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## INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SENSITIVITY IN GLOBAL ACADEMIC NETWORKING: EFL TEACHER TRAINEES’ PERCEPTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The present study is aimed at uncovering EFL teacher trainees’ perceptions of intercultural communication sensitivity, required as their ways of facing global networking. Using intercultural sensitivity scale (ISS) proposed by Chen and Stratosta (2000), this survey involved the third grade of EFL teacher trainees ( $N=50$ ) of a private teacher education college in Ciamis, West Java, Indonesia who had taken advanced language skill courses, pedagogical basics, teaching methodology, and cross-cultural understanding subject. The closed-ended questionnaires were administered to get their responses towards the options ranging from 1 to 5, the least and the most sensitive level. The percentage calculation of frequencies of the number of trainees’ responses revealed the trainees’ tendencies. The findings indicated that the trainees had positive perceptions of the necessity of having cultural sensitivity under three categories: engagement, enjoyment, and confidence. The finding suggests a high possibility for the Department to foster the trainees’ cultural competence for their own pedagogical considerations for their future teaching practices.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communication Sensitivity, Global Academic Networking, Cultural Competence.

### INTRODUCTION

Recent information and communication era challenges both teachers and students to be literate in all aspects of life and at the same time able to encounter different cultural communications among communities in this globe. That demand gives

implications to the EFL education to prepare teacher trainees to have cultural competence and high sensitivity towards different cultural contexts.

The sensitivity of the students towards the culture needs to be improved from time to time. Culture changes from time to time and it can also change the social and economic development, exchange with the other cultures, take shape and change with developments” (Sezer and Kahraman, 2016). Based on the changes above, the English teacher trainees need to cope with the cultural exchanges of time to time. Intercultural Communication Competence is the ability to show effective communication behaviors and to accomplish goals in a different cultural environment (Chen and Startosta in Sezer and Kahraman 2016). However, intercultural communication sensitivity according to Bennet (2003) is “The ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences”. This Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) has six stages: denial, defense reversal, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration (Bennet, 2003). DMIS represents a set of prospective value to understand and to complete experience of culture. Besides that, it provides the structure for understanding how people experience cultural differences.

Many studies have investigated the intercultural communication sensitivity dealing with teachers such as Sezer and Kaharaman (2016); Koroglu (2016); Cubukcu (2013); Leutwyler et.al. (2014). Those studies emphasized the investigation of the measurement of teacher intercultural sensitivity from different perspectives. The perspectives above are viewed as the important variables in the research due to teacher sensitivity in facing the global dimension.

Dealing with the importance of the teachers towards intercultural sensitivity, Sezer and Kahraman (2016) investigated the relationship between the personal qualifications of preschool and classroom teacher candidates and their intercultural sensitivities. The result found that there is a significant difference in intercultural sensitivity levels of classroom teacher candidates in favor of teacher candidates who express that they have friends from different countries. This result is determined by other variables such as reading cultural books, participating in learning the foreign culture, and following website foreign culture. According to Koroglu (2016), foreign language teachers have a very significant role to open their students’ minds to other cultures and prepare them for intercultural communication. This statement immersed from the study about teacher candidates' sensitivity in pre-service training towards cultural differences. The result showed that English language teacher candidates enjoy

interacting with people from other cultures and they are sensitive towards cultural differences and complexities.

In the same area, Cubukcu (2013) investigated teachers' intercultural sensitivity towards culture teaching in the curriculum. In this regard, Bennet's intercultural model was used to measure the level of readiness of the teachers' sensitivity. Through this model, it is found that the teacher trainees integrate language teaching objectives with culture teaching. However, Herlina (2018) said that English teachers in Indonesia need to do remarkable practices because it occurs in the complex ecologies of individual, social, cultural settings and in the interactions of local and global contexts. Hence, Leutwyler & Mantel (2014) proposed that the belief of intercultural education, the teachers depend on the level of intercultural sensitivity level.

However, the previous studies on intercultural communication involved mainly the teachers in the schools and teacher training in the ESL context, In view of this, the present study examined the students (teacher candidates) intercultural sensitivity in a private university in EFL context. Given that situation, the research questions for this study are as follows;

- 1) How do EFL teacher trainees perceive intercultural communication sensitivity?
- 2) Which categories among the levels of cultural communication sensitivity will be evident?

### **Intercultural Communication Sensitivity**

The definition of intercultural communication sensitivity is viewed by the experts differently. The reason is that each expert has a different background of knowledge. For instance, Chen and Stratosta (2000) define intercultural communication as an umbrella of intercultural communication competence and intercultural communication competence as a combination of intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity ability. In this regard, then, Chen (2010) define the term of intercultural sensitivity as the ability of individual development of emotion toward the understanding and appreciating the different culture that promotes effective and appropriate behavior in intercultural communication. However, Bennet in Chen (2010) views the definition of Intercultural Communication sensitivity as the transformational process of individuals from the ethnocentric stage to ethnorelative stage which has six stages that consisted of *denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration*.

Each of stages has different explanation such as denial means the person denies the existence of cultural differences, defense means the person attempt to defend their

own worldviews facing the perceived threat, minimization means the persons protect their own values concealing differences under the cover of cultural similarities. Then, the acceptance stage is the person begins to recognize and accept cultural differences both cognitive or behavioral level. The next stage is adaptation where the person develops sensitive and emphatic skills to adapt to the cultural differences and move into a bicultural-sensitivity or multicultural level. The last stage is integration where the persons are able to establish an ethnorelative identity and enjoy the cultural differences. As a result, an intercultural sensitive person is a person who has the ability to receive positive emotional behavior before, during and after the interaction.

### **Global Academic Networking and Intercultural Sensitivity**

The sensitivity of intercultural communication contributes significantly to global competence. The definition of global competence has a relationship with the competence of language and culture. In other words, having global competence means having intercultural communication skills. The candidates should aware of different cultures and different languages.

Aside from the benefits of the sensitivity of the English teacher candidates in their communication with other cultures, it also will give a contribution towards the classroom interaction. The knowledge of culture will develop an interesting interaction. According to Rustandi (2013), the success of the teaching-learning process will depend on the interaction that happened in the classroom. As a result, the candidates of the English teacher should be sensitive towards the student's different cultures to get more engagements in the classroom interaction.

### **METHOD**

The research employed a mix-method approach by collecting the data by delivering close-ended questionnaires and open-ended questionnaires to determine the personal teacher's intercultural sensitivity which was taken from Chen and Stratosta (2000). The questionnaires that consisted of forty-four questions were given to the candidates of the English teacher of the third grade or sixth semester in the university. The candidates of the English teacher were chosen because they have taken the teaching practice course and cross-culture understanding course where intercultural communication has been taught this semester. Fifty EFL teacher trainees (of the third year) of a private teacher training college in Indonesia participated in this survey.

A survey was employed for collecting data and analyzing the data at one point in the time only. In analyzing the data, a five-point Likert-scale proposed by Kothari (2004) was adopted in this research to foster the teacher candidates' intercultural sensitivity. The second questionnaire that consisted of five questions by highlighting their reasons towards their answer. This question was aimed at finding out the level of sensitivity of the teacher candidates in facing intercultural communication situations adapted from the intercultural sensitivity level proposed by Chen and Stratosta (2000). Besides that, the findings were then analyzed using descriptive statistics involving frequency, percentage and mean were employed. As for identifying the level of readiness, descriptive analysis was taken to describe the English teacher candidates' readiness in facing the intercultural situation. In analyzing the level of the teacher candidates used Koroglu (2016) namely *Interaction Engagement*, *Interaction enjoyments*, *Interaction Confidence*, *Interaction Attentiveness* and *Respect for Cultural Differences*

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In order to investigate the teacher trainees' intercultural sensitivity, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) was administered to third graders of the English teacher trainees. The researchers used descriptive statistics to analyze the data. As a data collection tool comprised of various domains of intercultural sensitivity, the frequency of each item was presented in detail.

### English Teacher Trainees' Responses to Intercultural Sensitivity

On the basis of the findings from the closed-ended questionnaire, the English teacher trainees have various opinions in responding to their sensitivity. It can be seen that they a positive attitude toward the other cultures and they are ready to notice the nuances and differences and can take initiatives to adapt themselves to the changing situations. However, they feel worried when colleagues from another country wish for something or change their habits and culture. In this regard, the English teacher trainees were easy to adjust to their habits by saying that the colleagues are hosts in their country and it is their duty to make them feel home. The responses of the English teacher trainees are as follows.

Table 1  
Intercultural Sensitivity Response

No	Questions	5	4	3	2	1
1	I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from	10	10	30		

	different cultures.					
2	I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.		40	10		
3	I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.				50	
4	I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.		10	40		
5	I often feel happy about interacting with people from different cultures.	10	10	10	10	10
6	I don't like to be with people from different cultures.		20	30		
7	I feel shy when being with people from different cultures.		40	10		
8	I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.			30	20	
9	I know my culturally-distinct counterpart is interested in my point of view during our interaction.		40	10		
10	I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.				40	10
11	I am aware of when I have hurt my culturally-distinct counterpart's feelings during our interaction.				50	
12	I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.	10	30	10		
13	I can tell when I have upset my culturally-distinct counterpart during our interaction.				40	10
14	I think my culture is better than other cultures.		40	10		
15	I can tell when my culturally-distinct counterpart is paying attention to what I am saying.		40	5	5	
16	I feel discouraged when people from different cultures disagree with me.		10	20	20	
17	I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.				20	30
18	I respect the values of people from different cultures.	10	20	5	15	
19	I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.		30	20		
20	I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.				20	30
21	I act naturally in a culturally different group.	10	20	20		
22	I find it is difficult to disclose myself to people from different cultures.				20	20
23	I get embarrassed easily when interacting with people from different cultures.				10	20
24	I find it is easy to talk to people from different cultures.	10	10	10	10	10
25	I have a problem knowing my culturally-distinct counterpart's motives during our interaction.				20	20
26	I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.	10	20	10	10	
27	I often deny the existence of cultural differences among people.				20	10
28	I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.		10	10	20	10
29	I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.	5	20	10	15	
30	I find it is not easy for me to make friends with people from different cultures.		20	20	10	
31	I am keenly aware of how my culturally-distinct counterpart perceives me during our interaction.	5	20	20	5	
32	I am not willing to join a group discussion with people from different cultures.				10	10
33	I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.	25	10	15		
34	I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.	25	20	5		
35	I am open-minded to people from different cultures.		20	10	10	10
36	I have a problem sensing what is inside my culturally-distinct counterpart's mind during our interaction.	45	3	2	1	

37	I often appreciate different views raised by people from different cultures.	17	30	10	2	1
38	I find it is difficult to reach mutual understanding with people from different cultures.	30	20			
39	I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.		10	20	11	9
40	I often sincerely listen to my culturally-distinct counterpart during our interaction.	20	10	10	5	5
41	I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.	20	15	10	3	2
42	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.		15	10	10	15
43	I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.		20	30		
44	I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts.		10	20	10	10

From the table 1, the English teacher trainees, most of them show that they responded to the positive attitude towards cultural differences. It means that they enjoy interacting with other people. However, some of them respond negatively to cultural differences. It can be seen from the participants responded that they were still worried about the language that cannot be understood by them when they are interacting. For example, they tend to wait before forming an impression when they face different cultures.

The positive attitude of the English teacher trainees is on item 1 *I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures*. In this regard, the response is 20 % =strongly agree, 20% agree and 60 % uncertain. Then another positive attitude is on item 5 *I often feel happy about interacting with people from different cultures* by 10 %. This item presented they are open-minded to interact with different cultures. As for their respect (item 19, they act positively toward the different cultures with 40 or 80%. In item 21, their positiveness on the different cultures, they behave naturally in respecting the phenomena. In item 29 *I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures*, by 5 strongly agree and 20 agree towards this case.

The positive attitude were also immersed from the respondent such as the item 5,13,15,16,18,24,29,35,36,38, and 43. In these items, they tend to act negatively towards different cultures. Item 5 showed that 10 respondents uncertain, 10 respondents disagree and 10 respondents strongly disagree. It means that they felt not happy when they are interacting with different cultures. Then, with respect to like and dislike to be with people from different cultures, 30 respondents respond uncertainly. The next item on *I can tell when I have upset my culturally-distinct counterpart during our interaction*, 40 uncertain respondents, and 10 disagree respondents. Another item is on *I can tell when my culturally-distinct counterpart is paying attention to what I am saying*, 5 uncertain and 5 disagree. And then, in item 16 in responding to the discouraging act when other people disagree, 20 uncertain respondents and 20 disagree respondents. In the item of 18 which is dealing with respecting the values of other people, 15



respondents disagree. It means that they do not respect values from other cultures. Then, item 24 on *I find it is easy to talk to people from different cultures*, there are 10 uncertain respondents, 10 disagree respondents and 10 strongly disagree respondents. In this regard, it means that there is some candidate of the teachers that do not easy to talk with people from a different culture. Regarding item 35 on *I am open-minded to people from different cultures*, 10 uncertain, 10 disagree and 10 strongly disagree. It means that some of them are not open-minded toward different cultures. The item on *I have a problem sensing what is inside my culturally-distinct counterpart's mind during our interaction*, 45 strongly agree and 3 agree. It means that involved their emotion when they face different culture. Also at the 38 items on the difficulties in reaching a mutual understanding that they have difficulty to reach a mutual understanding by 30 respondents strongly agree and 20 agree on the respondent. The last item on *I avoids those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons*, by 20 agree on respondents and 30 uncertain respondents. In this regard, the English teacher candidates will avoid when they meet other people of different cultures.

### **The Level of the English Teacher Trainees of Intercultural Sensitivity**

Based on the result above, the teacher's sensitivity to intercultural communication can be traced from the level of classification such as interaction engagements, interaction enjoyments, interaction confidence, interaction attentiveness, and respect of cultural differences. The classification of this level based on the classification of Koroglu (2016). The definition interaction Engagement (IEng) is the participant's feelings towards participation in intercultural communication. Then, respect for cultural differences (RCD), the participant orients to or tolerates their counterparts' culture and opinion. Another classification is Interaction Confidence (IConf) that the participant is confident in the intercultural setting. Next, Interaction Enjoyment (IEnj) is the participant's reaction towards communicating with people from different cultures. Then the last is Interaction Attentiveness (IAtt) that is the participant's effort to understand what is going on in intercultural interaction (Bonte, 2014).

#### ***Interaction Engagement***

The first domain is interaction engagement which is related to participants' willingness for intercultural communication and items such as 1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23 and 24 are related to the domain. They seem to be uncertain when they interact with people from different cultures. In responding to the first question related to *I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures*, the highest score is 60 % English teacher candidates is uncertain about their self to interact with someone forms



other culture. Then, related to the questions *I am aware of when I have hurt my culturally-distinct counterpart's feelings during our interaction*, about 100 % of the candidates of the teachers is uncertain about having hurt when they interact with different cultures. Moreover, regarding the, *I can tell when I have upset my culturally-distinct counterpart during our interaction*, they respond that 80 % they feel upset when they engage to make interaction. Then, the next questions, *I act naturally in a culturally different group*, they mostly answered that 40 % were naturally acted when they engage in interaction. Then, the next item on the *I get embarrassed easily when interacting with people from different cultures*, 80 % of most candidates of the teachers respond uncertainty when they engage with different cultures. The last item is on *I find it is easy to talk to people from different cultures*, the students feel uncertain around 10 %. It means that there were 5 respondents that do not easy to talk with other people from different countries.

Table 2  
Interaction Engagement

Item	5	%	4	%	3	%	2	%	1	%
1	10	20	10	20	30	60				
11					50	100				
13					40	80	10	20		
21	10	20	20	40	20	40				
22					10	20	20	40	20	40
23					20	40	20	40	10	20
24	10	20	10	20	10	20	10	20	10	20

### ***Interaction Enjoyments***

The second domain of the scale is related to interaction enjoyment. It consists of three items. Items 9, 12 and 15 questions whether participants feel positive emotions during interaction with people of other cultures. These emotions are stated in items such as useless, feelings of discouragement and getting upset. Participants agree and strongly agree with the items in this domain. Thus, participants enjoy the interaction, are productive during interaction and have a cooperative role to carry out interaction. The results suggest that English teacher candidates enjoy the interaction with people of other cultures.

Table 3  
Interaction enjoyments

Item	5	%	4	%	3	%	2	%	1	%
9			40	80	10	20				

12	10	20	30	60	10	20			
15				40	5	10	5	10	

### ***Interaction Confidence***

The third domain is related to confidence in interaction. The domain is questioned with five items. The results of this item present that most of the participants have uncertain confidence in interaction with people from different cultures. According to findings that are presented above, third-year students of the English language education department have confidence in interaction with people from other cultures.

Table 4  
Interaction Confidence

Item	5	%	4	%	3	%	2	%	1	%
3					50	100				
4			10	20	40	80				
5	10	20	10	20	10	20	10	20	10	
6			20	40	30	60				
10							40	80	10	20

### ***Interaction Attentiveness***

The fourth domain of the scale is interaction attentiveness. The domain is investigated through three questions. The majority of the participants attentively listen and cooperate in interaction. The last item of the domain questions whether or not participants are sensitive to their culturally-distinct counterparts' subtle meanings during their interaction. The results show that the majority of the participants tend to be sensitive to subtle meaning in interaction.

Table 5  
Interaction Attentiveness

Item	5	%	4	%	3	%	2	%	1	%
14			40	80	10	20				
17			20	40	30	60				
19			30	60	20	40				

### ***Respect For Cultural Differences***

The fifth domain of the scale is respect for cultural differences. Items 2, 7 and 18 present a negative attitude towards other cultures. The results of these items show that participants agree or are uncertain about these items. The results indicate that participants do not reject culturally different counterparts' opinions and enjoy being

with people from different cultures. Also, participants are open to people of other cultures. The results show that the majority of English language teacher candidates respect other cultures' values and culture-bound behaviors. As Bennett (1993) mentions, people at ethnocentric stages may perceive the world from their own cultural view. As a result of the domain, present participants accept other cultures and respect their values. The results also indicate that English language teacher candidates have a shift from ethnocentric stages to ethnic relative stages.

Table 6  
Respect Cultural Differences

Item	5	%	4	%	3	%	2	%	1	%
14			40	80	10	20				
17			20	40	30	60				
19			30	60	20	40				

## CONCLUSION

The findings presented significant results in terms of EFL teacher trainees' intercultural communicative competence, intercultural sensitivity and their perspective towards cultural differences. In conclusion, they have a positive attitude towards cultural differences and they respect other cultures' values and culture-bound behaviors. As the results showed, EFL teacher trainees enjoy the interaction with people from different cultures and they are eager to communicate. In addition, according to the results, they are confident during the communication process in 'third place'. The results indicate that they are open to different cultures and they accept their existence as well.

Regarding the level of intercultural sensitivity, EFL teacher trainees resemble the level of acceptance stage. It means that they begin to recognize and accept cultural differences both cognitive and behavioral level. As a matter of fact, it can be seen from the level of intercultural communications of interaction engagements, interaction enjoyments, interaction confidence, interaction attentiveness, and respect for cultural differences. In this respect, the results of current research present quite positive perspectives in terms of the level of intercultural communication. The important result is that participants think their culture is superior to other cultures. This result can be interpreted that EFL teacher trainees in Indonesia have limited opportunities to learn about other cultures through experience. The present study reveals that EFL teacher trainees who participated in this study are intercultural sensitive people and they have the necessary capabilities to teach and use English in intercultural settings.

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