

CULTURAL SNAPSHOT: FOSTERING CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH CULTURAL PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

The fundamental perception used in this study is that teaching and learning activities in Indonesian classroom have potentially generated individual's sensitivity on cross-cultural understanding. This study aims at investigating Indonesian university students' perception on cross-cultural understanding after doing Cultural Snapshot Project. The data was critically analyzed through multicultural ideology and diversity theories. The subjects were 30 EFL college students in one of colleges in Indonesia. Each student was assigned to capture a photograph which depicted the existence of any cultural manifestation in their surrounding such as discrimination, prejudice and stereotype. Students were then requested to reflect on the picture by writing a short description and make an exhibition using their pictures. The result reveals that Cultural Snapshot Project has given the opportunity for the students to better realize cross-cultural understanding in their environment. In conclusion, the study shows that Cultural Snapshot Project has specifically enhanced students' perception of multiculturalism in three major areas: cultural sensitivity and empathy, social tolerance, and understanding of diversity.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Snapshot Project, cross-cultural understanding, students' perception, multiculturalism

1. INTRODUCTION

While it has been a great challenge for educators to find out the best system to educate students as intelligent and responsible individuals, educators should also prepare students to be part of multicultural society. Education system has a big responsibility to create environment which foster democratic exchange of ideas and cross cultural understanding based on mutual respect, reflection, and informed decision making for students (Gay, 2000).

In Indonesia, cross cultural understanding is very essential because the country is a diverse nation (Rachmawati, Yi-Fong and Chen, 2014). The diversity in cultures, religions, languages, customs and other aspects has created Indonesia as a rich country with an abundant potential for development. However, because of the vast multiculturalism in each region, Indonesia is very fragile to any intra-group tension. Lack of understanding, respect and tolerance toward each other endangers multicultural value. Therefore, instilling cross cultural understanding, especially through education, is inevitable.

Education plays an important role for teaching cross cultural understanding toward students to avoid such conflicts. Education must promote cultural sensitivity and understanding. In response

to such urgency, this study aims at analyzing Indonesian university students' perception on cross-cultural understanding after doing Cultural Snapshot Project¹.

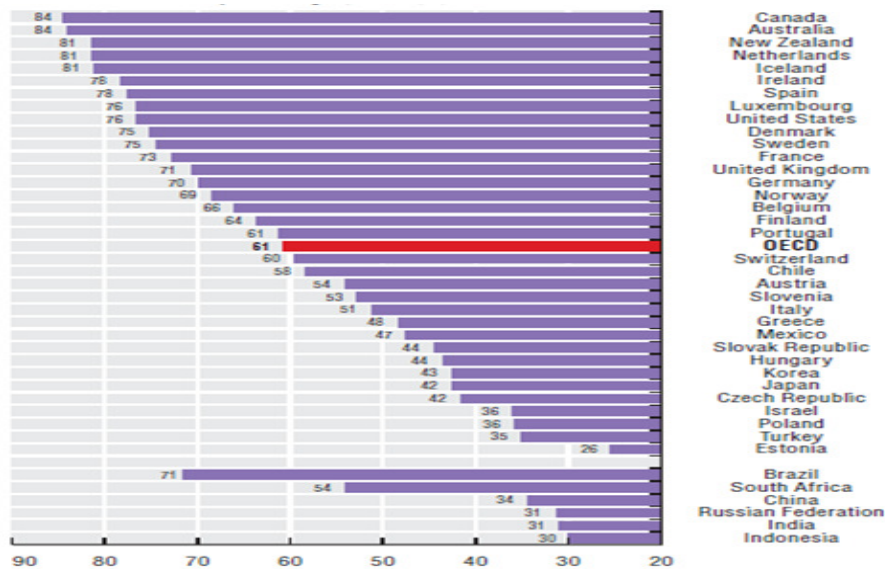
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Sanctity of Cross-Culture Understanding within Curriculum

People living in Indonesia are aware of plurality of diverse ethnic and cultural communities. The diversity of religions, cultures, ethnicities and languages is reflected through The Five National Pillars “*Pancasila*” and national motto “*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*”, translated as unity in diversity.² Although having different cultural backgrounds, people in Indonesia have the same objectives to achieve equal justice and prosperity.

However, the commitment of unity in diversity requires hard efforts from all stakeholders. The data on tolerance index from the Gallup World Poll in 2010 shows that Indonesia has low tolerance index as compared to the standard set by The Organization for Economic and Cooperation and Development (OECD). Indonesia is particularly scored low in community tolerance index of minority group (OECD, 2011).³

Figure 1. Community tolerance index of minority groups, percentages, 2010



¹Cultural snapshot is an assignment for students to capture any social phenomenon through camera and write brief description about it.

²It is the official national motto of Indonesia, quoted from an Old Javanese poem Kakawin Sutasoma, written by Mpu Tantular during the reign of the Majapahit empire sometime in the 14th century.

³The Gallup World Poll is conducted in over 140 countries around the world based on a common questionnaire, translated into the predominant languages of each country. Society at a Glance 2011: OECD Social Indicators © OECD 2011.

During post-reform in 1998, ethnic and religious conflicts are still increasing. Ironically, the trend is not only happening in Indonesia. In 2015, the United Nations records as many as 75% of major conflicts going on in the world today are rooted from cultural dimension. Indonesian still encounters some multicultural conflicts from urban level to nation-wide (Arifin, 2012).

The Jakarta-based Setara Institute, an organization which monitors religious freedom, states that there are 230 attacks on religious minorities in Indonesia in 2013 and 107 cases in 2014 through November.⁴Cultures, which should be interpreted as part of the diverse beauty, have sharpened differences. Therefore, cultural differences are usually blamed as the reasons why people often lose their sense of common humanity and it becomes the root of numerous conflicts (UNESCO, 2009).⁵

Responding to such trend, Indonesia has paid great attention to multicultural education as it contains the educational curriculum with multicultural value and character education (Rosyada, 2014). Character education, especially dealing with multicultural tolerance, is expected to be integrated within all subjects or courses. The main goal of multicultural education in national curriculum is to foster understanding, appreciation and awareness of students about their own culture and others (Amirin, 2012).

There have been plenty of studies examining the importance of multicultural education and cross cultural understanding in Indonesia (Tilaar, 2004; Amirin, 2012; Rosyada, 2014). Most studies believe that cross cultural understanding can prepare students to be responsible member of society. Cross cultural understanding is believed to help students in developing their awareness of and ability to act for equality and social justice in participatory democracies (Rachmawati, Yi-Fong and Chen, 2014).

However, there is an urgency to revitalize the ways on how cross-cultural understanding and multicultural education are taught in Indonesian classrooms. The existing reinforcement of multicultural education has been very limited through only particular subjects such as Civic Education, Social Sciences and Religion Education focusing on theoretical cognition (Amirin, 2012). Additionally, the materials on cross cultural understanding and diversity have not been integrated contextually within students' life.

Although the current curriculum regards cross cultural understanding and tolerance to be essential, the implementation has not show many significant progress as reflected by high number of culture-based conflicts (Sugiharto, 2009).⁶ One of the reasons is because the technique in teaching cross cultural understanding greatly focuses on theoretical approach rather than real life practice. Therefore, the new method in teaching cross cultural understanding which can engage students must be done.

⁴World Report 2015: Indonesia. Events of 2014, Human Right Watch From <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/indonesia>

⁵ UNESCO World Report Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue, 2009

⁶Sugiharto, S. (2009, January). *Multicultural education in Indonesia: Opportunities and challenges* [Electronic version]. The Jakarta Post. From <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/01/22/multicultural-education-indonesia-opportunities-and-challenges.html>

2.2 The Basic Concept of Project-Based Learning

Project based learning is a technique of learning where some learners will work in group to organize their learning around projects (Thomas & Mergendoller, 2000). The projects are designed to activate students' higher thinking skill such as challenging questions or problem which involves students to solve the problem, design the solution, and investigate the process. The projects are also expected to provide an autonomous learning for students instead of solely relying on their teachers to gain the knowledge (Jones, Rasmussen, & Moffit, 1997).

The role of students is central in a project-based learning as they are expected to learn by doing the learning process themselves. Project-Based Learning is effective to activate students' critical thinking behavior (Horan, Lavaroni, & Beldon, 1996). However, there is some evidence showing that students are sometime struggling very hard to initiate the inquiries, undergo the investigation, manage time, and conclude comprehensible outcome within their learning (Thomas, 2000). Hence, teachers still need to provide intensive assistant and clear instruction during their learning activities.

2.3 The Power of Image in Cultural Snapshot Project

Cultural snapshot is project based learning which holds the principles of participatory collaboration. In this project, students work in pairs to capture some photographs based on cultural phenomenon in their surroundings. Photography serves as a visual system of representation, by way of which the visibility of an object not being present is produced (Christmann, 2008). The power of collaboration and autonomous learning through visual image has been a strong combination in learning cross cultural understanding.

Basically, human learns a lot from visual scenes. Visual image assists people to digest information more deeply. Learning through image enables people to create a meaningful atmosphere in learning process (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). That being said, by involving "learning by doing" approach and visual imager within education process, students will be able to learn more quickly and meaningfully. The photographs will be even more meaningful when students are the one who capture the moment by themselves. That is the basic idea of cultural snapshot project.

Visual scene captured by students through the project is deeply rooted within students' memory. According to Domke, Perlmutter and Spratt (2002), image-based experience tends to give more long term memory than conventional learning. The use of charts, pictures, diagrams, and other visual materials will make the learning process more interesting.

3. METHOD

This study employed descriptive qualitative approach; examining students' cross cultural understanding after doing Cultural Snapshot Project. The subjects were 30 junior EFL college students in one of colleges in Indonesia. The students were mostly from rural areas majoring in English Education. The students were teacher candidates who were expected to teach English in junior and high school students.

Each student was instructed to do Cultural Snapshot Project in pairs. The project was to capture a photograph which depicted the existence of any cultural phenomenon in their surroundings. The

students were then requested to reflect on the picture by writing a short description for the picture and make an exhibition using their pictures.

The data were collected through field observation and questionnaires in regard to the students' perception on cultural tolerance and sensitivity. The questionnaires were open-ended questions (simple "yes, no, don't know" answers with some follow-up responses). The answers were further reviewed within a theoretical framework of multicultural ideology.

By capturing the moment and reflecting on the project through cultural images, students invested their finding within learning cross cultural understanding. Students observed and analyzed what really happened in their surroundings. After learning cultural concept, they explored the existence of stereotype, prejudice, discrimination and other cultural terms. The students were asked to experience cross cultural understanding in a real context, rather than reading it theoretically.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cross cultural understanding is a mandatory course for students majoring in English Education in Pamane Teaching College, Indonesia. After joining the class, students are expected to be able to understand the concept of culture as part of daily life and improve their understanding toward cross cultural aspects.

The course aims at helping the students to understand cultural phenomenon and how to response multiculturalism within society. As the students are teacher candidates, they are required to comprehend the material on cross cultural understanding. Such comprehension is vital because teachers are not only required to have knowledge and skill on the taught subjects but also to assist students in being tolerant individuals.

Figure 2. The Exhibition of Cultural Snapshot



In this course, the students learn the concept of cultural material and social phenomenon such as prejudice, discrimination, plurality and others. Besides receiving theoretical information about

cultural understanding, students also learn to apply the knowledge in real life situation and to become more culturally sensitive with their surroundings. To be able to finish the course, the students are required to do Cultural Snapshot Project. They must work in pair to capture socio-cultural phenomenon through photographs. Therefore, students' self-learning and teamwork are essential in the project. They must be able to synthesize their learning and collaborate with their peers to complete the project.

According to the field observation, most students believe that Cultural Snapshot Project is very interesting and helpful for them to learn cross cultural understanding. According to Pacino (2008), in instilling multicultural education and cross cultural understanding, teaching and learning must take place within a learning community where teachers and students are all learners. This means that teachers need to create an atmosphere of equality in their classrooms. The atmosphere of classroom should also encourage students to know each other as individuals, regard each other as equals, and be able to work together on common interest and goals (Smardo and Schmidt, 1983).

Based on the questionnaire, the study shows that Cultural Snapshot Project has specifically enhanced students' perception of multiculturalism in three major areas, namely cultural sensitivity and empathy, social tolerance and understanding of diversity.

4.1 Cultural Sensitivity and Empathy

According to the questionnaire, there are 96% students who think that Cultural Snapshot Project has enhanced their sensitivity and empathy. They confirm that Cultural Snapshot Project has taught them to be more sensitive in seeing social phenomenon in their surroundings. The concept of Cultural sensitivity refers to an awareness of and a willingness to understand the motives of why people of another culture act as they do (Chen and Starosta, 1997). Indonesian people live in an environment with cultural differences. Therefore, acquiring the knowledge and sensitivity about others' culture is very important. Further, there are 93% students who state that the project has taught them about the virtue and value of diversity.

Thereason of why there is huge percentage is possibly because cultural snapshot enables the students to interact with the real people and phenomena. They directly experience what they have learned in class in the real context. One student writes that in their project, they have captured the image of a transvestite who is often bullied by people. They have conversation with the person and learn from his story. This situation makes them to empathize with the point of view of people from a diverse group.

The Cultural Snapshot Project alsoserves as an intercultural training program within teaching and learning process. Cargile and Giles (1996) state that intercultural training is a program which is developed to foster intercultural sensitivity by increasing awareness of cultural differences and attempts to develop one's communication potential. They argue that programs which can enhance people' intercultural understanding must be fostered. The project in this class is one of those intercultural training programs to help them understand that they live in a diverse society. Hence, they need to be culturally sensitive and show empathy toward plurality.

4.2 Social Tolerance

From the questionnaire, the students believe that The Cultural Snapshot Project is very useful in fostering their tolerance. Social tolerance refers to an objective attitude towards those who lifestyle differs from someone (Pacino, 2008). Social tolerance also means to respect other members of society and accept the differences of each person living in that society. The result shows that there are 96% students who believe that Cultural Snapshot Project is a great program to increase their appreciation and respect toward others' differences. Further, 80% students also confirm that the project enables them to be more tolerant. After listening to other people's stories, they feel the need not to blatantly impose their own standard of values because everyone is unique and different.

Visual scene and photography are powerful media in creating better impression of learning toward students (Domke, Perlmutter and Spratt, 2002). Image-based experience tends to give more long term memory than conventional learning. Therefore, when the students are provided with opportunity to go outside and capture the real social and cultural phenomenon, their understanding toward cross cultural understanding becomes better and deeper.

The project also enables the students to not only learn from the object of image, but also from their partner teamwork. They learn from the story of individuals that they involve for the project. Therefore, most students find the project very beneficial. Building social tolerance through the project helps the students to develop a confidence to mingle with other people. Such attitude creates a fair perception toward those with different opinions, beliefs, practices, racial or ethnic origins, etc. This confirms the opinion of Horan, Lavaroni, & Beldon (1996:78) which states that Project-Based Learning is an effective method to activate students' critical thinking because it stimulates the students are engaged more in synthesizing, forecasting, producing, evaluating, and reflecting process.

4.3 Understanding of Diversity

Diversity is a wide range of cultural and individual differences (Sue, 1994). Respecting diversity in a multicultural society is the main prerequisite in building a mutual environment among people. From the questionnaire, the students state that Cultural Snapshot Project has made them to better understand the diversity in their surroundings. There are 96 % students who believe that the project gives them valuable information about plurality and social phenomenon such as different ethnic, religion and language. For example, there are students who capture a group of men doing chores in the kitchen although the jobs are usually associated with female work. There are students who take photograph of little boy who work in the palm oil plantation to help his parent getting more income. From taking such photographs autonomously, the students learn the diversity in gender role, custom, beliefs, opinion, and others.

The use of autonomous learning and real life context as implemented in the project is very effective to activate students' critical thinking behavior (Horan, Lavaroni, & Beldon, 1996). By understanding and embracing the diversity, a society can achieve their common goal and potential optimally because people from all backgrounds are united and not restrained by group categories such as sex, nationality, religion, ethnicities or race. In regard to such view, the students also believe that the project helps them in creating better sense of respect and appreciation toward

differences within society. From the questionnaire, there are 96% students who claim that they more appreciate and respect the diversity after conducting the project.

The students really like the project and they will do the same project once they are teaching their students in the future. When they are asked which project steps that they like the most, 80% students mostly like the idea of taking picture in their surrounding with their partners and reflect on it. This step encourages the students to go outside, observe their surroundings, interact with real people and learn from them. They will advocate such project because it really helps the students with autonomous learning and learning by doing.

The overall response of the students toward the project is very positive. There are 96% students who really like the project. However, there are only 70% students who say that they will implement a similar project in their future class. The rest of the students think that the project requires intensive preparation and active participation from students. They believe that advocating the project might hamper the students who are introvert and it is time-consuming.

5. CONCLUSION

The result reveals that Cultural Snapshot Project has given the opportunity for the students to better realize cross-cultural understanding in their environment. In conclusion, the study shows that Cultural Snapshot Project has specifically enhanced students' perception of multiculturalism in three major areas: cultural sensitivity and empathy, social tolerance, and understanding of diversity.

It is not always easy to create meaningful education by implementing multicultural education in our classrooms. There are so many challenges such as complicated regulations, increased preparation, etc. Therefore, this becomes huge duty for educators to build up classroom communities that extend into an awareness of students' role in larger communities and responsibility on them. This can be done through introducing new technique which promote autonomous learning like Cultural Snapshot Project.

The future research is expected to expand the research by involving more diverse subjects. The students in the study are college students who are used to do the project independently and responsibly. The result might be different if it is applied to high school or primary school students.

This result is particularly beneficial for teachers in inserting the value of cross cultural understanding. Teachers must consider creating a technique and media which can attract students' participation in learning. The government can also use the result as one of the considerations to set the policy in educational curriculum. That curriculum must not only put emphasis on theoretical knowledge but also practical aspects to instill cross cultural understanding and values for the students.

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