

INDIVIDUAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN SHAPING THE INTERACTION BETWEEN GERMAN AND INDONESIAN EXCHANGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to better understand the dynamics of short-term student exchange as a form of educational tourism. The case study used in this study is the exchange program between a German Junior high school in Brunsbüttel and the Indonesian counterpart in SMPK 2 Harapan Bali. It focuses on the individual and cultural differences between students, and subsequently their behavior and attitude. It uses the qualitative method to analyze the cross-cultural exchanges already happening throughout and after trip from the German students to visit their Indonesian counterparts. It looks into the preparedness of the German students coming to visit Indonesia, and vice versa. It is interested in analyzing the international interaction through foreign exchange, to find the barriers in communication, interaction and understanding for each other. The study uses guided interview in the form of reflection with the German students after the exchange program in Indonesia.

Keywords: student exchange, educational tourism, German students, Indonesian students, cultural differences

INTRODUCTION

Student mobility through an exchange programs help creating awareness of the Internationalization in education system. Through student exchange, each student will be benefited not only credit transfer/point, but also cultural, language, specific need in academic achievement, experiences, and the most important is having extended networking with other students from other country.

Indonesia is not one of the 15 most popular countries for German exchange students [1] and according to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Indonesia remains at the lower bottom of the destination countries for German students and Germany remains at the lower bottom of the most popular destination countries for Indonesian students [2]. Even though Germany or Indonesian considered as lower bottom of the destination countries, SMPK 2 Harapan and High School in Brunsbuttel try to develop the mutual cooperation at each other, expecting that German-Indonesian partnership will grow, to get closer, to understand each other better and to improve communication.

The student exchange between SMPK 2 Harapan that is located in Banjar Untal-Untal, Dalung is having academic cooperation with High School in Brunsbuttel, North Germany has been established since 2016. The exchange started by teacher visits in 2016, then it shown the needs to share the opportunities to junior high school's students. The idea was confirmed and in 2019, the first project of sending students from each school has put into a reality.

The previous research in the paper named Expectations and Anxieties Relating to Short-Term Edutourism Exchange Program: Case Study of Indonesian-German Students Exchange was presented during ICOSI (International Conference on Sustainable Innovation) found that the expectations of students, parents and teachers can be clustered into personal development, learning about the language

and culture as well as the enjoyment of the trip [3]. As for anxieties, major concerns were the ability to cope with the language and culture, problems in everyday life as well as personal health. In between the groups, differences regarding the importance of some expectations and anxieties were observed. Additionally, the groups' international experience played an important role relating to their perception and had an influence on their expectations and anxieties. Therefore, this research aims to find the individual and cultural differences from both different nationalities students in shaping the interaction. This research was conducted during the visit of German students to SMPK 2 Harapan.

By knowing the individual and cultural differences of each student will ease to prepare students for the cultural differences before their arrival to keep the cultural shocks as low as possible as well as the subsequently behavior and attitude that match with country visited.

METHODS

To identify the impression of the other cultures and the differences, the research was conducted through mix method of qualitative and quantitative. Where the questionnaire was spread for 8 students from Indonesia, 8 students from Germany, and two teachers, each from Germany and Indonesia. The questionnaire data was collected to identify what the first impressions were like and identified the cultural differences. Then the cultural differences later were used to form the team building games. Teambuilding games was designed and implemented to increase student's ability working together and make each of them felt connected, released the tension, drop fears, make each of student more open.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

One of the bigger challenges of cross-cultural psychology and communications, there are any things could be influenced on people's behaviors and the ability to adapt living abroad. There is also awareness that certain behaviour are just easier to adapt to a new culture than others, it depends on how much people are connected to values.

There are five aspects that is observed and discussed through the activities, such as: a) Communication; b) Power distance; c) Group Orientation; d) Religion/believes; e) Optimism; f) Time; g) Food.

A. Communication.

People around the world are having their own characteristic in communicating to others [4]. The scales described by Erin Meyer include on how people communicating through cross cultural. There are two scale of communications: a) Low context, means that good communication is precise, simple, and clear. Messages are put into action and understood at how they implicate on something. On the other side, another scale of communication is b) High-context, means good communication is wordy, pay attention to the voice intonations, and there are layered messages that need to be interpreted well. Messages are both spoken and must be understood between the lines. It shown on the figure below:



Figure 1. Low Context vs High Context

Source : The book of "The Culture Map" by Erin Meyer (2014)

D. Religion/Believes

The belief in an all-powerful god is part of the official state philosophy in Indonesia. Atheism is therefore not allowed. Moreover, all major religions are also represented in Indonesia. 6 religions are officially recognized: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, Protestantism and Confucianism [6]. As a result, Religion is perhaps the most important thing for an Indonesian. You can observe that many Indonesians are very religious. they pray several times a day, visit the temples often and respect the holidays [7].

In Germany, however, atheism is not uncommon. The " Research Group on World Views in Germany " has found that in 2017, 37% of Germans did not belong to any religion and are therefore free of religious convictions. Furthermore, this research group also confirmed that church visits are becoming increasingly rare. According to statistics, in 2016, 16.8% never went to church, 43.2% rarely and 27.6% more times a year. Only 5% go to church more times a week [8].

E. Optimism

The Indonesians live more at the current situation, believe in solving problems, where the German student are more concern about what could happen. Indonesian are very optimistic because the impact of living around family shows that the help is always given in time of need.

F. Time

German people are seen as very punctual compared to the Indonesian people. But it was very interesting to see that the German students themselves would not rank themselves as more punctual than the Indonesian students. From 8 German students, 28,6% said that they are not more punctual than Indonesian students. It shown in Figure 3

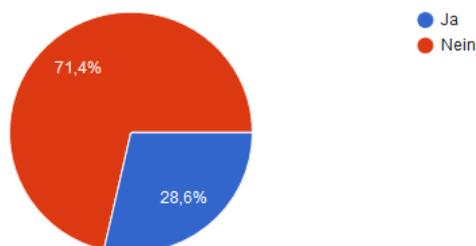


Figure 3: Do you think you are more punctual than your Indonesian exchange student?

Even though the time principal in Indonesia is getting better, in another side, Indonesian students sees punctuality is translated as requirement than a commitment. Indonesian students believed that time is not the most important as long as the goal is achieved, everyone doing their job is healthy and happy. However, German students sees schedules time is well respected and punctuality is more putting into commitment.

G. Food

In some sources eating is called Indonesian "volkssport" [9]. Indonesian people are used to eat spicy and eat a lot of rice. A meal without rice is often considered as – no meal. Indonesian food presents the harmony of aspect of life, almost every flavor is mixed (salty, spicy, sour, and sweet). Indonesian eat lots of food.

Whereas Germans don't used to eat spicy. Often the Germany which eat not spicy food in Indonesia still have the feeling that it is spicy. German students eat lots of pork and simple food such as breads and consume lots of dairy

product. Also the portion of the food is small compared to Indonesian. Seven out of eight students told that the families cooked not spicy food for the German students. The pie chart shows that parents were prepared and informed about important cultural differences and willing to make the say for the German students as good as possible.

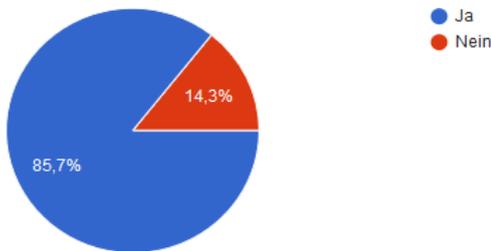


Figure 4: Had your host family extra cooked not spicy for you?

CONCLUSION

Both schools keep giving pre-departure preparation and always there are topics could be covered more. Based on the team building games and the interview as well as the questionnaire, there are suggestions to be made during the program as follows: a) To avoid misunderstanding in the communication process, the written details on all the programs need to be implemented. With the cultural of low context and high context, both cultural differences will be facilitated with well information; b) To balance the power distance, the team building games need to be implemented more. It also could be developed through outside school activities, like cooking, watching movie, and spending with the host family; c) Group orientation is needed prior to establish an exchange program. Due to different cultural background where individualism and collectivism exists, Group orientation is needed to be implemented in order to achieve the enjoyment of the study abroad activities; d) Required to have skype, Whatsapp video communication before coming to destination country, to introduce each other, culture, and habits. Therefore, students have the connecting feeling even before they see each other in person.

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