

## Overseas Student Experience of Homesickness

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**Abstract:** The pursuit of higher education in an alien environment can give rise to a number of novel experiences and opportunities, which may require additional adjustment efforts. Homesickness is a phenomenon commonly experienced by overseas students as they transition from a familiar environment to one that is foreign. Being separated from a familiar environment, which has constituted a part of one's life for an extended period, can give rise to a range of emotions, including sadness, anxiety, and homesickness. To meet the needs of international students, it is important to consider their psychological well-being, particularly in terms of social adjustment and self-acceptance. Identifying and addressing factors that contribute to homesickness is crucial. In this study, a qualitative approach with a phenomenological perspective was employed, and a purposive sampling technique was utilized. The data collection techniques employed in this study involved observation and interviews at Prof. Dr. HAMKA Muhammadiyah University over a period of approximately one month. Three overseas students from Java were interviewed, representing the regions of East Java, Central Java, and West Java. The results of this study provide an overview of the influence of psychological well-being and coping strategies applied by overseas students on homesickness experienced during overseas studies.

**Keywords:** Overseas Students, Homesickness, Psychology Well-Being.



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### Introduction

The overseas student may be defined as an individual who relocates to another area with the intention of pursuing an education and preparing to achieve academic success. According to Santrock (2009), the primary objective of migrating for students is to gain access to a higher standard of education and to demonstrate maturity, independence, and responsibility. Unequivocally, in our modern world, many things compel us to leave our comfort zones or home environment to new places for shorter or longer periods. Studying abroad is one of the pressing factors linked with the tendency to suffer from homesickness (Saravanan et al., 2019). (Hutapea, 2014) posits that students at all levels undergraduate or postgraduate, domestic or foreign must confront a range of challenges. This assertion is applicable to both

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undergraduate and postgraduate students, irrespective of their nationality. This assertion is made with respect to the transition into college.

It must be acknowledged that migrating entails a significant separation from one's family and the familiar surroundings of one's home environment. Upon arrival in a foreign country, overseas students may experience a range of differences in communication, culture, language, and other habits. These may have an impact on the psychological and emotional state of the students, including feelings of sadness, anxiety, loneliness, longing for home, and nostalgia. In addition, the feeling of homesickness or homesickness may be a common experience for overseas students (Azizi, 2015).

(Voolstra et al., 2005) posited that homesickness is a psychological condition that arises when individuals experience a sense of alienation in a new environment. This alienation is accompanied by feelings of psychological pressure, which are experienced by individuals after separating from their place of origin. The situation of separating from the environment becomes a significant factor in the onset of psychological pressure experienced by individuals, as they feel alienated from the new environment. This is consistent with the concept of homesickness, as outlined by Archer (2000), which posits that individuals will experience psychological reactions due to the distance from familiar people.

Consequently, there are profound implications associated with the phrase "go home," which is frequently uttered by overseas students. Social adjustment is a crucial aspect of the social development of individuals across various age groups, including children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. Social adjustment can be defined as the process of adapting to one's social environment, encompassing relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and the broader social context (Bryne & Baron, 2005). The multitude of requirements that overseas students face necessitates the application of the concept of psychological well-being in the form of social adjustment and self-acceptance, with a view to identifying and addressing the factors that contribute to feelings of homesickness (Linggayuni Istanto & Engry, n.d.). observed that homesickness experienced by overseas students may have a detrimental effect on their experience of regret at having chosen to pursue education away from their place of origin. Furthermore, this study indicates that overseas students require the presence of individuals who can alleviate feelings of loneliness. One such individual is a close friend or source of social support.

In their research, (Diniyya Hediati et al., n.d.) found that one of the factors that contribute to the homesickness experienced by overseas students is their individual ability to express feelings related to the level of emotional maturity of such students. (Yasmin et al., n.d. 2017) similarly found that homesickness is a natural experience for overseas students, although it may be offset by the appearance of positive behavior displayed by the students.

In light of the aforementioned findings, the research question for this study can be formulated as follows: "How can the experience of homesickness in overseas students be described?"

(Ryff, 1989) said that the concept of psychological well-being is an integration of human development theories, clinical psychological theories and mental health concepts. Based on these theories, (Ryff, 1989) defines psychological well-being as a state in which an individual has a positive attitude towards himself, can make choices, can make his life more colorful, and can accept the conditions he experiences. The components of individuals who have positive psychological functioning are as follows: First, self-acceptance, an individual who has self-acceptance will have characteristics: having an attitude that is always positive towards himself, accepting his good and bad conditions, thinking positively about the circumstances in the past and the things he has gone through. Second, positive relationships with others, the attitude shown is to have a positive relationship with other individuals, such as: having strong empathy, building trust with others, accepting the presence of others and being positive towards others. Thirdly, autonomy, which is the ability to act independently and confidently to achieve satisfying wants and to be able to achieve. Fourth, purpose in life, the state in which a mentally healthy person is able to believe that there is a purpose in life and that doing something that can help others is the purpose of life. Fifth, personal growth, which is not only the achievement of past accomplishments but also the development of one's potential for the future. Sixth, environmental mastery, the mental state of a healthy individual can be seen as how an individual is able to create and be in an environment that is in harmony with their physical condition.

(Waterman, 1993) suggests that the concept of well-being in the eudaimonic view is how an individual is able to live in the circle of their life or their true self. This true self occurs when an individual can do things that are consistent with the values of his or her life and be fully engaged in them (Azizi, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Individuals undertaking further study in a new environment and away from their place of residence will inevitably encounter new experiences and possibilities that will require more effort to adapt to. Separation or leaving something that has been in one's life for a long time can certainly cause feelings of sadness, worry and nostalgia. Additionally, a very frequent feeling is the feeling of homesickness (Azizi, 2015). Homesickness which is considered evasive in its nature (Kegel, 2009) can be defined as "a psychological reaction to the absence of significant other and familiar surroundings". Homesickness is a feeling that resembles the feeling of grief when individuals are abandoned by their loved ones (Stroebe et al., 2002). In a broader sense, a study found that there was a higher level of homesickness among international students who had migrated than among students who had not migrated (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). This occurs because when an individual migrates or is separated from their immediate environment, there is a separation from their home. Prolonged homesickness can have adverse effects, including loss of spirit, prolonged sadness, diarrhoea and even depression (Thurber & Walton, 2012)

A study has indicated that those experiencing homesickness may experience a range of negative emotions, including acute longing for home and associated images, as well as difficulties with interpersonal relationships, feelings of loneliness and a strong desire to return to their original environment. Although studying abroad is a worthy opportunity for overseas students, the aggregation of educational practice differences, cultural shock, the pressure of independent living, and language fluency problems make their stay challenging (Geary, 2016) (Grace Pardede. 2015);Pardede, 2015). Additionally, friendship, stereotype, discrimination and lack of social support aggravate their problems (Heng, 2018) Zhai et al., 2021). (Nejad, 2013) According to (Archer et al., 1998) the experience of homesickness is a response to bereavement that manifests as a constellation of negative thoughts, a strong desire to return home, an unstable emotional state, anxiety, depression, and contact-seeking and maintenance behaviour. Based on the aforementioned descriptions, it can be posited that homesickness is a condition or feeling of profound sadness when separated from home and loved ones, which gives rise to negative responses and affects the psychological state of the individual.

## Method

The research methodology employed in this study is qualitative in nature. The research design adopted in this qualitative study adheres to a phenomenological approach, wherein the investigator strives to elucidate the subject's explanation and understanding of his experience with great detail.

In this study, the sampling technique employed was a homogeneous sample and purposive sampling. The researcher has determined the criteria for the subject to be studied as follows: The subjects of this study are overseas students who have been studying abroad for at least two years, have no close family members living abroad, and do not own a private home overseas.

In this case, the researcher's observation is non-participant observation, where the researcher is not involved with the things done by the subject. Through the observation stage, the researcher aims to gain insight into how overseas students experience homesickness in their daily activities, which are far from home and their old environment. The interview technique used in this research is semi-structured interviews, which are semi-formal. The research design employed in this study is descriptive qualitative research design, as the objective is to identify and interpret the experiences of homesickness among overseas students.

The research location is the setting in which research is conducted or data is collected. This may be a specific unit, part, group, or setting in which the subject is involved in the research. In this case, the research location used by researchers is the student environment of Muhammadiyah Prof. DR. HAMKA University. The number of respondents is the number of participants who are asked to provide information or data. In this case, the number of respondents used by the researcher was three overseas

students who were taken as representatives of overseas students to Jakarta from Java Island, namely West Java, Central Java, and East Java.

Research time is the time used by researchers in research and data collection. In this case, the time used by researchers is approximately one month, with two weeks allocated to data collection and two weeks to data processing, which includes the presentation of the final research results. In this study, the content analysis method employed by researchers involved directed content analysis. Transcripts from interviews with multiple informants will be read and coded using codes that have been determined by the researcher according to certain criteria.

To ensure the trustworthiness or validity of this research, the researcher employs two forms of research validity, namely validity and reliability. In this case, to achieve high validity, the researcher confirmed the data on the subject by revisiting the research subject after data analysis, such as conducting further and in-depth observations. Reliability is an equally important standard, which aims to determine the extent to which the data findings show consistency in research. In this instance, the researcher employs the technique of theory triangulation, which entails a comparison between the theory and the findings of the data obtained. In addition to this, the researcher strengthens the data obtained by triangulating the source, which involves visiting other sources than the subject, who is considered capable of providing data and information related to the research subject. These sources may include the subject's closest person.

## Result

### Motives for Studying Overseas

The primary motivation for pursuing an overseas education is to engage in academic pursuits, according to respondents. One individual, for instance, stated that their primary reason for migrating was to pursue higher education. The respondent also indicated that this was their first experience of migrating and being separated from their family. They further noted that this decision was not a personal choice but rather a consequence of external circumstances. The first reason for migrating is to gain new experiences and insights, as the respondent felt that staying in their place of origin would not allow them to develop. They felt that the people and environment were not conducive to personal growth, so they sought a new environment to gain these insights. Additionally, they wanted to travel and experience different cultures. One of the respondent's goals was also to explore herself because the respondent was raised in a strict parent environment and family, which made the respondent feel constrained and limited in terms of self-exploration. '[...] In addition to my academic pursuits, I am interested in pursuing employment. However, due to the demands of my schedule, I am unable to effectively manage my time. I am conscious of the financial burden my tuition fees place on my parents, and I am aware that they are expensive. I am therefore seeking ways to reduce these costs, such as by working part-time. In addition, one of the primary motivations for my relocation was the desire for autonomy. From an early age, I had consistently envisioned the trajectory of my life. However, during my tenure in high school, I encountered a significant shift in my perspective. In school, she was consistently pressured [...]' (EAL- 5 January 2024), and her initial experience of migration was similarly unexpected.

The next step is to devise strategies to achieve this goal of migration. It is advisable to join an organization, even if it is for new experiences. There, we have the opportunity to meet new friends, to create a fresh atmosphere, and even to learn new ways of controlling our emotions, managing our time, and so forth. This is particularly relevant for students who may face a stark contrast between their own experiences of student life and the expectations of their new environment. The respondent's stated goal in migrating is to learn. In pursuit of this goal, the respondent has adopted a strategy of maximizing his status as a student by joining organizations and becoming active within them. This strategy involves first joining organizations that will provide new innovations and experiences. The respondent previously resided in a highly structured environment, characterized by a strong familial influence. Consequently, one of the key motivations for migrating was to gain a deeper understanding of oneself and to seek out a

more conducive environment. The respondent's strategy involved joining a diverse range of organizations and activities outside the campus, as he also identified as a shy individual who struggled to display his abilities in front of people he knew. This led him to pursue a strategy of engaging in activities outside the campus and meeting new friends. The respondent was the first individual to migrate and his objective was to explore his identity. Prior to high school, the respondent was subjected to strict parental control, which he perceived as a limitation in his ability to discover new experiences. Consequently, he devised a strategy to overcome this challenge, which involved cultivating the courage to engage in novel pursuits by overcoming his shyness and learning new skills.

Table 1.  
Motives for Studying in Overseas

Open Coding	Categorization
<b>Learning</b> <b>Work</b> <b>Free to explore yourself</b> <b>Get out of the toxic environment</b>	Purpose in life
<b>Resolve conflicts with friends</b> <b>Good communication</b> <b>Support</b>	Positive relationship
<b>Joining an organization</b> <b>Participating in off-campus activities</b> <b>Participating in off-campus activities</b> <b>Participating in independent campus activities</b>	Environmental mastery

The responses of the respondents indicate that they are able to adapt to their circumstances with relative ease. They are able to devise their own strategies to achieve the goals of being an overseas child.

### Challenges & Coping Strategies for Overseas Student Activities

The respondents indicated that they experienced a number of emotions and feelings during their time as overseas students. It is evident that the transition to a new environment, which is characterized by a lack of familiarity, can be challenging. Homesickness is a common sentiment among overseas students. Indeed, respondents indicated that there were numerous novel experiences encountered during their time as overseas students. However, with time, they were able to adapt and become comfortable in their new environment. The respondent expressed a sense of happiness derived from the opportunity to be independent and away from her family. She noted that this independence has led to a variety of new experiences, including learning how to navigate the city and adapting to the pace of life. However, she also acknowledged that these experiences can be challenging, particularly when faced with illness or loneliness. Despite her repeated visits to Jakarta, the respondent still felt a sense of unfamiliarity and isolation when faced with these circumstances. The respondents indicated that they experienced a range of emotions contingent on the circumstances. They expressed that they felt a sense of joy and fulfillment due to the opportunity to cultivate independence. However, they also acknowledged that the transition to

independence was accompanied by feelings of sadness and vulnerability, particularly when they were unwell and required self-care.

It is not uncommon for students who are far from home and family to experience feelings of homesickness. In fact, if I wish to release my emotions, I cry. However, more often than not, I confide in people I trust, who then also become aware of the situation. In addition, I must remind myself of the reasons behind this state of affairs. It is, therefore, more beneficial to consider the problem from both sides and identify the underlying causes. In the event of illness abroad, such as a fever, it is relatively straightforward to administer one's own medication. However, if the condition is more severe, it is common to seek assistance from one's boarding house companions. If one is unable to accompany them, it is not uncommon to request that they procure food or medication on one's behalf. (NYU, 3 January 2024), The respondent indicated that when she experienced feelings of sadness abroad, she would validate her emotions by crying and sharing her experiences with individuals whom she trusted. The respondent indicated that the experience of worship time was distinct from their previous experience during their junior high and high school years. Additionally, the respondent expressed a preference for the food from their hometown and a desire to reconnect with their family.

The respondents indicated that they experienced a sense of sadness when they were overseas and ill, as they were forced to attempt to heal themselves independently. Additionally, they reported feeling homesick and validated by crying and listening to sad songs on public transport. Additionally, the respondent disclosed that if the homesickness intensified, they would contact their family via telephone, despite experiencing feelings of unease towards their family. This was due to the respondent's perception of their family as being somewhat strict and unresponsive in the family environment.

In addition, feelings of homesickness also had an impact on respondents' activities. The experience is further compounded by the fact that many students are homesick, which can lead to feelings of confusion and a sense of being adrift. However, the advent of mobile phones has provided a means of maintaining contact with home, allowing students to call or text their loved ones when they miss them. This has the effect of distracting them from dwelling on the familiar atmosphere of home. However, she did express a strong desire to eat the food from her home country. "Indeed, I have experienced instances of low mood, such as following a bout of crying in the evening. This has resulted in a pervasive sense of sadness the following morning, accompanied by a lack of enthusiasm and a tendency to view others as flawed, particularly in the context of new challenges. I have also found that homesickness can impede my daily functioning and result in an exaggerated sense of negative affect on those days," (EAL-5 January 2024).

Table 2.  
Challenges & Coping Strategies for Overseas Student Activities

Open Coding	Categorization
<b>Crying</b> <b>Talking to a close friend</b> <b>Listen to music</b> <b>Calling family at home</b> <b>Going home</b>	Self-acceptance
<b>Taking care of yourself</b> <b>Me time or traveling</b>	Autonomy

It is posited that respondents experience a sense of homesickness that impedes the performance of certain daily activities while abroad.

## The Dynamics of Homesickness and for Overseas Students

Firstly, it can be defined as a place where people reside. Secondly, it can be defined as a place where people are judged by how they behave. For example, I can consider a place to be home if it fulfills my inner child. In order for a place to fulfill this role, it must be able to listen to what I say and understand it, even without me having to explain it. The respondent posited that the true meaning of home is not a physical structure but rather a tranquil and secure atmosphere. They further elaborated that the essence of home is where there is someone who is able to fulfill the respondent's inner child, until finally the respondent feels at ease in their presence. Furthermore, the respondent indicated that she did not perceive the manifestation of home in her home and family environment. She had hoped that the house where she lived would provide peace, but instead encountered quarrels and noise. The respondent posited that the concept of home is one of comfort and stability. However, when faced with stressors such as academic assignments, many individuals may seek solace in their homes. However, in reality, this is not always the case. (DAAP- 4 January 2024), The respondents indicated that a genuine home is a person who is capable of providing comfort and can be utilized as a venue for storytelling and expressing discontent. "[...] I believe that a home is a place where one can be oneself, and where one is able to be honest about oneself. One does not need to lie about one's world, but it is a place where one finally lets go [...]" (EAL- On 5 January 2024), the respondent posited that a home is a place where one can be oneself, where one can be honest about one's situation without fear of being oneself in front of others.

Table 3.  
The Dynamics of Homesickness and for Overseas Students

Open Coding	Categorization
<p><b>Fulfill the inner child</b>  <b>Provides a sense of security</b>  <b>Provides a sense of comfort</b>  <b>Provides a sense of freedom to be oneself</b>  <b>A place to tell stories</b></p>	<p>Personal growth</p>

The reasons for migrating to a city of people, as conveyed by respondents in this study, can be broadly classified into two categories: the desire to explore oneself and the aspiration to become a better person than one was before. The former is driven by the need to find oneself in a new environment, while the latter is motivated by the lack of opportunities for personal growth in one's hometown. In addition, in order to achieve the goal of migrating, overseas students must adopt certain strategies. These include the need to adapt to the culture of the host country, to integrate into the local community, and to form friendships. Failure to do so may result in difficulties in adjusting to the new environment and in achieving the goal of migrating.

### Discussion

The results of studies conducted by researchers suggest that the trigger for homesickness in overseas students lies in a sense of comfort that has been embedded in them. This preoccupation with thoughts of home so that they cannot travel has a negative impact on students' eating habits and sleep routines. This is consistent with the theory of homesickness as a psychological response to the absence of close individuals and familiar surroundings (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Despite all the controversies regarding the conceptualization of homesickness among scholars (Nijhof & Engels, 2007)), it can be surmised that it is predominantly related to missing home and an adapted environment. Homesickness

implies a distressed state because of separation from familiar people and residences (Biasi et al., 2018) and places or things (Hack-Polay & Mahmoud, 2021). This is commonly understood as stress or anxiety associated with separation from home. According to (Thurber & Walton, 2012) the separation may be real or predicted. Isolation and a lack of social support in adapting to a new environment can result in feelings of stress and sadness (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). It can be deduced from the study's findings that the travel restrictions triggered homesickness among participants in the study. While it is an undeniable fact that studying abroad often results in homesickness (Rathakrishnan et al., 2021). For most of the students, their inability to travel home generated feelings of loneliness, isolation, and depression that significantly affected their communication, social life, academic life, and their sleeping and eating routine. Some felt alienated from their classmates who returned home prior to the border restrictions. Some of the students revealed that they missed their local foods. Also, the anxiety of being far from home affected the eating and sleeping habits of some of the participants (Mekonen & Adarkwah, 2023). A strong correlation between homesickness and depression has been revealed in numerous studies and is known to likely result in eating and sleeping disturbances (Constantine et al., 2004).

It is therefore essential for an individual to be able to apply the concept of psychological well-being in their lives in general and in dealing with homesickness in particular. In line with what (Ryff, 1989) said, psychological well-being is the state of an individual where they have a positive attitude toward themselves, can make decisions, can make their lives more colorful and accept the conditions they experience. As (Khafifatun Nadlyfah et. al., 2018) have demonstrated, culture shock can be precipitated by shifts in cultural milieu. Alternatively, it can be triggered by shifts in situations that are quite drastic from the area of origin. These changes can lead to a multitude of challenges, which in turn can contribute to the development of culture shock. During the process of self-adjustment, individuals may encounter challenges that stem from their inability to adapt to the novel circumstances. According to (Winda & Listyasari, 2013). effective self-adjustment is a prerequisite for the cultivation of social relationships. This ability to establish and maintain positive social relationships is crucial for well-being. This ability is characterized by a sense of ease and comfort in social interactions, as well as the capacity to effectively manage and cultivate relationships with others. This ability to cultivate and sustain relationships is a hallmark of effective self-adjustment. In accordance with this perspective, (Jamaluddin et al., 2020) posits that individuals possess the capacity to this assertion is supported by the notion that individuals possess the capacity for self-adjustment, a concept that will be further elaborated upon in the following section. This adaptability, or the ability to adjust, is a critical component of an individual's well-being and success in adapting to changing circumstances. This adaptability to the environment is a key component of his definition. The ability to adapt or adjust to the surrounding environment is contingent upon the satisfaction with one's life and the absence of stress. Furthermore, the ability to be free from various sources of anxiety is crucial. stress, and is able to be free from various things that can make him feel anxious. Consequently, the application of psychological well-being is regarded as a potential strategy for overcoming homesickness. This entails fostering a positive attitude and self-awareness, enabling individuals to make decisions and plans in their daily lives. This, in turn, reduces the likelihood of experiencing homesickness. Additionally, it is essential for individuals to accept their current circumstances, whether they are away from their home environment or in a state of migration.

## Conclusions

The results of the data analysis on the homesick experience of overseas students indicate that there are numerous goals overseas and a variety of challenges and psychological dynamics that affect the development and activities of individuals. In terms of the dynamics of homesickness, it is evident that the concept of homesickness and the associated anxiety towards one's home can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. It can be argued that the longing experienced by overseas students extends beyond the physical boundaries of a house, encompassing a deeper emotional and psychological significance.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research, which included a sample size of only three respondents from a single university. Additionally, the cultural factors influencing the data collection process require further consideration.



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