

Exploring the cultural awareness of students majoring in English: a case study

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Abstract

Cultural competence has become an important element in creating a positive academic atmosphere. This study is a case study on the case of Cross-Cultural Understanding course. The participants or research subjects of this study consisted of 48 (forty eight) diploma, 21 (twenty one) bachelor, 20 (twenty) master, and 8 (eight) doctorate program. This study found out that doctorate students are consistently perceived the cultural awareness. This study does not mean that the older the student the wiser their acceptance to different culture due to some of the diploma program show the highly perceived on cultural awareness. This study revealed that cultural awareness is reasonably allied to the level of education. The majority of diploma group are in a medium cultural awareness. Bachelor and master showed significantly that they are in the medium level of cultural awareness. This study recommends for further study to conduct a quantitative study to investigate the cultural awareness of the students before and after the course of Cross-Cultural Understanding and to examine the increase the students' cultural awareness.

Keywords:

Cultural awareness; linguistics competence; communication competence; cross-cultural competence

1 INTRODUCTION

Cultural competence is the ability to work effectively with people from various cultural, ethnic, economic and religious backgrounds (Byram, 2012). Intercultural competence occurs when members of the school community respect, and value diversity in theory and practice; and teaching and learning are made relevant and accessible to students from various cultures, races, and ethnicities. There are many benefits associated with competent cultural practices including promoting mental health and positive behavior, supporting academic and behavioral success, ensuring access to various services and school activities for all students, and involving students and their families in the school community.

Teaching culture in L2 is of course just as important as teaching language and literature. Culture is one of the most critical concepts in social sciences such as Psychology, Political Science, and Economics, which has now entered into the lane of applied linguistics and second language acquisition. Social values, beliefs, cultural elements, and attitudes must be incorporated into the communicative approach to improving the effectiveness of L2 learning. The inclusion of 'cultural components' can motivate learning L2 because the main

purpose of language teaching is to improve students' linguistic abilities and cultural competencies which can be referred to as inter-cultural competencies. In today's classrooms, teachers are expected to include a component of culture in teaching because of the paradigm shift in language teaching with a different view of culture. This view arises from social science, which defines 'culture' as a broad term that covers many aspects of society such as art, food, environment, customs and traditions, religious, ethical, moral and behavioral practices. Consequently, culture encompasses everything that a person acquires or learns in his individual and social life. Culture is the ideal cognitive system - a system of knowledge, beliefs, and values - which is in the mind of every member of society (Goodenough, 1981).

The teaching and learning of a second foreign or language cannot be separated from a culture which must include linguistic competence, communication competence and cultural competence (Baker, 2012; Cakir, 2006). Furthermore, linguistic competence is the accuracy and smooth use of phonology, grammar, lexicon, and semantic along with four intralingual skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing (Hammerly, 1987). Communication competence is the ability of a speaker to deliver a message that is appropriate and effective, which is relevant to the situation and by various ways of communicating. Whereas cultural competency is knowledge about the culture that is owned by an educated native speaker plus the ability to behave as he should behave. In communicating linguistic competence is not enough to participate in a discourse - one must also have competence communicate and curriculum competencies. Without cultural communication, a second language learner will not know what is said, to whom, when, and where to say something. Without the cultural competence of linguistic and non-linguist behavior, it would not be appropriate or appropriate; he would not understand the behavior of others so that it would make someone show his ignorance of broad cultural knowledge including knowledge/competency in cultural principles

Cross-cultural competency is the competency possessed by a person (whether in private, in an organized group or ethnicity and race) to increase the capacity, skills, knowledge related to the main needs of other people who are different. In other words, intercultural competence is the competence possessed by a person (whether in person, in groups, organizations, or ethnicity and race) to increase the capacity, skills, knowledge related to the main needs of other people who are of different cultures. Intercultural competence is a congruent behavior, attitude, structure, as well as policies that come together or produce cooperation in intercultural situations.

Every intercultural competency of an individual depends on social institutions, organizations, work groups, and individual places (physically and socially). All of these factors form a system that affects useful individual intercultural competencies. So, in macro terms, it can be said that intercultural competence is the responsibility of the total system of culture. Next, we will discuss how rules, infrastructure, policies, agency agents deepen individual skills, beliefs, values, and behavior, to enhance intercultural competencies. In

short, intercultural competence is related to a situation and individual readiness so that its capacity can function effectively in situations of cultural differences.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Importance of Intercultural Learning

Tolerance in the form of inter-cultural dialogue and respect for diversity are more important where people are becoming closely interconnected. English language learning experts emphasize that it has been carefully tested that cultural competence plays a significant role in determining the success of language learning (Ellis & Ellis, 1994; Su, 2008). It is well tested that cultural competence plays a critical role in successful language learning (Ellis & Ellis, 1994). Intercultural communication problems are one source of problems in communication. The use of certain terms in one culture may not be acceptable to other cultures. Likewise the use of nonverbal language that often raises problems in communication.

Intercultural conflict cannot be considered trivial. Saying and acting harshly can be commonplace in a culture, but it is extraordinary and insulting in other cultures. Daily communication failures or misunderstandings due to language differences, differences in cultural backgrounds, exclusive behavioral attitudes due to expatriates, and other attitudes that are not in accordance with the local cultural setting can lead to prejudice and are very possible. In the global domain itself, the world leads to multicultural society, in which every person can come from several different races and live in several cultural contexts (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2015). For example, President Barack Obama; he was born in Hawaii whose native population was not white, his father was from Kenya, his mother was white, had lived in Indonesia with an Indonesian stepfather, then settled in Hawaii with his white grandmother.

For the business context, many changes have occurred primarily since the rapid development of information technology. Business transactions can be done in minutes; exchange of information from various parts of the world happens every second. Professionals and entrepreneurs can at any time make contact and make business trips to various countries. Unfortunately, the ability and intercultural communication skills for smooth relationships and business are not all realized by business people. This is coupled with the very lack of intercultural communication training to address a variety of intercultural barriers. Many business transaction failures occur only because of failure in intercultural communication.

Learning for students and training for employees in order to improve intercultural communication competencies and intercultural awareness is a necessity for students, especially the English Language majors who are expected to take part in the global and local work world. The lack of intercultural awareness and lack of competence in intercultural communication often creates misunderstandings. This misunderstanding can cause offense and distrust from both parties. Even misunderstandings can occur only because of differences in communication styles (Yoshida, 2002). Through this paper, the

research aims to demonstrate the importance of intercultural awareness and the ability to communicate effectively across cultures in the global era.

2.2 Previous Studies on Cross-culture

The study conducted by Gay et al. (2016) on evaluating interventions to increase cultural competence in the field of health professions revealed that cultural competency training shows promise as a strategy to improve the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of health professionals. However, evidence that this increases patient adherence to therapy, health outcomes, and equality of services across racial and ethnic groups is lacking. Future research must focus on these results and must determine which teaching methods and content are most effective.

Mehegan and Preziosi (2000) conducted research on Cultural awareness in Australia showing that some Business graduates cannot provide adequate descriptions of the economies of major Asian countries. Some students who have studied other Asian languages have succeeded, but others have not. That a student can spend several years studying Asian languages and has no knowledge of history, politics, religion, geography, and culture has significant implications for the way the second language is taught in the education system. This is also the case for the faculty of Asian Science and Business Studies which produces graduates who, if this questionnaire is a test, will fail. This survey also revealed that the majority of students felt that learning from cultural issues increased their mastery of Indonesian

Azadipour (2013) in Iran conducted a study on Cultural Motivation, and Its Impact on Foreign Language Learning in Globalizing World concluded that there was a correlation between age and general knowledge about Asia but not with an educational background. This shows that there is a relationship between cognitive competency and a positive attitude about the Asian correlation between general and general knowledge of Asia but not between educational background and knowledge of Asia. It also has a link between cognitive competence and positive attitudes towards Asia.

The main objective of this study was to reveal the cultural awareness profile of English language majors. This study is significant to have feedback from the students in all level starting from diploma to doctorate students. After they have enough understanding about the Cross-Cultural Understanding course, they were observed to find out their cultural awareness.

3 METHOD

3.1 The Design of the Study

This study is a case study (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2017), focusing on Cross-Cultural Understanding course. The researchers do not control all variables which theoretically influence in the learning process. Researchers only conducted trials on the variables that are the focus of the research. To answer the problem questions hypothesized in this study, descriptive analysis was conducted. Therefore, to explore the cultural awareness of the students at the end of the course, the researchers distributed the observation checklist as feedback for the course.

3.2 The Participant of the Study

The participants or research subjects of this study consisted of 48 (forty eight) diploma, 21 (twenty one) bachelor, 20 (twenty) master, and 8 (eight) doctorate program. They were all the classes taking the Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) course in 2018 academic year. This is expected to have a comprehensive result by conducting the study in all level of the program in Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia. All the students took the CCU course in 2018 participated in the study.

4 RESULTS

The results of this study show unique results about cultural awareness level. Participants in this study were divided into 4 education level groups. The first is a diploma group, the second group is a graduate, the third group is a master, and the fourth group is a doctor. The results of this study indicate that the level of education from diploma to master majority is at a moderate level in terms of cultural awareness. Only the majority of Doctoral groups are at a high level in cultural awareness. For more details, this section describes the four groups. Table 1 below illustrates the cultural awareness of the Diploma group.

Table 1. Group 1 (Diploma)

Cultural Awareness		Frequency	Percentage
Interval	Category		
$57 < X \leq 76$	High	7	14.58%
$38 < X \leq 57$	Medium	35	72.91%
$19 < X \leq 38$	Low	6	12.5%
Total		48	
Average		46.71	
Standard Deviation		7.68	

Although the majority of diploma program students choose to be at a moderate level in cultural awareness, almost 15 percent of this group has high cultural awareness. Very much, the number that is almost the same, which is more than 12 percent of Diploma students also shows a low level of cultural awareness. The standard deviation of this group which reached 7.68 as the highest indicates that this group's cultural awareness is spread in an extreme manner between high, medium and low levels. The next group is a bachelor as illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Group 2 (Bachelor)

Cultural Awareness		Frequency	Percentage
Interval	Category		
$57 < X \leq 76$	High	0	0%
$38 < X \leq 57$	Medium	20	95%
$19 < X \leq 38$	Low	1	5%
Total		21	
Average		44.90	
Standard Deviation		3.99	

Table 2 above shows that only 5 percent are at a low level of cultural awareness. Unfortunately, none of them are at a high level of cultural awareness. However, as many as 95 percent of bachelor students choose a moderate level in terms of cultural awareness. The standard deviation in this group (3.99) is significantly different from the diploma program (7.68) indicating there is no extreme choice between high, medium and low. Next, the third group is the master as in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Group 3 (Master)

Cultural Awareness		Frequency	Percentage
Interval	Category		
$57 < X \leq 76$	High	0	0%
$38 < X \leq 57$	Medium	20	100%
$19 < X \leq 38$	Low	0	0%
Total		20	
Average		47.00	
Standard Deviation		3.40	

Table 3 above shows that 100 percent of master program students choose a moderate level in cultural awareness. The smallest standard deviation in this study shows that this group is very compact in choosing certain choices, namely being in cultural awareness. The last group in this study were students of doctoral programs as illustrated in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Group 4 (Doctorate)

Cultural Awareness		Frequency	Percentage
Interval	Category		
$57 < X \leq 76$	High	5	62.5%
$38 < X \leq 57$	Medium	3	37.5%
$19 < X \leq 38$	Low	0	0%
Total		8	
Average		58.75	
Standard Deviation		7.51	

Table 4 above shows that the majority of doctoral program groups have high cultural awareness. A percentage of 62 percent indicates this indication. As many as 35 percents of students from doctoral programs in this group is still at a moderate level in cultural awareness. This group no longer has a low level of cultural awareness. Thus, from the four groups that have taken Cross-Cultural Understanding courses in 2018, most doctoral programs generally have a good level of cultural awareness.

5 DISCUSSION

Every intercultural competency of an individual depends on social institutions, organizations, work groups, and individual places (physically and socially). All of these factors form a system that affects effective individual intercultural

competencies. So, in macro terms, it can be said that intercultural competence is the responsibility of the total system of culture. Next, we will discuss how rules, infrastructure, policies, agency agents deepen individual skills, beliefs, values, and behavior, to enhance intercultural competencies. In short, intercultural competencies are related to an individual's situation and readiness so that his capacity can function effectively in situations of cultural differences.

There are several factors that encourage the researchers to conduct the study on intercultural competencies. Firstly, there are differences in intercultural values. Secondly, cultural rules tend to govern themselves. Thirdly, awareness to manage the dynamics of difference. Fourthly, knowledge of the culture that has been institutionalized. Fifthly, adapting the power of service spirit in cultural diversity to serve others.

For students majoring in English at the Universitas Negeri Makassar, cross-cultural understanding is a compulsory subject. So, it is necessary to explore the level of their cultural awareness after taking the course as feedback on the course. This study found out that doctorate students are consistently perceived the cultural awareness. This study does not mean that the older the student, the wiser their acceptance of different culture due to some of the diploma program show the highly perceived on cultural awareness. The older age is not the guarantee to have the wiser attitude (Sternberg, 2005).

6 CONCLUSION

The results of this study revealed that cultural awareness is relatively associated with the level of education. The group of diploma program students who participated in this study showed that some of them have high cultural awareness. However, the majority of diploma group are in a medium cultural awareness, and many of them are in a low level of cultural awareness. Bachelor and master showed significantly that both of the groups are in the medium level of cultural awareness. It is expected for further study to conduct a quantitative study for investigating the cultural awareness of the students before and after the course of Cross-Cultural Understanding to find out the contribution of the course to increase the students' cultural awareness.

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