

The Perception of International Students of Universitas Negeri Semarang in The New Rural Environment (Intercultural Studies Perspective)

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Abstract— This study investigates international student perception of rural environment at Universitas Negeri Semarang and how they overcome those as a part of their cultural adaptation. The way they perceive the new cultures which are truly different from their country will be discussed in this research and the difficulties in trying to adapt the new environment as well. This is since they consider that Semarang is more rural than their own countries. This study involves several international students who are studying at Universitas Negeri Semarang for at least 5 years. Interviews were used to collect data, and coding and interpretation were employed as tools to analyze data. Based on their experiences, the results show that those international students identify the different habits, norms and customs in rural environment, such as public transportation, food, social interactions, etc. In addition, the international students also show culture shock in their first year living in the new rural environment. Hence, the international students at Universitas Negeri Semarang may use their new experiences as their self-development process by coping these difficulties properly.

Keywords— perception; international student; rural environment

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization nowadays encourages massive people move from one place to another place easily. They tend to move from one country from another one which is culturally different from their home. They have different purposes and motives in moving, such as tourism, vacation, education, health, business, etc. Particularly, in education field, people want to improve their knowledge by joining seminar or international conferences in other countries, and they can also continue their study abroad or join exchange program as well. Therefore, several universities in the world accept students from other countries in order to increase their reputation and improve their quality of education.

Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) is one of Indonesian universities which accommodate international students from several countries, especially Thailand,

Turkey, Madagascar, Libya, South Korea, China, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Poland. This is in line with its vision to have international reputation. In addition, Universitas Negeri Semarang also initiates 2018 as “internationalization year”, so one of the ways is to enormously attract international students to continue their study or at least to join short courses in various study programs in Universitas Negeri Semarang. Thus, the impact of internationalization here leads the establishment of International Student.

Thus, these international students should be able to adapt themselves in the new rural environment. The word “rural” means that the area of Gunungpati and its surrounding is considered as a village by international students. They assume that their home countries are more urban than in Universitas Negeri Semarang. Hence, they have to struggle in adapting themselves in communicating with other local people, living in different environment, using local transportation, tasting local food, making friends, etc. In addition, rural does not only mean the location, but it also includes the attitude, custom, habits of the local people around UNNES who are definitely different from their home.

Furthermore, the aim of this study is to describe their perception of the rural environment as a part of their cultural adaptation and the following strategies which they use to overcome the difficulties. This can be achieved by understanding their real-life stories when living in Semarang and studying at UNNES. Then, this will also lead to the shifting identity of these international students.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This research used qualitative method including interviews. This method was chosen because this was the best method in order to find out the perception of international students in adapting themselves in the new rural environment based on their own experiences. The participants of this research were six international students from Turkey, Madagascar and Thailand. These participants were selected because they studied in

Universitas Negeri Semarang for more than 3 years, so it was included as purposive technique sampling.

In-depth and semi-structured was used to explore and to gain more detail data about the real experiences from these international students [1]. The interview was located in an informal setting (cafe), It's Milk, and in a relax situation as well in order to make the respondents feel more convenient to truthfully describe and to tell their story. The interviews were in Bahasa Indonesia. Moreover, the interview took approximately 15-20 minutes and it was recorded to help the researcher analyze the data. Next, the data was coded and analysed based on the research question above.

III. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES TO THE NEW RURAL CULTURE

Based on the interviews with 6 international students at Universitas Negeri Semarang, the results show that in general, they tend to feel anxious in their first year living and studying at UNNES, and then they can adapt and overcome their difficulties in their own ways. They can speak Bahasa Indonesia fluently because for them, learning Bahasa Indonesia is easy and there are no complicated rules, for example tenses.

Their first impression living in UNNES environment is that the local cuisines are totally different with their home country. They said that not all of Indonesian food may suit their taste. One of the respondents said that she really loves Nasi Padang, especially Rendang due to the delicious taste. In addition, another respondent also agrees with her because she impresses with the authenticity of Indonesian cuisine and the affordable price as well. However, some respondents argued that for her first three months living in Indonesia, she could not eat any Indonesian food, and she said (translated to English) "I definitely vomit [eating Indonesian food], especially its smell". Additionally, one of the respondents show their difficulties in tasting Indonesian food because there are many spices and unidentified tastes which he never tastes before, so he needs to cook by himself. He (R1) stated:

Saya ga pernah makan di warung, saya beli roti padahal saya makan nasi ya. Cara masaknya [Indonesian food] dan beda, rasanya pedas, manis. Pernah saya makan warteg sakit perut soalnya nggak sehat dan nggak ditutup [jadi] banyak lalat. [Jadi] saya masak sendiri, dengan menu Madagaskar tapi pakai bumbu Indonesia. Saya mending masak sendiri saja, soalnya lebih enak. (I never eat at stall. I eat bread although I eat rice. The way Indonesians cook is different, and the taste is spicy and sweet. I once ate at warteg and I had stomachache because [the food] did not cover [well], [so] there were many flies. I prefer cook Madagascar menu by myself but using Indonesian spices because it is more delicious).

Moreover, one of the respondents also shows that she is in shock if she talked about the restaurant in Gunungpati. She mentioned that the restaurant can freely stand everywhere without the physical building and in proper places. She also said that she doubts about the hygiene of food because the restaurant owners do not have

the certificate. In addition, she also amazed with many cadgers selling street food without any food certificates and people still eat that food ravenously. She stated (R2):

Di Turki ya, ga boleh orang jualan [di jalanan] kan itu bahaya sekali, ga sehat. Yang jual itu gaboleh di luar [bangunan]. Saya pertama kali heran sekali banyak orang beli dan murah sekali [harganya]. Aku mikir ada sesuatu gamungkin murah sekali di jalan dan ga masuk akal. Tapi sekarang aku beli bakso beli bakwan karena ikut-ikutan aja. Di Turki kalo ada itu polisi langsung ditangkap. (In Turkey, you cannot sell food [on the street], it is so dangerous [because] it is unhealthy. The sellers cannot be outside [the building]. At first, I am surprised [because] many people buy [the food] and [the price] is very cheap. I have been thinking that there is something [since] it is impossible [to sell] cheap food and it does not make sense. But, I buy meatball and bakwan now because I follow along. In Turkey, the police will immediately arrest [the sellers].

Moreover, she is also curious why Indonesians in Gunungpati may eat together without considering their social status. She is glad that Indonesians tend to forget their status when eating in the stall. She said that "both rich and poor [Indonesians] also buy that [the same food], so there is no gap."

Related to their experiences in coping with public transportation in Gunungpati, all of them agree that using public transportation is the most difficult thing in their adaptation. Since the quality of public transportation, they do not feel comfortable if they want to go to university, so they prefer to walk even though it is quite far. They are also confused because there is no proper guidance in Google Maps or Waze. One of the respondents deliberately expressed her annoyance when telling her experience using *angkot* and she finally gives up using it anymore. She (R3) stated:

Kemarin saya naik angkot. Tukang angkotnya jahat banget padahal itu orangtua dan hanya ada, saya, bapak dan bapak angkotnya. Dia setel dangdut kenceng banget terus dia ngerokok juga terus dia tanya "Kamu mau kemana? Kamu mau ketemu siapa?" Mau jadi pacar saya ya?. Kan dia tau saya gasuka, lalu dia bilang "Kamu gasuka ya? Yaudah turun aja. Kalo kamu gasuka naik taksi aja". Mungkin dikira saya orang kaya. (Yesterday, I took city transportation. The driver was really bad although there were only me, a man and the driver. He set up the dangdut [music] loudly and he also smoked, then he asked me "Where are you going? Who do you want to meet? Do you want to be my girlfriend?" Afterwards, he knew that I dislike him, and he said "You do not like it? Okay get off now. If you do not like it just take taxi". Maybe he thought that I am rich.)

Inside the university, they prefer walking rather than using private vehicles such as motorcycles or cars. However, they found that Indonesians tend to use their private vehicles, so they sometimes are afraid if those crush them. One of them also added (translated to

English) “it is so difficult to find sidewalk. I’m afraid, the roads are narrow, but the motorcycles are super-fast”.

Furthermore, related to the social interaction between international students and other Indonesian people, they are glad that Indonesians are very welcomed to them, either in their boarding house or in university. They mentioned that Indonesians are very friendly and kind to newcomers or strangers. One of the respondents said that Indonesians are “smile a lot rather than people in my country” and “they tend to greet each other”. However, one of the respondents show his displeasure about Indonesians because they sometimes like to ask personal things. He said that asking personal life is considered as rude, so he is agitated. For example, Indonesians asked whether he has already taken a bath or not, or where he is going to. He (R4) mentioned:

Orang suka tanya udah mandi belum, udah makan belum, mau kemana itu ga sopan. Padahal kan nggak kenal pas saya lagi jalan. Saya mau bilang “kan itu bukan urusanmu.” Tapi saya tau kan saya yang bule jadi mereka care. Tapi kalo untuk yang udah mandi apa belum ya, itu nggak sopan kalo di negara saya. (People like to ask whether I have already taken bath or not and eaten or not, where I am going to, it is impolite. Even we do not know each other in the street. I want to say “it is not your business” but I realise that I am a foreigner here and they [actually] care. However, [for the question] whether I have already taken bath or not is impolite in my country.)

Another case is one of the respondents told her story about her interaction with Indonesians. She is angry with people who freely take pictures of her without her permission since it is rude. She is aware that she is different from other people in Indonesia, but she also wants respect from others. Additionally, she is agitated with Indonesians call her as bule because it may indicate discrimination. She (R5) stated:

Bukannya nggak sopan tapi harus minta ijin dulu. Oh ya, gini kan kita gatau hasil fotonya gimana gitu dan digunakan untuk apa dan dimana gitu takutnya nanti bisa disalahgunakan. (It is not rude, but [Indonesians] have to ask first. We do not know the results [of the photos] and what and where they are used for. [I am] afraid that it can be misused)

In addition, one of the respondents also feels sad and inconvenient if Indonesians talk with other Indonesians using their local language, Javanese or Bahasa Indonesia slang. She feels insecure that people with talk about her using the language which she cannot understand even she actually want to blend with Indonesian friends. She (R6) explains:

Kita memang banyak interaksi dengan orang Indonesia. Kita punya janji, kita ga enak kalau ada orang Indonesia ngomong bahasa Turki. Dulu kita [orang Turki] sengaja pilih kelas terpisah biar bahasa Indonesianya lancar. Tapi kadang mereka ngomong pakai bahasa Jawa yang tidak saya tahu. Mungkin saja dia berbicara tentang saya diam diam. (We do have a lot interaction with Indonesians. We have promised if we talk each other using Turkish. Before studying [at UNNES], we intentionally did not

take the same class for practicing Bahasa Indonesia fluently. But, sometimes [Indonesians] talk using Javanese which I do not understand. Maybe, they talk about me secretly].

IV. DISCUSSION

In general, this can be seen that initially International students at UNNES show their impression and confusion in living at the new rural environment, in Gunungpati. They express culture shock at their first year, and then gradually can accept the new culture openly. Furthermore, we may categorize the international students at UNNES doing short-term adaptation because they only live there until they graduate, so they voluntarily come to Indonesia to study. It will be different if we compare with other migrants who want to get proper sanctuary and live in the target country permanently [2][3][4]. The evidence is that the respondents mentioned that they can easily adapt themselves in the new environment for only one year, and they can speak Bahasa Indonesia fluently.

International students at UNNES had to adapt themselves in order to survive in the new environment, or we call it cross-cultural adaptation. It is a process to lead a person positioning himself to adapt into the new environment, so he may create reciprocal cooperation between his home and new culture [4]. Therefore, the conceptualization of this adaptation can be reflected through acculturation, integration, assimilation (Kim, 2001). From the results above, it can be shown that the way international students try to suit themselves to eat Indonesian food after 2 years living in Indonesia may be categorized as successful adaptation, and there is also integration between Indonesia and Madagascar cuisines stated by R1 due to the fact that he usually cooks Madagascar food using Indonesian cuisine. In addition, the way R4 understands the new rural culture in Indonesia if sometimes private questions are asked to her shows that she is aware about differences with her own culture.

Related to the phenomena of Culture Shock, based on the cultural dimension by Hofstede [5], there are several differences between the international students’ home country and the target country. For example, R2 mentions that in her country, the restaurants must have hygiene certificate and are located inside the buildings. In addition, she mentioned that Indonesian people can mingle without considering their social status. Turkey and Indonesia show different dimension because Turkey adapts high power distance, although Indonesia supports low power distance. It means that Indonesians are pleased to get together in their daily life without thinking about social distance.

Moreover, intercultural communication competence actually has been applied by International students at UNNES through their adaptation process. The competences are interpersonal skills, linguistic ability, cultural curiosity, flexibility, patience and respect, cultural empathy, sociability, non-judgmental, goal orientation, sense of humor, tolerance, uncertainty and ambiguity [6][7][8]. One example is that Indonesians sometimes may intervene another person’s business as R4 said above. Indonesians actually does not mean to want to her

intentionally because for native Indonesians, they only show good manner and care to others. It does not mean that they really want to know whether she has taken bath or where she is going to do, and it is definitely polite. However, for her home country, it is rude. International students have to improve their flexibility and cultural empathy towards another culture, so this may assist them to adapt properly. Thus, she also shows her cultural sensitivity to identify that the host culture is truly different from her home country. It refers to the function of social decentering which is the ability to understand and adapt to others to enhance her relational development with Indonesians [9].

Another case as R3 said about her experience using public transportation should not make her for giving up using it again. She has to improve her tolerance and curiosity about another culture. Additionally, she also may consider what the driver said to her as humor, so she may increase their sense of humor which is different from their home country. The importance of having knowledge of host culture may help them to overcome the situation including its tradition, customs, belief and values through her interaction with native Indonesians, so misunderstanding will be decreased [10][11][12].

Finally, the case is shown by R6. She shows her respect towards other people from different countries, so she does not want to use her mother tongue in talking with her Turkish friends in front of Indonesians. In addition, this phenomenon also shows that she wants to increase her linguistic ability by understanding the target language precisely, so she chose different class with her fellow friends in order to have great experience in communicating and socializing with other Indonesians as well. In this case, language competence is a significant key to the cultural adaptation process, so she enables to speak, listen to, and understand the language of the host culture [10].

V. CONCLUSION

As explanation above, it can be concluded that international students at UNNES perceive their experiences living in the new rural environment as a part

of adaptation process. Adapting in the host culture may enhance their intercultural communication competences such as cultural empathy, flexibility, respect because they may cope their difficulties and tolerate the differences between their host and home country. Furthermore, their experiences in living in new environment may lead them to increase their knowledge and linguistic ability about another culture and it is a key success to smooth interaction.

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