

Prep course helps adjustment for Germany study

Christina Schott, Contributor, Jakarta

Two years ago, Bambang's proud parents gave a huge farewell party for their son. A high school graduate with good grades, he was leaving for Germany to study electro-technology. Everybody in the neighborhood knew that the family had long saved to send their child abroad to get his degree.

One and a half years later, Bambang was back home and nobody talked about Germany any more. After two semesters learning German as well as physics and mathematics at a Studienkolleg -- a special preparation course for foreign students applying for higher education in Germany -- the 21 year old did not pass the exams required to get regular admission for university over there, and returned home without any degree.

A new study from the Higher Education Information System in Hanover, Germany, shows Bambang is not alone in this humiliating experience: Only 25 percent of all foreign students at German universities receive their degree over 16 semesters. And an unofficial survey reveals that around two thirds of the candidates from Indonesia wanting to study in Germany leave the country before they even enter a regular university.

"It is not because they are not clever enough, they just are not well enough prepared -- mainly concerning the language, but also concerning the culture," said prof. Soedijarto, former cultural attache at the Indonesian Embassy in Bonn and vice chairman of the Indonesian-German Foundation in Jakarta, formed in 1997.

Under a new law, foreign students are given only 18 months to pass the entrance tests for regular studies in Germany, before they must be sent back to their home countries. Most of them usually need a minimum of a year to reach the required level -- and since there are more and more on waiting lists for the Studienkollegs, time goes by too fast for many unfortunate candidates.

To remedy the situation, the Indonesian-German Foundation, in cooperation with the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) and the German Center for International Migration and Development (CIM), started a new project with the inauguration of the first Studienkolleg in Indonesia, one of very few outside Germany.

Here, students can prepare themselves for German higher education admission in their home country, without jumping headfirst into culture shock, homesickness, the pressure of expectations or loss of face.

"Our courses are not only equal to their German equivalents -- they offer even a more intensive, optimal preparation for studies in Germany that saves time and money at the same time," said Ekkehard Zeeb, director of the Studienkolleg.

The condition speaks for itself. The three teachers in Jakarta have all studied or even got a doctorate from German universities, and the board of examiners flies in from the University of Hanover. The learning material is the same requested at the Studienkollegs in Germany. Since one course has a maximum of 15 students, the teaching is more

intensive and personal than the multinational course of up to 40 students at a German university.

Another advantage: There are no waiting lists in Jakarta and instead of the usual full academic year, students in Jakarta can pass the exams after only nine months, paying Rp 36 million for the whole course.

Although the course in Germany is free, they would spend around Rp 72 million in living costs for the year, excluding airfare.

"Besides saving money, it is easier for me to learn all the material while being in surroundings I am used to," said 19-year-old Kidung Ajisurya, a student at Studienkolleg Jakarta.

His friend Radieth Haviak, 17, added, "In case I cannot pass the exams for admission, I would rather be here than already over there."

Four out of five students passed from the first class and have left already for Germany. Others are repeating the tests. The two current courses of five and seven scholars will be merged. Both are focusing on technical and medical studies which means that besides language, there are courses in physics and mathematics, biology and chemistry.

An economics course will start soon. A preparation course for arts and literature is yet to be provided because the break-even-level has not been reached.

Ekkehard Zeeb acknowledges the main criticism from German colleagues: a Studienkolleg abroad cannot provide a German environment in which German is spoken every day, or students adjust to the climate and the mentality of the people. This is compensated by visits to the German International School (DIS), which is also one of the partners for the Studienkolleg. Here they can meet German youth, taste German food and learn about particular manners.

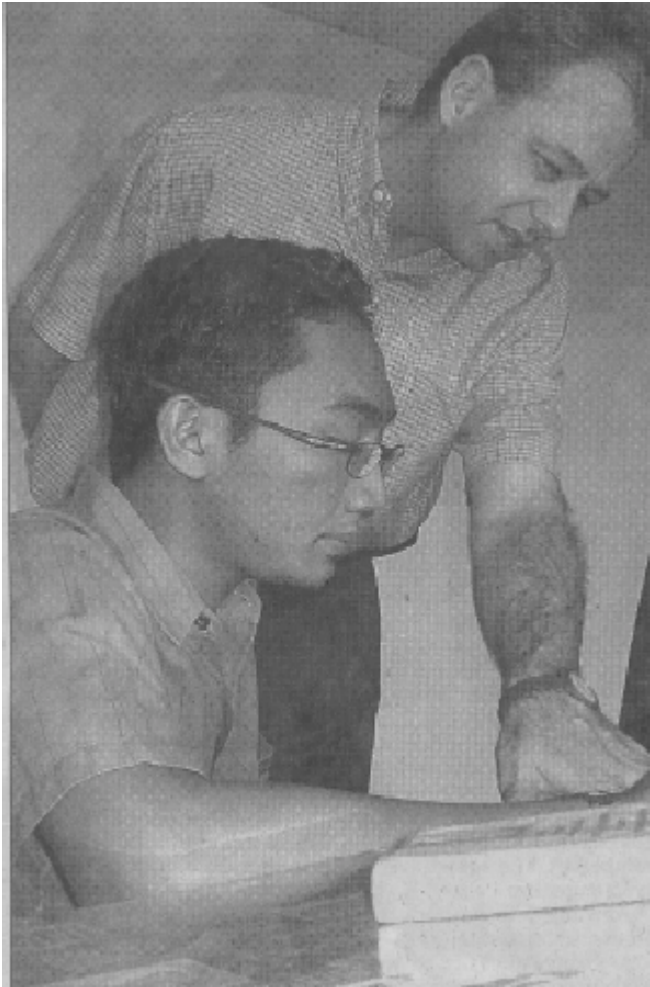
"If the Germans say no they mean no, and if there is a no-smoking sign, it really means that you must not smoke," 23-year-old Eibe San Dheina said.

"They are quite harsh in the beginning," said Radieth, "but if you have already talked several times with them, they become more friendly. It will help me when I go there that I already know about this."

Asked why they chose to study in Germany, the students at the Studienkolleg mentioned the advantage of free education, even though students seeking to study abroad are almost universally from well-to-do families. But if they had to pay a fee, they still would choose the same destination -- the legend of German technology remains strong.

A non-education reason is another reason for selecting the European nation.

"As a Muslim, I would not want to study in America anymore," Dheina from North Sumatra said. "I feel safer going to Germany -- I heard that a lot of Turks live there as well," she added, perhaps unaware that Germany has its own checkered past with racist violence against immigrants.



An instructor helps a student at the preparation course for study in Germany, held in Jakarta. For Indonesians taking the Studienkolleg here instead of in Germany, there is none of the culture shock, homesickness or potential loss of face from failure to deal with far from home.

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