



The Sharing Approach to Teaching Cross-Cultural Understanding: Evidence from University Students' Perspective

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Abstract: In the current global era, there is a distinct need for cross-cultural understanding (CCU) instruction. This study endeavored to explore participants' perspectives following the completion of a course designed to enhance students' CCU knowledge and appreciation for diversity through a sharing approach. Data were collected via questionnaires and reflection reports, which were distributed to university students through Google Forms. Utilizing an explanatory sequential design, the study involved 18 university students enrolled in the Nusantara Module. The findings indicated a positive acceptance of the sharing approach among the students. Furthermore, the students revealed that their sense of nationalism remained intact despite exposure to different cultures. These results have several implications, including a promising direction for the development of more effective CCU courses and the potential of educational programs to augment global understanding without undermining national identity. Nevertheless, further research is needed to validate these findings across diverse settings and demographics. Future studies may also explore the long-term effects of the sharing approach on students' attitudes towards cultural diversity.

INTRODUCTION

The globalization era necessitates that higher education institutions produce graduates who are culturally aware (Al-Haija & Mahamid, 2021; Anwar et al., 2022; Kienle & Loyd, 2005; Wood & St. Peters, 2014). These graduates need to possess a mastery of cross-cultural understanding (CCU), enabling them to comprehend various backgrounds such as culture, language, tradition, or custom (Shadiev et al., 2015). This aspect of understanding acknowledges that people are diverse, suggesting that knowledge of diversity coexists and is essential for interaction with others (Lin, 2020).

Consequently, it signifies that the understanding of cross-cultural elements is crucial for societal survival (Amirovich et al., 2021; Lin, 2020; Sergeeva et al., 2019). Without adequate understanding, societal misunderstandings and judgmental attitudes can arise. Lin (2020) asserts that people might be reluctant to cooperate with individuals who differ from their native culture. Knowledge of CCU and diversity are vital, yet the exploration of practical approaches to teaching CCU remains necessary.

Previous literature suggested that it is crucial to teach CCU. Through this teaching, participants could acquire skills

to communicate and behave appropriately with people from different cultures (Angelova & Zhao, 2016; Bloom & Johnston, 2010; Kidwell, 2019; Shadiev et al., 2015, 2019). They could learn to respect others' traditions and value them more effectively (Shadiev et al., 2019), demonstrate care for others (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2018), transform their negative stereotypes, and stimulate critical thinking as well (Angelova & Zhao, 2016; Bloom & Johnston, 2010; Chen & Yang, 2016).

In the context of higher education, mastering CCU also offers numerous benefits. International students are likely to succeed in their studies when they possess cross-cultural understanding competence (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2018; Sherry et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2015), and they are further supported by institutions that value diversity (Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2017). As they graduate, this competence helps them integrate into society and compete in a global context (Shadiev et al., 2015), and successfully navigate diverse cultures (Barker, 2016). The lack of knowledge related to cross-cultural understanding can hinder students' interactions, leading to misunderstandings, racism, stereotypes, disrespect for others, and insensitivity to other cultures (Shadiev et al., 2015; Sherry et al., 2010; Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004).

As stated by Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2018), colleges and universities are ideal venues where students can enhance their cross-cultural knowledge and skills. These institutions often offer activities that immerse students in various cultures. They frequently host cultural events or excursions, and the presence of international students on campus encourages cultural exchange. Students can take cross-cultural-related courses or join exchange programs to visit foreign countries or different cultural areas within a nation. However, such activities may

require sufficient financial support. Consequently, countries like Indonesia offer programs like MBKM (*Merdeka Belajar Kurikulum Merdeka*), where students can study at other universities for free and interact with people from diverse backgrounds. Such programs enrich students' experiences and understanding of other cultures and traditions (Anwar, 2022; Indriati et al., 2022).

Many countries worldwide have launched various programs to promote cross-cultural understanding. For instance, Canada established the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and implemented projects to enhance its citizens' CCU knowledge and skills (The Critical Thinking Consortium, 2011). Similarly, America introduced several programs to encourage cross-cultural understanding, such as student, educator, and leader exchange programs. Examples include the Fulbright program and The International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2022). Indonesia has also taken action, providing scholarships for Indonesian students to study abroad through programs like the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (*Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan* or LPDP), and for foreigners to study Bahasa Indonesia through the Dharmasiswa Program (Ministry of Education and Culture The Republic of Indonesia, 2022). Through all these programs and initiatives, the governments of these nations aim to enhance human resource quality and promote cross-cultural understanding.

Based on previous research, patterns have been identified in terms of research participants, contexts, and approaches. Concerning participants, many studies have involved international students living in a country of a target culture (e.g., Sherry et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2015), expatriates (e.g., Barker, 2016; Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004), or both natives and non-natives of a target culture (e.g., Shadiev et

al., 2015, 2019). In terms of context, previous researchers often frame their investigations within the sphere of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) (e.g., Angelova & Zhao, 2016; Chen & Yang, 2016). Lastly, many studies focus on digital technology-based tools as approaches to teaching CCU (e.g., Bloom & Johnston, 2010; Chen & Yang, 2016). Despite these differences, most research aims towards the common goal of finding effective ways to teach CCU.

Chen and Yang (2016), for instance, examined Taiwanese students in EFL classes, exploring their attitudes and perceptions of the intercultural project titled *United Beyond Our Diversity*. This project was shown to enhance participants' English language skills and intercultural communicative competence. Additionally, participants found the program to yield further positive impacts, such as reducing negative stereotypes and facilitating the acquisition of cultural knowledge and awareness. Moreover, participants exhibited reflective behavior through the program and gained necessary skills to engage with diverse cultures.

Shadiev et al. (2019) studied the integration of speech-enabled language translation (SELT) technology to support cross-cultural understanding and intercultural sensitivity. This study, which involved 21 university students from 13 different nationalities, reported positive outcomes. Firstly, SELT enabled participants to learn about other cultures, traditions, and values. The acquired knowledge and skills facilitated their communication with individuals from other cultures. Furthermore, SELT aided them in demonstrating respect for different cultures, traditions, and values.

Nonetheless, certain aspects are not extensively covered in previous research. Firstly, many studies involve state-of-the-art technology as an approach to teach CCU, leaving the potential effects of a sharing approach in technology-limited

contexts unexplored. Secondly, existing studies often engage participants from the target culture, consequently leaving a gap in studies involving non-native participants. Thirdly, while researchers have been dedicated to exploring the significance of teaching CCU and finding strategies to do so, there is room for improvement. Lastly, many studies use EFL/ESL teaching as a context to teach CCU, leaving the topic open to exploration in other contexts.

In light of the aforementioned gaps, the present study aims to explore a method for teaching CCU in a different context. The researchers in this study focus on implementing perspective sharing as an approach to teaching CCU in a non-EFL/ESL setting with minimal technology use. Specifically, the study aims to reveal participants' views on a facilitation approach used to enhance their CCU knowledge while preserving their value of diversity. The results of this study could guide educators in fostering university students' sense of patriotism (nationalism) even as they learn about other cultures. Furthermore, it could serve as a resource for other researchers on the topic of a sharing approach to teaching CCU.

METHOD

Design

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, adopting an explanatory sequential design where quantitative and qualitative datasets were collected consecutively to answer the research question (Creswell, 2015). This design aimed to comprehensively understand university students' perspectives on the sharing approach to teaching CCU. For data collection, the researchers distributed a survey questionnaire with closed-ended questions. Following this, the researchers requested reflection reports from the class lecturer to gain an in-depth understanding of the general findings resulting from the quantitative data analysis.

The Context and the Participants

This study was conducted at a private university in Indonesia, which remains anonymous to ensure the credibility of the institution. This university was among those in Indonesia that received funding to host and execute a program from the Indonesian government called *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) *Kampus Merdeka* (Independent Campus) or MBKM. This initiative aimed to enrich students' experiences through exchange programs (Tim Pertukaran Mahasiswa, 2021). Initiated by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, the program allowed the host university to receive inbound students from various campuses across Indonesia to study for one semester. The students could also earn up to 20 transfer credits from the host university to their home institutions.

Among the many MBKM programs, the Nusantara Module (or *Modul Nusantara*, MN) was one. The MN program was designed to promote university students' tolerance and love of the nation through activities around four major themes: diversity, inspiration, reflection, and social contributions (Makhmud et al., 2021). The program facilitated the study of various topics based on local wisdom, offering activities like cultural excursions, discussions with subject-matter experts, workshops, and other activities contributing to broader society. Each week, students participated in MN activities.

The study was conducted in the Reflection Module, one of the components of MN. This module had 18 participants, comprising two males and 16 females aged between 19 to 21, who were working on their undergraduate degrees. These students hailed from various universities across Indonesia, and as MBKM exchange students, they had the right to enroll in some courses as regular students for one semester. In the Reflection Module, the participants

studied an introduction to Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) and language as a means of diplomacy. This module comprised three sections: pre-learning, main learning, and post-learning, all instructed by an expert in teaching English and Indonesian as a foreign language (BIPA).

In the pre-learning section, students underwent a formative assessment wherein they answered questions related to cross-cultural understanding via Google Forms. This assessment, designed to gauge students' background knowledge and encourage them to read additional sources, included questions about American culture and the participants' backgrounds. The questions were written in Bahasa Indonesia and had been peer-reviewed and validated by an experienced BIPA lecturer.

In the main learning section, students attended a mini-facilitation workshop conducted face-to-face with the facilitator. This two-hour session involved sharing, discussions, and group work, covering topics like American cross-cultural understanding, the Indonesian language as a critical language, academic culture in America, teaching BIPA in America, opportunities for teaching BIPA in America, and preparations for teaching BIPA overseas. These topics were presented using slides, compiled by the subject matter expert who did not prescribe a specific textbook as a source. In addition, students partook in a group activity that served as a formative assessment to measure their mastery of formal Indonesian language, conducted online using Socrative.

In the post-learning section, participants completed another assessment with questions identical to those in the pre-learning section to measure changes in understanding following the workshop. Additionally, they completed an evaluation survey delivered online via Google Forms.

The Sharing Approach

The researchers concurred with Bloom and Johnston's (2010) assertion that instructor knowledge about cross-cultural understanding might be insufficient for adequately equipping students with CCU knowledge. Further, barriers such as language, cost, and time made it impossible to immerse students in the culture of a target country during the course of this study. As a result, the researchers invited a Subject Matter Expert (SME) to guest lecture in the module. The expert attended the main learning session, taught participants about CCU, and shared his experiences of living abroad. As noted earlier, the SME had resided in a foreign country, which had provided him with substantial exposure to other cultures. This strategy of sharing personal experiences is a recognized method of creating a meaningful learning environment by engaging with individuals who have direct exposure to the target culture (Murray & Bollinger, 2001; Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). Moreover, the experiences of those who have lived abroad are believed to offer significant benefits to students and the institutions where they work (Li, 2020).

Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers collected data from various sources to ensure triangulation, which included surveys and reflection reports. Different labels were assigned to each data source for identification: S for survey and R for reflection, whereas each participant was labelled with P. For instance, SP1 refers to the survey results from participant number one.

The researchers distributed a survey questionnaire to the participants as an attitudinal measurement (Creswell, 2015). This was done to gauge participants' feelings towards the teaching of CCU. The self-constructed survey consisted of 16 questions that were developed and confirmed for validity through a peer validation process. Two fellow lecturers

were asked to validate the instruments in this process. These validators were experts in CCU topics and had been teaching CCU-related courses at higher education levels. Their inputs led to revisions in the survey instruments accordingly.

Before administering the questionnaire to the participants, the researchers conducted a pilot test involving five junior university students from the first author's institution. This step confirmed the construct validity of the instruments (Creswell, 2015), and based on the feedback from the pilot study, further amendments were made to the instruments.

The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms at the end of the workshop session. It consisted of demographic questions and questions designed to capture the participant's perspective of the program. The survey included 10 closed-ended questions that were rated using a five-point Likert scale, and 3 open-ended questions that asked participants for their views, feedback, and whether they would recommend the program to others. Prior to completion of the surveys, the researchers sought the participants' consent, ensuring their participation was voluntary, and that their anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained.

In addition to the survey, the researchers collected reflection reports. The first author obtained these reports from the MN lecturer. These reports, submitted to an online platform provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture, offered insights into participants' learning experiences, feedback, and other testimonial statements related to the module.

To analyze participants' responses to the open-ended questions in the survey and reflections, the researchers applied inductive analysis to generate codes for grouping similar issues (Yin, 2011). The researchers then compared the findings

and classified them into initial categories and subcategories. The coded data analysis results were divided into perceptions of the material content, perceptions of the approach used, and gains that the participants derived from the teaching.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to explore participants' perspectives on participating in a program that used a sharing approach to teach CCU. In this section, we present the findings derived from the analysis of survey data and participants' reflections.

The first finding pertains to the participants' views on the content of the materials. Overall, the participants

responded positively to the materials. Survey results regarding the organization of the materials revealed that 83% of participants (15 individuals) strongly agreed that the materials were easy to understand and well-organized, while 11.1% (2 individuals) agreed with the same sentiment. Additionally, participant responses suggested that the materials presented were relevant to the topics discussed: 38.9% (7 individuals) strongly agreed and 50% (9 individuals) agreed with this statement (see Figure 1 and 2). Participants also believed that the content of the materials facilitated their understanding of the topics discussed, with 11.1% indicating strong agreement and 72.2% indicating agreement.

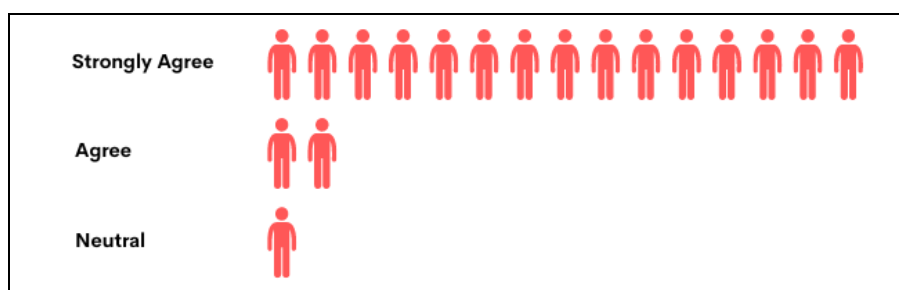


Figure 1. The Organization of the Materials.

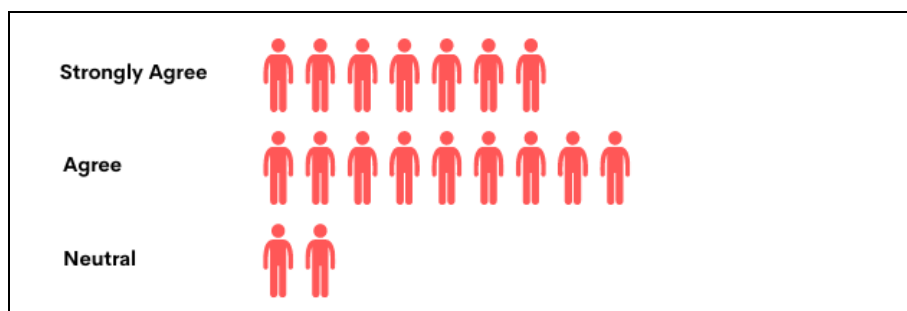


Figure 2. The Relevancy of the Materials.

Responses to the open-ended questions in the survey also indicated a positive reception towards the content of the materials. The participants' responses allowed us to identify three significant benefits: understanding other cultures, fostering self-motivation, and enhancing their love of the nation. In terms of

attitude towards the materials provided, most participants agreed that the materials increased their knowledge of other cultures.

"The benefit that I get from this training is that I can find out what is in America, things I didn't know before..." (SP18).

"In today's lesson, we were introduced to the dynamics of life in America. Cross-Cultural Understanding in America is as follows..." (RP2)

"... during the presentation of the material, I received information about life in America, the education system, and the level of tolerance there." (RP1)

The fostering of self-motivation was another aspect that participants gained from the teaching. While the goal of the teaching was primarily focused on CCU and diversity topics, the teaching also had the additional advantage of fostering self-motivation. The participants felt motivated to improve their mastery of English and Indonesian, believing that proficiency in these two languages could help them pursue opportunities abroad, such as teaching Indonesian to foreigners. Additionally, the teaching inspired them to explore, develop, and maximize their potential. The following excerpts exemplify this:

"I am motivated to learn more English and explore Indonesian so that in the future I can become part of BIPA teaching abroad..." (RP1)

"The benefit that I get from this material is that it helps me to optimize myself to be disciplined in developing my potential." (SP16)

The final benefit that participants derived from the teaching was a strengthened love of their nation. The materials sparked participants' patriotic feelings towards their home country.

"From this activity, I also learned how American life differs from Indonesian life and I am very proud to be Indonesian." (RP2)

"...and the key point we get from delivering this material is that we can teach Indonesian abroad and we need to love our homeland more and learn more deeply about Indonesia so that other countries become interested in the Indonesian language and culture." (RP5)

"After participating in this activity, I feel inspired and motivated that there are many opportunities if we are willing to try." (SP2)

The study indicated that participants' attitudes towards their nation didn't lessen from learning about other cultures, but rather became more assertive. The following excerpts explain this best:

"...and the important point we get from delivering this material is that we can teach Indonesian abroad and we have to love our homeland more and learn more deeply about Indonesia so that other countries are interested in the Indonesian language and culture." (RP5)

"From this activity, I also learned how the lives of Americans are different from Indonesians and I am very proud to be Indonesian." (RP2)

Regarding attitudes towards the approach used, the responses from the participants also showed a positive acceptance. From the survey question asking about time allocation, the SME's understanding of the material, the presentation of the material, the SME's engagement with the class, and the activities in the program, most participants agreed that the approach was effective. They concurred that the SME had a solid understanding of the materials, indicated by 55.6% who responded 'strongly agree', and 44.4% who chose 'agree' (18 participants in total). Concerning the SME, the participants also agreed that the SME was engaging during the sessions (73.2%). The participants also believed that the SME could answer questions from the participants well (55.6%). They also agreed that the time allocation was sufficient (27.8% chose 'strongly agree' while 61.1% answered 'agree'). In addition, they believed that the sharing session enabled them to augment and develop their existing knowledge on the topic discussed (see Figure 3). From the chart, 38.9% of the participants (7 people) responded 'strongly agree', 50% said they 'agree', while 11.1% chose 'neutral'. When they had to indicate their overall impression of the sharing session activity, they strongly agreed that the

approach facilitated their understanding of the topic (66.7% of the participants).

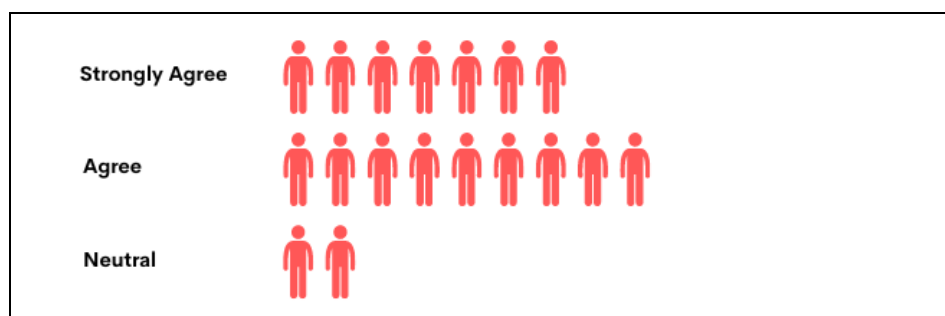


Figure 3. The Sharing Session Activity.

The advent of emerging technologies, including the Internet, World Wide Web, and social media platforms, has impacted all sectors of human life, including education. Students, among other entities in the educational sector, derive benefits from these technology tools. With access to the Internet and mobile devices or computers, they can stay informed about happenings within their nations and globally, irrespective of time and place. Consequently, these students are exposed to other cultures, gaining understanding and experiencing these cultures through both passive activities (such as reading or watching videos) and active interactions (like commenting on videos or chatting with native speakers). Nonetheless, these interactions often necessitate proficiency in English or the targeted language, and a deep understanding of the relevant cultures to avoid potential misunderstandings due to cultural differences.

Cultural knowledge plays a crucial role in fostering respect for other cultures and reducing prejudices (Barrett, 2018; Glass et al., 2022; Sherry et al., 2010; Li, 2020). This understanding promotes non-discrimination and encourages high levels of tolerance towards others (Barker, 2016). As Barker (2016) argues, comprehensive knowledge of Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) enables

effective interaction and communication with diverse individuals.

This study aligns with research conducted by Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2018), which highlighted the importance of cross-cultural interaction practices in academic contexts. These practices encourage meaningful CCU comprehension and help to dispel the parochial definition of nationalism (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2018). Rather than pushing individuals towards chauvinism, the teaching of CCU materials through sharing experiences boosts nationalism. This study demonstrates that gaining knowledge about other cultures does not hinder one's love for their nation; instead, it fosters a broader and more inclusive perspective (Malihah, 2015). The facilitation approach, including open dialogue and communication, is an effective method for introducing students to CCU, reducing cultural clashes and prejudices (Malihah, 2015).

The Subject Matter Expert (SME) approach, involving an experienced speaker as a guest, was found to be effective in teaching CCU, supplemented by the use of technology. This method enables students to gain practical insights and enhance their theoretical knowledge (Mahrous & Ahmed, 2010). The study corroborates the findings of Murray and Bollinger (2001), who posited that an SME could stimulate understanding of

CCU, offering firsthand perspectives and experiences.

While this research offers valuable insights into teaching CCU through the sharing approach, it is not without its limitations. The study primarily focused on a single method of teaching CCU and may not account for the efficacy of other potential methods. Additionally, the participant sample was not diverse, which might limit the generalization of the findings. Future research could expand the scope to include a larger, more diverse sample and evaluate other teaching approaches to provide a more comprehensive view of effective CCU teaching methods.

Furthermore, this study focused solely on the role of the SME and did not examine the influence of other key factors such as curriculum design, student engagement strategies, or the use of technology in teaching CCU. Future studies could investigate these factors and their potential interplay with the SME approach to provide a holistic view of CCU teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

Technology has expanded the sphere of human interaction, often exposing individuals to diverse cultures. To tackle challenges that may arise, such as miscommunication and a lack of respect for other cultures, the teaching of Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) becomes crucial. The results of this study indicate that a sharing approach, which involves subject matter experts, is an effective strategy in teaching CCU. This strategy enhances cultural understanding and strengthens participants' love for their own countries. Moreover, the sharing approach can be applied in various contexts, both academic and non-academic, and can also be used in learning environments with limited access to technology. Given the effectiveness of the sharing approach in teaching CCU, it

is recommended that this strategy be widely adopted. In the future, research should involve more participants and extended sessions to gain a deeper understanding of this strategy's potential. Furthermore, future studies may also utilize or combine the sharing approach with other methods in teaching CCU.

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