



# Cultural Immersion Program as a Potential Live Laboratory for Applied English Students in Indonesia

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**Abstract** - Applied English students as vocational future graduates must be prepared to be ready to work in international atmosphere directly after they are graduates. One of the most essential skills that should be learned is intercultural interaction. There are two problems that should be answered in this research. First, how is the previous implementation of CIP in Indonesia? Second is why CIP can be used as live laboratory for applied English students? The purpose of this research is to discuss and analyze the success of CIP in Indonesia and its potentials of Cultural Immersion Program (CIP) in becoming the live laboratory for Applied English students. Reflected on the increasing number of International Students in Indonesia, many Cultural Immersion Programs (CIP) held by some institutions to build interaction between local society and international students. This research is a qualitative study. The data is collected by asking 30 international students. This study found that the implementation of CIP in Indonesian is seen as something effective to learn about Indonesia by the international students who ever joined the program. Another finding is CIP could be a miniature of the working place for international tourism since it also has intercultural interaction as well as has same goal and principle with international tourism. Therefore, it could be a potential live laboratory for Applied English students in Vocational School at the university level.

**Keywords:** cultural immersion program; international student; international tourism; intercultural communication

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## 1. Introduction

Applied Studies underlines organized learning and mastery since the graduates are required to be equipped with students' readiness in facing the work field right after they graduate. English for Tourism is preferred to be the major of Applied English at Diponegoro University. Applied English, as one of the major in Vocational School at this point additionally ought to modify and figuring out how to be in line the direction of Vocational School. One way that is basic, yet simple to be actualized is coordinating the learning framework with the need of the industry.

In International Tourism industry there is another essential skill besides the English skill and Tourism skill that need to be prepared for students before they graduate named Intercultural communication comprehension. According to [1] it is commonly recognized that language and culture are related, and are firmly connected with one

another. It is because culture will always influence the made of language; therefore, language contained rich social variables. According to [2], culture is defined as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. It is also have been discussed since century ago by [3] stated that culture is a complex entity includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

Even if there are some subjects related to intercultural skills have already given to the students such as Intercultural Communication, Communication Skills, and British American Culture, some problems are still existing. The first problem is students are only practicing the materials with their classmates. Therefore, they could only be practicing the language, but not the culture as part of their language. [4] mentioned that individuals from

deferent societies have their own social recognitions, convictions, qualities and social customs which enormously decide their correspondence ways. It is not astounding to find that individuals have numerous troubles and impediments in understanding each other and speaking with each other. In daily intercultural correspondences, it is important to focus on the code that integrated with social norms and behavior.

Currently, Indonesia is receiving many foreign students who come to study through different programs such as scholarships, student exchange, student tour, as well as inbound and outbound programs. This is the big opportunity for the government of Indonesia to share and spread each culture and social experience through establishing different programs like Cultural Immersion Program (CIP). According to [5] CIP is the act of surrounding yourself with the culture of a place. It might mean living with family and helping out on their farm, or simply sharing a meal with a local. Cultural immersion is a unique experience that can open doors to a deeper understanding of an unfamiliar place.

For international students, CIP can enhance what is taught in school by extending student learning beyond the classroom, into the community. In this aspect International students are students who chose to undertake all or part of their tertiary education in a country other than their own and move to that country for the purpose of studying. The main aims of establishing different program about culture is building an interaction between local society and international students.

On the other hand, CIP also could be a potential live laboratory for Applied English students in implementing their intercultural knowledge from the class. However, most of CIP are not attended by the Applied English students. Instead, it is full of international students or Indonesian students coming from other backgrounds that want to learn English. Therefore, this paper aims at analyze CIP as potential live laboratory for Applied English students based on the similar characteristics of CIP and students' future working place in international tourism.

## **2. Context**

Cultural Immersion Program (CIP) is the program used by many educators to equip students with the skills they require to succeed in a global environment. Cultural immersion programs already acknowledge by global world since it shown to support global outcomes include service learning, global service-learning, study abroad programs, and international internship [6]. Studies show that participation in these programs increases outcomes such as cultural tolerance, global awareness, self-development, listening, intercultural communication, and critical thinking [7]. There are several different names of CIP in Indonesia such as Summer School, Summer Course, Cultural Exchange, or Live In. However, the basic idea of those activities are similar. In Indonesia, the main idea of those activities is more to build an interaction between local

society and international students. CPIs in Indonesia usually held for couple of days until couple of weeks.

## **3. Details of the Research**

### **3.1 Research Questions and Objective of the Research**

There are two problems that should be answered in this research. First, how is the previous implementation of CIP in Indonesia? Second is why CIP can be used as live laboratory for applied English students? The purpose of this research is to discuss and analyze the potentials of Cultural Immersion Program (CIP) in becoming the live laboratory for Applied English students.

### **3.2. Research Methodology**

This research is qualitative descriptive study. Data is taken from 30 international students who are living in Indonesia and have experienced in joining the CIP. The data collection method used in this research is structured open-ended questionnaire. Some questions have been prepared to guide the participants in answering the questions. Open-ended questionnaire is chosen since according to [8] open-ended question gives the research participants opportunity to describe their opinion as well as respect the topic under discussion. It is better than forcing respondents to agree or otherwise with the statements that have been provided by the researchers.

The voices of international students are chosen under several reasons. First, most of the participants of CIP is coming from international students. Second, the international students have similar characteristics with the international tourists. [9] and [10] stated that foreign tourist can be classified as inbound tourists. They have the exact characteristics of tourist in education type of tourism. The most obvious things for classifying international students as tourists are cross-border movement, economic impacts, and socio-cultural consequences. Results of the questionnaires then being discussed and analyzed along with the literature review and previous study.

## **4. Knowledge of Cultural-Immersion Program**

There are 10 general questions related to CIP that have been given and answered by 30 international students both male and female, and both master and bachelor degree students in some various ages around 18 – 40 years old. The students are coming from social and science field of study.

The results found that almost 75% students are stated that CIP which mostly attended by the international students in Indonesia. Some of the international students were also attended same CIP during their stay in Indonesia. However, when they need to describe about three things that they have learned during that program, they mentioned it variously.

Some participants mentioned the “real things” that they get during their CIP. For instance, new knowledge, traditional dances, martial arts, Indonesian food, Bahasa Indonesia, etc. Meanwhile, some other students mentioned the value behind those experiences related to what did they get from the CIP in Indonesia. Those things are spirit of

tolerance, social diversity, Indonesian Islamic system in woman empowerment, intercultural issues, and also different ways of communication.

Those differences in receiving the message of an activity is a normal thing. According to the basic theory of communication as stated by [11] individuals contrast in their own accounts, manners by which they experience things, and passionate reactions, prompting contrasts in the manners by which interchanges are encoded, transmitted, got, and comprehended. Various individuals join various implications to the words, pictures, sounds, and motions utilized during correspondence.

## **5. CIP and Applied English**

In this part, some similarities of the objective and nature of CIP as well as Applied English will be discussed. It will be analyzed under two major ideas. Those are: 1. CIP and Intercultural Communication; 2. CIP and International Tourism.

### **5.1 CIP and Intercultural Communication**

As its named, it is obvious that CIP has strong relation to Intercultural Communication. [12] mentioned that communication as a result learning a culture will always create challenges. The differences usually based on interpersonal style, professional expertise background, or any cultural backgrounds (ethnicity/ race, gender, and religion). CIP which always consist of many international students with various background will be an effective place to practice intercultural communication. It is because CIP usually takes long time and has a lot of group activity. This can be a good chance for Applied English students to practice their intercultural communication.

Reflected to the results of the questionnaire, it could be seen that all of the participants could learn something positive during the program. This study found that the intercultural competency has already shown by the local society in Indonesia. It can be seen by the international students' satisfactory on local society acceptance and treatment during their stay.

Since the international students are studying far from their family, we could say that CIP could be work also as the place to promote harmonious society experience for the international students from community and neighborhoods aspect.

According to the theory on harmonious society stated by [13] social harmony is essential for truly being social because it means that you can have a harmonious living with your surroundings. Further, Sharma also stated are four elements in shaping the harmonious society. Those are family, nation and government, organizations, and community and neighborhoods.

Some of the opinion summarized from the questionnaire results could be stated as followed:

Question: Value being learned during CIP

1. Spirit of tolerance
2. Cooperation and unity
3. Harmony, culture, peace

4. Intercultural issues
5. Friendship, solidarity, and creativity
6. Democracy issues and minorities

Question: The ways to adopt Indonesian culture

1. Through learning and intermingling with natives
2. Imitation and interaction with local people
3. Exchanging experiences with others
4. Participating many community events

Based on the results, we could see that CIP programs are effective to promote intercultural communication in Indonesia. It is proven by the success of the respondents that could absorb the value being promoted as the goal of CIP. It is also could be seen that the favorite alternative ways to adopt with Indonesian culture is through socialization with locals as also being the function of CIP.

Concept of CIP as the live laboratory for English students can be define as transformative learning. Transformative learning is the learning process that makes student could experience a perspective change through their learning. Some scholars also believe that transformative learning can change significant an irreversible the way of someone thinking and acting. It is because they will get different experiences, new conceptualizes, and learn how to interact with the world [14] and [15]. [16] also stated that experiencing another culture helps people losing any potential feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, and uncertainty with not understanding.

Regarding to the results of questionnaires some challenges are still found during the programs. The most challenging issue is the language barrier between the local society and international student that sometimes obstruct the cultural and social changes. Almost 70% of the participants are mentioned language barriers are becoming the main problem to achieve it. According to [17] three reasons behind why language is more than essentials. First, language expresses cultural reality (with words people express facts and ideas but also reflect their attitudes). Second, language embodies cultural reality (people give meaning to their experience through the means of communication). Third, language symbolizes cultural reality (people view their language as a symbol of their social identity). Besides those issues, adaptation of wealth condition, food and socialization style have been remaining also to be a problem to the international student in Indonesia.

However, this lack of CIP also could be a potential place for Applied English students to apply their English skills. They could be a bridge between the international CIP participants and the local societies. Students can do experiential learning to deal with intercultural communication as well as English competency in a real condition. It is based on study conducted by [18] which found that experiential learning method usually designed as a bridge between theoretical instruction and the realities.

## 5.2 CIP and International Tourism

Besides the similarities and benefits of CIP for Applied English students, CIP also could be a potential platform to learn about international tourism in a real atmosphere. According to [19] there are some important components of tourism that should be offered to society since it can influence the tourism supply and demand. Those are tourism facilities, tourism services, environment and facilities, which include a demand component of tourist activities and aspirations of the community and around the area of tourism. By joining CIP programs, students also can learn about how to treat international guests to fulfill all those tourism components especially in the parts of services, activities, as well as building the warm connection among the CIP participants and community surrounded in the area of tourism.

Related to the function of CIP to promote Indonesian tourism in one package with culture and value, almost all of the participants stated positively. There are two questionnaire questions upon this issue. The first question is about mentioning the local social life and culture of the visited places. Some of the answers are stated as followed:

*"I visited Madura; still known by culture or tradition like Karapan Sapi. Karapan Sapi is a party event for people and tradition that can relate one's social status. This tradition has been handed from generation to generations."*

*"Dieng. Their cultures are gathering and haircut for new baby born with the belief that if the kid grow without having the first haircut event, their hair will not grow longer."*

*"Most Indonesian are Muslim, so they live according to Muslim rules like wearing Hijab for woman, and they are very kind."*

Further, there is similar natures of CIP and international tourism. People are choosing to do the activity to get some memorable experiences. [20] explained that in tourism industry, something that will always be stored by the individual is the value of experience. The experience felt by tourists is started before they arrive at the destination, and will be used in planning the future visits. [21] found that consequently, tourist count experiences as overall experience of destination during the travelling time, from initial departure to the return home. It consists of inherent factors combination and associated satisfaction in terms of acquired and consumed services during the holistic tourism experience which will decide the overall satisfaction level of the tourists.

In line with that, according to [22] "concrete experience" is the most effective way to learn cultural interaction. According to social learning theory, concrete experience such as CIP involves being immersed in an

experiencing by using feelings and understandings. Results of the questionnaires also supported that experience is the reason behind their decisions to join CIP during their time of study in Indonesia. 20 from 30 students mentioned exposure and international experience as their motivation in joining the CIP. Others are about opportunities, career, or a responsibility from their university or scholarship.

It is therefore, both CIP and international tourism demand the professional service to make them having a good memory. It is because both will decide the future international guests who want to come to Indonesia. Either for leisure, business, or even study. This can be a platform for Applied English students to learn to be professional in communicating internationally. They should be able to create a happy atmosphere because both CIP participants and international tourists are joining the activity in a pleasure.

Not only having a similar nature, actually CIP programs also effective to promote tourism in Indonesia. When it comes to a question about major cultural and social aspects that they have learned from CIP, students mentioned various issues. Some examples are food, language, music, tradition, dance, traditional visual arts, social life, ideology, and clothes. Those are already representing the success of tourism promotion for tourism in Indonesia. This is why CIP program is appropriate to be a live laboratory for Applied English students.

[23] explained that for social studies, a good laboratory for sustainability education and innovation is the one that can develop a transdisciplinary, community-based, and high-level course that engages students in participatory research that linked dimensions of social sustainability. A good laboratory to practice their knowledge is by collaborating with community partners to work across networks, disciplines, and institutions in order to make students have the opportunity to solve real problems in the local community.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The graduates of vocational program in university level is hoped to be match with the needs industry. This is therefore, they should be equipped with additional skills to support their knowledge and basic skills. For Applied English students at Diponegoro University which is focusing more on English for Tourism, intercultural communication skill is a fundamental skill that cannot be neglected since they are prepared to work in an international environment. However, students are lack of opportunity to practice their intercultural comprehension. Cultural Immersion Program (CIP) as a program that has function to put students contributing to the society in a real world, become a very potential program to be a live laboratory for Applied English students. Other factors that make CIP is promising is because in Indonesia, CIP usually dominant with international students which is using more to merge the international students with local society. Moreover, CIP has proven succeed in making international

students learn about Indonesia effectively. CIP also has some characteristics which is similar to international tourism. Therefore, CIP consider potential to be a live laboratory for students, in which they can practice their knowledge as well as learning directly in the place which has exactly same atmosphere with their future carrier.

As a recommendation, this research is only focusing on the reason why CIP is potential for becoming the real live laboratory for Applied English students. It is hoped that in the future, there will be a research upon the mechanism of inserting CIP to the curriculum in order to make the learning process becomes more structured and maximum.

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