A CASE STUDY ON INTERCULTURAL PROCESS IN LIMITED SETTING

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Abstract

In a global world, living in other country is no longer unusual thing. Thus, the encounter with other culture is unavoidable. Progressing from ethnocentrism to ethno-relativism is vital for the success of someone living out of his/her mother country. This progress occurs through an intercultural process. A study on the intercultural process utilizes short self-reports and surveys to conduct the assessments of individuals' attitude, personalities, and values. Conducted in an informal school with a boarding system, this study examines how the intercultural process of foreign teachers and whether this process gives influence to the local students' cross cultural understanding. An informal school with a boarding system is a limited setting for an intercultural process. However, the interaction is still considered natural for two reasons: firstly, no certain particular cultural obligation for personal and social conduct there; secondly, cultural "take and give" occurs. The process occurs to both foreign teachers and local students. To some extent, the intercultural process of one party contributes the other party's cross cultural understanding.

Key Words: Intercultural Process, Cross Cultural Understanding

Introduction

In present global world, living with differences both at home and abroad is becoming more important. Differences such as values, attitudes, culture, ethnicity, social practices, political beliefs, sexuality and religion clearly direct people all around the world to take various meanings from their surroundings which must be fully respected and integrated into life according to their individual attitudes (Tesoriero, 2006).

Among many reasons, people decide to leave their mother country for jobs. Working abroad plays a unique role in offering individuals the opportunity to develop their intercultural competencies. Intercultural competence marks a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself (Fantini, 2006). Working in different cultures needs a good understanding of the norms of that culture.

The acquisition of such competencies is important not only for the foreigners, but also the local individuals who have interaction with the foreigners in the working environment. The interaction between foreign and local people gives influence to both parties.

In a multicultural working place, individuals need to develop their intercultural competence based on their own situations and needs. Different norms, rules and customs lead to different expectation from different cultures. A study was conducted in an international school program which focused on examining the process from 'Ethnocentrism' to 'Ethnorelativism' of foreign teachers, exclussively those are from English speaking countries. It makes a clear depiction of the contradiction between West and East values and customs in which both involve in the intercultural competence process. The scope of the intercultural process was limited to the foreign teachers' intercultural communicative competence and cross cultural adaptation with the local students, their intercultural sensitivity toward the local cultural values and customs, and the influence of foreign teachers' intercultural process to students' cross cultural understanding of West values and customs.

This study works mainly under two theories which include intercultural competence theory (Bennett in Paige, 1993) to exemine the foreign teachers' intercultural process and symbolic interaction theory (Blumer, 1969) to exermine the influence of foreign teachers' intercultural process to students' cross cultural understanding.

Methodology

This study exercices a case study as a method which underlines a "bounded system" over through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. This "bounded system" is bounded by time and place, it is the case being studied - programs, events, activities, and individuals (Creswell, 1998). In figuring out the intercultural process and finding out the intercultural competence resulted from the process, this study needs multiple sources of information which include observation, interview, documents, and audio visual material. This study situates the intercultural process within a limited physical and social setting. The intercultural process of the individuals and the intercultural competence resulted are observed through their natural activities, programs, and events.

Direct assessment of intercultural competence which include performance

assessment, portfolio assessment and interviews were applied. The data showed the elicitation of an individual's ability to display intercultural competence through his or her behavior, whether in real-time situations (performance assessment), in reflections and collections of work (portfolio assessment), or in one-on-one conversations with interlocutors (interviews).

To observe the intercultural process, the data were analyzed based on six stages of Bennett's DMIS.

No	Stage	Description
1.	Denial	The individual denies the difference or existence of other cultures by erecting psychological or physical barriers in the forms of isolation and separation from other cultures.
2.	Defense	The individual reacts against the threat of other cultures by denigrating the other cultures (negative stereotyping) and promoting the superiority of one's own culture. In some cases, the individual undergoes a reversal phase, during which the worldview shifts from one's own culture to the other culture, and the own culture is subject to disparagement.
3.	Minimization	The individual acknowledges cultural differences on the surface but considers all cultures as fundamentally similar.
4.	Acceptance	The individual accepts and respects cultural differences with regard to behavior and values.
5.	Adaptation	The individual develops the ability to shift his frame of reference to other culturally diverse worldviews through empathy and pluralism.
6.	Integration	The individual expands and incorporates other worldviews into his own worldview.

These six stages comprise a continuum from least culturally competent to most culturally competent and illustrate a dynamic way of modeling the development of intercultural competence.

To observe the local students' cross cultural understanding as the outcome of their interaction with their foreign teachers, the aspects being observed were as follows:

No	Apect	Description
1.	Substantive Knowledge	The individual has a firm, important, meaningful awareness or consciousness or familiarity of certain culture gained by experience during interaction.
2.	Perceptual Understanding	The individual has the right interpretation of certain culture s/he encounteres during interaction.

Analysis

Boarding school can be seen as centre of socialization where students mingle with others. Teachers and students acknowledge that living in a total institution like boarding school has significant impact and change their perception and interaction during their social relationships. In a boarding school with "international setting", the changes which the students experience is often not in the manner that the boarding school defines itself or claims to inculcate, instead the changes that come about is chiefly due to the students' constant interaction with other students, and even with teacher from different culture.

The existance of boarding school with an "international setting" in a certain country, however, does not eliminate the influence of local culture in both students and teachers' daily lives. Thus, in such place, an intercultural contact between foreign and local party is intense. Though it is limited and not free from the influence of local culture at any intensity, the "naturalness" of this setting which refers to the absence of particular cultural obligation for personal and social conduct guarantees that the intercultural interaction between foreign teachers and local students occurs naturally as well.

When two people from different cultures meet in a boarding school with "international setting", cultural "give and take" plays important role in the interaction. In such a place, "international" does not refer to the connotation of the

superiority of the West, rather that during the interaction between West and East there is a party whose culture is neither considered as superior nor inferior. Each party of the interaction at the same time gives and takes cultural influence in an equal position. Therefore, the intercultural process which is marked by the cultural "take" and ""give" during the interaction happens to both Indonesian (local students) and non-Indonesian (foreign teachers).

To some extent, the occurance of cultural "take" and "give" during the intercultural process also contributes cross cultural understanding to both local students and foreign teachers. Thus, two ways correlation happens in that situation. In such a limited "international setting", focusing merely on one way correlation that is the influence of non-Indonesian's intercultural process towards Indonesian's cross cultural understanding marks two significant things: firstly, for the foreign teachers, progressing from 'Ethnocentrism' to 'Ethno-relativism' as vital for the success of living in out of mother country. Secondly, for local students, progressing from 'Ethnocentrism' to 'Ethno relativism' means the "absence" of comfort zone in mother country where the "international feeling" exists.

To see further the intercultural process, this study works under Bennett's *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* (DMIS) theory (Bennett in Paige, 1993). It is based on the intercultural process of an acquaintance of two different cultures at the first place. DMIS includes six stages on this path of intercultural process which is respectively characterized by certain perceptions and behaviors towards the "own" and the "other" culture. It refers to a shifting from the understanding of foreigner teachers' own culture as being superior to the understanding of their own culture as equal in value and complexity to any other cultures.

The end goal of DMIS stages is an competence in an intercultural process. The term *competence*, according to Brian H. Spitzberg and Gabrielle Changnon (in Deardoff, 2009, p.6) has been equated with understanding, relationship developement, adaptation, and a set of abilities or skills and at other times a subjective evaluated impression. Applying the DMIS stages as the guideline for making the interpretation of the intercultural process, this study notes that those stages comprise a continuum from the least culturally competent to the most culturally competent. The stages illustrate a dynamic way of modeling the development of intercultural competence.

Regarding the DMIS stages, culture shock as the initial issue of the intercultural process is something envitable experienced by the foreign teachers. This culture shock, as noted by Oberg (1960), is precipated by the anxiety that result from losing all their familiar signs, cues, symbols, custom and norms of social intercourse. The customs include the ways in which the foreign teachers orient themselves to the situation of daily life: communication style. This feeling shock refers to the first three stages of Bennett's DMIS: the stage of denial, defense, and minimization. However, this study shows something different in case of this culture shock. The foreign teachers experience culture shock at minimum level during the initial interactions with their local students while they live together in their boarding. This experience is at DMIS stage of minimization. It is a stage when both parties minimize any cultural differences by correcting people to match their expectations. It means that the two previous DMIS stages – denial and defense – is likely "absent" during their initial interactions.

The shock feeling is merely a minor psychological barrier for both parties to build harmonious interactions. This study shows that what make possible for the harmonious interactions during the culture shock periods is that both parties hold the same value of respect. Respect works as a glue for the interactions during the culture shock periods. The foreign teachers do not either deny the difference or existence of the local cultures by erecting psychological or physical barriers in the forms of isolation and separation from the local cultures nor react against the threat of local cultures by denigrating the local cultures or by promoting the superiority of their own culture. In this case, they undergo not only the absence of stereotyping toward their local students, but also a reversal phase in which their worldview shifts from their West culture to the local culture.

The foreign teachers' worldview which shifts from West to local culture includes certain circumtances where different values and behavior acceptance are needed and of which the most notable relates to the communication style. In this acceptance stage, the common shared value of maturity plays a very important role during the interactions. Maturity encompasses awareness of the correct time and place to behave and understanding when to act, according to the circumstances and the culture of the society they live in. When each party has what Dilts (1996) defines as "social maturity", there is no doubt that a climate of trust, harmony, active co-operation and

peaceful coexistence are produced in a boarding school.

Besides common shared values of respect and maturity, the role of someone "standing in the gap" or an "intercessor" during the intercultural process is an important thing needed by the foreign teachers in the early adaptation stage. However, after building a long interaction with the local students, the role of "intercessor" is no longer needed. This study shows that after long term of living and working in a boarding school, the foreign teachers instinctively change communication style when they interact with their local students' culture. Further, this study also shows that after a year, the foreign teachers acquire a capacity to change their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors so that they are open and flexible to the local students' cultures. Taylor (1994) states that such capacity is a transformative process whereby the foreigners develop adaptive capacity, altering their perspective to effectively understand and accommodate the demands of the host culture.

The foreign teachers who have the adaptive capacity can not only develop relational competence with local students' cultures, but also manage to solve complicated conflicts by moving around the alternatives (e.g. the *intercessor's* role) which arise as the result of cultural

differences. According to Penbek, et all (2009) personal attitudes like empathy and flexibility are also two important components of adaptive capacity. It is noted that during the intercultural process, communication is also an important thing. According to Sinicrope, et. all (2007), communication is a developmental strategy in the development of intercultural sensitivity, particularly in the ethno relative stages. Participants who move out of acceptance are eager to apply their knowledge of cultural differences to actual face-to-face communication. Through this communication, sharing information to reach a common understanding occurs during the interaction of individuals.

This study also shows that to some extent there is the changing of foreign teachers' communication style. They experience two senses of adaptation: micro and macro. In a micro sense, they are influenced by the actions of the local students' culture; and at macro sense, they experience assimilation. According to Deardorff (2009, p.6), adaptation at the micro level is concerned with the interdependence and alternation of behavior in the episodes of interaction, such that the actions of one interactant influence the actions of the other interactant(s) in the context. While at a more macro level tends to the meaning that the sorjouners are adapt at making

assimilation to host culture across the episodes and contexts of interaction within that culture. In the perspective of DMIS stages, this macro adaptation refers to the integration stage. It is a stage when the sourjoners instinctively change their communication style when interacting with local cultures.

This study shows that relating to communication style, the foreign teachers' minimization and acceptance stages during their intial interaction with the local students refer to the phase of half cultural originality loss, while after a longer interaction, the adaptation and integration stages refer to their phase of total cultural originality loss. The particular circumtances of which the phase of cultural originality loss is related to the Indonesian concepts of 'face' and etiquette in communication.

Indonesian concepts of 'face' and etiquette in communication are important concepts which the foreign teachers need to understand. These concepts are due to the need to maintain group harmony. In Indonesia, these concepts are about avoiding the cause of shame. Consequently, people are very careful how they interact and speak. Although the foreign teachers cannot be expected to understand the complete nuances of the concepts, they keep an eye on their behavior. Following to these concepts,

they never ridicule, shout at or offend their local students. Since the imperfections should always be hidden and addressed privately, the foreign teachers never blame never their local students publicly or personally. In Indonesian culture, the manifestation of the concept of face or shame is that people communicate quite indirectly. They will never wish to cause anyone feel shame by giving them a negative answer so that they phrase it a way and expect what they truly want to say is understood. As the foreign teachers adapt themselve to that concept, they practice Indonesian way of saying "Yes" when the actual meaning is "No". This seems to be a paradox to the value of openness, outspokeness, and directness in communication and problem solving style in their western culture.

Hierarcy also plays a great role in Indonesian culture. Hierarchical relationships are respected, emphasised and maintained. Respesct is usually shown to those with status, power, position, and age. In Indonesian communication etiquette, superiors are often called "bapak" or "ibu" and followed by their first name. These means the equivalent of "sir" or "madam" in English, however in Western formal situation it is followed by last name instead of first name. The concept of Indonesian addressing system does not merely refer to the necessity of

formality. This ties back to the idea of maintaining strong group cohesivess and harmonious relationships. To the foreign teachers, the concept behind the Indonesian addressing system is, to some extent, contrary to the concept of formality in Western culture.

To some extent, the foreign teachers' phase of cultural originality loss provides cross cultural understanding to the local students which includes two aspects, fistly cross cultural knowledge and secondly, cross cultural awareness. The first aspect refers to the initial level of understanding. This aspect relates to the phase of half cultural originality loss in which the local students still see certain part of foreign teachers's culture. In this case, the local students can see two things: the concept of face and direct communication. The meaning of maintaining face for their foreign teachers is preserving their image for other people and themselves. To do this, their foreign teachers can negotiate, debate, discuss differences and most of all defending their own opinion directly. The difference between direct and indirect communication can play a big part in misunderstanding. They speak openly with honesty and are always to the point.

The second aspect refers to the higher level of the understanding. This aspect relates to the phase of total cultural originality loss in which refers to the paradox as in these adaptation and integration phase, the presence of "conflict", even in a very tiny scale and implicitly, is not avoidable. The existence of conflict marks the beginning of cross cultural awareness to the local students. This can be seen in term of non verbal communication. To some extent, the interpretation of nonverbal communication can also cause conflicts. The point of conflict concerns on which expressions are acceptable to show and by whom. The foreign teachers do not use nonverbal communication as often as the local students. In the local students' culture, these nonverbal gestures are also a very important part of communication. Wrong interpretation of the gestures can lead to a conflict. for example, facial expression that will be recognized around the world as conveying happiness may actually express anger or mask sadness.

Conclusion

Based on this study, it can be concluded that an informal school where foreign teachers and local students live under the same boarding provide a limited "international setting" for the intercultural process. This limited "international setting" changes both foreign teachers and local students' perception and interaction during their social relationships. On the

foreign teachers' side, the intercultural process is marked by the minimum level of culture shock which means the absence of denial and defense phase during their initial interactions. The foreign teachers' social maturity enables them to achieve the intercultural competence. While on the local students' side, their cross cultural understanding happens during their foreign teachers' process of cultural originality loss which concerns on the concept of face and direct communication. During this process, conflict, though, at a small scale is not avoidable.

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