

**AN ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL SHOCK ENCOUNTERED BY INDONESIAN
PEOPLE COMMUNICATING IN ENGLISH IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES****Cindy Janely¹, Fariska Wulandari², Yovita Angelina³***eleonoracindy39@gmail.com¹, riskadiandra0212@gmail.com², yovita.angelina89@gmail.com³*Politeknik Tonggak Equator^{1,2,3}**Abstract**

This article provides an in-depth analysis of cultural shock encountered by Indonesian people communicating in English in foreign countries, especially English-speaking countries. The focus of this study is to find out the experiences of culture shock in a real-life during the stay in the host country and the way they overcome those experiences. This study will provide examples from various English-speaking countries and additional information on real-life experiences of culture shock from the informants. The writer does this study by doing interviews with ten people from Indonesia with several occupations who had an international experience, whether it was for working or studying in a foreign country. To prevent people from experiencing culture shock once they move and stay in a new place with different cultural backgrounds, individuals should learn and find out more information about other countries' cultures before going to any country. The cultures include people's ways of greeting, talking, interacting, socializing, behaving, eating, thinking, maintaining eye contact, and managing their time. It is important to note that every country has a distinctive cultural background and lifestyle.

Keywords: *Culture shock, Real-life experiences of culture shock, Communicating in English, Cross-Cultural Communication, International experiences*

1.1 Introduction

Language is being used by all humans to communicate with others. Language is all about the way how people share their ideas, thoughts, information, and express their feelings. Although there are approximately 6,500 spoken languages used by people around the world, not all of the languages are similar to each other. Language differentiates one individual from another because people have different ways of conveying what is on their minds. Some modes of speaking are quite similar, but some are quite different (Anderson, 2012).

There are over 6,000 spoken languages in the world and 450 million people worldwide speak English with different types of speakers and even more,

people speak English as their second language. Nevertheless, many speakers use English and have variety in pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary (Horobin, 2018). As an international language, English has been in use for such a long time and it has changed throughout the years and has become the dominant language in the world that is used by people to transfer information. English is a bridge for people to communicate in a global community. It is undeniable that understanding and mastering this language is a must today, even the basic knowledge of it.

Understanding and mastering English is essential for people, but building good communication and acknowledging others' cultures is also crucial. Ultimately, people

need to deal with other people from different cultures and all sorts of nationalities. Communication will be misleading and not effective if the receiver is not getting the message of what the sender is intending to share. It is because the receiver is not in the same situation as the sender in cultural terms.

Communication and culture have a complicated relationship. Aside from being learned hereditarily from one generation to the next, a culture might be created through communication from a social interaction from one individual to another, which means cultural characteristics are created and shared. As it is stated before, there are around 6,500 different spoken languages. The diversity of those languages is not only about the differences in spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, but also in different cultures of speaking (W. C. Wang et al., 2011).

Culture and communication are two different concepts, but they are directly linked. Communication is all humans' ability to share their ideas, thoughts, information, and feelings. Communication is the basis for all human interaction, while culture is transferred, exchanged, and learned through communication. Culture is differentiated by how people communicate with each other, including how they talk, behave, and act out in front of other people who are not similar to them in terms of culture.

There are thousands of people who also want to have an international experience by studying abroad or an international career by working overseas. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the number of Indonesian students studying abroad has increased by 21% since 2014 (*Market Report Indonesia*, 2020). They want to have the experience of working or studying in another country, expand their network, meet new people from all sorts of nationalities, learn new skills and cultures, and develop personal skills. Working overseas is not only about mastering an international language, but

also about having a basic knowledge of others' cultures to avoid miscommunicating and misunderstanding with others.

Based on the statistic, there are approximately 80,000 Indonesian people who work in Malaysia. There are more than 70,000 Indonesian workers who work in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Singapore is also on the list for having 19,850 Indonesian workers and followed by Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Brunei Darussalam, Italy, United Arab Emirates, Japan, Oman, Qatar, and Bahrain.

Based on the explanation above, the problems of this study are:

1. What are the experiences of Indonesian people about culture shock in foreign countries?
2. How do they overcome the experiences of culture shock in foreign countries?

To focus on this study, the writer will focus on analyzing:

1. The experiences encountered by Indonesian people who have studied abroad about their culture shock and stayed there for at least one year.
2. The experiences encountered by Indonesian people who have worked in foreign countries about their culture shock and stayed there for at least one year.

The purposes of this study are:

1. To find out the experiences of Indonesian people about culture shock in foreign countries.
2. To find out how they overcome the experiences of culture shock in foreign countries.

The benefits of the study are:

1. Theoretically, this study will be helpful for theoretical development for the readers or the further research on a similar topic.
2. This research will provide more information on cultural shock in foreign countries that should be avoided and considered for people who want to work overseas and study

abroad to avoid miscommunicating and misunderstanding.

2.1 Literature Review

Communication is the process of sharing and transferring thoughts, ideas, information, and instructions verbally and nonverbally between two people or more (Hurn & Tomalin, 2013). Communication is the human ability to convey information to create a shared understanding. It is an activity all humans do every day in their life. In other words, communication is the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information. The activity of communicating includes speech, visuals, signals, writing, or behavior. Communication draws on several interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. The interpersonal and intrapersonal skills include speaking, listening, observing, questioning, processing, analyzing, and evaluating. The one who received a message must be able to identify the intention of the sender, take into account the message's context, resolve any misunderstandings, accurately decode the information and decide how to put an action on it. Those skills are essential to be learned to build healthy relationships, create a sense of community and achieve success in the workplace (Velentzas & Broni, 2014).

Culture has many shades of meaning. It is defined as the total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behavior, social habits, etc. of the members of a particular society (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). The definition is supported by Hurn & Tomalin (2013), who remarks "Culture is a system of shared beliefs and values which are learned rather than inherited. It is composed of those values and beliefs, norms, symbols and ideologies that make up the total way of life of a people". Indeed, the origin of language is understood as the human capacity for complex symbolic communication, and the origin of complex culture is often thought to stem from the same evolutionary process in early man. A study by Shachaf (2008, as cited by W. C. Wang et al., 2011), stated

culture can be studied on several levels including international, national, regional, business, and organizational as a complex, multidimensional construct. A wide range of cultural factors: ethnic, organizational, and national influence each individual in the society. Commonly, the definition of cultural diversity includes racial, sexual, organizational, professional, and national heterogeneity. Heterogeneity of national cultures of team members or an individual's national culture defines cultural diversity.

1. Eastern Vs. Western Culture

There are differences between Eastern and Western cultures. There are numerous. There is a noticeable difference between Eastern and Western people in terms of education and their society. Their personalities, behavior, and attitudes toward life are quite different. Western people tend to be bold and aggressive. On the contrary, Eastern is mostly passive and submissive. There is a distinction in how they think between them. In some cases, Western parents believe that their children can make their own decision and decide what is best for their own, while Eastern parents believe that they are still obligated to decide what is best for their children. Even though their children can live independently on their own when they are mature enough to do so, then again Eastern parents think they still must take care of their children until they get married. Thus, Eastern people usually experience culture shock when visiting or staying in Western countries (M. Wang, 2007).

2. Culture in Indonesia

Indonesia is well-known for having the highest tolerance between one ethnicity to others. There are approximately 300 ethnic groups in Indonesia (Yasmin, 2020), and each has its own rules of customs and different cultural objects. However, that does not mean the facts there are not any similarities or tendencies between cultures. Aside from ethnicity, Indonesian people are well known for being religious. Indonesian people are spiritual even though Indonesia has many religions to uphold. They take

each of their religion very seriously, and that is reflected in daily rituals, ceremonies, and even the grandness of their places of worship (Putri, 2018).

Indonesian people were taught to be polite to everyone especially to the elder people since they were young. People sit properly with the position of their feet on the floor and uncrossed legs while guests, men, and elders are given the best seating and deference. Strong emotions and rapid or abrupt movements of the face, arms, or body are avoided before guests. Drinks and snacks must be served, but not immediately, and when served, guests must wait to be invited to drink. The only right hand is used for giving or receiving something because it will be rude if people use their left hand since it is considered only for toilet functions. Guests are served with a slight bow, and elders are passed by juniors with a bow. Confrontations should be met with smiles and a quiet look, and direct eye contact should be avoided, especially with social superiors. Punctuality is not prized – Indonesians speak of "rubber time" – and can be considered impolite (*Ctries. Their Cult.*, 2020).

Language is something that all humans use to communicate with each other and express their feelings in words. A wide variety of human situations involves language, perhaps every situation (Salzmann et al., 2012). Whatever comes out of people's mouths when they talk, play, work, or fight is what people called as language. People live in a world of language. Language is the source of all human life and power. Language distinguishes humans from other God's creations. Language is not only about speech, but the ability to understand others with the sound of their voice or sign, or gesture (Fromkin et al., 2017).

In some countries, that would be a great benefit for people to speak English as their mother tongue because it is used for international congresses, commercial negotiations, journals, music, sports, news,

technology and industry, and other activities involving global participation. In other words, English is the world's number-one second language (Salzmann et al., 2012).

Cross-Cultural Communication is communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. According to Hurn and Tomalin (2013), the cross-cultural relationship is one of the reasons why people failed in communicating aside from speaking different kinds of languages. Klopff and Park (1982, as cited in Akkiliñç, 2018) claim that cross-cultural communication is the interaction and communication with one individual and others, thus the language patterns that are shared, but nonverbal modes are caused by culture. For people to avoid language and misinterpretations, they need to increase their understanding of other people and their own cultures.

Appreciating the diversity of others' cultures is the effective implementation of successful cross-cultural communication. The appreciation of cultural diversity involves mindful listening, cultural empathy, mindful reframing, and self-awareness of global heterogeneity (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). People are conscious of others' cultures can also help them to make free communication become reality. Hence, there will be no misunderstanding between different people from different cultural backgrounds.

Culture shock is experienced by people from different countries all over the world. It is experienced when one moves or visits a new place or area where there is a completely new environment that has different dressing, language, food, and customs. When people move or travel to a new place, they are likely to face a lot of difficulties such as how they act to people around others, and what people say. It is bound to be different from the culture where they come from. People have to be very careful not to offend anybody or make them misunderstand others by the way they act or behave (Akkiliñç, 2018). According

to Lai (2011, as cited in Akkiling, 2018), culture shock is defined as entering and adapting to a new environment with different emotions and feelings. Being away from family, close friends, colleagues, and teachers may enable people to feel uncomfortable due to not being familiar with the cultural norms. Culture shock is the term used to describe the more pronounced reactions to the psychological disorientation most people experience when they move for an extended period into a culture markedly different from their own. Today, nearly everyone has at least heard the phrase “culture shock” (Kohls, 2001). There are five stages of experiencing culture shock. The first stage of initial contact, called as “honeymoon stage”, involves the excitement and curiosity of a newly arrived individual experiences being in a new whole different environment where they are far away from their family and home. When they feel overwhelmed by the new culture’s requirements, the individual experiences self-blame and a sense of being not good or not enough for any difficulties encountered in the disintegration stage. The reintegration stage involves an emotion toward the new culture that causes them some difficulties, people in this stage will show their anger and displeasure toward the new culture, and they are difficult to help. The process of reintegration is continuing to the fourth stage where people in this stage can increase their ability to see and differentiate the bad and good elements in both old and new cultures. They make a balanced perspective that helps them to interpret both their home culture and the new cultures. The interdependence stage is where the person has ideally achieved biculturalism or has become comfortable in both their home and new cultures. People in this stage can live normally in the host country (Pedersen, 1994, as cited in Akkiling, 2018).

3.1 Methodology

In this study, the writer used qualitative research and purposive

sampling technique to get the informants. The writer obtained the data by interviewing some people who already had the experience of working or studying overseas. The informants will be interviewed through social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, or Line. The writer used text-chat or audio voice calls and semi-structured interview questions even though the writer already prepared some questions to encourage the informants to share their personal experiences and perspective. The interviews were scheduled with the adjustment of each of the informants. It was conducted in the Indonesian language to make it more natural, comfortable, and understandable. The interview was done by phone so it will be recorded. The duration of the interviews can be thirty minutes until one hour with around ten to twenty questions. The place of this study was conducted in an unspecified location because the informants were contacted and interviewed through social media such as Instagram, WhatsApp, or Facebook. Mostly, this research will be done by using a phone with the adjustment from each informant because some are currently living outside Pontianak.

In processing the data, the writer used validity and reliability. In analyzing the data, the writer used three concurrent flows of activity, the process of analyzing the data includes: data condensation; data display; and conclusion drawing and verification.

4.1 Finding and Discussion

Based on the research finding, the writer correlated the informants’ answers about their experience of cultural shock communicating in English in a foreign country and the way they overcome such situations during their stay in the host country. It is generally accepted that experiencing a culture shock is a natural and normal thing for people to experience, especially when they are entering a new environment with different emotions and feelings. It is inevitable, or without people

realizing it. Being away from family, close friends, colleagues, and relatives for a long period may enable people to feel uncomfortable situations because they do not have someone that they can trust to share their difficulties while experiencing something unfamiliar with the culture. Every country has its own culture. It is bound to be different between the home and host cultures. This was also experienced by several informants who were willing to share their experiences during their stay in a foreign country that has different habits from Indonesia.

The interview results with the informants show that there are a lot of small things that can be counted as culture shock. Although some people think it is only a small matter and unimportant, it gives a distinct impact on those who experienced it during their stay in the host country. It includes people's way of greeting, talking, interacting, behaving, eating, thinking, managing their time, rejecting an offer, and maintaining eye contact. Even though the things that were mentioned earlier are simple and always happened in daily life, it still gives some effects if people experienced them every day for a long period during their stay in the host country. The greeting is the first step to building good communication and creating a rapport between two people or more. It is an important part of building friendships. Every country has its way of greeting. It depends on the time and function. So, it is better to know other people's greetings behavior to prevent an embarrassing experience. Mostly, the informants encountered almost the same experience with the way Western people greet others in general. Western people are known as friendly, bold, and straightforward. Their personalities, behavior, and attitudes toward something are quite different from Eastern, especially Indonesian people. For Australians and New Zealanders, kissing on the cheek is a preferred greeting among close people, but some people practice it for the very first time or have no close

relationship at all. It depends on each preference, comfort level, and nature of the relationship. A verbal greeting is the preferred form of greetings for Americans between individuals who have met for the very first time or have the least family or friendship connection, but hugs and kisses are the preferred form of greetings between individuals who have a deep and close relationship, especially for girls. Fist-bump or high-fives shows the friendship among the boys. Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, whenever British people say "You all right!", it means "Hello" in general. It needs to be answered with "You all right!". The common practice for greetings is different in every country. So, it is important to understand other people's practices related to greetings since it involves other individuals or groups.

Western people's straightforwardness is not only when they want to get to know or greet some individuals, but also in almost everything. They are not the type of people who understand any codes. One of the informants mentioned it is better to state it directly and clearly, people do not have to be shy and uncomfortable with the native people. If they are given codes without any clear statement, they might find it to be a different meaning. They are the type of people who state something directly without feeling bad for whatever comes out of their mouths. If they do not like it, they will say it out loud. There will be no pleasantries or feeling bad. Besides verbal communication, they also have straightforward writing styles. They might find it strange and weird if some people from different countries use or add too inconsequential remarks in their writing. So, whether it is verbal or written communication, people from Western countries tend to be straightforward.

Straightforwardness does not only apply in their communication, both verbal and written, it also applies in their way to reject an offer and invitation. It is way different from Indonesian people. In

comparison, Indonesian people tend to feel bad if they reject someone's offer or invitation. Usually, they are scared that it might affect their friendship or relationship if they have ever given their rejection. Even if they do not like to join or accept the offer. So, it means sometimes they might be doing it half-heartedly. On the other hand, Western people tend to be consistent with their decision. If no means no. If they want to accept the offer or join the invitation, they will surely say yes. They never think that rejecting some offer or invitation might give an impact on their friendship or relationship just because of feeling bad.

As mentioned previously, people from Western countries are known to be friendly to others. They are a type of people who can greet people whom they never met randomly on the street. They can say "Good morning" or "Have a nice day" whenever they meet people while walking on the street. They can say "Hello" and then ask "How are you?", even if it is the first time, they meet this person. All of their friendliness is not for formality, it does not have an empty meaning. Because they are genuinely like that, it is their personality. One of the informants mentioned that Australians can talk about the weather all of a sudden, but it does not because that's their way to open a conversation. It is because they appreciate the weather for that day. So, it does not have an empty meaning. They say it because they mean it. At first, most of the informants found it strange, because in Indonesia they never encountered something like that. Indonesian people are not used to greeting strangers randomly. Even though it is strange, with some adjustment, they will be used to doing it afterward. The informants said that is one a good culture and behavior that they can learn during their observation and their stay in the host country.

One of the informants mentioned her experience with native people's eating behavior in the host country. It is weird and strange to be witnessed. Indonesian people usually go with a spoon and fork to eat their

food. Meanwhile, New Zealanders usually use a fork and knife to eat rice. Most western people also cannot eat spicy food or they will end up in a hospital or seeing a doctor because their stomach cannot take it. It is something simple, but if it happens every day, it will leave a certain feeling and impression. Moreover, New Zealanders usually eat red beans with rice, they never eat them as a side dish or something that can be cooked with meat. Yet, it still gives a unique experience to the informant.

Besides different ways of greeting, eating, and rejecting an offer or invitation, they also have different ways of thinking. Critical thinking is needed if it is related to study. The assessments and tasks require people to think critically. Since the learning system is different from Indonesia, because it is two-way learning, the students must be able to be active learners. In a foreign country, the students will not get the whole material and explanation about some topic. The professor only gives the topic and provides the basic information and explanation, while the students need to dig up more by themselves. In daily life, people in Western countries are more open-minded to some matters that are unacceptable to Indonesian cultures. Indonesian people may find it as something forbidden.

Time is highly appreciated in a foreign country, especially in a Western country. There is no such thing as rubber time like always happens in Indonesia. Based on the informants' experience, people in the host country appreciate every minute of their life, they will be on time for work, study and appointments. They already calculate and estimate their time, such as when is the right time for getting off to work or attend classes so they will not be late because of a traffic jam or any problems with the transportation or anything else. If possible, they will come earlier than the appointment. So, they will wait for others to come, but they do not make others wait for their arrival. Their lateness will be only five until fifteen minutes. It is still acceptable. Some cultures are very strict with keeping

everything on time, but some cultures have a more relaxed approach to time. Different cultures have their perception of time.

Maintaining eye contact seems simple but the implementation is very important in the host country since there is a difference in terms of maintaining eye contact between Indonesia and Western countries. One of the informants shared that Western people usually look at the speaker's eyes when they are talking to the other person. She was once scolded by her supervisor because she was not paying attention to her supervisor's explanation and discussion about work. After that, she always pays attention to other people whenever they have a conversation. The practice of maintaining eye contact might have positive and negative meanings. Mostly in Western countries, maintaining eye contact while talking or having conversations with others is considered okay. It can be a sign of confidence and respect. It shows that people who are engaging in a conversation give their attention and concentration fully to each other. It is impolite if one does not look into the other person's eye when talking. It is considered rude in New Zealand because it shows that the person is not listening. So, the practice of maintaining eye contact in some countries may show the person is interested in the discussion during the conversation.

There are several types of stages for people who have encountered real-life experiences of culture shock. Some of the informants who felt excited when they were far away from their family and home are in the honeymoon stage. They were curious about something new and different from their home. They felt excited to explore new things and the environment in the host country. Some informants were in the reintegration stage because they were able to differentiate what were the bad and good elements in the host cultures. They might face some difficulties that involved their emotion and feeling during their stay in the host country, but they could overcome the

situation and distinguish the cultures. If they were able to be comfortable with their home and host cultures, they were able to live normally and comfortably in the host country without having any concern or hesitation about something unfamiliar again. Those people are included in the interdependence stage.

As discussed previously, culture shock is a common problem for people once they arrive in a new area or place with a completely different way of life and culture. However, to be able to survive and live peacefully in a whole new situation and environment without any concern, it is important to overcome the experiences. People should seek and find out more information before going to the host country. It may help them to understand the new environment. Time is the only answer for people to adjust to the host country. Observation is highly recommended for people to know about the host country's culture and people's behavior there. The informant suggests that making friends, interacting, and being more open up to the local people may help them to overcome such situations. Try to find and have a trustworthy local person to share their concern about something to enable them to overcome the culture shock faster than those people who hold back. If people can overcome the situation, the next step is they will be able to differentiate which culture is good to follow or which culture is bad to be avoided.

Accepting, appreciating, and respecting the diversity of cultures in the host country can be one of the other steps to overcoming culture shock. Appreciating the diversity of others' cultures is also an effective implementation to succeed the cross- in cultural communication with people who have different cultural backgrounds. People being conscious of others' cultures may also help them to make free communication become reality. So, there will be no misunderstanding between different people from different cultural backgrounds.

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the research finding and discussion described previously, here are the conclusions of this research:

1. The experiences encountered by the informants are mostly simple things that some people consider unimportant things.
2. By finding out more information before going to a foreign country about their cultures will help people to make a faster adjustment and reduce the shock once they arrive and stay for a long period in the country.
3. It is better to interact, open up, and make friends with local people because it can be a powerful tool for overcoming a culture shock during a stay in a foreign country.

Based on the conclusion above, the writer suggested some points that might be helpful and useful for further research on the same topic and for people who are interested to have an international experience, whether to continue their studies or work in a foreign country.

1. Accepting, appreciating, and respecting the diversity that exists in the world is necessary, especially for the people who want to have an international experience whether it is for continuing their studies or working overseas. There is no need to be afraid to face some difficulties during the stay in a foreign country. It is a natural thing since people come from all sorts of nationalities and have different cultural backgrounds. The purpose of having an international experience is to learn and explore something new. Besides, with the international experience, people will be given some positive changes and impacts on themselves.
2. Future researchers can conduct research with a similar topic but toward a more specific country or conduct research with different aims and purposes.

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