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MEASURING INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN INDONESIA

Sukardi Weda
Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia
sukardi.weda@unm.ac.id

Haryanto Atmowardoyo
Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia
haryanto@unm.ac.id

Iskandar Abdul Samad
Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Indonesia
iskandar.abdul.samad@gmail.com

Siti Sarah Fitriani
Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Indonesia
ssfitriani@gmail.com

Andi Elsa Fadhilah Sakti
Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia
andielsafadhilas@yahoo.co.id

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Abstract: This study aims at measuring the intercultural sensitivity of English language students at a higher education institution in Makassar, Indonesia. The participants of the study were the first semester students of the English Literature Study Program from the Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, who enrolled in the English Phonology course (N = 73, female = 61 (83.56%) and male = 12 (16.44%). The participants of the study were from the English Phonology course because the participants were from various ethnic group backgrounds. The instrument used for the study was Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) to explore the intercultural sensitivity of English language students. The findings reveal that the subjects enjoy interacting with people from different cultures. It was also found that: 1) The participants respected the values of people from different cultures, 2) They felt confident when interacting with people from different cultures, 3) They are pretty sure of themselves in interacting with people from different cultures, 4) They respect the values of people from different cultures, 5) They often give positive responses to their culturally different counterpart during their interaction.

Keywords: *English language students; higher education institution; intercultural communication competence; intercultural sensitivity*

INTRODUCTION

In international communication, intercultural relation becomes essential. The issue of intercultural communication in both international and domestic contexts has become an interesting topic for researchers around the globe in various disciplines (Bennett, 1998; Mulyana, 2012; Washington et al., 2012; Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013;

*Corresponding Author:
sukardi.weda@unm.ac.id

Klimova et al., 2019; Kostina & Mallaev, 2019).

As the main dimension of intercultural communication competence, intercultural sensitivity has increasingly gained attention in research in different disciplines (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Fritz et al., 2001; Hammer et al., 2003; Peng, 2006; Baños, 2006; Altan, 2018). The development of communication networks in the digital technology era and the increasing number of people traveling to and remaining in foreign countries either temporarily or permanently have raised awareness of the greater need to interact with people from different cultures (Mulyana, 2012). Mulyana asserts that foreign cultures have become a vital part of the sojourners' communication milieu. Intercultural communication seems to be an integrating and important factor for understanding sojourners and cultural adjustments (Brein & David, 1971). Brein and David (1971) then mention that the term sojourner refers to many types of travelers, including students, trainees, technical assistants, tourists, businessmen, military personnel, missionaries, foreign service officers, professors, and others. Therefore, intercultural sensitivity among intercultural speakers of sojourners is a fundamental aspect of intercultural communication. This is because the mutual understanding of cultural elements, compromises, and substantial cultural knowledge about appropriate behavior will facilitate sojourners' effectiveness in working and living abroad (Awang-Rozaimie et al., 2013).

Hammer et al. (2003) argue that greater intercultural sensitivity is associated with greater potential for taking part in intercultural competence. This present study will refer to two key terms used by Hammer et al. (2003) as the prominent scholars in intercultural communication practices; "intercultural sensitivity" and "intercultural competence." As Hammer et al. (2003) illustrate, "intercultural sensitivity'' refers to the ability to examine the relevant cultural differences. This study will use the term ''intercultural competence'' to mean the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways.

Studies on intercultural sensitivity and intercultural competence have been fundamental in the global and domestic context. Altan (2018) has suggested that one of the key aspects of intercultural communication competence is intercultural sensitivity, gaining increasing attention in other disciplines.

A similar study was reported by Riemer and Jansen (2003), who argued that non-verbal communication has a good emotional component in which emotional intelligence (or EQ) can contribute to understanding intercultural non-verbal communication, particularly with regard to its elements of self-empathy, self-awareness, social skills, and intercultural communication awareness.

Similar comment from Wolfgang Fritz et al. (2001), who argued that behavioral effectiveness is the core criterion of intercultural communication and identified seven skills that account for interculturally competent behavior; this including the display of respect, interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, empathy, self-oriented role behavior, interaction management, and tolerance for ambiguity.

Chen and Starosta (as cited in Ahnagari & Zamanian, 2014) outlined three major components of intercultural communication competence. They are intercultural sensitivity or affective process, intercultural awareness or cognitive process, and intercultural adroitness or behavioral process, which are defined as verbal and nonverbal skills needed to act effectively and efficiently in intercultural communications. In this study, we focus on the importance of the intercultural sensitivity of English language students in EFL classrooms.

In this study, we adopt the concept of intercultural sensitivity and the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) from Chen & Starosta (2000) because it accommodates the issues of intercultural sensitivity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the pertinent ideas and the previous related studies dealing with students' intercultural sensitivity and competence in a higher education institution in Makassar, Indonesia.

Intercultural Sensitivity

Intercultural sensitivity consisted of interaction engagement, interaction confidence, respect for cultural differences, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness (Peng, 2006).

In this present study, we use the term ''intercultural sensitivity'' as defined by Hammer et al. (2003) as the ability to respond to and handle relevant cultural differences. The study employs the term ''intercultural competence,'' which is defined as the ability to think and act in culturally appropriate ways (Hammer et al., 2003).

As a component of intercultural communication competence, intercultural sensitivity is not widely understood (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Chen and Starosta (2000) show that the main problem of confusion is embedded in the long misperceptions of three concepts: intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness, and intercultural communication competence. Chen and Starosta (2000) mention that there are three concepts that are closely related but separate. Intercultural communication competence is an umbrella concept consisting of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral abilities of participants in the intercultural communication process. In other words, Chen and Starosta (2000) argue that the cognitive aspect of intercultural communication competence is represented by the concept of intercultural awareness, which refers to "understanding cultural conventions that affect how we think and behave." The affective aspect of intercultural communication competence is represented by the concept of intercultural sensitivity, which refers to "the active desire of subjects to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept intercultural differences (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

The same comment is from Gardner (as cited in Brein & David, 1971), who suggested that "universal communicators" would have little difficulty in adjusting to other countries. The universal communicator is described as having a well-integrated personality, a central organization of a more open type, a value system that includes "all values," universal cultural socialization, and a high level of sensitivity towards others.

To this end, integrating cultural elements in foreign language education programs is also recognized as a way to increase awareness among students of intercultural citizenship, defined by Byram (2008, as cited in Bouchard, 2017) as the capacity to coexist and communicate (in local, national and international domains) with people and groups outside one's ethnic, cultural and/or linguistic identity, an ability that goes beyond national identification towards mutual respect, social involvement, and reducing prejudice.

Intercultural sensitivity is an affective dimension of intercultural communication competence that refers to one's emotional desire to acknowledge, appreciate, and accept cultural differences. (Fritz et al., 2001). Fritz et al. (2001) mentioned that the dimension included six components: self-esteem, self-monitoring, empathy, open-mindedness, non-judgmental, and social relaxation.

Williams (2005) argues that expressive resilience to face failure, confusion, and misunderstanding and continue working towards positive interactions is an important component of effective intercultural communication skills.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design. In order to answer the research objectives, 73 questionnaire items were distributed to students of the English Literature Study Program of Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia. The questionnaire was written in English, and the

participants were asked to rate their perception of intercultural sensitivity. In this research, the participants were asked to rate their perceptions with response to the questionnaires on a 5-point Likert scale; 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = uncertain; 4 = agree; and 5 = strongly agree.

Participants

There were seventy-three participants in this study. The participants were 61 (83.56%) females and 12 (16.44%) males from the English Literature Study Program of the Faculty of Languages and Literature of Universitas Negeri Makassar. The participants' age ranged from 17 – 20 years old. The percentage of the ethnic group of the participants is revealed in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1. *Demographics of Participants in Questionnaire*

Demographic Information		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	61	83.56
	Male	12	16.44
Age	17	23	31.50
	18	37	50.68
	19	10	13.69
	20	3	4.11
Ethnicity	Buginese	36	49.31
	Makassarese	22	30.14
	Javanese	4	5.47
	Mandarese	3	4.10
	Torajanese	2	2.73
	Sundanese	2	2.73
	Butonese	1	1.36
	Selayarese	1	1.36
	Ambonese	1	1.36
	Posonese	1	1.36

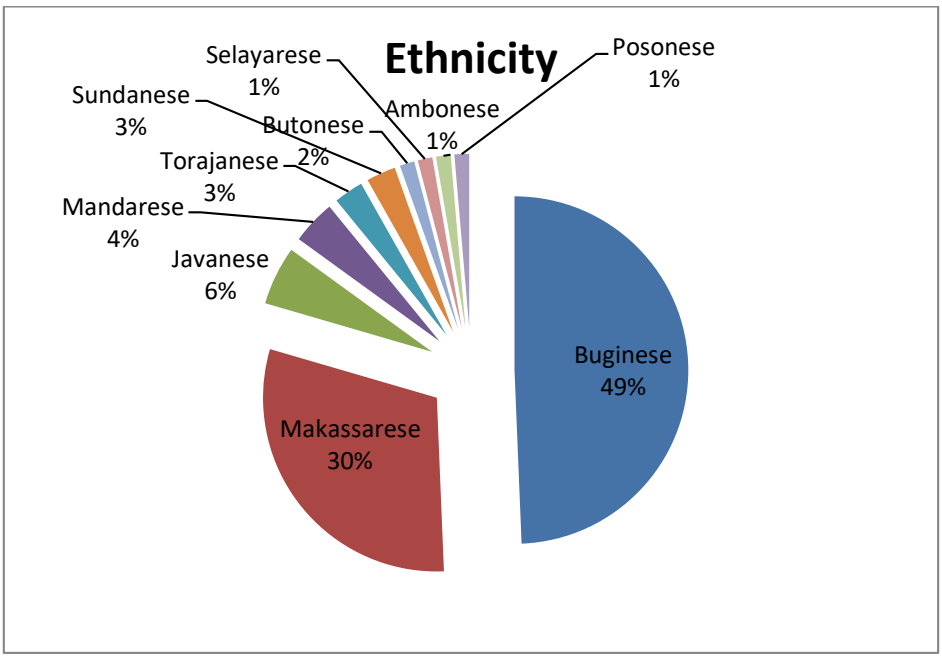

Figure 1. Ethnicity of the Participants

Instruments and Procedures

This study used questionnaires as the instrument used to assess the students' perception of their intercultural sensitivity. The students were asked to respond to the statements in the questionnaire and they were asked to react to the questions offered by the researchers. Data were collected in October 2019. The students were asked to fill in the questionnaire, which consisted of the 24-item intercultural sensitivity questionnaire developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) containing statements to be assessed by students. The questionnaire employed in this present study was Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS). In this present study, the students were asked to rate their perceptions on a 5-point Likert scale on which 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

The 24-item intercultural sensitivity questionnaire developed by Chen and Starosta (2000). Items 2, 4, 7, 9, 15, 18, 20, and 22 are given a reverse code in which the researcher rephrase "positive statement" into "negative statement". Other the respondents give consistent responses before adding 24 items. The interaction involvement items are 1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23, and 24. Respect for items of cultural difference is 2, 7, 8, 16, 18, and 20. The items of trust that interact are 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10. The interaction pleasure items are 9, 12, and 15, and the interaction attention items are 14, 17, and 19.

Data Analysis

Data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics 9.0, which showed the mean, Standard Deviation (SD), and percentage. The kurtosis and skewness are also revealed in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 shows the percentages, sum, mean, and standard deviation of students' perceptions of Intercultural Sensitivity of English Language Students at a higher education institution in Makassar, Indonesia.

Table 2. *Intercultural Sensitivity Test Score of English Language Students at Higher Education in Indonesia (N = 73)*

No.	Students' Perception	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Kurtosis	Skewness	Sum	Mean	SD
1.	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.	0	0	2.7	41.1	56.2	-.667	-.640	331.00	4.5342	.55483
2.	I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.	34.2	31.5	30.1	4.1	0	-1.049	.265	149.00	2.0411	.90429
3.	I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.	0	1.4	11.0	69.9	17.8	1.644	-.427	295.00	4.0411	.58780
4.	I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.	1.4	17.8	53.4	23.4	4.1	.273	.146	227.00	3.1096	.79165

5.	I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.	2.7	5.5	39.7	34.2	17.8	.174	-.317	262.00	3.5890	.94038
6.	I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.	0	8.2	26.0	42.5	23.3	-.590	-.332	278.00	3.8082	.89221
7.	I don't like to be with people from different cultures.	49.5	38.4	1.4	5.5	5.5	2.526	1.737	131.00	1.7945	1.09238
8.	I respect the values of people from different cultures.	1.4	4.1	4.1	34.2	52.6	3.705	-1.814	321.00	4.3973	.86184
9.	I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.	34.2	35.6	26.0	4.1	0	-.833	.375	146.00	2.0000	.88192
10.	I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.	1.4	0	42.5	50.7	5.5	1.987	-.484	262.00	3.5890	.66323
11.	I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts.	0	2.7	64.4	27.4	5.5	.676	.906	245.00	3.3562	.63179
12.	I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.	4.1	68.5	17.8	5.5	4.1	2.909	1.651	173.00	2.3699	.82507
13.	I am open-minded to people from different cultures.	0	4.1	13.7	47.9	34.2	.278	-.733	301.00	4.1233	.79835

14.	I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.	2.7	12.3	34.2	32.9	17.8	-.388	-.265	256.00	3.5068	1.01548
15.	I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.	28.8	39.7	21.9	6.8	2.7	.296	.772	157.00	2.1507	1.00928
16.	I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.	0	1.4	17.8	43.8	37.0	-.514	-.482	304.00	4.1644	.76401
17.	I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.	1.4	2.7	9.6	45.2	41.1	2.476	-1.312	308.00	4.2192	.83743
18.	I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.	56.2	35.6	5.5	1.4	1.4	4.855	1.854	114.00	1.5616	.78149
19.	I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart' s subtle meanings during our interaction.	5.5	19.2	53.4	21.9	0	.120	-.533	213.00	2.9178	.79501
20.	I think my culture is better than other cultures.	26.0	34.2	37.0	2.7	0	-1.082	-.046	158.00	2.1644	.85006
21.	I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.	0	0	11.0	64.4	24.7	-.114	-.022	302.00	4.1370	.58488

22.	I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.	11.0	37.0	38.0	11.0	2.7	.048	.312	188.00	2.5753	.92673
23.	I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.	0	11.0	52.1	32.9	4.1	-.106	.161	241.00	3.3014	.72043
24.	I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.	0	0	32.9	41.1	26.0	-1.287	.119	287.00	3.9315	.76972

The means and standard deviations of students' perception on intercultural sensitivity test scores of English students are displayed in Table 2.

The findings indicate that the students achieved a mean of 4.5342 and SD = .55483 for students' perception 1. The students achieved a mean of 2.0411 and SD = .90429 for students' perception 2. The students achieved a mean of 4.0411 and SD = .58780 for students' perception 3. The students achieved a mean of 3.1096 and SD = .79165 for students' perception 4. The students achieved a mean of 3.5890 and SD = .94038 for students' perception 5. The students achieved a mean of 3.8082 and SD = .89221 for students' perception 6. The means and SD for students' perception 7 to students' perception 24 are clearly stated on table 2. Finally, a normal distribution can be observed for all scales in this current study as revealed by skewness and kurtosis value as presented in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, it is stated that more than half of students (56.2%) were strongly Agree, saying that they enjoy interacting with people from different cultures. Table 2 also reveals that the highest response for statement number 2 (They think people from other cultures are narrow-minded) was Strongly Disagree with 34.2%. The highest response for statement number 3 (They are pretty sure of themselves in interacting with people from different cultures) was Agree with 69.9%. The highest response for statement number 4 (They find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.) was Uncertain with 53.4%. The highest response for statement number 5 (They always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.) was Uncertain with 39.7%. The highest response for statement number 6 (They can be as sociable as they want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.) was Agree with 42.5%. The highest response for statement number 7 (They don't like to be with people from different cultures.) was Strongly Disagree with 49.5%. The highest response for statement number 8 (They respect the values of people from different cultures.) was Agree with 52.6%.

The highest response for statement number 9 (They get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.) was Disagree with 35.6%. The highest response for statement number 10 (They feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.) was Agree with 50.7%.

The highest response for statement number 11 (They tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts.) was Uncertain with 64.4%. The highest response for statement number 12 (They often get discouraged when they are with people from different cultures.) was Disagree with 68.5%. The highest response for statement number 13 (They are open-minded to people from different cultures.) was Agree with 47.9%. The highest response for statement number 14 (They are very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.) was Uncertain with 34.2%. The highest response for statement number 15 (They often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.) was Disagree with 39.7%. The highest response for statement number 16 (They respect the ways people from different cultures behave.) was Agree with 43.8%. The highest response for statement number 17 (They try to obtain as much information as they can when interacting with people from different cultures.) was Agree with 45.2%. The highest response for statement number 18 (They would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.) was Strongly Disagree with 56.2%. The highest response for statement number 19 (They are sensitive to their culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during their interaction.) was Uncertain with 53.4%. The highest response for statement number 20 (They think their culture is better than other cultures.) was Uncertain with 37.0%. The highest response for statement number 21 (They often give positive responses to their culturally different counterpart during their interaction.) was Agree with 64.4%. The highest response for statement number 22 (They avoid those situations where they will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.) was Uncertain with 38.0%. The highest response for statement number 23 (They often show their culturally-distinct counterpart their understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.) was Uncertain with 52.1%. The highest response for statement number 24 (They have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between their culturally-distinct counterpart.) was Agree with 41.1%.

As revealed in the findings, students enjoyed interacting with students from different cultures when they scored high for the related responses. This means that students at EFL classroom at higher education institution love to interact with people of various cultural backgrounds. Soltani (2014) mentions that investigation of EFL learners' intercultural sensitivity as the prerequisite for intercultural competence and its relationship with their ethnicity can give new insight on second language education given the dramatic increase in the amount of communication among individuals of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and the rapidly growing trend of globalization. The same comment from Dollah et al. (2017, p. 41) that the interaction enjoyment of participants with other cultures happens in the EFL classroom at higher education. Dollah therefore adds that participants did not get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures and they were enthusiastic when they were with people from different cultures.

On the one hand, the majority of the students reported that they disagree towards the statement "They think people from other cultures are narrow-minded," and on the other hand, they agree towards the statement "They are open-minded to people from different cultures." In intercultural communication, diverse individual competences are needed: self-concept, open minded, non-judgmental attitudes, empathy, self-regulation and interaction involvement (Baños, 2006). The same comment is from Davis and Cho (2005) who assert that an

interculturally competent person shows affective, behavioral, and cognitive abilities, such as openness, empathy, adaptive motivation, perspective taking, behavioral flexibility, and person-centered communication.

The students' responses on the statement "They are quite confident in themselves in interacting with people from different cultures," show high responses. Macintyre et al. (1998) argue that in many cases, motivational tendency to communicate is, stable individual differences that apply in some situation. They mention that there seem to be three groups of variables it is important here: (a) motivation between individuals, (b) motivation between groups, and (c) L2 self-confidence. Motivational tendencies are based on the affective and cognitive contexts of intergroup interaction and ultimately lead to circumstances confidence and desire to interact with certain people.

The students' responses on the statement "They respect the values of people from different cultures," show high response. Baidhawy (2007) states that developing mutual respect places all humans in an equal relationship: there is no superiority or inferiority. Baidhawy therefore adds that respect leads to sharing among individuals and groups. The findings also endorse of Ip (2014, p. 139) who asserts that people who live in society will have mutual respect and tolerance as a common attribute in realizing social harmony. Furthermore, Walsh as cited in Mulyana (2012, p. 42- 43) asserts that universal man is a person who respects all cultures: he understands what people from different ethnic groups think, feel, and believe, and he respects cultural differences. This fits with the study finding which reveals that the people from different cultural background respect each other.

CONCLUSION

This present study attempted to explore the students' perception on intercultural sensitivity of English language students at a higher education institution in Makassar, Indonesia. The following results can promote intercultural communication competence in a county with various ethnic groups. The results revealed that the students enjoyed interacting with students from different cultures. Other evidences of the study are: 1) They respected the values of people from different cultural background, 2) They felt confident when interacting with people from different cultures, 3) They are pretty sure of themselves in interacting with people from different cultures, 4) They respect the values of people from different cultures, 5) They often give positive responses to their culturally different counterpart during their interaction in daily life. The implication of the study is that the intercultural sensitivity is fundamental in the classroom setting in building and promoting harmony.

In other for intercultural education becomes more quickly an inseparable part of the standard educational practice at higher education, the following policies are necessary: 1) The inclusion of intercultural communication in the curricula at higher education, 2) Mutual respect is a positive behavior that students need to live with, 3) Be open-minded to other people from different cultures, and 4) Accept other people from different cultural backgrounds without conditions. The implication of the present study is that intercultural communication of a nation with a variety of ethnic groups is vital to be included in the curricula at higher education institutions.

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