Students’ Cross-Cultural Understanding: A Descriptive Study On Year-10 Senior High School Students Of Madrasah Mu’alimin Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta

Ahmad Sidiq Permono, Solikhin, Muh. Mahrup Zainuddin Sabir, Umi Rokhyati

Abstract: This study was intended to investigate students’ cultural understanding of western cultures, chiefly U.S. and U.K., after their students exchange program. The form of the research was qualitative. The instrument of collecting data was an individual task, and interview. The purpose of this task-paper was to record students’ responses in a multicultural situation. After they answered the task-paper, they were interviewed to gain knowledge of their reactions in the task-paper. The population of the research is EFL students at Madrasah Mu’alimin Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. The participants were 14 students of Madrasah Mu’alimin Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta who participated in a student exchange to Turkey for 14 days. The result showed that most of the students succeed in communicating their thoughts when the cultures share the similarity. Meanwhile, some of them still inappropriately responded to the situation as they still used the view of their culture in responding to the international setting.

Index Terms: Cross-Culture Understanding, Western Culture.

1 INTRODUCTION

Language has a cultural aspect which should be applied in a conversation. Dobrovoľskij et al. cited in Sugirin [19] claim that language is inseparable from its cultures. The problem is that if the learners only study the language without the culture that follows it, some conflicts can happen. For instance, one of the researchers experienced an embarrassing moment where he was asked if a gift the researcher gave to his supervisor was expensive or not. He simply said it was cheap and could be found anywhere. According to the Indonesian culture, showing the prestige of a gift is considered inappropriate (boasting). Therefore it is important to study the culture of the native target language to be able to use English with its natural culture. Cross-cultural understanding is significantly essential due to the Indonesian status as a diverse nation. Each land has its own value and culture; therefore, western culture should be presented along with the course. Selected Mu’alimin Senior High School students participated in an international program in Turkey. They must have interacted with English native speakers. Therefore it was important to investigate their cross-cultural understanding toward English culture to see if they carried out the conversation or not. Thus, a research entitled “Students’ Cross-Cultural Understanding: A Descriptive Study On Year-10 Senior High School Students Of Madrasah Mu’alimin Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta”.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

- E-mail: ahmadsidiq93@gmail.com
- Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
- E-mail: ekeani0784@gmail.com
- Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
- E-mail: muhmahrupzainuddinsabir@gmail.com
- Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
- E-mail: umi.rokhyati@pbi.uad.ac.id

understanding as "the ability to recognise differences (ethnicities, religions, regions, localities, and countries or nations), make a correct interpretation, and react properly to people or situations in the communication with diverse communities." Hence, it plays a very important role in communication in international settings. Singatullin cited in Sugirin [19] claims that the goal of understanding cross-culture is to help students to acquire attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to function within their micro-culture successfully, mainstream culture, and the global community." The manifestation of this knowledge is the students able to personify an orientation on valuing global environment respectfully. Recognizing a variety of traditions and habits among diverse ethnicities, religions, localities, regions, or nations is crucial to avoid confusion and misunderstanding in communication Sugirin [19].

2.2 Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication relates to face-to-face interactions among people of different cultures Mukminatun [8]. The success of intercultural communication is affected by many aspects, including both speakers’ understanding of different cultures. For example, John is an Englishman who travels to Indonesia, to be considered in a friendly way, John praises his counterpart by saying “Your t-shirt is nice”, and his counterpart replies “Oh, I think that it is just a usual t-shirt”. At this moment, a conflict may occur if John does not have any information about how the Indonesian response to a compliment. For Westerners, instead of disagreement, it is best to agree and say thank you whenever someone expresses a compliment. Unfortunately, this culture is quite different. For many Indonesian, they would prefer to lower their class to be considered humble. This is an example of how important a cross-cultural understanding is.

2.3 Integration of Language Learning and Culture

Sociolinguistic shows that students who master a language go beyond grammar and memorization Mukminatun [8]. A language is a complex tool for communication; hence, it includes cultural aspects. Therefore, EFL students must possess this knowledge since they are going to be involved in international settings. To equip students with cross-cultural
knowledge, they must often involve in international settings. A study conducted by Nurcahyako [10] reveals that Cultural Snapshot Projects has given more chance for students to learn cross-cultural understanding around their environment. Besides, students' participation in a discussion, especially when participants have different mother tongues also contribute to their intercultural understanding Olesova, Yang, & Richardson [11]. Therefore, if the students fail to demonstrate their cross-cultural knowledge, it means that they are probably lack integrated cultural learning.

2.4 Common Cross-Culture Differences: The Do's and Don'ts
In the Indonesian context, there are a tremendous amount of cultural differences between Indonesian culture and Western culture. These cultural differences are sometimes so sensitive. Thus it requires special attention. Adapted from Sugirin [19], there are some cultural differences between Indonesia and America, which are presented below:

**The Do's (what you should do)**

1. Greeting people or guest properly. Some proper common expressions of greeting are "Good morning," "Good afternoon," "How are you," etc. The use of slangs or other friendly expressions is allowed as long as both speakers understand that it will not lead to confusion or misunderstanding.
2. Saying "Please" when asking for a favour. The word "Please" is a form of politeness used in America and England. For example, when someone asks for direction, she/he may say, "May I know where I can find a bookstore, please?"
3. Saying "Excuse me" to avoid misconductions and to get attention. This expression can be used to get attention before somebody starts talking to someone that is not in contact with her/him or to get attention from strangers.
4. Saying “Thank you” or “Thanks” as often as necessary. This expression is conveyed whenever someone has done something for others. For example, "I really appreciate your help, thank you”.
5. Say “Sorry” if something goes wrong or if you cannot help other people. For example, somebody asks you about the time but you do not know, you can say “Sorry, I don’t know what time it is”.

**The DON'Ts (What you should avoid)**

1. Do not ask private/personal information such as “where do you live?” “Are you married?”, and the like. These questions are considered as violating privacy.
2. Do not say offensive words, even if it is common in a movie such as “Damn!” , “Holy Shit!” and the like.
3. Do not accept an invitation for breakfast/lunch/dinner if you do not have/bring money. In western culture, everybody is responsible for their own bills.
4. Do not discuss politic view or religion with strangers. These are considered as a personal business. Most foreign cultures disrespect such discussions.
5. Do not reject other people compliments. In western culture, you must say “Thank you” when somebody praises you.

3 METHOD OF RESEARCH
Kothari [4] stated that research design is needed because it facilitates the smooth sailing of the various research operations. Making research as efficient as possible yields maximal information with minimal expenditure of effort, time, and money. There is a tremendous kind of research designs for different purposes. The best design fits with this research is a qualitative research study. Descriptive research study are studies involving discussion of characteristics of research variable Kothari [4] with the main focus is to understand, explain, explore, discuss, discover, clarify situations of a group of people Kumar [5]. In qualitative research, there are certain types of study design which aim different results. This research applies focus group design which explores attitudes, opinion, perceptions about specific issues. The methods of collecting data were through individual-tasks and interview. The instruments of this research were a task-paper and questionnaire which have open-ended questions. The task-paper was validated by the lecturer who has expertise in that field. The purpose of this task-paper was to record students' responses in a multicultural situation. Then students' answers were described if their responses were appropriate toward the situation. After they answered the task-paper, they were interviewed to gain knowledge of their responses in the task-paper. In qualitative research, sample size and sampling strategy were not really significant in sample selection because the selection of the samples is based on researcher' judgments about who was likely to provide the best information for the researcher Kumar [5]. The population of the research is EFL students at Madrasah Mu'alimin Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. They were senior high school students in a boarding school who have learned English as a school subject in a class for four years. The participants were 14 students of Madrasah Mu'alimin Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta who participated in a student exchange to Turkey for 14 days.

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Each of the questions in the individual-task was created to investigate students' response in an international situation. Their answers were simplified in the form of the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>X1</th>
<th>X2</th>
<th>X3</th>
<th>X4</th>
<th>X5</th>
<th>X6</th>
<th>X7</th>
<th>X8</th>
<th>X9</th>
<th>X10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: ✓ = Expected X = Unexpected □ = Unidentified
The above table showed the analysis of students' responses. The “Expected” meant that the response was appropriate in western culture. The “Unexpected” meant that the response was not best to express in western culture. The “Unidentified” meant that the response was not corresponding with the
questions, for example, the question “You are on vacation to London, unfortunately, you are lost and must find a way to get back to the hostel. Your address is on Abbey Road. What would you say to a stranger you ask for help?” asked for an expression or speech in which how they asked for help, but instead of it, one of their responses was showing their action like “Asking the direction and open Google Map too, to check it”. The above table provided the summary of students’ responses. More than half of the students responded unexpectedly on questions number 3,4,7,9,10 and responded unexpectedly on questions number 1,2,5,6,8. Question number 2, unlike other numbers, was the only question which did not obtain any expected response, question number 10 obtained all the expected responses. Each of the students’ answers was recorded to see the gap between the responses. Two students provided eight expected responses, four students provided seven expected responses, four students provided six intended responses, one student provided five intended responses, and three students provided four intended responses. No student showed a similar response. The task in this research was made to investigate students’ responses in an international setting, especially in the U.K context. The task was designed based on the dissimilarity of cultures of U.K and Indonesia. The students’ responses were categorized into three groups namely: expected responses, unexpected responses, and unidentified responses. The analysis of students’ answers on each question was presented below.

**Question 1**

Few students responded expectedly on questions number one. It was obtained that 4 students provided expected responses, nine students provided unexpected responses, and one student’ response could not be identified. A sample of students’ expected response (1a), unexpected response (1b), and unidentified response (1c) were presented below, respectively:

(1a) “Hello, my name is Arjuna. What is your name?”
(1b) “I will introduce myself to them”
(1c) “make a friend”

Based on the result of the interview, the student with an expected response at (1a) indicated that they would first greet the people they were going to talk prior to introducing themselves. The student with an unexpected response at (1b) indicated that introducing the self is part of greeting. The student with an unidentified response at (1c) indicated that making a friend is the best to do in order to know the foreigner better. According to the Family Network on Disability [1], people greet others to welcome them and to be considered friendly and polite. The norm is applied globally but in different ways. For example, in western countries, common words to greet people are Hello, Hi, Good morning, How are you doing?, etc, while in the Indonesian, it was less common to say Good morning to other people, unless if it was in a very formal setting just like in the above occasion. Students’ responses at (1a & 1b) were already appropriate toward the situation, while student’ response at (1c) was not appropriate, making a friend in the first meeting was rather too early.

**Question 2**

None of the students responded expectedly on questions number two. It was obtained that 13 out of 14 students provided unexpected responses, while one student’ response could not be identified. A sample of students’ unexpected response (2a), and unidentified response (2c) were presented below, respectively:

(2a) “Can you show me the way to the Abbey Road?”
(2c) “Asking the direction and open Google Map too, to check it.”

Based on the interview, the student who responded at (2a) claimed that it was already right to say it while the student who responded at (2c) revised his response to being “I am sorry, can you show to me the way to Abbey Road because I must find a way to get back to the hostel.” He considered it to be relevant to ask. In the U.K., saying please even in the low stake situation, like if someone is a customer asking for something in the shop, is natural Hargis [3]. Hence, saying “please” must be highly suggested even more in a formal occasion. In Indonesia, saying please is no longer embedded in its society, especially in his teenagers. Without saying please, asking for something is more likely to be a command than a favour Novarda [9]. In a low stake situation like a sister-brother conversation, a sister tends to give a command to her brother instead of a simple request with please such as can you take it for me. This habit is dangerous when it is applied in a formal situation. Without saying please, requesting is more likely seen as commanding which can render a problem. Based on the above occasion, all of the students failed to demonstrate their decency in a formal setting, especially in the U.K., where please indicates politeness to a certain extent.

**Question 3**

Almost all students provided expected answers; only two students’ answers were not identified. The sample for an expected response (3a), and an unidentified response (3b) were presented below respectively:

(3a) “Sorry, can you move a little bit so I can pass?”
(3c) “Talk to the person to give away.”

Based on the interview, the student who responded at (3a) considered saying “Sorry” as a positive politeness strategy in which he said “We must try our best to ask with the most polite manner” while the student who responded at (3c) revised his response to being “Excuse me.” He claimed that the purpose of saying it was to politely ask for space which was followed by body gestures to show that he wanted to pass through. English native often says Excuse me preceding a request or an interruption Yin [23]. In Indonesia, ‘Excuse me’ is to show politeness toward the interlocutor Ratnasari [14]. This expression can be seen most of the time when somebody is going to pass by others, especially passing by the elders in Indonesia. Hence, the use of Excuse me for Westerners and Easterners, especially Indonesia, respect different level of politeness. Therefore, almost all students responded expectedly on the questions.

**Question 4**

Many students provided expected answers; only four students’ answers were unexpected. The sample for an expected response (4a), and unidentified response (4c) were presented below respectively:

(4a) “Thanks, bro, you are my man.”
(4c) “Can you take a bottle of ketchup for me?”

Based on the interview, the student who responded at (4a) considered himself to be friendly; thus he added: “you are my man” while the student who responded at (4c), revised his
response to being “Thank you” during the interview. He mistakenly understood the question. These students referred thank you for appreciating the help from others. According to Robertson [15], Thank you in western society is the idea of verbalizing someone’s gratitude, which has been programmed since infancy. He also adds that words like Thank you have become a reflex rather than an expression of actual gratitude or, in other words, it has been a cliché for western society to say Thank you. In comparison to the Indonesian’s culture, Setyani [18], in her paper which is presented in national seminar, implies that Thank you or in Bahasa Indonesia literally translates into Terima kasih have two nuances, which is, first, the nuance of cultural sense in moral ethics, and second, the nuance in spiritual ethics. Therefore, both cultures apply the same use of Thank you with different respect. It is the reason why all the students responded as expected.

**Question 5**

Six students’ responses were expected, while eight students’ responses were unexpected. The sample for students’ expected response (5a), and unexpected response (5b) were presented below, respectively:

(5a) “Sorry, Mr./Mrs./Ms. why you staring at me? Absolutely it disturbs me.”

(5b) “What are you looking at?”

Based on the interview, the student who responded at (5a) considered saying “Sorry” in reaction to the person who is staring at him while the student who responded at (5b) claimed that annoying action such as staring at random people deserved equal respect; thus it was accepted to have a strong utterance like What are you looking at?. Hofstede cited in Power & Ju [12], an Intercultural communication scholar, divided cultures on the basis of individualism or collectivism. Western countries such as America values individual effort more than a group as a whole, while Eastern countries such as Japan, Korea, and Indonesia value group efforts more than individual achievement. If the theory is applied in the above occasion, should the students say Sorry to the stranger whenever something wrong happens in western cultures? Western societies highly value an individual, thus if an individual does something even when it offends others, they still say Sorry before going to the real problem as seen in response (5a). It goes along with some Westerners who still say, please shut up! In contrast, an individual effort does not weight the same respect in eastern cultures, including Indonesia. Thus, it is common in the Indonesian context for the student who responded at (5b) to speak the problem straightforwardly, but it is slightly inappropriate when it comes to western cultures.

**Question 6**

Five students’ responses were expected, while nine of them were unexpected. The sample for students’ expected response (6a), and unexpected response (6b) were presented below, respectively:

(6a) “Hello, where are you from?”

(6b) “Where do you come from, and what are you doing here?”

Based on the interview, the student who responded at (6a) addressed the question in order to recognize the language of the foreigner who is sitting next to him while the student who responded at (6b) claimed that asking the person about what of the personal business in the country was what made the student become curious about.

In western society, Privacy is considered as extremely crucial human good, a value which becomes the core of what makes life worth living Whitman [21] In addition, Hofstede cited in Power & Ju [12], an Intercultural communication scholar, divided cultures on the basis of individualism or collectivism. Individualism values personal belonging, including personal information in which it is distinctive from the public. Hence, asking for privacy is extremely inappropriate in western culture. For most Indonesian, asking questions like Where are you going?, What are you doing?, and What are you cooking tonight? are just normal. It is because of the Indonesian values personal information or privacy less than western society Yusari [24]. Similarly, the Indonesian will be puzzled when Westerners talk about the weather. Thus, some students may have learned this cross-cultural understanding.

**Question 7**

Eight students’ responses were expected, two of them were unexpected, and four students’ answers were unidentified. The sample for students’ expected response (7a), unexpected response (7b), and unidentified response (7c) were presented below, respectively:

(7a) “Be careful next time!”

(7b) “Damn it!”

(7c) “Shock”

Based on the interview, the student who responded at (7a) argued that his exclamation was to remind the driver to drive safely next time. The student who responded at (7b) claimed that it was a common expression. The student who responded at (7c) argued that if he was in a shocking state, he would not have time to think what to say to the driver; thus he did not say a word. All indecent language is taboo because of its restriction to be used in a public place Mercury [7]. Although it is frequently used by modern society, exclusively by American Schippers [17], it is socially not desirable and thus taboo. The students who responded at (7a) appropriately expressed his feeling, while students who responded at (7b) did not successfully express his feeling in a polite way. The students’ response (7c) was also appropriate for the situation, even though it was not answering the question.

**Question 8**

Six students’ responses were expected, seven students’ responses were unexpected, and one student’ response was unidentified. The sample for students’ expected response (8a), unexpected response (8b), and unidentified response (8c) were presented below, respectively:

(8a) “No, I will not take the outfit.”

(8b) “Yes, absolutely I take it because it’s rizki (a gift).”

(8c) “If they insist me to accept that”

Based on the interview, the student who responded at (8a) did not want it because he did not want the host family to be burdened with the high price of the outfit. Based on his statement, it was assumed that he considered the host family intended to buy him an outfit. Similarly, the student who responded at (8b) also assumed that the host family intended to buy him an outfit. The response (8c) was actually a not complete statement of “I will take it if they insist”. In western culture, word “invite” means to offer an invitation to someone to do something together, and it does not mean that the meals
or things are paid by the host McMahon [6]. While in Colombia, as well as in Indonesia, the etiquette for paying the bills such as dining is burdened to the host or the one who invites Walsh [20]. Not only in dining, but the same occasion is also applied in another context, such as inviting someone to go shopping. An invitation is often misunderstood by most Indonesian as an occasion in which all the cost will be treated by the host. The researcher’s lecturer ever experienced this situation. When she was in the U.K., she was invited to go shopping by the host family, and the host family suggested her an expensive outfit. With the culture she had, she confidently took the outfit. Then, she was surprised when she was asked to pay for the bill. Based on the interview, all students who said that they would not take the outfit was because they did not want the host to spend much money on the outfit, not because they knew that they were responsible for the bills. The student who responded at (8b) clearly thought that it was a gift. Finally, this culture seems to be misunderstood by most Indonesian who have not yet studied cross-cultural understanding.

Question 9
Eleven students’ responses were expected, two students’ responses were unexpected, and one student’ response was unidentified. The sample for students’ expected response (9a), unexpected response (9b) were presented below, respectively:

(9a) “Religion.”
(9b) “Where (is) the recommendation destination in three (there)?”

Based on the interview, the student who responded at (9a) believed that religion was a sensitive issue where it could lead to chaos if it was not discussed properly. The student who responded at (9c), however, decided to talk about the recommendation destination was due to his awareness of avoiding a sensitive issue like politics. It responded to the question indirectly rather than directly. People in western countries do not welcome personal topics like finances (wage/salary), appearance, age, marital status and the like, and sensitive issue like death, politics, religion, and the like in a conversation Will [22]. In Indonesia, it is common to talk about personal information such as age, marital status, address, and the like, but it is suggested never to make a joke related to race, religion, and ethnicity in a conversation because those topics are very crucial in keeping the nation at peace and harmony Putri [13]. Thus, the student who responded at (9a) was really aware of this and made a good decision to avoid talking about religion just like the student who responded at (9b) who claimed that it safer to talk about the destination than sensitive issues.

Question 10
All of the students’ responses were expected. The sample for the student’s expected response (10a) was presented below:

(10a) “Thank you; you are cool too.”

Based on the interview, all students responded to the compliment by saying Thank You. In (10a), the student decided to also compliment the interlocutor by saying, You are cool too in order to make the person happy. In accepting the compliments, there are two common responses: agreement and disagreement Herbert R. K. cited in Feilin & Gaofeng [2]. Hence, most Americans tend to agree with the compliment and take the appreciation by saying Thank you, while more middle east society including China and Indonesia like to disagree to the compliment which is a contrast to American culture Feilin & Gaofeng [2]. This contrast response is due to the ideology of individualism which American takes; thus they appreciate personal view and opinion, while Middle East society is taking socialism which makes them try their best to narrow down themselves in communication. By responding to the situation expectedly, it could be concluded that all students had gained this cross-cultural knowledge. Cross-cultural understanding plays important roles in international communication. It determines the norm of communication applied in certain places called “A society’s culture”. Goodenough cited in Ronald [16] argues that a society’s culture is a certain knowledge or manner that one should possess in order to be accepted by the members of a community. This knowledge is obtained socially. When a person travels to a specific place, the person should learn about how to express his thought or behave appropriately according to the culture in that place. Hence, if cultural norms are embedded in the conversation or action, communication can be successful.

5 CONCLUSION
Cultures and communication must go along together to be successful. Some cultures are contrast at each other, and some cultures are alike, but delivered in different ways. Most of the students succeed in communicating their thoughts when the cultures share the similarity, while some of them still inappropriately responded to the situation as they still used the view of their culture in responding to the international setting.

6 REFERENCES


