INCREASING STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE BY UTILIZING BLENDED LEARNING MODEL

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ABSTRACT

This article is a summary of a qualitative observation to the students of English Education Program, Brawijaya University, Indonesia. It tries to describe the students' learning experiences, perception, and expectation about issues related to the contents, that is intercultural communication; and learning methodology, particularly blended learning. As foreign language students, the subjects of this observation need to achieve not only language competence but also intercultural communication competence because when they communicate with people coming from different cultural backgrounds they should understand their communication styles as a part of their culture. Meanwhile, the advancement of information technology and communication (ITC) affects the teaching and learning strategy where blended learning has been very popular applied in some universities. This research employs three parallel classes in Cross Cultural Understanding course. Qualitative observation, document analysis, and online interviews were conducted to gain students pedagogical interaction, learning experiences, and expectation about both intercultural communication competences and blended learning strategy. The study reveals that students have new perspectives about the role of culture in communication especially the use of language as a medium of communication. Students also realize that living in a multicultural society needs an intercultural awareness to avoid misunderstanding caused by prejudice and overgeneralization toward people coming from different cultural background. Abouut the blended learning strategy applied in the course, students find it is interesting. The strategy motivates their learning activities because the media used is similar to social media that have been very familiar with their daily life.

Keywords: intercultural, communication, competence, blended learning, awareness, misunderstanding

INTRODUCTION

Living in a multicultural society like in Indonesia needs a cross cultural awareness among the members of society. With thousands of Islands, Indonesia has thousands of different ethnics, languages, cultures, and traditions. Consequently, nearly every time we, as an Indonesian, meets people coming from diffrent cultural background. Making contact with different cultural background people in one hand can enrich our cross cultural awareness; however, on the other hand it can make a cultural misunderstanding each other due to cultural differences.

When we are communicating with people coming from different cultural background, we need a cultural awareness, a self-concept that requires us to realize that our conversational partners might have different communication styles, non verbal communication, family values, customs, and other cultural aspects of life. In this global era, intercultural communication happens every time. The advancement of technology expands the people ability to connect to each

other for any purposes. The ability to work with people from other cultures is becoming increasingly necessary in our global work environment. Even if you never travel abroad, it's important to be ready to mix with other cultures as each year the number of immigrants is increasing. Likewise, the number of interpersonal exchanges at the global level via video and teleconferences is becoming more frequent (Mackin, 2003).

The ability tocommunicate in a multicultural society and interact with people coming from other culture, often in other languages, is inherent to the success of living in a plural soceity like in Indonesia. Effective cross cultural communication skills are the fundamental that enhance the success transaction of communication around the world. This paper tries to describe the students' learning experiences, perception, and expectation about issues related to the contents, that is intercultural communication; and learning methodology, particularly blended learning. As foreign language students, the subjects of this observation need to achieve not only language competence but also intercultural communication competence because when they are communication with people coming from different cultural backgrounds they should understand their communication styles as a part of their culture.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

For foreign language learners, just being able to use the foreign language fluently is not enough. They also should be able to use the language in approrpiate cultural context. It means that they also have to understand the language function as a tools of communication, as well as the understanding of the pragmatic function of the language such as politeness and respect.

Tang (1999) states that language is a part of culture. When a person decides to learn French, for example, he or she is not merely absorbing the linguistics of the language, but everything to do with French and France. What he or she is taking in includes all the preconceptions about the French language, that it is beautiful, that it is romantic, that it is spoken along the Seine, and so on. I may be accused of stereotyping here, and perhaps I am, but this does not discount my underlying point, which is that most, if not all, languages come with some cultural associations attached. By speaking the language, therefore, one automatically (to a greater or lesser extent) aligns oneself with the culture of the language. To speak a language well, one has to be able to think in that language, and thought is extremely powerful. A person's mind is in a sense the center of his identity, so if a person thinks in

French in order to speak French, one might say that he has, in a way, almost taken on a French identity. Language is the soul of the country and people who speak it.

Meanwhile,Miladinovic(2013) adds that the link between foreign language learning and culture learning has been established by the linguists and anthropologists a long time ago. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages has concluded that through the study of other languages, students gain a knowledge and understanding of the cultures that use that language. Moreover, students cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs. Linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language. From simple, everyday things, like forms of address to appropriate ways of expressing disagreement, culture forms an integral part of the language learning curricula. In any case, in order for communication to be successful, language use must be associated with other culturally appropriate behavior, not only linguistic rules in the narrow sense.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language always leads to the integration of language and cross-cultural understanding. In Brawijaya University, Indonesia, in Cross Cultural Understanding subject, some teaching strategies are used during the teaching learning process combined with some teaching media (picture, audio visual, pattern texts, etc). Activities such as lecturing, discussing, presenting paper and online discussion will be applied during the course. The lecturer conducts the class by way of discussion rather than straight lecture. Students' willingness to jump in and participate in the conversation will add greatly to the overall success of the class. In particular sessions of the meetings, the lecturer asks the students to write a single page of analysis that responds meaningfully to some aspect of the assigned reading. The assignment is not meant to summarize what students have read; rather, they provide them opportunity to focus upon some elements of the reading they find particularly engaging.The objectives of this reading materials fall into two categories: (1) language objectives which include to broaden reading and conversational vocabulary, to develop reading skills, and to increase conversational fluency; and (2) cross cultural objectives which include to provide an understanding of cross-cultural communication, to increase students' knowledge of cultural conflict and adjustment, and to describe patterns of communication among different cultural groups.This compilation consists of reading texts in which each chapter has two distinct

sections: (1) readings and exercises about cross-cultural communication, and (2) conversational activities about designed to promote discussion of the cross-cultural communication. The focus on values, behavior, attitudes, and communication styles in the chapter readings is designed to serve cultural background for the conversational activities. Each chapter consists of: (1) pre-reading activities, (2) reading text, (3) comprehension questions, (4) discussions questions, (5) vocabulary exercises, (6) conversational activities, and (7) cultural notes.

BLENDED LEARNING FOR CCU SUBJECT

Blended learning can be defined as the combination of multiple approaches to pedagogy or teaching, e .g. self-paced, collaborative, tutor-supported learning or traditional classroom teaching. Blended learning often refers specifically to the provision or use of resources which combine e-learning with other educational resources. Some authors talk about "hybrid learning", "mixed learning" or "multimethod-learning". However, all of these concepts broadly refer to the integration (the "blending") of e-learning tools and techniques with traditional methods. Computer-based learning is no longer regarded as an alternative to traditional forms of learning/teaching. It is

integrated into a learning arrangement which combines those methods that have been selected for a specific learning purpose or environment. Blended learning is not really a new concept. Teachers have always been using 'combined resources'. Basically, blended learning is just a combination of teaching or facilitation methods, learning styles, resource formats, a range of technologies and a range of expertise (Trap, 2006: Online).

Strauss (2015) argus that inblended learning, where students' face-to-face education is blended with Internet resources or online courses, it has been gaining considerable attention in education reform circles. It has become entangled with the ambiguous notion of personalized learning and is being positioned as the new way to individualize learning in competency-based education systems. Michael Horn, co-founder of the Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation, and a key proponent of blended learning, claims that it is the "new model that is student-centric, highly personalized for each learner, and more productive, as it delivers dramatically better results at the same or lower cost" (Horn &Staker in Strauss, 2015, Online).

Adi (2003) adds that the reason which has always been cited for the benefit of blended learning is the teacher can select and sort curriculum contents and learning

activities, whether online or face to face, based on the level of difficulty, interests, and learning styles of students. Furthermore the teacher can let students decide when to learn at their own discretion as well as what to do if they cannot attend the face-to-face sessions. In the context of learning, blended learning can be implemented with adjustments and modifications accordingly with the conditions of the school. With blended learning, it is expected that students and teachers develop a culture of technological competence within themselves, and also a culture of critical thinking and inquiry within students by comparing or elaborating materials provided by teachers with resources that are virtually available.Blended learning can be utilized as an information sharing medium with other parties that are concerned with the development of education and scientific study of their fields. Through blended learning, teachers can sort a compressed curriculum and present it face-to-face or online, in the process increasing the quality of learning which leads to an increase in learning retention. Based on the development of technology which can be utilized for learning, at this time there is no single ideal learning method for all types of learning or training, because any form of technology has its own advantages. As well, blended learning allows learning to become more

professional to handle learning needs in a way that is most effective and efficient, and has high appeal (Adi, 2003).

The blended learning used in this CCU class is mediated by a social-media like, an educational online system called Edmodo. It is an educational website that takes the ideas of a social network and refines them and makes it appropriate for a classroom. Using Edmodo, students and teachers can reach out to one another and connect by sharing ideas, problems, and helpful tips. A teacher can assign and grade work on Edmodo; students can get help from the entire class on Edmodo. It is a safeenvironment. There is no bullying or inappropriate content, because the teacher can see everything that is posted on Edmodo. Also parents can join the class to bring a level of transparency that is difficult to achieve without technology. All in all Edmodo is a great companion to just about any class (The EdmodoUser Guide, Online).

The researcher utilizes Edmodo for mediating some subject courses. It helps the researcher particularly when he is not able to attend to the offline classes, he can post teaching materials, assignments, or learning resources using the online model. This Figure 1 below shows the researcher's Edmodo mediated classroom, and Figure 2 shows some classroom groups under the researcher supervision.
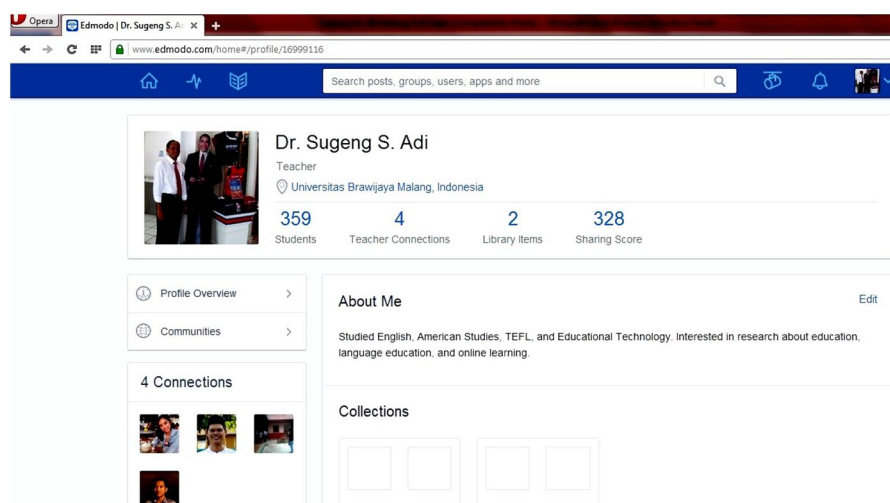
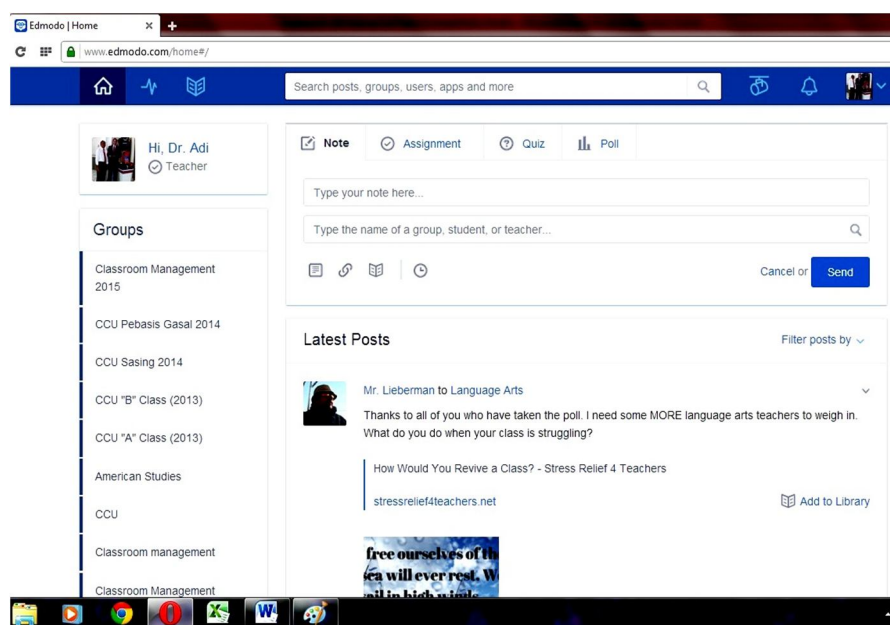**Figure 1. The researcher's Edmodo account**

Figure 2. The researcher's classroom groups

The use of Edmodo for the Cross Cultural Understanding course was also to support the offline sessions. In the previous year, the researcher also taught this course, but using the FIB e-learning medium provided by the university, as explained in the previous part. There are some differences between the online sessions using the FIB e-learning medium and Edmodo. There were still technical difficulties on the first sign-in using the FIB e-learning medium, while in Edmodo, students do not relatively find any difficulty because the appearance of Edmodo is familiar to them due to the fact that it

resembles other forms of social media, in particular Facebook. The researcher tried to make use of Edmodo (located at http://www.edmodo.com), a learning medium in a social media format using an attractive appearance styled after popular culture, to manage five courses. The researcher uses the Edmodo medium as a complement to offline sessions, conventional courses with face-to-face interaction. Edmodo was chosen as the online session medium because the medium has some features which were believed to be appropriate for students and learning management. In addition, the appearance of Edmodo which resembles other social media such as Facebook became a consideration in selecting this medium to manage the aforementioned five classes. With this appearance, hopefully students felt comfortable and learning became fun for them, and at the same time they did not feel as if they are learning but virtually interacting like in social media. Edmodo has a few learning tools which support the process of planning, management, and evaluation of learning. In learning planning, Edmodo allows the lecturer to post the semester course plan as well as to provide the learning resources in different formats, whether textual, audiovisual, or multimedia. In learning management, the lecturer can post assignments, quizzes, and discussion topics,

as well as to facilitate a discussion forum among students. In learning evaluation, the lecturer can give feedback regarding the learning progress using the grading feature provided. The lecturer can give feedback on structured assignments, midterm and final examinations, as well as quizzes using an array of interesting icons. Students can use this medium to post their learning "status" like in Facebook, turn in assignments, answer questions, be actively involved in online discussion, and comment on other students' "status" (Adi, 2013).

FINDINGS
Students' perception and learning experience

Observation and interview with the students highlight three interesting issues, they are: students engagement in the teaching and learning process, students' perception and experience about blended learning, and students intercultural awareness.

Table 1 below shows the students' pedagogical interaction in the Cross Cultural Understanding subject applying blended learning mode of instruction. Among 14 meetings, 7 topics of discussion were mediated by Edmodo online system. Among 51 students, it is only in the final test that all students are answering the lecturers' questions. In the final test, two out of 51 students are not answering the question

items. Interestingly, the students collected the answers in a printed form after reading the

questions in the online learning session.

Table 1. Pedagogical interaction in online session using Emodo (Adi, 2013)

1.	**Edmodo Reflection**		-
Subject: Cross-Cultural Understanding (51 students)			
	Assignment topic	Turned-in	Feedback
1.	Introduction to CCU	38	-
2.	Verbal patterns	45	-
3.	Mid-semester test	51	51
4.	Friendship	43	-
5.	Family Values	50	-
6.	Education Values	47	-
7.	Final test	49	-

In general, students have a positive perception about the blended learning applied in the CCU classroom subject. Some students have difficulty in the beginning of using Edmodo especially when they have to register and log in to the learning media; however, they can solve the problem by discussing their friends or doing trial and error. Even one student knows ho to operate Edmodo from his friend studying at other university. These followings are the students' first experience using Edmono.

*Student A.*First time I have a difficult with the features of Edmodo because it's a little bit different with Facebook. But, day by day I've understand because I always open Edmodo to learn each features of Edmodo.

*Student B.*Actually I do not find any difficulties because in the first semester, my friend who studied at ABM started using Edmodo for discussion and if teacher of certain subjects can not attend, the lecturer upload the material and the tasks that must be

done by students. Because of that I can use Edmodo well. First time I have a difficult with the features of Edmodo because it's a little bit different with Facebook. But, day by day I've understand because I always open Edmodo to learn each features of Edmodo.

*Student C.*At the first time when I tried to join and sign up the Edmodo, my searching engine could not open Edmodo, I did not know why. Then I moved to use another searching engine, finnally I have Edmodo. But another problem come, I do not know exactly how to use Edmodo because it has different display with the other social media that I have known. I do not know which one the right way to answer the assessment, just give a comment or I must turn in first.

Besides, the students perceive that they have more freedom when expressing opinion in the Edmodo rather in the offline session or conventional learning mode. Some students' opinion can be described as below:

Student D. It is free if we give opinion in late night or in the time outside the class. In other hand, expressing opinion orally in the traditional classroom setting is just in one time, I mean we only just have 120 minutes in the class to give an opinion. I think I'd better to use Edmodo because it's give so much time to give an opinion than in the class.

*Student E.*I think the differences is when we use Edmodo, we are not limited by time, the point here is if the lecturer can not attend class, lecturer can upload assignments and materials through Edmodo, because that the interaction between lecturer and students occur indirectly. It caused lecturer can not give feedback. When expressing opinion orally, we can discuss with other friend about the material and teacher also gives feedback. I feel confident if I expressing my opinion orally because I can know feedback from teacher and I immediately knew what my mistake.

*Student F.*When in traditional or oral expression, sometimes I lost what I want to say, nervous, can't review my answer/opinion. And when there is a mistake Icant edit the word I have said, say sorry is the way out. But when in Edmodo, I can more express what in my mind without nerveous. And when I don't know what to say, I just think for a while then I got what I looking for. While typing I also can review

my opinion, is it right or need adjustment. When there is a mistake, I can edit it and make it right.

*Student G.*The first difference is expressing opinion using Edmodo consist of online learning, whereas expressing opinion orally in the traditional classroom setting consist of traditional learning. The second difference is expressing opinion using Edmodo only in written form and can be done in everywhere, not only in classroom. Whereas expressing opinion orally in the traditional classroom setting can be done in written or speaking and only in classroom. The third difference is expressing opinion using Edmodo by online, it means that indirectly. It is usually done by raising hand or the other quite signal. Between the two of the teaching models, the teaching model which is more confident in expressing my opinion is expressing opinion using Edmodo. You must need internet connection and go online first when expressing opinion using Edmodo, while in the traditional classroom setting you have to come to classroom first in the teaching and learning process directly. I prefer expressing my opinion orally in the traditional classroom setting, because sometimes I can't go online, there is no internet connection in my home town, I should go to the nearest "warnet" if I want to post my opinion.

This research also tries to describe the students cross cultural awareness,

particularly the students' opinion about the differences between Indonesian and American culture. The lecturer asked the students to explain the differences between the way Indonesians and Americans speak and respond compliments. It was found that normatively students have a positive attitude about intercultural communication. These followings are the students' opinion reflecting that they have a good perception about intercultural communication.

*Student H.*If we talk about directness, it must be very different between American and Indonesian. There are a lot of factors that influenced their way to utter. Cultural factor give the biggest effect. In Indonesia, the people tend to speak or share their idea in detail with a lot of metaphors, addition, and politeness in their utterances. Therefore, in United States, people tend to speak directly straight to the point what they want to say. This also affected by the cultural that they have. In United States and some western countries, the politeness is not the important thing for them. Their main goal is their message is delivered. No matter how it delivered. The sooner is better. So, they likely speak to the point.

*Student I.*Indonesian conversation style tend to be "ping-pong" style because they are influenced by a cultural thoughtsuch as politeness. If they speak directly, especially for the younger, Iti will be impolite. They have to say in conversation in polite and humble way. They have to choose the best diction that sometimes lead them into small talk and create lot of intended meaning. That's whyit's called "ping-pong" style. Because they make simple utterances become complicated of twist in and out.

*Student J.*In Indonesia if someone gives any compliment to others, people will say thank you or another responses like "are you serious, it is not like that" and so on. In Indonesia, compliments are positive things that bring people together but in American, they don't need any compliments because they might think it is such a scarce or taboo for the example, if you compliment an American person on how well she did something, she's likely to claim that anyone could have done it or to point out the bits she could have done better.

*Student K.*I think American people tend to use directness in their conversation. They will say 'yes' if what they mean is yes, and 'no' if what they mean is no. However, in my culture, sometimes people will say 'yes' and 'no' for unclear meaning. For the example, when I offer 'bakso' to my friends from my culture, they will say 'no' in which sometimes the meaning is they want to be offered 'bakso' once or more times to make sure that my offering is real and not only to show my politeness to them, because on the other way, maybe my offering is just to show

politeness and not really an offering. Let see when I offer 'bakso' to American people. They will say 'yes' if they want to eat 'bakso' and 'no' if they don't want it.

*Student L.*I think Indonesian conversation style is more "bowling". In a conversation, when a person is talking, the other one will faithfully wait until he knows the right time to talk. Actually, he is bored and wants to interrupt him. In order to show politeness, he listens to what he says. I think, it will happen to people in general, but for me, when I quite close with someone and we are in same age, I think it's no problem if we interrupt to each other in a conversation. I will give the example directly to explain this. When I say, "How beautiful your dress", to my female friend, perhaps she will say, "Yours is better". She seems to refuse it, but actually in her heart she wants to say thanks. It's indirectness. Perhaps other people will say thank you directly to appreciate the compliment. I think that's it, Sir. Thank you.

*Student M.*In my opinion, my culture (Indonesian) is very family orientated. And also Indonesian culture often shows value of politeness above the directness. Indonesian culture likes to focus on quality and Indonesian people believe in social responsibility (that is your responsibility to society). So if you want to say something to someone, you have to choose the right words or the polite words to convey your meaning.

So your utterances will not hurt their feeling or will not make them feel not appreciated.In the other hand, Americans are more direct, open and honest than many other countries and nationalities. American culture is very independent and individual orientated. And American people tends to value directness (say what you mean) over being polite. So American people is more direct in the way they say what they want to say/what they mean, although it can be hurt the hearer's feel.Americans like to focus on efficiency and tend to worry more about.

Student N. Compliment as a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes to someone, usually the person addressed, for some good (thing, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer. Compliments vary from one culture to another. Compliments are generally paid and appreciated in the Western culture. However, in the Eastern culture, when compliments are paid, they are either rejected or denied.

CONCLUSION

Using blended learning in university classrooms currently is inevitable. The sophistication of technology enables both lecturers and students interact in synchronious and unsynchronious learning mode. This reseach found that students have new perspectives about the role of culture in

communication especially the use of language as a medium of communication. Students also realize that living in a multicultural society needs an intercultural awareness to avoid misunderstanding caused by prejudice and overgeneralization toward people coming from different cultural background. And about the blended learning strategy applied in the course, students find it interesting to motivate their learning activities because the media used is similar to social media that have been very familiar with their daily life.The blended learning used in this CCU class is mediated by a social-media like, an educational online system called Edmodo. In this learning strategy students have a positive perception about the blended learning applied in the CCU classroom subject. Some students have difficulty in the beginning of using Edmodo especially when they have to register and log in to the learning media; however, they can solve the problem by discussing their friends or doing trial and error. Studentsalso perceive that they have more freedom when expressing opinion in the Edmodo rather in the offline session or conventional learning mode. Finally, this reseach found that students have a positive attitude about intercultural communication.

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