

CHAPTER1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Title of the Study

An Analysis of Intercultural Communication Problems Faced by Indonesian International Mobility Awards (IISMA) Awardees of State Polytechnic of Bengkalis

1.2 Background of Study

Communication is a social process in which individuals use symbols to create and interpret meaning in a communication environment of these individuals. Since language is used by common people, many people argue that language is an integral part of a culture. However, a lot of people also believe that language and culture are two completely different things. As a result, language and culture have come together to form a single, inseparable entity because they are always connected and dependent on one another.

Culture has a huge impact on communication, because every individual who communicates will be reflected in his culture seen from the style and way of communicating by using the language that has become his daily language in interacting with his interlocutors. Hall in Liliweri (2005) noted the close connection between communication and culture, asserting that a highly contentious definition. According to Edward T. Hall, only cultured people speak, and they do, their culture has an impact. Humans communicate their culture to others and may also interpret it for them, and vice versa. Culture gives us instructions so we can start, including how to read signals.

Culture and communication are two things that cannot be separated, where each culture has a different way of communicating with each other. Culture as an overall way of life of a society will be seen continuously from generation to the next generation through communication. Meanwhile, the communication process

carried out by anyone is inseparable from their main culture. In every communication, a person will be influenced by the values, beliefs, social organizations he enters, his view of the world, his perception of self, and other people who are part of his culture (Liliweri, 2009).

An increasingly connected world demands the ability to understand communication across culture as an indispensable skill. Shoelhi,(2015) says Cross-cultural communication helps to reduce the uncertainty of communication between people who have different backgrounds. Cross-cultural communication is carried out with the aim of changing attitudes, opinions, behaviours and society, where this is done so that communication can run well and messages can be conveyed well.

IISMA is a prestigious international student mobilization scholarship program from the Ministry of Education and Culture funded by LPDP to study one semester at the best universities abroad. The purpose of the program is an effort to improve student competence, competence is not only national competence but also global competence. The Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program is one of the Indonesian government's efforts to prepare young people to compete in a globalized world. The program provides Indonesian students with the opportunity to study at leading universities abroad for a semester, allowing them to gain international insights, global networks, as well as first-hand experience in interacting with other cultures.

However, the study abroad experience often comes with challenges, especially when it comes to intercultural communication. In this context, intercultural communication is the key to interacting and adapting in a foreign environment. Studying abroad commonly has its challenges, especially in the early years. Some of these difficulties are frequently caused by differences in language and culture, which can interfere with their efforts to achieve academic success in a limited amount of time Zaenal Muttaqin (2022). These communication challenges are not only related to language comprehension, but also include non-verbal aspects such as body language, facial expressions, and etiquette rules that differ between cultures.

The *Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) for Vocational Students* is a program designed to provide vocational students with the opportunity to study and undertake internships abroad for one semester. This initiative is part of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* program and is equivalent to 20 academic credits (SKS). It is organized by the *Perguruan Tinggi Pelaksana Pendidikan Vokasi (PTPPV)* and funded by the *Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP)*. In 2022, three students from the State Polytechnic of Bengkalis successfully passed in this program and were placed in France, South Korea, and Taiwan. The number increased in 2023, with nine students selected to study in the Netherlands, Taiwan, South Korea, and Hungary. As these students are immersed in foreign academic and cultural settings for a full semester, they are likely to encounter challenges in intercultural communication. These challenges may arise due to cultural differences, language barriers, cultural misunderstanding and unfamiliar communication styles, potentially affecting their ability to adapt to the new environment.

As IISMA participants spend one semester studying and interacting in multicultural academic and social environments, they are expected to communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. To gain an initial understanding of this phenomenon, the researcher conducted preliminary informal conversations with several IISMA awardees from the State Polytechnic of Bengkalis. The preliminary findings revealed that some participants experienced difficulties in understanding different English accents, interpreting culturally influenced expressions, adjusting to unfamiliar social norms, and responding appropriately to different communication styles while interacting with local communities and international students. These preliminary findings indicate that intercultural communication problems are experienced by IISMA awardees and therefore provide the rationale for conducting this study.

Several research have been done in this field. Dewi (2018) did research focusly on discussing culture shock that occurs Indonesian students in USA.

Soemantri (2019) discusses the adaptation process carried out by Indonesian students in Australia, then Budiarti et al (2022) had research on the forms of

communication that occur Indonesian students studying in Russia. Although previous studies have generally explored the challenges of intercultural communication about Indonesian students studying abroad and are not mobility programmes and there has been no research that focuses on students who participate in international mobility programmes, especially polytechnic students who take part in IISMA. This research differs by offering a detailed examination of the specific needs, challenges and experiences of these students, especially those from Bengkalis Island who, prior to their involvement in the IISMA program, had limited exposure to international travel or intercultural environments.

This research is important because intercultural communication plays a significant role in students' success in adapting and achieving during their study abroad. A better understanding of the intercultural communication issues faced by IISMA students will help program organizers provide more effective support. In addition, this study can also provide insights for prospective students who are interested in participating in student exchange programs in the future, so that they are better prepared for the intercultural communication challenges that may arise. This study will focus on identifying the types of intercultural communication problems experienced by IISMA students, the factors that cause these problems, and the strategies used by students in overcoming these challenges.

1.3 Formulation of the Problem

Based on the background stated above, the problem that arise in this study are as

1. What are the intercultural communication problems experienced by IISMA students while interacting with communities in destination countries?
2. How do differences in cultural values and non-verbal communication affect the adaptability of IISMA students in social and academic environments?

1.4 Limitations of the Study

In this section, the researcher discussed the scope and limitations of the study. The scope of this study is centered on exploring intercultural communication challenges encountered by IISMA awardees in 2022 until 2024 at the State

Polytechnic of Bengkalis. The research aims to identify the specific communication barriers faced by these students while participating in the IISMA program. However, the study is limited to only 13 students who took part in the program during the specified period.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

1. To identify and analyze the intercultural communication challenges encountered by IISMA students while engaging with local communities in their host countries, including language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and differences in social norms.
2. To examine how differences in cultural values and non-verbal communication affect the social and academic adaptability of IISMA students in their host

1.6 Significance of the Study

1. For Researchers: This study fills a gap by examining the intercultural experiences of IISMA awardees in a polytechnic context, especially from less globally connected regions, providing new insights and a basis for future research.
2. For Readers: It offers valuable understanding of the intercultural communication challenges faced by IISMA students at the State Polytechnic of Bengkalis, emphasizing the importance of intercultural skills in diverse academic settings.
3. For the State Polytechnic of Bengkalis: The findings enable the institution to identify specific challenges in international programs and develop targeted support such as pre-departure training and workshops.