

COMMUNICATING IN FOREIGN LAND: CULTURAL SHOCK EXPERIENCES DURING INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY IN THAILAND

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Abstract

This study to investigate culture shock experiences faced by Indonesian university students during international community service program in southern Thailand. The participants of this research were five students of seventh semester who had completely conducted community service program in Thailand for about five months. They were Indonesian students of one private university in Bogor. The result of this study revealed that there were three aspects of students' culture shock faced by Indonesian Students University during international community service program. Those were language, cultural differences and social-academic attitudes. And also the students' strategies to deal with their culture shock were social support and accepting different cultural.

Keywords: *Culture shock, International community service program, Indonesian students*

INTRODUCTION

In this world, we have a various culture in every country. With this different culture people who have familiar with their cultural such as environment, people, place and others. In other word, as they visit to other country with new environment they suffer unfamiliar cultural which opposite for them. This condition or symptoms that they encounter is culture shock. The culture shock is as the traveler visits a new country then feel anxiety and strain because of facing different environment. Furnham (1993) defined that the culture Shock 'hypothesis' or 'concept' implies that the experience of visiting or living in a new culture is an unpleasant surprise or shock, partly because it is unexpected, and partly it may lead to a negative evaluation of one's own and/or the other culture. Generally, the

culture shock occurred in people who visit other county for studying, working and having vacation.

The most severe and costly cases of culture shocks occur to individuals who live outside of their native country for an extended period of time such as international students (Ernofalina, 2017). Differently, in Wahyuni (2019) defined that the transition from one culture to another could be a shock when cultural differences can play a significant part in the success of international teaching practice and community service. In this case, students who studying or doing teaching practice and community service experience new cultural environment. Prastowo & Suyono (as cited in Krisnawati, 2009) stated that community service program as a community

empowerment program done by students as a means of applying their knowledge systematically in the form of community development Programs. Nowadays, teaching practice and community service are not only in public area that is in Indonesia, but it also grows to International such as South Thailand (Wahyuni, 2019). In addition, Indonesian university students who are studying or doing community service program in abroad would face with new different cultural.

Wahyuni (2019) mentioned that the students' university is living in different place in southern Thailand. Each university student will be mixed with other difference university students. So that is why they will find a new atmosphere in this cultural change. Therefore, students should recognize the stages of culture shock in order to comprehend every phases. Winkelman (1994) mentioned that the four primary phases of culture shocks are typically considered to involve the following:

1. The honeymoon or tourist phase
2. The crises or cultural shock phase
3. The adjustment, reorientation, and gradual recovery phase
4. The adaptation, resolution, or acculturation phase

The honeymoon or tourist phase is the people have a good vibe as they arrive in new place. They expected that the environment, people, and place would be pleasant. Winkelman (1994) mentioned that it is characterized by interest, excitement, euphoria, sleeplessness, positive expectations, and idealizations about the new culture.

The crises phase is the people feel frustration and strain in couple days later after passing honeymoon phase. They it may start with a full-blown crisis or as a

series of escalating problems, negative experiences, and reactions. The crisis phase may emerge immediately upon arrival or be delayed but generally emerges within a few weeks to a month (Winkelman, 1994).

The adjustment and reorientation phase is as people start accepting new cultural environment. Winkelman (1994) stated that the culture begins to make sense, and negative reactions and responses to the culture are reduced as one recognizes the problems are due to the inability to understand, accepts, and adapt. This hostility evidently grows out of the genuine difficulty which the visitor experiences in the process of adjustment (Oberg, 1960). Although the problem is not end completely, they can manage it with comprehending any situation around.

The adaptation, resolution, or acculturation stage is people can accept completely cultural differences and they used to it. In addition, it is important to recognize and accept the fact that an effective adaptation will necessarily change one, leading to development of a bicultural identity and the integration of new cultural aspects into one's previous self-concept (Winkelman, 1994).

The culture shock cannot be avoided as people visit new places. However, it can be overcome by own self. There are three approaches to reduce psychological stress. Those are self-confidence and optimism, accepting new culture and seeking social support (Xia, 2009).

a. Self-confidence and optimism

In the field of social psychology, there is a term self-efficacy which means the conviction or belief of people that they can overcome the obstacles encountered. People with high self-efficacy usually believe that they have abilities to perform tasks well (Xia, 2009).

b. Acceptance of new culture

The second method is acceptance, which means accepting other cultures' values and behaviors as not good or bad but simply different. Once people are able to accept them, they will be more comfortable and able to minimize psychological stress (Xia, 2009).

c. Social support

Finally, seeking social support is also regarded as an effective way during the anti-stress process, which means people receive consolation, caring, encouragement, advice, approval and help from others around them. It seems that people who have friends to lean on deal with stress better (Xia, 2009).

Wahyuni (2019) revealed that there are six culture shock experiences faced by Indonesian university students in doing teaching practice and community service in the southern border province of Thailand. Those were language and communication problems, lifestyle and cultural differences,

social support and making friends, positive experiences, academic issues, and psychological issues. Also, there were study conducted by Poedjiastutie (2009) revealed about the culture shock experienced faced by foreign students. They stated that there are three points in academic shocks. Those are the teachers' role and attitude, poorly-organized program and the local students' attitude. Whereas, in social shocks found three aspects. Those are women-men relationship; community bonding, and different habits.

This study design to investigate culture shock experiences faced by Indonesian university students during international community service program in Thailand. The findings of this study will be useful for students to identify the problem they might encounter while doing community service program and to describe the strategies used to deal with different cultural environment.

METHOD

This research conducted to investigate the phenomenon of culture shock experiences faced by Indonesian students of university during their community service program in southern Thailand. Hence, the case study was used in this study. Mills and Gay (2019) stated that case study research allows a researcher to study phenomena that are not easily or appropriately studied by other research designs. In this case, qualitative research is designed to explore the human elements of a given topic, where specific methods are used to examine how individuals see and experience the world (Given, 2008).

Participants

Five students who had conducted the international community service program purposely selected to engage in

this research. They placed in southern Thailand for about five months. The participants consisted four female and one male. They are students in seventh semester in one private university in Bogor.

Data Collection

The instruments of the study that the researcher used to collect the data were through interview. The type of interview that the researchers made was that a qualitative interview. The researcher applied two questions for the interview. A voice recorder from Smartphone was used to prevent any words skipped during the interview. And also the researcher took a note after doing the interview for more facilitate the researcher to comprehend the data.

Data Analysis

After the data had been gathered from the interview, the researcher conducted several steps for analyzing the data. First, the researcher begun

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result from the interview, the researcher found out there are several culture shock experiences encountered by Indonesian students during their community service program in Thailand. The data presented as follows:

Culture Shock Experience Faced by Indonesian Students

For about five months they were living in Thailand, they experienced symptoms of culture shock. The researcher concluded three aspects of culture shock encountered them such as language, cultural differences, and social and academic attitudes.

Language

Culture shocks exist when people are transferred from one culture to another; linguistics shock would exist when the language environment is switched to another language environment (Fan, 2010). In this case, most of the participants from the interview mentioned that language becomes one of culture shock. They were difficult to communicate with others since people use Siam language (Thai language). Even though they lived where people can speak Malay, they did not understand what people talked. In other word, Malay language used in southern Thailand is different from Malay language generally. Three participants mentioned that as follows:

*P = Participant

P1: ...even they spoke English; I didn't understand what they said. And also when they spoke Malay, I didn't still understand.

transcribing the interview and reading the transcription repeatedly. Second, the researcher managed the data by grouping them into a specific problem. Last, the data would be concluded by researcher.

P2: Students of school that I placed cannot speak Malay. So, they must speak Siam (Thai language)

P3: ...even though I placed in around people can speak Malay, this language is so different than usual Malaysian speaks. So, I could not understand what they talked about. Besides that, people here live in the village which difficult to communicate with them and they can't speak English also.



Differently, two participants stated that the language was not a big deal because every county has different language. The participant (P5) mentioned that the language felt strange at first. Both the participants (P4) and (P5) stated that it was rare to find out people in Thai to speak English.

P4: it's not really big deal for me because every country must have different language. It's just about difficult to find out people can speak English.

P5: first time I arrived in there, I felt like weird about their language because I'm not used to it. at first, I didn't understand what they talked so it's hard for me to communicate with them and also difficult to find someone can speak English and Malay in my place.

Cultural Differences

The cultural transition from the country of origin culture to the host country culture needs to address three areas of adjustments, which are individual aspects, work related aspects, and environmental aspects (Holtbrügge, as cited in Siagian and Tike, 2019). The adjustments occurred since people are the different culture. Thus, the second culture shock faced by Indonesian Students University is cultural differences. The researcher concluded that the most of them tend to have a problem about the foods. They wondered about what it tasted on the foods. As they tried to eat some Thai foods, they said the taste had sour flavor. In this case, they experienced some symptoms as they tried the unfamiliar foods. They presented below.

P1: For the first time I tried the food “why the taste of this food like this?” it’s weird.

P2: I didn’t expect that this food would be tasted like this. I knew that Thai has a sour flavor in the foods but I shocked that the sour of the food would be very pungent. And also about the transportation, we couldn’t find transportation easily like in Indonesia.

P3: Honestly, I have a sensitive-stomach in food because of the foods there have a sour-spicy flavor.



In addition, there are different cases that faced by Indonesian students university. Participant (P4) and (P5) encountered the symptoms in culture shock. This symptoms can be categorized in four stages of culture shock such as honeymoon, crises or culture shock, adjustment and adaptation (Winkelman, 1994) In this states, the participants were in crises or culture shock phase that they felt frustration, uncomfortable, and having a strange environment. In addition, Suwankhong and Liamputtong (2015) defined that someone was no longer familiar with the geography of the community, the lifestyle of local people, the environment, and even the public transport system.

P4: I couldn’t sleep in the first early day because of the new place. The place from one place to other place is so far.

P5: Because of my place was close to the beach, I felt uncomfortable about the weather. It’s hot and windy. And also I shocked when they drunk cool mineral water or soft drink in the morning, maybe because of their weather is hot. But I’m not used to it.





In fact that the symptoms above defined by Jandt (as cited in Pradita, 2013) there are physical and psychological symptoms occurred by individuals. Physical symptoms are over concerned about cleanliness of food, bedding, and dishes; extreme stress on health and safety; fear of physical contact with anyone in the new country; great concern over minor pains and skin eruptions; craving “home cooking”; use of alcohol and drugs, and a decline in work quality. Meanwhile, psychological symptoms are insomnia, fatigue, isolation, and loneliness, disorientation, frustration, criticism of the new country, nervousness, self-doubts, irritability, depression, anger, and emotional and intellectual withdrawal.

Social and Academic Attitudes

Poedjiastutie (2009) mentioned that social shock and academic shock are two aspects in culture shock. Besides the language and cultural differences problems, the researcher concluded that the social and academic attitudes become students’ shock culture where they were living in Thailand. The participant (P2) stated that the people

looked friendly and they felt safe as they were in public. However, (P2) assumed that Thai people unlike walking so that they must use transportation. Whereas, (P3) encountered shock culture in academic attitude. Thai teacher would hit students who break the rules which different from Indonesia.

P2: I felt safe and comfortable living there because people are kind. In Thailand. I found that people didn’t charge parking fees. Sometimes they leave the key still on the motorbike in parking lot. However, one thing that I identified is Thai people are not used to walk. They always use transportation even the store near from their home.

P4: Sometimes when the students break the rules, the teacher must hit the students. Differently, in Indonesia we can’t do it.



How Indonesian University Students Deal with Their Culture Shock

Based on the interview, to manage and cope this culture shock Indonesian students university have their own strategies. In these strategies, there are 2 points: social support and accepting different culture.

Social Support

The first strategy which can help them to deal with new cultural environment is social support. Social support plays a role in reducing possible negative side effects of major life events and daily hassles (Lafreniere & Cramer as cited in Xia, 2009). Since the language become difficult culture shock, students had to find a way to can communicate with local people to get the information. Thus, three participants stated that they were helped by stakeholder and friend who could speak English and Malay to communicate.

P1: Luckily, in my place there were two students did the same community service program. They are from Yala, Thailand. So they could speak Malay, Thai, and English. so I always communicate with them in English or Malay.

P4: The headmaster helped me to communicate easily.

P5: I learn Thai language with teacher, or sometimes with students.



Accepting Different Culture

In the four stages of culture shock, one of them there are adjustment and adaptation. In this case, all participants encountered some symptoms of culture

shock. This phases (adjustment and adaptation) become strategies after facing in crises or culture shock phase. In other word, adjustment is as people start accepting new cultural environment while adaptation is people can accept completely cultural differences and they used to it. In addition, Sulaiman and Saputri (2019) defined that the foreigners or newcomers have got a positive behavior to the people of the new country they stay and the culture becomes more familiar. The participants revealed their strategies by accepting different cultural as follows:

P1: Because I always ate Thai food every day, so I get used to it.

P2: Adapting with new culture day by day. Sometimes if I felt homesick, we gathered with other students and we made Indonesian food, we much talked Indonesian and communication with family by via phone.

P3: Trying the food little by little, so I get used to it. For the language, I learnt Thai daily language little by little. And I get used to understanding about their language and situation. Needs more time to deal with all the culture shock that happened on us.

P4: Making the place as comfortable as possible and the room as our own room.

P5: Adapting with new cultural every day and it would be used to it.



CONCLUSION

The result of this study revealed that there are three aspects of culture shock faced by Indonesian Students University during international community service program. Those were language, cultural differences and social-academic attitudes. In this case, most of them tend to have difficulties in

new cultural environment. As for the students' strategies to deal with culture shock were social support and accepting different cultural. In addition, Indonesian Students University had their own strategies so that they were able to adapt the culture shock easily.

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