**INVESTIGATING EFL TEACHERS UNDERSTANDING ON AMERICAN ENGLISH CULTURAL ASPECTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH**

**Munirah**

unirahman@gmail.com

**Kisman Salija**

**Sukardi Weda**

sukardiweda@yahoo.com

**State University of Makassar, Indonesia**

**ABSTRACT**

The aims of this research were to find out; (1) the understanding of certified EFL teachers on American English cultural aspects in teaching English, (2) the understanding of certified EFL teachers on American English cultural aspects in teaching English, and (3) the difference understanding between certified English teachers and non-certified English teacher on American English cultural aspect especially in communication style.

This research employed mixed method research design. The population and sample of this research were 15 certified and 15 non certified English teachers of Senior high school in Selayar Regency. Instruments of the research were multiple choice, questionnaire and interview.

The result of the research showed that (1) in understanding American English cultural aspects in teaching English, certified EFL teachers were in “average” category where the mean score of multiple choice test were 60.13 and the mean score of questionnaire were 56.86, (2) in understanding American English cultural aspects in teaching English, non-certified EFL teachers were in “average” category where the mean score of multiple choice test were 58.2 and the mean score of questionnaire were 56.2 (3) Related with the questionnaire and interview season there are two main differences between certified and non-certified teachers in understanding American English cultural aspects, the first difference is certified English teachers more creative in apply American cultural aspects especially in communication style in teaching and learning process than non-certified teacher, the second is certified English teachers have more experience in teaching so it makes them more understand American cultural aspects especially in communication style than non-certified English teachers.

The implication of this research that is very important for the teachers to have knowledge and understanding American cultural aspects in teaching English because by bring the culture it will be easier for the students to understand the language.

***Key words: American English, Cultural Aspects, Communication style***

**INTRODUCTION**

Language is a part of culture and plays an important role in the development of culture. Language is the product of culture and one important instrument of cultural expression is language. At other side, language also influenced and shaped by the culture. Culture also has a very important role in language teaching, which is widely acknowledged by English teaching circle.

Teachers of a language are also teacher of culture. Culture and teaching language cannot be separated, thus culture must be recognized as an important area in language learning and teaching. If languages are taught without their cultures, students are only the strangers who are not familiar with the target languages. Lacking of cultural background knowledge of the teacher will become a crucial problem because the students get their knowledge from the teacher and they believe that the teacher as transmitter knowledge for them.

When two people of different language communicate, intercultural communication occurs because they may not have same perception of the world around them. They will bring with them their background values, expectations, and perception which are manifested in the way they communicate. Based on this explanation, the communication not only occurs at language level but also the socio-cultural aspect.

English is a foreign language so English have own culture and it will be different with Indonesian culture. The teacher should have knowledge about the English culture because the duty of English teacher is deliver the knowledge to the students. In this case the teacher understanding and perception of English culture is crucial. Lacks of knowledge about cultural background in English language learning, makes students not only misunderstand in communication but also the students fell difficult in decoding the message. If the teacher understands about the culture they will be able to teach the material to the students accurately and properly

English teacher should have understanding of cultural knowledge of English as a solution of this problem. It is the challenge of English teachers in Indonesia because they teach a foreign language which means that the students are not familiar with the way to use English appropriately. In teaching and learning process the teacher mostly focuses on teaching the linguistic aspects only, such as the accuracy of grammar and structure. When the students communicate in English, sometimes they use inappropriate expressions. For example when the students meet with native speaker they directly ask “what is your name?” because in Indonesia when we first met with others we can directly ask their names, on the other hands the native culture always say “What a lovely day?” or “what time is it?” to start a conversation when they meet at the first time. The main problem is the students can speak English but they cannot apply their skill in real life. Based on this problem, the researcher would bring up this cased in a research entitled Investigating the Understanding of the English Teachers at Senior High School Selayar Regency on American English Cultural Aspects in Teaching English.

The researcher took 30 English teachers at senior high school Selayar regency who is divided into two groups; 15 certified teachers and 15 non certified teachers. The researcher wanted to investigate the understanding of English teachers at Selayar regency on American English cultural aspect especially in communication style.

In an effort to investigated the teachers understanding on American cultural aspects that focused on communication style in teaching English at senior high school Selayar Regency, the researcher formulated research questions as follows:

1. To what extent do the certified EFL teachers understand the American English cultural aspects?
2. To what extent do the non-certified EFL teachers understand the American English cultural aspects?
3. What are the differences between certified English teachers and non-certified English teachers in understanding American English cultural aspects especially in communication style?

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Previous Related Studies**

Previous research about Wang (2011)*,* he made a relation between culture and English teaching in China. He wanted to found the cultural differences between America and China. He found that the teachers should focus not only in cultural differences but also try to understand and study the differences to avoid misunderstanding in study and communication because the aim of English teaching is to foster students’ comprehensive English capability by learning language and its culture.

Fungchomchoei and Kardkarnklai (2016) he found that Thai teachers often interact with other cultures using various communication technologies, such as Facebook, Instagram, and television. The teachers can encourage their students to use social networks to explore, understand, and consider the interrelationship between language, culture, and communication so that this activity can increase students’ familiarity with other cultures.

Choudhury (2014), he found that culture and language are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. In EFL/ESL classroom the students should be taught English with the culture associated with it so that the students can acquire the target language with cultural background and correspond in real life situations. The role of culture that it plays in teaching and learning of English as a foreign or second language cannot be avoided while designing course for EFL/ESL students and in the class room situations.

Mukhlis (2014), he made a research to see the teacher understanding and different understanding among teacher based on the teaching experience among teachers. He found that there is no significant difference among three groups of teaching experiences in understanding the cultural aspects in teaching English. There is no relationship between the teachers understanding and the teaching experience of the teacher in understanding the cultural aspects in teaching English.

**Some Pertinent Ideas**

**The Understanding of American Culture**

According to Brown in Tran (2010:5) Culture refers to ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools that characterize a certain group of people in a given period of time. According to Strevens (1978:27), American English begins in Elizabethan times around year 1600 when English –speaking settlers began to live on the Atlantic coast of the American continent. The children n learn to speak and write English in the last quarter of the sixteenth century.

A particular target language teaching in American English teaching based on culture paradigm that cultures influence the way we view the world, make decisions and interact with others. Communicating across cultures persons focus on the socio-cultural features of speaking and behaving and share their country values with each other. Students are to be prepared to cross-cultural dialogue forming active speech skills of a foreign language and acquiring the cultural values of the country the language of which they study because now is the globalization era where they can make interaction with many people in the world. So, the students need to know the way to communicate cross culturally.

**American Communication Style**

According to Levine in Mukhlis (2014:18) that consist of addressing people, greetings and farewells, complementing and showing appreciation, expressing emotion and showing understand.

Addressing people means that the use of titles or special words that go along with people names, for example if you meet with someone that you do not know, never ask her/his name directly because in American culture is impolite, try to make a small talk before asking name. Greeting and farewells means that expressing “Hello” and “Good bye”. Complementing and showing appreciation is the way to show like or dislike or approve of someone praising and showing another person the way you like that someone doing for you. Expressing emotion is expressing feeling such as sadness, happiness and anger. Showing understands is the way to show the understanding of someone which is divided into three; giving feedback, interrupting and asking for repetition.

**Definition of Certified Teachers**

Teacher certification is a government's efforts to improve the quality of the teachers that have been set by the government through the Department of Education and Culture. Teachers who have been declared as professional teachers will get a teaching certificate. Teacher certifications mention in UU No. 20 of 2003 about Sisdiknas. Article 61 states that the certificate is like diplomas form or certificate of competence, but not the certificate obtained through scientific meetings such as seminars, panel discussions, and workshops but the competence certificate which is obtained from education and training institutes after pass the competency test that is organized by educational institute.

**METHOD**

**Design**

The method of this research was mixed method. In this research the researcher used explanatory sequential mixed method where the first step is find the quantitative data collection and follow up with qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2014:270).

**Population and Sample**

The populations of this research were the English teacher of twelfth senior high schools in Selayar Regency. In this research the researcher took 15 certified English teachers and 15 non certified English teachers in senior high school as sample.

**Instrument and Procedure of Collecting Data**

The data were collected through multiple choice test, questionnaire and interview. The researcher came to the school and gave multiple choice test and questionnaire to measure the teachers understanding of American cultural aspects that focus on communication style. Then did an interview to find out the difference understanding between certified and non certified teachers on American English cultural aspects focused on communication style.

**Data Analysis**

In quantitative data analysis, based on multiple choice test result the data will be analyzed, tabulated, and determined the mean score. Questionnaire test result will be analyzed descriptively in percentage and mean score. Qualitative data took from interview to find out the difference understanding between certified and non certified English teachers on American cultural aspects focused on communication style.

**FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

**Certified and non-certified EFL teachers in understanding American cultural aspects in teaching English**

The finding of this research was taken from multiple choice test and questionnaire that is given for 12 senior high schools in Selayar regency to measure the teachers understanding on American English cultural aspects focused on communication style that consist of addressing people, greetings and farewells, complementing and showing appreciation, expressing emotion and showing understand. Multiple choice test consist of 15 questions and questionnaire consist of 20 questions. The result both of the test showed that certified English teachers and non certified English teachers indicates “average” category in understanding American English cultural aspects that focused on communication style. This is proved by the mean score of multiple choice test were 59.17 indicates “average” category and the mean score of questionnaire test were 56.53 indicates “average” category.

Multiple choice test result of certified and non certified English teachers in understanding American English cultural aspects focused on communication style showed that 6.67% of the teachers got “excellent”, 40% of the teachers got “good”, 50% of the teachers got “average” and 3.33% of the teachers got “poor”. The total score of all the teachers (certified and non certified teachers) which obtained through multiple choice test were 1775. The mean score of all the teachers in understanding American cultural aspects focused on communication style in teaching English were 59.17 which indicate “average” category.

To find out the deep understanding about American English cultural aspects especially in communication style between certified and non certified teachers, the researcher also used questionnaire. Questionnaire consists of positive and negative statements. The questionnaire result found that the percentage of all the teachers who strongly agree plus agree were 75% and the percentage of all the teachers who disagree plus strongly disagree were 24.33% in positive statements. In negative statements found that there were 36.66% teachers who strongly agree plus agree and there were 63.33% teachers disagree plus strongly disagree. The mean score were 56.53 which indicate “average” category.

Based on the data above both of multiple choice test and questionnaire between certified and non certified teachers have “average” category in understanding American cultural aspects in teaching English focused on communication style. The teachers have “average” category in understanding American cultural aspects in teaching English that is focused on communication style because the teacher have lack knowledge about American cultural aspects. The teachers also never join to the workshop or training to increase their knowledge. On the other hand, MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran) did not work and makes the teacher difficult to sharing each other.

In Selayar Regency also hard to find English textbooks that use real English that will become the teachers’ guidelines in teaching English, most of the books just for students’ textbooks in learning process and this situation make the teachers have limited books to read in order to improve their capability. If the teachers wants to read they will open the Google and look for what they want to read but internet connection become the problem also because not all the places have an internet access. Some of senior teachers also do not understand how to use computer or smart phone so it makes them hard to got new knowledge.

Only several teachers in Selayar regency understand about the relation between culture and teaching. In teaching and learning process most of the teachers do not have ideas on how to teach the students to make it suitable with the culture. According to Byram in Choudhury (2014:2) states that the target language culture should be taught along with English to acculturate language learners into the cultures of English speaking countries. An English teacher should have knowledge about the target culture because they are students’ guidelines in learning English. Actually all of the teachers in Selayar regency understand that it is important for the teacher to have knowledge about target culture in teaching and learning process but in apply the target culture in class is very difficult because in their handbook just a little bit explanation about it.

Ikpeze (2008:2) wrote in his book that the biggest challenge in teacher education is getting prospective teachers to understand the meaning of culture and its role in teaching and learning. The teacher in Selayar regency understand well that culture is very important in teaching English but in fact there are many challenge faced by the English teachers to improve their ability in understanding the culture, the teacher have lacked knowledge about the culture and also the teacher do not have idea in transfer the knowledge about the culture to the students in teaching and learning process.

Wang (2014), he did the research in China to see the cultural differences between China and America to present the background knowledge of English and expose the students to it, so that they can develop their English ability. He found that the teachers should focus in understanding the culture differences to avoid misunderstanding in communication because the aim of English teaching is to foster students’ comprehensive English capability by learning language and its culture. In line with Wang, it is important for the teachers to understand the culture in order to make the successful language learning by bring the culture that is associated with the language. The teachers should understand the culture to transfer the knowledge to the students because it is not possible in the future the students can study abroad so they can make a good communication because they understand about the culture especially American cultural aspects.

**The difference in understanding between certified and non-certified EFL teacher on American English cultural aspects in teaching English**

To see the difference between certified and non certified English teachers in understanding American cultural aspects in teaching English that focused on communication style, the researcher used interview. The interview consist of 8 questions to see how the teacher taught the students in relation with American cultural aspects focused on communication style that consist of five aspects; addressing people, greetings and farewells, complementing and showing appreciation, expressing emotion and showing understand. The researcher took 5 certified English teachers and 5 non certified English teachers in conducting the interview. The interview data was taken on 2nd May up to 16th May 2017. The duration of each interview that is recorded by the researcher was approximately 10 minutes.

Based on multiple choice test and questionnaire, certified English teachers and non certified English teachers indicates “average” category in understanding American English cultural aspects focused on communication style, but based on interview results the researcher found two main differences between certified English teachers and non certified English teachers in understanding American English cultural aspects that focused on communication style. The first is certified teachers are more creative in apply American cultural aspects especially communication style in teaching the students than non certified teachers and the second is certified English teachers have more experiences in teaching process so it make them have more knowledge about culture than non certified teacher.

The first difference is certified teachers are more creative in apply American cultural aspects especially communication style in teaching the students than non certified teachers. Certified teachers in teaching process use role play or drama to provide a situation that will make the students active in class. . According to Qu (2010:59) drama is the common method in teaching the culture, the drama should be constructed around an experience that is compatible with the age and interests of the students. Students become familiar with the dialogue and act it out, they can learn through role playing how to interact with all kinds of people, as they did in their own culture.

Non certified teachers look confuse when the researcher asked the question about American communication style especially in giving complement and appreciation also in expressing emotion. Most of non certified teachers just asked the students to make dialogue and practice in front of the class, then giving some exercise to do by the students. In addressing people also most of non certified teachers directly asking the name first and as we know that American people dislike if they met for the first time and directly asking their name. Contrast with certified teachers, they know that in addressing people American people are rarely to shake hands. American people in the first met they just say “Hy” or “Hello” and this is important for the teachers to understand about it.

The second difference is certified English teachers have more experiences in teaching process so it make them have more knowledge about culture than non certified teacher. This is proved by the interview result from certified English teachers. Certified English teachers know well about how to make the difference between American and Indonesian culture in teaching. They believe that to learn English not only learn about the language but also the culture and if we just want to learn the language we can come to the course. This situation contrast with non certified teacher, some of non certified English teachers still confused if the researcher give questions in interview process, some of them asked the researcher to repeat the questions, look confuse and did not know American communication style.

Actually between certified and non certified teacher are aware about the importance of having knowledge about the culture. But in fact, they claimed that they have limited time to deal with cultural issues in the class and they prefer to use their handbook that is written by Indonesian and the handbook just provides a little explanation about the culture. According to Ritlyova (1994:93) bringing the cultural in teaching of English will make the students closer to get the better understanding the language, its background and usage, also will help the students to accept a foreign culture and also their own culture.

According to Choudhury (2014) in designing courses for EFL/ESL students, the teacher should pay attention to the role of culture and the teachers should keep in mind about the importance of culture in teaching and also the teacher should have a prior knowledge of the cultural knowledge of the chapter or lesson he is going to teach the students. Relate with Choudhury research, it is needed the attention of the English teachers in Selayar regency to give attention in designing the lesson plan to make the material associated with the culture of the language.

It is very important for English teacher to teach the students with the culture that associated with the language because it can make the students know more about the language that they study, enrich their global information that there are many culture in this world and can make the students easier to make adaptation with native speaker when go to abroad. The language and the culture cannot be separated because they complete each other, so in teaching English is also teaching the culture and being and English teacher also being a culture teacher.

**CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the findings and discussions, the researcher conclude that The English teachers at senior high school in Selayar regency have “average” category in understanding the American cultural aspects in teaching English because they have lack opportunities to learn about the target culture, there is no significant difference between certified and non certified English teachers in understanding American cultural aspects in teaching English especially in communication style, and there were two main differences between certified and non certified English teachers in understanding American cultural aspects specially in communication style, the first is certified teachers are more creative in apply American cultural aspects especially communication style in teaching the students than non Certified teachers and the second is certified English teachers have more experiences in teaching process so it make them have more knowledge about culture than non certified teacher.

Considering the conclusion above the researcher provides suggestions in following points; (1) Culture is an important point in teaching English and all the teachers should have knowledge about the culture because being an English teacher is also being a culture teacher so all of the English teachers are expected to be able to understand the English culture. (2) Intercultural activities and workshop about the target culture must be given to the English teacher to increase their knowledge about culture teaching method and the techniques that the teacher must applied in their English classes to make them aware about the culture is important as the language itself. (3) English teachers should have an opportunity to study abroad or join with international events to enrich their knowledge or the English teacher should learn directly from native speaker about American culture to develop better intercultural understanding and awareness.

**REFERENCES**

Choudhury, R. U. (2014). *The Role of Culture in Teaching and Learning of English*, *1*(4), 1–20.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design, Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Method* (4th edition). SAGE publications.

Fungchomchoei, S., & Kardkarnklai, U. (2016). *Exploring the Intercultural Competence of Thai Secondary Education Teachers and its Implications in English Language Teaching.* Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 236(December 2015), 240–247. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.12.017

Ikpeze, C. H. (2008). *Teaching Across Cultures.* *PsycCRITIQUES* (Vol. 53). https://doi.org/10.1037/a0010007

Mukhlis. (2014). *Teacher Understanding on Cultural Aspect in Teaching English*. Unpublish Thesis. Pascasarjana Universitas Negeri Makassar.

Qu, Y. (2010). Culture Understanding in Foreign Language Teaching, *3*(4), 58–61.

Ritlyová, A. (1994). *Cultural Studies in Language Teaching*, 93–97.

Strevens, Peter. 1978. *British and American English*. London: Cassel Ltd.

Tran, T. (2010). *Teaching Culture in the EFL/ESL Classroom*. Online Submission, 1–45. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED511819. Accessed on 20 Maret 2017.

Wang, J. (2011). *Culture Differences and English Teaching,* *4*(2), 223–230. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v4n2p223