



# Clothing Adaptation Strategies in Japan for MBKM Students of Japanese Study Programs

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**Abstract.** The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Mengajar (MBKM) policy, which provides opportunities for students to carry out activities abroad, including in Japan, provides challenges for students. Students must adapt to the Japanese culture, which is very different from Indonesia, including in clothing. This research aims to discover the adaptation strategy of Japanese Study program students doing MBKM activities in Japan. In addition, this research also aims to update the existing research on adaptation strategies in clothing. The data for this study are collected from interviews and questionnaires distributed to students. Interviews and questionnaires were conducted with 15 students from the Bachelor of Japanese Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Jenderal Soedirman University. The results showed that the challenges students face regarding clothing have been overcome using several strategies. The first strategy is to learn about the Japanese clothing style before going to Japan through various sources. The second strategy is to adapt to the Japanese clothing style, and the last strategy is to assimilate two clothing styles. The last strategy is widely used, especially by Indonesian women who wear hijab. From the collected data, this research suggests the need for learning about Japanese clothing styles in university lectures before doing MBKM.

**Keywords:** Adaptation Strategy, Clothing, Japan.

## 1 Introduction

The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) has positively influenced Japanese literature students as they have opportunities for activities outside the campus [1]. MBKM is a policy by the Minister of Education and Culture that encourages students to excel in diverse sciences relevant to today's dynamic world of work, fostering adaptable competencies for evolving social, cultural, and technological landscapes [2]. According to Rahmat, this policy is seen as a means to enhance the Indonesian education landscape by granting universities the autonomy to adjust and thrive globally [3]. Through the MBKM program, students of the Japanese Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Jenderal Soedirman University have the opportunity to do internships and student exchanges in Japan. Along with the positive influence of the MBKM policy, students who carry out internships and student exchange activities in Japan face challenges. They face these challenges in various ways, including clothing.

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Indonesia and Japan have had a long-standing diplomatic relationship, which began in January 1958 with the signing of a peace agreement in Jakarta. This agreement holds potential benefits for both nations in the future [4]. Indonesia has a bilateral trade partnership with Japan called the Indonesia-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (IJEPA). IJEPA was initiated on July 1, 2008, through a joint statement by the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Indonesian Minister of Trade in Tokyo, Japan. [5]. This partnership aims to create fair and equitable advantages for both nations by promoting market liberalization, facilitating collaboration, and enhancing capacity. Implementing IJEPA is intended to reinforce economic cooperation between Indonesia and Japan, specifically focusing on trade and investment [6].

Japan and Indonesia have clear differences in terms of climate and seasons. It is well known that Japan has 4 seasons: spring, summer, autumn, and winter, while Indonesia has 2 climates: rainy and dry seasons. These seasonal differences mean that MBKM students in Japan have to deal with clothes that suit the seasons in Japan and also deal with temperature differences indoors and outdoors. Clothing is a concern for students of the Japanese Study Program at Jenderal Soedirman University when they go to Japan. Students who go to Japan for the MBKM program are going to Japan for the first time. They tend to worry that their clothes will not suit Japan's climate and dress styles. In addition, they also have concerns that the clothes they carry will not be sufficient.

There are several research has been done on adaptation in Japan. Some of the latest research has been conducted by Govinda (2023), Muhajirin (2023), Turistianti (2019), and Pravitha (2018). Research conducted by Govinda has discussed the obstacles faced by students continuing their studies in Japan and how they adapt between cultures [7]. In the study, Govinda looked at the constraints faced in general and did not explicitly look at it in terms of clothing. Research conducted by Muhajirin aims to determine the competence of intercultural communication carried out by migrant workers (TKI) in Japan in dealing with culture shock [8]. From the study results, it was concluded that Indonesian TKI continues to try to adapt. In addition, Indonesian TKI also take a deep self-approach to their surroundings and try to join the new environment. The research conducted by Turistianti aims to identify and understand the obstacles faced and the adaptation strategies of Indonesian students in Nara [9]. The results of this study indicate that the challenges faced by Indonesian students studying at Nara, Japan, are due to factors from internal and external individuals. The adaptation process is carried out to overcome the obstacles experienced. Pravitha's research [10] examines cultural adaptation carried out by students doing internships in Japan. The study results show that cultural differences and lack of work experience led to difficulties adapting students to the work environment. Students use open-minded strategies, communicate with colleagues, and follow rules to overcome this.

So far, studies on the adaptation strategies of students experiencing culture shock in Japan have paid little attention to how clothing adaptation strategies are carried out. This study analyzes how students of the Japanese Study program carry out clothing adaptation strategies when doing internships or student exchanges in Japan. The purpose of this study is to complement previous studies on how students of the Japanese Study program deal with the culture shock they experience during internships and

student exchanges. To achieve this goal, the study will analyze how the adaptation strategy in terms of clothing is carried out by students, based on the argument that adaptation strategies in terms of clothing need to be carried out by students who carry out internships and student exchange activities in Japan as a form of strategy to deal with the culture shock they experience.

The development of clothing in Japan has a long history. During Tokugawa's lead, Japan only allowed Chinese, Portuguese, and Dutch to set foot on its land, so foreign influences from outside Japan did not enter this country. As a result of this isolation, developments and events that occur in the outside world cannot be accessed or understood by Japanese society, including fashion or clothes. In this period, the kimono became the leading clothing used by Japanese people [11]. Japanese fashion has significantly transformed after Westernization, with the West influencing Japanese society. Japan has adopted Western elements, including fashion [11]. Fashion in Japan has developed thanks to Western influences that entered the country during the Westernization period. During the Meiji Restoration in 1867, Japan opened up and began to accept Western influences that influenced the development of fashion in that country [11]. After the Meiji restoration, Japanese society embraced Western dress styles and shifted from traditional Japanese clothing (*wafuku*) to Western-style clothing (*yofuku*). However, this change did not occur quickly because Japanese society needed time to adapt to *yofuku*. Thus, fashion trends in Japan are accepted slowly and gradually. Japanese fashion managed to find its way by combining and adopting elements from the more advanced Western fashions of the time [11]. Japan has succeeded in adapting to world fashion trends that may initially seem foreign to them. As a result, Japan has succeeded in advancing and developing in a world of modern fashion.

Adaptation can be defined as the process by which individuals adjust to their environment. This adjustment can mean changes to the individual to suit the environment they face or changing the environment to suit their wishes [12]. The adaptation process is one of several basic characteristics of living things, including humans, to create a harmonious and minimal conflict society environment [13]. That is why adaptation is needed as an effort to minimize conflict for students doing MBKM in Japan.

## 2 Method

This study analyzes the clothing adaptation strategies by MBKM students of the Japanese Study Program. This research is qualitative research with a case study model. The primary data source for this research was students of the Japanese Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Jenderal Soedirman University, who were conducting MBKM activities. As many as 15 Japanese Literature study program students are currently carrying out MBKM activities with the conversion of 20 credits. The MBKM activities in question are internships and student exchanges. The participants consist of students aged 19-23 years who have been living in Japan for 3-6 months. They are 2nd, 3rd, and 4th-year students who depart in semesters 4, 6, and 8. Students in semesters 4 and 6 will carry out MBKM activities for two semesters in Japan.

Whereas semester 8 students will carry out MBKM activities for one semester in Japan.

Secondary data from this study are texts in scientific journals related to adaptation strategies in Japanese books related to Japanese clothing. The data was collected using a questionnaire distributed via Google form to Japanese Study Program students currently in Japan. Interviews were also conducted to find out the culture shock they faced related to clothing, which was the cause of the need for an adaptation. The data analysis technique that will be used is data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion.

### 3 Results

The results below are the results of a survey conducted on respondents who are currently carrying out MBKM activities in Japan, either through internship programs or student exchanges. This survey uses a Google form and has been distributed via various social media platforms from June 2023 to July 2023. Details of the survey results are listed in the table below.

#### 3.1 Knowledge of How to Dress in Japan

**Table 1.** Respondents' responses about their knowledge of how to dress in Japan.

Statement	Answer			Amount
	VK	KL	ANI	
Do you have any knowledge of the common way of dressing in Japan before leaving for Japan?	3 20%	10 66,7%	2 13,3%	15 100%

In Table 1, it can be seen that most of the respondents (66.7%) Knew Little (KL) regarding the style of dress in Japan. A small portion of the respondents (20%) have Very Known (VK) about how to dress in Japan. Furthermore, only a few respondents (13.3%) had Absolutely No Idea (ANI) about how to dress in Japan.

#### 3.2 The thing that caused a culture shock in dressing while in Japan

**Table 2.** Respondents' responses to the factors that caused culture shock while in Japan.

Factors that caused culture shock		Amount	
1	Differences in dress styles and trends	9	60%
2	Differences in social norms are related to personal appearance	4	26,7%
3	Differences in the ethics of formal and non-formal dress	2	13,3%
Total		15	100%

In Table 2, it can be seen that more than half of the respondents (60%) stated that the factors causing the culture shock were due to differences in dress styles and trends in Japan. A small portion of the respondents (26.7%) stated that the factor causing culture shock was differences in social norms related to personal appearance. Only a few respondents (13.3%) stated that differences in the ethics of formal and non-formal dress were the cause of culture shock.

### Adaptation process.

**Table 3.** Respondents' responses regarding the process of adaptation to the culture shock experienced.

	How to deal with cultural differences experienced	Amount	
1	Combining the style of dress so far with the style of clothing in Japan	10	66,7%
2	Observing and imitating the style of clothing in Japan	5	33,3%
	Total	15	100%

In Table 3, it can be seen that most of the respondents chose to combine the style of clothing so far with the style of dress in Japan. Only a small proportion (33.3%) of the respondents chose to observe and imitate Japanese clothing styles.

## 4 Adaptation Strategies of the Students

### 4.1 Pre-departures Knowledge

Knowledge of the targeted country is needed in the adaptation process to deal with culture shock. Based on the results, it is known that most respondents have little knowledge about how to dress in Japan. Knowing how to dress allows students to prepare themselves when leaving for Japan. This provision of knowledge will make it easier for respondents to deal with the perceived culture shock. This provision of knowledge will also reduce the anxiety that students feel when they are going to Japan. They can easily estimate how much clothing they need to bring with them.

Based on the result, some respondents claimed to have absolutely no knowledge of how to dress in Japan. This impacts the lack of preparation for their departure in terms of dress. The more unfamiliar the respondent is with the target country's culture, the more difficult the adaptation process will be. The fact that there are still students who have absolutely no knowledge of how to dress in Japan requires that the class process places more emphasis on knowledge about Japanese culture, one of which is regarding how to dress.

Culture shock is a natural phenomenon faced by people who move from one culture to another. The phenomenon of culture shock occurs because an individual enters an unfamiliar culture, and almost all signs familiar to him are lost [9]. Not everyone is

affected by culture shock in the same way, simultaneously, to the same degree[14]. In this case, much knowledge about Japanese dress styles will help reduce the symptoms of culture shock faced by students who carry out MBKM activities.

As it has been explained, culture shock can occur when an individual loses symptoms familiar to him; for MBKM Japanese Study Programs students, what makes a culture gap in Japan is a difference in dress styles and trends. This shows that even though in the lecture process, they have gained knowledge about Japanese culture, including the style of dress, there are still significant differences that cause culture shock. The difficulties encountered regarding this trend are also caused by the seasonal differences faced by students who carry out MBKM activities. One respondent stated that clothes in Indonesia would be too cold for spring and too hot for summer. For the Japanese climate, buying clothes in Japan would be more appropriate. From this, it is known that it is better to bring just enough clothes when leaving for Japan.

## 4.2 Adaptation Stages

Apart from trends and dress styles in Japan, another thing that causes culture shock to students who carry out MBKM activities in Japan is that social norms related to personal appearance create a culture gap. One of the respondents stated that if going out using sandals in Indonesia is a very normal thing, then it becomes something strange in Japan. People in Japan tend to use shoes when going out of the house. The clash of social norms related to personal appearance occurs here. In this case, something familiar to the respondent becomes unfamiliar in Japan. Because of that, the respondents felt embarrassed and insecure about wearing sandals when leaving the house, which is familiar in Indonesia. Several female respondents stated that as a minority, Japanese people still find it strange to see women wearing hijab. Some of them will be asked about the clothes they wear. However, there has been no coercion from the surrounding environment that requires them to take off their hijab.

Looking at the previous statement, a process of adapting the style of dress while in Japan is needed. Gudykunts and Kim (2003) explain that individual motivations for adaptation vary. They emphasized that everyone experiences a process of adaptation when interacting with different environments and cultures. Kim identified two stages of adaptation, namely cultural adaptation and cross-cultural adaptation. Cultural adaptation is a communication process that involves sending messages, mediums, and recipients, which involves encoding and decoding messages [15]. This process occurs when individuals move to a new environment and learn to understand messages from local residents, called enculturation, which occurs during socialization. The second stage is cross-cultural adaptation, which includes acculturation, deculturation and assimilation [15]. Acculturation occurs when individuals begin to interact with a new culture and eventually choose local cultural norms and values. Furthermore, deculturation also affects the adaptation process because individuals cannot completely let go of their previous culture. Assimilation is a situation where immigrants minimize the use of old culture so that they look like local residents. In theory, assimila-

tion seems to occur after a change in acculturation, but in reality, assimilation is not completely achieved [15].

The cultural adaptation process has been passed by students while they carry out the lecture process. They had previously gained some knowledge about how to dress in Japan. This is where the encoding process occurs. Students then depart and experience a decoding event where what they have learned becomes something they experience directly. The enculturation process occurs when students experience culture shock. Students move from their home environment, Indonesia, to a new environment, Japan. Students then get messages from local residents either directly or indirectly. The message is conveyed through differences in trends and styles of dress, differences in social norms related to personal appearance, and differences in formal and non-formal dress ethics. This enculturation process then forces students to carry out cross-cultural adaptation.

From the results obtained, the combination of the style of dress that has been done so far with the style of dress in Japan is often done. This adaptation in terms of clothing shows that Japanese Study Program students who carry out MBKM activities have reached the second stage of the adaptation process, namely cross-cultural adaptation. Students have gone through a period of acculturation and deculturation but have yet to reach the assimilation stage. The achievement of acculturation can be seen from the answers of most respondents, who stated that they chose to combine the current style of dress with the style of dress in Japan. Maintaining the dress style all this time proves that the process of deculturation occurred. Meanwhile, the choice to combine it with the Japanese dress style shows that the acculturation process occurs. In this adaptation process, many students choose to buy jackets that are more multi-functional than clothes that will change every season. The main reason for this choice is due to the short stay in Japan and limited funds. From the respondents' answers, it is known that only 5 respondents chose to imitate Japanese dress styles. Following the statement of Gudykunts and Kim that theoretical assimilation will occur after the acculturation process, but the results will not be perfect.

## 5 Conclusion

Based on the research, it is known that there are still MBKM students in Japan who do not have knowledge about how to dress in Japan. This shows the need to improve the lecture process to introduce Japanese culture, especially regarding clothing. In the process of MBKM activities, the thing that causes a cultural gap between clothing and Indonesia is the trend and style of dress caused by the difference in seasons. While doing MBKM, students of the Japanese Study Program prove that they have successfully adapted to culture. This is evidenced by their achievements at the cross-cultural adaptation stage. Even so, most of them have yet to be able to reach the cultural assimilation stage and are still at the acculturation-deculturation stage. This is due to the short duration of MBKM activities and limited funds.

This paper can finally provide a point of view that knowledge of clothing styles in Japan, which is heavily influenced by the season, needs to be taught to students before

carrying out MBKM activities so that the adaptation process can run well. In addition, this study proves the achievement of a good adaptation process by Japanese Study Program students who carry out MBKM in Japan. This research also still has the limitations of respondents who are only students of the Japanese Study Program, so further research is needed that discusses not only the adaptation process of the Japanese Study Program.

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