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Student Reflections on Intercultural Communicative Competence: A Case Study of EFL Islamic Higher Education Students in Kendari

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Abstract.
Intercultural competence is required in all walks of life. This paper aimed to investigate how the EFL students in an Islamic higher education institution in South East Sulawesi reflect on their intercultural communicative competence. Using reflective journals, the students revealed a range of examples of how they develop their intercultural competence. The participants perceived the significance of intercultural competence in communication. Through critical reflection, they stated that intercultural competence helps them to behave and communicate appropriately in many different intercultural contexts. It is hoped that these findings can be used to shape lecturers' awareness of the importance in being more reflective in their teaching.

Keywords: Intercultural communicative competence; EFL students; Islamic higher education; reflection

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1. Introduction

The study of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has gained tremendous attention in English language teaching [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]. The notion of such researches is in line with Sercu's [4] ideas which point out that second/foreign language teaching needs to include an intercultural dimension. Sercu [4] maintains that the basic aim of teaching a second/foreign language does no longer concern only to the acquisition of communicational competence, but also the acquisition of intercultural competence. This is vital in language learning because it is considered as the ability to deal with differences that comes from day to day communication [6].

The main objective of this study is to dig more information from students' point of views about how they reflect their intercultural communicative competence. This is vital to know in order to align the current teaching practices with the needs of the students to improve inter cultural communicative competence. This will also become a good consideration for the lecturers to reflect how they will integrate the intercultural

communicative competence in their teaching. The driving force of this study is that second/foreign language teaching needs to include an intercultural dimension [4]. Sercu [4] maintains that the basic aim of teaching a second/foreign language does no longer concern only to the acquisition of communicational competence, but also the acquisition of intercultural competence. The study of intercultural competence (IC), in fact, has been regarded as one of the foundations to build communication skills in order to equip the target learners to be capable to communicate their thought other people beyond boundaries [6],[7],[8]].

2. Research Method

This study employed a case study which provides depth and detail empirical work through reflective journal written by 165 participants. This was conducted at one of Islamic Higher Education in Kendari. Reflective journal was used to get useful and critical comments and ideas from the students about their intercultural communicative competence knowledge throughout their studies. These data were analyzed used thematic analysis proposed by Xu & Zammit [9]. This fits with the rationales of the study which is investigating how the EFL students in one of Islamic Higher Educations in South East Sulawesi reflect their intercultural communicative competence. The analysis entails: familiarizing ourselves with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report.

The use of reflective journal in this study is very important because some of the participants are not willing to talk about their ideas orally. The majority of the participants were very comfortable writing their ideas in their free time, and this was considered appropriate especially when trying to get genuine data. The participants write their ideas using Bahasa Indonesia, this aims to help the participants to clear with what they want to say without being hesitant of having limited vocabulary. This reflection was conducted through google form, the from was sent to students group WhatsApp. Expert such as Dewey have noted that reflective practices have important role in raising educational standards. This is because we get direct narrative from the participants which may exhibits many information to deal with what are going to achieve. Since the data of this study will be used for the improvement of sharing of intercultural communicative competence to the students, the result of this study may shape integral attitudes of the teachers, such as to be more open-minded, responsible, and wholehearted in dealing with teaching preparation, activities, and instruction.

3. Result and Discussion

The intercultural communicative competence (ICC) written by the students in the reflective journal in this study were divided in four sections: students' expectation about lecturers' contribution to develop their ICC; types of application which could build their ICC; and students' perception of the significance of ICC. This study provides

To begin with, a language teacher will no longer just focus his teaching on linguistic aspects but he or she must integrate L1 and L2 cultures to help students use the language appropriately [10]. In response to this, the participants of this study expect their lectures to do the followings: sharing stories of what happening out there, presenting examples of different cultures and practice doing them so they could attune their selves to those cultures, explaining the concept of intercultural in the class, having a specific course on cross cultural issues, having basic knowledge of intercultural communicative competence, showing video or films, being friendly when they are teaching, encouraging students to read related literatures, relating the topic of the lesson with the current issues, being opened with their own cultural background, and building concepts of tolerant. These all lead to the notion that a language teacher or lecturer needs a language teacher needs to simulate a new role. This may mean that teacher should provide students with different information, such as showing videos, share appropriate literatures. These are essential to shape the students' knowledge of how they can learn the target language. This suggests that a teacher must have wider and good understanding of the target language cultures in order to help the students to use the language beyond the literal meaning. Implicitly, a teacher must surely familiarize him or her selves with target language and culture as well as the linguistic and cultural background of the learners [4]This illustrates that teaching material and the teaching process should direct the students to be more open minded the meaning and the use of language.

With regard to the types of social networking sites which could build students ICC, most of the participants of the study revealed that types of social networking sites that help them learn better were the use of YouTube and WhatsApp. Most of participants also expressed that using social networking sites led them to understand netiquette which build their understanding to show respect each other. This is in line with Alvarez Valencia [11]who states that social networking sites for language learning could provide access to the wide range of materials and activities. In fact, this study revealed that participants could perceive something better. In further extent, social networking sites could help students to learn from each other, such as they could assess and provide feedback

from each other, as what participants learned from the use of WhatsApp [12], this, later on, will promote independent learning and create strong intercultural communicative competence. Such aforementioned benefits have also been strengthened by Dooly & Sadler [13]; Hockly [14]; Lee & Markey [15]; O'Dowd, [16]. Despite the benefit of social networking sites in building students ICC, very few participants are still in favor of the use of traditional classroom, which is face to face. They disclosed that it distracted their concentration.

The majority of participants of the study perceived that ICC is very important to help them better see and understand what is happing around and widen their horizon. This result was in line with a study done by Ozdemir [17]which stated that ICC could help students to learn the language better. This is due to the notion that language is part of the culture itself. The participants of the study also reflected that ICC taught them how to respect each other, could help and not to be judgmental. They also wrote that ICC help them build partnership. Byram [8] illustrates that ICC plays very important role in language learning because it helps the learners to put their selves in someone's shoes. This condition creates better communication practices because students not only communicate what she or he has in the brain but they really use their holistic approach, such as understand what types of person and how they usually communicate in their day to day environment. Byram [8] further acknowledges that ICC could help students not to be judgmental easily. Byram [8] also further emphasis that ICC will help the students to build good partnership with other people. These skills are very essential to introduce and impart to the students so they can use the language for different purposes in their life.

4. Conclusion

This small scale of research has provided three main information of the current condition of intercultural communicative competence in place where this study was undertaken. Firstly, a language teacher is required to have the following qualities: linguistics knowledge, interpersonal communication, and intercultural communicative competence. Secondly. Good range of modes of teaching, such as WhatsApp and YouTube may provide target learners with input of intercultural communicative competence. Finally, teachers need to explore more of the intercultural communicative competence in their teaching since the participants feel very positive about it, such as they can respect to each other, not being judgmental, and they can relate their selves with other people.

One of the implications of this study is that intercultural communicative competence (ICC) should be integrated in all units or subjects that are over at the language department. This means that ICC should not be separated in one unit, but it needs to features the content of the units offered at the department. Since this idea is somewhat new to the teachers, then training and workshop on how to integrate it in the materials and teaching process are encouraged. The teachers also need to equip their students to self-acquire the concepts of ICC. This is due to the notion that a better understanding will take place if both students and teachers could work together.

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