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(IJEPC)**[www.ijepec.com](http://www.ijepec.com)**INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT OF EFL  
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**DOI:** 10.35631/IJEPC.954004**This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)****Abstract:**

This paper explores EFL teachers' perception of intercultural competence in Indonesian higher education institutions. It also provides some recommendations for teaching intercultural competence. The participants are 10 teachers who were purposively selected from different higher education institutions. The instrument for data collection was semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that it is important to develop professional teachers' intercultural competence. Teacher as participants found intercultural competence as a way of accepting cultural differences and respecting other cultures. Most of the teachers had high perceptions on the development of EFL teachers' intercultural competence. They agreed that interculturality in English should be integrated as the goal of English learning because language and culture are integral part and inseparable.

**Keywords:**

EFL Teacher; Higher Education; Indonesia; Institutions; Intercultural Competence

**Introduction**

In recent years, due to the benefit of intercultural competence among people, the attention on the issue about intercultural competence has increased. It is considered as crucial need because some people are more aware of the benefits of intercultural competence (Barnatt et al. 2020;

Idris 2020; Kim et al. 2023; Mascadri et al. 2017; Sercu 2004). People who want to succeed in a globalizing world need to understand intercultural competence (Abduh & Rosmaladewi 2018). The United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as Global organisations are specifically addressing the importance of intercultural competence for all people and for education (Gulikers et al. 2021; OECD 2018).

Integrating intercultural competence in foreign language classroom has been emphasized especially in Indonesia, yet few explicit guidance currently exists on how is EFL teacher's perceptions on intercultural competence development in higher education institution (Roiha & Sommier 2021; Estaji & Tabrizi 2022). Furthermore, the development of intercultural competence is a crucial part of foreign language education. Dealing with intercultural in Indonesian context, several research have been conducted by researchers. Abduh & Rosmaladewi (2018), for example, conducted research in intercultural competence in bilingual programs in Indonesia, making explicit core features of cultural production in inter-Asia contexts (Boonstra & Rae 2022), implementing intercultural competence for teacher education institutions in Indonesia in music teacher education and training (Gunara & Sutanto 2021), EFL teachers' understanding and beliefs in intercultural communicative competence in Indonesian context (Hasanah & Gunawan 2020), beliefs regarding teaching about culture for novice Indonesian EFL teachers (Kidwell 2021), intercultural values in local wisdom in Indonesia (Moeis et al. 2022), views and beliefs regarding to intercultural competence in English teaching practice from Indonesian EFL teachers (Sugianto 2020).

All of the mentioned studies above have focused on intercultural awareness, intercultural value, and exploration on teachers' understanding and belief. Therefore, very few research related to the intercultural competence development in higher education context. This present study fills the gap and aims at exploring teachers' perception on intercultural competence development in foreign language classes in Indonesian higher education institutions. These issues have been organised into the following questions: (1) What are EFL teachers' perception of intercultural competence in Indonesian higher education institutions. (2) How do they perceive their level of intercultural competence in their teaching?

This present study also offers theoretical, methodological, and practical significances. Theoretically, this study contributes to the debates on intercultural issues. In terms of methodological contribution, this study will utilize a narrative study. It will provide a platform for deconstructing the meaning of lived experience from an insider perspective. Practically, in EFL context, this study can be a source of information for teachers and practitioners.

## Literature Review

Culture is a complex and dynamic concept. It is considered as an crucial curriculum component, and some scholars and researchers converge on the suggestion that integrating explicit instruction of culture in the lesson should be done by language teachers (Çelik & Yazan, 2023).

Developing intercultural competence (IC) in culturally diverse socio-educational contexts is essential for the teachers (Valencia & Benavides 2019; Valdivia & Montoto 2018). Intercultural competence refers to the ability of an individual to communicate effectively with representatives of different cultures and in different cultural environments (Deardorff 2006;

Khukhlaev et al. 2020). In this study, intercultural competence refers to the ability of changing cultural perspective and adapting our behaviour as well as developing empathy, respect, and open-mindedness towards people from different cultures. Having positive attitudes towards other cultures are also necessary (Perry et al. 2011). A person who has intercultural competence is willing to engage in interactions with people from other cultures and has the necessary skills and knowledge to do so.

In the field of educational and in term of intercultural approach, the schools are required to become spaces for teachers and students to be engaged flexibility and adaptability with different values, cultural norms, as well as heritage repertoires (Dalib et al. 2017; Elias & Mansouri, 2023). All students get necessary information dealing with cultural knowledge, skills and attitudes that make them to have respect to accept and adapt to diverse social groups from other cultures.

Byram (1997); Byram & Zarate (1996) address a definition of intercultural competence into five areas, namely *savoirs*, *savoir apprendre*, *savoir comprendre/faire*, *savoir eˆtre* and *savoir s'engager*. Byram & Zarate (1996); Sercu (2004) highlight the definition of each area. *Savoirs* refers to the knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction. It means that it includes our own and foreign culture knowledge which affect language and communication. *Savoir-comprendre* refers to the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own. *Savoir-apprendre/faire* is the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction. *Savoir s'engager* describes an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries. Finally, *savoir-eˆtre* is defined as curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.

In Indonesia, teachers' education that emphasizes intercultural values need to be improved (Gunara & Sutanto 2021; Sugianto & Ulfah 2020). Indonesian teachers actually already have knowledge about the concept of intercultural competence (Munandar & Newton 2021). They are naturally embedded in intercultural setting in a situation of the lesson. This happens because of the condition of Indonesia that has a multiculturalism society (Idris 2020). There is a number of studies focusing on the notion of an intercultural approach to English language teaching (Idris 2020; Kusumaningputri & Widodo 2018; Saud & Abduh 2018). Idris (2020) studied the evidence the correlations between teaching locations and secondary school English teachers' level of intercultural competence. Kusumaningputri & Widodo (2018) proposes English language teachers should integrate cultural components in their curriculum materials, even it is in syllabus, textbook and pedagogical tasks. Saud & Abduh (2018) recommended for both educators and learners that promoting intercultural understanding is crucial within the context of learning a foreign language. Moreover, educational institutions have the option to designate learners who exhibit a strong commitment to fostering intercultural understanding as volunteers, aiming to enhance awareness and appreciation of diverse cultures. Although studies focusing on English teachers' intercultural competence are redundant in abroad countries, we still have little about similar studies focusing on how EFL teachers view intercultural competence in Indonesian context. In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), there is a limited use of English for communication by the students outside the classroom; they just

learn English as a lingua franca (ELF) or as an international language in order to interact with people from either inner circle, outer circle, or expanding circle (Wang 2020). Therefore, this present study provides insights from EFL teachers' perspectives of intercultural competence development.

### Methodology

This research was a qualitative research using narrative inquiry design. We used narrative inquiry to investigate perception from ten Indonesian teachers from higher education institutions. Narrative Inquiry as a research phenomenon arises from a personal to professional dilemma or puzzle. They may be persons previously known or unknown and are interested in the experience being explored, usually are implicated in it autobiographically and willing to discuss their perspectives (Lindsay & Schwind 2016) in a form of storytelling. Narrative researchers are looking for ways to understand and represent the lived experiences of participants through stories (Clandinin 2006). We obtained our data through semi-structured interviews. The participants were chosen purposively were judged to be representative of this study included in some criteria such as focus in the field of English teaching at higher institutions, years of experience, and educational background. Thematic Analysis was used for data analysis. Thematic Analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns of meaning (themes) within data (Anderson et al. 2014). The research teams read and made the transcripts and listened to the interview and analyzed the result of interview. Anderson et al. also provides the guide process of thematic analysis which consists of six phases, namely (1) familiarising yourself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing the themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report.

**Table 1: Demographic Information of the Participants**

| Name           | Age range in (years) | Years of teaching experience | Educational Background |
|----------------|----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Participant 1  | 41 - 45              | 5 – 10 years                 | Doctoral Degree        |
| Participant 2  | 41 - 45              | 5 – 10 years                 | Doctoral Degree        |
| Participant 3  | 31 - 35              | 5 – 10 years                 | Master Degree          |
| Participant 4  | 41 - 45              | 11 – 20 years                | Master Degree          |
| Participant 5  | 36 - 40              | 11 – 20 years                | Doctoral Degree        |
| Participant 6  | 41 - 45              | 11 – 20 years                | Master Degree          |
| Participant 7  | 46 and above         | 21 + years                   | Doctoral Degree        |
| Participant 8  | 41 - 45              | 11 – 20 years                | Master Degree          |
| Participant 9  | 41 – 45              | 11 – 20 years                | Doctoral Degree        |
| Participant 10 | 46 and above         | 21 + years                   | Doctoral Degree        |

## Results and Discussion

The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. The responses were initially reviewed comprehensively to understand the overall data and to pinpoint any recurring themes, similarities, and discrepancies within the participants' replies (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

During the interview sessions, we asked the EFL teachers as participants to share what culture and intercultural competence means to them. The finding of the present research revealed that there was variation in the way of each participant talked about culture and intercultural competence. The interview results produced relatively similar findings; it showed that the teachers' perception of intercultural competence development was relatively high. One of the experienced participants had a very good understanding about intercultural competence; why EFL teachers should have intercultural competence; and why culture need to be integrated in the lesson. Furthermore, teachers' experience is not a guarantee in shaping their perception and judgment toward components of intercultural competence. The teachers found out that cultural knowledge is one of the important elements of intercultural competence. They viewed cultures as an inseparable part of the language and the target cultures should be integrated into English language teaching. The results of this present study are in line with those of the previous studies (Estaji & Rahimi 2018; Roiha & Sommer 2021).

It appears that, in the result we are presenting, two out of ten teachers in our study had low perception of intercultural competence development. They became interested in having knowledge about cultural diversity after considering their controversial and problematic educational context after conducting interview. It could be interpreted as the awakening of key sensitivity for the development of intercultural competence (Liao & Li 2020).

The following are the examples of excerpts from teachers' narrative which illustrates the storyline:

“Yes, as I said earlier, I think we need to think about...we should focus on teaching good speaking skills in English. Not all material can be embedded into intercultural teaching...(excerpt 6)

I am not familiar with intercultural education...maybe I introduce different culture...but seldom... I just go with the listed topics (excerpt 9)

The evidence reviewed here suggests that the teachers reflected a lack of understanding of the close relationship between language and culture, as well as the importance of developing intercultural competence in learning English. These teachers may not yet realize that understanding culture can enrich students' understanding of the context of language use, making them more competent in communicating effectively in intercultural situations (Valdivia & Montoto 2018). The statement also reflects a lack of recognition of the fact that many language activities include cultural elements, and that emphasizing only the technical aspects of language may not create holistic learning (Çelik & Yazan 2023).

To sum up, most of the EFL teachers as participants in this study had a high perception of intercultural competence and it is reflected on their behavior, such as openness, social initiative, and communication skills. They also believed that the significance of cultural teaching in EFL



education are really crucial (Fungchomchoei & Kardkarnklai 2016). We here can further analyze excerpts from teachers' narrative illustrates:

I always give space to students to ask questions and divide them into groups randomly. I appreciate the differences in students who have different cultural backgrounds...(excerpt 1)

... during the lesson, I teach my students various cultures from different countries such as how to greet people from America, will it be different for people from Japan...(excerpt 2)

When delivering learning material...I not only facilitate language understanding, but also enrich my students' insight into cultural diversity...I introduce them culture from different country or different area of Indonesia when I am teaching...I implement intercultural...I will appreciate my students by giving them praise if they actively answer or share their ideas or their cultural experiences during our discussion...(excerpt 5)

In my classroom, I divided my student into groups. I asked them to have discussion in their groups ...they were free to express their ideas, their thinking with their peers. They were also free to exchange opinions and perspectives with their peers.....(excerpt 7)

I really understand that my students in the class come from different cultural backgrounds, different economic backgrounds, different family backgrounds. They have different learning styles, different interests... I always give all of them the same opportunities during the teaching and learning process without discriminating them ...(excerpt 10)

In these extracts, the teachers drew together a high level of intercultural competence. These excerpts highlighted the teacher's commitment and illustrated how the teacher actively integrates intercultural competence into their teaching practice by creating an inclusive learning environment, promoting cultural awareness and understanding, and valuing the diverse perspectives and experiences of their students. The teachers really inspired their students to become global citizens.

From a theoretical or conceptual perspective, this present study seeks to facilitate a better appreciation on the concept of intercultural competence. The teachers as professional should become more professional in their lesson or their teaching practices through an awareness of intercultural competence. It will be reflected in their language instruction, language learning, and their teaching performance. From a practical perspective, this present study can be a starting point for whom who have interest find out how foreign language teachers view and understand intercultural competence and how their views and understanding reflect to their teaching.

## Conclusion

We conclude by reflecting on the key findings from the study. Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that EFL teachers had a high perception of intercultural competence development. However, the findings of this study are not definitive; on the contrary, it will open new questions to be highlighted to continue myriad research regarding to this topic. For future research, it would be important to expand the research to large scale study. With regard to developing intercultural competence, it requires more than just individualized language acquisition, cultural knowledge, and increased cultural exposure (Lash et al. 2020). As teachers, we need to improve our understanding of the various ways that to develop intercultural competence. In addition, the impact of intercultural sensitivity on intercultural competence and the development of each intercultural component reflected to EFL teachers' intercultural competence need to be investigated.

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