Intercultural Sensitivity Perceptions among Graduate Students in Indonesia and Malaysia

[1]Diana Trisnawati, [1]Azni Yati Kamarudin, [2]Abd Razak Zakaria, [1]Dyah Kumalasari, [1]Nurul Khotimah, [1]Kurnia Nur Fitriana

[1]*Faculty of Social Sciences Law and Politics, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY), Yogyakarta, 55281, Indonesia*
[2]*Department of Educational Foundations and Humanities, Faculty of Education, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 50603, Malaysia*
*Email: diana.trisnawati@uny.ac.id

Abstract

The aim of this study was to measure the level of intercultural sensitivity (IS) exhibited by graduate students, explore their perceptions of IS, and analyze the strategies employed by graduate students to enhance their IS. The mixed methodologies employed to address the objectives of the study. The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) developed and two reflective items were included in the online questionnaire. The findings revealed there is no significant different level of IS among graduate students in Indonesia and Malaysia. The participants suggested various aspects of IS perceptions were proposed, encompassing the Perspective of Life: Acceptance, appreciation, and comprehension of cultural differences; Respect for multiple cultures; and Proficient guidance on encounters with different cultures. Multicultural educational environments within universities have the capacity to implement various strategies aimed at fostering IS among graduate students. These strategies include participation in multicultural classrooms, engagement in students' activities, cultivation of students' self-awareness, enhancement of communication skills, and provision of support services by the university.

INTRODUCTION

Culture serves as a pervasive topic of discourse in the daily lives of individuals, ranging from casual conversations to more formal academic settings. Societies can be delineated, and culture exhibits dynamic potentiality over time. Culture can be regarded as an integral aspect of a nation's historical narrative, exemplified by countries like Indonesia and Malaysia. Both of them exhibit commonalities that can be examined through an analysis of their respective national compositions. Malaysia referred to be "Truly Asia," comprises three primary cultural groups. The dominant group is the Bumiputera, accounting for 68.6% of the population, followed by the Chinese at 23.4%, Indians at 7%, and other ethnicities at 1% (Othman & Ruslan, 2020). However, the discourse surrounding Indonesian culture must be contingent upon the diverse range of ethnicities spanning from Sabang to Merauke, as eloquently expressed in a renowned national anthem. The multiethnic composition of Indonesia has a significant impact on the country, since it encompasses a diverse array of local languages, wisdoms, cultures,

beliefs, and traditions. Therefore, Indonesia and Malaysia are renowned as culturally diverse Asian nations, exemplified by their distinct identities and iconic representations.

However, with respect to the influence of globalization, it is important to note that society is not just comprised of individuals who adhere to a single culture, characterized by uniform cultural ideas, practices, languages, and values. The current era is witnessing a notable rise in worldwide mobilizations, which may be attributed to the significant advancements in communication technology and transportation systems (Esmaeili et al., 2022; Wattanavorakijkul, 2020). Social medias have a significant impact on individuals by facilitating regular interactions with individuals from diverse cultures and social backgrounds. This exposure enables individuals to gain insights into circumstances that would otherwise be inaccessible to them (Alijanian et al., 2019). Individuals possess opportunities to relocate inside different regions of their respective countries or engage in temporary residence overseas for specific purposes. It is not surprising that individuals engage in international travel for many reasons, such as private business, medical objectives, employment as foreign workers, educational pursuits overseas, and leisurely vacations.

Intercultural discussion becomes inevitable when individuals find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. It can be difficult for persons in communicating in different cultural background (Deveci et al., 2022). If individuals have a lower level of intercultural competence, it is possible that cultural difficulties may arise during their communication with others. The process of communication is sometimes fraught with many barriers and challenges, leading to the potential failure of communicative goals (Zhao, 2018). The possession of intercultural skills is crucial for achieving successful adaptation and deriving satisfaction in international contexts, especially for graduate students as they navigate their future professional endeavors within global settings (Wattanavorakijkul, 2020). Consequently, there has been a growing interest in intercultural studies aimed at investigating the methods employed to enhance students' IS, particularly in various Asian nations (Kim, 2020). Individuals are organized in such a way as to develop intercultural competence, which refers to their ability to communicate responsibly and successfully across diverse cultural backgrounds (Zhao, 2018).

Numerous studies have discovered various cultural challenges that arise in intercultural discussions, particularly when individuals encounter difficulties in adapting to other cultural contexts. The persistence of race- and ethnicity-based disparities and discriminatory practices in the workplace remains a significant concern. A study conducted by Heymann et al. (2023) revealed that in 54 countries, efforts to eliminate wage inequities based on race have been unsuccessful. Yanto (2022) have identified intolerance issues as a prominent source of conflict within multicultural environments. In an educational setting characterized by cultural diversity, students of various cultural origins contribute their unique perspectives on the process of constructing meaning within the learning environment (Kim et al., 2017). The communication process is significantly influenced by the association between individual and cultural backgrounds (Paker & Tuncel, 2018). However, several factors contribute significantly to the challenges faced in multicultural classrooms, including the instructors' heavy workload, limited cultural knowledge, inadequate campus facilities, and ineffective cultural training (Esmaeili et al., 2022).

Therefore, the development of intercultural skills is of great importance in facilitating adaptation to multicultural environments. Consequently, institutions should prioritize the incorporation of intercultural training within their curriculum or through specialized courses, in order to adequately prepare students for such settings. The language barrier is only one aspect to consider when it comes to effective and meaningful communication. It is equally important to be aware of the cultural differences and similarities in order to develop successful communication (Alijanian et al., 2019). International students may experience stress upon their arrival in the host country as they navigate daily life conditions, primarily owing to linguistic challenges (Ospina & Medina, 2020). In China, universities have implemented many strategies to provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge for their future international endeavors and professional pursuits. These strategies include the adoption of foreign curricula, the expansion of students' exchange programs, and the cultivation of their intercultural competencies (Liu, 2022). According to Tuncel (2019), the cultivation of IS is contingent upon the regulations and practices embedded within the curriculum. The university plays a crucial role in designing and implementing strategies to enhance students' IS. This study presents a paradigm for enhancing IS among university students within the campus environment, based on the outcomes of the research.

The concept of Intercultural Sensitivity

Previous studies have presented multiple definitions of IS. According to Bennett (1986), IS can be described as an individual's capacity to effectively undergo cognitive and behavioral transformations throughout their developmental journey, transitioning from an ethnocentric mindset to an ethnorelative perspective. This process involves six distinct components, namely denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Chen and Starosta (1997) posited that IS is a fluid construct that encompasses an individual's capacity to cultivate favorable affective responses by means of comprehending, valuing, and embracing diverse cultural perspectives. Furthermore, the concept of IS can be described as the extent to which an individual demonstrates sensitivity towards cultural diversity and exhibits an understanding of various structures and experiences related to cultural differences (Dinani, 2016). Regrettably, despite the considerable efforts made to construct IS, a comprehensive definition encompassing its multidimensional nature has not yet been established (Panggabean, 2004). Hence, within the context of this research, IS is conceptualized as an individual's capacity to adapt to and embrace the values and norms inherent in cultural diversity by comprehending, valuing, and embracing the perspectives of individuals from different cultures.

The ISS developed by Chen and Starosta (2000), was incorporated into the data collection method for two specific purposes in this study. The ISS has been examined within several national settings. For instance, Fritz et al. (2002) conducted a study on German samples, Yunus et al. (2017) focused on Malaysians, Andi et al. (2020) investigated Indonesians, Luo et al. (2021) examined Chinese individuals, and Mellizo (2019) conducted research on Americans. Furthermore, a significant portion of prior research employing quantitative methodologies has demonstrated robust dependability and validity, rendering them applicable to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Luo et al., 2021). Chen and Starosta (2000) designed a total of 24 objects for the ISS, which are outlined in the following manner.

Table 1. 24 Items of Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) Designed by Chen and Starosta (2000)

Variables	Items	
	Code	Descriptions
Interaction Engagement	IE.1	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures
	IE.2	I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts.
	IE.3	I am open-minded to people from different cultures
	IE.4	I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.
	IE.5	I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.
	IE.6	I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.
	IE.7	I have a feeling of enjoyment toward differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.
Respect for cultural differences	RCD.1	I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.
	RCD.2	I do not like to be with people from different cultures.
	RCD.3	I respect the values of people from different cultures.
	RCD.4	I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.
	RCD.5	I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.
	RCD.6	I think my culture is better than other cultures.
Interaction confidence	IC.1	I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.
	IC.2	I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.
	IC.3	I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.
	IC.4	I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.
	IC.5	I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.
Interaction enjoyment	IJ.1	I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.
	IJ.2	I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.
	IJ.3	I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.
Interaction attentiveness	IA.1	I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.
	IA.2	I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.

IA.3   I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.

The objective of this study was to measure the level of IS and to investigate the perceptions of IS among graduate students, with a specific focus on two public universities located in Indonesia and Malaysia. The research questions that will be addressed are as follows: (1) How does it the level of IS among graduate students in Indonesia and Malaysia, as measured by the ISS developed by Chen and Starosta (2000)?; (2) How do graduate students in Indonesia and Malaysia define IS?; and (3) What strategies can be employed to enhance IS among graduate students in a university setting?

METHOD

The present study used a mixed methods research design, comprising a quantitative questionnaire consisting of 24 items and a qualitative questionnaire consisting of 2 items.

Participant

In accordance with the principles of convenience sampling, a total of 51 individuals were selected to participate in this study. It is important to note that all participants voluntarily agreed to take part and provided informed consent by completing a consent form prior to responding to the online questionnaire. The categorization of students can be delineated based on their respective universities of origin. A total of 27 graduate students from a public university in Indonesia and 24 graduate students from a public institution in Malaysia were included in the study.

Data Collection

The data for this study were acquired by the administration of an online questionnaire consisting of three sections, across two universities located in Indonesia and Malaysia. The research team partitioned the questionnaire into three distinct pieces. The first segment focused on gathering demographic information from the participants. The second section involved the utilization of the ISS to assess IS among university graduate students. Lastly, the third component had two types of reflective questions.

Data Analyses

The online questionnaire in section 2 consisted of items that were presented using a 5-point Likert-type scale. This scale was used to assess the participant's degree of agreement with each statement, with a rating of 1 indicating strong disagreement and a rating of 5 indicating strong agreement. Kim et al. (2017) utilized the SPSS 26 statistical software to analyze the quantitative data, including descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients. The descriptive statistics were used to assess the degrees of IS among graduate students at two public universities in Malaysia and Indonesia. The study focused on five categories of IS as defined by Chen and Starosta (2000). The qualitative questionnaire utilized NVIVO12 software for the analysis of data, such as transcribing the participants' answers inside the NVIVO12 platform, carefully reviewing and revisiting the transcriptions, coding the data, identifying recurring themes, eliminating extraneous information, and ultimately interpreting the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Intercultural Sensitivity among Graduate Students in Indonesia and Malaysia

The ISS developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) to assess the degree of IS exhibited by graduate students at two public universities in Indonesia and Malaysia. The data collection period spanned from May to July 2023. A total of 51 individuals completed the online ISS questionnaire using Google Forms. The questionnaire is available in two languages, namely English and Bahasa. The analyses conducted using SPSS 26 resulted in the identification of five distinct groups of ISS.

Interaction Engagement (IE)

Tabel 2. Interaction Engagement's Scores

No	Item	A Public Uni in Indonesia		A Public Uni in Malaysia	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	IE. 1	4.67	.480	4.13	.797
2.	IE. 2	3.11	.847	2.58	.929
3.	IE. 3	4.52	.700	4.21	.833
4.	IE. 4	4.22	.698	4.38	.576
5.	IE. 5	1.89	.698	1.79	.721
6.	IE. 6	3.33	.961	3.83	.816
7.	IE. 7	4.37	.742	4.00	.722
	Total	26.11	2.833	24.92	2.552

According to Puspitasari (2023), those who effectively cultivate IS have the capacity to attain dual identities and derive satisfaction from embracing cultural diversity. The aspect of "interaction engagement" was assessed using a set of seven items, as previously mentioned. The findings of the data analysis indicate that there is a significant difference in IS, specifically in the aspect of 'interaction engagement', between two countries. The mean score for this aspect was 26.11 for a public university in Indonesia, while it was 24.92 for a public university in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the results indicate that graduate students from a public institution in Indonesia exhibit higher scores in "interaction engagement" across most items, with the exception of statement IE.4 (refer to table 1).

Respect for Cultural Differences

Tabel 3. Respect for Cultural Differences' Scores

No	Item	A Public Uni in Indonesia		A Public Uni in Malaysia	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	RCD. 1	1.44	.577	1.42	.504
2.	RCD. 2	1.26	.526	1.38	.495
3.	RCD. 3	4.81	.396	4.67	.482
4.	RCD. 4	4.59	.501	4.63	.576
5.	RCD. 5	1.44	.847	1.38	.495
6.	RCD. 6	1.85	1.027	1.79	.658
	Total	15.41	1.551	15.25	1.726

Based on the data pertaining to the issue of "respect for cultural differences," no statistically significant differences in scores were seen between two universities in Indonesia and Malaysia. This element pertains to the manner in which individuals respond to the culture and opinions of their counterparts, demonstrating either respect or tolerance (Wang et al., 2021). The average score of graduate students from Indonesia was 15.41, but the average score of graduate students from Malaysia was 15.25. Multiple indicators suggest that graduate students from Indonesia exhibit a greater level of reverence towards cultural diversity. These indicators include items RCD.1, RCD.3, RCD.5, and RCD.6. In terms of the feature of "respect for cultural differences," it is seen that Malaysian graduate students exhibit a higher level of proficiency in both item RCD.2 and item RCD.2.

Interaction Confidence (IC)

Tabel 4. Interaction Confidence's Scores -Attached

No	Item	A Public Uni in Indonesia		A Public Uni in Malaysia	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	IC. 1	3.89	1.013	4.12	.612
2.	IC. 2	2.44	.801	2.33	.816
3.	IC. 3	3.78	.801	3.29	.690
4.	IC. 4	4.04	.854	4.00	.722
5.	IC. 5	3.93	.917	3.96	.806
	Total	18.07	2.336	17.71	1.601

Chen and Starosta (2000) assessed the level of interaction confidence by employing a set of five tasks, as previously mentioned. The concept of interaction confidence refers to the degree to which individuals feel assured and self-assured in their ability to engage in effective intercultural communication (Wang et al., 2021). Based on the analysis of SPSS data from two universities, it was shown that there is no statistically significant difference in the scores of participants across five questions. In terms of the feature of "interaction confidence," participants from Indonesian universities achieved a better overall score compared to participants from Malaysian universities. However, the participants enrolled in universities in Malaysia attained higher scores compared to those in Indonesia, as indicated by the results of IC.1 and IC.5.

Interaction Enjoyment (IJ)

Tabel 5. Interaction Enjoyment's Scores

No	Item	A Public Uni in Indonesia		A Public Uni in Malaysia	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	IJ. 1	1.37	.742	1.46	.588
2.	IJ. 2	1.59	.694	1.54	.588
3.	IJ. 3	1.63	.742	1.46	.588
	Total	4.59	1.623	4.46	1.318

Chen and Starosta (2000) identified three specific components related to the measurement of "interaction enjoyment," namely IJ.1, IJ.2, and IJ.3. According to a study conducted by Awang-Rozaimie et al. (2013), it was observed that the dimension of "interaction enjoyment" emerged as the sole IS factor that exhibited a positive correlation with sociocultural adjustment, specifically among Malaysian students studying abroad. Nevertheless, the findings indicated that the participants hailing from a public institution in Indonesia exhibited superior results in comparison to their counterparts from a public university in Malaysia, with regard to the cumulative score. The comparison of results indicates a relatively little difference, as evidenced by the total mean score of 4.59 for Indonesia and 4.46 for Malaysia. at contrast, the participants enrolled at a public institution in Malaysia have a higher score in item IJ.1.

Interaction Attentiveness (IA)

Tabel 6. Interaction Attentiveness' Scores

No	Item	A Public Uni in Indonesia		A Public Uni in Malaysia	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	IA. 1	3.70	.953	2.96	.806
2.	IA. 2	4.11	.847	3.96	.751
3.	IA. 3	3.78	.847	3.96	.751
	Total	11.59	1.966	10.88	1.262

Chen and Starosta (2000) conducted a study in which they investigated the concept of "interaction attentiveness" using three specific tasks, as previously explained. The findings indicate that participants from a public university in Indonesia achieved higher scores in the element of "interaction attentiveness" compared to participants from a public university in Malaysia. There is a notable disparity in the average scores between Indonesia and Malaysia, with Indonesia having a mean score difference of 11.59 and Malaysia having a mean score difference of 10.88. However, it was observed that the participants from Indonesia achieved higher scores only on two specific measures, namely IA.1 and IA.2.

The Students' Perception of Intercultural Sensitivity

The study's findings imply that markers can be used to assess graduate students' perceptions of IS:

Theme 1: Perspective of Life: Acceptance, appreciation, and understanding different cultures

The ability of pupils to engage in self-adjustment is crucial for establishing connections with others from diverse cultural backgrounds, both within educational settings and beyond. Participants put out a number of suggestions pertaining to perceptions of IS. In this juncture, the authors are amalgamating three facets pertaining to individual responses towards various cultures, namely acceptance, appreciation, understanding difference cultures. The paramount importance of embracing individuals from different cultural backgrounds should be recognized as a fundamental aspect of fostering effective intercultural communication.

The present submission suggests that individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds who unite to form a team with well-defined objectives initially faced a language barrier (Ibrahim et al., 2020). The demonstration of an individual's acceptance can be discerned through several forms of expression, including pleasant smiles directed towards others, greetings, and attentive behaviors. Once an individual displays a receptive response towards others, they typically proceed to further appreciate the inherent worth of other cultures by providing feedback. Therefore, the substance of the message serves as the cornerstone of cultural aspects that are crucial in facilitating communication across other cultures (Syam et al., 2023). An individual who possesses a high level of IS typically demonstrates a tendency to provide constructive comments during interpersonal conversation.

According to Puspitasari (2023), the absence of the ability to cultivate and value profound interpersonal relationships may result in individuals experiencing feelings of despair. Consequently, their understanding of culture and the individual's views towards their own culture exert an influence on the manner in which the concepts of multiculturalism are to be formulated (Dudic, 2023). The concept of belonging is contingent upon various facets of an individual's life, including familial resemblance, shared interests, engagement in activities, professional pursuits, educational and training history, prior experiences, preferred lifestyles, and personal passions. The subsequent replies from students highlight their efforts to comprehend their emotions and sentiments by adopting the perspectives of individuals from diverse cultures. These instances were examined within the context of the course (Paker & Tuncel, 2018). It is arguable that the establishment of mutual understandings in intercultural communication contexts may be hindered by a lack of familiarity with another culture (Piechurska-Kuciel & Rusieshvili, 2021). Hence, the significance of the message's content within the community lies in its ability to demonstrate the recipient's level of understanding of the subject matter (Syam et al., 2023).

Theme 2: Respect for different cultures

According to Gedik Bal (2023), the incorporation of respect for diverse cultures may represent the subsequent phase in an individual's development of IS. This stage is distinguished by traits such as open-mindedness, a willingness to express oneself candidly, and the acceptance of others. This study reveals that the manifestation of respect for cultural diversity among graduate students can be observed through several indicators, such as open-mindedness, empathy, tolerance, and compassion. According to Dalib et al. (2023), there is a correlation between certain personality traits and intercultural competencies. These traits include interpersonal sensitivity, openness, empathy, self-involvement, resourcefulness, and mindfulness. The present study has identified open-mindedness, empathy, tolerance, and care as key factors that signify a student's IS.

Syam et al. (2023) suggested that open-mindedness can be defined as the cognitive capacity to entertain alternative perspectives and demonstrate empathy towards others, even when holding a divergent viewpoint. In contrast, open-mindedness is associated with a disposition to acknowledge, accept, and value a range of perspectives, hence eliciting affective responses that can manifest in behavioral outcomes (Piechurska-Kuciel & Rusieshvili, 2021). Open-mindedness is a cognitive disposition characterized by the inclination to contemplate multiple perspectives or viewpoints prior to formulating definitive conclusions or responses. Moreover, those who possess open-mindedness have a heightened level of IS and consistently demonstrate empathy towards others, even when their actions deviate from their customary behaviors. The possession of an open-minded disposition is intricately linked to the expansiveness of cognitive processes and a wealth of experiential knowledge. Consequently, individuals who exhibit such behavior tend to gravitate towards social interactions, as

they are attuned to the heightened perceptiveness that arises from their accumulated experiences (Syam et al., 2023).

Theme 3: Effectively guidance on diverse cultures experiences

The concept of culture is widely recognized as being highly intricate within the field of social sciences. Scholars frequently acknowledge the abundance of definitions attributed to culture, which corresponds to the diverse perspectives put forth by various theorists (Dudic, 2023). In multicultural environments, several challenges may arise as a result of insufficient intercultural comprehension among individuals. For example, certain educators have voiced their concerns regarding the absence of a common understanding of disciplinary protocols and limited opportunities for pedagogical discourse. These concerns arise from the potential ethical dilemmas that may arise when an individual educator is required to make decisions without the support and input of the wider campus community (Hosio et al., 2023). Hence, the cultivation of IS within the university setting can be effectively included, not just for the students, but also for the educators who play a pivotal part in the learning process.

In addition, it is crucial to acknowledge that the field of community building within the context of higher education operates as a profession that is rooted in principles of humanism, human rights, solidarity, and reciprocity. Consequently, it becomes imperative for professionals in this field to exhibit intercultural competences, as highlighted by Dudic (2023), in order to effectively foster equality within workplace environments. For instance, it is imperative to cultivate a sense of unity, wherein individuals must have the ability to engage in constructive relationships with individuals who possess diverse linguistic backgrounds and varying cultural values (Dalib et al., 2023). The acknowledgment by educators of the principle of equality in both education and evaluation demonstrates a commitment to fairness. Educators have made efforts to establish equitable and supportive frameworks for assessments and examinations, recognizing the significance of providing equal opportunities for students to demonstrate their competencies and understanding in educational endeavors (Hosio et al., 2023).

Enhancing Intercultural Sensitivity within the University Context: Insights from Graduate Students

The findings revealed that there are various programs available at universities that aim to enhance students' intercultural skills as described below.

Theme 1: Attending Multicultural Classroom

Academic institutions encounter distinct requirements pertaining to the knowledge and skills essential for effective engagement within multicultural educational settings. Consequently, they have garnered increased understanding and insights on the requisite proficiencies and desired aptitudes for effectively instructing culturally diverse pupils (Adili et al., 2023). As a higher education institution, universities should develop curricula that equip students with the necessary soft and hard abilities to navigate the global and unpredictable landscape, particularly in relation to intercultural competency (Deveci et al., 2022). To foster an inclusive educational setting, educators must use a culturally sensitive pedagogical strategy that integrates diverse perspectives into didactic activities and assignments (Gedik Bal, 2023). According to Swartz et al. (2020), it is suggested that educators employ creativity and discernment when adapting the classroom learning experience. This can involve deviating from traditional textbooks, incorporating technological resources, and establishing connections between the course material and real-life contexts. These strategies have the potential to foster students' IS.

According to Adili et al. (2023), it is imperative for lectures to possess adaptability and flexibility in their instructional methods in order to effectively cater to the varying learning requirements of students from different cultural backgrounds. The intercultural course encompasses various activities and tasks that aim to enhance students' awareness of multicultural issues. These activities include promoting respect for the values of individuals from diverse cultures, fostering open-mindedness towards others, encouraging the sharing and active listening of information about different cultures, fostering understanding and acceptance of ideas from individuals of other cultures, combating prejudice, fostering positive interactions with individuals from different cultures, promoting friendliness and care, fostering the improvement of self-esteem, and emphasizing appropriate communication practices (Paker & Tuncel, 2018). This particular form of practice involves educational planning that allocates sufficient time and resources for the purposes of discovery, analysis, reflection, and intercultural inquiry (Esmaeili et al., 2022).

Theme 2: Students' Activities

The results of this study indicate that certain non-academic activities may serve as viable alternatives for fostering IS among graduate students. These activities include engaging in collaborative efforts with diverse groups, participating in cultural communities, attending cultural events, conducting studies or research pertaining to cultural differences, implementing group activities, and engaging in student exchange programs. On the other hand, the advent of the internet era has resulted in a reduction of barriers in online communication, enabling global individuals to more readily utilize their second, third, or even fourth language in their linguistic arsenal (Puspitasari, 2023). Virtual student exchanges can serve as a viable alternative for campus programs seeking to familiarize students with cross-cultural interactions and global communities. In addition to financial savings, this activity offers an opportunity for a greater number of students with limited financial resources who are ready to pursue international education to participate.

Theme 3: The self-awareness of students

Self-awareness plays a significant role in the cultivation of IS among graduate students inside academic environments. The concept of self-awareness in communication pertains to an individual's comprehensive comprehension of their own personality, predominant thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Syam et al., 2023). The present study has revealed that it is imperative for graduate students to adequately educate themselves prior to engaging in multicultural situations, particularly within the university setting. The self-improvement of students can be observed through various dimensions, such as adaptation, consciousness, comprehension of cultural variances, and the individual's approach to enhancing their mindset. This is further exemplified by their readiness to engage in cooperative activities, visit one another, and build trade relationships (Ivenz & Reid, 2023). Furthermore, it is undeniable that the acquisition of intercultural competence is closely linked to the significance of language learning as it enables individuals to comprehend the values and attitudes associated with a particular culture (Tuncel, 2019). Hence, the enrollment of students in foreign higher academic institutions has led to an augmentation in intercultural exposure and has made significant contributions to national socio-economic development through the provision of foreign exchange, hospitality, and other related services (Awang-Rozaimie et al., 2013). The students engaged in a comprehensive analysis of various dimensions of their newly adopted culture, thereby fostering the development of their self-awareness (Ivenz & Reid, 2023).

Theme 4: Improving Communication Skill

The study examined the perspectives of participants about the cultivation of IS among graduate students. The participants highlighted various factors, such as refraining from using informal language, demonstrating tolerance and empathy, exhibiting curiosity, and actively engaging in communication. When engaging in cross-cultural communication, it is advisable for the communicator to initially establish a broad topic before delving into more detailed and in-depth discussions. The selection of a generic topic might be made in order to avoid the usage of slang words that may potentially lead to misunderstandings. In order to foster successful cross-cultural understanding, it is imperative to provide a conducive and comfortable communication environment. It is imperative for those engaging in communication to exhibit qualities such as respect, tolerance, curiosity, and empathy when interacting with others. Based on the replies provided by the participants, it is evident that they possess a level of awareness regarding the comprehension of other cultures. The acquisition of cross-cultural communication experience immediately enhances individuals' understanding and mitigates their ethnocentric tendencies. This study reveals that participants from public universities in both Indonesia and Malaysia share similar perspectives regarding the significance of cultivating IS within university environments. The importance of IS in multicultural and multiethnic nations, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, has been highlighted in studies conducted by Othman and Ruslan (2020) and Yanto (2022).

Theme 5: University support services

In the present study, the participants shown a high degree of creativity in their contributions pertaining to the cultivation of IS among graduate students inside university environments. Various strategies can be implemented as protocols, such as providing intercultural education training for instructors and faculty members prior to engaging in classroom activities, fostering diversity and inclusivity through both in-class and extracurricular activities, facilitating experiential learning opportunities in cross-cultural domains (e.g., student exchange

programs, intercultural virtual communities, and research collaborations with international partners), and establishing support services and resources to aid the intercultural development of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Possible revision: The aforementioned provisions encompass cultural mentoring initiatives, counseling services, language assistance, and programs aimed at facilitating cultural integration. The establishment of a nurturing and all-encompassing atmosphere aids students in effectively addressing cultural obstacles and fosters the development of their IS. In order to foster IS among students in higher education institutions, it is imperative to adopt a holistic approach that encompasses educational initiatives, opportunities for exposure, and adequate support mechanisms. Universities have the capacity to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively engage with various and interconnected global contexts through the cultivation of cultural awareness, empathy, and proficient intercultural communication. This preparation enables students to navigate these situations with a sense of respect and understanding.

CONCLUSION

The findings and discussion reveal a correlation between the score of the ISS and the observed phenomenon. Furthermore, from the viewpoint of graduate students, IS can be conceptualized as a holistic outlook on life including various dimensions, including the acceptance, appreciation, and comprehension of varied cultural backgrounds. IS can be regarded as a means of demonstrating respect for cultural differences and providing good advises on varied cultural experiences. The cultivation of IS within the university setting is not solely a subjective viewpoint held by researchers, but rather an essential element that ought to be included into the university's curriculum, vision, and goal. The primary catalyst for the successful adoption of IS within a university context is the lecturer, who assumes the role of an educator. Nevertheless, it is imperative for graduate students, who represent the younger generation, to possess a heightened sense of IS within their individual contexts. The participants in this study identified several strategies for enhancing IS among graduate students. These strategies encompassed several aspects such as attending multicultural classrooms, engaging in students' activities, fostering students' self-awareness, enhancing communication skills, and utilizing university support services. However, there is also a need for greater research on IS in university settings, particularly across a broader range of academic disciplines. This study aims to explore the most effective approach for fostering IS among university students.

REFERENCES

Adili, B., Ameti, M., & Zenki-Dalipi, A. (2023). Teachers' Attitudes Towards Desirable Intercultural Competences Necessary for Working in Multicultural Classrooms. 32-46.

Alijanian, F., Mobini, F., & Ghasemi, P. (2019). The Correlation between Iranian EFL Learners' Intercultural Sensitivity, Vocabulary Knowledge, and English Language Proficiency. *Issues in Language Teaching*, *8*(2), 109-135. https://doi.org/10.22054/ilt.2020.49017.450

Andi, R., Iskhak, S., Jonathan Rante, C., & Sazuliana Binti, S. (2020). Intercultural Communication Sensitivity in Global Academic Networking: Efl Teacher Trainees' Perceptions. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy*, *4*(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.25157/jall.v4i1.3040

Awang-Rozaimie, A. S., Alfred Tom, A., Johari, A., Siti-Huzaimah, S., & Adib, S. (2013). Intercultural Sensitivity and Cross-cultural Adjustment among Malaysian Students Abroad. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, *3*. https://doi.org/10.5901/jesr.2013.v3n7p693

Bennett, M. J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *10*(2), 179-196. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(86)90005-2

Chen, G.-M., & Starosta, W. (2000). The Development and Validation of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. *Human Communication*, *3*.

Chen, G.-m., & Starosta, W. J. (1997). A Review of the Concept of Intercultural Sensitivity.

Dalib, S., Mohamad, B., Nadeem, M. U., Halim, H., & Ramlan, S. N. (2023). Intercultural communication competence among migrant workers in Malaysia: a critical review and an agenda for future research [Hypothesis and Theory]. *Frontiers in Communication*, *8*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2023.1147707

Deveci, T., Elgamal, G., Dalton, D., & Langille, D. J. (2022). The development of Emirati university students' intercultural sensitivity. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives*, *18*(1), 62-73. https://doi.org/10.1108/LTHE-09-2021-0087

Dudic, A. (2023). Intercultural education and intercultural sensitivity of social work students: experiences from Bosniaand Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia.

Esmaeili, S. Z., Kuhi, D., & Behroozizad, S. (2022). Developing Intercultural Sensitivity Through Interculturally-Laden Tasks: Male vs. Female Iranian EFL Learners. 1-34. https://doi.org/10.22132/TEL.2022.143868

Fritz, W., Möllenberg, A., & Chen, G.-M. (2002). Measuring intercultural sensitivity in different cultural context. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, *11*.

Gedik Bal, N. (2023). In-service Teachers' Intercultural Sensitivity. *27*. https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.27106a2

Heymann, J., Varvaro-Toney, S., Raub, A., Kabir, F., & Sprague, A. (2023). Race, ethnicity, and discrimination at work: a new analysis of legal protections and gaps in all 193 UN countries. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, *42*(9), 16-34. https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-01-2022-0027

Hosio, M., Heikonen, L., Kallioniemi, A., & Ahtiainen, R. (2023). Finnish Teachers' Perspectives on Caring and Meaningful School Development Work. *Education Sciences*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13090880

Ibrahim, H., Abdulai, M., & Abubakari, A. (2020). Culture and International Volunteerism: an Analytic Study of Intercultural Interactions between UK and Ghanaian Volunteers on the International Citizen Service (ICS) Program. *Human Arenas*, *3*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-019-00082-w

Ivenz, P., & Reid, E. (2023). Development of Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence via Creating Their Own Cultures. *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, *10*, 61-69. https://doi.org/10.2478/jolace-2022-0006

Kim, J. (2020). International students' intercultural sensitivity in their academic socialisation to a non-English-speaking higher education: a Korean case study. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *44*(7), 939-955. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1627298

Kim, J., Choi, J., & Tatar, B. (2017). English-Medium Instruction and Intercultural Sensitivity: A Korean Case Study. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *21*, 102831531772076. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315317720767

Liu, M. (2022). Effects of Learner Variables on Chinese Bilingual Undergraduates’ Intercultural Sensitivity and Effectiveness. *Education Sciences*, *12*(12), 873. https://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/12/12/873

Luo, X., Liu, C., & Lu, Q. (2021). A Case Study of Intercultural Sensitivity of Junior School Students in an International School. *English Language Teaching*, *15*, 69. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v15n1p69

Mellizo, J. (2019). Exploring the effect of music education on intercultural sensitivity in early adolescence: a mixed methods inquiry. *Music Education Research*, *21*, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2019.1665005

Ospina, N. S., & Medina, S. L. (2020). Living and Teaching Internationally: Teachers Talk about Personal Experiences, Benefits, and Challenges. *Journal of Research in International Education*, *19*(1), 38-53. https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240920915013

Othman, A., & Ruslan, N. (2020). Intercultural communication experiences among students and teachers: implication to in-service teacher professional development. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, *14*(3/4), 223-238. https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-04-2020-0024

Paker, T., & Tuncel, I. (2018). Effects of an Intercultural Communication Course in Developing Intercultural Sensitivity. *International Journal of Higher Education*, *7*, 198-211. https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v7n6p198

Panggabean, H. (2004). Characteristics of Indonesian intercultural sensitivity in multicultural and international work groups. *Ongoing themes in psychology and culture. Selected papers from the 16th Congress of International Association of Cross-cultural psychology*, 565-595.

Piechurska-Kuciel, E., & Rusieshvili, M. (2021). Us and them: intercultural sensitivity of Polish and Georgian adolescent multilinguals. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *18*(3), 352-369. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2020.1820013

Puspitasari, F. (2023). Intercultural sensitivity in the online multicultural community: Indonesian students' experiences. *LingTera*, *10*, 41-53. https://doi.org/10.21831/lt.v10i1.59649

Swartz, S., Barbosa, B., & Crawford, I. (2020). Building Intercultural Competence Through Virtual Team Collaboration Across Global Classrooms. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, *83*(1), 57-79. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490619878834

Syam, A. F., Nurhikmah, A., & Ap, S. (2023). Exploring Intercultural Communicative Competence of EFL Higher Education Students: A Communal Perspective. *Tamaddun*, *22*, 52-64. https://doi.org/10.33096/tamaddun.v22i1.327

Tuncel, I. (2019). The Effectiveness of Intercultural Sensitivity Development Activities Integrated with Scientific Research Methods Course. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 8. https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.8.1.301

Wang, M., Devitt, A., Hodgins, G., & Bauer, C. (2021). Students' intercultural sensitivity development through telecollaborative Chinese language learning on Zoom: a case study of Irish students at the beginning-level of Chinese language. In (pp. 279-284). https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2021.54.1346

Wattanavorakijkul, N. (2020). Measuring Intercultural Sensitivity of Thai University Students: Impact of their Participation in the US Summer Work and Travel Program. *rEFLections*, 27(1), 81-102. https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/reflections/article/view/241822

Yanto, M., Warsah, I., Morganna, R., Muttaqin, I. & Destriani. (2022). Intercultural Sensitivity of Educational Management Students as the Future's Educational Leaders in Indonesia. *International Journal of Sociology of Education*, *11(3)*, 263-290. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/rise.10483

Yunus, N., Tamam, E., Bolong, J., Adzharuddin, N. A., & Ibrahim, F. (2017). Validation of intercultural sensitivity three-factor model in Malaysian context. *SHS Web Conf.*, *33*, 00049. https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20173300049

Zhao, G. (2018). Intercultural Sensitivity Assessment of the Postgraduates Majoring in English: A Case Study of Guangxi Normal University. *Higher Education Studies*, *8*, 59. https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v8n4p59