Enhancing Students' Cultural Competence through a Cross-Cultural Understanding Subject: A Case Study of 4th Grade Students at the Pasundan School of Higher Learning and Education, Cimahi, West-Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

Current pedagogy stresses that language cannot be taught without culture and that culture is a necessary context for language use. This leads to a need for English teachers in Indonesia to develop their competence in holistic language competence, particularly cultural competence. In this research site, Pasundan School of Higher Learning and Education, the basic concept of culture related to the teaching and learning a language has been accommodated by the Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) subject. This study seeks to explore how the CCU subject could enhance the students' cultural competence. The primary method for this research is a case study, involving the fourth year students within a single selected class as the sample. Observation, students' questionnaires and a Cross-Cultural Self-Assessment Checklist were used as instruments for data collection. Results of the study indicate that: 1) students' cultural competence was enhanced after the CCU course; 2) through discussion and interaction with the native speaker of English in the class, the students gained clear understanding of the target language's culture; 3) culture shock and the process of adjustment to a new culture were the most interesting topics; and 4) the data from the Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist showed that the students achieved significantly higher scores on the three areas of cultural competence: a) cultural knowledge with an average score of 27.7; b) cultural awareness with an average score of 24.4; and c) cultural skills with an average score of 24.6. Furthermore, all respondents (100%) agreed that CCU contributed to their understanding about culture, cultural differences and cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Cultural Competence, Cross-Cultural Understanding

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Introduction

It is already known that English has been taught either as a foreign or second language in many countries throughout the world. It is also acknowledged that language cannot be taught without culture and that culture is a necessary context of language use (Singhal, 1998). In other words, learning a foreign language includes learning the culture of that language. Furthermore Brown (1994, p.25) says that language and culture are intricately intertwined. Anytime you successfully learn a language you will also learn something regarding the culture of the speakers of that language. To have a better understanding when communicating with another, someone should know about the culture of the person with whom he/she communicates.

English in Indonesia has a status as the first foreign language taught from elementary school until university. Indonesia is a multicultural country composed of hundreds of various cultural tribes, races and languages. Thus, we come up with the motto, "Unity in diversity" which means that even though we come from various different cultural backgrounds we are one as a nation.

Indonesian students usually have cross-cultural experiences every day when they study and socialize with the students from different ethnic groups. They encounter different accents and mannerisms, different lifestyles and backgrounds, and likes or dislikes, and lifestyles among Indonesian ethnic groups. Thus, they need to learn from and appreciate one another, respect and enjoy differences, and negotiate and work through cultural (mis)understandings. They have already encountered cross-cultural experiences that may help them become more flexible in encountering cultural differences. Even though cultural differences may cause cultural barriers, those barriers can help them to be more cognizant of the need for understanding other cultures.

In most Indonesian classrooms, the students has been exposed to the nuances of English culture as it pertains to English language. For example, in greeting, English native speakers address someone with surname like Mr. Smith and simply greet someone first whenever they meet. This leads to a need for English teachers and also English teachers candidates to develop their competence in all aspects of language competence, particularly cultural competence. To fulfill the need to help English learners understand the cultures of English-speaking countries, a Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) subject has been developed. This subject is taught in the fourth grade by the English department at Pasundan School of Higher Learning and Education. It is expected that by implementing this subject, the students will develop their cultural competence gradually, since this course focuses on improving the students' cultural awareness, knowledge and cultural skills.

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Objectives

This research is aimed at achieving the following objectives:

1. To describe how the Cross-cultural Understanding (CCU) subject could enhance the students' cultural competence.

2. To discover the students' cultural competence from the results of Cross-cultural Self-Assessment Checklist and its contribution to the enhancement of students' cultural competence.

Conceptual Framework

This part reviews theories that serve as the basis of this research. The findings from the data obtained will be discussed in through perspectives provided by these theories. There are four main theories in this section: 1) Definitions of Culture; 2) Cultural Differences and Communication; 3) Teaching Cross-Cultural Understanding; and 4) Cultural Competence.

Culture

The term culture encompasses a large number of definitions which show its richness, dynamics and breadth. Robinson (1988) points to the three categories of culture as follows: ideas (belief, values, institution) behaviors (language, gesture, custom/habit, foods) and products (literature, folklore, art, music, artifacts). The categories of behaviors and products reflect a notion of culture as an observable phenomena. On the other hand, the category of ideas reflects a notion of culture that is not observable but rather something which is internal yet can also be explicitly described.

The underlying concepts used to define culture, are firstly, the system of cultural pattern. Each society has its own cultural pattern that can be learned and shared with its members (Hiebert, 1983; Luzbetak, 1967; Levine & Alderman, 1993; Spradley, 1975). The second concept is the way of life of a society. It is the context within which we exist, think, feel, and relate to others (Luzbetak, 1967). Thirdly, it is the categories of behavior and ideas that reflect observable and unobservable behaviors including customs, beliefs, attitudes, values in which a society lives (Robinson, 1988; Spradley, 175; Levine & Alderman, 1993).

Cultural Differences and Communication

Culture is different from society to society or from one ethnic group to another. Cultural differences exist because people who live in different places see the world, time and space in different ways. They eat different foods, build different kinds of houses, speak different languages or dialects, and greet each other in different ways (Hiebert, 1983).

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Cultural differences can lead to misunderstanding, as people move from one culture to another, particularly when the same behavior has a different meaning in the new setting (Hiebert, 1983). In other words, cultural differences can cause conflict when two cultures come into contact. Conflict is often caused by a clash of values. Furthermore, cultural differences can be barriers to communication (Nida, 1976).

Communication is an element of culture. It derived from the Latin word "communicare", meaning to share with or to make common, as in giving to another part or sharing your thoughts, hopes, and knowledge (Jandt, 1998). Intercultural or cross-cultural communication are often used interchangeably, which is an interdisciplinary field of research that studies how people understand each other across group boundaries of various sorts: national, geographical, ethnic, occupational, class or gender.

Intercultural communication can be defined as face-to-face interaction or communication between members of different cultures (Samovar, 1980; Jandt, 1998). While cross-cultural communication is defined as communication (verbal and non-verbal) between people from different cultures and is influenced by cultural values, attitudes and behavior, and the influence of culture on people's reaction and responses to each other (Levine & Adelman, 1993:xvii-xviii).

Teaching Cross-Cultural Understanding

Cross-Cultural Understanding is (CCU) one subject taught by the English Department of Pasundan School of Higher Learning and Education in the seventh semester. CCU can be defined simply as a comprehensive way to examine similarities and differences between L1 culture and the target culture. It is a basic skill that the students need for developing an intellectual and emotional appreciation of cultures other than their own.

Students in the English Department will study the CCU subject as one main core in the curriculum.This subject is designed to introduce and help the students understand some basic concepts dealing with their own culture and the culture of the target language. Since the students mostly have communication with the people from these countries, the popular cultures discussed in CCU are those from England, United States and Australia. Many books used in Indonesia are categorically oriented towards these countries.

Kramsch (in Singhal, 1998) states that in order for learners to understand a foreign culture it has to be compared with their own culture. Interactions they have with native speakers, or texts for that matter, will require them to construct their own meanings. Rather than having teachers simply transfer information about people and their culture, non-native speakers should have opportunities to make their own meanings and reflect both the target culture and their own. Fortunately, while teaching the CCU subject, I was accompanied by an Australian-English native speaker, Mr. Reijerink, who led some sessions particularly those

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discussing the target language culture and culture shock and adjustment. His presence in the class helped the students gain a clear understanding of his regional Australian culture and he provided exposure to the English language itself.

In addition, some relevant principles from Brown (1994, p. 24) were also applied to the teaching context and situation. Here are the principles:

a. Discuss cross-cultural differences with your students, emphasizing that no culture is "better" than another, but that cross-cultural understanding is an important facet of learning a language.

b. Include among your techniques certain activities or materials that illustrate the connection between language and culture.

c. Teach your students the cultural connotations especially of the sociolinguistic aspects of language.

d. Screen your techniques for material that may be culturally offensive.

e. Make explicit to your students what you think may be culturally offensive.

After studying this subject the students are expected to understand the basic concept of culture related to teaching and learning and language, be aware of cultural diversity within the English speaking countries, be familiar with some differences and similarities between the TL culture and their native language culture; understand the concepts of cultural conflict and adjustment, and be familiar with some specific patterns of communication and use the TL culture appropriately. Learning activities include lectures, discussions, student performances of scenarios for specific cultural issues, and table manners.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence refers to a set of congruent attitudes, practices, policies, and structures that come together in a system or agency to enable professionals to work effectively with members of culturally distinct groups in a manner that values and respects the culture and worldview of those groups (Hanley, 1999). The attainment of cultural competence is an important prerequisite for effective teaching. One approach to promote cultural competence is through training and education. Hanley (1999) defined cultural competency as the ability to work effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being served (p. 10).

In this research, the cultural competence discussed is based on and adapted from Pedersen's Conceptual Framework for Developing Cultural and Cross Cultural Competence (1994) and Cross Cultural Competence Model (1989). This model is called a Tripartite Developmental Model (Pedersen, 1994) to promote cultural and multicultural understanding among practitioners. These competencies include the domains of: awareness, knowledge and

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skills. In addition, Cross (1989) emphasized three critical elements in the model of cultural competence: 1) self-awareness; 2) culture-specific knowledge; and 3) skills promoting socio-cultural interactions by individuals. Each domain builds successfully on the previous one; mastery of an earlier domain is necessary before proceeding to subsequent domain.

The awareness domain competency involves recognition of one's own biases as well as awareness of the socio-political issues that confront culturally different youngsters. Competencies in the knowledge domain involve the acquisition of factual information about different cultural groups. Finally, competencies in the skills domain involve integrating competencies in the previous awareness and knowledge domains in an effort to positively impact culturally distinct children.

Table 1 Cultural Competence Model

Cross' Cultural Competence Model	
Cultural Destructiveness	Destructive attitudes, policies and practices towards diverse cultures and individuals within an organization
Cultural Incapacity	Extremely biased organization and individuals in the dominant group. Oppressive policies and stereotyping. Decisions and actions fear-based. Disproportionally in resource allocation, discriminatory hiring practices, subtle unwelcoming messages, lower expectation for culturally diverse.
Cultural blindness	Ethnocentrism in policies, practices, and attitudes. Philosophy: "I don't see colour. We are all the same." Cultural knowledge lacking.
Cultural Pre-competence	Proactive organization and individuals. Acceptance and respect for differences, cultural assessment, ongoing professional development, organizational adaptation.
Advanced cultural competence	Culturally proficiency with integration of culture-based models and practices. Assertive and proactive agenda and programming.

Adapted from Pederson (1994) and Cross (1989)

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Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative case study in which the researcher sought to construct a description of the total phenomena within the context (Maxwell, 1996; Cohen and Manion, 1989; Merriam, 1988) of one research site (Nunan, 1992) combined with three data collection techniques (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1988; Silverman, 2005).

1. Participants

Participants of the study were fourth year students of the English education department enrolled in the cross-cultural course during their seventh semester. The aim of the study was to answer the following research question:

How does teaching the Cross Cultural Understanding subject to the fourth grade students of English department of Pasundan School of Higher Learning and Education enhance their cultural competence?

2. Measurement and Data Collection Design

In this study, the measurement and data collection design were: A. Student questionnaires; B. Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist; and C. Classroom observations.

A. Student questionnaires consisted of twelve questions in the form of an open-ended structure. They were used to obtain the data from students' perspectives on how they learned the CCU subject and their opinion about the subject.

B. Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist was taken from the Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society Canada (2007) as a tool to explore three areas of student cultural competence: skills, knowledge and awareness. Its purpose is to help the students to consider their skills, knowledge, and awareness of themselves in during interactions with others. Its goal is to facilitate recognition of what they can do to become more effective in diverse working and living environments.

C. Classroom observations were conducted almost the entire semester to analyze the theme of the materials taught in the class and students' responses toward the classroom discussions and interactions.

3. Analytical design

In this study, the researcher used several data analysis techniques. Data from students' questionnaires were analyzed based on the theoretical framework and emerging themes; then data were organized and coded based on the themes.

Next, data from students' Cultural Competence Self-assessment Checklist were analyzed by calculating the students' answers on the checklist in the three areas of awareness,

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knowledge, and skills. The right column provided the answers: "Never" by 1, "Sometimes/ Occasionally" by 2, "Fairly Often/Pretty well" by 3 and "Always/Very Well" by 4. The results of the calculations were presented in a table, then they were divided by the total number of the questions and the total number of the participants who filled in the checklist to determine the average score for each area.

Lastly, the data from classroom observations were presented in a table together with descriptions of classroom activities, techniques and the teaching materials. These three analysis techniques were used to triangulate the findings from the emerging data.

Results

This section reports the findings from data analysis to answer the research question. Firstly, data from students' questionnaires were presented in the form of the table below:

A. Data from Students Questionnaires

Ten respondents completed the questionnaire, and the results of the coding were presented in the table below:

Table 2 Data from Students' Questionnaires

No	Categorization	Respondents									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	The importance of cultural competence	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V
2	The reason why we should have cultural competence:										
	-Multicultural background		V	V							
	- Cultural knowledge	V					V		V	V	
	-Cultural awareness				V						
	-Teaching English					V					
	-Cultural skills							V			V
3	The importance of CCU										
	-Very important	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V
4	The reason why we should learn CCU:										
	-Understand different cultures	V	V					V	V	V	V
	-Different language			V							
	-Cultural skills				V	V					
	-Additional knowledge							V			
5	The most interesting topic in CCU:										
	-Culture shock	V	V	-	V	V	V	-	V	V	V

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Table 2 Data from Students' Questionnaires (Cont.)

No	Categorization	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	Classroom activities that help the students understand cultural differences:										
	-Classroom discussion		V			V					
	-Table manner	V									
	-Classroom presentation				V						
	-Watching movies					V	V			V	
	-Cultural performance							V			
	-Song/Music								V		V
6	The advantages of learning CCU:										
	-understand cultures from different part of the world		V					V	V	V	V
	-verbal/non verbal communication	V									
	-know how to behave in different cultures					V		V			
7	The contribution of CCU to the students as English teacher candidates:										
	-Expressing ideas in English properly	V									
	-Cultural knowledge		V			V	V	V	V	V	V
	-The Use of English language				V						

B. Data from Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist

Table 3 Data from Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist

Respondents (R)	Awareness	Knowledge	Skills	Total
R1	4x2, 3x3, 2x4= 25	1x1, 3x2, 5x3, 1x4= 26	2x1, 4x2, 4x3= 22	73
R2	3x2, 5x3, 1x4= 25	2x2, 4x3, 4x4= 32	3x2, 3x3, 3x4= 27	84
R3	3x2, 3x3 = 15	8x2, 1x3, 1x4= 23	3x1, 2x2, 5x3= 22	60
R4	6x2, 1x3, 2x4= 23	5x1, 2x2, 2x3, 1x4= 19	5x1, 2x2, 1x3, 1x4= 16	58
R5	1x2, 7x3, 1x4= 27	3x3, 7x4= 37	1x2, 5x3, 4x4 = 33	97
R6	1x1, 2x2, 2x3, 4x4= 27	1x2, 2x3, 7x4= 36	1x1, 2x2, 3x3, 3x4= 26	89
R7	1x1, 3x2, 2x3, 3x4= 25	2x1, 3x2, 2x3, 3x4= 26	2x1, 4x2, 3x4= 22	73
R8	3x2, 3x3, 3x4= 27	1x2, 4x3, 3x4= 26	2x2, 5x3, 2x4= 27	80
R9	3x2, 3x3, 3x4= 27	1x2, 4x3, 3x4= 26	3x2, 4x3, 2x4= 26	79
R10	4x1, 1x3, 4x4= 23	2x1, 1x2, 6x4= 28	3x1, 3x2, 4x4= 25	76
Average Score	24.2	27.7	24.6	76.9

C. Data from Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were conducted throughout the whole semester, the schedule of the teaching and learning process is presented in the table below:

Table 4 Data from Classroom Observation

Meeting	Topics	Technique	Description
1st 10 Oct'14	Syllabus overview	Explanation	Introduce course outline Discuss basic concept in CCU
2nd 17 Oct'14	Cross-cultural terms and Principles; The importance of CCU in the teaching & learning EFL	Explanation and discussion	Students can explain their understanding of CCU, the importance of CCU in the teaching and learning EFL
3rd 24th Oct'14	The Concept of Culture And the elements of	Group Presentation	Students present their presentation on the concepts of culture and the elements of culture
4th 31st Oct'14	Cross-cultural contact with English speaking people	Discussion with the Native Speaker of English	Students perform cultural simulation & discuss the concepts of multicultural country; raise as many as needed the questions about the habit, custom or culture of an English speaking country
5th-6th 7 Nov'14	Cross-cultural conflict and adjustment How to cope with CC conflict & to make adjustment with TL culture	Explanation Classroom discussion	Students perform cultural simulation and discuss the concepts of cross-cultural conflict and adjustment with the tar-get language culture
7th-8th – 21st Nov'14	Non Verbal Communication	Demonstration Discussion Watching movie	Students perform cultural simulation and discuss the concept of non-verbal communication
9th-10th 5th Dec 2014	Relationship and Acquaintances	Group discussion Watching movie	Students can identify and compare the the ways people of different culture Make human relationship
19th Dec' 14	Table Manner	Field trip to Harris Hotel	Students can identify and compare the way how people behave in Table Manner

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Enhancement of the sample of fourth grade students' cultural competence can be seen from the triangulated data. The data displayed in the tables above reveals the findings of this research and can be summarized into the following points:'

A. All students confirmed that cultural competence was very important for them as future English teacher candidates.

B. The CCU subject was very important in the development of their cultural knowledge, awareness and skills, particularly when they had to behave in multicultural situation.

C. Discussion with Mr. Reijerink, the Australian native English speaker, during some sessions in the classroom helped the students understand more about the target language culture.

D. As English teacher candidates, they stated that cultural competence was very important for them in teaching English.

E. Some techniques in teaching CCU such as classroom discussion, watching movies, cultural performances, and song or music brought the real world cross-cultural learning experiences into the classroom.

F. Analysis of data from the Cultural Competence Checklist Self-Evaluation confirmed the average score for each student, 76.9. The distribution of scores in each area were: a) cultural knowledge 27.7; b) cultural awareness 24.4; and cultural skills 24.6.

G. Analysis of data from classroom observation showed that the learning materials and the interactions in the classroom helped the students enhanced their cultural knowledge, awareness, and cultural skills during the learning process.

Conclusion and Discussion

There are some conclusions that could be drawn from the findings above: 1) the students' cultural competencies were enhanced after studying the CCU subject. Specifically the average score from the Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist was 76.9, distributed between cultural knowledge, cultural awareness, and cultures skills as 27.7, 24.4, 24.6, respectively.

These scores informed us that the students possessed quite good cultural competence, but it is also assumed that the more points the students have, the more culturally competent they are becoming. The rating scale is designed to help the students identify areas of strength and areas that need further development in order to help them reach the goal of cultural competence. We should remember that cultural competence is a process, and that learning occurs on a continuum and over a life time.

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As they are English teacher candidates, the attainment of cultural competence is an important prerequisite for effective teaching. Indeed, the average scores on the Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist indicate that students enrolled in CCU increased their cultural competence. As it is stated by Hanley (1999) promotion of students' cultural competence occurs through training and education.

In agreement with the Cultural Competence Model, the students' average scores revealed their current stage of cultural competence. It can be concluded that the students' cultural competence is exemplified by the cultural pre-competence stage in which the students form a proactive organization of individuals and they have acceptance and respect for differences, cultural assessment, ongoing professional development, and organizational adaptation.

In addition, the three areas tested in Culture Competence Self-Assessment Checklist are derived from Pedersen's Conceptual Framework for Developing Cultural and Cross Cultural Competence (1994) and Cross' Cultural Competence Model (1989). Students scored highest in cultural knowledge which reveals that the students have developed cultural awareness as the prerequisite for the other competencies. Each domain builds successfully on the previous one, such that mastery of an earlier domain is necessary before proceeding to subsequent domain (Cross, 1989).

The second conclusion is that the students' cultural competencies were enhanced after studying the CCU subject. All respondents (100%) agreed that CCU contributed to their understanding about culture, cultural differences and cross-cultural communication. Even the discussion with the Australian native English speaker in the classroom helped them to get clear understanding of the target language culture. In addition culture shock and the process of adjustment in a new culture was the most interesting topic during the class.

The students' understanding of culture and cross-cultural understanding subject were based on the theories that culture embraces a large number of definitions which shows its richness, dynamics and breadth as a concept. Robinson (1988) points to three categories of culture as follows: ideas (belief, values, institution) behaviors (language, gesture, custom/habit, foods) and products (literature, folklore, art, music, artifacts). The categories of behaviors and products reflect a notion of culture as an observable phenomena. On the other hand, the category of ideas reflects a notion of culture that is not observable; something which is internal but can also be explicitly described.

Since Indonesians are multicultural people, learning other cultures and comparing them with their own culture has helped the students understand the target language culture (Kramsch in Singhal, 1998). Moreover, the interactions with the Australian native English speaker helped them construct their own meanings. This has been a good opportunity for the students to make their own meanings and reflect both the target culture and their own.

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Suggestions

The findings from this study are a meaningful contribution to teaching CCU which helps the students understand culture, cross-cultural differences and communication and cultural competence. Relevant to this, there are some suggestions:

For the students:

The students can develop their cultural competencies as they experience lifelong learning. For specific cases, they can practice in stimulated exercises in order to develop their cultural competencies by bringing cultural exposure into the classroom for the specific purpose of teaching the target language culture. Since cultural competence enhancement is not static, the students' interaction in multicultural life, their roles as English teacher candidates, and their life learning experiences will help them become more mature and will lead them to the level of cultural competence proficiency.

For other researchers:

From this study, it is recommended other researchers conduct more elaborate and deeper investigations in cultural competence by using a cultural competence continuum as the standard for teaching CCU. It is also suggested that other researchers conduct some studies which focus on how to develop a training program for specific students using specific techniques or models for teaching CCU to enhance the students' cultural competence.

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