Strategies to Improve Intercultural Communication Knowledge of Business English Students in an Indonesian Higher Education

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Abstract
This article aims to portray strategies to enhance students' intercultural communication knowledge. This survey of English department students in Business English study programs seeks to understand strategies of how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world around them. The findings show that engaging frequently with people from different cultures, attending cultural events, and obtaining information about people from other cultures through various sources. The findings suggest that to improve intercultural knowledge, a person needs to take part in many intercultural occasions and events so that they can establish and immerse themselves within a multicultural environment.

Keywords: Strategies, Improve Intercultural Communication Knowledge, Bussiness English Students, Indonesian Higher Education

Introduction

The issue of intercultural communication has become an important theme within scholars and researchers around the globe particularly those who are interested in interculturalism, multiculturalism, and communication. Researchers around the world investigate issues and themes within the scope of intercultural communication: online intercultural writing competence (Xu, 2017), intercultural language teaching dimension (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002), assessing intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2011), the internet and intercultural communication

(Marcoccia, 2012), intercultural in ESP contexts (Aguilar, 2018), and intercultural competence within bilingual contexts (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2018).

The definition of intercultural communication is feined by different authors. Intercultural communication refers to the communication between people from two different cultures (Chen & Starosta, 1998). Intercultural communication is a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process, in which people from different cultures create shared meanings (Lustig & Koester, 2007). Further, intercultural communication refers to the effects on communication behavior, when different cultures interact together. Hence, one way of viewing intercultural communication is as communication that unfolds in symbolic intercultural spaces (Arasaratnam, 2013).

The research of intercultural communication and competence within the Indonesian contexts has been explored in many different themes. For example, intercultural sensitivity in English language teaching (Dollah, Abduh, & Talib, 2017), collaborative culture (Rosmaladewi & Abduh, 2017), intercultural understanding within foreign language learning (Saud & Abduh, 2018), cross-cultural understanding in syllabi of language teaching (Prihatin, 2018), and multicultural themes in Islamic settings (Abduh, Basri, Shafa, Patak, & Rosmaladewi, 2020). From these convincing studies, none of them focuses specifically on intercultural communication knowledge in English specific course contexts. As a result, there is a limited understanding of intercultural communication knowledge within this particular setting. Moreover, many studies have focussed on intercultural issues rather than strategies to develop intercultural knowledge among university-specific contexts. Therefore, it is suggested to conduct further studies within the research gap mentioned in this article.

Further, this study aims to fill the current research gap by exploring strategies for developing students' intercultural knowledge, particularly in business English learning contexts. This study can contribute to the debate of English as Specific Purposes and the debates on intercultural communication.

Research Design

This research is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology studies illustrate the meaning of a life experience for some people about a concept or phenomenon. People involved in dealing with a phenomenon explore the awareness structure of human life experiences.

Research data

The research data were obtained from English students at Makassar State University with different ethnic and regional backgrounds. Every student has experience in learning English as a foreign language during high school as a passive learner. English courses are structured to build a strong foundation for the ability to use English academically, communicatively, and accurately. Therefore, the expected outcome is that students will be able to use English in their communities, as long as they study in college and the future.

Data collection technique

The focus group discussion (FGD) method is one of the tools used for the data collection because this study is aimed at obtaining qualitative data that does not involve tables and statistical calculations. In this case, data collection was obtained through interaction between discussion group members (Ritchie, et.al., 2003). From this method, information is expected to emerge

naturally through conversations between participants. FGDs were carried out in two different groups. Each group consists of twelve people.

The second method chosen for this research is a qualitative interview to maintain data quality and to obtain more information. Another reason is that the question is also about what each student does, so the data collection process involves a face-to-face conversation between the researcher and the investigator. In short, the process is based on several considerations such as the parties to be interviewed, the sampling strategy, and how to get access to the interviewees (Minichiello, 1990). One of the conditions is that the informant for this interview must be accessible to the researcher so that he can communicate easily. In interviews, the questions are arranged in the form of open-ended questions to get more in-depth information so that they are not uniform (Weiss, 1994). By using this method, it is expected that the interview can provide additional answers that were not expected by the researcher at the beginning of the study.

Data analysis technique

After the data is collected, researchers use thematic data analysis as the approach. A priori approach, as part of thematic data analysis, is taken to get the results of the analysis. Using this approach, researchers can determine categories to group data without considering what will emerge from the data (Freeman, 1998). There are four elements of data analysis, namely naming, grouping, finding relationships, and displaying.

Findings
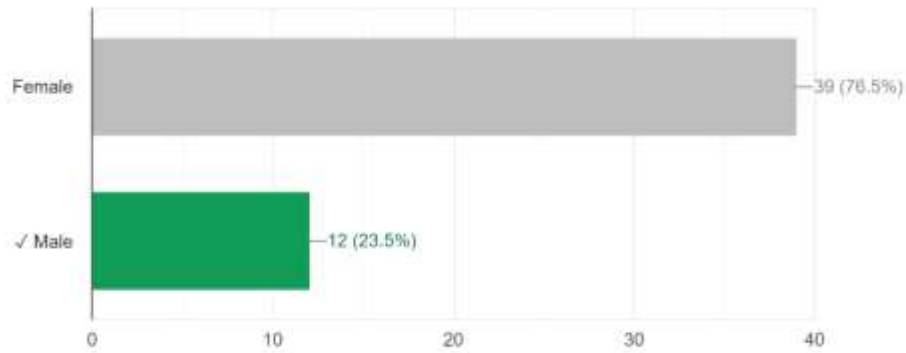
Participants' profile
Gender background

Figure 1. gender background

From the graph above, it indicates that the majority of the participants in this study is female compared to male consisting of nearly a quarter of the total number of the participants. The reasons of having more female in this research is due to the female students dominate the body of Business English Department as the site of this research.
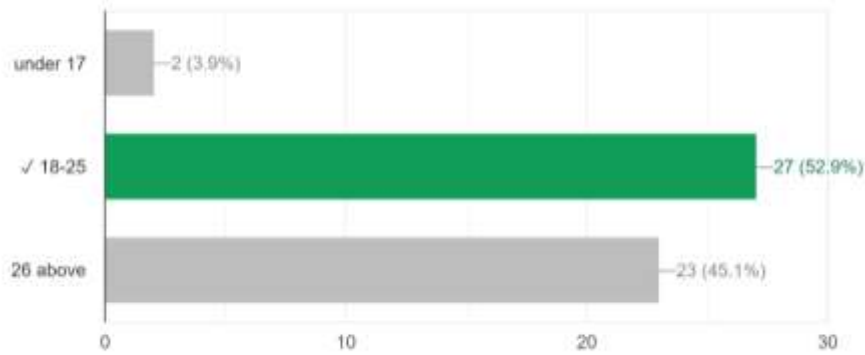
Figure 2. The age of respondents

Concerning the age background, it is between 18 and 25 years of age consisting of more than fifty percent of the participants. It is followed by the age above 27 years. However, there is a small percentage of participants' age below 18 years. This shows that the participants of this study are categorized as adult participants.
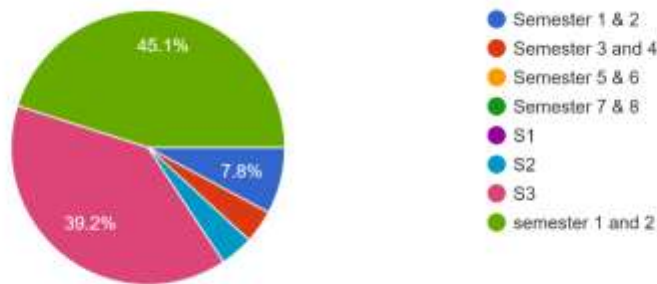

Figure 3. Respondent educational status

In terms of educational background, there are different ranges: bachelor's students, master's and doctoral degree students. Among these three, the majority of them come from undergraduate levels particularly those from the senior students in the final years of their studies.

Strategies to improve intercultural knowledge
a. Engaging frequently with people from different cultures
There are two important ways to engage with people from different cultures: a) interacting with them in an informal situation and b) engaging with informal situation.
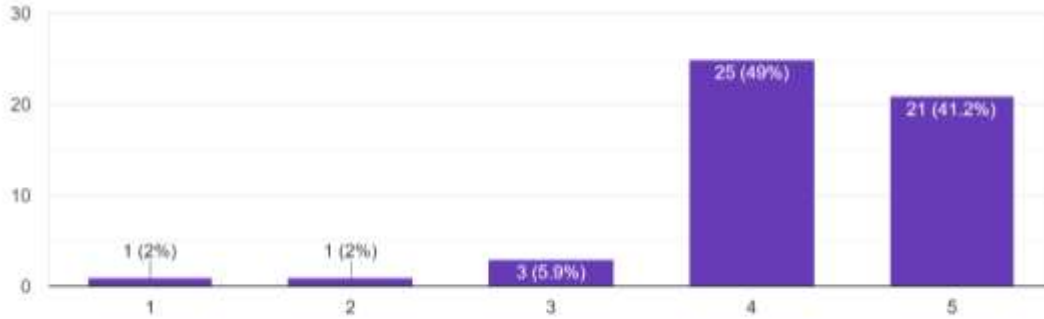
Figure 4. Interacting with people in an informal situation

From Figure 4, it indicates that the interaction with people in informal situation is very important to learn and improve knowledge of other cultures. It is due to that informal occasion allows learners to be more relaxed, open and mutual interaction. It is far from the rigid procedures and administrative rules that can prevent them from interactive communication. The informal situation provides opportunities for students the get in-depth information about other cultures. This approach can facilitate the understanding of other cultures from many sources and many different kinds of information. The informal way seems to be the most preferable approach for students to learn other cultures compared to the formal training or formal situation.
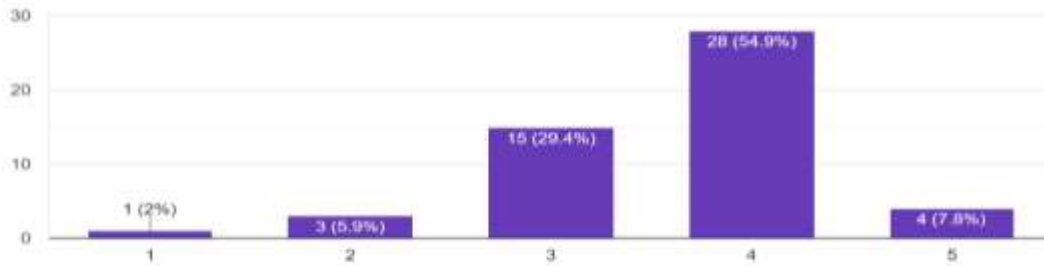

Figure 5. Interacting with other people in a formal situation

The formal situation includes attending class, regular training, and any related intercultural programs provided by formal or public institutions. The most common ways of increasing the knowledge of other cultures are through attending formal class or training, which has many positive impacts: the materials are organized systematically, the lecturing is well-managed, and the situation is formal with the rules and regulations are imposed formally. Regular training is often organized by institutions that concern about intercultural understanding and knowledge.

b. Cultural events

Cultural events can be one of the ways to improve the knowledge of students concerning other cultures. There are two types of cultural events: national and international cultural events.
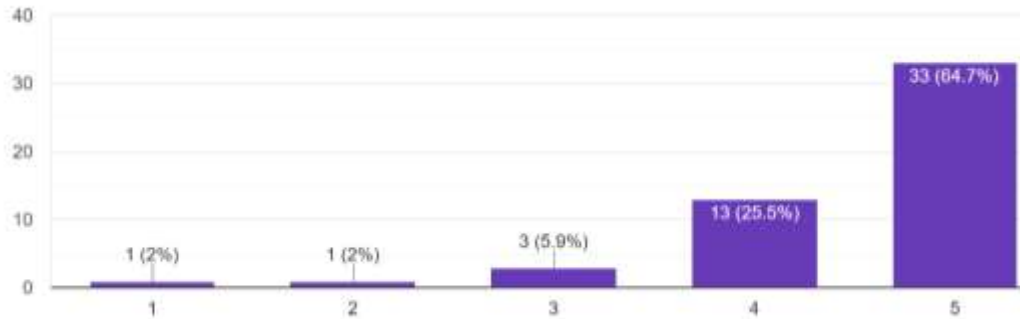
Figure 6. National cultural events

The national cultural events are the activities that can provide knowledge to learners on the diversity of the cultural existence across the Indonesian archipelago. The national cultural events aim to show the symbol, logo, and characteristics of different cultures nationally. The events can be annually or every six months so that they will become regular events for Indonesian and other visitors. The national events can be held in different cities every year. They can exhibit the uniqueness of each culture followed by cultural arts and performances. Through these different scenarios, learners are provided with rich knowledge on cultures, arts, dances, and performances.
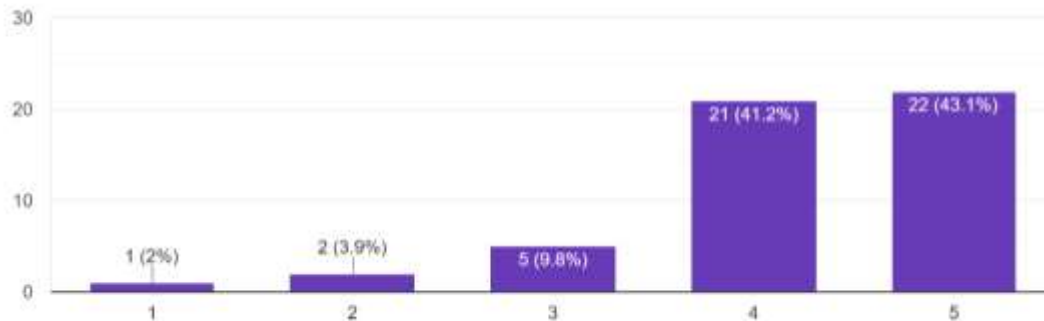

Figure 7. International cultural events

On the other hand, the international cultural events aim to invite other countries that have mutual agreement and collaboration with Indonesia. The events can provide the intercultural understanding knowledge of learners about the diversity and uniqueness of other countries' cultures. As a consequence, learners can improve their learning and knowledge of other cultures so that they become an intercultural minded individual who can interact and work with people harmoniously.

c. Obtaining information about people from other culture through various sources

Two different media can be used by students to learn about other cultures informally: digital and non-digital media. The non-digital media includes newspapers, books, and any available printed media.
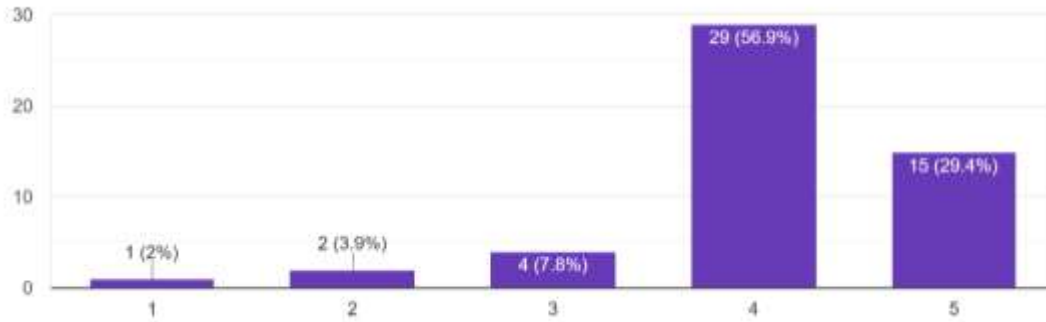
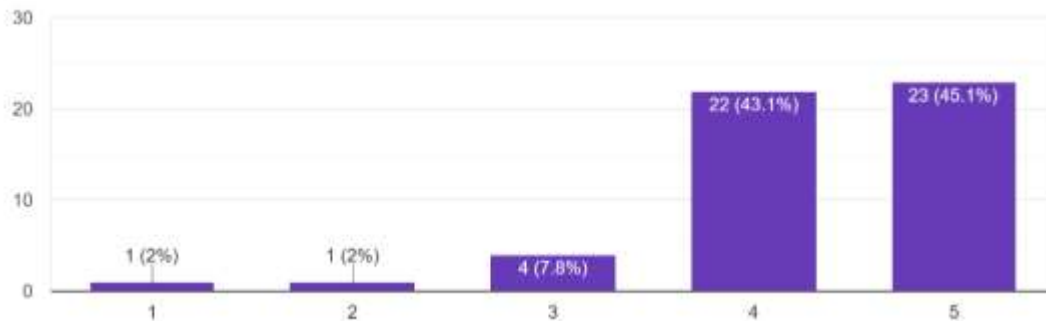Figure 8. Reading through books and printed materials

Figure 9. Learning other cultures through digital media

Digital media includes you-tube, online intercultural resources, video, online radio, and television. Digital media has significant advantages for learners: it is a visual and hearable form. Digital media help learners to convey a comprehensive understanding of other cultures.

Discussion

The findings in this research extend the previous works by earlier researchers in the area of promoting and increasing intercultural understanding knowledge in western and non-western contexts. It extends the understanding of previous studies on intercultural communication (Chen & Starosta, 1998; Arasaratnam, 2013).

The findings reflect what Rosmaladewi and Abduh (2017) investigated the collaborative culture in Indonesian polytechnics. Intercultural communication knowledge can be developed through the establishment of cultural events. Those cultural events are one form of the collaborative culture that is genuinly establish for the development of science, knowledge, and interaction.

It is also interesting that multicultural events have been perviously investigated by Prihatin (2018). These events have been stated explicitly within the cross-cultural understanding syllabus and how to design a syllabus that accommodates the intercultural understanding issues. This research shows a further understanding of how multi-cultural events can be a better source for intercultural knwoledge development.

What has been missing from the earlier conversation is that the importance of individual initiative through readings and participating in cultural events might the pivotal finding in this

current research. The notion of sustainable personal development can improve personal knowledge on intercultural understanding, which results in becoming an intercultural competent person.

Conclusion

The research shows strategies to enhance students' intercultural communication knowledge. It appears that engaging frequently with people from different cultures, attending cultural events, and obtaining information about people from other cultures through various sources are the key findings in this study. The findings suggest that there is an important recommendation for educational institutions to adopt different cultural strategies to imrove their students' knowledge on intercultural communication in this digital era.

From the discussion above, this study suggests that it is recommended to conduct further study of intercultural understanding because there is still limited information of intercultural communication from non-western context. There is a need for an investigation into intercultural understanding, particularly from students 'perspectives. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' views on intercultural understanding from a non-western context, particularly in the Indonesian higher education context.

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