

The Conception of Emotion among Indonesian and German Students: An Exploratory Studies using Cross-Indigenous Psychology Approach

Kwartarini Wahyu Yuniarti

Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Gadjah Mada

Yogyakarta - Indonesia

Abstract

This study aimed to explore the difference between German and Indonesian students' perception toward happiness using cross-indigenous psychology approach. A number of 453 university students are involved on this study, fifteen of them are Germans and the rest are Indonesian. The happiness questionnaire developed by Kim (2008) was used as the instrument. They were asked to write response on open ended question, "Please write the moment that makes you most happy". The responses were analyzed using thematic content analysis by native coder for both cultures. There are six categories that appear in Indonesian data which are togetherness with close people, self-fulfillment, psychological peace, social support, social benevolence, and control in life. Not far from the Indonesian data, categories that appear from German data are accomplishment, family, *familienreise* (family travel), exciting experience, relationship, and stability after uncertainty. The categories that have been appeared in both cultures were discussed across two types of cognitive template, German and Indonesia. The difference between German and Indonesian students is in line with the concept of interdependent self among Indonesians and independent self among Germans. Germans see the object and their relation with the object in separates component. Family category in German's data, as a factor of happiness, was seen independently from relationship category. Meanwhile, Indonesians perceive subject and the relationship with the object as a whole. In Indonesian's data, togetherness with family contain "family" as an object and "togetherness" as a relation between participants and the objects. The result of this study can be used as a preliminary initiation for further studies regarding the difference between German and Indonesian perception toward states of emotions.

Keywords: Happiness, Cross-Indigenous, Germany, Indonesia

Introduction

In order to promote the world social development, the study of well-being among nations and cultures became one of the prominent issues in positive psychology (Kahn, 2002). In the sixty-fourth United Nations' general assembly, nearly 40 speakers and 13 youth delegates agreed that reinforcing the well-being for people in the world has to be considered in a global social development (United Nations, 2009). Well-being is sometimes identified with happiness, though scholars define that it is a combination of happiness and life satisfaction. O'Brien (2008) stated that sustainable happiness is a factor that comes from individual and leads into the enhancement of global development. According to O'Brien's research, there are three indicators of sustainable happiness. The happiness must be supported by the condition of social, environment, and economy. Concerning this statement, it can be assumed that German is the country with a high level of happiness since it is placed on the fourth rank of GDP among 192 countries around the world, while Indonesia is placed on the 16th rank (World Bank, 2012). However, according to a study done by Easterlin, McVey, Switek, Sawangfa, and Zweig (2010), happiness was correlated with income in short term observations, but not in long term observations. The long term observation data showed that there was a negative correlation between income and happiness. From these observations, it was concluded that happiness does not increase at the same degree as the rise of country income. Easterlin et al. called this phenomenon the Easterlin Paradox, and it was supported by Diener and Suh (1999) who stated that evaluation on well-being should include people's perception of life rather than the actual condition of their life.

Established in 2006, The New Economic Foundation found a formula to calculate the global index of sustainable well-being, called The Happy Planet Index. This formula was created based on how efficient a nation supports their inhabitants to live their lives and how the nation care in saving the resources for their future (NEF, 2012; Ricker, 2009). The Happy Planet Index is formulated by life expectancy and experienced well-being, divided by resources that has been used in pursuing the well-being. This perspective shows that happy feeling is a result of life

satisfaction of their personal experience and its relation with the external factors. Based on the HPI data in 2012, Germany was placed on the 46th rank out of 151 countries and considered as a country with a poor happiness index. Surprisingly, Indonesia was placed on the 16th rank and considered as a country with a good happiness index (NEF, 2012). This latest data reflected the high discrepancy between the objective quality of life of Germans and Indonesians and the subjective feeling that the Germans and Indonesians experienced. This discrepancy raises some questions. What are the factors that make Germans and Indonesians happy? Hence, a qualitative case study on Germans happiness and factors behind that emotion using indigenous approach is important to be conducted.

Happiness

Happiness is considered as one of the life goals that most of human beings pursue in their life. Even though this issue is quite important in positive psychology, the term of happiness is still too complex to be defined. Some state that happiness is a feeling when we [are] satisfied with our life (Diener & Dean, 2007). Some others {who?} state that happiness is more than just achieving some life circumstances like academic successful [success], happy marriage, or good health. Happiness is a positive emotional experience that happens through the life process [as someone lives]. It is more sustainable than just a joy feeling (Diener, Diener, & Robert, 2009). A qualitative study on meaning of happiness among Chinese conducted by Lu (2001) defined happiness into [as] (a) a mental state of satisfaction and contentment, (b) positive feelings or emotion, (c) a harmonious homeostasis, (d) achievement and hope, [and] (e) freedom from ill-being. Happiness also defines [defined] as a balance between positive affect (e.g. pleased, joy, and confidence) and negative affect (e.g. angry, depressed, and jittery) (Diener & Emmons, 1985 in Busseri & Sadava, 2010). Happiness requires a condition which someone has high positive affect and low negative affect.

The definition of happiness is not always remaining the same and static. The meaning of happiness is shifting along with the development of maturation. A cross sectional study on development of happiness resulted

that the adolescents tend to define happiness as an excited feeling and this definition will shift into a peaceful feeling along with their maturation process (Mogilner, Kamvar, & Aaker, 2011).

Cultural issues on Happiness

Scholars have widely argued that Western culture is rooted in individualistic values while Eastern culture derived from collectivistic values, according to Nisbett (2003) [(Nisbett,2003)]. In an individualistic culture[,] people are supposed to look after themselves, compared to the collectivistic culture where people belong in groups that maintain an exchange of loyalty (Hofstede and Bond, 1984). Undeniably, these cultural characteristics influence human's perception, behavior, and how they evaluate their overall life (Lu, Kao, & Gilmour, 2004).

Satisfaction, positive affect, freedom, and surprising event, are the words that can define happiness according to Germans' perspective (Pflug, 2009). In Indonesia, Happiness can be defined as *Bahagia*, *Gembira*, and *Senang*. *Bahagia* can be defined as a well-being. *Gembira* is another happiness that can also translated into gaiety, cheerfulness, bounciness, and enthusiasm. [,] While [while] *Senang* is more defined as delighted (Shaver, Murdaya & Fraley, 2001).

Relation with friends and family are the main source of their happiness among Germans (Pflug, 2009). Not far different from German, South East Asian people's well-being is also strongly associated with relation with family, especially closeness with mother (Jordan & Graham, 2012).

In contemporary Indonesia, culture always appears together with religion even though [eventhough] the religion is not a part of Indonesian culture. Since the spiritual value is always attached in their daily life, Indonesian people strongly believe in God, spirit, and soul. The religious belief influence peoples' perspective to perceive negative or positive emotional experiences as a part of life lessons and process (Adian & Arivia, 2009).

Indigenous Psychological Approach

Indigenous psychology research is the study of human's behavior and mind using native perspective that is not adopted from other regions (Kim and Berry, 1993). This intellectual movement appeared as a critic for

mainstream psychological concepts and theories that tends to be Western in origin, ideas and instrumentation. Indigenous psychology approach enables researchers to understand person's personality, behavior, and mind in their origin (Puhan, 1995; Bishon, 1999). In indigenous psychology, it is the role of researchers to translate episodic knowledge into analytic forms so that they could be tested and verified (Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006). Practitioners in indigenous approach tend to gathered [gather] data from self-report test and questionnaire with sensitivity to local ethos and customs (Ho, et al, 2001). The main point of this research is the process of interpreting the data. Data has to be interpreted by the locals who are considered to have a similar cultural background with the participants (Kim and Berry, 1993).

Studies about different behaviors across cultures are usually done using cross cultural psychology. On cross cultural psychology approach, researchers put culture as an independent variable. They just examine the difference between the groups using a psychology theory without concerning the different context of the behavior itself in each of cultures (Kim, Park, & Park, 2000). While, it has to be noted that in understanding culture, we need to examine three key factors: (a) context, (b) epistemology, and (c) phenomenology (Berry, 1976; Nsamenang, 1992 in Kim, Park, & Park, 2000). To explore the concept of happiness among cultures deeply, Cross indigenous psychology was used as an approach of this study. This research approach allows researchers to understand psychological concepts in various cultures around the world contextually (Kim, Park & Park, 2000).

Cross indigenous psychology approach shifting etic approach, when the universal concept are used to interpret and compare psychology phenomena, into emic approach which emphasizes uses of concept and terms from the local cultural system to understand the meaning of local phenomena and compare it with another culture as a step in constructing a more universal psychology (Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006). This approach is expected to be able to explore the difference between German and Indonesian happiness that cannot be explained by a cross cultural study.

Method

Participant

German Participants. Fifteen undergraduate students from Leipzig University were involved in this study (male= 1, female= 14). Participants are first year students in psychology. Their age range from 19 to 21 years old (M= 19.73). The participants identified themselves as a German or European.

Indonesian Participants. The participants are 438 high school student (male= 174, female= 264) who live in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Their age range from 15 to 18 (M= 16.55). The participants identified themselves as a member of various ethnic groups or tribes around Indonesia.

Instrument

Happiness Open Ended Questionnaire developed by Kim (2008), was used as an instrument for this study. This questionnaire consists of three parts, which are happiness, anger, and sadness. This study will just focus on happiness part. The question is **“In your life, please list an event that made you most happy.”**

Procedure

We distribute the questionnaire through a paper and pencil survey. The participants were asked to write down their response to a set of open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire for the Indonesian participants are written in Indonesian while for the German participants are written in English. All of the Indonesian participants answered the question using Indonesian while the German participants wrote their answer using English and little German for some special terms.

Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis along with the method that has been promoted by Weber (1990) and Krippendorff (2004). Each response was named by its theme in order to define the basic unit of the text. Data were grouped into several categories using coder's local cognitive scheme. This categorization process was done in several stages until the core categories were found. To generate a reliable

code, at least three coders analyzed these data by conflicting their arguments. Since this study conducted using a cross indigenous approach, the Indonesian data were analyzed by three Indonesian coders while German data were analyzed by two German coders.

Result

Indonesian Data. On Indonesian data, the categorization process resulted six categories, which are: togetherness with the closest people, self-fulfillment, psychological peace, social support, and social benevolence.

Majority of the Indonesian participants stated that togetherness with closest people includes meeting friends to share many things with them and being together with family. The sample of the statements are “Meeting with friends and doing our hobby together”, “When people care and respect me” and “Can be open to my mom and discuss my problem together.”

Self-fulfillment consists of achievement, wish fulfillment, success, having money, and need fulfillment. The examples of the statements are “When I can get what I want” and “I got a good grade in school and was so happy!” The third category that appears is psychological peace. This category includes spiritual, positive suggestion toward self, and many things, for example “Everything that is given by God is must be the best for my life” and “Always in the shadow of the Lord”

The next two categories are social support and social benevolence. Social support consists of being loved, getting a reward, and being supported. The sample of the statements are “Having a lot of people who love me”, “When I got something over my expectation”, and “Get the blessing of parents”. Meanwhile, social benevolence includes making others happy and helping others, for example “When people satisfied because of something I’ve done”, “Can make others smile”, and “The moment when I can help others”.

Having control of life is the last category stated by the Indonesian participants. It is refer to the experience that everything in their daily activities is under control. Here are the sample of the responses

“Anything, as far that it is going perfectly”, “When I don’t meet any problem”, and “I can manage my time and the problem solved”.

German Data. Data categorization using local German local coder generates seven categories which are: family, family travel, accomplishment, exciting experience, relationship, and stability after uncertainty.

Accomplishment is consisted of academic achievement, wish fulfillment, and other success moments. The sample of the response are “I passed my A-levels with 1.4” and “Getting the chance to work in the US”.

The second category is family and followed by family travel or “familienreise” in German. Family refers to happy moment that is happened to their family, for example “My grandmother recovered from an illness” and “birth of brothers”. Meanwhile, family travel is going travel with family. This activity is quite popular in German. The sample of the response is “Trip to Argentina with my family”.

The next category is exciting experience. This category refers to an extreme experience or that can be called as once in a lifetime experience. The sample of the response is “Bungee jumping in New Zealand”.

The last two categories are relationship and stability after uncertainty. Response in relationship category is “Getting to know my current boyfriend”. Stability after uncertainty consist response like “Finding new people in the town I live now and being happy at university”.

The table below shows the comparison of the categories among the German and the Indonesian data.

Table 1. Event that makes the Indonesian and the German participants most happy

Indonesian	German
Togetherness with close people	Accomplishment
Self-fulfillment	Family
Psychological peace	Family travel/ Familienreise
Social support	Exciting experience
Social benevolence	Relationship
Control in life	Stability after uncertainty

Discussion

The data shows both the similarity and the difference between Indonesian and German in perceiving happiness. In both cultures we could see that happiness moment could be interpreted as togetherness with family and the loved one. Participants from both cultures stated that they feel happy when they are being together or having a contact with their family. The difference between the cultures is on the way they separate the response into categories. German coders separate family matters into two categories. In family category, the German coders put response that reflects to the happy moments that happen to participant's family, while relationship category refer to the quality of relation between participants and the family. Indonesian coders didn't differentiate the object, which is family, and the relation between participants and their family. This is in line with recent evidence that human perception is strongly influenced by culture. Westerners tend to perceive an object independently of its context. Meanwhile, easterners tend to see object, context, and the interaction between object-context in a holistic view (Nisbett & Miyamoto, 2005). Family in German's data was seen independently from participants' relation with their family and the relational factors was also seen independently from the family. In Indonesian's data, togetherness with family contain "family" as an object and "togetherness" as a relation between participants and the objects.

Family travel only appears in the German data since it is a unique tradition that really popular in German. For adolescents, going travel with family is not just a matter of going somewhere or togetherness. It is a combination between togetherness in other places that far away from their home town or home country. Sometimes, it is also mixed with pride when the family going abroad.

Another similarity between German and Indonesian lies in the last category, having control in life and stability after uncertainty. Both categories refer to the similar response, which are time management, getting stable in life, and successfully adjust with the new life.

Accomplishment didn't perceive as an important factor of happiness among Indonesians. However responses related to achievement appear in both cultures. Indonesian coders include

achievement in self-fulfillment, while German coders put it together with success in accomplishment category. It is placed on the first rank in the German data. This finding reflects that accomplishment is a thing that can stimulate Germans but not Indonesians. The result of this study can be used as a preliminary initiation for further studies regarding the difference between German and Indonesian perception toward states of emotion.

Reference:

- Aidan, A. G., & Arivia, G. (2009). Relations between religions and cultures in Southeast Asia. Washington DC: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication
- Berry, J. W. (1976) Human Ecology and Cognitive Style: Comparative Studies in Cultural and Psychological Adaptation. New York: Sage
- Kim, U.; Park, Y.; Park, D. (2000) The challenge of cross-cultural psychology: The role of the indigenous psychologies. *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*. 31 (1), 63-75
- Biswas-Diener, R. & Dean, B. (2007). Positive psychology coaching: Putting the science of happiness to work
- Busseri, M. A., & Sadava, S. W. (2010). A review of the tripartite structure of subjective wellbeing: Implications for conceptualization, operationalization, analysis, and synthesis. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 15, 290-314.
- Diener, E., & Suh, E. M. (1999). 22 National differences in subjective well-being. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz, *Well-Being, The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (pp. 434-449). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Diener, E., Diener, E., & Robert, S. (2009), *The Science of Well-Being; The Collected Works of Ed Diener, Social Indicators Research Series 37*. Illinois: Springer, DOI 10.1007/978-90-481-2350-6_1,
- Easterli, R. A.; McVey, L. A.; Switek, M.; Sawangfa, O.; Zwi, J. S. (2010). The happiness-income paradox revisited. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. 107 (52), 22463-22468
- Hostede, G. & Bond, M. H. (1984). The happiness-income paradox revisited An Independent Validation Using Rokeach's Value Survey. *SAGE journals*. 15 (4), 417 - 433
- Jordan, L. P. & Graham E. (2012). Resilience and Well-Being Among Children of Migrant Parents in South-East Asia. *Child Development*. 83 (5), 1672 - 1688
- Kim, U. & Berry, J. (1993). *Indigenous Psychologies: Research and Experience in Cultural Context (Cross Cultural Research and Methodology)*. New York: SAGE Publications
- Kim, U.; Park, Y.; Park, D. (2000) The challenge of cross-cultural psychology: The role of the indigenous psychologies. *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*. 31 (1), 63-75
- Kim, U.; Yang, K. S.; Hwang, K. K. (2006). *Indigenous and Cultural Psychology: Understanding People in Context (International and Cultural Psychology)*. 1st ed. Illinois: Springer

- Krippendorff, K. (2004). Reliability in Content Analysis. *Human Communication Research*. 30 (3), 411-413.
- Lu, L. (2001). Understanding Happiness: A Look into the Chinese Folk Psychology. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. 2 (4), 407-432.
- Luo, L.; Gilmour, R.; Kao, S. F. (2004) Cultural values and happiness: an East-West dialogue. *The Journal of social psychology*. 141 (4), 477-493.
- Mogilner, C.; Kamvar, S. D.; Aaker, J. (2011). The Shifting Meaning of Happiness. *Social Psychological & Personality Science*. 2 (4), 395-402.
- Shaver, P. R.; Murdaya, U.; Fraley, R. C. (2001). Structure of the Indonesian Emotion Lexicon. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*. 4 (3), 201-224.
- NEF. (2012). The Happy Planet Index: 2012 Report. Retrieved from: <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/assets/happy-planet-index-report.pdf>
- Nisbett, E. & Miyamoto, Y. (2005). The influence of culture: holistic versus analytic perception. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. 9 (10), 467-473.
- Nisbett, R. E. (2003). *The geography of thought: how Asians and Westerners think differently, and why*. New York: Free Press.
- O'Brien, C. (2008). *Sustainable Happiness: How Happiness Studies Can Contribute to a More Sustainable Future*. Educational Publishing Foundation. 49(4), 289-295.
- Pflug, J. (2008). Folk Theories of Happiness: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Conceptions of Happiness in Germany and South Africa. *Springer Netherlands*. 92 (3), 551-563.
- Puhan, B. N. (1995). Projective-Inventory: An Indigenous Approach to Personality Assessment. *Psychology and Developing Societies*. 7 (2), 115-131.
- Weber, R. B. (1990). *Basic Content Analysis*, 2nd ed. New York: Sage Publications.
- Ricker, A. S. (2009). The Happy Planet Index. (<http://www.happyplanetindex.org/>)(Website overview). *American Library Association dba CHOICE*. 46 (12), 2369.