

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a wide-ranging description of the research. It comprises the background, formulation of the problem, operational definitions, aim of the study, and significance.

1.1 Background

Intercultural awareness is one of the essential things in learning English. This is related to learning English to enable students to master pure English and communicate with people from English-speaking countries (Ye Zi, 2015), especially in the era of globalization, which makes intercultural contacts a crucial factor (Zhao, 2011). However, Ye Zi further explained the biggest obstacles to successful communication failures, one of which is applying one's own culture to other people's cultures. This phenomenon is commonly found in EFL learners because they tend to judge other cultures based on their values and consider other people's cultures unacceptable (Belli, 2018). The same thing was found in the researcher's investigation results after conducting initial interviews in February 2021 with several EFL students from one of the universities in Indonesia regarding their perceptions of the existence of culture in learning English, especially in communication.

This phenomenon arises because of the relationship between culture and language, and culture affecting language in two ways, linguistic and pedagogical.

Linguistically, culture affects the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse-level of the language. Meanwhile, pedagogically, culture influences the choice of the language material (McKay, 2003). Furthermore, they always emphasize on elaborating each other because language reflects the values of a society's culture (Bada, 2019). Both are in one unit that must always be side by side because they have connecting threads that bind each other. Including when language is learned, culture must also be involved in it.

Involving culture in language learning is not limited to the reason for the relationship between the two. Still, they will also lose their crucial aspects if separated, and without a culture in language learning, learners cannot interpret the language embedded in that culture (Alptekin, 1993). Culture exists in language learning because language practice involves cultural practices in the real world (Risager & Chappelle, 2012). Therefore, without cultural engagement, language learners will have difficulty in adapting and negotiating, even understanding the native speakers of the language in the absence of cultural knowledge. In other words, language learners must be aware of the culture in the language they are learning, including learning English.

Since some of these statements have emerged, English learners must raise intercultural awareness to be good speakers of intercultural communication rather than being poor imitators of native speakers (Kramsch, 1998, cited in Byram, 2000). Intercultural awareness can also enable English learners to minimize the psychological problems they can encounter with cultural differences (Zhu, 2011). Furthermore, Zhu (2011) and Saharani (2020) also argue that intercultural

awareness can be used as a basis for communicating with people of different languages and cultures without losing their own cultural identity and to avoid some conflicts because of misunderstanding. Simply put, intercultural awareness is a skill that English learners must own.

This fact leads experts to pay attention to a study related to intercultural awareness. Saka, F.Ö., & Asma, B. (2020), in their research entitled “A study on developing intercultural awareness scale (ICAS) and examining ELT students’ intercultural awareness” found that English learners did not significantly change in their intercultural awareness according to learning achievement and even the frequency of their experience visiting other countries. However, significant changes were found only for those with "international experience." After conducting a quantitative study of 207 ELT students in a state university, they obtained this research, considering the extraneous variables like gender, grade, presence abroad, and the number of been abroad. This indicates that intercultural awareness still has to be their obligation and requires a clear continuation in learning English. It aims to find a significant change from both of the "international experiences" and from the basis of their learning in English.

The previous study's findings have triggered the researcher to be on the same topic by researching students’ intercultural awareness in English learning, especially communication. Considering that for previous research the experts focused on the quantitative study with the objective results being present or not and high or low the significance of intercultural awareness. Therefore, the researcher conducted qualitative research to get more coverage on how intercultural awareness

of EFL undergraduate students at the English Department in one of the universities in Indonesia, entitled “Exploring EFL Students’ Intercultural Awareness: An Empirical Evidence from Higher Education Context.”

1.2 Formulation of the Problem

The research question raised in this study is to identify, “How is the intercultural awareness of the EFL students in Higher Education context?”

1.3 Operational Definitions

There are some definitions related to this study as follows to avoid misunderstanding about the terms set out in this study:

1.3.1 Intercultural Awareness : The perceived knowledge of undergraduate English Department students at one of the universities in Indonesia about another country, a positive attitude towards emerging cultural differences, and the ability to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from the United Kingdom as an English speaking country.

1.3.2 EFL Students : Students from one of the universities in Indonesia who are specifically

studying English as a foreign language to improve their proficiency in that language.

1.3.3 Higher Education : English Department of undergraduate students at one of the universities in Indonesia.

1.4 Aim of the Research

This study aims to find out the intercultural awareness of undergraduate English Department students in one of the universities in Indonesia.

1.5 Significances of the Research

In conducting this study, the researcher indeed considers various aspects such as:

1.5.1 Theoretical Uses : This study is expected to be an overview and reference for further research regarding EFL students' intercultural awareness in higher education context.

1.5.2 Practical Uses : This study is expected to motivate teachers and students to learn English without neglecting its culture. That way, the teacher and the students are expected to follow up accordingly in carrying out language learning to achieve the desired output.

1.5.3 Empirical Uses : Then, for the researcher, this study provides an empirical insight into the students' intercultural awareness and their understanding of the relationship between culture and language to

further improve English learning. More than that, this research is expected to enrich the researcher's writing experience to further enhance quality.