunities for participation, as students' hesitation may reflect previous educational norms rather than limited understanding. Curriculum designers should develop differentiated language support for students with oral heritage exposure but interrupted formal literacy, rather than relying solely on standard BIPA or native speaker curricula. Counselors should address not only language difficulties but also sociocultural adjustment and identity conflict associated with returning to an ancestral culture that feels unfamiliar. At the policy level, Third Culture Kids and heritage returnees should be recognized as a distinct student

group because their need to relearn language and culture differs from the needs of students encountering them for the first time. This study has several limitations, including its single case design, reliance solely on semi structured interviews, cross sectional data collection, and the participant's limited Indonesian proficiency, which may have restricted the depth and generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve more participants, use multiple data sources, and adopt a longitudinal design to provide a more comprehensive understanding of culture shock among international students at the secondary education level.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, T., & Shahzeb. (2024). Cultural shocks: Understanding the impact on international students' academic journey at Yogyakarta, Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmiah WUNY*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.21831/jwunyt.v6i1.72278>
- Amanah, S. (2018). Motivasi dan culture shock mahasiswa asing di STAIN Kediri dalam lingkungan budaya Kediri. *Jurnal Sospol*, 4(1), 1–20.
- Černigoj, A., Szabó, Á., & Jose, P. (2024). Systematic literature review of factors influencing reacculturation after returning home from a stay abroad. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2024.102037>
- Devinta, M. (2016). Fenomena culture shock (gegar budaya) pada mahasiswa perantauan di Yogyakarta. *E-Societas: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosiologi*, 5(3). <https://doi.org/10.21831/e-societas.v5i3.3946>
- Fail, H., Thompson, J., & Walker, G. (2004). Belonging, identity and Third Culture Kids: Life histories of former international school students. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 3(3), 319–338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240904047358>
- Faizin, F., & Isnaini, M. (2020). Fenomenologi gegar budaya pemelajar BIPA asal negara Afrika Selatan di Malang. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, 5(1), 27–33.
- Hafizah, N. (2023). Pengaruh globalisasi terhadap kebudayaan bangsa Indonesia. *Journal of Creative Student Research (JCSR)*, 1(1), 37–41.
- International Organization for Migration. (2024). *World migration report 2024*.
- Jin, R., Le, T.-T., Gao, R., Shen, Q., & Wang, X. (2024). Sea turtles stranded ashore: Sociocultural dissonance and identity conflicts in migration intentions of Chinese international student returnees. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 103. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2024.102079>
- Kılınç, N. (2025). Felt like a fish out of water: Second generation Turkish German returnees' narratives of educational disintegrations and selective acculturation paths in Turkey. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 51(17). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2025.2504625>
- Maizan, S. H., Bashori, K., & Hayati, E. N. (2020). Analytical theory: Gegar budaya (culture shock). *Psycho Idea*, 18(2), 147. <https://doi.org/10.30595/psychoidea.v18i2.6566>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

- Mustofa, R. H., & Defiana, A. (2024). Culture shock akademik mahasiswa asing di Indonesia (Studi kasus di Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta). *Didaktika: Jurnal Kependidikan*, 13(2), 1641–1654. <https://doi.org/10.58230/27454312.667>
- Nur, R., Nasir, S. A., & Burhanuddin, W. (2021). International students in Makassar, Indonesia: Do they experience any cultural shock? *International Journal of Advanced Research (IJAR)*, 9(1), 424–430. <https://doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/12312>
- Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology*, 7(4), 177–182.
- Pedersen, P. (1995). *The five stages of culture shock*. Greenwood Press.
- Pitriyani, Wilodati, & Maftuh, B. (2024). Systematic literature review: Gegar budaya dan strategi. *Jurnal Dinamika*, 5(2), 145–167.
- Suciawati, A., Anita, A., & As'ari, A. (2025). Culture shock and adaptation: International students' academic and social experiences at a State Islamic University. *Passage: Journal of English Language and Literature*, 13(2), 105–116.
- Waal, M. F. de, Born, M. Ph., Brinkmann, U., & Frasch, J. J. F. (2020). Third Culture Kids, their diversity beliefs and their intercultural competences. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 79, 177–190. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.09.002>
- Widianti, F. D. (2022). Dampak globalisasi di negara Indonesia. *JISP (Jurnal Inovasi Sektor Publik)*, 2(1), 73–95. <https://doi.org/10.38156/jisp.v2i1.122>
- Wilczewski, M., & Alon, I. (2023). Language and communication in international students' adaptation: A bibliometric and content analysis review. *Higher Education*, 85(6), 1235–1256. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00888-8>