

THE ROLE OF TEACHER'S CULTURAL EXPOSURE ON INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS' INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Fenty Linda Siregar

Email: fenezia@yahoo.com
Universitas Kristen Maranatha (UKM) Bandung
Alamat Koresponden: Jalan Mohamad Yunus No 67/6B

Abstract

A number of researchers argue that attaining intercultural communicative competence (ICC) should become the goal of every EFL and ESL learners (Bryam, 1997, and Alptekin, 2002). Shin (2010) states that helping the learners to develop their intercultural sensitivity (IS) can be a starting point for improving their ICC in English. Besides, teachers' cultural exposure might play an important role to develop learners' IS. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the role of teachers' cultural exposures on intercultural sensitivity of EFL students. The participants of the study are 160 Indonesian EFL learners who are studying English at either English department or D3 English programme at Maranatha Christian University. In order to gather data needed, the present study employed a semi-structured interview and a questionnaire containing 12 questions about teacher's cultural exposures and 24 questions taken from the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) which was formulated by G. M. Chen and Starosta (2000). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis were used to answer the questions raised in the study. The findings of the study revealed that the participants had a moderate intercultural sensitivity level and received more exposures of native English speakers' cultures than exposures of non- native English speaker's and Indonesian cultures from their teachers. There was also no correlation found between the intercultural sensitivity level of the participants and teachers' cultural exposures. The positive correlation was only shown in the correlation between teachers' cultural exposures and a variable of IS which is participants' interaction engagement.

Keywords

Intercultural, Sensitivity, Cultural, Exposures

Introduction

The ultimate goal of learning English is not anymore limited to gain ability to speak the language but it has developed into one's journey to obtain intercultural communicative competence. According to Chen and Starosta (2000), intercultural communicative competence is composed by intercultural awareness (cognitive dimension), intercultural sensitivity (affective dimension), and intercultural adroitness (behavioral dimension). Chen and Starosta (2000) states that, intercultural awareness refers to the cognitive aspect of intercultural communication competence represented by "the understanding of culture conventions that affect how we think and behave" (p. 1). It includes two components; namely, self-awareness and cultural awareness. Intercultural adroitness refers to the behavioral

aspect of intercultural communication competence represented by ones' "ability to get the job done and attain communication goals in intercultural interactions" (G. M. Chen & Starosta, 1996, p. 367).

It contains four components: message skills, appropriate self-disclosure, behavioral flexibility, and interaction management. Moreover, Chen and Starosta (1997) define intercultural sensitivity as "an individual's ability to develop positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication" (p. 6). In other words, should ones want to be interculturally sensitive people, they "must have a desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures, and to produce a positive outcome from intercultural interaction" (Chen, 1997, p.5).

Conclusion

To sum up, the participants of the study have a moderate intercultural sensitivity level. Their teachers expose them to cultures of Indonesian, NSE, and NNSE but the portion of the NNSE's culture is bigger than other cultures. There is also no correlation found between the intercultural sensitivity level of the participants and teachers' cultural exposures. The positive correlation is only shown in the correlation between teachers' cultural exposures and a variable of IS which is participants' interaction engagement.

The findings urge MCU teachers to do some improvement in terms of increasing participants' IS. The aim of the improvement is of course to produce students with high intercultural sensitivity which will enable them to interact well in their future intercultural interaction. Research suggests that people whose intercultural sensitivity is high tend to involve well in intercultural communication (Peng, 2006). Some programs such as internship experience which involves people from any cultures and English language activity via internet with English speakers from other cultures will help to increase the participants' IS. With high IS, they will respect cultural differences, foster

multiple cultural identities, and maintain multicultural coexistence (Chen and Starosta, 2004) and be able to live and work with others from different cultural backgrounds (Landis and Bhagat, 1996).

Moreover, Greenholz (2000) states that one's intercultural competence increases as they experience more cultural differences. Thus, since the most of the current participants always study at school where the majority of the students is Chinese-Indonesian, teachers should expose more knowledge of cultural difference which might be found in intercultural interaction to the students and equip them with intercultural awareness and adroitness.

Furthermore, the analysis of the intercultural sensitivity scale of this study has ended in relatively lower alpha values in the reliability analysis; therefore, in terms of suggestions for future research, it would be necessary to test the scale in separate populations to reach higher internal consistency. It is also advisable to translate the questionnaire since the language of the questionnaire might be one of the causes of a lower alpha value.

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