

# The Scavenger Hunt: A Technique for Enhancing Culture Learning and Intercultural Communication Practice

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In this changing era, which is characterized by the interconnected world, and the increasing mobility of people, the need to be able to communicate inter-culturally is evident. To be successful in intercultural communication, one does not only need to be linguistically competent but also culturally knowledgeable and sensitive. Bearing in mind these cultural needs, this paper details the scavenger hunt technique as a tool for enhancing culture learning and intercultural communication practice. Although this technique applies to*

*students of any major, this study was specifically implemented to a group of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Indonesia. Participants of this study were nine (9) male and twenty (20) female students of The English Language Education Program at a private university in Central Java, Indonesia. The students did the scavenger hunt in a group of four or five during their three-day trip to a multicultural setting in Indonesia: Bali island, and documented the activities in vlogs. The students' vlogs which were data of this study were analyzed by using a qualitative content analysis approach. The findings showed that the scavenger hunt task resulted in the students' learning on cultural knowledge, intercultural communication, intercultural adaptation, information technology, and soft skills. During the three-day program, the students could also use English in a meaningful way. The study presented the strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations of this study, as well as some ideas for further research.*

**Keywords:** *culture learning, intercultural communication, EFL, scavenger hunt.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Several studies on the EFL teaching have indicated that linguistic skills without cultural knowledge and awareness might be inadequate for effective communication (Alptekin, 2002; Bahman, 1990; Council of Europe, 2001). Cultural knowledge and awareness in the context of EFL today is not merely directed to the culture of native speakers of English, but to the culture of the world, as English is now used as a medium of communication across nations (Alptekin, 2002). To facilitate culture learning and intercultural communication, theories and practice within the classroom environment might not suffice. Practice in real-world situations and problems, with the first-hand experience, using experiential learning, has been reported to be significantly useful (Shih, 2015). This kind of learning uses an approach that focuses on the process (Wright, 2000). Practice like this kind enables students to implement the lessons in the classroom (Myers & Jones, 1993).

This article briefly reviews culture and intercultural communication learning for EFL students and the use of experiential learning in the form of a scavenger hunt technique for the students' practice. The application of the scavenger hunt exercises is described in detail, and the results of the activities which the students documented in a form of vlogs are presented and discussed. The article closes with a summary, which includes the strengths, weaknesses of this study, and recommendations for future implementation of this scavenger hunt technique. Some topics for further studies are also provided.

### ***Culture learning and intercultural communication in EFL context***

Culture, in brief, can be described as "a set of knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, ideas, and traditions formed within, owned, and shared by a group of people and passed down from generation to generation" (Shih, 2015, p.409). Halverson (1985) developed the concept of culture in two big categories: the big "C" culture and the small "c" culture. Shih (2015, p.409) described Halverson's categories of the big "C" culture as "visible aspects of culture such as food, art, artifacts, geography, history, and institutions," and the small "c" culture as "less visible or invisible aspects of culture, such as language symbols (verbal and nonverbal), values, beliefs, and behaviors associated with a group of people". While Lee (2009) listed the big "C" culture referring to things like arts, history, geography, business, education, festivals and customs of a target speech society and the small "c" culture referring to values, norms, and beliefs that varies according to socio-cultural

factors such as freedom, privacy, equality, informality, fairness, control over time and competition.

Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby (2003) divided culture learning in three aspects: the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. The cognitive aspect of culture learning is the learning of knowledge of culture, which includes the big “C” culture and small “c” culture. The affective culture learning is when learners can accept the learned culture as something positive, and the behavioral aspect of culture learning is when one is aware of the learned culture and can behave appropriately in the learned culture. The three elements of culture learning are best learned in context and under the circumstances of the learned culture (Shih 2015). The static approach of culture learning regards cultural knowledge as unchanging (Brooks, 1975). The dynamic approach of culture learning considers culture as constructed by a group of people so it may change and culture learning should be obtained through interaction and communication with the local people (Paige et al., 2003). Shih (2015, p.407) in her study argued that cultural knowledge could be gained through “cultural immersion” such as “observing, participating in experiential learning activities and engaging with a culture”. Culture learning is to enable students to reflect their own culture to or possibly in contrast to another culture (McKay, 2002; Kramsch, 1993). In other words, learning the culture of others is connected to the understanding of one's own culture.

A situation where people/s who have different cultural backgrounds interact is called intercultural communication (Issa, 2016). “Intercultural communication is a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people from different cultures create shared meanings” (Girik Allo, 2018, p.160). The students' knowledge of the diversity of culture is vital in

cross-cultural encounters (Mc Kay, 2002). A misunderstanding may occur, should people communicate without an understanding of each other's cultures. "Culture determines what we perceive, how we react to situations, and how we relate to other people" (Hall & Hall, 1990, p.136). With the increasing mobility of people and the constantly changing world, people are likely to encounter intercultural communication situations in their daily lives, the workplace, and in almost all aspects of life. Therefore, culture learning has become increasingly important and been included in the higher education curriculum.

In the context of EFL in this globalized world, EFL students do not use English to speak with native speakers of English only as they may be in contact with people all over the world using English as the medium of communication. Consequently, teachers can not teach the cultures of the native speakers of English only, as they used to. McKay (2002) argued that as English is widely spoken as an international language, the paradigm of the target culture learning is no longer directed to the cultures of the countries that use English as the first language, but to the international culture. In this way, students may learn about the cultures of the peoples from the countries that they are interested in visiting, although they may not be people whose first language is English. Borrowing the terms of the three concentric spheres of Global English proposed by Kachru (1985, p.12-15), the target of culture learning can be of the culture of "inner circle" countries that include: USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, or of "outer or extended circle" countries that use English as a second language, or of the "expanding circle"

countries that use English as a foreign language. In the context of learning English in Indonesia, where English is a foreign language, occasions, when English is to be used, will likely be among people of different nationalities with different cultural backgrounds. In other words, communication in English will mostly be intercultural communication.

### ***The scavenger hunt as a pedagogical tool***

Scholars have found the advantages of employing authentic learning activities or experiential learning to enhance learning. The scavenger hunt technique, among the others such as problem-solving, and a group project, belongs to this type of learning. In [collinsdictionary.com](https://www.collinsdictionary.com), a “scavenger hunt” is defined as “a game, usually played outdoors, in which the players must collect various objects from a list of things they have been given.” (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/scavenger-hunt>).

As a pedagogical tool, a scavenger hunt technique has been used in various fields, both in language and culture studies and in other areas. In Business studies, for example, Doyle, Helms, and Westrup (2016) implemented the scavenger hunt technique to nine students and two faculty members from Dalton (GA) State College during their nine-day trip to Monterrey, Mexico. They reported that "the use of scavenger hunt experiment can be economical to the study abroad program and can replace the typical city tour" (p.84). They also observed that students learned to read city maps and use public transportation in the city. Other learnings from the scavenger hunt in this study are "long-term interest in Mexico, in international travel, in learning another language, and in pursuing careers in International business" (p.85). The use of scavenger hunt exercises to support business schools are

also acknowledged by some researchers, in particular to compensate the students' inadequate work experience (Shipp, Lamb & Mokwa, 1993), and to support language awareness and learning (Doyle et al., 2016; Kaplan, 1997).

Another study was done by Renner, Cahoon, and Allegri (2016), who investigated the use of scavenger hunt exercise for facilitating campus library orientation for students of health sciences at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). The results were described to be beyond orienting students to the library. Both students and the library staff seemed to enjoy the activity. It was reported that the library staff didn't feel like working extra, but they felt the assistance they provided during the hunts was just like the course of regular work.

The scavenger hunt was also done in some other settings. In Geography courses, Krakowka (2012) used a scavenger hunt task as one of the types of field trips. In his example, students received a map of the scavenger hunt about Central Park, New York. Students had to answer questions and find a specific location. The findings indicated that this activity enabled students to connect between reality and theory, accentuate learning, and motivate students to explore further. The Scavenger hunt is also used to enhance learning in the field of archeology (Holzinger, Lehner, Fassold, & Holzinger, 2011), to develop interest in a topic (Klopfer, Perry, Squire, Jan, & Steinkuehler, 2005), and to build student camaraderie (Kassens & Enz, 2018).

In the context of EFL, a number of studies revealed the benefits of the use of the scavenger hunts in the teaching of intercultural skills and language

skills. In a study conducted in Japan, Butler, Watkins, and Wilkins (2012) used this technique successfully to nine EFL students at Kansai University of International Studies. The nine students had to complete a scavenger hunt task in a group of three students in the areas of Osaka and Kobe. The nature of the task was to speak in English with their team members and English speaking foreigners as they completed the task. For example, they had to shop for some groceries at a store run by an English speaking foreigner, visit a coffee shop and meet a foreigner who was the researcher's friend but who was unknown to the students. They should speak to the foreigner who had a clue to do the next scavenger hunt task. Findings indicated that the activity enhances students' autonomy of learning and integrates the learning of communication across culture into their daily life activities.

Mclean (2006), in his article, reported that Altherton High School in Louisville, Kentucky, USA implemented the scavenger hunt technique for students from Korea, Somalia, Croatia, Iraq, Mexico, and other foreign countries who came there to study English. These students had to do a scavenger hunt of Louisville city landmarks. Students reported that they liked doing the scavenger hunt. They loved the group work, they learned about the technology downtown, and all of them enjoyed doing tasks outside the wall of the classroom. Even the teachers who were involved in supervising the students also benefited from the scavenger hunt task as they became expert in using a GPS unit and got to know different places downtown.

A study of the use of the scavenger hunt technique for intercultural learning, an essential aspect of language learning, was conducted by Wesp and Baumann (2012). Participants of this study were nine undergraduate students at a public university in St. Croix in the US Virgin Island (USVI) and



11 undergraduate students at a public university on the US mainland. Although both groups of students were majoring in Psychology, the researchers affirmed the applicability of this technique in other settings for intercultural learning by students of all majors, which include EFL students. The nine USVI students were hosting the eleven US mainland students. The scavenger hunt task was prepared by the hosting students to be completed by the visiting students. The task was about historical issues, culture, language, and food. Besides doing a scavenger hunt, they had other course activities, which included dinner with the host students, class meals, and tours of a plantation, a reef, and a social service program. The findings revealed that the students believed the scavenger hunt was more effective for culture learning compared to other activities in the course. It enabled the students to explore different aspects of culture not only for the visiting students but also for the hosting students as they devised questions, verified answers, and interacted with their mainland counterparts. The activity was also reported to add cultural contacts and lead to friendship as students continued interacting through social media. Sampson and Jackson (2007), cited in Wesp and Baumann (2012), highlighted that an enjoyable initial cultural experience is vital to building a more receptive attitude to learning other cultures.

For the learning of English skills, the scavenger hunt has also been used primarily in the EFL elementary students. In the study conducted by Alghamdy (2019), 52 EFL elementary students in Al Baha city, Saudi Arabia, were taught English through games, which included the scavenger hunt

technique. The researcher found that the students' learning achievement improved, and interactions among peers increased.

Wen and Copeland (2003) in their project also suggested making use of the word - wall scavenger hunt technique for teaching vocabulary. In this technique, students have to choose words from the resources that the teacher has prepared in the classroom, such as magazines, posters, signs, or other materials that have English texts for the students to peruse. The words of the students' choice are then written on cards and collected in a grab bag. The words were then learned by having students to guess the words with clues from the teacher. In this way, students choose their own words they want to learn. Wen and Copeland (2003) believed that this technique could be engaging, low stress, and fun.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this study, the scavenger hunt exercise was applied to nine (9) male and twenty (20) female EFL students of the English Education Program (EEP) at a private university in Central Java, Indonesia, who were taking the Language, Culture, and Identity course in semester two in the year 2018/2019. One of the projects in this course was a three-day culture trip to Bali island where the students had to do the scavenger hunt exercise.

Bali island was chosen for some reasons. First, Bali is a place in Indonesia where we can find people from many different nationalities. In that situation, exposure to English variety and opportunities to use English to the international community should be huge. And since the Balinese have a culture that is different from the culture of the students who mostly come from

regions in Java island, this location choice would enable the students to encounter numerous cultures both from the local Balinese and foreigners.

The project was given in week ten after students had learned about basic cultural knowledge in the previous weeks in the classroom. The students were divided into groups of four or five to arrange their Bali trip, and then to travel and do the scavenger hunt exercise in their group.

The scavenger hunt exercise was designed based on several concepts. First, students need to learn both the big “C” culture or the visible ones such as food, arts, English variety, and the small “c” culture or the less visible ones such as belief, norms, and values. To acquire the big “C” culture knowledge, students had to: take out menus from five different restaurants, visit popular cultural places in Bali, find artifacts such as children’s toys, local products, and sweets or snacks that were foreign to them, look through travel brochures or magazines to see businesses offered in the city and identify the origin of those businesses.

As for obtaining the small “c” culture, students had to speak to both the Balinese local people and foreigners, ask them about reasons for coming to Bali and their opinions of Bali, interview the Balinese who is at least fifty years old to know their views of Bali now and then, when they were young.

The second concept was based on Mc. Kay's (2002 ) and Kramsch's (1993) views that said that learning another culture should help understanding one's own culture. Students were encouraged to use the analytical skills to see similarities and differences in what they observed. For obtaining this

objective, the tasks given were to find five similar and five different things they found in Bali as compared to the ones in their hometown, compare food there in Bali and Balinese food in their hometown.

The next concept was that the target culture is not necessarily the cultures of the people who speak English as their first language, as English now is an international language. Thus, students may choose their own target culture to learn by giving them the freedom to choose people from which country they would like to interact with or based on the country they would like to visit. And since Indonesia is already a multicultural country, students were also assigned to interact with the local people in Bali and people from other islands different from their own.

Students did the scavenger hunt exercise with their group and recorded the results in vlogs. After the trip, students wrote their trip reports individually. The strategy used was adopted from the experiential approach to culture learning proposed by Hess cited in Shih (2015), which consists of the action-reflection-response strategy. The action was done through the scavenger hunt exercise, which the students did in a group and documented in vlogs. The reflection was done through making a trip report individually, and the response was the cognitive, affective and behavior changes after the learning experience.

The primary purpose of this study was to describe the scavenger hunt activities and some examples of what the students did. The author did not include what the students thought about the activities and the behavior changes after the learning experience. The students' documentation of the scavenger hunt exercises in a form of vlogs which were data of this study were processed by using a qualitative content analysis approach proposed by

Kawulich (2004). Following the procedure in this approach, the author watched the vlogs several times, took notes of the students' main activities in the vlogs, put them in a table and arranged them into categories to develop themes.

## **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

Following the three-cycle strategy mentioned earlier: the action-reflection response strategy, this three-day scavenger hunt experience in Bali, which the students documented in vlogs, and the individual student's reflection resulted in the completion of the first two steps (action and reflection) of the strategy. But as mentioned earlier in the method, in this study, the author focused on the actions and did not include discussions on the reflections and response. The students' actions during the scavenger hunt activities which were documented in vlogs can be accessed from the links presented in the following table.

**Table 1.** List of access to the students' vlogs

Group	Access to Vlogs
1	 <a href="https://bit.ly/2RgNiis">https://bit.ly/2RgNiis</a>
2	 <a href="https://bit.ly/37kKcze">https://bit.ly/37kKcze</a>
3	 <a href="https://bit.ly/2urdOwf">https://bit.ly/2urdOwf</a>
4	 <a href="https://bit.ly/3axwkUj">https://bit.ly/3axwkUj</a>
5	 <a href="https://bit.ly/3atoETj">https://bit.ly/3atoETj</a>
6	 <a href="https://bit.ly/2tDZDE4">https://bit.ly/2tDZDE4</a>

The presentation of this session is divided into three main categories: the scavengers' results and discussion on (1) the visible culture, (2) the less visible culture, and (3) other learning. Topics on the big "C" such as food, toys, cultural places, similarities and differences, and different expressions of greetings belong to the visible culture. The less visible culture includes intercultural communication practice with foreigners and local Indonesian, and intercultural encounters and adaptation. The other learning comprises of IT and soft skills learning. Each topic is described in the following paragraphs.

### *The visible culture*

#### *Food*

On the category of the more visible culture, one of the focuses of the scavenger hunt exercise was learning about food in Bali, which covered both Balinese food and food from other countries. In the vlogs, students made a review of menus from Balinese, Japanese, Thai, Chinese, Singaporean, and Middle Eastern restaurants. They admitted that it was the first time for them to taste some of the food, such as *ayam betutu* (chicken cooked with Balinese spices). Students also compared *nasi campur* (rice with various side dishes) in Bali and *nasi campur* in their hometown, which they described to be significantly different in taste. During their exploration of a traditional market, students found snacks that were foreign to them. They included *reto*, *ulibegino*, *miluk*, and *bagiak*. These snacks have Balinese names, so non-Balinese will not have any idea of them, just by hearing the names. In their vlogs, the scavengers showed the snacks, described the ingredients, the texture, the shape, and the taste. They appreciated these foreign snacks. They said ‘yummy’ all the time.

### *Toys*

Children's toys are also rich in culture. The scavengers captured western toys such as Avenger's toys, Barbie, and superman dolls. They also demonstrated how to play some traditional musical instruments such as *icik-icik* by shaking it, or *ketipung* by hitting it, and *kalimba* by picking the strings. Other toys include *ketapel* (slingshot), and a toy frog, which produces sounds of a frog. Toys reflect the culture of the producers and users (Gorman, 2019) and can become good sources for further cultural learning.

### *Cultural places*

During the scavenger hunt exercise, students visited some cultural places and managed to learn about the aesthetic values behind them. One of the cultural icons was Garuda Wisnu Kencana, which is a gigantic statue of a Hindu god (Wisnu) riding a mythical Garuda bird. They described the statue, the meaning, and how to get there. The students who traveled to Bali by the land transportation and ferry to cross the Bali strait from Java, used the opportunity to visit Rama Shinta Park on the way from Gilimanuk port (in Bali) to the nearest city in Bali (Denpasar). This group captured and described Rama Shinta statue, another famous statue about King Rama and his wife, Shinta.

### *Similarities and differences*

During the activities, students found that the convenience store in Bali and the one in their hometown was similar in the lightning, displaying method, and the interior. But they were different in the sale products which mostly were local Balinese products such as *Kopi Bali* (Balinese coffee), *Pia Bali* (a kind of Danish pie from Bali), and *Brem rasa anggur* (fermented glutenous rice cake with grape flavor). They also found differences in ritual stuff, such as incents and offerings that were available almost everywhere in public areas in Bali.

### *Different expressions of greetings*

As students interact with people/s from different nationalities in English, students were exposed to a variety of English, for example, an Australian greeted: 'How ya' or 'How are ya' mate' or 'Good day, mate.' Students specifically also asked the foreigners how to say 'how are you' in their



language. They learned from the Japanese 'konichiwa', 'o-genki desu ka,' and were informed that there's no expression such as 'I'm fine' in Japanese.

### ***The less visible culture***

#### *Interactions with foreigners and other ethnic groups in Indonesia*

On the category of the less visible culture, although still at the beginning level, the students survived in adjusting themselves in the new environments. They managed to approach foreigners and start a conversation well, by greeting them, saying a few opening words and could stay relaxed during the social interaction. They found that the foreigners' reasons for coming to Bali were mostly for entertainment, holiday, or shopping. The foreigners they spoke to were those coming from Russia (3 people), Australia (1 person), New Zealand (1 person), the Philippines (1 person), Japan (1 person), the U.S (1 person), France (1 person), and India (1 person). This fact shows that from ten foreigners they spoke to, only three people come from the inner-circle countries ( the U.S, Australia, and New Zealand), two from the outer or extended circle countries (The Philippines and India), and the other five are from the expanding circle countries (Russia – three people, Japan and France - one person each). In other words, the countries the students are interested in consist of 50% countries that use English as the first and second language, and the other 50% are countries that use English as a foreign language.

Besides interviewing the Balinese, which was required for all groups, they interviewed people from Ambon, Makassar, Jakarta, and Medan –

several big cities in Indonesia. From the interviews, students found out their reasons for coming to Bali. Their intentions were ranging from having a job with better pay, marrying a Balinese, or just for avoiding the rainy season in their region.

### *Intercultural encounters and adaptation*

The students practice their conversation prompts, responded to questions, and maintained a good dialog. They asked questions to the foreigners, such as reasons for coming to Bali, length of stay in Bali, differences between Bali and their home country, and other issues. During the interviews, students encountered several intercultural differences and learned how to adapt to them. For example, a Russian that they met in the lodge told them that she was surprised and a bit scared to be greeted 'good morning' by a policeman in the street in Bali. She thought she had done some offense. She was at last relieved only after knowing that the policeman was just friendly to her. The students laughed, listening to this story. They were amused as the foreigner's reaction to a simple greeting by the policeman was beyond their anticipation.

Another intercultural adaptation happened when a Japanese man they would interview refused to have his video taken. Not to miss the opportunity, students managed to make some adaptation. They understood the Japanese' objection and offered an audio recording instead of a video recording. The Japanese then agreed.

On another interview with a Filipino, the students were asked by the Filipino: 'how old are you?' - a taboo topic asked to a foreigner. But in

response to this question, the students smiled widely, instead of being offended, and answered the question happily. The students responded appropriately. They seemed to understand that a taboo topic was relative and affected by socio-cultural factors such as who said that, to whom, and in what circumstances. The question was said by a middle-aged Filipino lady, to students who were all girls in their late teens or early twenties, in a relaxed and friendly conversation engagement in a resort place.

### ***Other learning***

Apart from their culture learning and intercultural communication practice, students developed their Information Technological skills for making the vlogs with various techniques. Sometimes they gave a prolog, and at other times they used a question and answer technique in presenting their findings. During their vlog making, they alternately used a monopod and tripod depending on the situation, inserted texts, and completed the vlog with appropriate background music, and creative animation. Students also developed their soft skills, which include cooperation, leadership, participation, confidence, and navigating skills. And as students of EFL who scarcely can practice speaking English outside English classrooms, the scavenger hunt exercise in Bali has conditioned the students to make meaningful communication in English in real-life situations.

## **CONCLUSION**

The three-day scavenger hunt exercise has resulted in the students' learning on both the big “C” culture or the visible ones and the small “c” culture or the less visible ones. The visible include the learning of Balinese food and food from countries outside Indonesia, toys, and artifacts from different parts of the world, English variety, and understanding of some cultural places. While the less visible culture includes the learning of communicating with the residents in Bali and local Indonesian people asking about their views on some topics and also interacting with people from ten nationalities by using English, learning to start a talk appropriately, and maintain the conversation in a relaxed way. During the interactions, students also encountered cultural differences or people's reactions that were different from their basic assumptions of responses. Besides obtaining cultural knowledge and intercultural communication experience, students developed their IT skills in particular for making their reflection in vlogs, soft skills for working in a team, navigating abilities, confidence. Also, they had a lot of opportunities to practice English in a meaningful way.

The strength of this scavenger hunt exercise was that students enjoyed learning. Starting from the day when this project was announced, the students were excited already. The students' positive responses were similar to those of other scavenger hunt researchers (Butler et al., 2012; Doyle et al., 2016; Kaplan, 1997; Krakowka, 2012; Renner et al., 2016; Wesp & Baumann, 2012).

The researcher realized that this scavenger hunt exercise could have resulted better if the time hadn't been only three days. The three day trip to Bali was indeed too short, as the first and last day were mostly spent for the traveling time, effectively resting only the second day for doing the scavenger

hunt exercise. My recommendation is a week or ten days for doing this kind of task with reflection and evaluation on every other day. In this way, changes after learning may be more evident, and students may have an opportunity to have recycling of learning by retrying after reflection and do the practice repeatedly. A more complete result could be obtained if reactions from the faculty were also studied. Investigation on the faculty's views could become a topic for further research. Further study can also be conducted by collecting longitudinal student data to see their affective and behavior changes as a result of learning and see their success in intercultural communication and ultimately in their career life.

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