

Reconstruction of Learning Identity among International Students in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education

Rois Imron Rosi¹, Najiyya Najat Azzeehavella², Dina Alfiah³, Geritza Rabbani Setiawan⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang

*✉: roisimron@uin-malang.ac.id

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Abstract

Keywords:

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The study of learning identity is essential for ensuring students' academic adjustment and success, as identity is widely recognized as a pivotal factor in educational outcomes. Scholars generally agree that identity is dynamic and changes over time; therefore, identity studies need to be continuously revisited. Although many studies have examined identity reconstruction among international students, limited attention has been paid to their learning identity. This study addresses this pedagogical gap by examining the reconstruction of learning identity among international students in Indonesian Islamic higher education, specifically at Maliki Islamic University, Malang. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, this study explored the experiences of 14 international students from various countries. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings identified four initial learning identity themes: individual, writing-based, book-based, and critical thinking and discussion-based learning identities. These identities were then reconstructed into two new learning identities to meet the demands of Indonesian learning practices: social-individual learning identity and digitally literate learning identity. Participants reported that adaptation generally occurred during the first year of study. During this period, they encountered several challenges, including culture shock and linguistic barriers. Beyond its theoretical contribution to studies on international students, this study offers practical insights for stakeholders seeking to establish a conducive and supportive academic environment that facilitates improved learning outcomes.

Abstrak:

Kata Kunci:

Identitas
Pembelajaran;
Rekonstruksi
Identitas;
Mahasiswa
Internasional;
Universitas
Islam.

Studi tentang identitas pembelajaran merupakan hal esensial dalam mencapai keberhasilan pembelajaran, sebab identitas dipandang sebagai faktor penting yang berkaitan dengan capaian pembelajaran. Banyak peneliti meyakini bahwa identitas tidak bersifat statis, tetapi terus berubah sepanjang waktu. Oleh karena itu, studi tentang identitas perlu terus dilakukan untuk mengidentifikasi perubahan tersebut. Menariknya, banyak studi sebelumnya lebih berfokus pada identifikasi identitas mahasiswa asing dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, tetapi belum banyak yang menyentuh aspek identitas pembelajaran di dalam kelas. Studi ini berupaya melengkapi kesenjangan penelitian tersebut dengan mengkaji identitas pembelajaran mahasiswa asing di Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam, tepatnya di UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologi. Subjek penelitian ini adalah 14 mahasiswa asing yang berasal dari berbagai negara. Studi ini berupaya mengungkap proses rekonstruksi identitas pembelajaran. Teknik analisis data menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil studi ini mengidentifikasi empat tema identitas pembelajaran di kalangan mahasiswa internasional, yaitu identitas pembelajaran individual, berbasis tulisan, berbasis buku, serta berbasis diskusi dan berpikir kritis. Beberapa identitas pembelajaran ini kemudian direkonstruksi menjadi dua identitas baru untuk memenuhi tuntutan pembelajaran di Indonesia, yaitu

identitas belajar sosial-individual dan identitas belajar berbasis literasi digital. Partisipan melaporkan bahwa adaptasi umumnya terjadi pada tahun pertama studi. Selama periode tersebut, mereka menghadapi berbagai tantangan, seperti gegar budaya dan kesulitan bahasa. Selain memberikan kontribusi teoretis terhadap kajian mahasiswa internasional, studi ini juga memberikan kontribusi praktis bagi pemangku kebijakan dalam menciptakan lingkungan akademik yang kondusif dan suportif guna memfasilitasi peningkatan capaian pembelajaran.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Discussion on identity has been the subject of continuous scholarly debate in recent years. This discourse has been examined across various disciplinary fields, ranging from sociology to education. Within the educational realm, identity is considered a critical determinant of individual pedagogical success. Various studies have demonstrated that a clear understanding of one's own identity can support greater academic success (Arzu Sosyal Altugan, 2015; Rosi, 2023; Rosi & Yousif, 2024). Notably, identity researchers, from classical to contemporary perspectives, consistently state that identity is dynamic and changes over time rather than remaining static (Anbreen, 2015; Ash Shidiqie et al., 2023; Rahman Hakim et al., 2021; Rosi & Yousif, 2024). In general, the formation of individual identity is influenced by the social environment and interactions in which individuals live (Cedrúna & Civilá, 2024; Pérez-torres, 2024).

Since identity is forged through everyday lived experiences, learning identity is likewise the product of continuous interactions that occur both inside and outside the classroom and are constructed by learners within educational institutions (A. Y. Kolb et al., 2009; A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2012; Rosi, 2023). Consequently, the study of learning identity is essential for ensuring academic ease and success, given that identity is widely recognized as a pivotal factor in educational outcomes. Furthermore, the fluid nature of learning identity necessitates ongoing scholarly investigation.

Understanding learning identity within the context of Maliki Islamic University is equally imperative. As a university seeking to strengthen its international reputation, the institution needs broader global recognition. Such recognition can be pursued in several ways, including by understanding the learning identities of international students. Moreover, as a State Islamic Higher Education Institution known for having the highest number of international students (Fikyansyah, 2024; Wijaya, 2021), the university needs to maintain a positive reputation among all students, especially foreign students. This statement is strengthened by the Maliki Islamic University International Office, which reported that more than 200 new international students were registered in 2025. Therefore, this study supports academic analysis of international students in order to provide better academic services that may contribute to the university's international reputation.

Understanding learning identity is not merely a way to provide better academic services to international students; it can also enhance their academic success. As is widely acknowledged, educators are responsible for supporting

their students' academic success (Kolb & Kolb, 2012). Academic success can be achieved by helping students understand their own learning identities and develop self-understanding. This research offers significant novelty by focusing specifically on the learning identities of international students, an area that remains relatively underexplored in previous research and may provide a meaningful academic contribution to the field of education. At Maliki Islamic University, the international student population has experienced substantial growth. This growth necessitates a more profound investigation into the construction of learning identities within the Indonesian context, where foreign students must navigate cultural, traditional, and behavioral differences from their countries of origin. The classrooms experienced by international students can also be categorized as multicultural classrooms.

Multicultural classrooms consistently offer a compelling area of study due to the diverse strategies employed for communicative and cultural adaptation (Ma'rifatulloh et al., 2024; Saddhono, 2017; Solihat, 2018). Drawing on Bhabha's (2015) theoretical framework, a classroom comprising international students can be characterized as a "third space." This concept refers to a pedagogical site where different cultures intersect and interact. In such environments, the study of learning identity becomes increasingly important because it allows for the examination of identity negotiation, the emergence of new identities resulting from environmental adaptation, and the formulation of more effective and targeted strategies for fostering learning identities.

Unfortunately, several previous studies have identified identity reconstruction among international students without giving sufficient attention to their learning identity. Most previous studies have focused on the reconstruction of cultural and gender identity (Qin et al., 2022), daily educational life in a new environment (Hou et al., 2025), or the reconstruction of specific skills in learning activities (Chen & Hanson, 2023). Therefore, this study seeks to fill the pedagogical gap by examining the reconstruction process of learning identity among international students in Islamic higher education. It focuses more specifically on learning identity reconstruction than the first two studies and offers a more detailed analysis than the third.

Preliminary observations revealed a compelling perspective on international students at Maliki Islamic University. While the majority of these students come from Arab countries, there are also several representatives from Central Asia, such as Tajikistan and Afghanistan; Southeast Asia, such as Cambodia; and East Asia, such as China. Geographically, the distribution of international students is highly diverse. This diversity suggests the emergence of various learning identity constructions and a wide range of identity negotiation processes shaped by the foundational learning identities established in their home countries.

Based on the aforementioned background, this study formulated several research questions: What learning identities do international students bring from their previous educational contexts? How do they reconstruct their learning identities in Indonesian Islamic higher education? What new learning identities emerge from this process? Furthermore, the findings of this study are intended to provide pedagogical insights for educators, enabling them to better understand diverse learning identities and, consequently, enhance the quality of educational services. In a broader scope of contribution, this study seeks to offer strategic recommendations for higher education institutions hosting

international students in order to optimize the educational support provided to them.

II. METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. The selection of this methodology was informed by the research objective, which sought to explore in depth the reconstruction processes of international students' learning identities in Islamic higher education, especially at Maliki Islamic University. By utilizing a phenomenological approach and thematic analysis, the data were analyzed thematically to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the informants' academic and social experiences.

Using purposive sampling, the subjects of this study consisted of 14 international students from various countries: three students from Yemen, two from Thailand, two from Cambodia, one from the United States, one from Tajikistan, one from Afghanistan, one from China, one from Sudan, one from Comoros, and one from Pakistan. The purposive sampling criteria included representation from different continents, such as Asia, Africa, and America, as well as different semesters to support in-depth analysis. The observations were carried out in four international student classes during the four-month period from March to June 2025. More detailed information on the research subjects is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Research Subject Identity

No	Research Subject Identity				
	Name	Gender	Country of Origin	Semester	Main Language
1	M I	M	Tajikistan	4 th	Tajik and English
2	M J	M	China	6 th	Mandarin and Arabic
3	A M M	M	Yemen	4 th	Arabic
4	M M	M	Afghanistan	2 nd	Pashto and English
5	A N	M	Thailand	2 nd	Thai
6	R D	M	Thailand	2 nd	Thai
7	M A	M	Yemen	4 th	Arabic
8	M S Y	M	Yemen	2 nd	Arabic
9	S O K	M	Comoro	2 nd	Arabic
10	C R P	M	The United States	2 nd	English
11	R N	F	Cambodia	6 th	Khmer and Melayu
12	E Y	F	Cambodia	6 th	Khmer and Melayu
13	A A U	F	Pakistan	4 th	Urdu and English
14	E A E	M	Sudan	6 th	Arabic

Interviews and observations were used as the data collection techniques in this study. Both methods were selected to ensure comprehensive data and strengthen the credibility of the research findings. The interviews and observations focused on exploring student identity from three primary perspectives: historical, axiological, and pedagogical. The historical aspect identified previous lived experiences and educational backgrounds. The axiological aspect focused on the principles and beliefs that influence learning

behavior. The pedagogical aspect focused on learning strategies, styles, and several academic obstacles faced during their current study.

In-depth interviews were used to obtain comprehensive accounts of international students' experiences in reconstructing their learning identities. The languages used during the interviews were English and Arabic. The interviews and observations were conducted from March to June 2025. Triangulation techniques were used to ensure data validity. The limited information about the subjects presented in the table above is related to the participants' research ethics approval. However, this limitation does not reduce the validity of the data and analysis.

III. RESULTS

1. Learning Identity of International Students at Maliki Islamic University

This study identified four distinct student learning identities: individual learning identity, writing-based learning identity, book-based learning identity, and critical thinking and discussion-based learning identity. These four identities were identified as previous learning identities constructed through the life and educational experiences of international students before they enrolled in their current study in Indonesia.

a. Individual Learning Identity

The individual-based learning identity was predominantly observed among participants from the United States, Thailand, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Several participants stated:

"The biggest responsibility for your grade is on you, not on your teacher or your friends. People do study in groups, but it is very minimal. Many people study in the library by themselves individually" (CRP, the USA). "In Thailand, students do homework, so studying is about homework. We learn individually. There is no group work" (AN, Thailand). "I usually learn by myself, in class or at home" (MM, Afghanistan). "In every subject, there is individual homework and no presentation" (AAU, Pakistan).

These interview data indicate that individual learning identity was dominant among participants from these four countries based on their previous learning environments. In addition to these participants, the student from Tajikistan also exhibited this identity, although less prominently. This emphasis on individual learning was deeply rooted in the educational systems of their countries. Consequently, individual learning remained a cornerstone of the participants' learning experiences, particularly among those from Thailand and the United States.

Participants from Pakistan and Afghanistan also demonstrated learning characteristics centered on the individual. An informant from Pakistan noted that education in the region is largely conducted through traditional, individual-based methods.

"In my country, the teacher explains, and students listen and do the work. That is all. There is no presentation or anything like I found here" (AAU, Pakistan).

Collectively, these data confirm that the foundational learning identities of participants from these regions were primarily individual-based.

b. Writing-Based Learning Identity

The second learning identity identified in this study was writing-based learning identity. Participants from three specific countries showed a dominant orientation toward writing in the classroom, namely China, Cambodia, and Yemen. The Chinese participant stated that the pedagogical characteristics in his country remained focused on writing and assignment completion.

“In China, we write a lot. The teacher explains, and we write everything. We are usually asked to write any information given in class” (MJ, China).

These data indicate that the Chinese participant generally adopted a passive role in the classroom, with listening and writing as the primary modes of engagement. Similar characteristics were also observed among participants from Cambodia and Yemen.

“Here, we use IT so much. In Cambodia, students are asked to listen and write. We always do writing” (RN, Cambodia). “In Yemen, when the ustadz enters the classroom, we listen to the explanation and usually write down the explanation” (MA, Yemen).

Similar to the Chinese participant, the Cambodian and Yemeni participants also identified their learning identity as writing-based because they were accustomed to writing extensively during the teaching and learning process.

c. Book-Based Learning Identity

The third learning identity was characterized by a strong orientation toward textbooks. Similar to the previously discussed identity, this identity was heavily influenced by the educational environments from which the students came, particularly contexts where textbooks served as the primary instructional resource. This identity was predominantly observed among participants from Arab countries or the Middle East, such as Sudan, Yemen, and Comoros. Participants from Arabic-speaking countries stated:

“In Sudan, the teacher comes with a specific textbook. We do everything based on the book. The questions and examinations are based on that textbook” (EAE, Sudan). “I studied in Sudan. Comoros has similar characteristics to Sudan. We learn from books. Textbooks were everything for students like us” (SOK, Comoros).

A book-based identity is practically relevant to the Indonesian learning style, which also emphasizes reading books for comprehensive understanding. This type of learning identity can be supported by providing a specific textbook as the main reference for lectures.

d. Critical Thinking and Discussion Learning Identity

The fourth learning identity was critical thinking and discussion-based learning identity. This identity was significantly influenced by the specific educational environments in which the students were previously enrolled. One informant reported that this identity was cultivated through an educational institution that implemented the Cambridge Curriculum. Because one informant from Tajikistan had previous experience in a Cambridge-based

school, he was able to construct a learning identity focused on critical thinking and discussion.

"I have told you many times about my previous school. My school used the Cambridge curriculum. Presentations, discussions, and critical thinking shaped my learning characteristics" (MI, Tajikistan).

The presence of students who construct critical thinking and discussion-based learning identities presents a challenge for educators. Students who have internalized critical thinking and discussion as core components of their identity tend to adapt more easily and naturally to higher education environments that require analytical thinking and critical engagement. One characteristic developed at the university level is analytical discussion and thinking. Students who have constructed this identity may assimilate or adapt more effectively to the university environment.

2. Reconstruction Process of Learning Identity among International Students

The previous learning identities constructed by international students, including individual-based learning identity, book-based and writing-based learning identities, and discussion and critical thinking-based learning identity, were reconstructed in order to meet the demands of Indonesian education. Before the reconstruction of a new learning identity, the reconstruction process was often experienced as an adaptation process. All informants indicated that adaptation to the Indonesian educational system required approximately one year. This one-year adaptation process represents the minimum average period experienced by the informants to adapt successfully to the new environment.

"This is my second year on this campus. I think one year is enough to adapt to the new educational system" (MI, Tajikistan). "I think one year is enough. After studying BIPA and making friends, I can adapt well. In the first year, I found several differences in cultural and daily activities, but it was okay" (AMM, Yemen).

During the first year of study in Indonesia, international students frequently encountered culture shock when facing different cultures or habits in both educational and daily experiences. From the perspective of international students at Maliki Islamic University of Malang, the university's academic atmosphere, along with support from peers and faculty, contributed significantly to their smooth adaptation. Consequently, the findings of this study suggest that the campus academic environment is important in supporting the adaptation process of international students.

"The academic environment on campus was great. We had language barriers, as almost all international students do, but the campus has a BIPA program. It was really helpful" (MSY, Yemen). "BIPA helped us a lot. Although I can speak a little Malay, it is different from Bahasa Indonesia. BIPA is important" (EY, Cambodia).

In the context of Maliki Islamic University, this linguistic barrier was mitigated through a four-month language learning program called BIPA (Bahasa Indonesia for Non-Native Speakers). This program is designed to help students communicate effectively and engage in the educational process at the university. Another adaptation process experienced by international students involved the

use of learning media in the Indonesian learning context. In several countries, such as Cambodia, Yemen, Comoros, and Sudan, academic activities are dominated by traditional methodologies, such as lecture-based and book-based learning, while digital technologies, such as PowerPoint presentations, internet-based secondary sources, and online learning applications, remain underutilized. Consequently, adaptation to the use of media as a learning paradigm also constituted a significant process. Accessing online literature, submitting assignments online, and delivering interactive presentations were seen as additional barriers faced by international students in reconstructing their learning identities. Therefore, the process of learning identity reconstruction required international students to consider content mastery, learning media, and strategies for overcoming several barriers within the Indonesian educational system.

3. New Identity Construction of International Students

The results of this study found two new identities constructed by the international students who participated in the study: social-individual learning identity and digitally literate learning identity. These two constructed identities are considered the result of the reconstruction process experienced by international students after encountering a new pedagogical environment during their study in Indonesia. The first identity shows that previous individual learning identities were not fully diminished after studying in Indonesia. Participants stated:

"I experienced two distinctive learning systems: Indonesia with active learning and China with passive learning. I tried hard to be like Indonesian students, but I cannot fully be like them. I love studying individually, and I also like learning with friends. It is fifty-fifty" (MJ, China). "I had an interesting experience in class. I love studying by myself, but after meeting [a course instructor] who trained students, including me, to work in groups through fun activities, I also loved working in groups with my friends" (CRP, the USA).

These interview data were also strengthened by observations showing that international students enjoyed working in groups with Indonesian students, even though they reported that this learning system differed from their previous one. Another newly constructed identity was the digitally literate student. Many participants stated that the previous learning identities constructed in their home countries were mostly traditional and involved little digital utilization. After studying and experiencing Islamic higher education at Maliki Islamic University, they were able to utilize the internet and various digital platforms. Several participants stated:

"I used TikTok when I lived in my country, but here I believe that it can be a tool for study. My account is now often used as a learning medium that is useful for others. I learned digital skills and digital production through lecturers' assignments here" (AMM, Yemen). "I had no opportunity to access digital tools in my country. I could not use PowerPoint or other tools. Here, I can use many of them" (AAU, Pakistan). "Several lecturers' tasks here use media, such as creating content, vlogs, editing videos, and so on. It is new, and I enjoy it" (CRP, the USA).

These interview data indicate that the second newly constructed identity is digitally literate identity. Digitally literate identity refers not only to having digital skills, such as the ability to use digital platforms, but also to engaging in digital creation and digital culture. These two newly constructed identities resulted from the learning identity reconstruction process after students experienced the Indonesian learning system in Islamic higher education, especially at Maliki Islamic University.

IV. DISCUSSION

Stuart Hall, a symbolic sociologist, formulated two primary forms of identity in each individual: identity as being and identity as becoming (Hall, 1990; Hall & Gay, 1996). In Hall's theoretical framework, identity as being refers to an individual's original identity, shaped by geographical location, nationality, family background, and former social environment. Understanding this "old" identity serves as a vital benchmark for comprehending Hall's second theoretical framework, identity as becoming. On the other hand, understanding old learning identities can support further analysis in formulating the most effective strategies for constructing new identities within a new environment (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2012; Rosi, 2023). The four learning identities constructed by international students are categorized as identity as being based on Hall's concept.

Individual learning identity developed among students based on the different educational orientations in their countries. For instance, students in the United States are guided by an educational framework that emphasizes self-planned learning (Olsen, 2000; Veblen, 2024). Similarly, Thailand's educational characteristics foster strong individual capabilities (Durongkaveroj, 2023; Rukspollmuang & Fry, 2024). Although researchers have stated that there are educational reforms in Thailand involving project-based learning, competency-based learning, and problem-based learning, these reforms often continue to prioritize individual skill acquisition (Fry & Bi, 2013; Sakdapat, 2024; Sangwanglao, 2024).

Participants from Pakistan stated that traditional methods and individual learning were dominant. In contrast, scholarly literature indicates that several reforms have been applied in Pakistan to strengthen teacher-student interaction and engagement through demonstrations and presentations; however, the findings suggest that such systemic changes have not yet been implemented uniformly (Lama et al., 2024; Niazi et al., 2025). Similarly, Afghanistan's learning culture is also characterized by an individual approach. From the perspective of the Afghan informant, learning is viewed as a personal responsibility; thus, independent study remains the dominant mode of academic engagement. This statement is also supported by studies identifying visual learning and individual-based instruction as prevalent characteristics among Afghan students (Mulholland, 2023; Noori, 2021; Safi et al., 2024).

The second learning identity is writing-based learning identity, which was constructed by the Chinese participant. Chinese students often require significant adaptation when they encounter unfamiliar pedagogical styles (Fang & Zhao, 2013; Liu & Liu, 2023; Rosi & Yousif, 2024). Interestingly, a writing-oriented pedagogical style does not necessarily indicate poor learning habits. Many studies suggest that note-taking can positively affect material comprehension and enhance learning motivation (Simamora & Simamora, 2022). Furthermore, the skill of transforming lessons into notes is regarded as a skill that demands creativity and critical thinking (Arnidha & Nihayati, 2023).

Specific techniques, such as mind mapping, are often employed to optimize note-taking efficacy (Walidaini, 2022; Yeni et al., 2024).

The third learning identity identified in this study is book-based learning identity. This learning identity was dominant among participants from Arab countries. Students from Arab countries were accustomed to using textbooks to master learning materials. Textbooks are usually used as media for achieving various pedagogical goals, such as the instillation of nationalism and character building (Lestarinigrum et al., 2023; Saqinah & Yuliantina, 2024). Furthermore, textbooks continue to be regarded as significant contributors to fostering deep conceptual understanding across all educational levels, from primary school to higher education (Susanto et al., 2023).

In Stuart Hall's theory, identity as becoming can be constructed through specific pedagogical treatment. Regarding this third learning identity, educators can provide such treatment by supporting learners with specific books as primary references for the material. This statement supports the aim of this study that understanding learning identity can be a vital factor in determining specific learning strategies (Arzu & Issa, 2014; Rosi, 2026; Rosi & Yahya, 2025). If specific learning strategies based on learning identity are applied, students' academic success can be improved (Anindya & Pamungkas, 2023). Therefore, academic achievement can be supported by understanding students' learning identities.

The last learning identity identified in this study is critical thinking and discussion-based learning identity. This learning identity was constructed by the Tajik student who had enrolled in a Cambridge school. As is widely understood, the Cambridge curriculum emphasizes critical thinking and discovery-based learning (Anindya & Pamungkas, 2023; Ilma et al., 2025; Lim, 2012; Muzaedah et al., 2023).

Regarding the reconstruction process of new learning identities, participants reported that they faced several adaptation barriers, such as culture shock and language barriers. Many studies have stated that culture shock is a common phenomenon for international students studying in Indonesia (Mustofa & Defiana, 2024; Rosi, 2026; Virna et al., 2025; Widiasih et al., 2020). This adaptation process and the ways of handling culture shock may differ among individuals, but a supportive academic and social environment, as well as effective communication with peers, can support the successful adaptation of international students (Ahmed & Shahzeb, 2024; Listrikasari & Huda, 2024; Naibaho & Murniati, 2022; Pitriyani et al., 2025).

Beyond adaptation and culture shock, all informants stated that language was the main barrier they faced when studying in Indonesia. Linguistic barriers therefore constituted the most common challenge during the first year of foreign students' study in Indonesia and have been experienced in many universities (Abu-Rabiah, 2025; Pitriyani et al., 2025; Rosi, 2026).

The utilization of digital media and its integration into the educational system are among the characteristics developed by the Indonesian education system. Various digital media, such as YouTube and podcasts, have been utilized as learning media (Hamdi, 2024). In practice, the utilization of digital media in Indonesia has been proven to create various benefits, such as providing flexible access to learning, supporting personalized instruction, strengthening collaboration between students and faculty, and ensuring educational continuity during emergencies (Zutiasari et al., 2025). The findings of this study further demonstrate that the use of digital media as a learning

resource has emerged as an important identity constructed by international students. This contributes to the identity construction of 21st-century learners, specifically digitally literate international students (Audrin & Audrin, 2022; Byfield et al., 2015; Rosi & Yahya, 2025; Siregar, 2024).

1. Two Reconstructed Learning Identity of International Students

International students pursuing higher education in Indonesia came with previous pedagogical experiences. However, upon entering the Indonesian educational system, they encountered divergent pedagogical approaches that emphasized active interaction, teamwork, open discussion, and more varied methodological strategies. These disparities led to the reconstruction of a new learning identity, in which students did not merely retain their previous identities but also adopted new, more contextualized, and collaborative learning strategies. The development of learning identity among international students allowed them to evolve into a more adaptive and responsive form that met the academic demands of the Indonesian educational environment. The conceptual figure of reconstructed learning identity can be seen below:

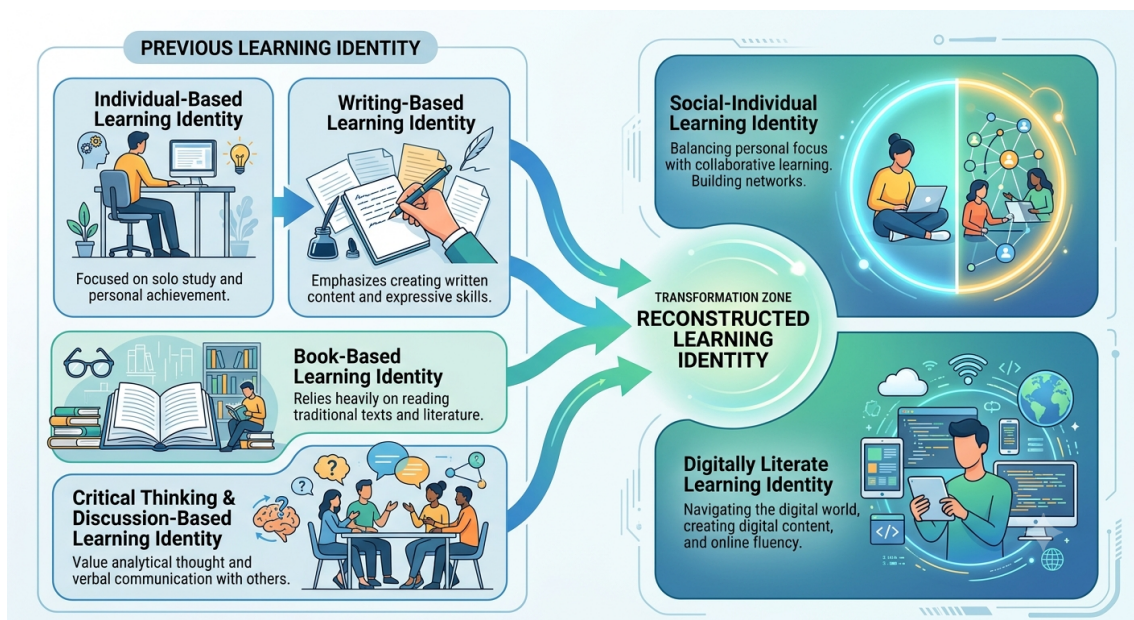


Figure 1. Conceptual Figure of Reconstructed Learning Identity of International Students

This phenomenon demonstrates that the identity construction process can produce a novel identity resulting from the synthesis of two distinct educational or pedagogical systems. This aligns with the theories posited by Mead and Hall, which suggest that individuals continuously undergo transformation to develop new identities in order to coexist with new environments that often differ significantly from their previous ones (Hall, 1990; Mead, 2015). This emergent identity is what Hall characterizes as identity as becoming, an identity formed through the continuous negotiation of individual experience to support academic success within a new environment. The findings of this study identified two new learning identities constructed by international students: social-individual learning identity and digitally literate identity.

a. Social-Individual Learning Identity

The first new identity developed and constructed by international students is social-individual learning identity. In accordance with Hall's identity as becoming, the students' previous identities were not entirely discarded. They did not abandon their previous learning identities, nor did they fully relinquish their new Indonesian learning identities. Instead, a novel learning identity emerged, synthesizing both previous and new pedagogical styles based on their experiential learning. Based on students' experiential learning, social-individual learning identity was constructed as a result of the adaptation process to the Indonesian educational system. Kolb and Kolb (1984) posit that the formation of learning identity progresses through four stages: concrete experience, followed by reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

For international students, these four stages of identity reconstruction are continuous, evolving in tandem with each new experience they encounter. The findings of this study indicate that, moving from concrete experience toward active experimentation, these students proactively sought to become more receptive to the Indonesian educational landscape, which favors active learning paradigms. An informant from Afghanistan continued to rely on independent material repetition and nocturnal review sessions. This reinforces the observation that although the Indonesian pedagogical environment is more interactive and collaborative, international students do not entirely abandon the learning identities of their home countries identities they still perceive as effective for content mastery provided they integrate more interactive Indonesian learning characteristics. This identity construction process closely aligns with Stuart Hall's (1990) concept of identity as becoming. Consequently, the findings of this study extend the application of Hall's theory of identity as an experiential evolution while also reinforcing the learning identity framework proposed by Kolb and Kolb.

Consequently, their learning identities evolved into a sophisticated combination of academic independence, content mastery, open discourse, and active knowledge demonstration, underpinned by an emerging capacity for critical inquiry.

b. Digitally Literate Identity

The second learning identity constructed by international students is digitally literate learning identity. Previous research indicates that while the digital proficiency and utilization rates among international students at UIN Malang tend to be low during their first year, these levels increase significantly during the second and third years (Rosi & Yahya, 2025). For instance, an informant from Yemen successfully maintained his characteristic independent learning habits while simultaneously integrating digital media, such as YouTube, to deepen his conceptual understanding. He further utilized translation tools to mitigate linguistic barriers and actively engaged with peers for clarification. To navigate social interactions and classroom dynamics, he pursued intensive Indonesian language acquisition through both formal instruction and various digital media, demonstrating that the adaptation process encompasses academic, social, linguistic, and technological dimensions. These data indicate that digital literacy was constructed through activities such as searching, validating, translating, communicating, and independently constructing knowledge through digital resources (Rosi & Yahya, 2025; Siregar, 2024; Sogalrey et al., 2024).

The utilization of various social media platforms and gamification served as a significant factor in the emergence of a new digitally literate identity among international students. Furthermore, gamification is widely recognized for its potential to foster a more interactive and engaging classroom environment (Huseinović, 2023; Rahman et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2024). Educational systems that intensively leverage diverse technological platforms also function as critical determinants in the construction of these novel and compelling identities among international students at Maliki Islamic University of Malang. This second new identity also extends the application of Hall's theory of identity as an experiential evolution while reinforcing the learning identity framework proposed by Kolb and Kolb.

V. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, this study reveals four distinct student learning identities that had been developed and influenced by students' previous pedagogical environments in their home countries: individual learning identity, writing-based learning identity, book-based learning identity, and critical thinking and discussion-based learning identity. After arriving in Indonesia and pursuing higher education, international students needed at least one year to adapt to Indonesian pedagogical characteristics because these characteristics differed significantly from, and sometimes even contradicted, their previous learning identities.

After a one-year adaptation process, international students successfully reconstructed their learning identities in order to meet the demands of the Indonesian educational system. This study concludes that two new learning identities were constructed by international students: social-individual learning identity and digitally literate identity. These two new learning identities were reconstructed not by diminishing previous learning identities but by synthesizing previous and new pedagogical styles based on students' experiential learning. These previous and reconstructed learning identities are crucial for selecting appropriate learning media and strategies to provide good academic services to international students in Islamic higher education.

This study is limited by its use of data from only one Islamic higher education institution. Therefore, future research can explore learning identity reconstruction with a larger number of universities or participants. Future studies may also use comparative designs across universities to examine different constructed identities and investigate the relationship between learning identity and academic performance.

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