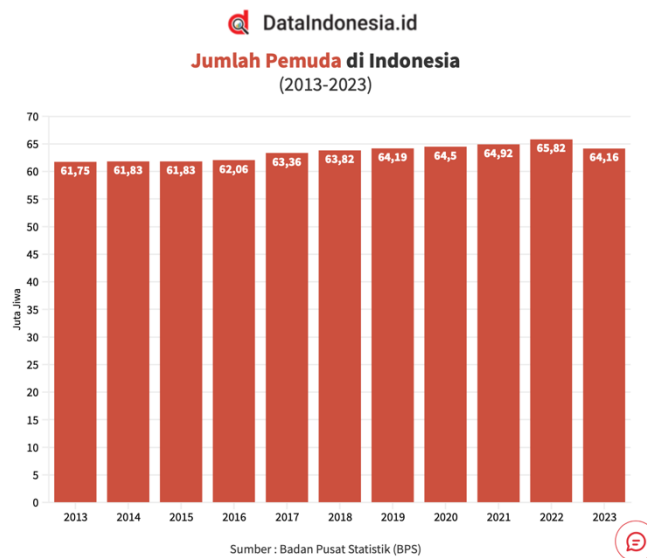


# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of The Study

The youth are the future and the optimism of all nations. Demographically, a country that has a lot of youth also has a high labour force. Based on data from BPS (*Badan Pusat Statistik*) published on the dataindonesia.id website, the number of youths in Indonesia in 2023 reached 64.16 million people. The data attached below.



**Diagram 1.1** Chart of number of youth in Indonesia (Dataindonesia.id)

The chart shows that the number of youths is equivalent to 23.18% of the total population in the country last year. This means that Indonesia has many productive generations. With the existence of quality and visionary youth, the nation has assets in the form of hope to construct a brighter future. These youths continue to develop and give birth to a stunning new vision and mission. They are the generation that inherit values, culture and are responsible for advancing the country. With a fresh perspective and adaptability, they are well-equipped to tackle complex problems with innovative solutions in this globalized world.

One of the advances that has been born in Indonesia is the fact that our country is open to building partnerships with other countries. Currently, Indonesia

has many international partnerships, including trade, economics, industry, and education. In the context of education, countries from various continents and Indonesia see that there must be a partnership in the form of educational aspects for young people and other future generations to improve the quality of the next generation. One of the efforts in this aspect is to create an International Student Exchange Program.

Fundamentally, The Student Exchange Program allows a student from two universities in two different countries to spend a semester or two taking a course (Atalar, 2020, p. 63). The university of origin is called "Home University" while the university where the student participates in The Student Exchange Program is known as "Host University". In this program, they are required to enter international classes provided by the "Host University" to take several courses.

The Student Exchange Program involving Indonesian students in the University of Pécs, Hungary, is currently divided into two distinct programs: IISMA (Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards) and the Indonesian Study Abroad Program. IISMA, a scholarship initiative provided by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, provides Indonesian students with the opportunity to study at renowned foreign universities for either one semester or a duration of 4-6 months, as outlined in the kemdikbud.go.id. This program caters to both undergraduate and diploma students and has been in operation for the past three years.

In 2021, 41 undergraduate students embarked on this program, and the numbers surged in 2022 to 46 undergraduate students and 20 diploma students, marking a significant increase of 60%. In 2023, the IISMA awards program further expanded, specifically for diploma students, with 39 students participating. This year, however, the IISMA University of Pécs program is not open to undergraduate students, as confirmed by one of the Study Abroad Program coordinators. For diploma students under the IISMA scheme, there is an additional opportunity to engage in internships at NGOs within the city of Pécs, enabling them to gain valuable international exposure and practical work experience abroad.

On the other hand, the Indonesian Study Abroad Program was introduced in 2023 as a self-funded initiative. It represents the first year of this program's existence, offering approximately 14 undergraduate students the chance to spend the fall semester at the University of Pécs, renowned as one of Central Europe's oldest institutions. These 14 students come from various faculties, including Humanities and Social Science, Business and Economics, Law, Engineering, and Psychology. During their fall semester abroad, these students are enrolled in 3-5 courses. The above data pertaining to these two programs are substantiated by the author's interview with one of the Study Abroad Program Coordinators through personal communication in the years of 2023.

In the learning process, Indonesian students gathered with international friends from various countries, ethnicities, races and cultures. This condition requires them to communicate with individuals from different backgrounds. Apart from in class activities, some lecturers require them to create projects or group work, outside of class. This condition increases their time to interact with each other. They create conversations, build friendships and so on. The communication that occurs between them is often referred to as a type of intercultural communication.

Intercultural communication is communication in which participants or researchers recognize the importance of cultural and language variations during contact (Baker, 2022, p. 212). Individuals in intercultural communication engage with and navigate numerous barriers of language and culture throughout communication. These differences include nationality, race, socioeconomic position, occupation, gender, and sexual orientation. Individuals who engage in the field of intercultural communication encounter a variety of views, customs, and beliefs that may not align with their own. To successfully negotiate these variations, an individual must be sensitive to and aware of cultural differences. To satisfy the expectations and cultural preferences of others, individuals might need to modify their language use, habits, and communication style.

From the interactions that occur through intercultural communication, students should expect the experience of culture shock (Chaponniere & Hall, 2019,

pp. 41-49). This statement reflects the empirical situation that happened to Indonesian students in the University of Pécs. One of the participants in this program stated that she felt anxious to come to the class alone by herself. This is confirmed by the other participant who mentioned she finds it hard to mingle with international friends in class when there are no other Indonesian friends. They also experience how difficult it is to communicate with the locals when they go grocery shopping, go to public markets, restaurants, and any other place that requires them to ask for information. This is due to the situation where the locals rarely speak English.

From the initial communication with the students who participated in this program, the food and weather differences are also their struggles. They find it difficult to find chili as the Indonesians are used to eating spicy food. As for the weather, there are huge gaps between Indonesia and Europe. Indonesian students go there from late August until January, which means that they experience Autumn and Winter seasons. This condition requires them to use several layers of clothes due to subzero temperatures.

The initial communication also clarified that the Indonesian students lived in a campus dormitory named Szántó Dormitory located in Pécs, Szántó Kovács János u. 1/d, 7633 Hungary. Each block of dormitory has two rooms and each room contains two students. So, they shared a kitchen and bathroom for four people. This means that they need to live together with other students from another country which require them to interact, navigate and tolerate each other's behaviour that is reflected by their own culture. Some arguments may occur.

The above descriptions are some of the experiences stated by participants in the Student Exchange Program at the University of Pécs. Similarly, research on Chinese students at an Australian University indicates they face similar issues. This research stated that “Language barriers and cultural distance are frequently the factors that hinder communication” (God & Zhang, 2019, p. 305). This means that people who go overseas struggle in a way that they find difficulties in communicating with other people. In other research, an Indonesian student stated that studying overseas led to a decrease in confidence in class participation due to

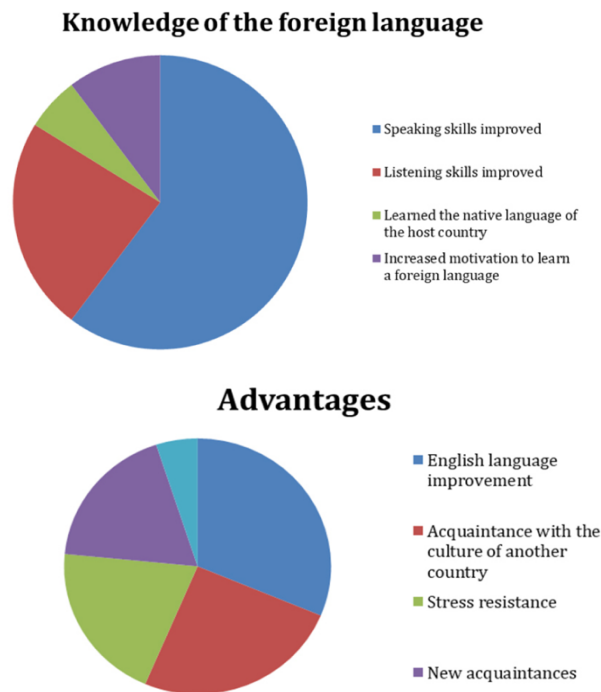
the culture shock experienced (Ernofalina, 2017, p. 104). Related to this similar research, it is important to also know all those experiences of students who go to the University of Pécs.

Culture shock itself can be defined as "an anxiety brought on by loss of social signs and symbols that are familiar being replaced by those that are unknown, unfamiliar, and strange; also defined as grief or separation anxiety" (Brown & Holloway, 2008, p. 34). The unfamiliarity with conditions in a new place means students have to experience terms of "shock" and make sacrifices and adaptations. When interacting should be carried out normally, students in terms of culture shock must convey tolerance and respect for the person they are talking to because of the differences that occur.

Culture means the whole complex of traditional behavior which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation (Brumann, 1999, p. 4). In this sense, culture can take the form of beliefs, values, and customs that are inherited continuously through the learning process. Meanwhile, the term "Intercultural" is defined as something relating to or involving more than one culture (Online Cambridge Dictionary). On the other hand, communication is the process of creating and ascribing meaning (Fatimayin, 2018, p. 1). From these explanations, we can interpret intercultural communication as a process of creating meaning from the situation in which many beliefs, values, and customs are constructed.

It is believed that the primary role of communication is building relationships rather than just exchanging information. By this sense, a built relationship is being done through the communication between individuals, in this focus of study, who come from different cultures. Communication formed from different cultures certainly creates a challenge to be adapted between individuals. It cannot be denied that this challenge may form a cultural conflict. This may occur for many individuals who come to an area where the people around them do not share the same values as themselves. The way to know that the area does not share the same values is to observe the attitudes of local people, how people react to each other, and other habits that have been born since time immemorial.

In the educational context, namely Student Exchange Program, this challenge often occurs in the form of a friendship form and the process of interaction between international friends. However, from the challenges they faced, their intercultural communication skills actually improved. Previous study stated that by participating in the ERASMUS, which is one of the Student Exchange Program in Europe, students positively improve their intercultural communication skills and develop foreign language knowledge (Baranova, Kobicheva & Tokareva, 2020, pp. 4-5). They argue that intercultural communication reflects a person's ability to maintain diverse and multi-level contacts and forms of communication in multicultural teams as well as using various behavioral strategies in social and professional activities. This type of communication is an important requirement to ensure world peace, stability, necessary to improve relations between countries, ensure the sustainability of resources and promote values such as tolerance and diversity. Consequently, intercultural communication skills are now seen as crucial skills. In this sense intercultural communication skills refer to the ability to effectively communicate with people who have different backgrounds.



**Diagram 1.2** The impact of Erasmus program on intercultural communication skills of students (Baranova et al., January 2020)

As claimed by previous researchers, one of the most effective methods for developing international experience is by participating in a Student Exchange Program (Atalar, 2020, p. 63). He argues that students can become multilingual individuals with intercultural competence and develop lasting friendships. This study also focuses on how the Student Exchange Program can prepare students to acquire competence that make them more competitive internationally in the context of business or employment in the future. Therefore, the ability to communicate with individuals from different backgrounds is essential.

However, although previous research has suggested that participating in the Student Exchange Program can increase students' intercultural communication competence, there are many cases that do not reflect this value. In December 2023, a thread on a popular platform named X went viral. This thread showcased an IISMA awardee who showed a striking sense of arrogance by stating “they hate us just bc *kita orang pinter dan disayang negara coy*” suggesting they feel superiority compared to others because they were intelligent and favored by the country. The comment within the thread highlighted this individual’s lack of humility and respect towards their peers, casting a negative light on their behavior. The thread attached below.



**Figures 1.1** IISMA awardee’ thread (x.com)

Such behavior stands in stark contrast to the ideals of intercultural communication competence, because effective intercultural communication requires humility, empathy and respect for differences. By feeling superior and demeaning others, this IISMA awardee failed to demonstrate these essential qualities, undermining the very essence of intercultural understanding and cooperation.

Another significant issue involving IISMA awardee emerged through a thread published in April 2024. This thread focused on a Student Representative (SR) of the IISMA Awardee 2023 cohort. The discussion highlighted several problematic behaviors, particularly noting in the second point, that this SR “shittalked almost everyone in his batch in order to trade ‘gossip’ with other batches”. Additionally, the final point emphasized that this individual “NEVER properly apologized for what he did”. The thread attached below.



**Figures 1.2** IISMA awardee thread (x.com)



These actions reveal a deep lack of respect and a profound ignorance on the part of the IISMA awardee. By engaging in gossip and disparaging remarks about his peers, the SR not only sowed discord within the group but also violated the trust and integrity expected of someone in a leadership position. The refusal to issue a proper apology further underscores a disregard for accountability and reconciliation. Such behavior is particularly troubling given the expectations of intercultural communication competence, which includes the ability to engage respectfully and constructively with others, fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding. The actions of this SR, as highlighted in this thread, starkly contrast with these principles, instead demonstrating a failure to uphold the values essential for effective and respectful intercultural interaction.

These two issues are the latest indications that not all students who study and live abroad automatically develop intercultural communication competence. This research aims to investigate whether Indonesian students who've participated in the 2023 Student Exchange Program at the University of Pécs have acquired these essential skills. By examining their experiences and interactions, the study assesses their ability to effectively communicate and engage in a multicultural environment, focusing on their diverse perspectives and overall cultural sensitivity.

Previous research shows that the Student Exchange Program which allows students to live abroad creates situations for students to adapt to new environments and cultures. This constructs conditions where intercultural communication competence becomes sharpened. Furthermore, by gaining international exposure, students can better prepare themselves for the next level, especially in the professional field. This is the reason for researchers to explore this phenomenon by looking at how the experience of living overseas through the Student Exchange Program at the University of Pécs as well as how they learn values from their interactions with individuals who have different backgrounds and cultures which then sharpened their intercultural communication competence.

## **1.2 Research Problem Statement**

In the current era of globalization, the ability to interact with individuals from various cultural backgrounds has become really crucial. However, there is still prejudice and competition between cultures, as well as views of cultural superiority that still exist. This indicates that the ability to communicate across cultures and/or known as intercultural communication competence are not reflected.

In today's higher education context, the Student Exchange Program provides opportunities for students to meet peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is expected that the younger generation become global citizens who can communicate with flexibility towards individuals from various cultural backgrounds, including culture, gender, sexual orientation, or even religion. It is hoped that in this increasingly global world, individuals no longer feel that there are cultural barriers while they are interacting.

Through the Student Exchange Program, which consists of IISMA and the Indonesian Study Abroad Program at the University of Pécs, Hungary, provide Indonesian students with invaluable opportunities to live overseas and explore the other side of the world and furthering their academic and personal development. Moreover, the experiences of Indonesian students at the University of Pécs, as highlighted by empirical data as well as building relationships with international peers, and navigating day-to-day situations may sharpen their intercultural communication competence.

Furthermore, although earlier studies suggest that involvement in Student Exchange Program can improve students' foreign language proficiency and intercultural communication abilities, more research is required to determine the precise explanation of the experience of living abroad sharpens Indonesian students' intercultural communication competence while participating in the University of Pécs's Student Exchange Program. Gaining an understanding of these students' experiences, difficulties, and learning goals can help to evaluate the success of the Student Exchange Program and guide the development of better strategies to assist students in overcoming cultural barriers and acquiring essential intercultural communication competence.

To better understand the experience of living overseas experienced by Indonesian students while participating in the University of Pécs's Student Exchange Program, it is essential to investigate the specific learning outcomes they achieve. Therefore, the primary research question addressed in this study is: "How did the experience of living overseas sharpened the intercultural communication competence of Indonesian students through the Student Exchange Program at the University of Pécs?"

Through this study, the author attempts to address the process of how living overseas sharpened a student's intercultural communication competence through the Student Exchange Program and adopt the values of communication with individuals from different backgrounds and cultures in the area of University of Pécs.

### **1.3 Research Objective**

The objectives to be achieved in this research are:

1. To explore how the 2023 Student Exchange experience at the University of Pécs contributes to the development of intercultural communication competence among Indonesian students.

### **1.4 Research Significances**

The author aims for readers, themselves, or other interested parties to gain information from the utilization of their study. The significances of this study are as follows:

#### **1.4.1 Theoretical**

This study demonstrates the process of how the experience of living overseas sharpened Indonesian student's intercultural communication competence while participating in the Student Exchange Program at the University of Pécs. The study offers empirical evidence on how particular experience sharpens skill development, which theoretically can enhance current theories of intercultural communication. Additionally, this research may help develop conceptual models

clarifying the connection between intercultural competency development and Student Exchange Program.

#### **1.4.2 Social**

Through the development of students' intercultural communication competence, this study has the potential to positively impact society by promoting a more sensitivity to cultural differences. These students might serve as cultural representatives when they return to their hometowns, places of employment, and society at large, which help to foster the development of global competency.

#### **1.4.3 Practical**

In practical terms, this study could improve education by providing information on how to improve curricula and support systems for Student Exchange Programs. Evidence-based recommendations may also improve the overall educational experience and better equip participants for a multicultural society, specifically among university students.

### **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

#### **1.5.1 Research Paradigm**

The paradigm used in this study is Interpretive Paradigm. The Interpretive Paradigm is a paradigm that assumes that truth, reality, or real life does not have one aspect, but many aspects that can be considered from various perspectives. In general, the interpretive method is a system that examines and interprets individuals. The essence of understanding social meaning is to regard facts as distinct and contextually significant. This study also incorporates a phenomenological perspective.

The Phenomenological Approach, is a qualitative research inquiry that explores the lived experiences of the individual (Badil et al., 2023, p. 9). This approach focuses on the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals in their interactions with the world. With this kind of approach, the author is given the opportunity to understand the innermost deliberation of “lived experience”. As a

'participant-oriented' approach, interpretative phenomenological analysis allows interviewees to express their 'lived experience' stories without distortion. (Alase, 2017, p. 9).

This research uses a phenomenological approach because it focuses on understanding how individuals feel, understand and give meaning to a phenomenon. This allows researchers to explore an individual's subjective view of the world. The focus of phenomenology is on the circumstances and context that affect personal experiences. This aids in the comprehension of how context, culture, and other factors affect how a phenomenon is interpreted and understood by the researchers.

### **1.5.2 State of The Art**

This study refers to earlier research conducted both locally in Indonesia and globally.

The first study is titled “Student Exchange: The First Step Toward International Collaboration” by Abdullah Atalar. This study focuses on the need for students to acquire more skills to become employable. The skills in question include intercultural competence, which is essential in a multicultural work environment and a globalized world. One of the most effective ways to increase this competency is through a Student Exchange Program, where students have the opportunity to meet people from different cultures and backgrounds. This research also states that the presence of international exchange students at a university can increase diversity in class activities and foster interactions that develop intercultural competencies. This helps students to become more global citizens.

The second research, by Pawet Sobkowiak from Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, titled “The impact of studying abroad on students’ intercultural competence: An interview study,” states that students (the participants of this research) attempt to learn about various cultures in an active and direct way, specifically through their own involvement, in addition to interacting with other international students. The interview results demonstrated that the students made

an effort to be attentive in the rich, global context and open-minded toward their international peers, and they gladly engaged in meaningful relationships with them.

The third study, titled “Exploring the Impact of Study Abroad on Students’ Intercultural Competence: The Case of Myanmar” by Cherry Kyaw San and Khin Mar Htwe under the University of Mandalay, Myanmar, and Yadanabon University, Myanmar, used a qualitative research method involving interviews. The interviews were conducted with Myanmar undergraduates who participated in study-abroad programs to learn more about their experiences. This interview-based study confirms the five elements of Intercultural Competence (IC) identified by Deardorff (2008): attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, skills, desired internal outcomes, and desired external outcomes. After studying abroad, the majority of participants reported developing greater intercultural awareness, openness, ethno-relative perspectives, attitude transformation, skill development, and acceptable and effective intercultural behaviors. Other participants learned more about the host culture, exhibiting good attitudes and preferences such as adaptability, friendliness, gender equality, work-life balance, and independence.

The fourth study stated that study abroad programs help Korean students feel less anxious about using English. According to a study titled “The Impact of Experience Abroad and Language Proficiency on Language Learning Anxiety,” Korean language learners tend to display relatively high levels of anxiety related to learning the language, despite numerous findings from earlier research indicating anxiety in the Korean context. Because Korean students' English proficiency is often inadequate for classroom participation, they experience psychological effects when asked to participate (Thompson & Lee, 2014, p. 255). According to this research, students who are considering going abroad for an experience should be informed of the significant impact such experiences can have on affective factors like language learning anxiety.

The fifth study to bolster this particular study is "Intercultural Contact in Short-term Study Abroad Programs," conducted by Jorge Cubillos and Thomas Ilvento *Hispania*. The study's findings indicated that short-term study abroad programs do not always have positive cultural effects. Consequently, students must

maintain consistent interpersonal contact in order to gain cultural benefits like intercultural competence. This means more than just staged and infrequent meetings; it requires extended and significant relationships that have grown and evolved over time with the host community. The participants in this study were students enrolled in the University of Delaware's five short-term winter study abroad programs (in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Panama, and Spain). The aspects of media contact, the importance of contact as perceived, attitudes toward learning the L2, and self-efficacy beliefs showed the most significant increase. The rating for these four indicators is "Best".

The sixth study, titled "Effects of Intercultural Competence and Social Contact on Speech Act Production in a Chinese Study Abroad Context" by Naoko Taguchi, Shuai Li, and Feng Xiao, examined how social interaction and intercultural competency affect pragmatic development among college students studying abroad in Beijing. It was discovered that although cross-cultural adaptability by itself had no direct effect on pragmatic skills, it did have an indirect effect due to increased social interaction. This highlights the importance of social interaction in developing pragmatic knowledge and how intercultural competence facilitates this process. The importance of unique characteristics in utilizing social experiences for learning was also emphasized in this study. These findings provide substantial fresh knowledge about the relationship between intercultural competence and pragmatic development through the use of empirical path analyses.

The title of the seventh study is "Predicting Changes in Cultural Sensitivity among Students of Spanish during Short-term Study Abroad" by Rob A. Martinsen. This study examines how students who study abroad for just six or seven weeks typically exhibit a significant increase in cultural sensitivity. Interaction with native speakers was one of the factors included in this study, which was a significant predictor of gains in cultural sensitivity. After their time abroad, the scores of thirty-one of the forty-five students increased, while twelve students showed a decline in cultural sensitivity, and two students showed no change. This indicates that roughly 70% of the participants increased their cultural sensitivity while studying abroad.

The eighth research, which enriches this study, is titled “Guided Disorientation for Transformative Study Abroad: Impacts on Intercultural Learning” by Anne Gibson, Whitney Sherman, Ezra Spira-Cohen, and Nina Namaste. This research investigates the elements influencing intercultural learning in study abroad programs by utilizing Mezirow's transformative learning theory and data derived from the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). The results indicate that the most significant learning opportunities during study abroad arise when students encounter intense cultural disorientation within unfamiliar cultural settings. Additionally, having supportive facilitators to assist in reflecting upon and navigating intercultural differences enhances this learning experience.

The ninth study, titled “Uncovering the Potential Learning in Short-Term Study Abroad” by Elizabeth Niehaus and Gudrun Nyunt, is a qualitative study. The aim of this research was to pinpoint the aspects of intercultural learning that could be attained via short-term study abroad programs. The research findings indicated that the most significant improvements are in the area of cultural knowledge.

The last research supporting this study is titled “Intercultural Challenges, Intercultural Practices: How Chinese and Australian Students Understand and Experience Intercultural Communication at an Australian University” by Yu Tim God and Hongzhi Zhang. This research discovered that while students from both Chinese and Australian backgrounds generally hold positive attitudes toward language and cultural differences, they encounter difficulties in understanding each other and face challenges in their interactions. The research highlights that successful intercultural communication necessitates individuals to bridge language and cultural gaps through mutual negotiation of meanings, a process crucial for establishing common ground. The inability to navigate these differences impacts their motivation to engage in further intercultural interactions necessary for sustaining communication or any related relationships.

Based on these previous studies, we can draw a conclusion that the Student Exchange Program may influence intercultural communication competence. This program provides benefits such as making students more employable, increasing intercultural awareness, sensitivity, openness, and the ability to communicate in



English more confidently. Additionally, this program expands social interaction with international students and their pragmatic knowledge. The most significant opportunities arise when students experience cultural disorientation in an unfamiliar environment, with the greatest increases occurring in cultural knowledge. In this instance, intercultural communication is expected to be a bridge language through negotiating shared meaning.

This study builds on insights from ten prior studies and aims to deepen understanding of the experiences of Indonesian students through the University of Pécs Student Exchange Program. While previous research is valuable, this study focuses specifically on how living overseas through the Student Exchange Program sharpened Indonesian students' intercultural communication competence at the University of Pécs. It explores topics such as cultural differences and the interactions with locals, international friends, and lectures. Additionally, the research delves into the unique ways overseas living experience boosts the intercultural communication competence of Indonesian students while participating in the Student Exchange Program at the University of Pécs.

### **1.5.3 Intergroup Contact Theory**

This theory, developed in 1954 by Gordon W. Allport, states that when individuals from different groups interact with each other, they have the opportunity to understand and appreciate different perspectives regarding others' behavior. In this sense, personal contact is one of the most effective methods for reducing prejudice between groups. If the contact and/or communication are successful under the right conditions, it can lead to new appreciation and understanding. Ultimately, prejudice or stereotypes might be reduced, leading to better interactions and increased intercultural understanding.

For Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory (1954) to effectively reduce prejudice, certain conditions must be met:

1. Equal Status: Participants from different groups should have equal understanding in the context of their interaction.
2. Common Goals: The groups should collaborate towards mutual objectives.

3. Cooperative Interactions: There needs to be a spirit of collaboration between the groups in achieving these goals.
4. Institutional Support: The interaction should be endorsed by authorities, legal framework or societal norms to ensure positive engagement.

Living overseas allows people to engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds on a first-hand basis, which can aid in the development of their communication competence as well as in reducing prejudice among groups through interactions. In relation to this research, students engage with peers from various backgrounds in numerous contexts, such as interactions with friends and lecturers, both inside and outside the classroom, and their interactions with locals. Students typically work together towards shared academic and social objectives, such as group projects, class assignments, which help build a cooperative spirit. Additionally, universities typically offer cultural programs that further reinforce positive intercultural relationships and mutual understanding among cultures.

This practical application of Allport's Contact Theory highlights how living and studying abroad can significantly contribute to the development of intercultural communication competence and the reduction of prejudice as the interaction among groups developed. When students live abroad, they are placed in environments where they constantly interact with individuals from various cultural backgrounds. This constant exposure helps them understand and appreciate different perspectives, which is crucial for effective intercultural communication.

#### **1.5.4 Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)**

In 1997, Michael Byram defined Intercultural Communicative Competence as an extension of communicative competence. The expansion is the ability to interact effectively across cultures (Byram, 1997, p. 3). More than just information is exchanged in this kind of communication; the listener's perspective must be carefully considered, and the cultural context must be understood. Consequently, the expression of politeness serves as a representation of the deeper cultural variations in behaviors and beliefs which influence interaction.

When individuals interact socially with others from different cultures, they bring knowledge about both their own culture, thereby influencing the interaction (Byram, 1997, p. 32). Through the interactions with people from different cultures, they bring two types of knowledge: knowledge about their own culture and social group and knowledge about the processes of social and individual interaction. Primary and secondary socialization, national, regional, ethnic, and socioeconomic class identities, as well as historical symbols and narratives that delineate groups, are the sources of the first knowledge. Understanding social identity, and effective interaction strategies are part of the second set of knowledge. Along with interpreting, connecting, discovering, and interacting, these skills are necessary to comprehend and react to different cultures. Byram noted that diplomats, foreign correspondents, visiting teachers, and exchange students often have access to official information and guidance. Their understanding of their own culture is also a part of their social identity. The interactions that occur are shaped by mutual perceptions of each other's social identities, which may include shared knowledge as well as their identities. This interaction can be said to be successful if they succeed in effectively exchanging information and establishing a human relationship between the interlocutors.

In the context of human relationships between interlocutors, apart from knowledge, individuals need an attitude factor. This attitude includes curiosity, openness, and a willingness to suspend judgment about one's own cultural norms while analysing them from the perspective of others. In this sense, interlocutors must be willing to anticipate communication problems due to differing worldviews and be open to criticism of their cultural values.

However, these two factors – knowledge and attitude – are preconditions and can be modified through intercultural communication processes. This process depends on the skills a person has when interacting. These skills, which help a person understand and navigate cultural differences better, fall into two main categories:

1. Interpreting and Relationship Building Skills: The ability to analyse data from one's own culture and another culture, and understand potential relationships between the two.
2. Discovery and Interaction Skills: The ability to discover new information, both through direct interaction with people from other cultures and from other sources such as documents and literature.

When we refer to the objectives of these elements of ICC, Byram (1997, p. 49 – 53) formulated those elements into five sections:

1. Attitudes; curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own, has objectives as:
  - a. Being open to actively pursue or embrace chances to interact with diversity.
  - b. Having curiosity about exploring the familiar and unfamiliar aspects within one's own culture and other's.
  - c. Being open to challenging the underlying values and assumptions within cultural customs in one's own environment.
  - d. Being prepared to experience the various phases of adjusting and engaging with a different culture during a period of residence.
  - e. Being prepared to participate in the norms of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction.
2. Knowledge; of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutors country and of the general process of societal and individual interaction, has the objectives (knowledge about/of):
  - a. The historical and current connections between one's own culture and culture of one's conversation partner.
  - b. The methods used establish communication with individuals from other cultures.
  - c. The collective memory of one's own culture and the conversation partner's culture.
  - d. The national conceptualizations of geographical regions with one's own culture and how they are understood from others perspective.

- e. The national conceptualizations of geographical regions with the conversation partner's culture and how they are perceived from others perspective.
  - f. The responsible for socializing individuals within one's own and conversation partner's culture.
  - g. The social hierarchies and their primary indicators in one's own culture and the conversation partner's culture.
  - h. The establishment impacts daily life within both one's own culture and the conversation partner's culture.
  - i. The dynamics of social engagement within the conversation partner's culture.
3. Skills of interpreting and relating; the ability to interpret other culture to explain it and relate to one's own culture, has the objectives (ability to):
- a. Recognize ethnocentric viewpoints within a text or occurrence and clarify the sources.
  - b. Identify instances of miscommunication and discord within an exchange, elucidating them based on the cultural frameworks involved.
  - c. Facilitating resolution between differing interpretations of phenomena.
4. Skills of discovery and interaction; the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction, has the objective (ability to):
- a. Elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of a culture to develop explanatory framework to various phenomena.
  - b. Recognize significant references within across cultures.
  - c. Differentiate between similar and dissimilar verbal and non-verbal interaction processes.
  - d. Employ a suitable blend of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively engage with interlocutors from diverse cultures.
  - e. Identify past and present relationships between one's own culture and the counterpart.

- f. Utilize both public and private institutions facilitating cross-cultural contact.
  - g. Employ mediation skills in real-time interactions between individuals from diverse cultures.
5. Critical cultural awareness/political education; the ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and others cultures, has the objectives (ability to):
- a. Recognize and interpret explicit and implicit values present across different cultures.
  - b. Make an analysis of the cultures using explicit perspectives and criteria.
  - c. Engage in and facilitate intercultural exchange, negotiating acceptance as needed by drawing one's knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

In the context of the experience of living overseas through the Student Exchange Program in the University of Pécs, Indonesian students undergo practical skillset honing through real-world experience as they immerse themselves in a new cultural setting. They acquire knowledge about their own culture while simultaneously gaining insight into the cultural practices and norms of others' culture.

Moreover, Byram's outline of the aims of ICC – which includes critical cultural awareness, exploration and interaction, interpretation, and relational skills offers Indonesian students a road map for negotiating the challenges of intercultural communication. These objectives shape their interaction with peers and locals, which then reflects their intercultural experience during their time abroad.

Essentially, Byram's ICC framework provides a theoretical lens through which to examine Indonesian students' experiences within the setting of the Student Exchange Program. It highlights how interactions between cultures can have a profoundly positive impact on students' communication abilities and cultural competence, fostering a deeper understanding of global diversity.

## **1.6 Research Assumption**

This research assumes that the experience of living overseas through the Student Exchange Program at the University of Pécs plays a significant role in sharpening the intercultural communication competence of Indonesian students. The main focus includes social, cultural, academic, and non-academic competence acquired inside and outside the university environment. In addition, interaction with local, international students, and lecturers at the University of Pécs, is considered as an important part of the cultural experience for Indonesian students participating in the Student Exchange Program.

## **1.7 Operational Concept**

The operationalization concept entails translating abstract concepts into more understandable terms in order to specify how the concept can be measured or observed. In operationalization, a logic that describes the purpose of the concept, the process, the goal, and the expected outcome should be developed.

This study aims to empirically investigate the process on how the experience of living overseas through Student Exchange Program sharpens Indonesian students' intercultural communication competence. It defines "intercultural communication competence" as students' observable abilities to communicate, interact, and navigate cultural differences across diverse contexts and with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. The qualitative measures used in the study include the students' experiences and reflections during their semester in the University of Pécs while participating in the Student Exchange Program.

As explained above, the Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) elements in this study can be observed in Indonesian students residing in Pécs. These elements can be broken down as follows:

### **1. Attitudes**

Indonesian student's curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend judgement about other cultures, and belief about one's own.

## 2. Knowledge

Indonesian student's of understanding social groups, practices the general process of societal and individual interaction in their own and others' cultures.

## 3. Skills of interpreting and relating

Indonesian student's ability to interpret other cultures to explain them and relate to their own culture.

## 4. Skills of discovery and interaction

Indonesian student's ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices.

## 5. Critical cultural awareness/political education

Indonesian student's ability to critically evaluate perspectives, practices and products in their own and others' cultures.

Through interviews with informants, the goal of this study is to achieve the understanding why the research phenomenon can be found. This concept is expected to aid the research goal by guiding this research.

## **1.8 Research Method**

### **1.8.1 Research Approach**

This research employs a qualitative research method based on phenomenology. The phenomenological approach aims to describe the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals regarding a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). The goal of the phenomenology study is to describe the meaning of each subject's experiences. In this phenomenological research, participants are asked to describe their experiences as they perceive them, and the researcher must take into account their own beliefs and feelings. This description includes "what and "how" the participants experienced it.

### **1.8.2 Research Subjects**

The subjects for this qualitative research are the Indonesian students who are participating in the Student Exchange Program at the University of Pécs, namely



IISMA and the Indonesian Study Abroad Program. From a total of 53 students in 2023, 10 students selected as the subjects for this research. Based on this fact, the author chooses the subjects who have the understanding of the phenomenon and who can also be relied upon as reliable sources of data.

### **1.8.3 Type of Data**

The type of data used in this study is qualitative data, which includes interview transcripts, textual notes, and observational data.

### **1.8.4 Sources of Data**

The sources of data used in this particular research are primary and secondary data.

#### **1.8.4.1 Primary Data**

Primary Data is generated by the researcher herself through conducting research, interviews, and experiments designed specifically to understand and solve research problems directly from the informant.

#### **1.8.4.2 Secondary Data**

Secondary data refers to the additional information obtained from already-published sources, such as literature reviews, citations to books, articles, journals, theses, and other relevant sources. It describes information that has already been gathered and documented by another researcher and includes materials like books, articles, reports, and databases.

### **1.8.5 Data Collection Method**

In qualitative research, interviews are conducted when researchers ask one or more participants broad, open-ended questions and record their responses. This research conducts interviews both online and offline. After interviewing, the researcher frequently transcribes and enters the data into a computer file in order to

evaluate it. Interviews are especially beneficial for learning the backstory of a participant's experiences and gathering in-depth information on a subject.

### **1.8.6 Data Analysis Technique**

This study employed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method, which seeks to conduct a comprehensive investigation of how each research subject interprets their experiences. Following that, the researcher applies a number of fundamental theories to re-examine the subject's interpretation. It is evident from IPA that a variety of factors contribute to the diverse perspectives that individuals hold regarding the specific reality that they encounter. The steps of IPA are described in the following framework by Smith et al. (2009, p. 79 - 107):

#### **1. Reading and Re-reading**

Transcribe interview recordings into written form. Read the transcripts multiple times to recall details and comprehend research subject's information, breaking them into sections.

#### **2. Initial Noting**

Test the transcripts for the words, sentences and language used by the informants. Take initial notes openly, identifying how informants express their understanding on the issues. Make descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments. This stage may include follow-up interviews for deeper insight.

#### **3. Developing Emergent Themes**

Analyze exploratory comments to identify recurring themes relevant to research objectives.

#### **4. Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes**

Explain interrelationships and patterns between themes using graphs, tables, or maps. Eliminates themes that are inappropriate.

#### **5. Moving to the Next Case**

Repeat stages one to four for the next research subject until all transcripts are analyzed.

## 6. Looking for Pattern Across Cases

Identify patterns across all information by referring to analyses from stages one to four.

### **1.8.7 Data Quality**

Three test methods – the conformability, transferability, and dependability tests – used to evaluate the validity of this study. The dependability test attempts to evaluate the researcher's credibility to ensure that the data provided are facts genuinely discovered and existing in the field. Methods such as checking data sources, member checks, case analyses, and conversations with co workers or auditors – such as supervisors – are used to carry out this testing. The transferability test measures the research's degree of accuracy and the extent to which its findings are applicable or useful in different social contexts or scenarios. The conformability test aims to determine whether the procedures used during the study are compliant with the goal of the investigation.