



EnJourMe (English Journal of Merdeka):

Culture, Language, and Teaching of English

Journal homepage: <http://jurnal.ummer.ac.id/index.php/enjourme/index>

## What makes Indonesian Eastern students struggle on academic performance at urban college: A grounded theory

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 20 June 2020

Revised 07 July 2020

Accepted 09 July 2020

Available online 24 July 2020

#### Keywords:

inclusive education  
educational disparity  
social justice  
grounded theory  
higher education

DOI: 10.26905/enjourme.v4i2.4311

#### How to cite this article:

Musthofiyah, U., & Isnainiyah, L. (2020). What makes Indonesian Eastern students struggle on academic performance at urban college: A grounded theory. *EnJourMe (English Journal Of Merdeka): Culture, Language, And Teaching Of English*, 5(1), 16 - 31. doi:10.26905/enjourme.v5i1.4311

### ABSTRACT

*A Grounded Theory was employed to design a theoretical model for explaining a phenomenon of low academic performance among a minority group at Urban college, henceforth referring to as Indonesian Eastern Students. There are 15 college students were purposively selected to take a semi-structured interview focus group about perspectives, experiences and insights that might hinder minority students in academic performance, putting a limelight on how they constructed self-identity through social interaction on and off campus. Through social justice perspective, this research finding offered theoretical framework to improve student performance in academics, to reduce the gap of educational disparity and foster inclusive education in Indonesia.*

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## 1. Introduction

There has been an increasing number of students from eastern Indonesian in a pursuit of higher education at urban colleges which subsequently changes the demographics of student population at campus, becoming more diverse with various ethnic groups and languages. However some challenges emerge along with the growth of population, calling attention to academic performance of eastern Indonesian students. Some prior studies suggested low academic performance among Eastern Indonesian students i.e, low GPAs, drop

out and no disciplinary (Bakhtiar, 2015; Mayora, Nazir, Basyir & Zuliani, 2016; Uriepa, 2019) that consequently make them underachievers in academics. Their reluctance to fully engage classroom activities, being inattentive on lecturers, lack of commitment to improve grades, inferiority, and lack of discipline were most of the blame (Mayora, et.al, 2016).

In addition, the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education in 2017 revealed culture shock and lack of college preparation attributed to the failure of study completion and academic achievement among students from rural areas and ethnic minority groups. A variety of studies taking place in some urban areas such as Jogjakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, Malang, Kendari, and Medan revealed several problematic issues among Eastern Indonesia students i.e., conflict with local people (Awe, 2019; Renggi, 2014), socio-cultural experiences and challenges (Ariyanti, 2013; Wijanarko & Syafiq, 2013; Ariani, 2015; Yahya & Rahardjo, 2018; Situmorang, 2019), social adaptation strategies (Rizal, Arsyad, & Hos, 2019), low academic performance (Bakhtiar, 2015; Mayora, et.al., 2016), the effect of self-concept on social adaptability (Agustin, 2007), motivation, discipline and academic performance (Mangguway, 2018), discrimination and self-esteem (Patiraja, 2017), self-confidence, social adaptation and academic ability (Uriepa, 2019). Prior studies suggested that students from Eastern Indonesia encountered difficulties in adjusting with new culture and environment, which was consistent with a study by Eri Wijanarko and Muhammad Syafiq (2013) that revealed inferiority and difficulties among Papuan students in self adjustment with college as a reason of their social withdrawal and lack of enthusiasm in learning activities.

For additional information, the researchers considered two parts of large regions in Indonesia based on regional development, i.e., Eastern Indonesia and Western Indonesia to set limitation on a realm of investigation. Western Indonesia includes Java, Bali, Sumatra and Kalimantan, whereas Eastern Indonesia includes Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Nusa Tenggara Barat, Maluku, and Papua. This is in line with a study from Suryadama, Widyanti, Suryahadi, & Sumarto (2006) that discussed about different characteristics of both groups of regions, calling for attention to promote actions of closing the disparity of growth between these two large regions. Azzizah (2015) stated the difference between Eastern Indonesia and Western Indonesia in term of Human Development Index (HDI), referring to Jakarta with the highest HDI index and Papua province with the lowest HDI index. Based on this classification, the researchers developed a study that took participants among Indonesian Eastern Students.

This study is intended to gain accurate data from the field which is further can be used as contribution to the policymakers and educators related to reducing educational disparity between urban and rural areas. Some interventions and well-adjusted programs based on the empirical evidence will be meaningful and effective. The adjustment to students' population change should not be solely burdened to students, but also universities. The institution should provide inclusive campus that is ready to accommodate diversity and understand how to effectively produce good outcomes regardless of students' background. In response to the challenge, the policymakers and any stakeholders should consider learning strategies that encourage enthusiasm and willingness to learn, an encouragement of pre-reading strategies to retention of students to study offers a beautiful idea. A prior study mentions the effectiveness of pre-reading activities to promote learning efficacy (Lailiyah, Wediyantoro, & Yustisia, 2019) and to stimulate writing skill which is required in academics (Farani, Y., & Kurnia, L. I, 2017).

Significance of contribution in this study is offered to stakeholders in higher education to understand an insight of unheard voices among minority students about their struggles in academics. In order to promote positive climate for an inclusive education and regulating policies that are suitable with current change of demographics in campus, as college students are getting more diverse with a variety of ethnic backgrounds and languages. It is a serious issue that needs to be addressed because psychological well-being of students is an utmost of

importance in education. Some studies highlighted enormous impact of fostering good psychological well-being to succeed in academics (Rüppel, Liersch & Walter, 2015; Merwe, 2005). This phenomenon is like a tip of an iceberg that conceal hidden voices that would be unraveled in order to be aware of real situation happening among minority students in campuses.

Previous studies have not yet offered an in-depth insight about social justice perspective addressing academic struggles among Indonesian Eastern Students. Therefore this study was undertaken to fill out this gap as it is necessary to include social justice perspective and unravel unheard voices that may have been unobserved and go unnoticed. Without embracing social justice perspective, the college would be unprepared to deal with diversity and current change of campus demographics which subsequently inflict social conflicts and potential risks of psychological well beings of minority groups. Failing to nurture a positive climate for minority students in college will consequently lead to unsuccessful academics. The objective of the study is in line with the ministerial regulation of the Republic of Indonesia about Inclusive Education No.70 of 2009 paragraph (ii), that is to implement an education that embraces diversity and non-discriminatory of all participants in education. Referring to this regulation, it creates an underlining basis to conduct this study to embrace diversity in campus with social justice perspective.

## 2. Method

Research method in this study is a grounded theory giving prominence to subjective interpretations of perspectives, experiences, challenges and struggles among Indonesian Eastern Students at college. Participants in this study were undergraduate students at one of the universities in Malang with several sampling criteria as follows: 1) students from Eastern Indonesian regions, i.e., Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Nusa Tenggara Barat, Maluku and Papua, 2) age ranging from 19 to 25 years old, 3) living in the city of Malang at least 2 years.

This study used pseudonyms to protect data and confidentiality of participants. It used focus group to derive thorough information from a targeted group with some justifications: that is to offer better way in acquiring information from certain group, allowing them to listen more into peers' sayings and to identify whether they have similar experiences or not. This situation encourage them to be more open up and supporting each other while sharing their collective stories. A prior study by McLafferty (2004) used a focus group interview as an effective way in acquiring collective thoughts and perspectives among participants in group, suggesting interaction and dynamics within group as prominent advantage in data collection. It allows exploration of unthinkable Ideas which might be kept inside over the years until the participants understand that they are not alone and someone outside also shares similar experiences. Feeling not alone will encourage them to speak more.

The researchers presented a brief information about confidentiality and a protocol prior focus group interviews. A protocol of semi structured interviews consisted of several guiding interview questions based on several theoretical studies and literature reviews are illustrated in table 1. This study used a theoretical sampling and consisted of two periods: September 2016 and May 2019. Each focus group interview took 45 minutes. The interview results were recorded with an audio tape and transcribed verbatim. Due to time constraints, the second period of data collection was made in May 2019 in which a point of saturation was eventually reached.

The transcript was further analyzed to reveal hidden phenomena drawn from experiences, perspective and insights of the participants. In the first data analysis, a coding process was taken on a basis of an established regulation to reveal a phenomenon in the data. Along with data analysis, the researcher regularly carried out constant comparison as

suggested by Charmaz (2006, p. 165). The comparative constant was carried out in order to compare the findings of the interim with existing data. The transcripts of interviews were coded into three stages: initial coding, focused coding, axial coding. In addition, the conceptual labeling process employed properties and dimensions such as actions and consequences to generate more in-depth understanding on the relationship between subcategories and categories (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). The researcher labelled some conceptual codes based on properties and dimensions to generate any relevant categories and concepts and developed repeated reading process from each line, each paragraph to whole transcripts to ensure no codes and concepts were missed out.

In addition, the researchers reflected and revisited a collection of ideas, activities, follow up actions and revisions through a memo while frequently discussing concepts and labels with co-researcher in order to reduce subjectivity and bias to consider different perspectives and valuable concepts that contributed to the depth of insight. Five selected categories were constructed and integrated to generate a theory that describes Indonesian eastern students in academic performance.

**Table 1. Guiding questions for Focus Group Interview**

- 1 What do you feel after leaving hometown and studying at campus?
- 2 Based on your personal experience, what makes the biggest deal on self-adjustment in new environment? Why?
- 3 Can you give me an example of when you experienced culture shock? Why do you feel so?
- 4 Tell me unforgettable stories that you ever perceived during study in campus
- 5 What do you think the primary cause of such situation?
- 6 How do you cope with the issues?
- 7 How do you learn yourself identity and group identity from social interaction on and off campus?
- 8 What are challenges and struggles that you perceive during study?
- 9 What are few examples of which experience that discourage you to engage classroom activities?
- 10 Can you share your thoughts, experiences, and stories that we have not discussed yet today? How do you feel about it?

### 3. Results and discussion

This grounded theory constructed several categories to describe factors that hinder academic performance of Indonesian Eastern Students at urban college. At this stage, the results of the analysis data was presented in a theoretical model in figure 1 illustrating five categories that explain struggles in academics such as sense of belonging, stigma consciousness, language, college preparation and social isolation. Furthermore, figure 1 clearly illustrates the interconnections between each variable. Lack of college preparation and language barrier likely intensify the feeling of inferiority which adds a fuel to social isolation

and eventually leads to low sense of belonging. The discomfort becomes worse when the students experience high stigma of consciousness, meaning that everything happen to them is always associated with negative stereotype labelling their groups. If left ignored, it will disrupt the psychological wellbeing of the impacted students. When the psychological wellbeing of students get worse, it will eventually create another conflicts that risk the academics.

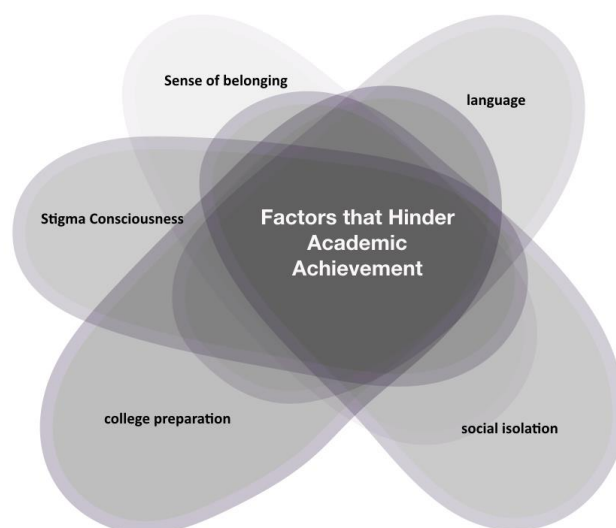


Figure 1. A theoretical model of factors that hinder academic achievement of Indonesian Eastern Students in Urban Campus

### 3.1. Sense of belonging

The results of study revealed an underlying pattern of social withdrawals among Eastern Indonesian students in classrooms which can be perceived from an unwillingness to engage with peers. The students encounter some challenges so that in coping with it, they prefer to remain less active in learning activities. Dara from Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) discussed her reluctance to open up with colleagues:

*I don't talk a lot in classroom, I often keep everything to myself. I am reluctant to share my views with my classmates. I rarely communicate with the rest of class*

As a minority students, being aware of their position among majority students accentuate the feeling of different from the rest of groups. As Ronnie remarked his experience within classroom:

*When I was among them, I always feel different...there is a wall standing between us*

The use of wall as a metaphor to illustrate his inner feeling may reflect a current state of emotional wellbeing. He might feel alone and not well understood by others, which lead to low sense of belongings and fear of rejection. Avoiding such a risk of rejection, he socially withdrew from those of outer circle group. In addition, Jessica expressed her discomfort with the following statement:



*I don't really interact with friends in class, during lessons I just stay quiet. I rarely interact with lecturers because I would be embarrassed to give wrong answer.*

Fear of being rejected by other classmates, fear of making fool of themselves, and inferiority were salient. Rather than spending time to engage with others, they decided to do their own things which hinder maximum learning experience. The difficulty of making friends becomes unbearable. Dessy from Nusa Tenggara Barat (NTB) expressed her feeling through the following remark:

*In the beginning I felt inferior with my Javanese peers. It was difficult to get along and adjust with new situation.*

She identified herself as an outsider, revealing a challenge to adjust with new place where she was identified as a minority student in a small circle of classroom. She also described her inferiority toward a majority ethnic group in a classroom, i.e., Javanese students, which were benefitted from their upbringings in a Java island, in which most urban cities and a national capital city are located, allowing them to get more quality education than the rest of islands in Indonesia. As a result, they develop low sense of belongings. Meeuwisse, Severiens, & Born (2010) describe this situation as alienation, difficulty to socialize with peers and homesickness.

Another reason behind poor academics of rural and minority ethnic students is culture shock. A difficulty to cope with an overwhelming new situation in campus may result in social withdrawal from campus society. Further it creates a feeling of being alone. Sense of belongings refers to the feeling of acceptance, support and inclusive that students feel from the schools (Goodenow, 1993) and as predictor of student retention (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). Academic performance and engagement into school community (St-Amand, Girard, & Smith, 2017; Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, & Waters, 2018). Students with lack of school belonging may be at risk of dropout (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Drawing from their social interaction, it can be concluded that the low sense of belongings could be the reason why eastern Indonesian students are less enthusiastic and involved in campus activities.

### **3.2. Stigma consciousness**

Fear of being judged by fellow classmates due to physical appearance and existing stereotypes labelling their ethnic group were frequently discussed among participants. This category describes a challenge perceived by Indonesian eastern students which make them feel anxious about their physical appearance: i.e., dark skin and curly hair which represent characteristics of Melanesian race in Indonesian Eastern Regions. John from Papua had not been self-conscious with his physical appearance until moving into new town to pursue education, he subsequently felt different.

*Some people stared on me when I walked passing by. It makes me anxious. Could it be my skin darker than other fellow Indonesians?*

Getting stares from people passing by created a feeling of discomfort. It makes them anxious of what people might think about them which subsequently discourages social engagement with outer circle group and preference to hang out with inner circle group. They construct self-identity by learning from society on how their ethnic group was labelled with certain stereotypes and become conscious on how these might influence their behavior and attitude toward them.

*... Sometimes even in the classroom the lecturers only pay attention to certain students. So, why do I have to try anyway?*

As stigma of consciousness of individuals is high, they might relate any circumstances happening around them is due to existing stereotypes labelling their groups. It makes them sensitive and easily get offended whenever encountering mistreatment and discrimination. They become anxious on what people might think and feel powerless on any possible things to deal with. It discouraged them to fully engage in learning activities and feel apathy. In addition, students from rural areas and minority ethnics are often anxious about how they are perceived by faculty staff and/ or peers with regard to any stereotype threats labelling them. They are concerned whether faculty, peers and staff perceive their college admission solely due to their status as minority groups, not academic achievement. Things are getting worse when students believe their sole reasons of being treated such a negative way is due to their stigmatized cultural identity and would see it as an evidence that confirms the existing stereotypes (Mosley & Rosenberg, 2007). This condition creates a preconceived bias of being victimized due to social group discrimination despite of whether or not discrimination might actually happen.

Meanwhile, another case describes a challenge they had encountered when searching for boarding houses. Romy from NTT shared his personal experience about subtle rejection of a boarding house's owner giving an unusual expensive rental cost.

*When looking for a boarding house, rent owners gave me very expensive rent cost which are higher than it should be, beyond normal. He probably rejected me by offering such unusual price.*

This situation creates a subtle message of non-confrontational rejection. The interlocutor simply understands what brings to rejection. When the individual has high stigma of consciousness, they would relate most of accidents due to racial stereotypes, which happened to this example. Renny from NTT shared similar experience. She almost made a deal and get cancelled only after the rent owner learnt about her hometown.

*I almost made a deal of rent contract through down payment, but after the rent owner learnt that I was coming from NTT, he said the room was no longer available, fully booked.*

Renny resonated the image of individual with high stigma of consciousness. She was aware on how people might see her. She constructed new concept of self-identity from new environment in which stereotypes across ethnic group was pervasive. Agung from Sulawesi Island described his experience as an unfair treatment. He felt unjustly treated and blamed existing stereotypes as a source of this injustice.

*The locals regarded Indonesian easterners as rude, loud, and making troubles. I am different. I only want to pursue my education, but the stereotypes hit me anyway.*

The physical characteristics of Indonesian Easterners which are dominantly represented by Melanesian race are dark skin and curly hair. In college, the physical characteristics make them stand out among the crowds which simultaneously lead to labelling any existing stereotypes inherent to the group. Agung from Sulawesi shared his remark on this personal experience.

*... they assume that Indonesian Easterners like to drink and bring girls into boarding house. It's wrong. We cannot label everyone the same. It depends on each individual.*

Henny from NTT expressed her disagreement on certain existing stereotype which bothered her. Friendliness, enthusiasm, loud & high-pitched tones characterizing Indonesian easterners were perceived differently by a majority people as a sign of rudeness and impoliteness.

*We are considered harsh, impolite, speaking with high-pitched tone. This is us. We often speak loudly but it does not mean we are rude. High intonation does not mean being impolite and rude.*

According to Aronson & Inzlicht (2004), stereotype threat can be inflicted by existing negative stereotypes of individual's social identity. When the negative stereotypes and slight change of environment are salient, the individuals are reminded to their self-identity, which will affect their confidence and performance. The fear of being discriminated and mistreated made them feel anxious. John from Papua shared his thoughts on such experience.

*Watching news about protests from fellow Papuans and some racist callings, had left deep impression on me. I feel anxious of what people think about me.*

An example of study conducted by Steele (1997) reveals the impact of stereotypes for being blacks and female in the United States, this stereotype triggers consciousness among black and female students about their scholastic skills and intellectual capacity which impacted on the functioning of intellectuality and the identity development of individual as part of the group. However, Mosley & Rosenberg (2007) mentions the existence of fluctuation in stigma consciousness. It does not always go stagnant in every other situation. It goes ups and downs depending on every situation that individuals might encounter.

In the case of African American female students, the stigma consciousness increases when they are entering predominantly white universities. Stereotype threat and stigma consciousness may be intertwined and relates to each other even though they literally go with different constructs. Pinel (1999) explains how these two constructs are obviously different. The stereotype threat refers to a consciousness of individuals on their own behaviors that confirm the existing stereotype labelling their groups. On the other hand, stigma consciousness makes someone concern whether they are going to be stereotyped or not, regardless the presence or absence of discrimination. According to Steele (1997), the stereotype threat is initiated with students' perception of negative judgment and ill-treatment they perceive due to stereotypes. The fear that students feel anxious with then confirms the negative stereotypes. Those with high degree of stigma consciousness perceive more distress and more susceptible to any stereotype threats against them (Steele, 1997).

Mosley & Rosenberg (2007) argued that being different from the rest of other groups make ethnic minority students become sole target of intense scrutiny and stereotype labelling, leaving them more vulnerable to any stereotype threats against them. Moreover, having solo status intensifies the impacts of stereotype threat, self-conscious thoughts and behavior and stigma consciousness with female students suffer more against negative stereotypes than male students (Mosley & Rosenberg, 2007). Being solo status triggers worries on any stereotype against them. As Mosley & Rosenberg (2007) stated that solo status creates burden that could be destructive for students, leading to vulnerability against any stereotype threats which further confirms their low academic performance.

In addition, Mosley & Rosenberg (2007) reveals the fluctuation of stigma consciousness on individuals. It does not go stagnant in every situation. Meanwhile, it goes up and down depending on every situation that individuals have encountered. In the case of African American female students, the stigma consciousness significantly increases when situated in predominantly white universities. This situation may reflect what is perceived by rural and ethnic minority students in urban college where they have different physical appearance to the rest of other groups. and how they understand life understands the meaning of life from what is experienced by people who share the same characteristics with them they observe the experiences that exist in their environment experiences that occur in people who are in their groups and they take The meaning of the experiences felt together with people who are in their group so that based on this philosophy researchers use grounded theory to produce a theoretical concept that we take from the data we get from. This is in line with Mosley & Rosenberg (2007) defines high stigma consciousness as individuals' belief that stereotypes could influence the way they interact with people outside the groups.



Individuals with low stigma consciousness are not affected with the existing stereotypes labelling their groups. They would resist the impact of stereotype status when interacting with outside groups. In a study conducted by Brown & Pinel (2003), there is an evidence that high stigma consciousness could affect student's academic performance, as the higher stigma consciousness the worse the academic performance. Brown & Pinel (2003) gave some empirical evidences that establish relationship between stigma consciousness and stereotype threat. Students who have high level of stigma consciousness perform worse on certain subject tests, compared to the rest of students with lower level of stigma consciousness.

In addition, Spencer, Steele, & Quinn (1999) found a relationship between stereotype threat and problem solving skill so that stereotype threat could reduce the efficiency of cognitive processing in dealing with cognitive tasks. A study by Ryan & Ryan (2005) found another negative impact of stereotype threat toward students as well. They explained that the stereotype threats trigger anxiety, which is a big threat for effective study, as many believe anxiety could hinder cognitive processing (Spencer et.al., 1999; Ryan et.al., 2005). Furthermore, Pinel (1999) describes an inevitable impact of stigma consciousness on children as the higher stigma consciousness, the more likely they confirm the stereotypes imposed on them.

### 3.3. Social isolation

Some participants shared similar experiences about social isolation. Transition from secondary to tertiary education might be overwhelming which is even escalated with new environment and different culture. As a minority group in campus, they have less social interaction with peers and limit the interaction only with inner circle group, which aggravates loneliness. To cope with it, they seek a relief in gatherings with inner circle group and religion, as Hanna from Papua shared her remark:

*I often spend most of my time in a boarding house. Sometimes I join a gathering with fellow Papuans and visit church.*

The feeling of loneliness and isolation emerge from feeling lonely and being different from the rest of other groups in college. Jessica from Papua shared her limited interaction with the locals and how she dealt with loneliness through singing, an escape from an overwhelming situation in new environment. She had found a source of happiness by spending time with fellow Papuans and singing together.

*the only locals that I frequently interact off-campus are my rent owner and other tenants...In a boarding house, I sing together with other fellow Papuans.*

It is undeniable that college transition and stereotype threat have worrying effects on students' emotional well-being, particularly those of minority groups and the only representatives of their social group (Mosley & Rosenberg, 2007). Even it may get worse when they find themselves as few representative of their social groups which set them apart from others, escalating the feeling of loneliness and isolation.

### 3.4. College preparation

Some participants articulated their experiences in adapting with college life. They were underprepared and had no idea which major they would supposedly take in, which were suitable with their interest and aptitude. They had to deal with unfamiliar concepts which subsequently became a source of anxiety and insecurity due to getting overwhelmed with current major they are dwelling in.

*I am not familiar with a major that I am currently in, neither I am interested in. I chose this major simply because I didn't have any idea which major that I was supposed to take in. Turns out... it was way more difficult than what I had expected.*

College requires more rigid, intense and independent learning that students should deal with. Failure to cope with college life would lead to a feeling of 'getting lost'. It creates a vicious cycle, begun with learning new concepts they are not interested in and even familiar with, failing an exam, getting insecure and anxious, tackling with new concepts, anxiety gets overwhelming which reduces emotional wellbeing and disrupts the optimum of learning. Agung, a participant from Sulawesi, shared his experience on dealing with the struggle.

*In the beginning, I was so confident that I could get through academic life. Yet it changed after one semester passed, I got bad scores which made me insecure. Even though I studied hard, it felt persistent. It made me insecure and inferior to my peers.*

The struggle likely emerges from lack of college preparation among Indonesian Eastern Students. They are not well-prepared about which college major that suits on their aptitude and interest and what sociocultural challenges they may encounter in the transition from high school to college. Students coming from Indonesian eastern regions may be overwhelmed with new situation, demanding self-adjustment with new college. Some of the students are probably first timers among their families to attend college. They pioneer a step up journey of higher education without getting adequate information about college preparation. They have no one in family to confide in and to ask for advices in coping with issues. Meeuwisse et.al., (2010) suggested lack of experiences, lack of supports and lack of guidance from relatives and friends as attributing factors of underprepared students.

Another thing to consider in the lack of college preparation is an educational disparity between eastern and western Indonesia. Azzizah (2015) gave some examples of a disparity in education: the teacher shortage, few qualified teachers, the shortage of materials to learn, inadequate school buildings and school facilities. Samosir (2008) even reported that many school buildings in Eastern Indonesia have semi-permanent structure which are below adequate standards, resulting in some damages that could disrupt classroom learning activities such as leaky roofs, broken chairs and tables. In a worst case, due to the shortage of teacher, one teacher could handle two or three classes at once, leading to lower standards of quality teaching. They paid less attention to students and got unattainable learning targets in standardized national curriculum. Azzizah (2015) gave some reason on why educational disparity becomes salient. She revealed some factors contributing the educational disparity between Western and Eastern Indonesia, they are inadequate infrastructure and forest typography. These two challenges have resulted in the uneven distribution of material books and school facilities which are supposed to support students in academics. Therefore, when Indonesian eastern students decided to pursue higher education in urban areas in which better quality teaching, materials and more adequate numbers of teachers are available, it becomes overwhelming to cope with. It imposes a huge challenge for students to adjust with.

### **3.5. Language**

In some cases, language barrier attributed struggles perceived by Indonesian Eastern Students at college. Participants articulated their experiences when confronted with situation that triggers discomfort. There were eight participants who shared similar thoughts about their experiences related to language. Upon recollection, John from Papua stated:

*I was once being laughed at by my peers because of my thick accent of Indonesian language. They said my accent was funny and too formal.*

The feeling of discomfort discourage them to have frequent social interaction with outer circle group due to fear of being laughed at. In addition, Indonesian language is often influenced by ethnic language, it creates differentiation of regional accent across ethnic groups. Indonesian language with a variety of regional accents are pervasive in Indonesia which sometimes signify where people come from and which ethnic they might belong. Moreover, Indonesian language influenced by local accent among Indonesian eastern students have different word structures and word selections that sometimes a bit challenging to understand by outer circle groups. On the contrary, they also grasp difficulty in understanding Indonesian language which is often switched code with Javanese language.

*It is challenging to understand lessons delivered by lecturers because they often switch code between Indonesian language and Javanese language which I don't really understand.*

Azzizah (2015) gave a rationale on why such situation might be possible to hinder academic achievement among Indonesian eastern students, indicating some regions in eastern Indonesia such as Papua, Maluku, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Nusa Tenggara Barat and Sulawesi do not use Indonesian language as primary medium of instruction, instead the teachers use local languages to deliver new lessons in classrooms. In addition, the language barrier may come from different accents of Indonesian language. Since Indonesia has many ethnic languages that influence the national language, it further create thick accents which likely impose barriers for outer circle group in grasping the meanings. One participant spoke about her recollection:

*I have a problem understanding materials delivered by lecturers because their Indonesian language is different from one I get used to be.*

Despite thick accent, unfamiliarity with local language, i.e., Javanese language creates an invisible distance that makes them lonely and insecure. This stressful condition likely hinders their successful adjustment in new environment and lead to social withdrawal.

*When I participated in a campus organization, I did not really understand what folks said and what they were talking about as they spoke Javanese. I felt alone and wondered – were they gossiping about me?*

Their vulnerability makes them feel powerless. Since they have to cope with culture shock due to overwhelmingly new environment and cultural differences, they have to keep balance on their emotional well beings. Failing to notice this issue would likely result in underperformance in academics. Feeling like an outsider, unable to adjust with new situation, thick accent and language barrier might construct low sense of belonging. As suggested by Goodenow (1993), sense of belongings in school likely reduce dropout rates in schools. It is necessary to foster sense of belongings in campus among minority students. They need to feel that they are part of the campus and not regarded as outsiders.

The diversity of ethnicity in campus brings attention as the campus structure needs to be adjusted to accommodate the change of students' population. They should have equal access and treatment with their counterparts that coming from other majority of ethnicity. In some situations where students feel not included in the community, the behaviour tend to be the opposite (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). An example of study conducted by Steele (1997) reveals the impact of stereotypes about being blacks and being female, this stereotype creates consciousness among black and female students about their scholastic skills and intellectual capacity which impacted on the functioning of intellectuality and the identity development of individual as part of group.

In a grounded theory, there is one thing that cannot be ruled out i.e., trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). There had been many interpretations can be drawn in a data which become appreciated when it was layered with trustworthiness. Therefore, to increase

trustworthiness we encouraged few participants to re-check the transcripts for verification. For additional information, this study also has some limitations. We admit that in qualitative research, there are several versions of interpretation that could be drawn from a data and we are not subjective and bias free, therefore we acknowledge any possible interpretations that may come in further research which suggest research triangulation.

In addition, the researchers acknowledged some limitations in the study, particularly when selecting participants of study. Dual positions of researcher and lecturer may ignite biases in which reduce participants to speak up and more honest in sharing their negative experiences and thoughts. This study took a sample which was not representative of the entire target population. The used of focus group in data collection gave an advantage of respondents to listen and share their experiences which have been kept so long and finally found bravery to speak and broke the silence. Given such collective experience, they are more willing to speak up. However for some people it may work inversely, as they are more nervous speaking up before others, it may reduce their willingness to share their inner thoughts. This research offers a contribution to the existing literature on factors that likely hinder academic performance of Indonesian Eastern Students in urban college. It contributed as well on inclusive education and social justice that should be present in campus with current demographic change with more diverse ethnic background students.

#### 4. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study reports five categories that describe factors hindering Indonesian eastern students in academic achievement. Collecting empirical evidence about factors that may hinder the success of rural and ethnic minority students in urban education is prominently important. It is an effort to explore in-depth about the experiences of Indonesian eastern students dealing with college life, how it affects the development of self-identity through social interaction on and off campus, what factors that reduce their optimum performance in academics. To understand struggles of Indonesian Eastern Students is an utmost of importance to generate strategies and relevant policies that are ready with the current demographic change and diversity. It would create sense of belonging. Fostering positive environments in a campus, as a learning support, can be a significant thing to improve student performance and embrace diversity as well as help government to address issues related to educational disparity in Indonesia.

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