

Enhancing Indonesian EFL Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence: A Digital Literacy Project

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Abstract: Misunderstanding during communication, especially with learners from different cultural backgrounds, might happen easily in this digital era. However, it could be avoided by having intercultural communicative competence. This study, therefore, was intended to examine EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence through a Digital Literacy Project. It employed a descriptive qualitative design as it analyzed the learners' intercultural communicative competence through non-numerical data. The project involved 25 EFL learners taking Interculturality in Language and Literary Studies subject in one of the Islamic universities in Malang, Indonesia, in 2018 academic year. The data were taken from their interpretation reported in the video and from the questionnaires (reflection sheets). After taking the data, it was revealed that through this digital literacy project, learners' intercultural communicative competence were increasing, as most of them were understanding of intercultural relationships through others' experiences and experiencing situations similar to what their peers had. They were also able to position others in no different place from themselves, which indicated that they had had higher intercultural communicative competence.

1 INTRODUCTION

The interrelation between language and culture in foreign language learning has become the subject of discussion in many studies (Crozet, 1997), (Kramsh, 1996), and (Seidl, 1998). The language determines, expresses, and communicates one's culture (Seidl, 1998). Therefore, in language learning, the study of culture—either one's culture or the target language's culture—is inevitable. Studying culture will help learners to have a better understanding of their own culture and others' culture, and to be wise in facing the differences. In addition, the integration of culture in a language class is presumed not only to enhance the learners' language proficiencies but also to advance learners' intercultural communicative competence, which will prepare them to interact with people from various cultures in this global world (Seidl, 1998).

In this globalization era, the universities all over the world have been challenged to include the teaching of culture in language classes. Accordingly, intercultural communication and competence among foreign language learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms should be prioritized

(Murcia, 2007). This case also happens in Indonesian EFL classes, which often consist of multilingual and multicultural learners, involving the interaction between Indonesian EFL learners and international students from non-English-speaking countries, resulting in misunderstandings. To avoid these misunderstandings, intercultural communicative competence should be introduced to the learners.

However, today's learners are not very much the same as language learners from several decades ago. Current language learners are parts of digital natives, considered as "native speakers" of the digital language of computers, video games and the world wide web (Prensky, 2001). As a consequence, one of the most effective ways to promote intercultural communicative competence for this generation is through digital literacy project. Digital literacy facilitates the learners to involve in a digital-based project encouraging them to be able to learn about beliefs, values, issues of people from different language and cultural background (Galante, 2014). Video projects, a final product of the digital literacy project, are also able to attract the learners' attention as it provides audio and visual, enabling them to discover the dimension and realms of different

cultures from different areas (Galante, 2014) and (Early, 2011). Moreover, the video projects can be developed and uploaded online. As one of the most popular video platforms, YouTube is easily accessible and believed to be the main mode to share the notion of intercultural experiences among the learners, as they are able to watch the platform without downloading it as well as reflecting the experiences of their peers at the same time.

Applying digital literacy project in EFL classes is advantageous for several reasons. (Daryin, 2014), for instance, say that a digital literacy project is intended to engage learners to use academic vocabularies and to increase their intercultural sensitivity based on the incidents they met and found in their environment. Moreover, reference (Galante, 2015) also highlights the importance of digital literacy project to stimulate the learners in sharing ideas from different cultural viewpoints rather than just having a discussion in one dominant culture.

There are many studies on intercultural learning and digital literacies have been conducted in Indonesian EFL classes. These studies tend to focus on various activities done in the EFL classrooms or a particular online digital media only. However, combining the intercultural experiences from both digital and real-life interactions are believed would give more added values to enhance the learners' intercultural communicative competence. This study, therefore, was conducted to investigate EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence through a digital literacy project in one of the Islamic Universities in Malang, Indonesia, in which there are many international students studying EFL in this university, varying from Lybia, Thailand, Sudan, and so forth. It was emphasized on the types of competence that might be enhanced and the digital technology affecting the enhancement.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of culture is described as a complex thought that is identified in the connection between the aspects of ethnic, values, customs, traditions, social and geographical area (Nieto, 2001). As learning EFL concerns with the learning of language and culture of the target language, learners are expected to understand and respect cultural diversity, since they need to learn different cultures from their own. Thus, having intercultural competence becomes the primary component in EFL learning.

Intercultural competence is defined as engaging the learners with appropriate and effective interaction with others from different cultural background (Sinicrope, 2007). Moreover, (Byram, 1997) argues that intercultural competence is an ability to act and communicate with others, regardless of the speakers' different culture and origin. Thus, no matter what language is used, whether it is the speaker's native language or a foreign language, as long as the speaker has the aptness to be engaged in a conversation with someone or people who come from different cultural background without having any conflicts related to the differences, the speaker can be regarded as an intercultural competent speaker.

Intercultural competence is often compared to intercultural communicative competence, which is quite common because both competences are not too different from one another. According to (Byram, 1997), the difference of both terms relies on the language used for communicating and understanding other's cultural background, in which the latter term uses a foreign language. By using a foreign language in understanding other culture's values, language learners will be participating in a wider social network. At the same time, these learners will also have the capability to make a reflection on their own culture (Liaw, 1997). Hence, these learners will not only appreciate others' culture but also acknowledge their own culture.

Nevertheless, it is not easy to assess learners' intercultural communicative competence. Teachers have been challenged to decide whether their students have had the intercultural communicative competence or not. This is why a number of scholars have conducted studies to propose several models of assessing intercultural communicative competence (Bennett, 1993) and have categorized the models into five different types involving co-orientational (Deardorff, 2006), developmental (Jones, 2012), compositional (Toohey, 2012), causal (Toohey, 2012), and adaptational (Mayoral, 2018). Among these models, co-orientational (Jones, 2012) is the most influential model in the context of EFL learning, as it guides the teachers to implement interculturality in EFL classrooms. This model has a five-factor model of intercultural communicative competence, including:

1. Attitude: representing the learners' ability to give more respects and values to other rather to themselves, which is indicated by being open and curious about others. It is also indicated by the trust given to other cultures rather than just believing one's own.

2. Knowledge: relating to the learners' understanding of the rules for individual and social engagement both of their own culture and those from other cultures.
3. Skills of interpreting and relating: describing and connecting events, celebrations, and documents of other cultures to their own culture.
4. Skills of discovery and interaction: allowing the learners to learn new knowledge and information about other cultures during the interaction. The process includes the background knowledge of learners.
5. Critical cultural awareness: describing learners' ability in using their perspectives of their own culture compared to other cultures as evaluation.

The main purpose of incorporating these five-factor model to assess learners' intercultural communicative competence is for learners to identify misunderstanding, justify the interpretations of the conflicts and avoid such misunderstanding (Galante, 2015).

EFL learners should be exposed to interact in intercultural communication to practice their intercultural communicative competence. One of the prospective efforts to develop their intercultural communicative competence is by asking them to join a project reflecting beliefs, values, ideologies, and issues of others from different linguistic and cultural background (Galante, 2015). Since the 2000s, the project addressing culture in EFL learning is shifted into the digital one, namely digital literacy, as it is believed to get learners involved in more communities from various cultures all over the world (Galante, 2015). Besides, it will be easier to draw learners' attention on accomplishing such project if it is put in a digital form since 2000s' learners are digital natives.

Digital native is defined as an advance practices training the learners to make, share, and understand knowledge and information in digital spaces (Hafner, 2015). In higher thinking level, it is not limited only in using all digital tools, i.e. computers, mobile phones, cameras, recorders; but also involving some aspects of social dimension, i.e. people's relationships, and interactions (Jones, 2012). Among other digital projects, video and movie projects have been considered as the most innovative one in EFL learning context; thus, they become very popular as types of digital projects.

In recent years, young learners are exposed to an easiest accessed channel of web 2.0 associated applications which enabling them for uploading and sharing videos. This platform is well-known as YouTube. It was started on February 15, 2005, and it

has become one of the fastest growing websites until now. Since 2013, the visitors of YouTube have reached more than 1 billion monthly, the video clips are viewed over 100 million daily, and about 65,000 new videos are uploaded every 24 hours (Mayoral, 2018). Considering this busy traffic, YouTube is believed as the fastest media to share the video project prepared by the EFL learners, indicating that their reflections on intercultural encounters can be learned and enjoyed by people from diverse cultures all over the world.

Regarding those theories, a number of studies has explored digital literacy in the context of intercultural learning among EFL learners. (Elboubekri, 2017) showed that the majority of learners exposed to more engaged cultural learning after using digital technology in the classroom. Another previous study proved that the enhanced competencies by the use of digital technology indicated the learners' awareness of their attitudes and it would also show them how to see others' (Wendy, 2013). Other studies also directly stated that using digital technology to produce videos facilitated learners to interact with many people from different cultural backgrounds both in the classrooms and in bigger communities (Toohey, 2012).

Moreover, another study (Spires, 2012) also proved that through movies project, "language learners will learn how to use their linguistic, cultural, visual, gestural, and material aspects to be delivered to the targeted audience so that it brings them to the higher level and is developing their critical reflections of literacy". Other studies also presented that the possible and valuable activities combining both linguistics and cultural skills are through YouTube editing; it included the process of video subtitling, creating soundtracks, captioning, and sometimes transcribing (Brook, 2011) and (Terantino, 2011).

These previous studies have informed us that the use of digital technology, especially YouTube, might enhance the learners' digital literacy and intercultural communicative competence.

3 METHODS

A descriptive qualitative design was applied in this research as it analyzed the students' intercultural communicative competence through non-numerical data. It involved 25 EFL learners of an Islamic university in Malang, Indonesia, in 2018 academic year taking Interculturality in Language and Literary

Studies subject from April to May 2018. As a final assignment, the participants were required to do a two-week digital literacy project, in which they were expected to produce a 30-minute video reporting as a result of the interviews they conducted previously. Both interviews' and reports' topics were related to their intercultural communicative competence experiences. The interviews and reports were conducted in English. The videos, then, were uploaded on YouTube.

There were some steps taken for finishing this digital literacy project (Galante, 2015):

1. Warming up: the explanation about the digital literacy project was given to the learners. After being familiar with the procedures of making the video, the students brainstormed ideas on topics they wanted to explore. They also designed the concept of the video. This step was recommended to them to enhance their intercultural relationships and predict the findings they might hear from their interviewee.
2. Scriptwriting: writing scripts were conducted in two phases. The first phase was preparing the open-ended interviews and the second one was preparing the analysis for their reports, which was done after the interview was conducted. To do the analysis and report, students should use their background knowledge. They were also suggested to do an internet research.
3. Video recording: the recording consisted of two steps. The first step was recording the video when students were interviewing their friends on intercultural encounters. The interviewees should be the Indonesian EFL learners at the same university. However, they should not be involved in the project. While the second step was done after the interview process was finished. This step was called the report or interpretation.
4. Editing and uploading the video on Youtube: the learners were well-informed about the video editing software, such as YouTube editor, Movie Maker, and so on. Most of the students had the digital skills to edit the video. For those who did not have such capability might learn the editing tutorials on YouTube. They were not allowed to hire someone else outside the group to help them with the video editing.
5. Watching and reflecting: on the last week of the project, the students were gathered in class, asked to visit other group's YouTube channel, and watched their friends' videos. After watching the videos, each student was asked to answer the questionnaire of reflection sheet distributed to them beforehand.

The learners' statements in the videos and their explanations in the reflection sheets were the data of the research. Finally, the data were analyzed using the theory of intercultural communicative competence (Jones, 2012).

4 FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This research undertook an issue of intercultural communicative competence through a digital literacy project among EFL learners in an Islamic higher institution in Malang, Indonesia. The 25 participants of this study worked in a group of four or five. However, at the end of the project, there were only four videos uploaded on YouTube and 23 reflection sheets (questionnaires) collected. Those 4 videos reported the results of interviews with Indonesian EFL learners; 2 videos described the intercultural encounters with Lybians (video A and video B), 1 video with a Thai (video C), and the rest with Australians (video D). In addition, the 23 reflection sheets consisted of the participants' answers regarding their participation in the digital literacy project.

4.1 Indonesian EFL Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence

From the videos and the questionnaires, the EFL learners presented some models of intercultural communicative competence. The first model discussed by all four videos was the attitude. Most of the participants talked about attitude from the aspect of openness. Video D, for example, described the learners as open and welcome people. The Australian learners in an exchanged program said that Indonesian learners loved to greet and initiate conversation, which was different from other foreign learners. Being welcome was another attitude shown by the Indonesian learners. In many occasions, they asked the foreign learners to hang out with them and visit their houses.

In contrast, 3 other videos illustrated attitude from different perspectives. Most EFL learners were not yet ready to suspend disbelief about other cultures. In video A, there was an intercultural encounter between one of Indonesian EFL learners and the Lybians. The learner asked the Lybians about the way they do their prayers. It seemed that the Indonesian was difficult to accept different perspective in term of religious aspects. The

Indonesian even asked judgemental questions which showed that it was hard for them to appraise the difference. Then the participants gave some comments in dealing with such situations, one of them was just asking the Lybians to pray together so that they would learn the differences. Here, the participants were able to offer an action preventing the conflicts.

The skill of discovery was another model of intercultural communicative competence discussed by 3 videos (video B, C, and D). The participants defined "discovery" here as the way to find or learn something new about other culture. As exposed by video C, Indonesian EFL learners might discover many new things about cultures from other countries, Thailand for instance. The participants mentioned that they experienced the same thing as the Indonesian EFL learners on new information about Thailand foods. Some of the foods could easily be found in Indonesia, such as tom yum goong (spicy shrimp soup) and pad thai (Thai style fried noodles). Moreover, she explained that learning about Thai foods might give some new insights into learning Thai culture, namely their healthy lifestyle.

Next, a skill of relating was the other model of intercultural communicative competence detected from the videos. The participants related the skill with the ability to interpret nonverbal communication. This was one of the points discussed by video B and video C. They concluded that Indonesian EFL learners, including themselves, needed to develop the skill of interpreting. Video B showed an interesting intercultural encounter by mentioning the example of how an Indonesian EFL learner reacted when the Lybian gave a book to him using his left hand. The Indonesian was angry and felt underestimated. Most Indonesians believe that the right hand is more polite to use when giving something to others. In contrast, Lybians consider both right and left hands are acceptable to use when giving something to others. Experiencing the same thing, they said that asking questions about what was happening could be one of the ways to avoid the misunderstanding.

The other model of intercultural communicative competence found in the videos was critical cultural awareness. The participants just realized that they had this model at the end of the project when they were looking at other groups' videos. Watching and listening to what happened to others led them to use their perspectives in viewing their own culture and compared it with other cultures. In this step, their abilities to explore and reflect values from other

experiences navigated them to learn more about how to respect others. Moreover, they also said that analyzing the intercultural communicative competence also made them appreciated their own culture better than before.

4.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence and Digital Literacy

This project focused on the use of digital literacies to facilitate the Indonesian EFL learners to express their intercultural communicative competence. The digital tools used by the learners were varied, from mobile phones to computers. In recording the interview and report, most of the participants used their digital cameras. After that, the videos were edited by inserting music, subtitles, images, and various transitions. The next step of the project, considered as the most interesting step, was uploading the video on YouTube. Before uploading the video, one of the representatives of the group should make a YouTube account. The last step is watching video streaming on YouTube. The use of digital tools in this project had successfully enhanced the Indonesian EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence. Based on the questionnaires, all of the participants reported were very happy and enthusiast participating in the project.

All of them also mentioned that YouTube was their favorite part of all. They said that it was interesting and enjoyable. At the same time, they eredit not get bored easily. During the process of scriptwriting, they learned and observed about the other cultures from YouTube. It helped them to know more about the aspects of cultures. The audiovisuals showed them real descriptions. Moreover, they also recognized some new vocabularies during this process. It was in line with the research result in (Brook, 2011) and (Terantino, 2011).

In addition, the participants should cooperate with other members of the group to share the tasks, which was mostly conducted online. Using websites and some search engines, googling topics, for instance, could be done by the participants to brainstorm the topic of their videos. They would also read, discuss, and select the common topics and definition of intercultural communicative competence. 20 of them said that finding some sources from the search engines helped them to learn much new information about cultures in such quite short times. There were many articles and texts providing such needed information about the aspects

of cultural differences and they could share the tasks with others and then discussed it. It is in line with (Bennett, 1993) stating that working an online project collaboratively increases the students' intercultural awareness.

Moreover, they were also exposed to conduct an autonomous learning as they needed to visit academic websites to download the intercultural communicative competence sources. (Elam, 2012) showed similar results. The online assignments given periodically during 8 weeks put the learners in online networking sites. Consequently, flexible independent learning facilitates them to find out others' background cultures easily and interesting audiovisual information provided online encourages them to know more about other cultures. In addition, they reported that scriptwriting was no longer frightening as they could use the online website to check their grammar. Even though not the most favorite digital technology; using other digital tools, social media, and emails during the project also gave them different experiences as it related to the cultural research they conducted to prepare the analysis.

To some extent, the increasing intercultural communicative competence could be seen from their steps to finish this digital literacy project. The steps required them to interpret and critique other cultures which then led them to have wider perspectives on other cultures. This was supported by the results of the research in (Galante, 2015), mentioning that being active in online media constructs larger intercultural communicative competence through criticizing and commenting digitally.

Joining this digital literacy project also enabled the participants to increase their intercultural communicative competence by accepting the differences, adapting with the new culture, and integrating their values into another culture. This was in line with the findings in (Hafner, 2015) that by joining this project, the learners are able to respect and appreciate other people from different cultural backgrounds. Having such competences also guided the participants in recognizing the difficulties faced by others from different cultures and lowering the possibilities of misunderstanding among people from different cultures. As it was shown in the research result (Galante, 2015) that integrating the competencies in the process of intercultural communication might help them to identify misunderstandings and avoid conflicts, stereotypes, and expand their worldviews.

Finally, involving the Indonesian EFL learners in this digital literacy project showed them the

importance of the art of interpreting, relating, and explaining. Such abilities would be able to open any possible boundaries prior to the interaction happens. Every time they learn something new, they do not have to judge or give a bad reaction to other people with different cultural backgrounds. The differences should be accepted with open arms. It also does not mean there is something wrong with them.

5 CONCLUSION

By referring to the aforementioned background, literature review, findings of research and the discussion on the result of data analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, by participating in a digital literacy project, the Indonesian EFL learners are able to enhance their intercultural communicative competence by showing each model of the competence. Although there are some components that could not be reached deeper, this project escalates them to a higher level of intercultural communicative competence.

Moreover, it also proves that the Indonesian EFL learners are able to reflect on others' intercultural experiences. The reflection, to some extent, invites them to be more flexible with any cultural differences. The flexibility might promote the feeling of accepting, adapting, and integrating with new and different cultural backgrounds.

As the implication of this study, other Indonesian EFL teachers are suggested to provide their students with some activities and projects concerning with the digital literacy project in developing learners' intercultural communicative competence. Furthermore, sophisticated digital tools and more reliable internet connection should be used by the learners to find more strategies to enhance their intercultural communicative competence.

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