

ANXIETY AND UNCERTAINTY MANAGEMENT: LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AT DIPONEGORO UNIVERSITY IN SEMARANG

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore and interpret the significant challenges experienced by international students and the strategies used to cope with them in managing their anxiety and uncertainty in intercultural communication settings at Diponegoro University. Phenomenological Analysis. Through their lived experiences, we realized that most participants were naïve about the practice of the Indonesian language and Indonesia/Javanese culture some of them faced anxiety and uncertainty challenges on their arrival and during their initial interaction, and adaptation process challenges based mainly on language anxiety and uncertainty; new culture and environment in communication and interaction with the inside and outside the campuses. They coped with their anxiety and uncertainty by accepting the host culture's lifestyle, and friendships, learning the Indonesian language, attending prayers at Mosques, hanging out with friends, and self-learning. Additional learning materials such as dictionaries, Google Translate, watching the news, books, family assistance, and listening to music were added to overcome their linguistic anxiety and uncertainty. The motivation from lecturers, classmates, and local people to learn a new language was valuable.

INTRODUCTION

Studying other locations, people, and cultures can be accomplished in various ways, but one of the most efficient is immersing inside another nation. Indonesia is one of the Asian countries visited mainly by international students through multiple

governmental programs. Such an environment provides them with a wonderful opportunity to improve their academic skills, gain educational degrees, and learn about geography, culture, humanity, and other topics. However, the nations from which these students originate, as well as their primary reasons for coming,

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are as diverse as their experiences while studying in Indonesia, particularly in their host universities' classrooms. Mostly challenges of all kinds are all they may encounter during their stay. In such a new environment, individuals may experience communication and interaction challenges when face-to-face contact with others. These challenges can be a source of panic, confusion, tension, fear, anxiety, and uncertainty that can exacerbate stuffiness in the process of developing relationships during the stay in a culture and environment (Khatimah & Kusuma, 2019). Some of these include challenges such as mastery of the language, and lifestyle changes that can impact overseas students' perceptions, but differences in culture may also shape transitions to the new living situation, such as a university setting (Kuhn, 2000).

Concerning that Hossain & Ali (2014) suggested that individuals (communities) reside inside diverse cultures formed of connections that determine who and what they are. This means people are divested of many of the instructions and signal that direct them towards their sittings when they confront cultural diversity (Weinberg, 2003). International students at Diponegoro University are indeed an illustration of a group that may feel bewildered and perplexed in their new living settings. They

not only reside in another nation with a variety of cultures, but they are still students at colleges with their very own distinctive identity inside the culture of a country. Meanwhile, international students are people who momentarily stay in a nation other than their home nation in order to engage in global education exchanges or activities as learners in this field (Talebloo & Basri, 2015). They come from a variety of backgrounds and have had a range of experiences.

Studying overseas programs offers them excellent opportunities for practical international education that is relevant to their academic, cultural, personal, and career aspirations (Hackney et al., 2012). Lin (2012) perceives global educational exposures as an opportunity to learn about diverse societies, acquire relevant experience, and broaden their education and professional knowledge. But as a matter of fact, several researches have shown that the obstacles faced by overseas students are distinct and are experienced differently. However, most have been clustered within the following five categories; namely 1) general lifestyle modification (rather, this is more like trying to adjust to food, getting reasonable and suitable accommodation, transportation, and coping with budgetary restraints.); 2) challenges in the classroom

(new educational system and setting); 3) English-language proficiency or local language casually used; 4) socio-cultural constraints; 5) personal psychological adjustment, like homesickness, loneliness, signs of depressions, anxiety/ uncertainty and other mental disorders (Tseng and Newton, 2002), (Norhasni Zainal, 2007); (Alavi & Shafeq, 2011). In addition, Sue, S., Zane, N., Hall, G. C. N., & Berger, L. K. (2009) argue that when members of one cultural group are coerced to follow a very different divers cultural style, it leads to conflict “ ... *they are likely to experience high levels of stress, a reduction in positive outcomes, lower self-esteem, anomie, and general demoralization*”.

Thus, foreign students at Diponegoro University may feel uneasy or unsettled because the student/teacher relationship's directions and roles, as well as the regulations and practices of the classroom, may vary from those they are used to in their native environments. Individuals (international students) who live and connect to a new cultural environment may undergo psychological disorders, including panic, anxiety, uncertainty, mental and physical health (Pietrabissa & Simpson, 2020), which can undermine whether an individual is capable of interacting and connecting to others conveniently (Yu et al., 2020),

(Edwards et al., 2016). We assume that international students are experiencing both uncertainty and anxiety in a new cultural environment. However, we do not know the extent of anxiety and uncertainty encountering international students in intercultural communication conditions at Diponegoro University in Semarang.

The accurate duty of this research work is to carry out interviews together with international students by means of which to comprehend international students' interaction with local people (lecturers, local students, or people). Exploring challenges encountered mainly by international students and recapping strategies used by them to cope with anxiety and uncertainty management theory would also be the concern of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative method with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. As a qualitative approach, Phenomenological Analysis demonstrates a concept's or phenomenon's common meaning for a group of people based on their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013).

In a broad sense, lived experiences are used to determine the universal patterns simply known as essences of the phenomena, as described by the research

participants (Draper-Lowe, 2016). The IPA analysis was employed to evaluate available information of one-by-one interview sessions to create a comprehensive description that can explain the participants' real mental and sociological realities. This research utilized a limited size of participant, as advised by the IPA (Rafique & Hunt, 2015). The subject of study was nine international students selected for the purposively chosen to relate to research participants who can intentionally investigate and interpret their personal experiences. The raw (primary) data was emanated from the results of in-depth interviews with participants who provided the targeted data during the data collection process. The secondary data, on the other hand was found through existing and related research such as books and scientific journals. The data collection was processed using in-depth interviews via smartphone records and M.S. Teams.

The data analysis was processed by categorizing the interview results into two segments: expectations before their enrollment and arrival and adaptation during their full-study programs at Diponegoro University in Semarang. Two major themes were explored during the data analysis according to the objective of this research, namely challenges those international students encountered along with recapping

strategies employed to cope with these challenges in managing anxiety and uncertainty. The data validity was checked by interpreting the data obtained through three main points: the comparison of observational data and interview data; the comparison of what the participants responded in public and private conversations; and the comparison of one's viewpoint with other participants (Yuliawati, 2019).

Conceptual framework

The expanding number of colleges in Indonesia that accept and host foreign students annually through various programs has resulted in greater cultural variety in other parts of the country. Such movement has been assigned to a growing need to understand the fostering better or inhibiting intercultural communication (Logan et al., 2015). Researches propose that the task of multicultural contact and learning is usually followed by discomfort and deep sorrow (Swift et al., 2014), exhibited as uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety (Tyng et al., 2017). Consequently, anxiety and uncertainty have indeed been suggested as variables that limit and contribute to aversion of cross-cultural participation.

During intercultural communication, and in the context of academic settings, many international students feel anxious

accompanying with grave impact, which is assumed to be caused by an experience of fear and negative evaluation, like being exposed, humiliated, or abandoned (Stephan et al., 2002).

In a broad context, anxiety is defined as an emotion marked by an experience of distress, trouble, and tension that an individual confronts, mainly when they will occur to themselves. Griffin (1997) defined anxiety as a feeling or emotion that arises when people do not feel secure or comfortable in communication and interaction situations. On the other side, Gudykunst and Hammer (1988: 112) describe uncertainty reduction as a mental construct related to individuals' ability to foresee and explain their own and others' behavior throughout encounters.

Several types of research achievement in the international education context using the theory of Anxiety and Uncertainty Management (AUM) support the literature review of this study. According to Ssemuddu (2020), the link among students' intercultural communication competence and sensitivity taking classes at the International Islamic University in Malaysia was investigated. He showcases factors that international students applied to manage their anxiety and anxiety when interacting with people from different identities, namely desire to engage with strangers, self-concept, reactivity to

strangers, social comparison of strangers, temporal procedures, moral contacts, and relationships with strangers. He also found that intercultural sensitivity allows individuals from the host culture to initiate conversations with international students from various backgrounds. In contrast, intercultural communication competence helps both interactants maintain communication contact in multicultural communities.

Khatimah & Kusuma (2019) explore how intercultural friendship may help international students from Zimbabwe cope with their anxiety and uncertainty while studying in a new culture. They identified several factors contributing to the anxiety and uncertainty experienced by international students from Zimbabwe while studying at Muhammadiyah Surakarta University: language difficulties, lack of information about the host environment, friendship, intensity of communication, and confidence in the host interaction, particularly interpersonal communication.

According to Maghfirah (2018), she indicates factors that Thailand students faced in minimizing anxiety and uncertainty in communicative interaction with members of the host culture, negatively affecting their relationships and academic progress, including language difficulties, cultural perception gaps, and dissimilarity in using

non-verbal communication. The author claims that these students used observation, learning the host language (Indonesian), and comforting new cultural customs to overcome anxiety and uncertainty. He also pointed out that personal characteristics such as cultural identity, motivation, knowledge, and abilities can also assist in their management of anxiety and ambiguity in communication situations.

For Rahmadaya (2020), he examines the challenges Mercur Buana university students faced who participated in student exchange programs in China, Korea, and Malaysia. The researcher demonstrates the four stages of cultural adaptation: honeymoon, cultural adaptation crisis, cultural adjustment process, and bi-cultural stage. However, he implied that during student exchange programs for Indonesian students from the University of Mercur Buana, understanding the cultures of destination countries helped them feel at ease and pay attention to local people's behavior in managing uncertainty and anxiety to achieve effective communication.

In the same vein, Chen (2009) explores how international students at Southwestern University struggle with efficient communication in English competence and gaining new information about American culture from faculty members. The research found in descriptive statistics that when

foreign students spoke with U.S. faculty members, they reported little self-perceived uncertainty, low self-perceived worry, and high self-perceived communication efficacy. According to bivariate and multiple regression analyses, he also asserted that when foreign students communicate with U.S. faculty members, their self-perceived uncertainty and self-perceived anxiety are highly related. Hence, he added that during such communication procedures, their self-perceived anxiety negatively predicts their self-perceived communication efficacy, although their self-perceived uncertainty does not. Their self-perceived English skill has a negative impact on their self-perceived uncertainty and anxiety. Also, he discovered that English competence and understanding of American culture are highly related to one another.

However, it is stipulated that Individuals' anxiety and uncertainty rise when they come into direct touch with other people from different categories (Yoshitake, 2002). In tandem, new cultural situations may produce and increase the level of uncertainty and anxiety, which may lead to incompetence in communication and interaction among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. The increasing anxiety and uncertainty in a new cultural environment can also create hardship in understanding other cultures and languages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study's results were interpreted from in-depth interviews using three major themes developed as follows: 1) Anxiety and uncertainty challenges including three subthemes; 2) Adaptation process challenges formed by two subthemes, and 3) Coping strategies grouped into two subthemes.

The first and second themes and their related subthemes explore and interpret the struggles international students experienced before their enrolment, amid their arrival and their study programs at Diponegoro University in Semarang. The third theme and its subthemes examine the coping strategies to international students' challenges in managing anxiety and uncertainty.

1. Anxiety and uncertainty challenges

Three themes were developed on challenges that encountered international students in regulating their anxiety and uncertainty at Diponegoro University in Semarang: 1) Disruption challenges 2) Language barrier challenges, 3) New language learning challenges 4) Adaptation process challenges

1.2. Disruption challenges

This subtheme discloses and reports obstacles that international students reflect about their new living environment before enrolment and during their first initial interaction at Diponegoro University in

Semarang. It also showcases how international students felt uncertainty and anxiety about their further study destination, which may be fulfilled with several struggles to adapt based on their expectations related to Indonesian people, their culture, food, religion, race, fashion styles, new education system, Referring to new language ability (Indonesian language), participants were asked in the interview questions if they had background verification about the Indonesian language before traveling to Indonesia. The results revealed that four participants were clueless about the Indonesian language except for one participant from Thailand, whose educational system incorporates the Indonesian language in her country. One of them said: *"...I didn't have any background about the Indonesian language specifically, but I knew that they are teaching by using the Indonesian language, but I have no chance to learn it in my country because there was no program given concerning Bahasa Indonesian previously"*

1.2. Language barrier challenges

upon their arrival at Diponegoro University in Semarang, all five participants had language barriers in their initial interaction and conversation with Indonesian/Javanese people both inside and outside the Diponegoro University Campuses in Semarang. This stresses difficulties in

speaking and communicating based on confusion, doubt, and stress-related poor grasp of both the local language (Javanese language), the national language (Indonesian language), and Indonesian/ Javanese culture during their first time in Indonesia. One of them stressed: “..., *I got a lot of challenges with communicating because I couldn't relate with my classmates, Indonesian people, and my lecturers. Speaking with them was a challenge because of my level of understanding of Bahasa Indonesia. Above all, this makes my level of interaction very challenging, and it's infringed in my communication skills such as speaking, understanding, and relating with the local people, classmates, and my lecturers.*”

1.3. New language learning challenges

language barriers connected to the lack of comprehension of the Indonesian language and culture. Interacting and communicating with Indonesian/ Javanese people were difficult for the fifth participant upon their arrival and their initial interaction in the host Indonesian/ Javanese culture. One of them expressed, “*I was a little bit frustrated because I saw the language as a handicap. My accent when speaking Indonesian was Arabic, and my friends considered it as funny. It was not easy, but I am that person who doesn't care what other people think of me. Outside of my classroom, I was trying to*

escape to speak Indonesia language when meeting those who didn't understand the English language.”

2. Adaptation process challenges

This second theme delves into the challenges that international students experienced in their adaptation process during their full-time study programs at Diponegoro university campuses in Semarang. Two subthemes or subordinate themes were developed, namely 1) New academic language anxiety and uncertainty, 2) Language anxiety and uncertainty.

2.1. New academic language anxiety and uncertainty

Each of the five research participants was nervous and unsure about what would happen in classrooms with their classmates and lecturers at the start of their studies. Each of the five participants has challenges with new learning materials, transitioning to a new academic system, learning new vocabulary and concepts, and lacking the ability to form friendships with individuals from a different culture. One of them stressed: “.... *I felt anxious and uncertain because I was coming to a new system of education and new culture which will be both new for me, and also getting to learn a new language along with new culture at my age makes me feel more anxious.*”

2.2. Language anxiety and uncertainty

Two participants encountered language obstacles during their intense study programs due to incompetence in speaking and writing abilities and a lack of understanding. In contrast, two others felt at ease with the new academic Indonesian language. However, one of the five participants who displayed the trait of uniqueness stated that he did not have any language anxiety or language uncertainty because he took an international English class. One of them said: “.... *the switch of languages for me was worrisome and anxious because it was a different teaching method and the words were also different. I had difficulties of understanding, pronunciation, and structure of the Bahasa Indonesia.*”

3. Coping strategies with challenges

This theme of adjusting or coping with anxiety and uncertainty for international students at UNDIP in Semarang is divided into three subthemes: 1) Coping with anxiety and uncertainty in the initial interaction, 2) Adjusting with the adaptation process during their study programs. These three subthemes reflect how international students cope with their anxiety and uncertainty during their early integration with Indonesian/Javanese people and their adaptation process in their

study programs at Diponegoro University in Semarang.

3.1. Coping with anxiety and uncertainty in the initial interaction,

This subtheme describes international students' strategies to cope with their anxiety and uncertainty when interacting with Indonesian/ Javanese people for the first time. Based on the answers of the research participants in their initial integration in managing anxiety and uncertainty, the first participant used acceptance of Indonesian/ Javanese culture and lifestyle, as well as interaction with people in different places. In contrast, the second participant used two methods: learning and understanding a new language (Indonesian) and making friends with Indonesian/ Javanese people. The third participant practiced his management by attending prayer moments or sessions at Mosques and keeping a safe distance from women in order to respect his Arabic or Islamic culture. The fourth participant applied the strategy of hanging out or gathering with her Indonesian friends, and the fifth participant practiced new language acquisition through self-learning using Google translate. One of them said: “*The first strategy I implemented was acceptance; I made up my mind to accept the Indonesian culture, food, and the lifestyle of the people. Another strategy was I had a robust strategy*

to interact with different people in the streets, marketplaces, classmates, etc. I did all of this to be able to communicate with different people so I can be able to practice the language.”

Motivation in learning the Indonesian language from lecturers, classmates, and local people (Indonesians/ Javanese) also contributed to helping them to overcome challenges encountered in managing their anxiety and uncertainty.

3.2. Adjusting with adaptation process during their study programs

This subtheme describes international students' strategies to manage or overcome their language anxiety and uncertainty during their study programs at Diponegoro university campuses. As stated in the research interview answers, the first and second participants applied a similar strategy to their initial interaction with Indonesian/ Javanese people. Still, the only things they added to manage their language anxiety and uncertainty during his study program were using learning materials such as dictionaries, google translate, books, and watching the news, which the fourth participant also used. The third participant reduced his linguistic anxiety and uncertainty with the help of his family. The fifth participant employed a method of listening to music and making friends. One of the participants said: “...

what I always do to improve the Indonesian language is watching news and movies in Indonesian, read Indonesian books and chat with Indonesian friends.”

The study aimed to shed light on anxiety and uncertainty, as well as adaptation process challenges those international students encountered, and recapping strategies used to cope with these challenging factors in managing anxiety and uncertainty while studying at Diponegoro University in Semarang. Four subthemes, namely disruption challenges, language barriers, and new language learning challenges, were connected to the central theme of anxiety and uncertainty to elucidate several challenges international students faced before their arrival and during their initial interaction with Indonesian/ Javanese people (lecturers, students or people).

4. The Discussions of the Results

Considering the disruption challenges, most research participants felt anxious and uncertain due to the obstacles centered on their expectations related to Indonesian people, their culture, food, religion, race, fashion styles, and new education system. A study carried out by Wright & Schartner (2013) among international students enrolled in different universities and programs in the U.K. reported that international students undergo frustration

and stress while interacting with natives, faculty members and during their initial interaction. Besides, international students face other academic experiments while studying in the host country by mostly feeling lonely, homesick, and stressed. Referring to language's barriers, all five participants faced obstacles in speaking and communicating in their initial based on confusion, doubt, and stress-related poor grasp of both the local language (Javanese language), the national language (Indonesian language), and Indonesian/ Javanese culture during their first time in Indonesia. It is claimed that one of the obstacles that overseas students encountered was language barriers, which play an essential role in communication and earning good academic marks (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005). A study on language barriers in Airlangga showcased that language barriers cause stress among international students (Ali et al., 2020).

New language learning challenges, the results revealed factors that they faced when learning the Indonesian language such as mixing both languages, Indonesian and Javanese, Lack of self-confidence in speaking, withdrawal from interaction, the unfamiliarity of the new environment, lack of knowledge, and lack of ability to form friendships with new people. Research conducted by Chen (2009) on effective communication of International Students

with U.S. Academic Staff asserts that when foreign students communicate with U.S. faculty members, their self-perceived uncertainty and self-perceived anxiety are highly related. Language acquisition and learning necessitate significant engagement in the language to be used and communication, which is regularly performed through messages expressed and their understanding (Krashen, 1981). For adaptation process challenges in managing their anxiety and uncertainty, two subthemes, new academic language anxiety and uncertainty and language anxiety, were developed to describe these challenges encountered by international students at UNDIP campuses in the classroom. All five participants experienced obstacles such as new learning materials, transition to a new academic system with a new learning language, new culture, and new vocabularies and concepts. Amanzo (2019) performs a study on students' foreign language anxiety and identifies elements that contribute to further academic language anxiety, such as communication fear, negative assessment, and exam anxiety. Hence, some international students also faced language anxiety and uncertainty challenges faced during their intense classroom courses, such as incompetence in speaking and writing and lack of understanding in the classroom. Research conducted by HORWITZ, E. K.,

HORWITZ, M. B., & COPE, J. (1986) on anxiety in a foreign language classroom in the language evaluation obstacles reveals that students who scored high on anxiety reported being terrified to speak in a foreign language.

A study by Hossain & Ali (2014) on language-related problems of international students reports their vulnerability when encountering language obstacles in their scholarly tasks. Another study of (Dağtaş, 2019), on the uncertainty in the learning of a foreign language in the classroom showcases several obstacles that new learners faced, including imprecise directions, lack of understanding, and incapacity to complete a task, their lecturers, their peers, or the environment.

Coping strategies are divided into two subthemes: coping with anxiety and uncertainty and adjusting to adaptation process challenges, which contain effective strategies used by international students to manage their anxiety and uncertainty during the study at UNDIP campuses in Semarang.

Referring to the first subtheme, they coped with their anxiety and uncertainty in their initial interaction by accepting host culture and lifestyle, interacting with people in different places (friendships), learning the Indonesian language, attending prayers at Mosques, and hanging out with the host culture members and self-learning. In this

context, several studies accomplished in the field of international education support these findings. According to Maghfirah (2018) about a study on Pattani Thailand students demonstrates, there are three ways to reduce anxiety and uncertainty: observation, learning a new language, and adjusting to new habits. In the same vein, Sadaf (2019) discovers that lecturers, university staff members, and the welcoming environment of the university helped Bangladeshi students overcome their anxiety and uncertainty when studying abroad for higher education. The second theme of coping with adaptation process obstacles was adjusted in similar strategies as the first one. Still, additional learning materials such as dictionaries, google translate, watching the news, books, family assistance, and listening to music were factors that assisted all five participants in overcoming their linguistic anxiety and uncertainty.

Moreover, to attain to effective communication in communication and interaction, motivation from lecturers, local students, and Javanese / Indonesia people were some of the factors that helped them to be familiar with a new environment/ UNDIP in Semarang. Findings from the previous researches also support the results of this current study.

5. The Implication of the Study

This study used a qualitative approach with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to gather data through semi-structured and in-depth interviews. In terms of social skills, this research will assist international students comprehend coping strategies that may be helpful in handling anxiety and uncertainty when interacting with the local community (Indonesian people). Hence, it can also establish a state of calmness when dealing with anxiety and uncertainty in the period of crisis.

Theoretically, the use of the theory of Anxiety and uncertainty management in this study lightens and redounds to researches that focus on the field of intercultural communication and international education. Practically, this research will serve as model to international students who come and study in several Indonesian universities in general and at Diponegoro University in particular during before and during their stay in a new environment. Furthermore, it will assist and mentor international students in stabilizing their coping strategies for potential obstacles they may encounter in their intercultural environments when interacting with the new community.

This study is undoubtedly limited to Diponegoro University in Semarang; however, future researches may expand

upon this work to include other Indonesian universities and increase the number of the informants to yield additional findings.

CONCLUSION

The present research was performed to examine and interpret the challenges that international students faced during their initial interaction, before and during their study programs, and how they cope with them to attain effective communication at Diponegoro University in Semarang. The majority of participants were inexperienced about the Indonesian language, in which some of them faced anxiety and uncertainty challenges in their arrival and during their initial interaction and adaptation process challenges based chiefly on language barriers and new culture and environment in communication and interaction with the inside and outside the campus settings with methods of coping with these challenges centered on motivation or encouragement from the lecturers, classmates and local Javanese/ Indonesian people to learn a new language.

For this shortcoming and lack of communication hint, hosting a university (UNDIP) indeed should make a setting in which international students can interact with a supportive environment regarding attaining their goal of achieving their target

mission of migrating to the host institution in the country.

Informants expressed their lived experiences by describing the adjustment problems regarding culture, less interaction with local people or mates, and language were among the main struggles during their studies at UNDIP campuses.

Acknowledging that international students in the same university are from different countries may convey them to create their own group based on national or regional basics in a new environment. Therefore, institutions could interfere and play a beneficial role in avoiding such sub-cultural groups based on nations. As a result, it may bring harmony among international students living in a foreign country.

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