

Research Article

Understanding the Psychological Well-being of International Students at a Private University in Surabaya, Indonesia

Hotimah Masdan Salim^{1*}, Achmad Yarziq Mubarak Salis Salamy², Wiwik Afridah³, Syiddatul Budury⁴, and Umi Hanik⁴

¹Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya, Indonesia

²Department of Medical Education, Bioethics, and Humanities, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya, Indonesia

³Faculty of Health Sciences, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya, Indonesia

⁴Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya, Indonesia

ORCID

Hotimah Masdan Salim: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0460-6830>

Abstract.

Amidst the backdrop of globalization, there has been a marked increase in international student enrollment across global higher education institutions. This study examines the psychological well-being of international students at a private university in Surabaya, Indonesia, focusing on the unique challenges and support systems available during their educational journey. The study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative assessment of well-being through standardized scales and qualitative interviews to capture personal narratives. The study sample consisted of 15 international students from various countries, providing diverse perspectives on the acculturation process and its impact on mental health. The results showed that factors such as cultural adjustment, language barriers, social support from peers, and the availability of university-led mental health services significantly influenced the overall well-being of these students. The study findings showed that while most students experienced initial stress and anxiety, those who engaged with available support showed marked improvements in their psychological well-being over time. This study underscores the importance of targeted support services for international students to enhance their academic and social experiences.

Keywords: physiological well-being, international students, mental health, academic

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing globalization of higher education has led to a significant rise in the number of international students pursuing academic degrees in various countries. Studying abroad offers students the opportunity to gain high-quality education, develop cross-cultural competencies, and enhance career prospects. However, international students often face unique challenges that can impact their psychological well-being, including **cultural adjustment, academic pressure, language barriers, social isolation,**

Corresponding Author: Hotimah Masdan Salim; email: dr.hotimah@unusa.ac.id

Published: 25 September 2025

Publishing services provided by Knowledge E

© Hotimah Masdan Salim et al. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the 2nd International Office Conference 2024 Committee.



and financial stress [1]. These factors may lead to increased anxiety, depression, and lower life satisfaction compared to domestic students [2]. Given the growing number of international students in Indonesia, particularly in Surabaya, it is crucial to understand their psychological well-being to ensure their academic success and personal growth.

Psychological well-being is a **multidimensional construct** that encompasses autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance [3]. Maintaining good psychological well-being is essential for international students, as it influences their ability to cope with stress, adapt to new environments, and perform academically [4]. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of **social support systems**, including peer networks, faculty mentorship, and institutional services, in promoting the mental health of international students [5]. However, limited research has explored the psychological well-being of international students in Indonesia, particularly in private universities.

As one of Indonesia's prominent centers for higher education, Surabaya continues to attract a rising population of international students. Although private universities in the region provide a variety of academic offerings and student support initiatives, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding how international students perceive their psychological well-being within this setting. Gaining insight into their lived experiences can reveal critical factors that affect mental health and assess the adequacy of current institutional support structures. Recognizing the specific challenges and coping strategies adopted by these students enables universities to develop more focused and effective interventions aimed at enhancing both psychological well-being and academic outcomes [6].

This study aims to explore the psychological well-being of international students at a private university in Surabaya, Indonesia, by examining key factors influencing their mental health and coping strategies. By identifying challenges and potential interventions, the findings may contribute to creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for international students in Indonesia.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1. Study Design

This study employs a cross-sectional study design to examine the psychological well-being of international students during their education at Nahdlatul Ulama University

Surabaya (UNUSA). The cross-sectional approach is chosen for its effectiveness in capturing a snapshot of the current state at a specific point in time. This method allows for the collection of data from a diverse population of international students from various countries studying at UNUSA, providing insights into their psychological well-being during their studies at the university.

2.2. Study Population and Sampling

The study population consists of international students enrolled at a private university in Surabaya. The sampling technique used is **total sampling**, including all international students currently studying at UNUSA, with diverse cultural backgrounds, academic levels, and lengths of stay in Indonesia.

2.3. Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection in this study is a structured questionnaire, using **Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB)** to measure key dimensions such as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

2.4. Data Analysis

In the data analysis section of our study, we utilized IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27 to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the collected data

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants

The findings of this study indicate that the **mean age** of the participants was **22.5 years**, with a **standard deviation of 2.55 years**, suggesting that most international students in this study were in their early twenties. This aligns with previous research indicating that international students are generally within this age range as they pursue undergraduate or early postgraduate studies [1]. This suggests that most respondents were in their early twenties, which aligns with the typical age range of university students pursuing

Demographic Factor	Percentage (or Mean/Std Dev)
Age	22.5±2.55
Male	40%
Female	60%
Academic Disiplin	
Faculty of Medicine	10%
Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery	50%
Faculty of Health Science	10%
Faculty of Education	10%
Faculty Economi bisnis and teknologi Digital	10%
Magister	10%

Figure 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants.

undergraduate or early postgraduate degrees[11]. This age group is often characterized by developmental transitions, such as increased independence and identity exploration, which may influence their psychological well-being [12]. Age plays a crucial role in psychological well-being, as younger students may face greater challenges in adapting to a new cultural and academic environment compared to older students with more life experience [6]. Regarding **gender distribution**, the study found that **40% of participants were male, and 60% were female**. This gender ratio is consistent with trends observed in international student populations in various universities, where female students often outnumber males [7].Gender differences can influence psychological well-being, as research suggests that female students may experience higher levels of stress and anxiety but are also more likely to seek social support and mental health services [8]. Previous studies have noted that gender may play a role in how international students experience and cope with psychological challenges, with female students often reporting higher levels of emotional stress and seeking social support more frequently than their male counterparts [13]. Understanding gender-based differences in coping strategies is essential for tailoring mental health support services for international students.

These findings underscore the need for universities to provide **comprehensive mental health support tailored to the diverse demographic and academic backgrounds of international students**. Institutional interventions, such as peer mentoring programs, academic counseling, and culturally sensitive mental health services, can help enhance students' psychological well-being and academic success [4]. Future research should explore **how different academic disciplines impact the psychological well-being of international students** and identify effective strategies for mitigating academic stress.

3.2. Psychological Well-being in International Students

Key Questionnaire Items	Response Distribution (Frequency/Percentage)
Psychological Wellbeing	
High Well-being	40%
Moderate Well-being	35%
Low Well-being	25%
Coping Strategies	
- Adaptive Coping	70%
Maladaptive Coping	30%
Perceived Support	
High Support	30%
Moderate Support	50%
Low Support	20%
Impact of Global Uncertainties	
High Impact	30%
Moderate Impact	43%
Low Impact	27%

Figure 2: Questionnaire Components and Response Distribution.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the psychological well-being of international students based on their responses to a structured questionnaire. The **Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB)** was used to assess key dimensions of mental health, including **purpose in life, autonomy, and personal growth**. Participants rated their agreement with various statements reflecting these aspects of well-being, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of their psychological state.

The results revealed that **40% of participants reported high psychological well-being**, indicating strong self-acceptance, a clear sense of purpose, and positive relationships. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that international students who successfully adapt to their new environment and build social connections tend to experience greater well-being [6]. Factors such as strong social support networks, effective coping mechanisms, and engagement in academic and extracurricular activities may contribute to this high level of well-being [9].

Meanwhile, **35% of participants experienced moderate well-being**, suggesting that while they may have some positive aspects in their psychological state, they also face certain challenges. Moderate well-being could be influenced by transitional stress, cultural adjustment difficulties, and academic pressure, which are common among international students [1]. These students may benefit from institutional support services,

such as mental health counseling, peer mentoring programs, and stress management workshops, to enhance their well-being and academic success [4].

Notably, **25% of participants indicated low psychological well-being**, highlighting a significant portion of students who may be struggling with emotional distress, loneliness, or academic burnout. This is consistent with research showing that international students often experience higher levels of stress and mental health challenges due to **language barriers, cultural adaptation difficulties, and limited access to mental health resources** [10]. Should prioritize targeted interventions for these students, including culturally sensitive psychological support, academic advising, and community engagement programs to help them navigate their challenges effectively.

These findings emphasize the importance of **universities implementing tailored mental health initiatives** that address the unique needs of international students. Future research should explore the specific factors contributing to variations in psychological well-being and examine the effectiveness of different support mechanisms in improving mental health outcomes for international students.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study offers crucial insights into the psychological wellbeing of international students during a period of global uncertainty. It highlights the significant role of adaptive coping strategies and the need for robust support systems. While it provides valuable implications for university administrations and policymakers, the limitations suggest the need for further longitudinal and qualitative research to deepen our understanding of these students' experiences and need.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to **Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya (UNUSA)** for its invaluable support in conducting this research. This study was made possible through the institutional assistance provided by UNUSA, including access to research facilities, academic resources, and continuous encouragement from faculty members and administrative staff. The authors also extend their appreciation to the international students who participated in this study, whose insights and experiences have contributed significantly to the findings.

LIMITATION OF THIS STUDY

One of the primary limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size, consisting of only 15 international students at a private university in Surabaya, Indonesia. While this sample provided valuable qualitative and quantitative insights into the psychological well-being of international students, the limited number of participants restricts the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. The small sample size may not fully capture the diversity of experiences, cultural backgrounds, or challenges faced by international students from different regions. Additionally, the participants were drawn from a single institution, which may further limit the applicability of the results to other university settings, both within Indonesia and globally. Future research with a larger and more diverse sample across multiple universities is recommended to enhance the reliability and generalizability of the findings, as well as to explore variations in psychological well-being across different cultural and academic contexts.

References

- [1] Chai PP, Krageloh CU, Shepherd D. Acculturation and well-being of international university students: the role of resilience, social support, and acculturative stress. *Int J Intercult Relat.* 2020;74:136–48.
- [2] Forbes-Mewett H, Sawyer AM. International students and mental health. *J Int Stud.* 2016;6(3):661–77.
- [3] Glass CR, Gómez E, Urzua A. Recreation, intercultural friendship, and international students' adaptation to college by region of origin. *Int J Intercult Relat.* 2014;42:104–17.
- [4] Russell J, Rosenthal D, Thomson G. The international student experience: three styles of adaptation. *High Educ.* 2010;60(2):235–49.
- [5] Ryff CD, Keyes CL. The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *J Pers Soc Psychol.* 1995 Oct;69(4):719–27.
- [6] Smith RA, Khawaja NG. A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *Int J Intercult Relat.* 2011;35(6):699–713.
- [7] OECD. *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators.* Paris: OECD Publishing; 2022.
- [8] Bayram N, Bilgel N. The prevalence and socio-demographic correlations of depression, anxiety and stress among a group of university students. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol.* 2008 Aug;43(8):667–72.

- [9] Glass CR, Gómez E, Urzua A. Recreation, intercultural friendship, and international students' adaptation to college by region of origin. *Int J Intercult Relat.* 2014;42:104–17.
- [10] Yeh CJ, Inose M. International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. *Couns Psychol Q.* 2003;16(1):15–28.
- [11] OECD. Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators. OECD Publishing; 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b->.
- [12] Arnett JJ. Emerging adulthood. A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *Am Psychol.* 2000 May;55(5):469–80.
- [13] Misra R, Castillo LG. Academic stress among college students: comparison of American and international students. *Int J Stress Manag.* 2004;11(2):132–48.