

Analysis of Indonesian Students' Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) During Internships in Japan

Cecep Wahyu Hoerudin¹⁾, Baby Poernomo^{2*)}, Supriyono³⁾, Md. Ahsan Habib⁴⁾

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia, ^{2,3}STIAM – Institute of Social Sciences and Management, Indonesia, ⁴University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Email: cecepwahyu@uinsgd.ac.id¹, babypoernomo9@gmail.com^{2*}, supriyono.stiami@gmail.com³, md.habib@du.ac.bd⁴

Abstract: *Internships abroad are a strategic opportunity for Indonesian students to hone professional skills, expand networks, and enhance competitiveness in the global job market. One country that many Indonesian students are interested in for internships is Japan. However, many students encounter challenges in cross-cultural communication. This is a qualitative study with a case study approach. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with Indonesian students who were interning in Japan. To maintain data validity, the researcher used source triangulation. The study results show that Indonesian students interning in Japan in the early period of their stay and internship still experience difficulties adapting to the work environment in Japan, which has high-quality standards, such as levels of discipline, kaizen, seishen, meishi kokan, and doryoku. However, with determination and strong desire, they managed to adapt to the new environment with appropriateness, effectiveness, and adaptability achievements in accordance with the company's expectations in Japan.*

Abstrak : *Magang di luar negeri merupakan peluang strategis bagi mahasiswa Indonesia untuk mengasah keterampilan profesional, memperluas jaringan, dan meningkatkan daya saing di pasar kerja global. Salah satu negara yang banyak diminati mahasiswa Indonesia untuk magang adalah Jepang. Namun, banyak mahasiswa menghadapi tantangan dalam komunikasi lintas budaya. Studi ini merupakan studi kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan mahasiswa Indonesia yang sedang magang di Jepang. Untuk menjaga validitas data, peneliti menggunakan triangulasi sumber. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa Indonesia yang magang di Jepang pada awal masa tinggal dan magang mereka masih mengalami kesulitan beradaptasi dengan lingkungan kerja di Jepang, yang memiliki standar kualitas tinggi, seperti tingkat disiplin, kaizen, seishen, meishi kokan, dan doryoku. Namun, dengan tekad dan keinginan yang kuat, mereka berhasil beradaptasi dengan lingkungan baru dengan tepat, efektif, dan mampu beradaptasi sesuai dengan harapan perusahaan di Jepang.*

Keywords : *Intercultural Communication Competence, Internship, Indonesian Students, Japan*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important factors that can support the process of forming good human resources for a company, organization, and also a country is the presence of superior and competent human resources. In the world of work, Human Resources need to be managed properly and correctly in order to achieve the goals that are desired (Rozarie & Indonesia, 2017).

Good human resources for companies can be trained starting from Senior High School (SMA) level as well as higher education. There are various efforts made to create excellent resources for this country, one of which is through internship programs. In recent years, the importance of educational internships has increasingly been recognized by higher education institutions and the business world. Educational internships not only help students understand how theory is applied in practice, but also help them build networks and identify suitable career interests. However, there are various factors that can influence the effectiveness of educational internships in developing students' competencies. Internship programs are one of the important elements in higher education aimed at equipping students with practical experience before entering the workforce. Internships provide opportunities for students to apply the knowledge they have learned in class in a real professional environment (Siregar, 2023).

Student internships are work practice activities designed for students to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired in college to a real work environment. This program provides opportunities to gain professional experience and is often part of the academic requirements at universities. The main purpose of an internship is to apply the theories and knowledge obtained during lectures to actual work situations. Through this activity, students can gain first hand experience in the industry, understand professional work ethics and culture, and expand a network of relationships that are beneficial for future career development.

According to Mulyana et al., (2022), internship programs have a positive impact on students both in academic activities and the experience gained. This opinion aligns with Hermanto et al., (2021), who stated that internship programs conducted within an industry, organization, or company will provide work experience for students. According to research conducted by Rosyani & Yushita (2017), there are three indicators used to assess the internship experience of a student, namely: skills acquired according to their field of study, gaining practical experience, and training problem-solving abilities related to the working world.

Currently, many universities have collaborated with the industry to provide internship opportunities for their students. These internship opportunities are not only in Indonesia but also abroad. However, many universities only prioritize quantity, by sending as many students as possible overseas, without providing adequate preparation. As a result, quite a number of students experience difficulties and obstacles when undertaking internships abroad. One of the obstacles is caused by students' lack of competence in intercultural communication, which results in prolonged culture shock, and frequently receiving reprimands for not understanding the values, norms, and culture of the country where they are interning. Therefore, the researcher is interested in conducting research on Indonesian students' Intercultural Communication Competence in facing culture shock during internships abroad.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative study that uses a case study approach. Many education experts and practitioners also use case studies as a research approach. Case studies can be said to be very popular in various social science disciplines such as history, politics, psychology, economics, and so on (Yin, 2018).

This research approach is conducted very intensively and in detail. To delve into a specific topic being researched, case study research needs to collect data from various sources. The goal is to obtain a deep understanding of the topic. The phenomenon being studied is usually referred to as a case, which means a real situation that is currently ongoing, not something that has already passed (Miza Nina Adlini et al., 2022). Semi-structured interview techniques are conducted to collect data. According to Creswell (2022), this type of interview is conducted more freely compared to structured interviews. The purpose of this interview type is to explore issues more openly, where the interviewee is asked to give their opinions.

In this study, the researcher interviewed 10 Indonesian students who were doing internships in Japan. The researcher also interviewed 3 hotel managers in Japan, with the aim of observing the quality of work of Indonesian students who are interning in Japan. To maintain data validity, the researcher used source triangulation. Data analysis in this study refers to the Miles and Huberman analysis model. Miles and Huberman (in Sugiyono, 2017: 246) mention three stages in the qualitative research data analysis model, which include data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions.

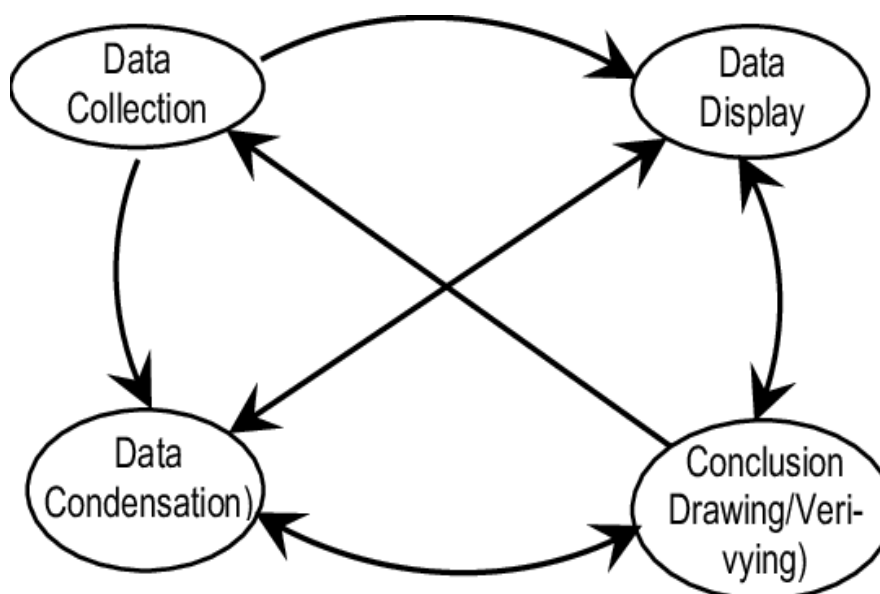


Figure 1. Qualitative Research Data Analysis Model According to Miles and Huberman

Source : Sugiyono (2017)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the researcher's interviews with 10 Indonesian students who are interning in Japan yielded the following data:

Motivation

Out of the 10 Indonesian students who were interviewed, all stated that they were motivated to go abroad and gain new experiences through internships. In the first few weeks in Japan, these Indonesian students encountered difficulties in many aspects. First, in terms of language. Although they had received Japanese language training before going to Japan, the training was still very basic, so many of them still had trouble understanding the conveyed meaning. In addition, the pronunciation of native speakers was still difficult to understand and follow. Nevertheless, over time, they became accustomed to it, and their Japanese language skills showed remarkable progress.

In addition, students also have the motivation to learn new things that they do not encounter in their home country, and over time they become accustomed to them, such as the Japanese culture of always giving something to others with both hands or bowing when shaking hands as a sign of respect.

"In the early days of being in Japan, I still often experienced culture shock, because I still made many mistakes and received reprimands from the supervisors." (Budi Pramono – Indonesian Student)

Seven out of ten students said that at the beginning of their internship, they found it quite difficult to adapt to the new environment, where we know that Japan is very famous for its culture of discipline, working with high-quality standards, being agile and accurate.

Knowledge

Although many students experience difficulties in adapting to the work culture in Japan, with high motivation and a desire to keep learning, they can show remarkable progress. The students who intern in Japan learn many things related to the work ethic in Japan, such as the concepts of *kaizen* (continuous improvement) and *seishen* (spirit). The strong desire to keep learning also allows these students to gain a lot of knowledge not only about the work world but also about life experiences in Japan, including the values and norms of a developed country while still upholding its culture.

"This is a very valuable lesson for me, where Japan is a blend of modernity and tradition, which teaches us to continue respecting tradition and culture even though we live in a digital era that is very close to advanced technology." (Aisyahrani – Indonesian Student)

Ability

With high motivation and a desire to keep learning, students can eventually develop the ability to adapt to a new environment. The ability to understand values and norms makes students no longer feel awkward and can minimize mistakes. With this ability, they no longer feel burdened by strict rules,

because 'discipline' has already become a part of their daily life. Bad habits commonly practiced while in Indonesia, such as littering or throwing candy wrappers into plant pots, are no longer done.

"With the ability to understand other people's cultures, we will be able to improve our own quality and be accepted in a new environment." (Andika Mahesa-Indonesia Student)

Cultural Sensitivity

Communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds is common in this era of globalization. However, in interacting with them, cultural sensitivity becomes a key element in building harmonious and mutually respectful relationships. A person's cultural sensitivity can be seen wherever they are. On public transportation in Indonesia, for example, we often still see people occupying priority seats that are not rightfully theirs, or not giving up their seats to older passengers. Behaviors like this, without us realizing it, have shown that we lack cultural sensitivity.

"While in Japan, wherever I went, I was trained to always be aware of my surrounding environment. I am grateful because I can continuously improve myself to become a better person, with high empathy." (Reni Anggraini – Indonesian Student)

Character

According to Musfiroh (2008), character is a series of attitudes, behaviors, motivations, and skills. Character includes attitudes such as the desire to do the best, intellectual capacities such as critical thinking and moral reasoning, behaviors such as being honest and responsible, and upholding moral principles.

"If we are trained to have good motivation in communication, have knowledge about values, norms, and culture in a new environment, have the ability to adapt to a new environment and live together with people from different backgrounds, have high cultural sensitivity, empathy, and respect for others, then it can be ensured that the character that is visible is a positive character reflected from attitude, behavior, motivation, and skills." (Nina Sagita – Indonesian Student)

Meanwhile, as an evaluative measure, Japanese company managers give their opinions on the cross-cultural communication competence of Indonesian students who are currently doing an internship in Japan.

Appropriateness

Indonesian students who participate in internships in Japan generally adapt quickly to the work environment in companies or workplaces in Japan, which typically follow professional work regulations, such as Kaizen, which means 'continuous improvement.' Keishan also emphasizes the philosophy of continuously improving one's abilities. However, what differentiates the principle of keishan from kaizen is that this principle places more emphasis on factors such as creativity, productivity, and the ability to innovate. Ikigai means or is a term for realizing the idea of happiness in

life. In other words, Ikigai is the concept of happiness in the workplace. It represents a balance among four factors that influence a person's satisfaction and motivation, namely passion, expertise, demand, and value. The attitude of receiving a business card from workers in Japan (Meishi Kokan) is worth emulating, which is to receive it with both hands, and place it on the table or in a bag, rather than in a shirt pocket, so that the relationship with new colleagues can develop smoothly.

Meanwhile, Indonesian students interned in Japan can also quickly adapt to the work ethic of Japanese society, which is known for high-quality work, such as: (a) Hard Work or Doryoku, (b) Discipline and Punctuality, (c) Loyalty to the company, (d) Ability to work in a Team, (e) Honesty and Integrity, (f) Understanding the norms of politeness in communication.

This is in line with the view of Toomey and Dorjee (2015), who argue that competent communicators need to have an understanding of appropriate situational norms to enhance the quality of trust in intercultural communication relationships.

Effectiveness

Indonesian students who intern in Japan are quite able to demonstrate their effectiveness in intercultural communication, among others, by having empathy, tolerance, and high cultural sensitivity. Although some students sometimes still seem to experience difficulties or are not yet accustomed at the beginning of starting work, they can quickly adjust to the rules and culture in Japan. In Indonesia, they might often forget about cultural sensitivity. For example, when seeing an elderly person standing in public transportation, they might not immediately be willing to stand up and give their seat to the older person, but in Japan, this has already become an unwritten rule that, if not followed, will invite a negative reaction from society. This is in accordance with what Toomey and Dorjee (2015) stated, that effective intercultural communication will be achieved if those meanings are accurately considered with cultural sensitivity, and the shared goals have been successfully achieved strategically and creatively.

Adaptability

Indonesian students who intern in Japan so far adapt more quickly and are willing to learn various new things that they do not encounter in Indonesia. Initially, it is still visible that they are awkward with the strict rules in the workplace. Not a few of them appear stressed. However, with hard work accompanied by the determination to succeed, they are able to adapt well to the new environment and culture. Their success in adapting is what then makes them not feel burdened; in fact, they seem increasingly comfortable living and working in Japan. This aligns with the view of Toomey and Dorjee (2015), who state that communication adaptability refers to a person's ability to change behavior and interaction goals in order to suit the needs of a particular situation.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the competence of Indonesian students who are doing internships in Japan shows good results, where the students are able to adapt quickly to a new work environment and place of residence. Students are able to apply well the 5 positive components that influence an individual's ability to interact with different cultures, namely motivation, knowledge, ability, sensitivity, and character. In addition, the evaluation results show that Indonesian students who participate in internships in Japan have good abilities in appropriateness, effectiveness, and adaptability. The researcher suggests that the next stage should conduct research focusing on the problems encountered by Indonesian students participating in internships in Japan with a different approach.

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