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Do I have Intercultural Competence as Language Learning Outcomes? Cultural-Self Awareness in Indonesian-Japanese Workplace

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Abstract—The international companies require the employees to have intercultural competence as one of the competencies. Foreign language learners should acquire this competency from higher education institutions, as well as the linguistic ability itself. However, the foreign language learning curriculum tends to neglect this importance, yet not mentioned in the stages of the learner's and user's needs analysis, learning objectives setting, and in the learning outcomes assessment. Therefore, this pilot study aims to evaluate the intercultural competence of Japanese studies alumni who work in Japanese companies in Jakarta, Indonesia. This study is expected to provide valuable feedback for the Japanese language and culture curriculum used in local universities. Qualitative research methods were conducted through personal-written reflection, depth-in interview, and job interview simulation to assess components of intercultural competence. The participants were sojourn-experienced and inexperienced alumni who recently work at Japanese companies in Jakarta. The findings reveal that participants' deeper self-knowledge as a critical component of the intercultural competence attained mostly throughout their working experience instead of as the learning outcomes in university. Besides, they claim the religious difference as the challenging aspect of culture that they have to overcome in the Indonesia-Japanese workplace environment, although they are working in their own country. Results also indicate that there should be more efforts to integrate intercultural competence into the Japanese language and culture learning curriculum in local universities.

Keywords—intercultural competence, Japanese language learning, graduate, workplace

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Backgrounds

The pervasive technological and communication advances have stimulated people from different parts of the world to be connected and live in a global village. At the same time, it is also enabling the expansion of interaction opportunities for multicultural business encounters. On the other hand, the phenomenon of borderless global village emerges the issue of a self-cultural identity crisis on the foreign language user [2]. Many of the foreign language speakers claim that they encounter difficulties in expressing their own cultural identity or being able to understand their communication partner's cultural identity [3]. Therefore,

intercultural communication competence (ICC) is essential here and should be cultivated through the foreign language learning process.

Many researchers explored the perspectives and the facts on the needs of intercultural competence towards the alumni of foreign language & culture studies. The results show that there is still an existing cultural gap between local employees and expatriate staff though local employees have a high foreign language proficiency [4]–[6]. In the context of the Japanese corporates in Indonesia, some of the studies also reveal the gap in the understanding of cultural differences and self-cultural identity among local Indonesian employees and Japanese expatriate employees, particularly in the aspect of religion. The differences have become a significant barrier in performing intercultural communication between parties [7], [8].

Regarding the challenges mentioned above, recently, the foreign language learning process has started to integrate the cultural aspects into the curriculum. Unfortunately, target culture tends to be the central focus of the foreign language curriculum, despite a higher education institution. Hence, it is eventually nurtured cultural hegemony from target culture upon the learner's self-culture. Some studies have also pointed towards the tendency of the efforts to integrate cultural dimensions into the foreign language curriculum in order to serve the tourism industry by introducing local culture products instead of developing intercultural competence.

Moreover, there has been a continuous effort in integrating culture into foreign language learning in the current curriculum in Indonesia. Nevertheless, according to the first author's experience as a Japanese language teacher, such efforts are still limited to the comparing of the Japanese and Indonesian culture cognitively. Furthermore, mostly it is designed for tourism purposes. The previous curriculum even has restricted segregation between culture and language learning. Also, the requirement of holding Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) certificate, held by the Japan Foundation, for graduation as an indicator of readiness in entering work place proves that the evaluation and assessment of the student's communicative competence as the

learning outcomes from the university still focus on the language ability itself.

Concerning the fact explained above, there are some efforts to conduct the need analysis in the workplace in order to receive feedback for the foreign language curriculum through assessing the university alumni who are already working in a multicultural workplace. Unfortunately, it is still challenging to find the references that explored such a case in a Japanese-Indonesian working environment in the Indonesia context. Furthermore, quantitative researches dominate the studies of the measurement of intercultural competence in the overseas setting. Thus, the gap to the real facts and needs in the field may exist, whereby the qualitative researches tend to focus on the intercultural competence of the teachers, learners, or the learning process of foreign language itself. Therefore, this study seeks to evaluate the intercultural competence of Japanese studies alumni who work in Japanese companies in Jakarta through a qualitative-approach study. The instruments of the data collection are data a self-assessment instrument, in-depth interview, and job interview simulation involving a Japanese with a profound experienced in human resource management. This study is conducted as a pilot study of the first author's doctoral dissertation.

B. Literature Review

Many experts have dedicated efforts to clarify the concept of intercultural competence. The findings reveal that intercultural competence consists of knowledge, understanding, skill, and attitude.

It includes of the understanding one's cultural backgrounds and cultural identities, the understanding to respect and appreciate other people from different cultural background, the response effectively in a correct manner while interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, the developing a positive and constructive relationship with people from different cultural backgrounds, and the understanding our own and other people cultures through an engagement and interaction with cultures different to our own [9], [10]. Fantini (2012) further explain personal qualities referred above include some characteristics: flexibility, sense of humor, patience, enthusiasm, curiosity, empathy, tolerance of ambiguity, open-mindedness, and others. These characteristics are an essential foundation in establishing one's ability to develop and maintain a relationship, communicate with minimal distortion, and perform collaboration in achieving shared goals. [11]. Therefore, intercultural communication competence could be concluded as a detail description of the achievement standard of self-identity-awareness development skills, leading to the ability to interact with people from a different culture. This concept is also well known as intercultural literacy.

Fantini further argue that benchmarking of the intercultural competence leve by its intensity will facilitate monitoring and assessing the achievement of intercultural competence. This benchmark comprises many levels. The first level is to measure the achievement for people who participated in a short-term exchange program (1-2 months duration). The second level is to measure people who have international experience by participating in an international exchange program in a particular culture hosting country, with full interaction with the local cultures (3-9 months duration). The third level is for professionals who work in a multicultural working environment. Finally, the fourth level is for professional trainers who provide training or consultancy service for learners coming from diverse countries [12]. Fantini further argues that assessing intercultural competence should be multi assessments, conducted by the teachers, the individual from the host culture, and both in qualitative and quantitative approaches [5].

A wide range of model variations have been developed and applied in various settings, not only in educational setting but also in professional setting [10]–[12]. Unfortunately, multicultural environment in Western culture remains as the central focus of such models. Thus, Wang revealed a study of intercultural competence assessment for Asian culture context, particularly China [13]. The findings show that the learners in China attained ten intercultural competencies which categorized in cognitive, affective and conative aspects as depicted in table below.

TABLE I.   INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE PERFORMED BY CHINESE STUDENTS; WANG 2015 [13]

Cultural level/mode	Emerging intercultural competence categories
Cognitive (patterns, knowledge, awareness)	1. Interacting with a diversity of cultural people and patterns 2. Understanding the complexity of culture 3. Relearning own culture with new awareness
Affective (psychological, attitudinal, sensitivity, motivation)	4. Generating positive attitudes toward other cultures 5. Overcoming stereotypes and prejudice (negative attitudes) 6. Seeing from other perspectives/world views (empathy and ethnorelativism) 7. Cultural humility (overcoming cultural superiority, power, privilege, pride) 8. Transformation of *xintai* (intuitive emotion/attitudes) 9. Obtaining confidence and motivation in intercultural communication
Behavioral (skills, responses, action)	10. Obtaining communicative skills

C. Objective and Research Questions

This pilot study seeks to evaluate the intercultural competence of Japanese studies alumni who work in Japanese companies in Jakarta, Indonesia. The results are expected to be utilized as valuable feedback for the Japanese language and culture curriculum used in local universities. In order to narrow the focus, the research questions are formulated as follow:

1. To what extent the alumni have the intercultural competence ability in their workplace?
2. Does the intercultural competence ability attain by the alumni was an outcome of the learning process in university/higher education institution?

II.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants in this research are three (3) Japanese Studies alumni from the local university in Jakarta, Indonesia. The alumni involved in this research are currently working in Japanese companies located in Jakarta. Further detail regarding their background is depicted in Table 2 below. The participant's selection criteria for inclusion are Medium up to high-level proficiency of Japanese language ability, the experience of sojourn in Japan, working experience in a Japanese company in Indonesia, and experience working in a multicultural environment. The participant candidates were contacted through e-mail to confirm their availability and willingness to participate in the study. Informed consent was sent via online upon agreement to participate in the research.

TABLE II.   PARTICIPANTS BACKGROUND

Participants	Age	Japanese Language Proficiency Test*	Sojourn in Japan Experience	Indonesian-Japanese Workplace Experience	Multicultural Workplace Experience
A /Female	28	N1	Long-time (1 year)	4 years 5 months	Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese
B /Female	24	N3	Short time (1month)	2 years 7 months	Japanese, Arabian
C/Female	29	N1	No experience	4 years	Japanese, Korean

*N1-N5 (the highest to the lowest)

Besides Japanese studies alumni, the research involved one (1) native Japanese participant, addressed as participant D. Participant D was the interviewer for all the participants who are alumni in the performative task, includes job interview simulation. Participant D detail information as follow: Japanese citizenship holder, working and living in Indonesia for more than 20 years, extensive experience of working in a multicultural company in Japan, New Zealand, and Indonesia.

B. Data Collection and Analysis

The research data was collected by using a narrative research approach. The instruments used in the data collection process were self-assessment, in-depth interviews, and performative tasks through job interview simulation. The utilization of the multi-method in narrative approach is believed to be able to raise awareness and to evaluate the learning process [14]. The self-assessment instrument was sent and done through an online platform due to the time constraint of participants as an employee. All items in the self-assessment instrument were developed from the ten competencies of intercultural competence developed by Wang in China [13]. A similar cultural background as part of Asia was the main reason for choosing Wang's instrument as the primary reference to construct the research instruments. The analyzing of data was conducted by the triangulation method through a wide range of data and various literature.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Cultural Self-Awareness and Skills as Attained Intercultural Competences

The result demonstrates that all three participants achieved a good intercultural competence, both in cognitive and conative aspect. The item indicator on the knowledge and awareness towards one's own culture and its difference with Japanese culture show that all three participants were able to acknowledge cultural diversity. Such understanding has raised their awareness that leads them to re-learn about their own culture. According to the self-assessment instrument, all three participants reveal that experience in interacting with people from diverse country provide a level of understanding about cultural difference and its complexity. They also claim that they had the opportunity to re-learned about the believes and cultures that they practice in daily activities where it has been internalized as part of Indonesian cultures. This result in line with Byram & Jandt that argue that exposure to cross-cultural interactions helps to develop intercultural awareness [2], [15]. It is further supported by the in-depth interview where Participant A stated that:

"I just realized that the way Japanese people and Indonesian people explain things are very different. Indonesian people would start the conversation with various details before coming to the main issue while the Japanese will do it in a reverse way. Such different has created misunderstanding in communication as Japanese would assume that Indonesian people tend to find excuses for their mistake."

Participant B provide the argument as follows:

"There is a similarity between Japanese people and the Indonesian people. Where both will conduct discussion before making decisions. Collective opinions are prioritized rather than individual opinions. It may reflect the character of Asian people, maybe… Togetherness is an important matter."

At the same time, Participant C views that:

"A significant difference between Indonesian and Japanese people is mainly on religious faith. We, as Indonesian, believe that God's decision is involved in everything that happens in our life. Japanese people believe that success is fully determined by your hard work."

The result from the job interview simulation reflects a similar result. Participant D, the interviewer, approves that all three participants have the right level of understanding towards their own culture, includes its similarities and difference with Japanese culture. The participants demonstrated such understanding through their ability to accomplish the task given by their Japanese superior under the Japanese management style. Such achievement proofs that their cultural understanding enables them to collaborate with Japanese expatriate in completing common goals. These support the concept from Fantini on the standard of intercultural competence achievement [5]. Their two or more years' experience working in a multicultural environment with numerous superior (not only Japanese) has indicated that they have reached the third level of intercultural competence achievement standard [5]. In this regard, participant D claims that participant A showed the highest intercultural understanding due to the one-year study experience in Japan. This information has yet confirmed that long-term study experience in culture targeted country is beneficial in supporting to attain intercultural competence understanding [6].

In contrary, similar results was not reflected in the affective aspect of intercultural competence achievement. The self-assessment instrument reports that intercultural understanding helps to motivate all participants to perform positive behavior and completing their work by utilizing various cultural perspectives. They also could better manage their emotions when they encounter cultural differences and conduct themselves remain professional. However, such

understanding was not sufficiently equipped them with negotiation skill to navigate through the targeted culture hegemony. This lack of negotiation skills contributes to creating a bias on stereotypes and prejudice against the Japanese. For example, participant A was failed in the job interview simulation to refuse the request for few days overtime though he/she felt unwilling to do so. In the depth interview, participant A then explained that he/she has never learned how to express an opinion in an open manner that fits the Japanese culture of communication during studying in university. Thus, participant A admitted that she/he has insufficient knowledge on how to communicate such a thing correctly. Meanwhile, participant C reported that he/she prefers to remain silent even when she/he disagree with the request or attitudes by the manager/boss, even though it caused inconvenient feeling for participant C. Participant D also evaluates that all three participants were also performed passive behavior, submissive action and attitude of resignation beside insufficient negotiation skill. This is shown through the description from Participant D:

"They are hoping that the Japanese superiors would be able to understand about Islam. However, they don't know how to explain it adequately. They eventually prefer to avoid the situation or provide explanations limited only to restricted things in Islam. "

These findings clearly show that Jandt [15] and Froese [16] arguments also apply in these three participants' case. The participants still encounter difficulties and feel awkward in stating their believes and culture despite their high level of Japanese language proficiency (particularly on participants A & C). This phenomenon could occur because there is no openness yet [11], and the mentality of "differences is tough to discuss with a minimal distortion" [5].

B. Japanese Language and Culture Curriculum Reflection

The research findings reveal that culture may not yet solely integrated into the language teaching in the curriculum of Japanese studies program learned by all three participants. During an in-depth interview process, participant C explained that: "I learned about Japanese working culture such as horenzo and kaizen under Japanese business globalization subject, but it was merely knowledge transfer. In Japanese language subject, there was not any simulation available on the situation that shows the culture difference between Indonesian-Japanese". Participant B highlighted different points in the self-assessment instrument: "I took Japanese language correspondence subject where it provided numerous simulations on Japanese working culture situations through e-mail correspondence. However, there was no discussion on the difference compared to Indonesian working culture". Participant D also reported that all three participants fully realize the cultural difference between Indonesia and Japan. However, they still lack the ability to explain the backgrounds of its difference to their Japanese superiors, particularly on the topic of religion. This result supports the research finding that there is an awkwardness persist in expressing culture as a self-identity (3), (4) includes the religious faith aspect (7), (8). According to the evaluation upon the implemented curriculum in the university during the learning period of these three participants, most of the

subjects associated with Japanese culture were delivered in theoretical based. There was no simulation or study case method in the teaching system yet. It is noted that there was an Indonesian culture subject available, but emphases more on exploring the cultural products instead of offering a comparative analysis with other cultures. In recent times, the Japanese language subject has been incorporating a cultural dimension to the current language curriculum. Nevertheless, its primary orientation remains exclusively to Japanese culture and not covers the critical thinking aspect in exploring the cultural differences between Japan and Indonesia yet, including on how to embrace and respond to such variance. This finding has become a mirror in reflecting the segregation of the study on cultural dimension in theoretical space with language that focusses more on the target culture (Japanese culture) in the current Japanese studies program.

IV. CONCLUSION

Results show the benefit of using the self-reflection method for developing and assessing the intercultural competence of graduates in their workplace. The participants reflect that their deeper self-knowledge as a critical component of the intercultural competence gained throughout their working experience instead of the learning outcomes in university. Besides, they stated that religious difference is the most challenging aspect of culture that they have to overcome in Indonesian-Japanese intercultural encounters in their work despite in their own country. Results indicate that there should be more efforts to integrate intercultural competence into the Japanese language and culture learning curriculum in local universities.

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