

# THE DIFFICULTIES AND PROBLEMS FACED BY INDONESIAN STUDENTS WHILE STUDYING IN AN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY

Oleh: Saiful, M.Pd

Dosen Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris

Universitas Syiah Kuala

## Abstract

*One of the issues that relates to Indonesian international students' perceptions about the quality of higher education is with regards to the difficulties and problems they face while studying in an Australian university. A survey was conducted with 78 First Year to Fourth Year Indonesian international undergraduate students undergoing a range of programs and courses at a university in Australia to determine their perspective of quality in higher education. Further interviews were carried out with nine Indonesian international students to gain insights into their difficulties and learning experiences. Based on these interviews, the three main difficulties highlighted by Indonesian international students are: different learning styles, cultural barriers and language problems. This paper seeks to highlight the initial problems faced by Indonesian international students in terms of learning styles and how they strive to overcome these difficulties through discussions and practice. These findings present implications for the use of appropriate teaching strategies with Indonesian international students.*

**Keywords:** Learning styles, culture, Indonesian international undergraduates, learning difficulties, higher education

## INTRODUCTION

Some literature seems to hold the view that students' learning styles are predetermined by their culture. This culture-based learning styles' approach (Neuman and Bekerman 2000; Spizzica 1997) has contributed some important knowledge but it also has limitations. It has limited our ability to understand the complexities of the international students' experience, and hence has limited our ability to conceptualise a quality education for these students. My personal experience has led me to believe that one can be flexible in one's learning practices. Having been brought up in a traditional Acehnese family, I could say I used to be a 'passive recipient' in education. Learning was, at that stage, one in which I played a very passive role, merely accepting and absorbing everything the teacher said. However, this changed with exposure to other methods of learning and I now enjoy the constructivist approach in learning. However, up to this moment there is still very little literature exploring the possibility of flexibility in changing learning styles or adding new styles to one's repertoire. This research will explore the possibility that Indonesian international students are able to be flexible and may challenge the common view that their cultural background is some kind of a stumbling block for quality learning in a western higher education system.

This study was based on the findings of the pilot study, which surveyed 78 First year to Fourth year Indonesian international undergraduate students enrolled in a range of programs at La Trobe University, Australia. The aim of the study was to examine the students' perspectives of quality in higher education. Although most of the Indonesian students came from a background of teacher centred learning, the study has shown that the students' most preferred styles of teaching and learning are lecturing and group discussion (29% each) followed by project, research and self study (13% respectively) (Wong, 2003). A tutorial can be either teacher centred or student centred; depending on how it is conducted. By grouping lecturing as a teacher centred style of teaching and learning, and project work, group discussions, research projects, self study and workshops as more student centred styles of teaching and learning, it is obvious that the majority (70%) of the students taking part in this study preferred student centred styles of learning, that was the style of teaching and learning used by their schools in Indonesia. This might explain why most of the students (58%) had above average level of satisfaction with the teaching and learning style of their schools. Only 12 per cent of the students were not happy with the teaching and learning style that they were experiencing in Indonesia.

When students were asked about the way they could learn best, most of them (65%) indicated that they learnt best when learning by themselves with little or no assistance from the lecturers. Some of them (21%) believed that they learnt better when most of the information was given by lecturers. Only 14 per cent of the students preferred being spoon-fed by the lecturer. This finding further confirmed that Indonesian international students predominantly preferred a student centred style of learning.

When separate data were used to analyse the preferred style of learning for first and second year's students compared to third and fourth year's students, the results showed that the preferred style of teaching and learning changes with the length of time spent in their program. When Indonesian international students began their study in Australia, initially more of them (33%) preferred the lecturing style but as they moved in to their third and fourth year of study this preference seemed to lessen. This was evidenced by the fact that only 23 per cent of the third and fourth year students preferred this style of teaching and learning.

The overall results have shown that Indonesia international students preferred a more student centred style of teaching and learning despite their previous educational and cultural background. Indonesian international students regarded the change to one comprising of more discussions, independent learning and critical thinking as the strengths of their programs. There seemed to be a preference for a more open and global type of learning experience. This paper reports the results of further indepth study with several Indonesian international undergraduates. In particular, it focuses on the students' learning experiences in their home country and Australia and the impacts on their education.

## **INTERCULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN LEARNING**

### **Transmission of knowledge**

According to Chan (1999) Western educators still lack the understanding of Indonesian students who are generally less spontaneous and more likely to conform to their teachers. Kirkbride and Tang (cited in Chan, 1999) stated that Asian, including Indonesian, students preferred didactic and teacher centred style of teaching and would show great respect for the wisdom and knowledge of their teachers. The fear of loss of face, shame and over modesty made the Western participative style of learning less acceptable to them. However, Biggs (1996, p.59) believed that "Indonesian students were more active in one-to-one interaction with the teacher as well as engaging in peer discussion outside the class".

Although it was believed that Indonesian lecturers are authoritative and highly respected by students (Biggs, 1996), the mode of teaching might not be through simple transmission of knowledge. It actually occurs in a complex and interactive environment. Stevenson and Stigler (cited in Biggs, 1996) stated that Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian teachers had much lighter teaching loads than Western teachers enabling them to have more time with students outside the class. According to Bond (cited in Chan, 1999) Indonesian students were generally quiet in class and were taught not to question or challenge their teachers. Teachers were regarded as having the authority and knowledge to teach and students readily accepted the information given by teachers. An Indonesian student was therefore less likely to express his/her opinion, unless being asked.



## **Rote Learning versus Meaningful Learning**

Chan (1999) believed that the style of Indonesian learning was still very much influenced by Confucianism that is dominated by rote learning and the application of examples. However, Biggs and Moore (cited in Biggs, 1996, p.54) highlighted that there was a distinction between rote and repetitive learning. According to them rote learning was generally described as learning without understanding, whereas repetitive learning has the intention to understand its meaning. They believed that the influence of tradition and the demands of the assessment system had affected Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) students' choice of using a repetitive strategy in learning. The Western student's learning strategies starts with exploration followed by the development of skills.

Indonesian learners believed that skill should be first developed to produce an acceptable output which would then pave the way for creativity to flow (Biggs, 1996, p.55). Flynn, Sue and Okazaki (cited in Biggs, 1996, p.48) argued that CHC students performed better than their Western counterparts and that such a high level of achievement could not be obtained through rote learning. This led Biggs (1996, p.63) to believe that CHC students were deep learners who in fact preferred high-level meaningful learning rather than rote learning. Westerners believed that Indonesian learners used the rote-learning strategy because of their practice of memorization, which did not enhance understanding. Marton, Alba and Kun (1996, p.70) however, argued that there were two types of memorization, namely, memorization with understanding and mechanical memorization. They concluded that Indonesian students could perform better in their level of achievement than the Western students because they had memorized with understanding.

Yu and Atkinson (cited in Kirby, Woodhouse and Ma, 1996, p.142) on the other hand stressed that the less fluent students, tended to rote learn for subjects, which required high language skills because they lacked the vocabulary to write on their own. However, the study conducted by Kirby et al (1996, p.148) had shown that even less-proficient students also use some forms of deep approaches to learning.

## **Creativity or Lack of it**

Indonesian children learnt well through concrete examples. They usually did better in concrete subjects but were weak in abstract thinking and lacked creativity and originality (Salili 1996, p.100). The Chinese authoritarian education system, which demanded conformity, might not be conducive to the development of creative and analytical thinking. Furthermore, Chan (1999) claimed that Indonesian students were being assessed mainly by examination with little emphasis on solving practical problems. Smith (cited in Couchman, 1997) believed that the Indonesian students' learning styles stressed reproduction of written work, and factual knowledge with little or no emphasis on critical thinking. Ballard and Clanchy (cited in Kirby et al, 1996, p.142) agreed that the Indonesian culture and education system stressed the conservation and reproduction of knowledge whereas the Western education system tended to value a speculative and questioning approach.

These differences in attitude to knowledge might affect the assessment of Indonesian students by Western lecturers. Spizzica (1997) believed that different cultures value different types of knowledge and skills differently. The ways to acquire these knowledge and skills might also differ from one culture to another. The Australian education system encouraged students to be critical thinkers, often giving them opportunities to question ideas and opinions. As a result Australian institutions tended to focus on developing tools for independent learning.

### **Cross Culturalism and Adaptability**

The views about Indonesian or Confucian learning style as mentioned above is predominant in the literature and give rise to a particular way of seeing the problem of international students studying in an Australian university. Several suggestions were put forward to resolve the problem. Elton and Laurillard (cited in Tang and Biggs, 1996, p.159) believed that “the quickest way to change students’ learning is to change the assessment system”. A survey conducted in Ohio by Pigge (cited in Tang and Biggs, 1996, p.164) had shown that 72 per cent of all the test items required only straight recall answers. Tang and Biggs (1996) believed that assignments, which required high-level strategies generally only addressed a topic, while examination with short answer questions, would cover wider parts of the contents of the course. However, this sort of test only encouraged surface approaches to learning.

According to Neuman and Bekerman (2000), it was important to take into consideration cultural resources before applying education theories in practice. They argued that for a community where students had been regarded as passive recipients of data, it would be difficult for the teacher to teach using a constructivist approach. They further questioned the effectiveness of implementing collaborative learning in a society promoting an individualistic ethos.

A study conducted by Volet and Renshaw (1996, p.208) however, supported the view that both Indonesian and Western students approach to study were influenced by their perceptions of course requirements, instead of by the so-called stable personal and cultural features. These students perceived that different courses would require different strategies of learning. Their study also showed that both Indonesian and Australian students alike were responsive to the demands and influence of new academic and institutional context in an Australian university. These findings were supported by Biggs and Chalmers (cited in Volet et al, 1996, pp.210-211).

Volet and Renshaw’s (1996) study showed that Indonesian students in an Australian university were able to adapt in order to fulfil the requirements in the new educational environment. This finding had contradicted the claims that Indonesian students’ approaches to learning were culturally bound and hence were stable in all educational contexts. In fact, Kumar’s (2000) concept of ‘Cross-culturalism and the Self’ proposed that it was possible for an individual to be flexible and to adopt new ideas and values and transcend linguistic terminology barriers in a social construct. Biggs and Watkins (1996), in contrast to Neuman and Bekerman’s (2000) cautious approach about

implementing constructive and collaborative approaches to Indonesian students, stressed that Western educators had to understand that Indonesian students might have different perceptions of task requirements, and that task requirements such as acknowledging sources of information needed to be explained very clearly to them.

Therefore, in addressing this issue of helping Indonesian students to settle in the Western university, there was a necessity to understand the Indonesian student's perception of education in general and the requirements of tertiary education in particular. What were some of the other perceptions that Indonesian students might have? This paper discusses this in greater detail.

### **THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research study is focussing on students' learning experiences from Indonesian international students' perspectives. A qualitative approach based on grounded theory was developed for this research. It was a bottom-up approach where the study was taken from the perspective of the students rather than the researcher.

The research questions that are related to this study are as follows.

1. Are there any learning difficulties faced by international students including those from twinning programs in adapting to the Australian tertiary system of education?
2. Are students' most preferred styles of learning determined by their learning styles in high schools or colleges in their home countries?

### **METHOD**

This research study was an interview-based investigation, seeking to provide rich qualitative data about Indonesian international students' perceptions of their learning experiences. Interviews were carried out with nine Indonesia international students from different disciplines, year levels and country of origin. The lengths of interviews were approximately one hour each. Recruitment of students had been done by direct contact at the university compound or through social contact. All participants were taken from one particular university only, La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

When Indonesian international students were asked about differences in their learning experiences between their home country and Australia, each of them cited several differences, but this paper focuses only on differences relating to learning and teaching styles. The comments and statements made by these students were audio taped and transcribed and are reported *ad verbatim* in this paper, with a number recorded in parentheses, identifying each of the nine students.

#### **Home country experiences**

##### ***Classroom learning experiences***

Indonesian students generally come from a more passive learning environment, especially for nonpractical subjects. This is obvious from the statements made by the students below:



*You just sit there listen to what teachers said [1]*

*...you just sit there let the lecturers give you some knowledge [4]*

The teaching style in Indonesia is more teachers centred, where the teachers or lecturers would give all or most of the information to the students. This makes the learning easier for students because they don't need to look for more knowledge themselves. This style of teaching also enables the teachers to cover a wider scope of knowledge in the allocated teaching time. Students involved in this interview regard this style of learning as spoon-feeding. They say it is...

*unlike high school where most information was given [1]*

*it just spoon feeding ... the lecturers give exactly what they want [4]*

*The tutors spoon feeding you, not so much on discussion [9]*

This so-called 'spoon-feeding' style of learning is even more obvious in Indonesia's higher learning institution where tutorials are not available. "*In Indonesia we don't have tutorials, we just have lectures*" [3]. The private colleges with twinning programs in an Asian country like Indonesia are usually much smaller than the universities here. With smaller class sizes, students find it easier to communicate with their teachers in class. "*The classes there were small, if we couldn't understand we can ask during the lectures*" [7].

Allocation of time to teach one topic is generally more in Indonesian colleges enabling the lecturers to explain a topic more clearly. This promoted a teacher centred style of teaching and learning as cited by one participant. "*In college they use 3 to 4 hours to teach one topic. Sometimes might be one week or two weeks. Everything they explain very clearly*" [7]. In addition, lecturers in Indonesia are claimed not to have close rapport with their students and usually maintain a distance from them.

*Lecturers seem to be not as friendly as the lecturers here. Here you know lecturers as your friends and in Indonesia as your teachers. So it is hard to get close to them. In the secondary school many students are scared of the teachers. They are so serious. [3]*

### ***Rote or Repetitive Learning***

From the information provided by the students during the interview, it is clear that Indonesian assessment systems requires students to remember all that they have learnt and to reproduce their learning in the examination in order to do well. According to one student, "*...in Indonesia as long as you study and memorise what you learn you can do well*" [6]. Other students reflect similar beliefs.

*The most important thing in Indonesia is you have to learn hard all that your teachers say. Even if you just try to learn hard you can get the best mark. You have to learn hard too much. [3]*

*If you study in the college, in the exam the lecturers will give you some hints, you can prepare for it, but not here, you can't actually do the thing just memorise and memorise. You need to know how to use it and apply your knowledge in the exam. [9]*

## **Assessment**

The assessment system for Indonesian higher learning institution is generally more examination based. The style of teaching and learning is aimed at helping the students to pass the examination.

*Yes, this is what most of the students do. It is very exam based. They only look for the information that they get then can pass. It is very exam based, they only teach you to pass the exam. Probably also the students want it that way. [8]*

*Before I came here...teacher will tell you everything and then you just read, memorize, and then go to the exam, that is all. Most of the students do not need to express our own opinion. [9]*

The Indonesian twinning higher learning institutions where these students came from didn't require them to do in-text referencing for their assignment. This created the problem of plagiarism when they studied in Australia. The Australian education system required every source of information to be acknowledged and any idea they put forward needed to be substantiated.

*In (college) we didn't need to do in-text referencing. But here it is very important. ...We just needed to dig out the answer, no need to discuss. [7]*

*...you just reproduce and you don't need to get evidence from the articles or journal. Because in the college, you just need to give information from your own opinion. Put anything you want. You don't need any evidence where you get this idea. [5]*

## **Learning experiences in Australia**

### **Learning conditions**

The classroom experiences of these international students in an Australian university are quite different from their home country. Due to large class size there is very little interaction between the students and lecturers in the lecture hall as indicated by this student. *"But here a lot of students in the lectures so difficult to ask" [7].*

Lectures have to depend on good sound system in order to present their lectures clearly to the students. *"Here a lecturer has a few hundred students. So the voice is not very clear" [7].*

Students in Australian universities are expected to play a more active role in tutorial. For Indonesian students this can be something new to them as expressed by this student. *"Here you need to talk in every tutorial. You can't escape" [9].*



The lecture times in the Australian university are much shorter than that in an Indonesian higher learning institution making detailed explanations a rare occasion. Because of this, Indonesian students find it harder to follow the lecture here.

*The lecturers here only give one-hour lecture for each topic. Sometimes they have to rush. They just simply explain, so for some parts we can't understand. [7]*

Indonesian students prefer the more practical oriented Australian programs here. They feel that what they learn here is more meaningful to them.

*It is quite different. What you learn in ... is more based on theory. Here we are provided with more practical things to do. Which makes what you learn sound more real to you. [6]*

### **Research and Analytical skills**

Australian university programs seem to place greater emphasis on critical thinking, and students are expected to be able to discuss and voice their opinions. This was clearly commented upon by the following students who said that

*In Australia, critical thinking is very important. Not like Indonesia we can memorise all the things. May be you can't actually apply the knowledge in the exam so is not very useful. [9]*

Others emphasised the importance of being able to voice one's opinion

*...here we have to discuss the questions, ...here we have to discuss whether agree or not agree. [7]*

*...but here they want your opinion and your knowledge. They want to know how much you understand it. [6]*

Indonesian students coming to Australia learn to be independent in their quest for knowledge. They need to learn how to look for information themselves. They can no longer depend on their lecturers to spoon-feed them. This was appreciated by some of them who say that

*...when we come here, the lecturers just give us the assignment and we have to look for information, which is pretty cool. [1]*

*...here they want you to research and to understand what you have learnt. [6]*

### **Initial learning difficulties faced by Asian international students**

When participants were asked to describe their initial learning difficulties while studying in an Australian university, the main problems mentioned by them are a lack in English language proficiency, cultural barriers, loneliness and different learning and teaching styles. However, this paper focuses only on the problems related to teaching and learning styles, as summarised in the following section.

### ***You are on your own***

The Indonesian students felt a bit lost in the beginning realising that they can no longer depend on the teacher to spoon-feed them like before. They need to learn how to study by themselves.

*Especially, during the first semester when I just arrived here, it tends to be a bit rough. In high school you are so used to teachers telling you every thing, including what will come out in the exam. When you come to university you are on your own, the lecturers will just come in lecture and they expect you to go back to do your own work.* [1]

*All sudden things are not being prepared for you. Then you had to go and search... right now I am not sure what is expect of me to do.* [1]

*The students have to find a way to finished their assignments. The lecturers and tutors will not give you the exactly right answers. There is no right answer.* [4]

Some Indonesian international students found it hard to see their lecturers here whenever they had problems. This is quite different from the practice in their home countries, where the lecturer will always be in the office during the office hour, unless they are having lecture.

*Unlike college time, where you go to the lecturer he or she will be there in the office.*

*Because college is smaller than the university and the time was fixed. The university is so flexible that you have to make appointment to see the lecturers.* [5]

### ***Lecture notes***

The Indonesian international students found that it was difficult to take notes during lectures. They had to contend with several hurdles. First, they lack the experience in note taking during lecture. They found it difficult to copy the notes given by the lecturer while simultaneously trying to understand them. Second, the Australian accent of the lecturer makes it even harder for them to follow the lecture.

*The hardest for me is to take down lecture notes, because I never had to do that before. Most of the time teachers would give out notes, coming here certain lectures we have to write our own notes, which is pretty hard because we are not used to it. By the time you finished writing, the lecturers are way out and you may miss part of it. That was hardest for me.* [1]

*Some lecturers didn't give notes. Some lecturer's notes are too brief. I would like to speak on behalf of the international students; sometimes it is difficult to pick up their accent. Sometimes you don't know what is happening, and there is no note or the notes are so brief. So you can't understand, at the end you spend more time.* [2]

*In the lectures they (lecturers) flip the transparency and you copy like crazy. That is hard. At one hand you copy like crazy and on one hand you try to understand what the lecturers is trying to say with their accent. [2]*

### **Assignment requirements**

Indonesian students seldom did assignments in their home country like here, so they are not familiar with the requirements of an assignment. They are unsure how to produce a good assignment, where to look for the relevant information, how much is enough and the format of the report. In the university here students no longer just reproduced what they had learnt. They need to know how to analyse the knowledge that they had acquired and to apply them in different situations. Generally different students in the same course will have different assignment topic except for those in the same group. Even so each group member will have different roles to play, so it is difficult for them to get help from one another in doing the assignment.

*...just sometimes I can't understand the questions, the requirements of the assignments. Because different lecturers got different perceptions. For example a lecturer asked to do the assignment in a particular formation, but the lecturer in the tutorial asked to do in another format. Sometimes we are quite confused. [5]*

*...in assignment, because quite short of time, I don't study from first year, I came directly from college, they expecting so high, and I can't focus in order to get better information which is more on track with the assignment. [5]*

*... here the assignment is more on how you analyse the thing, you have to find out the evidence, to support your assignment. Then you have to analyse the assignment which is different from other students and your friends. Every one is different. Sometimes when I was doing the assignment, I have no idea whether I am doing the right thing. Because I can't ask my friend to help to look at it, because it is different, different topics. Every one has different ways to do the assignment. But in college, everyone was doing the same thing. For example event, every body was doing the same event. So we can give advice and suggestions to each other to produce more information. But I think may be in college, it is an easy way to do the assignment, but in university you have to try to be independent. You have to know how to apply, and how to analyse the whole assignment. [5]*

*Like assignment what makes the differences between high distinction and distinction or credit. I don't really know what the lecturer really wants. I will only know all these when I move into the next semester. After I got back the first semester results. Then I will get better idea what the lecturers really wants. [1]*



*They don't realise our problems here. They just couldn't be bothered about our assignment date. They think that we can do it without anybody tell us how to do it and what they expect from the assignment. [6]*

*Information, whether they ask you to do some questions, so I done it, but I found it still not enough. So I don't know how much they need. [8]*

*Some assignments I still can't quite understand what the lecturer required. [7]*

### **Group work**

Generally, Indonesian students do not have much experience in teamwork. They found it difficult to work in a team especially with members that are not cooperative and unreliable. There is a preference to work individually so that they can have full control of the final product.

*And also group work. I realise that here they emphasis a lot of group assignment.*

*While in Indonesia, mostly is individual. So is very personal workload. Whereas here, they make you work in groups. So far I found it not as effective way for me. For me the group members do affect teamwork. I find it so far not a helpful way of learning.*

*Probably the background that I come from is very personal. [8]*

*...not only me, most of my friend do have this kind of problems. Mainly the group members themselves are not contributing something. [8]*

*...I understand that the university makes us work in groups, so that is another type of learning together, in order to build teamwork. So I am still learning. [8]*

### **Preferred style**

Indonesian students prefer the learning in Australia because in their home countries they always had to learn things by heart and being spoon-fed by their teachers. In Australia they can enjoy the new freedom of learning by themselves. The following students attest to that.

*Some of the lecturers there are good, but I don't like the styles. They just force the students to learn by hard. [3]*

*Last time we were given every thing, at least now we have the freedom to do our own thing. So that is very good. [1]*

According to the Indonesian international students, it is good for the university here to emphasise a lot on the in-text referencing. They agreed that it is necessary to acknowledge the work

done by others. They believe that the university is better than the college, because in the college they are allowed to 'cut and paste' without acknowledging the source and the college also allows students to give unsubstantiated opinions.

*When you do the assignments. They concern about references. In Indonesia we always use the Internet 'cut and paste'. Here they are very particular about the plagiarism. I think this is very good. [4]*

*But in the university you have to find out why you say like that and then you have to find out who says like that, and who is the author, every thing. But I think this is good, because at least I am not copying. Because what I am thinking is what I gain the knowledge from someone, so I have to put it in because this is not my job. Because it is other people's job so I have to put it in. And I just can't simply give any opinion or information in the assignment, because it is not true and it is not evident at all. So I find it university is better than college. [5]*

Indonesian students agreed that it had been their culture to expect their teachers to spoon-feed them. However, they agreed that the teaching style here is better because they can learn more when they do their own work. Although searching for information has taken a lot of their time, they feel that they can learn more by doing assignment than attending lectures.

*Not so many of students giving answers and ideas. I think Indonesian students are this kind of culture, they expect the tutors to spoon-feed them. This is why when I came here, it is totally different. Here is better. You learn more when you do your own work. [8]*

*Actually student centred is quite good. But as a student we will be more busy. Because we need to find out all the things ourselves. [9]*

*I think student centred (learning) you will learn more. If you go to the lecture, we can only listen, listen, listen. After that you can't actually get anything from there. [9]*

*Sometimes I found that doing the assignments is the main point for us of the course. The main point of the course. The lecture actually not so useful sometimes. They don't actually provide so much knowledge for us, only the lecture notes. It isn't really useful. [9]*

They believe that searching for information and presenting it during tutorial helps to build their confidence and enable them to do better.

*The presentations, make you talk and speak out, although you don't know what to talk, still have to talk. That will build up your confidence. And also the information and resources you need to look up for yourself. The information is there, but the initiative to search for it, you need to do it here. These two areas are the major one. Help you to do better. [8]*

## **Ways to overcome these problems**

### ***Willingness to change***

Indonesian students are able to overcome this problem because they are willing to change. They like this new style of teaching and learning.

*It's quite a problem for me. But I am ready to change the style of study. Because based on so much my friends told me, you must do more workload here. Can't be like that in Indonesia that attitude of learning. I think I am coming here prepared. So far this is only my half way through in my first semester. So far I am still coping. [8]*

*Because I like this style, so I can adjust to it. Yes, I like to learn myself. [3]*

### ***Better understanding***

The close rapport between students and lecturer has promoted better understanding between them. Students must be prepared to ask if they have any problem. Generally lecturers are helpful and are willing to guide them based on their needs.

*Last semester, I felt really lost, this semester the Indonesian student and I tried to talk to the lecturers how we feel, and every thing we are not happy. They become realised, it is not their fault, because they don't understand. We let them know it is not their faults. It is our problems. So they can understand now. [6]*

*They offer help. They become concern about our personal lives. [6]*

*I get more involved during the tutorial time. [6]*

*When we discuss topic on cultural, they will ask, what do you think? They ask about Indonesia. They try to get me more involved in tutorial or lecture. [6]*

*You must have the initiative to ask, then they will provide you with a lot of information. [6]*

*Normally they will tell you where you can find the information. Basically, the*



*assignments come out from the textbooks, from there you know where to look for information.* [6]

*I discuss with my tutor. They are helpful. They gave me the information what I need to do.* [7]

### **More practice**

Although the initial time in a foreign land is fraught with learning difficulties the students soon realize that it is just a matter of getting used to the new system. When students spend more time doing the assignment or participating in discussions they inevitably will acquire the new learning skills required of them.

*Although I can't speak very well, I will still participate in the discussion, because this is the chance for you to learn. May be sometimes you can't express well, if you speak more, you can actually convey your message better.* [9]

*Sometimes it is quite tough to look for information, but if you can spend more time you can get the thing.* [9]

Indonesian students normally took about two to three months to adjust to the new style of learning here. *"It took about one to two months for me to get use to it. After a while you feel ok. So the first semester is a big rough"* [1]. Another students said that he had been here for three months and he said he is *"getting better, now I know what the tutor required of the assignment"* [7].

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results obtained in the Study, it is obvious that the majority of Indonesian international students would prefer a more student centred style of learning. Despite the fact that these Indonesian international students had come from a so-called 'spoon-feeding' or teacher centred style of learning environment, they are able to adapt to the new style of teaching and learning here within two to three months.

This finding seems to support those of Biggs (1996) and Volet and Renshaw (1996), that Indonesian learners are highly adaptive for learning. The comparative study between First and Second Year students with Third and Fourth Year students also showed that the longer the students study in Australia the more they are likely to adapt to and adopt the style of teaching and learning here. It would seem therefore that learning styles are not culturally based but contextual. In fact these Indonesian international students regard the more student centred style of learning here as the strength of Australian higher learning education. There is therefore no apparent necessity for Australian higher

learning institutions to adapt to the Indonesian style of teaching and learning but rather the authorities and personnel concerned should try to understand the initial learning difficulties faced by these Indonesian international students and take certain measures to support them when needed.

## REFERENCES

- Biggs, J. and Watkins, D. (1996) The Chinese learner in retrospect. In D.A. Watkins and J.B. Biggs (ed.), *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological and Contextual Influences*. (pp.269-285) CERC and ACER, Hong Kong: The Central Printing Press.
- Biggs, J. (1996) Western misperceptions of the Confucian-heritage learning culture. In D.A. Watkins and J.B. Biggs (ed.), *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological and Contextual Influences*. (pp.45-67). CERC and ACER, Hong Kong: The Central Printing Press.
- Chan, S. (1999) The Chinese learner-a question of style. *Education and Training*, 41(6/7), 294-304
- Couchman, J. (1997) Making Sense: Cross-Cultural Variation in the Organisation of Academic Texts by Taiwanese and Australian Undergraduate Students. In Z. Golebiowski and H. Borland (ed.) *Academic Communication across Disciplines and Cultures*. (pp.64-76). Melbourne: Victoria University of Technology.
- Kirby, J.R., Woodhouse, R.A. and Ma, Y. (1996) Studying in a second language: the experiences of Chinese students in Canada. In D.A. Watkins and J.B. Biggs (ed.), *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological and Contextual Influences*. (pp.141-158) CERC and ACER, Hong Kong: The Central Printing Press.
- Kumar, M. (2000) Postcolonial Theory and Cross-culturalism: Collaborative 'Signposts' of Discursive Practices. *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 1(2), 82-92.
- Marton, F., Alba, G.D. and Kun, T.L. (1996) Memorizing and understanding: The keys to the paradox? In D.A. Watkins and J.B. Biggs (ed.), *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological and Contextual Influences*. (pp.69-83) CERC and ACER, Hong Kong: The Central Printing Press.
- Neuman, Y. and Bekerman, Z. (2000) Cultural Resources and the Gap Between Educational Theory and Practice. *Teachers College Record*, 103(3), 471-484. *166 Are the Learning Styles of Asian International Students Culturally or Contextually Based?*
- Salili, F. (1996) Accepting personal responsibility for learning. In D.A. Watkins and J.B. Biggs (ed.), *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological and Contextual Influences*. (pp.86-105) CERC and ACER, Hong Kong: The Central Printing Press.
- Spizzica, M. (1997) Cultural Differences Within "Western" and "Eastern" Education. In Z. Golebiowski and H. Borland (ed.) *Academic Communication across Disciplines and Cultures*. (pp.248-257). Melbourne: Victoria University of Technology.

- Tang, C. and Biggs, J. (1996) How Hong Kong students cope with assessment In D.A. Watkins and J.B. Biggs (ed.), *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological and Contextual Influences*. (pp.159-182) CERC and ACER, Hong Kong: The Central Printing Press.
- Volet, S. and Renshaw, P. (1996) Chinese students at an Australian university: Adaptability and continuity. In D.A. Watkins and J.B. Biggs (ed.), *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological and Contextual Influences*. (pp.205-220) CERC and ACER, Hong Kong: The Central Printing Press.
- Wong, K. (2003) What does quality higher education mean to Asian international students? Paper presented at *The Annual Postgraduate Research Forum*. Adelaide: University of South Australia.

