



Management of Anxiety and Uncertainty of Indonesian Students in Taiwan

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Abstract

Through cultural differences that are felt, especially with the language barrier experienced by Indonesian students while studying in Taiwan, this study aims to find out how Indonesian students manage the anxiety and uncertainty felt when studying in Taiwan. This research uses qualitative research with an explanatory type of research. Based on the results of interviews with the informants, researchers found that over time the informants were able to overcome the sense of anxiety and uncertainty they felt. Using assistance such as keywords, body language, and technology makes it easier for the informants to interact with the local community. In this study, researchers found that anxiety and uncertainty are naturally felt when a person enters a new cultural environment, but an attitude of openness to existing differences is needed to be more receptive to them.

Keywords: *Anxiety Uncertainty Management (AUM); Intercultural Communication; Indonesian Students; Taiwan*

Introduction

Indonesia is a country that requires its people to study for 12 years, making education one of the important aspects of people's lives. In addition to adding knowledge, education can also shape a person's character by socializing with friends who have diverse backgrounds. Having diverse backgrounds in the educational environment can help a person to value each other more and have a high sense of tolerance between each other. The rapid development of the times has made education programs abroad become an attraction for millennials in Indonesia. Offers in the form of scholarships and experiences to make friends from different countries make study abroad programs a special attraction for Millennials.

One of the countries that are often the choice for Indonesian Millennials to pursue their education in Taiwan. According to the Director of Education Division of Taipei Economic and Trade Office (TETO) Grace Ou, stated that in 2018 as many as 7,000 Indonesian students were studying at several universities in Taiwan. At the Taiwan education exhibition conducted online on 20 June 2020, the Director General of International and Cross-Strait Education, Ministry of Education of Taiwan, Andy Cheun-An Bi, said that the number of students from Indonesia in Taiwan is in the fourth position and every year always increases rapidly.

However, the difference in cultural backgrounds between the two countries is the reason that creates a sense of anxiety and uncertainty when Indonesian students study in Taiwan. One of the cultural differences that is the biggest obstacle for Indonesian students is language, where the language used is Mandarin. The existence of language differences can cause misunderstandings in communication due to the difficulty of understanding the message to be conveyed either by the communicator or the communicant. In this case, Indonesian students who act as communicators have difficulty communicating effectively with their interlocutors who are Taiwanese. Through interviews that have been conducted with Indonesian students who have studied in Taiwan, the obstacle felt during the first two years in Taiwan was communication caused by language differences (MN, interview, 18 July 2022).

Based on these constraints, researchers use anxiety uncertainty management theory which is a developmental theory of the uncertainty reduction theory of Berger and Calabrese (1975). In anxiety uncertainty theory, anxiety and uncertainty are used by Gudykunst and Hammer to explain how a person can adjust when engaged in a cross-cultural communication process. Where anxiety is described as a feeling of discomfort, worry, or anxiety, while uncertainty is described as a person's inability to predict or explain the feelings and behaviors of others. This theory differs from the theory of uncertainty reduction, by emphasizing the importance of managing uncertainty and anxiety to generate effective communication with strangers rather than simply reducing the sense of uncertainty and anxiety itself.

Gudykunst assumes that at least one person in an intercultural meeting is a stranger who experiences anxiety and uncertainty. When strangers enter a new culture, they tend to have a sense of anxiety and uncertainty related to the behavior, feelings, beliefs, values, and habits of the local community. The sense of anxiety felt by strangers at the time of communicating with the local community arises from negative expectations, because strangers do not want to try to reduce their sense of anxiety and uncertainty completely (Gudykunst, 1995 referred in Gudykunst, 2005). At the same time as strangers, they cannot communicate effectively with the local community if the sense of anxiety and uncertainty felt is too high.

When the sense of uncertainty is too high, strangers cannot interpret the message that will be conveyed by the local community accurately or make accurate predictions about the behavior that will later be carried out by the local community. In this case, strangers need to have the ability to predict some of the behavioral patterns typically used by local communities to undergo an effective communication process. When communicating with strangers, sometimes the communicator is unknowingly unable to recognize that the communication carried out is not effective due to the emergence of anxiety and uncertainty.

The basic concepts of anxiety uncertainty management theory consist of seven categories of superficial causes, basic causes, moderating processes, and outcomes. Through the basic concepts contained in anxiety uncertainty theory, superficial causes contribute to problems from anxiety and uncertainty when communicating across cultures. The seven categories that are superficial causes are self-concept, motivation to interact, reactions to strangers, social categorization of strangers, situational processes, connection with strangers and ethical interactions. In this study, the authors will use seven categories of superficial causes to find out how Indonesian students manage their anxiety and uncertainty while studying in Taiwan.

Research Method

The research method used in this study is qualitative research, which is research used to examine the condition of natural objects where the researcher is a key instrument (Sugiyono, 2005). Through this qualitative research, the researcher uses a type of explanatory research that is an approach to find details of why something happened, the objective being to provide details of existing information in detail and also to discover the why and for what an object of study is. In this study, researchers used two data sources that will be used, namely primary data and secondary data. The primary data source in this study

is Indonesian students studying in Taiwan. As for the secondary data that will be used in this study, it is previous research, books, and Google.

The data collection technique used in this study is by conducting observations and interviews with predetermined informants. During the observation stage, the author has been carried on a visit to Taiwan as an exchange student. Through this visit, the author got a topic that was used as research material and found several student candidates who would be used as resource persons. In addition, the researcher also conducted interviews with 3 Indonesian students who were studying in Taiwan through a Zoom Meeting from April 7, 2022 – April 23, 2022.

In this study, the data analysis techniques that will be carried out by the author include data collection through interviews that have been carried out with the informants, then recording the results of interviews that have been obtained through recordings into written form, and reducing data to make it easier to collect data that has been obtained and choosing the main things that will later be used in research. In addition, the authors also use data triangulation to support the results of the data collection that has been carried out. In this study, researchers will use source triangulation to support the results of the study.

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of observations that have been made by researchers during student exchanges, researchers found three informants who would be interviewed. Researchers will attach profiles of three informants who will be interviewed through a table. The data below was obtained by researchers through online interviews that have been conducted with informants. Two of the three informants were students who were studying at the master's degree level, namely YH and AC while, C was a student who was studying at the undergraduate level.

Table 1.1 Informant Data

NAME (INITIALS)	AGE	ORIGIN	LONG STAY IN TAIWAN	MAJOR
YH	25	Ambarawa	1 Tahun	<i>Global Master Business Administration</i>
AC	22	Semarang	6 Bulan	<i>Food and Nutrition</i>
C	19	Jakarta	6 Bulan	<i>Ball Sport</i>

Source: Informants, 2022

Through interviews that have been conducted by researchers with the three informants, researchers found that differences in cultural background such as language are not an obstacle to continuing education abroad. YH stated “*selain Bahasa Inggris sekarang kan Mandarin itu juga berguna jadi aku milih buat pergi ke Taiwan supaya buat bisa belajar Bahasa Mandarin juga buat dapat master degree-nya juga jadi dapat dua duanya langsung gitu*” (Interview, 7 April 2022). Just as YH chose to continue her education in Taiwan to learn Chinese, C also said

“*Pertama soalnya ada cece disini abis itu kedua itu uang kuliah juga gak beda jauhlah sama uang kuliah Indo jadi bisa sekalian belajar Bahasa Mandarin, abis itu yang ketiga juga emang mau ambil jurusan olahraga gitu tapi di Indo itu katanya kurang masih apa ya masih lebih baik di Taiwan lah.*” (Interview, 25 April 2022)

The reason that Mandarin is one of the languages that began to be used internationally, became a special attraction to continue education in Taiwan. On the other hand, the development of technology in

Taiwan is a special attraction for AC in continuing her education in Taiwan.

Based on interviews that have been conducted with a psychology lecture, she said that *“Prinsipnya, menghadapi sesuatu yang baru atau asing bisa jadi menimbulkan kecemasan karena hal tersebut belum pernah dialami sebelumnya. Begitupun saat memasuki budaya yang baru, kecemasan dan rasa ketidakpastian bisa saja muncul.”* (DK, interview, 16 July 2022). This was also felt by the three informants when they first came to Taiwan. So, they prepare themselves in advance by looking for information about the country of Taiwan. Through the information collected, the informants admitted that this was very useful for them, so they were not too surprised when exposed to a new culture. The information that many of the informants got was about how to talk to local people in Taiwan due to language differences and also about quarantine regulations and the condition of the Taiwan state during the pandemic.

When they first came to Taiwan there were some cultural differences felt by the informants. YH feels that local people in Taiwan are fast-paced in carrying out an activity, while YH itself is an individual who tends to be slower. Due to these differences, YH must adapt to the habits of the local community so as not to be left behind. On the other hand, AC states that Taiwanese tend to have an individualistic personality. They are independent and more assertive towards something than Indonesians. Through these cultural differences, AC sometimes finds it difficult when approach some of her classmates, most of whom are local Taiwanese people. Hence, she had to approach her friends first to communicate with them to build a sense of trust between them.

In contrast to YH and AC, C said that *“Iya, budaya hampir mirip - miriplah sama aku ya, di rumahku sama di Taiwan hampir - hampir miriplah komunikasi juga lebih sering pake Bahasa Mandarin.”* (Interview, 25 April 2022). The existence of cultural similarities between Taiwan and his family makes C not feel about the cultural differences between Taiwan and his family. On the other hand, C felt anxiety when he was afraid of not being able to have friends when he was in Taiwan, C said that

“Takutnya takut gak punya temen ci itu doang. Soalnya aku udah tau juga, sebelum dateng ke Taiwan kan ada kaya guru yang contact aku gitu kan nah aku nanya nih orang Indonesianya berapa di sekolah ini atau gak orang Malaysia deh yang bisa ngomong bahasa Indo juga kan, ya kira - kira dia bilang kalo orang Indo mah cuma 1 ya di bachelore itu S1 lah di Taiwan sini orang Indo cuma 1 itu juga beda jurusan sama kamu, jadi dia ngomong kaya gitu kan ya aku deg - degan kan. Takut gak bisa cari temen, gak bisa ngobrol kalau tahun pertama apa lagi apa stress - stressnya kan, belum terbiasa juga gitu.” (Interview, 25 April 2022)

According to the point of view of psychology, the sense of anxiety is described with feelings of discomfort such as fear, anxiety, and uneasiness when facing something as well as a sense of uncertainty depicted through feelings of uncertainty about what will happen in the future (DK, interview, 16 July 2022). This was also felt by the informants when they were going to interact with local communities in Taiwan. Where they feel scared, worried, and anxious at the time of starting communication with the local people in Taiwan. Through the theory of anxiety uncertainty management, there are 7 categories of superficial causes that can be used to analyze how to manage the sense of anxiety and uncertainty felt by foreigners when interacting with the local population when entering a new culture. The 7 categories contained in superficial causes are self-concept, motivation to interact with strangers, reaction to strangers, social categorization of strangers, situational processes, connection with strangers, and ethical interaction with strangers.

The self-concept describes that the social identity of a person tends to be active when communicating with strangers. Since communicators interpret strangers differently from the part of their group. Although the identity of the informants is different from that of the local people, the information obtained before coming to Taiwan can help them overcome the sense of uncertainty felt when communicating with local people. In this case, the informants still feel proud of their identity which is

Indonesian. This is supported by statements from the three informants when communicating with local communities in Taiwan they will tell their interlocutors that they are Indonesian so that their interlocutors can understand their deficiency in communicating. In addition, because the three informants are of Chinese descent, so they need to emphasize to the local people in Taiwan that they are Indonesians and not Taiwanese. Despite having a different self-identity from the local people in Taiwan, the three informants still carry the habits that they usually do in Indonesia when they are about to interact with the local community.

On the other hand, there is a motivation for someone to be able to interact with the local community in which they are located. Turner (1988, referred to in Gudykunst, 2005) suggests when the necessary needs meet each other, making the individual becomes more motivated to engage in interaction with strangers. The emergence of a mutual need for each other is one of the motivations used by the informants to interact with local communities in Taiwan. Such as AC and C who interact with their classmates intending to have friends who can help them while studying in Taiwan. AC said that

“Faktor pertama itu karena adanya rasa saling membutuhkan satu sama lain. Soalnya kalau aku ga deket sama mereka, ga kenal, aku mau ada masalah apa ga bisa tanya, ga bisa minta bantuan. Terus kita kan karena satu kelas, satu lab itu barang-barang di lab itu semua kita pakai barengan. Jadi kita tuh harus sharing, kita harus sharing terus ga tau kan aku cara pakainya gimana jadi mereka harus ngajarin aku gitu. Aku minta tolong diajarin gitu.” (Interview, 16 April 2022)

The intensity of the meeting that occurred between AC and C and their classmates made them motivated to be able to interact with them. Unlike AC and C, YH admitted that the motivation to interact with local people in Taiwan came from herself. YH said that:

“Ada sih motivasi dari diri sendiri sih kaya kalau misal aku gak nyoba - nyoba kapan aku bisanya gitu kaya gitu sih, kaya kalau dimulai dari pesen makanan aja kaya kalau misal aku takut - takut terus kapan aku bisa lancarnya, jadi aku mulai beraniin diri kalau misal pesen makanan atau minuman gitu ngomong kalau biasanya kan cuma nunjuk aja gitu tapi sekarang mulai ngomong. kalau kaya pesen minuman oh satu gelas gini gini pake mandarin gitu aku mulai coba sendiri gitu kalau gak tau ya nanya temen.” (Interview, 7 April 2022)

With this encouragement, YH can be braver in interacting with local communities in Taiwan.

When a person interacts with strangers of different cultures will generate a sense of anxiety and uncertainty in predicting messages during communication. At this stage how a person reacts to strangers becomes important so that communication can take place properly. Having a high sense of tolerance toward each other can make communicators and communicants more comfortable during interacting. Through interviews conducted with the three informants, researchers found that the informants were quite comfortable when communicating with local communities in Taiwan. According to statements from the three informants who said that local people in Taiwan can appreciate how the informants communicate even though they are constrained by language. Despite language limitations when communicating, local people in Taiwan can understand and assist the three informants when there are errors in pronunciation when speaking.

When carrying out interactions in a social environment there is often a grouping between individuals into certain categories. Goffman (1959, referred to in Gudykunst, 2005) argues that functional behavior in situations between groups involves recognizing the differences that exist between groups and using that information to make interactions occur as smoothly as possible. Increased understanding of the similarities and differences between existing social groups will help to lower the sense of anxiety and improve the ability to accurately predict the behavior of local communities. As felt by C when he first came to Taiwan, C didn't feel too much difference because of the cultural similarities between Taiwan and his family therefore C could interact more easily. The three informants found cultural similarities

between Taiwanese and Indonesians. It is excessive curiosity about something – when communicating about daily life interactions can run more easily and comfortably. These interactions can help in reducing the sense of anxiety and uncertainty felt by the informants.

In the category of situational processes, one of the main ways that influence a person's behavior is through scenarios that are activated when in different situations. In this case, the scenario helps the communicator when going to carry out communication with strangers. With the scenarios that are formed, it can help the communicator in reducing the sense of uncertainty when interacting with strangers. Like AC, which started by continuing to approach her classmates, AC can better understand how the character of her friend. The approach that AC does can help her in forming scenarios that will later be used when interacting with her classmates. Unlike AC, YH said that

“Kaya misalnya mau minta menu di restaurant aja kaya gimana ya ngomongnya, kaya dipikirin dulu mateng – mateng baru abis itu maju ke depan buat minta menunya. Disiapin dulu kata – katanya gimana terus juga dengerin dulu nadanya gimana biar gak salah ngomong, kaya deg – degan gitu nanti bener gak ya ngomongnya. Terus kalau gak, kalau ada yang bisa mandarin suruh dia yang pergi ke depan.” (Interview, 7 April 2022).

YH will prepare in advance what will be conveyed to the seller by reassuring the tone of speech that will be used with applications such as Pleco and Google Translate. Preparing in advance what she wants to say can help reduce anxiety during communication.

In addition to encouragement or motivation, a sense of attraction is also one of the triggers for a person to interact with strangers, besides that, a sense of dependence also affects the way a person communicates with strangers. However, apart from the statement, researchers found that the intensity of the encounters that occurred between the informants and their classmates was one of the factors that helped in strengthening the relationship with each other. As felt by AC and C when they get more intense in meeting with their classmates makes them feel connected to their classmates. With a sense of connection with each other, the communication that occurs between AC and C with their classmates becomes more comfortable. AC and C began to be able to do non-formal communication such as talking about daily life. On the other hand, the feeling of dependence between each other such as needing each other in lecture activities makes AC and C able to build relationships with their classmates well. Unlike AC and C, YH, which only interacts with local Taiwanese people outside the campus environment, tries to find friends who are Taiwanese because there is a sense of interest in making friends with Taiwanese people to help YH in learning Chinese.

Respect for each other is the basis of the ethical attitude that every human being should have. In the category of ethical interactions with strangers, a high sense of tolerance can help a person in appreciating the differences that exist when communication takes place. Although language differences are the main obstacle when the informants enter a new culture, these differences do not make the local people in Taiwan disrespect those who are Indonesian students, there is tolerance for the shortcomings of the three informants, helping the three informants in overcoming the sense of anxiety and uncertainty felt when communicating with local people in Taiwan. YH said that the sellers who interacted with her will help to justify the mistakes that occurred (interview, 7 April 2022). In addition, C said that when he made a mistake when reciting a word in Chinese, his friends helped to correct the mistakes made (interview, 25 April 2022). This was also conveyed by AC (interview, 16 April 2022). The differences between the informants and the local Taiwanese people do not make this an excuse to degrade each other, but through the existing differences, the local community in Taiwan should help in complementing the shortcomings of the three informants.

Apart from the seven categories of superficial causes in the theory of anxiety uncertainty management, researchers found other factors that can cause anxiety and uncertainty when communicating with strangers. Existing ethnic factors, it is one of the obstacles when interacting with local communities

in Taiwan. Like YH and C who are of Chinese descent, where their appearance looks like local people in Taiwan. Because their appearance is similar to the local people there, it is one of the obstacles when communication is taking place. Many of the local people who met them misinterpreted that they were Taiwanese and not Indonesian. When this happens, the local people there will start communicating using Chinese with the informants, while the informants do not understand Chinese too much.

Through interviews conducted with the three informants, researchers found that through the sense of anxiety and uncertainty felt when they first arrived in Taiwan, the informants could be overcome over time. The existence of several motivations created can help the three informants in overcoming the fears and worries felt. The encouragement to have friends to help while studying in Taiwan as well as the encouragement to be bolder to start communicating with the local Taiwanese community helped the three informants in overcoming the perceived sense of anxiety and uncertainty. Similar to Indonesian students who have finished their education in Taiwan, she also said that due to the urgent conditions to be able to communicate with the local community, she became more courageous and confident in starting interactions with the local community (MN, Interview, 18 July 2022). In addition, the mutual respect and respect for cultural differences between the three informants and the local community in Taiwan made the three informants more comfortable while communicating. The understanding given by the local Taiwanese people regarding the shortcomings of the three informants in speaking Chinese made the three informants more courageous in communicating.

Through an analysis that has been carried out using seven categories of superficial causes, researchers found a way for the three informants to manage their feeling of anxiety and uncertainty while in Taiwan. The three informants had their ways of managing their sense of anxiety and uncertainty. Like C who had a hard time in the first three months when he arrived in Taiwan, C met a friend who was a Malaysian who could speak Malay and Mandarin well so that he could help C when he wanted to communicate with the local community.

“Yang bantuin orang Malaysia yang mandarinnya bagus dan melayunya bagus. Jadi aku kalau mau ke guru pasti bawa dia. Jadi aku ngomong sama dia kalau dia gak ngerti paling Google Translate ke melayu dikit bentarlah ya abis itu dia ngomong sama ini translatein ke gurunya gitu” (Interview, 25 April 2022)

Through the results of the interview, it can be concluded that C can manage his feeling of anxiety and uncertainty because the help of his friend who can speak Chinese. Likewise, C can be calmer when he has difficulty communicating.

Unlike C, YH communicates with local people when ordering meals or buying goods at stores. YH uses technology to communicate with local people. The development of technology can help YH in overcoming the sense of anxiety and uncertainty felt when interacting with local communities in Taiwan. Using an application such as Google Translate can help YH to prepare before she starts interacting with her interlocutor who is from a local community.

“Kalau gak pake Google Translate, jadi kalau udah bener - bener sampe gak ngerti yaudalah Google Translate, nanti dia ketik di HP nya juga, Google Translate sih ngebantu banget kalau sama - sama gak ngerti terus kek pake Google Translate diliatin terus nanti dia bales pake Google Translate juga” (YH, Interview, 7 April 2022)

In this case, the application is very helpful for YH in overcoming the sense of anxiety and uncertainty felt, because through the application YH can minimize errors when speaking in Chinese with the interlocutor.

On the other hand, AC has her way of managing the sense of anxiety and uncertainty it feels. The thing that AC does is continue to approach her classmates who are Taiwanese. Using an approach model that is usually used by Indonesians can help AC in getting closer to her classmates.

“Pertama banyak approach mereka sih tapi paling gampang biasalah orang Indo tuh suka menyogokan jadi cepet, kaya beli beli apa gitu aku bagi-bagi ke mereka, kaya Valentine aku beliin coklat terus aku kasih, aku tulisin kaya note note gitu loh ke mereka gitu, terus abis itu kami menjadi lebih improve gitu loh hubungannya.” (AC, interview, 16 April 2022)

The small actions that AC keeps doing make the classmates slowly open up to be able to get to know each other. In addition, using several keywords when communicating can help AC in reducing misunderstandings that occur when interacting.

Through the existing differences, it is proven that the three informants can manage their sense of anxiety and uncertainty even in different ways. Help from friends, technological developments, body language, keywords, and strong self-concept became the methods used by the three informants in managing their sense of anxiety and uncertainty during their time in Taiwan. In this case, researchers found that age factors, as well as education levels, can help a person in managing their sense of anxiety and uncertainty, such as AC. Although the three informants experienced difficulties when they first arrived in Taiwan, especially the language. However, they were able to overcome this in their way. After almost a year of education in Taiwan, the three informants have begun to be able to adapt and are also more comfortable in communicating with local communities in Taiwan.

Conclusion

Through this research, it can be seen that a sense of anxiety and uncertainty is naturally felt when a person enters a new culture, but an attitude of openness is needed to be able to accept differences. Being open to the changes that occur when entering a new culture can help us to be able to be more accepting and appreciative of the existing differences so that the sense of anxiety and uncertainty felt is not too high. When a person can be more open to existing differences, they tend to be able to better control the sense of anxiety and disapproval that is felt. On the other hand, researchers found the existence of conditions in which when a person is in an urgent state can help a person to more quickly adapt to the new social environment. In addition to the need for an attitude of openness to new things and some conditions that force a person to be able to adapt to a new culture, encouragement and motivation are part of important factors in helping the management of anxiety and uncertainty. The existence of motivations such as wanting to have friends and motivation to learn Chinese helped the three informants in overcoming their feeling of anxiety and uncertainty. This motivation can help a person be more courageous in facing existing differences. The attitude to be able to accept and appreciate differences is also an important factor for a person in managing their anxiety and uncertainty. When a person can appreciate and have a sense of tolerance for differences, then it will be easier to accept the differences so that the level of anxiety and uncertainty will be lower.

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