

Research Paper

A schema social circle of Indonesian students in higher education

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Abstract

Social circle is one of the issues that we must address. It emerged as a significant social phenomenon because members joined based on their shared interests, rather than proximity or assigned ranks. It changes based on individual needs and the environment. This research aimed to expand the Indonesian community that studies abroad socially, specifically within their social circle. It is also a goal to explore students' social circle strategies as they learn within Hungary's higher education system. Quantitative pilot research was employed in this study. Convenience sampling was used. A questionnaire was administered to Indonesian students to collect data from 22 per cent (N=47) of Indonesians who studied in Hungary. The Indonesian student was the one who held a Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship. All of them come from different educational backgrounds and programs. The results revealed that most of respondents are members of home country student associations. Among various social background variables, educational attainment emerged as the sole significant determinant of multi-organizational membership. Other result is among the identified clusters, there is one that represents new types of motivations including relationship-building motivations, among Indonesian students. These findings highlight the pivotal role of informal, peer-driven networks in the social integration of Indonesian students, superseding formal university-led initiatives. Universities should implement policies that actively promote student satisfaction by facilitating access to identity-affirming and interest-based student organisations, while ensuring the affordability of participation through low-cost or subsidised social programs to guarantee inclusivity and accessibility for all students.

Keywords: higher education; Indonesian student; schema; social circle

Introduction

University life represents a pivotal phase in a student's development, offering essential opportunities for both academic advancement and social enrichment. While higher education equips students with specialised knowledge in their chosen fields, it simultaneously fosters the expansion of social networks and interpersonal relationships among peers. However, for international students, the process of integration presents unique challenges. Despite their expectations of forming meaningful connections with classmates, they frequently encounter cultural, linguistic, and systemic barriers that hinder their social inclusion. As Coleman (2015) suggests, studying abroad offers numerous opportunities for social interaction, often driven by a profound desire to mitigate feelings of isolation in unfamiliar environments. The success of these students in establishing social networks depends on factors such as who they connect with, the size of their social networks, and the depth of these relationships. Consequently, international students develop self-initiated strategies to navigate these complex social dynamics. Chirkov et al. (2008) further emphasise that international students are intrinsically driven to study abroad by factors such as curiosity, personal development, and the aspiration for better career prospects. Their motivations include acquiring new skills, enhancing language proficiency, and broadening their social horizons.

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In alignment with its internationalisation agenda, the Hungarian government launched the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship Programme to enhance Hungary's standing in global higher education by fostering international academic collaborations and increasing the global competitiveness of Hungarian universities (Aye & Bocsi, 2023). The program provides comprehensive support for international students, including tuition-free education, monthly stipends, accommodation assistance, and health insurance. Currently, 28 Hungarian universities participate, offering over 600 English-taught degree and non-degree programs across diverse academic fields. Among these, the University of Debrecen (20%), Eötvös Loránd University (14%), and Budapest University of Technology and Economics (13%) host the largest share of scholarship recipients. Notably, 95% of Stipendium Hungaricum students are enrolled in English-language programs, while the remaining 5% study in Hungarian, German, Italian, Spanish, or other languages.

Despite institutional efforts to promote internationalisation, the informal social integration of international students, particularly through their social circles, remains an underexplored area, especially within the Hungarian context. Coleman (2015) critiques the narrow scope of applied linguistics research, which tends to focus exclusively on classroom-based language learning, thereby neglecting the broader social dimensions of students' everyday experiences abroad. This fragmented approach overlooks the complex and interconnected nature of informal social interactions, which play a crucial role in students' adaptation and well-being. Similarly, Kadushin (1966) highlights the long-standing oversight of social circles as informal yet essential units of social organisation, particularly in large and complex societies where affiliations are often based on shared interests rather than physical proximity or formal institutional structures. These informal networks are crucial for understanding the subtleties of how students navigate social life in foreign environments. Focusing specifically on East Asian and other Asian international students, previous research has identified several factors that contribute to their comparatively lower levels of psychological well-being. Key challenges include the length of residence in the host country, limited English language proficiency, reluctance to seek professional psychological support, and broader difficulties related to cultural adaptation. Among the various challenges faced by international students, depression has emerged as a predominant issue, reflecting the emotional burdens many encounter in unfamiliar academic and social environments. Empirical evidence from Enim and Rónay (2025) indicates that 54% of international students at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) experienced feelings of social alienation, while 46% reported a sense of well-being and integration, highlighting the diverse experiences of belonging within university environments. This duality demonstrates that inclusion is not a uniform experience but is instead shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including cultural background, language proficiency, opportunities for social engagement, and the responsiveness of institutional support structures. While some students successfully navigate these challenges and integrate into the university's social fabric through participation in student organizations and intercultural programs, others remain on the periphery, facing barriers to full inclusion. These findings underscore the importance of examining the nuanced dimensions of belonging, which are shaped by both individual agency and structural conditions within higher education institutions, ultimately impacting students' emotional well-being and academic success. In this context, Li, Wang, and Xiao (2014) argue that the cumulative effect of these factors offers a compelling explanation for the persistent well-being gap experienced by East Asian students relative to other international student groups. The phenomenon of social alienation is particularly pronounced among East Asian students, a trend consistently highlighted in the literature on intercultural communication and international student well-being. Several studies, including Gareis (2012), have demonstrated that East Asian students face greater challenges in forming meaningful social connections with host-national peers compared to their counterparts from other cultural regions, due to factors such as cultural distance, communication barriers, and differing social expectations.

Addressing these research gaps, the present study seeks to examine the informal social integration of Indonesian students in Hungarian higher education, with a particular focus on how they construct and navigate social circles as an adaptive strategy. Unlike prior studies that have predominantly centred on formal academic interactions, this research shifts attention to informal peer networks and voluntary group affiliations, particularly within small-scale institutional settings. Given the unique cultural backgrounds of Southeast Asian students, where values such as community belonging, group harmony, indirect communication, respect for hierarchy, and social modesty are deeply ingrained, their experiences in international academic settings often differ significantly from those of students from other regions. However, these experiences, along with the social dynamics and cultural perspectives of Southeast Asian students, are frequently marginalized in current scholarship. Much of the existing research on international students tends to focus on academic performance or language proficiency. At the same time, the informal aspects of social integration, such as peer relationships and participation in community networks, remain underexplored for this particular group. In response to this

gap, the present study examines the organizational memberships and underlying motivations that drive Southeast Asian students, particularly Indonesians, to form social circles and participate in group activities during their studies abroad.

In response to these gaps, this study aims to investigate the informal social integration of Indonesian students enrolled in small-scale higher education institutions abroad. Specifically, it examines how these students navigate peer relationships, establish social circles, and participate in organizational memberships. To explore these dynamics, the study employed a quantitative pilot research design, focusing on the organizational affiliations and underlying motivations that drive Southeast Asian students, particularly Indonesians, to engage in social groups while studying abroad. The overarching objective is to contribute to a more nuanced and culturally inclusive understanding of international student integration, extending the current discourse beyond academic metrics to encompass the informal and interpersonal aspects of student life.

The remainder of this article is organised as follows: a comprehensive review of the literature examines theoretical and empirical work related to social circles, intercultural social networks, and group membership among international students. The methodology section then delineates the research design, sampling procedures, and data collection instruments. The results section presents key findings regarding group membership, social motivations, and patterns of group selection. This is followed by a discussion that interprets the findings in light of existing theories and prior research. Finally, the article concludes by summarising the study's contributions and proposing directions for future scholarly inquiry.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in the interrelated concepts of social circles, intercultural challenges, and group membership. Within this framework, existing literature emphasises the pivotal role of group participation in fostering student engagement, enhancing a sense of belonging, and promoting persistence in higher education contexts. The notion of social circles, in particular, offers a valuable lens through which to examine informal networks that facilitate social integration among students.

Social Circle

Kadushin (1966) conceptualised social circles as valuable social assets, distinguished by their indirect interactions, which are primarily grounded in shared interests and maintained with a low level of institutionalisation. He introduced the notion of "sets" to describe these loosely organised social structures, underscoring the informal and fluid nature of their formation. Building on Kadushin's foundational work, Ye et al. (2015) expanded the perspective by asserting that every individual functions as the nucleus of their social circle, linking this self-centred dynamic to concepts of ethics-centeredness, association differentiation, and social capital advantages. The influence of social circles, however, extends beyond mere affiliation. Verbeke and Wuyts (2007) demonstrated that an individual's membership within a group has a significant influence on their performance. They argued that individuals who align their interests with those of their group gain access to information exchange networks, which are pivotal for enhancing personal and professional outcomes. This assertion emphasises the reciprocal benefits that arise from active participation and alignment within social networks. Moreover, Pachur et al. (2004) identified three fundamental dimensions within social circles: family, friends, and acquaintances, highlighting the varying degrees of intimacy and influence across these categories. Returning to Kadushin's (1966) framework, he emphasised that friendship groups are not necessarily defined by shared ideologies or belief systems, but rather by patterns of interpersonal interaction. This suggests that the formation of such groups is initially driven by situational proximity or mutual interests, which may or may not evolve into deeper, value-based communities over time. The process of social circle formation, therefore, involves dynamic social interactions in which members gradually exhibit shared traits, behaviours, and preferences. These interactions, often emerging from initial common interests or activities, foster a collective identity that can influence members' social behaviours and access to resources within the network.

Social circles are typically categorised into two main types: informal and formal networks. Informal circles are loosely structured, spontaneous groupings, often formed through casual interactions in settings such as salons, social gatherings, or other unstructured environments. These networks are characterised by their fluidity and the absence of formalised roles or objectives. In contrast, formal social circles are highly organised groups, including cliques, gangs, voluntary associations, and fan-based communities. These groups often engage in collective activities such as demonstrations, picket lines, and organised protests, reflecting a greater degree of internal cohesion and structured participation. Among these, formal organisations exhibit the highest intensity

of relational ties, as members assume defined roles and collaborate towards shared goals (Kadushin, 1966). The formation and sustenance of social circles are deeply intertwined with the process of socialization. Harro (2000) posited that socialization occurs on two levels: intrapersonally, through individual self-reflection and identity formation, and interpersonally, through interactions that shape one's relationship with others within social contexts. This dual process is crucial in determining how individuals adapt to and integrate within their social environments. McKenna et al. (2002) emphasised that recognising shared traits and commonalities within a group is a gradual and ongoing process. Upon joining, individuals may initially be unaware of more profound similarities. However, over time, through interaction and observation, they become increasingly attuned to the collective identity and shared interests of the group. Extending this notion, Cherian et al. (2021) highlighted that group members continuously evaluate how well their values and behaviours align with the group's norms and expectations, which in turn influences their long-term engagement and sense of belonging.

Cultural and regional factors play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of social circles. Ye et al. (2015) contrasted Eastern collectivist cultures, particularly those influenced by Confucian traditions, with Western individualistic societies, noting how these differing cultural orientations impact patterns of social interaction and group formation. While collectivist cultures emphasise harmony, group loyalty, and shared identity, individualistic cultures prioritise personal autonomy and selective affiliations, resulting in distinct socialisation mechanisms. Moreover, language barriers often exacerbate challenges to social integration. Prieto-Arranz et al. (2023) found, in their Study of Erasmus+ students, that even within European contexts, students frequently gravitated towards peers who shared their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. For example, Catalan-speaking students preferred to interact within their linguistic community, suggesting that similarity in language and culture remains a critical facilitator for adequate socialization, regardless of geographical or regional origins. These findings underscore that cultural and linguistic homophily—the tendency to associate with others who share similar characteristics—is a central determinant in the formation and sustainability of social circles among students in international academic environments.

The intercultural issue in the Social Circle

Although this study focuses on the social circles of Indonesian students, it is essential to consider the intercultural dynamics that are inherently present within this context. Indonesia is a nation of vast cultural diversity, encompassing numerous ethnic groups and tribes, each characterised by distinct cultural identities and traditions. These cultural imprints are deeply embedded within individuals, influencing their behaviours, interpersonal interactions, and modes of social engagement. Consequently, even within the Indonesian student community, variations in cultural backgrounds generate diverse patterns of social interaction and group affiliation.

Language emerges as a pivotal factor in facilitating effective communication and fostering a sense of belonging within multicultural groups. Mittelmeier et al. (2018) highlighted the critical role of adopting a *lingua franca*, noting that the use of a common language not only bridges linguistic divides but also fosters inclusivity and encourages active participation. This insight is particularly relevant for Indonesian students, who often come from diverse linguistic backgrounds and must navigate academic and social environments in a foreign language, typically English. The adoption of a *lingua franca* becomes an essential tool for facilitating meaningful group interactions and forming social circles among students with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, Heine et al. (2002) asserted that cultural comparisons become meaningful when reference groups across cultures share common evaluative standards. In individualistic societies, reference groups tend to embody highly individualistic values, which in turn shape the self-perceptions and behaviours of their members. When social circles are analysed across different cultural contexts, the influence of reference group norms may lead to homogenised responses among members, potentially masking deeper cultural distinctions. However, this homogenization tends to occur only when cultural expectations determine individual behaviour solely. Social comparison, while a powerful mechanism for self-assessment, represents just one pathway through which individuals construct their self-concept.

Understanding the intercultural dynamics within Indonesian students' social circles necessitates a nuanced and multilayered approach. This involves not only recognising cultural diversity and linguistic adaptation but also examining the complex socialisation processes that shape both group behaviours and individual identity formation. Such an approach is essential for capturing the multifaceted experiences of international students navigating life in multicultural academic environments. It also reinforces existing research indicating that East Asian students studying in English-speaking countries face greater challenges in forming friendships with host-

nation students compared to their peers from other regions. According to Gareis (2012), this difficulty arises from a complex interplay of factors, including language proficiency, cultural norms, social group dynamics, and mutual perceptions. These interconnected elements create unique barriers that make it more challenging for East Asian students to establish close relationships with local peers than it is for students from other cultural backgrounds.

Additionally, students gain opportunities for intercultural learning across various contexts, with exposure to diverse perspectives often yielding profound learning experiences. King, Perez, and Shim (2013) emphasised that academic courses, international study programs, community service projects, student organisations, and interpersonal friendships all provide fertile ground for meaningful intercultural engagement. These diverse interactions enable students to develop intercultural competencies that are crucial for their academic success and personal growth in increasingly globalised educational settings.

Group membership

Organisations have historically played a pivotal role in Indonesian society, serving as key platforms for social cohesion and the formation of national identity. During the colonial period of the Netherlands East Indies, diverse ethnic groups, including the Javanese, Bugis, and Chinese Indonesians, often collectively referred to as "inlanders," began establishing distinct social affiliations. Arps (2024) notes that Chinese Indonesians formed a particular social group, separate from native Indonesians. Despite these distinctions, many Indonesians from diverse ethnic backgrounds pursued education abroad, where they established student organisations that played a crucial role in the Indonesian independence movement. Prominent organisations such as the Perhimpunan Indonesia (Indonesian Student Association) emerged as influential hubs for nationalist activism.

The establishment of Indonesian student associations persisted after independence, as evidenced by the formation of the Perhimpunan Pelajar Indonesia (PPI) in West Germany in 1954 and the Organisasi Pelajar Indonesia (OPI) in East Germany during the 1970s (Hasyim, 2014). Beyond nationalist movements, Indonesian students also organised faith-based groups, such as the Keluarga Mahasiswa Katolik Indonesia (KMKI) and various Muslim student organisations, reflecting the diverse religious affiliations within the Indonesian student community. The broader emergence of civil society organisations in Indonesia, as Harney and Olivia (2003) assert, was driven by historical resistance to state repression, the need for grassroots mobilisation, advocacy for marginalised communities, and the influence of global development agendas. These organisations have become essential actors in filling institutional voids, fostering social solidarity, and promoting democratic participation, particularly in post-authoritarian contexts. Supporting this pattern of organised social engagement, census data from the World Organisation of the Scout Movement (WOSM) recorded Indonesia as the country with the largest number of Scout members in the world in 2021, with a total of 25.27 million members (BPS Kabupaten Lahat, 2024). This demonstrates how structured group affiliations have long been a significant part of Indonesia's socio-cultural landscape, both domestically and among Indonesian communities abroad. Given the focus of this study on social circles, group membership emerges as a critical dynamic in understanding students' social integration. Schiper and Toueg (2006) conceptualise group membership as a fluid and evolving process, shaped by the continuous interplay between individual interactions and group structures. Leach and Vlieg (2008) argue that group membership has a significant impact on internal group performance, particularly for minority students, whose strong ethnic identification influences their social affiliations. Guala et al. (2013) further suggest that individuals exhibit greater self-involvement and commitment when their values align with those of the in-group. Similarly, Verbeke and Wuyts (2007) highlight the positive, linear relationship between friendship circles and individual performance outcomes. Group membership not only influences behaviour but also reinforces social identity. Sahertian and Jawas (2021) emphasise that an individual's identity gains meaning through loyalty, emotional reciprocity, and harmonious group interactions. Sutter (2008) underscores the reciprocal relationship between personal decisions and group dynamics, while Hogg (2016) describes social groups as fluid prototypes—collective constructs defined by shared attributes such as attitudes, behaviours, customs, and symbols.

Social identity plays a crucial role in promoting inclusion and cohesion within organisations. Scheepers and Ellemers (2019) provide empirical evidence suggesting that fostering a sense of belonging and respect for individual differences is fundamental for creating cohesive and high-performing groups. However, Elmoose-Østerlund et al. (2019) found that although social background factors influence levels of understanding and acceptance within groups, they have a limited influence on students' motivation to join organisations. Their

study further revealed that higher education fosters social integration only when it translates into students' knowledge of organizational processes and their acceptance by peers.

Language identity is another significant factor in determining group affiliation. Oktafiani (2019) illustrates how Indonesian communities abroad, such as those in the Netherlands, Singapore, and Turkey, often establish organisations grounded in shared language, culture, and collective objectives. Martono et al. (2022) further argue that linguistic similarity reinforces national identity, fostering greater group cohesion among Indonesian students. Additionally, geographical proximity and supportive environments play crucial roles, as students in nurturing contexts report enhanced development of social competencies and adjustment (Natoli et al., 2014). Sahertian and Jawas (2021) also identify both personal and technological factors as influential in shaping students' attitudes and performance within group settings. The size, density, and composition of students' networks are shaped by the types of campus groups they join. For example, students involved in service-oriented organisations tend to form diverse networks that span cultural backgrounds. In contrast, heritage-focused groups promote intra-cultural networks that enhance students' sense of belonging and attachment to the university (Glass & Gesing, 2018).

Students' motivation to engage with organisations is often rooted in their need for social support and a sense of belonging. Haines (2019) found that students participate in organisations to establish a "home away from home," thereby fostering personal development in supportive and inclusive environments. Group membership also offers valuable networking opportunities, as observed by Davidson and Middleton (2013) in their Study of the Science and Technology Librarians Association, where members valued collegiality, professional networking, and mentorship. McPherson et al. (1992) assert that groups predominantly attract members through interpersonal connections, resulting in homogeneous networks where individuals gravitate towards others with similar attributes. Strong interpersonal ties enhance group retention, while symmetrical social network structures facilitate the exchange of preferences and behaviours among members. Tachie-Donkor and Ezema (2023) emphasise the importance of information literacy skills in enhancing students' information-seeking behaviours in academic and professional contexts. Consequently, universities and scholarship organisations play a vital role in facilitating social integration by supporting structured group activities. Initiatives such as training workshops, cultural exchange programs, executive committee meetings, and graduation ceremonies (Umino & Benson, 2016) are crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and enabling international students to navigate academic and social environments effectively.

Many international students actively join multiple campus organisations, believing that such involvement significantly supports their academic, social, and linguistic adaptation to campus life. Through these engagements, students not only derive personal benefits but also assist fellow international students in becoming active participants in organisational activities. Their involvement broadens their social interactions, allowing them to engage with diverse groups—including members of their first-language community, other international students, and domestic peers through collaborative activities such as studying, working on projects, and participating in social events. Additionally, their organisational participation extends into the wider local community, enhancing their sense of belonging and fostering intercultural learning through direct engagement (Park, 2019). First-year students who achieve greater social integration often demonstrate higher self-determined motivation towards their studies, experience lower levels of external regulation, and exhibit reduced amotivation in higher education. Students who perceive their interactions with peers positively are more likely to experience enhanced academic motivation, both in quality and quantity. Positive peer interactions at the beginning of higher education play a critical role in fostering a sense of personal relevance in academic pursuits by the end of the first year (Noyens et al., 2018).

Fényes et al. (2018) examine the relationship between civic activity and dropout among higher education students, as well as how students' social background influences civic engagement. Their findings reveal that while objective factors, such as a family's financial problems and actual economic status, do not show a significant correlation with civic activity, students' subjective perception of their financial situation has a notable impact. Students who consider themselves financially better off are more likely to participate in civic activities compared to those who perceive their situation as less favorable. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of social networks in shaping civic involvement: while close relationships with parents tend to reduce civic participation, strong connections with friends, teachers, and religious communities significantly enhance students' engagement in civic life. These patterns suggest that students' motivations for civic involvement are complex and influenced by both personal perceptions and social environments. In line with this, volunteering motivations can be categorized into traditional and new (instrumental) types. Traditional motivations are rooted in altruism, community service, and personal values, where individuals volunteer out of a genuine desire to help

others and contribute to the betterment of society. In contrast, new or instrumental motivations emphasize practical benefits, such as gaining work experience, enhancing résumés, building professional networks, and improving language or intercultural skills, reflecting a more goal-oriented approach to volunteering (Bocsi & Fényes, 2019). International students with higher levels of social capital, including prior volunteering experience, exposure to English-speaking environments, and cross-cultural networks, tend to be more proactive in joining volunteer organisations. Students from supportive social backgrounds are more likely to participate in campus groups, utilising structured yet informal settings to foster intercultural connections, enhance language proficiency, and strengthen their sense of belonging within the university community (O'Neil, Young, Schartner, & Villalobos, 2022).

Finally, academic integration is closely linked to social engagement. Borglum and Kubala (2000) found that students who perceive themselves as academically integrated frequently report a concurrent sense of social belonging. This may be attributed to the perception of community colleges as foundational stages in their academic journeys, leading students to prioritise academic interactions, under the assumption that these suffice for fulfilling their social connectivity needs.

Research Design and Methods

The methodology of this study was quantitative pilot research. A self-developed questionnaire was given to Indonesian students to gather data. This pilot research refined the research questions and provided preliminary findings on the composition of social circles, patterns of group membership, and the sociopsychological motivations underlying student participation.

This pilot research focuses only on the Northern Great Plain of Hungary. We collected the sample from Indonesian students studying at the University of Debrecen, Hungary (N = 30). Participants will be asked to complete the questionnaire voluntarily. All Indonesians targeted were students holding a Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship. According to the WhatsApp group, the total number of Indonesian students in Hungary was 213, with 30 studying at the University of Debrecen.

Meanwhile, the total of respondents who filled in the questionnaire was N=47 (22%). According to Kieser and Wassmer (1996), the range of 20 to 40 encompasses trial sample sizes spanning from 80 to 250, so providing a framework for determining the appropriate size of a pilot sample. Julious (2005) recommends a minimum of 12 respondents per subgroup to ensure preliminary reliability, acknowledging that increased sample size reduces standard error and enhances generalizability. It is also notable that, at the University of Debrecen, one of the key institutions hosting Indonesian students, approximately 30 Indonesian students were enrolled in 2023 (University of Debrecen, 2023). The small sample size is one of the limitations of our research, as it restricts our ability to draw more definitive conclusions. Since this is a pilot study, our future goal is to draw the findings and incorporate them into a larger-scale, representative research study.

All respondents come from different educational backgrounds and programs. This study employed a questionnaire to collect data on students' social circles, which was written in English. We attempted to open up the Indonesian community of students who study abroad socially.

We analysed the data using IBM SPSS Statistics. The analysis began with descriptive statistics to summarise the respondents' demographic characteristics, organisational affiliations, and motivational factors. Multiple response analysis was employed to capture the diversity of motivations for joining student groups. Additionally, inferential techniques such as crosstabulation, correlation analysis, and mean comparisons were used to examine the relationships between variables.

Research question:

- Q1. What differences can be identified in the social background regarding joining the organisation?
- Q2. What motivation clusters can be identified using the research database?

Hypothesis:

- H1. Indonesian students with a favourable social background (higher social, economic and cultural capital) are more likely to join more organisations (Fényes et al., 2018).
- H2. Based on the motivational items, we assume that among the identified clusters, there will be one that represents new types of motivations (Bocsi & Fényes, 2015), including relationship-building motivations, among Indonesian students.

To collect data on the social circle of Indonesian students. The study procedure was as follows: first, we distributed a questionnaire to the Indonesian group via WhatsApp; then, the data were analysed using the SPSS

application, and the results were interpreted to draw information from the social circle of Indonesian students in Hungary.

After collecting the data, it is imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) application. The version that we used was 29. After that, the data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The parts being analysed included the demographic information of the respondents, the people with whom Indonesian students most frequently interact, the type of organisation they joined, and their motivations for joining the group. The analysis of the data utilises one variate frequency to determine the socio-demographic background of the participants, while the motivation is analysed using multiple response analysis. In our analysis, we employed univariate and multivariate analyses, including descriptive statistics, crosstabulation analysis, comparison of means, correlation analysis, and cluster analysis.

In our research the social background was examined with the following variables: gender (1=male, 2=female), age, marital status (1=single, 2=married, 3=divorced), education level (1=bachelor, 2=master, 3=doctorate), mother and father educational level (dummy variable 0=do not have a degree, 1=have degree), economic situation (1= I have everything I need and remain for material expenditures, 2= I have everything I need, but I cannot afford enormous expenditures, 3= Sometimes, I cannot afford my everyday expenditures), number of children.

According to the data, the study comprised 23 male respondents (48.9%) and 24 female respondents (51%). The average age of the respondents who filled in the questionnaire was 31 years old, with the youngest respondent being 19 years old and the oldest being 49 years old.

In terms of marital status, there were 59.6 per cent (N = 28) who were single, 38.3 per cent (N = 18) who were married, and 2.1 per cent (N = 1) who were divorced. The educational level of the students in the group primarily consisted of doctoral students, comprising 51.1 per cent (N = 24); master's students were the second largest group, at 38.3 per cent (N = 18); and bachelor's students made up 10.6 per cent (N = 5). Furthermore, in their economic situation, 59.6 per cent (N = 28) of them stated that they have everything they need; however, they cannot afford large expenditures, such as travel. Meanwhile, 36.2 per cent (N=17) of them stated that they have everything they need and remain material for starving and restaurants. However, only 4.3 per cent (N = 2) of students said that they sometimes cannot afford everyday expenses, such as food and transportation. Moreover, we also discovered their parents' educational level. We found out that for fathers' education, fathers who graduated from elementary school were 2.1 percent (N=1), secondary education was 27.7 percent (N=13), bachelor was the highest with 48.9 percent (N=23), fathers who graduated from master were 10.6 percent (N=5), doctoral programs were 8.5 percent (N=4), and some fathers were professors, about 2.1 percent (N=1). Additionally, for mothers education, for mothers who attended elementary school, it was about 8.5 percent (N=4); secondary school was 31.9 percent (N=15); associate degrees were 4.3 percent (N=2); bachelor's degrees were 38.3 percent (N=18); master's degrees were 8.5 percent (N=4); and doctoral degrees were 8.5 percent (N=4). Thirty-one per cent of respondents have children (N = 15). Of those with children, 40% have one child (N = 6), 26.7% have two children (N = 4), 20% have three children (N = 3), while 13.3% have four children (N = 2).

Results

Table 1. Different Types of Group Memberships among Indonesian Students

Group		Responses (N)	Per cent of Cases
group circle	[I am a member of a club in the university (for example, the International Student Union, Kazanhas University Club, Klinika University Club, Sport University Club, etc.)]	7	14.9%
	I am a member of a religious group (for example, church, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.)]	15	31.9%
	I am a member of a home country group (for example, a country student association).	44	93.6%
	I am a member of a sport or hobby group (for example, gym, reading, entertainment, etc.)]	14	29.8%
	I am a member of group work (for example, students' collaboration on research or any professional activities).]	25	53.2%

We created a dummy variable so that a value of 0 indicates membership in one organisation (typically the home country group), and a value of 1 indicates membership in two or more organisations (with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 5). Thirty-one per cent of the respondents are members of one organisation (N = 15), and 68.1% are members of more than one organisation (N = 32). 31.9% are members of two organisations (N=15), 21.3% are members of three organisations (N=10), 10.6% are members of four organisations (N=5), and 4.3% are members of five organisations (N=2). On average, students are members of 2.2 organisations. After gathering their information, we obtained the result that the group they mostly joined as members was the home country group; almost all Indonesian students were members of this group (N = 44). This result also showed why Indonesian students did not get information from university events. The home group association was not included in university events. Least of all were members of the club in the university (N=7). The highest level of group membership among respondents is found in home country groups, with 93.6% (N = 44) participating in student associations representing their country of origin. This indicates a strong connection to ethnic or national communities.

Additionally, group work activities related to research or professional collaboration are also popular, involving 53.2% (N = 25) of the respondents. Membership in religious groups is the third most common, with 31.9% (N = 15) affiliating themselves with religious organisations, such as churches, Islamic groups, Buddhist, or Hindu communities. Sports and hobby-related groups attract 29.8% (N = 14), indicating moderate engagement in extracurricular leisure activities. In contrast, university clubs have the lowest participation rate, with only 14.9% (N = 7) involved, suggesting limited interest or access to formal campus clubs. Furthermore, based on our research question, we found that Indonesian students' motivation to join a group is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Motivational Factors for Regular Interaction of Indonesian Students in University

Regular interaction of Indonesian Students			
		Responses (N)	Per cent of Cases
Motivation join group	Compulsory	2	4.3%
	Building network	25	53.2%
	Feeling comfortable	16	34.0%
	Gaining experience	23	48.9%
	Having more free time	12	25.5%
	Learning from the group	27	57.4%
	Meeting new people	17	36.2%
	Needing friends	30	63.8%
	Regular interaction	22	46.8%
	Looking prestige	0	0%
	Sharing the same interest	28	59.6%
	Similar goals	12	25.5%
	Similar hobby	12	25.5%
	Similar personality	5	10.6%
Similar interest	28	59.6%	

In the multiple answer in the question motivation of Indonesian students to join a group, the highest presentation that we obtain because of Indonesian students needed friend while staying in Hungary, this response with 63.8 percent (N=30), another reasons because of similar interest and they wanted to share it with the members of the group with 59.6 percent (N=28) respectively. Obligation (4.3 per cent, N = 2) and a similar personality (10.6 per cent, N = 5) were the least essential motivations for the Indonesian students.

The motivational factors of organisational membership were further examined by cluster analysis. Three motivational clusters were formed based on what motivated young people to join the organisations. The study employed k-means clustering, resulting in the following three clusters: relationship builders, community seekers, and unmotivated individual students (see Table 3) for cluster weights.

Table 3. The group memberships cluster groups (cluster centres, the items varied from 0 to 1, N=47)

	Relationship-builders	Community-seekers	Unmotivated individuals
Having more free time	,22	,50	,16
Needing friends	,83	,80	,37
Learning from the group	,72	,60	,42
Compulsory	,06	,00	,05
Sharing the same interest	,78	,90	,26
Gaining experience	,72	,50	,26
Looking prestige	,00	,00	,00
Similar goals	,39	,50	,00
Similar interest	,89	,80	,21
Similar personality	,17	,20	,00
Similar hobby	,50	,00	,16
feeling comfortable	,61	,50	,00
Meeting new people	,78	,20	,05
Building network	1,00	,00	,37
Regular interaction	,67	,50	,26
Total	18	10	19

The first cluster group included those Indonesian students for whom the primary motivation was building a network, as well as shared interests and making friends. A total of 18 people were included in this group. The second cluster group included students who prioritised sharing the same interests, similar goals, and a similar personality type. A total of 10 people were included in this group. This group consists of the young people who are the least motivated based on the listed items. Therefore, it can be assumed that these students have more individualistic attitudes and that communities and activities with others are less important to them. They formed the largest group (N = 19).

We examined the relationship between organisational membership (0 = member of one organisation, 1 = member of more than one organisation) and the social background of Indonesian students. A significant relationship was found between organisational membership and the educational level variable ($p < 0.000$). The results show that bachelor's and doctoral students are members of more than one organisation at a significantly higher rate than master's students. All bachelor's students and 87.5% of postgraduate students are members of more than one organisation, while two-thirds (66.7%) of master's students are members of a group. No significant differences were found along the other social background variables, nevertheless it can be cautiously stated that members of two or more organizations are primarily women (70.8%), older people, and married people (77.8%), whose parents have less than a degree (mother=78.9%, father=71.4%), who have average economic status (I have everything I need, but I cannot afford big expenditures= 75%) and who have fewer children.

Table 4. The relationship between the number of group memberships (two categorical variables) and social background

		1 group membership	2 or more group memberships	N	Chi square
Gender	Male	34.8	65.2	23	0,170
	Female	29.2	70.8	24	
Age		29.7	32.3	46	0.219
Marital status	Single	39.3	60.7	28	0.228
	Married	22.2	77.8	18	
Current education level	Bachelor	0	100	5	0.000
	Master	66.7	33.3	18	
	Doctorate	12.5	87.5	24	
Mother education level	Not having a degree	21.1	78.9	19	0.188
	Have a degree	39.3	60.7	28	
Father education level	Not having a degree	28.6	71.4	14	0.749
	Have a degree	33.3	66.7	33	
Economic situation	I have everything I need and remain for material expenditures	35.3	64.7	17	0.083
	I have everything I need, but I cannot afford enormous expenditures	25	75	28	
	Sometimes, I cannot afford my everyday expenditures	100	0	2	
Number of children		2.25	2.00	15	0.712

We examined the relationship between motivational cluster groups and organisational membership. The data show that individuals who joined organisations due to friendships were most likely to be members of two or

more organisations (88.9%). In contrast, those motivated by obligation were significantly less likely to join multiple organisations (42.1%).

Table 5. Relationship between motivational cluster groups and organisational membership

		1 group membership	2 or more group memberships	N	Chi square
Clusters	Relationship-builders	11.1	88.9	18	0,006
	Community-seekers	20	80	10	
	Unmotivated individual	57.9	42.1	19	

Discussion

This study seeks to address existing gaps in the literature by examining the informal social integration of Indonesian students in small-scale higher education settings abroad. Specifically, it explores how these students form social circles and participate in organisational memberships, thereby contributing to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the international student experience. As a pilot investigation, this pilot research refined the research questions. It provided preliminary findings on the composition of social circles, patterns of group membership, and the sociopsychological motivations underlying student participation.

The first hypothesis posited that Indonesian students with a favourable social background are more likely to join more organisations. This hypothesis was partially accepted based on the empirical findings. The analysis explored the relationship between various social background variables—namely, gender, age, marital status, current education level, parental educational attainment, economic situation, and the number of children—and students' membership in multiple organisations. Among these variables, current education level emerged as the only significant factor influencing organisational membership. Specifically, 100% of bachelor's students and 87.5% of doctoral students were members of more than one organisation, whereas only 33.3% of master's students engaged in multi-organisational memberships. The chi-square test yielded a p-value of < 0.000 , signifying a highly significant relationship between education level and group membership. In contrast, other social background variables, while displaying specific supportive trends, did not demonstrate statistically significant associations (p-values > 0.05). These findings suggest that educational attainment is a critical determinant of students' involvement in multiple organisations. However, the absence of significant relationships with other social background variables warrants a cautious interpretation of the findings. Thus, it can be inferred that while a favourable social background, specifically in terms of higher education level, increases the likelihood of joining multiple organisations, broader generalisations to other background factors remain unsupported. Notably, the Indonesian Home Country Association was identified as the primary organisation to which most students belonged. This preference likely stems from the shared cultural and national identity that such groups foster. As Kadushin (1966) highlighted, social groups often develop shared ideologies and collective identities beyond their initial formation purposes. McKenna et al. (2002) further elaborated that individuals require time to assess shared attributes with fellow group members, with shared interests often becoming the foundation for deeper interpersonal bonds. Cherian et al. (2021) echoed this sentiment, emphasising the continuous evaluation of value alignment and behavioural conformity within groups.

In the context of Indonesian students in Hungary, home-country associations provide a vital communication channel through the shared language, facilitating a sense of belonging and cultural continuity. Mittelmeier et al. (2018) underscored the role of a lingua franca in promoting inclusivity and active participation in diverse group settings, which aligns with the observed preferences among Indonesian students. Additionally, Heine et al. (2002) argued that cross-cultural comparisons gain relevance when reference groups share common evaluative standards, further elucidating the appeal of culturally homogenous groups. Although the hypothesis linking favourable social background to multi-organisational membership was not entirely substantiated, the significant relationship with educational attainment partially supports prior findings by Fényes, Markos, and Pusztai (2018), who identified perceived financial stability and parental education as factors influencing civic engagement. O'Neil et al. (2022) similarly noted that students possessing higher levels of social capital, such as prior volunteer experience and cross-cultural networks, are more proactive in organisational participation. However, as Elmoose-Østerlund et al. (2019) argue, social background factors influence group acceptance and understanding, but do not directly impact students' motivations to join organisations. Their study highlighted that higher education fosters social integration only when students gain procedural knowledge of organisational

operations and experience peer acceptance. Martono et al. (2022) further contended that linguistic affinity often supersedes socioeconomic variables in motivating organisational membership among Indonesian students abroad, reinforcing the notion that cultural identity plays a more influential role than social background characteristics. Nonetheless, it cannot be generalised that all Indonesian students are eager to join such associations, as contextual factors, such as university environments and the inclusivity of host communities, significantly affect participation. Haines (2019) emphasised that a supportive socio-religious environment is essential for fostering organisational engagement among international students.

The second hypothesis proposed that among the identified motivational clusters, there would be one characterised by new types of motivations, particularly those emphasising relationship-building, among Indonesian students. The findings from the cluster analysis corroborated this hypothesis. The study yielded three distinct motivational clusters: Relationship-builders (N = 18), who are motivated by building networks, making friends, and sharing interests. Community-seekers (N = 10): Focused on shared interests, similar goals, and personality congruence. Unmotivated individuals (N = 19): Displayed minimal motivation across the examined factors. The Relationship-builders cluster (Cluster 1) directly aligns with the hypothesised new type of motivation, emphasising social interaction and relationship building as primary drivers of organisational membership. Statistical analysis revealed that 88.9% of Relationship-builders were members of two or more organisations, with a chi-square test yielding a p-value of 0.006, indicating a significant association between relationship-building motivations and multi-organisation membership. Further reinforcing the relevance of this cluster, key motivational items, such as "Needing friends" (63.8%), "Sharing interests" (59.6%), and "Learning from the group" (57.4%), were among the most frequently cited reasons for joining organisations. These findings validate the emergence of relationship-oriented motivations as a central factor influencing students' engagement.

Consequently, Hypothesis 2 is accepted, as the cluster analysis successfully identified a group of students whose motivations align with the predicted relationship-building orientations. These findings align with Haines' (2019) emphasis that students join organisations to seek social support, create a "home away from home," and immerse themselves in a secure and welcoming environment that fosters personal development. Furthermore, McPherson et al. (1992) posited that organisations often attract members through interpersonal networks, leading to homogenous group compositions where shared attributes and interests prevail. Stronger interpersonal ties have been shown to enhance member retention, as individuals with closer relationships are more inclined to remain actively involved. Additionally, the structural features of social networks, such as density and symmetry, facilitate the exchange of preferences, perspectives, and behaviours, thereby reinforcing group cohesion and collective identity.

Conclusions

This study aimed to address existing gaps in the literature by examining the informal social integration of Indonesian students in small-scale higher education contexts abroad. Specifically, it examined how these students form social circles and participate in organisational memberships, thereby contributing to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the international student experience. Additionally, this research served as a pilot investigation to assess the effectiveness of the research instrument in capturing the hypothesised relationships between social background variables and motivational factors.

Despite these insights, the study has limitations. The small sample size, dictated by the limited population of Indonesian students within a single university, restricts the generalizability of the findings. Only 22% of the total Indonesian student population in Hungary participated in the survey, which limits the robustness of the conclusions. Future research must prioritise expanding the sample size and diversifying the participant pool to ensure more representative findings.

The insights gained from this study hold valuable implications for universities aiming to enhance the social engagement of international students, particularly those from Asian countries. Organisational memberships have been shown to serve as critical mechanisms for fostering a sense of belonging, thereby contributing to student satisfaction and enhancing the institution's reputation. Universities should evaluate their existing programs and develop targeted initiatives to support the integration of international students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Efforts should focus on broadening students' access to entry points for group participation, leveraging peer recommendations, digital platforms, and university-hosted events to enhance their engagement. Facilitating membership in identity-affirming and interest-based groups, such as religious,

cultural, and hobby-focused organisations, should be prioritised to improve students' social experiences and academic integration.

For future research, it is strongly recommended that the sample size and diversity be expanded by including participants from multiple institutions and diverse national backgrounds, thereby enhancing the external validity of the findings. Adopt mixed-methods approaches, incorporating qualitative techniques such as interviews and open-ended surveys to capture students' lived experiences and motivations beyond quantitative data. Investigate students' engagement in group projects, part-time employment, and volunteer activities to understand their contributions to social integration and campus involvement. Conduct comparative studies analysing differences in group membership patterns between Asian and Hungarian students, which would provide deeper insights into cross-cultural dynamics within university settings.

In summary, while structural factors such as socio-cultural background influence organisational involvement, relationship-building motivations and cultural-linguistic identity emerge as more profound drivers of student participation. Universities must recognise these dynamics to foster inclusive environments that support the social and academic success of their international student populations.

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