

# Assessing Intercultural Sensitivity: A Case Study of Indonesian EFL Students

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**Abstract**—The aim of this paper is to assess Indonesian students' intercultural sensitivity after taking 600 hours of Intercultural Communication course. The second year students of English Education Department of IKIP Siliwangi have to join Intercultural Communication course for two credit hours. About 36 students were involved in this research. They filled out an Intercultural Sensitivity questionnaire which investigates five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity competence: 1) interaction engagement, 2) respect for cultural differences, 3) interaction confidence, 4) interaction enjoyment and 5) interaction attentiveness. The result of this research reveals that despite the improvement of students' intercultural sensitivity after taking the 600 hours of Intercultural Communication course, there is still some room available for improvement in terms of the general level of Indonesian students' intercultural sensitivity. The improvement of intercultural sensitivity will also influence the improvement of intercultural communicative competence.

**Keywords**— Cultural Sensitivity, Cultural Differences and Intercultural Communication Competence.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In this modern world, intercultural communication is unavoidable. People from different regional backgrounds and different culture often interact in many different settings, namely business setting, educational setting, tourism setting and so on. Therefore, possessing intercultural competence nowadays is very crucial.

In relation to this phenomenon, Chen and Starosta (1996) have developed a model of intercultural communication competence. This model consists of three aspects of intercultural competence, namely: *intercultural awareness*, *intercultural sensitivity* and *intercultural adroitness*.

Indonesia is a country which consists of people from different tribes and languages. Moreover, in many parts of Indonesia, people from different countries also live and work in Indonesia. Therefore, interaction among people from different cultures happens in Indonesian context.

In the aspect of intercultural sensitivity, research about students' intercultural sensitivity in Indonesian context is relatively unexplored. Therefore, this research is trying to fill the gap by assessing students' intercultural sensitivity after joining 600 hours of *Intercultural Communication* course in English as Foreign Language (EFL) setting.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As the experts in the field of intercultural communication, Chen and Starosta (1996) have

developed a model of intercultural communication competence. It consists of three dimensions: *intercultural awareness*, *intercultural sensitivity* and *intercultural adroitness*. The model can be seen in the figure 1 below:

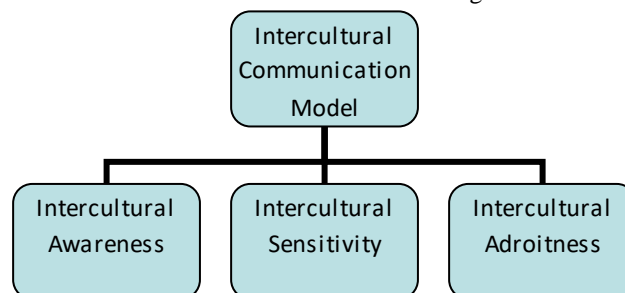


Fig.1: Model of Intercultural Communication Competence (Chen and Starosta, 1996)

The first dimension of intercultural communication competence is intercultural awareness. It can be defined as an understanding of one's own and others' cultures that affect how people think and behave (Chen and Starosta, 1996). Specifically, Hanvey (1979) proposed global perspective idea which becomes the framework for intercultural awareness. Hanvey (1979) also elaborates four levels of intercultural awareness: (1) awareness of superficial or visible cultural traits, such as isolated facts or stereotypes; (2) awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with one's own and interpreted as unbelievable and irrational; (3) awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with one's own but can be understood

cognitively; (4) awareness of how another culture feels from the standpoint of the insider.

The levels of intercultural awareness proposed by Hanvey (1979) can be seen clearly in the table 1 below:

Table.1: Level of Intercultural Awareness  
(Hanvey, 1979)

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION OF INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS
1	Awareness of superficial or visible cultural traits, such as isolated facts or stereotypes
2	Awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with one's own and interpreted as unbelievable and irrational
3	Awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with one's own but can be understood cognitively
4	Awareness of how another culture feels from the standpoint of the insider.

The second dimension of intercultural communication competence is intercultural sensitivity. According to Pourakbari (2015) intercultural sensitivity is the affective dimension of intercultural communication competence that refers to the emotional desire of a person to acknowledge, appreciate, and accept cultural differences. This dimension consists of six components: self-esteem, self-monitoring, empathy, open-mindedness, nonjudgmental, and social relaxation.

And the last dimension is intercultural adroitness. It is the behavioral dimension of intercultural communication competence that refers to an individual's ability to reach communication goals while interacting with people from other cultures. The dimension contains four components: message skills, appropriate self-disclosure, behavioral flexibility, and interaction management (Chen & Starosta, 1996).

Students of English Education Department in IKIP Siliwangi are assigned to join *Intercultural Communication* in the second year of their study as compulsory subject. The subject lasts for two credit hours. The textbook used is *Intercultural Communication* written by Patey. After 600 hours (six weeks) of learning *Intercultural Communication*, students then were given a questionnaire to assess their intercultural sensitivity.

Based on the background of the research above, the writers would like to know whether the participants Siliwangi have already possessed intercultural sensitivity after taking *Intercultural Communication* course for 6

weeks. Then the result of the survey will describe the present condition of students' intercultural sensitivity.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

This qualitative study was conducted in the framework of case study. According to Yin (1994) a case study research is an empirical enquiry about a contemporary phenomenon or a case set within the real world context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 1994). In addition to this inquiry, Dornyei (2007) also states that a case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case. Specifically, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), a case or a phenomenon here refers to a program, an institution, an organization, or a community.

By employing a case study approach, this research has several advantages: First, as case studies are qualitative in nature, thus they have the advantage of qualitative research. Johnson (1992) claims that a case study is primarily naturalistic which relies on the collection of naturally occurring data. In other words, the data of a case study is high in reliability for the naturalness in terms of behavior, environment and all related aspects of the events investigated. According to Yin (1994), a descriptive case study is "allowing an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events." Zonabend (1992) cited in Tellis (1997) states that "case study is done by giving special attention to completeness in observation, reconstruction, and analysis of the cases under study." A case study researcher focuses on a single entity as it exists in its natural environment (Johnson, 1992). McMillan and Schumacher (2001) also state that a descriptive research using a descriptive mode of inquiry simply describes an existing phenomenon by using numbers to characterize individuals or a group. It assesses the nature of existing conditions.

Qualitative research methods are used to examine questions that can best be answered by verbally describing how participants in a study perceive and interpret various aspect of their environment (Crowl, 1996). Qualitative research provides opportunities for researchers to study social phenomena in relation to people's everyday lives. Through a process of data interpretation, qualitative research provides information about what, why and how a phenomenon in a society happens. This is line with what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) say that qualitative research also involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Yin

(1994) also elaborates that employing qualitative method provides researchers with opportunities to represent the views and perspectives of the people/participants in a study.

### Research Site

This research took place in IKIP Siliwangi Bandung. Thirty six students of English Education Program were involved in this research. They are assigned to take *Intercultural Communication* course which has two credit hours as compulsory subject when they are in the second year of their study.

### Participants

As has been mentioned earlier, the participants of this study are 36 students of the fourth semester. There were 28 female students and 8 male students. The age is between 17-22 years old. They did not follow any courses related to *Intercultural Communication* course before. They joined the *Intercultural Communication* subject for 6 (six) weeks (600 minutes). The detailed percentage of participant is summarized in table 2 below:

Table 2: Profiles of Participant

Students	N	Age
Female	28	17-22 years old
Male	8	17-20 years old
TOTAL	36	

### Procedure & Instrumentation

There were two steps in this research. The first step of the research is the teaching learning process of *Intercultural Communication* course which lasted for 6 weeks (600 minutes). Then after the course was over, the students were given a set of similar questionnaire about *Intercultural Sensitivity*. It consists of 24 items of questions covering five factors of *Intercultural Sensitivity*: self-esteem, self-monitoring, empathy, open-mindedness & nonjudgmental, and social relaxation.

The first part of the questionnaire elaborates the introduction of the authors and the aim of instruments. The second part of the questionnaire comprises 24 questions about *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)* using Likert Scale. The participants are asked to filled out the

choices worth 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=uncertain, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree. The questionnaire covers the five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity. It can be seen in table 3 below:

Table 3: Dimensions of Intercultural Sensitivity

N O	DIMENSION OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY	NO OF ITEMS
1	Interaction engagement: participants' feeling of participation in intercultural communication	7 items
2	Respect for cultural differences: how participants orient to or tolerate their counterparts' culture and opinion	6 items
3	Interaction confidence: how confident participants are in the intercultural communication setting	5 items
4	Interaction enjoyment: participants' positive or negative reactions toward communicating with people from different cultures	3 items
5	Interaction attentiveness: participants effort to understand what is going on in intercultural interaction	3 items

### Data Analysis

The next step after collecting the data is data analysis. Burns (2000) states that the purpose of analyzing the data is to find meaning in the data and this is done by systematically arranging and presenting the information. It has to be organized so that comparisons, contrasts, and insights can be made and demonstrated. Specifically, thematic analysis was used in analyzing the data. Boyatzis (1998) elaborates thematic analysis as a strategy in qualitative research to analyze information in a systematic way in order to make the data understandable. It organizes and describes the data in detail according to emergent themes. In doing thematic analysis, the researcher used the phases by Braun and Clarke (2006) as the guidance. Figure 2 below displays the phases of thematic analysis process:

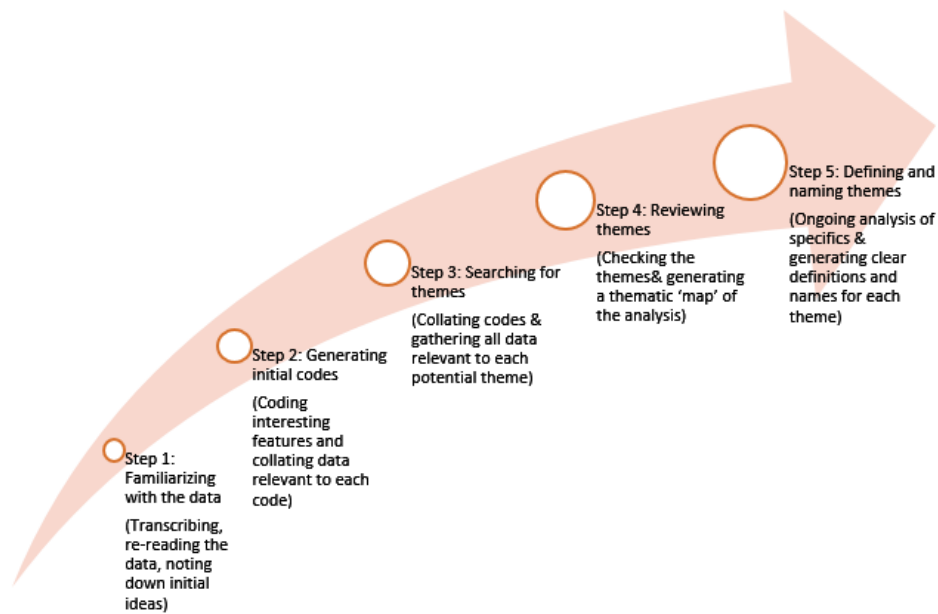


Fig.3: Phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clark)

The first step in the data analysis is organizing the data. The researchers transcribed the data gained from students' questionnaire. After transcribing the data, the second step is labeling the data. The researchers labeled the data based on the data resources. The data then were analyzed by reading the transcription text repeatedly. The next step was coding. Coding process is to make sense out of data, divide it into text or image segment, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy and collapse these codes into broad themes (Creswell, 2009). Coding was intended to identify certain ideas in the data that represented the same meanings. In the final step, the data were categorized into the aspects related to students' intercultural sensitivity.

**IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In this part, the writers analyzed the result of the questionnaire based on the five dimensions of *Intercultural Sensitivity* competence based on Chen and Starosta (1996): 1) interaction engagement, 2) respect for cultural differences, 3) interaction confidence, 4) interaction enjoyment and 5) interaction attentiveness.

**4.1. Dimension 1: Interaction Engagement**

The beginning part of the questionnaire is about the first dimension of *Intercultural Sensitivity* competence, which is *Interaction Engagement*. This dimension investigates participants' feeling of participation in intercultural communication. This dimension is investigated by delivering seven statements, they are:

1. *I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures*
2. *I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded*
3. *I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures*
4. *I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures*
5. *I always know what to say when interacting with people from different*
6. *I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures*
7. *I don't like to be with people from different cultures*

The result of the questionnaire can be seen clearly in table 4 below:

Table 4: Interaction Engagement

ANSWERS	STATEMENTS						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Agree	28	0	42	0	28	28	0
Agree	56	0	42	0	56	56	0
Uncertain	14	14	11	1	14	14	14
Disagree	2	30	5	20	2	2	30
Strongly Disagree	0	56	0	5	0	0	56
TOTAL (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

From table 4 above, it can be seen from statement no.1 that 84% (28% + 56%) of participants agree that they enjoy interacting with people from different cultures. While from statement no.2, it reveals that 87% (56% + 31%) of participants disagree that people from other cultures are narrow-minded. For statement no.3, 84% of participants (42%+42%) feel sure of themselves in interacting with people from different cultures. The other finding from this questionnaire is that for statement no.4, 70% (56%+14%) of participants disagree that talking in front of people from different cultures is hard. And for statement no.5, it can be seen that 84% (28% + 56%) of participants agree that they always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures. For statement no.6, 84% (28% + 56%) of participants agree that they can be as sociable as they want when interacting with people from different cultures. And the last statement is no.7, it is clear that 87% (56% + 31%) of participants disagree that they do not like to be with people from different cultures. However, there are 14% of participants who are uncertain for statements no.1,2,5,6,7 and 11% are uncertain for statement no.3 and 3% are uncertain for statement no.4.

The result of this research indicates that more than half of participants possess relatively high degree of interaction engagement in intercultural communication. They will not make any conclusions in intercultural communication setting before listening to their counterparts patiently. They also hold positive attitude and are willing to explain and accept differences in intercultural communication settings. .

#### 4.2. Dimension 2: Respect for Cultural Differences

The next part of the questionnaire deals with the second dimension of Intercultural Sensitivity, which is *Respect for Cultural Difference*. This dimension investigates how participants orient to or tolerate their counterparts' culture and opinion. It consists of six statements, they are:

8. *I respect the values of people from different cultures*
9. *I get upset easily when interacting with people from different culture*
10. *I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures*
11. *I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts*
12. *I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures*
13. *I am open-minded to people from different cultures*

Table 5: Respect for Cultural Differences

ANSWERS	STATEMENTS					
	8	9	10	11	12	13
Strongly Agree	28	0	28	28	0	28
Agree	56	0	56	56	0	56
Uncertain	14	14	14	14	14	14
Disagree	2	31	2	2	31	2
Strongly Disagree	0	55	0	0	55	0
TOTAL (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100

From table 5 above, the result of the questionnaire reveals that 84% (28% + 56%) of participants agree for statements no.8, 10, 11, and 13. They respect the values of people from different cultures. They also feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures. Moreover they always tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts, so they are always open-minded to people from different cultures. Moreover, 87% (56% + 31%) of participants do not get upset and discouraged easily when interacting with people from different cultures. However, there are still about 14% of participant feel uncertain to the conditions stated in statements 8-13. The result of the second part of this questionnaire indicates that majority of participants are open-minded and willing to appreciate cultural differences in intercultural communication settings.

#### 4.3. Dimension 3: Interaction Confidence

The next part of the questionnaire is related to the third aspect of Intercultural Sensitivity which is about *Intercultural Confidence*. This dimension deals with the condition about how confident participants are in the intercultural communication setting. This dimension is investigated by posing five questions, they are:

14. *I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures*
15. *I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures*
16. *I respect the ways people from different cultures behave*
17. *I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures*
18. *I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures*



Table 6: Interaction Confidence

ANSWERS	STATEMENTS				
	14	15	16	17	18
Strongly Agree	28	0	28	28	0
Agree	56	0	56	56	0
Uncertain	14	14	14	14	0
Disagree	2	30	2	2	45
Strongly Disagree	0	56	0	0	55
TOTAL (%)	100	100	100	100	100

The result of the questionnaire shows that 84% (28% + 56%) of participants agree with statements no.14,16, and 17. The majority of participants are very observant when interacting with people from different cultures. They also respect the ways people from different cultures behave. They will also try to obtain as much information as they can when interacting with people from different cultures. Moreover, 59% (56%+3%) of participants disagree with statements no.15. They do not often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures. And 100% (45%+55%) of participant disagree with the statement that they would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures. It means that despite the cultural differences, they would still accept the opinions. However, the result of the questionnaire also shows that 14% of participants feel uncertain to the conditions stated in statements 14-17. They doubt if they are observant when interacting with people from different cultures and also doubt if they can respect the ways people from different cultures behave. They also feel uncertain to obtain as much information as they can when interacting with people from different cultures.

The result of the third part of this questionnaire implies that more than half of participants have interaction confidence during intercultural communication. Only minority of participants have problems with interaction confidence. This interaction confidence problem is usually related with linguistics problems (Coleman, 2002). Moreover, Rodgers and Mc Goven (2002) also stated that individuals must meet the challenges of language barriers, unfamiliar customs and practices, and cultural variations in verbal and nonverbal communication styles in order to achieve successful intercultural understanding. As a result, linguistic and cultural barriers often carry evaluative and affective consequences for interactants in an intercultural context, resulting in their lacking of confidence.

#### 4.4. Dimension 4: Interaction Enjoyment

This part of the questionnaire is about *Interaction Enjoyment*. It deals with the participants' positive or

negative reactions toward communicating with people from different cultures. Through three questions below, this dimension is investigated:

- |  |
|--|
| <p>19. I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.</p> <p>20. I think my culture is better than other cultures</p> <p>21. I often give positive responses to my culturally-different counterpart during our interaction</p> |
|--|

Table 7: Interaction Enjoyment

ANSWERS	STATEMENTS		
	19	20	21
Strongly Agree	28	0	28
Agree	56	0	56
Uncertain	14	0	14
Disagree	2	45	2
Strongly Disagree	0	55	0
TOTAL (%)	100%	100%	100%

Table 7 above shows that 84% of participants (28% + 56%) agree with the statements no.19 and 20. It means that they are sensitive to their culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during intercultural interactions. They also often give positive responses to their culturally-different counterpart during intercultural interaction. Moreover, all of participants (100%) stated that they do not think that their culture is better. However, about 14% of participants are uncertain with statements number 19 & 21. They doubt if they are sensitive and can give positive responses to their culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during intercultural interaction. From the result of the questionnaire, it can be inferred that majority of participants have relatively high degree of interaction enjoyment. The enjoyment in intercultural communication can be shown by the joy of the interaction, productiveness of the interaction, enjoyment of the interaction, and cooperative nature of the interaction (Jettmer and Nass, 2002).

#### 4.5. Dimension 5: Interaction Attentiveness

The last part of the questionnaire investigates the participants' effort to understand what is going on in intercultural interaction. It is the last dimension of Intercultural Sensitivity, which is about *Interaction Attentiveness*. The questions are:

22. I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons
23. I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues
24. I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.

Table 8: Interaction Attentiveness

ANSWERS	STATEMENTS		
	22	23	24
Strongly Agree	0	28	28
Agree	0	56	56
Uncertain	0	14	14
Disagree	45	2	2
Strongly Disagree	55	0	0
TOTAL (%)	100%	100%	100%

Table 8 above shows that 100% (45%+55%) of participants in this research disagree with statement number 22. They never avoid those situations where they will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons. While 84% of participants (28% + 56%) agree with statements number 23 and 24. They often show culturally-distinct counterpart their understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues and have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between their culturally-distinct counterpart and them. It can be inferred that majority of participants are attentive enough in intercultural interaction so they could catch the meanings in intercultural interaction settings, either verbally or non-verbally.

## V. CONCLUSION

From five dimensions measured, more than half of participants show positive answers related to 24 statements in the questionnaire. It means that, the second year students of English Education Department in IKIP Siliwangi have already possessed intercultural sensitivity during intercultural communication settings. They can manage themselves well in interacting and communicating with people from different cultures in intercultural communication context. However, the result of the study also reveals that despite the improvement of students' intercultural sensitivity after taking the 600 hours of *Intercultural Communication* course, there is still some room available for improvement for all dimensions of intercultural competence, especially in the aspect of *Intercultural Sensitivity*. The improvement of intercultural sensitivity will also influence the improvement of intercultural communicative competence.

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**APPENDIX: INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY SCALE**

(Adopted from Chen and Starosta, 1996)

Hello. I hope you don't mind filling out this questionnaire. Please read the series of statements concerning intercultural communication below. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. Please put the number corresponding to your answer in the blank before the statement. SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Uncertain, D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree.

Thank you for your cooperation.

NO	STATEMENTS	ANSWERS				
		SA	A	U	D	SD
	<b>INTERACTION ENGAGEMENT</b>					
1	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures					
2	I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded					
3	I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures					
4	I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures					
5	I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures					
6	I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures					
7	I don't like to be with people from different cultures					
	<b>RESPECT FOR CULTURAL DIFFERENCES</b>					
8	I respect the values of people from different cultures					
9	I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures					
10	I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures					
11	I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts					
12	I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures					
13	I am open-minded to people from different cultures					
	<b>INTERACTION CONFIDENCE</b>					
14	I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures					
15	I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures					
16	I respect the ways people from different cultures behave					
17	I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures					
18	I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures					
	<b>INTERACTION ENJOYMENT</b>					
19	I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.					
20	I think my culture is better than other cultures					
21	I often give positive responses to my culturally-different counterpart during our interaction					
	<b>INTERACTION ATTENTIVENESS</b>					
22	I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons					
23	I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues					
24	I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.					