



P-ISSN 2355-2794
E-ISSN 2461-0275

Investigating Indonesian EFL Pre-service Teachers' Conceptions of Culture and Intercultural Competence

Arief Eko Priyo Atmojo^{*1}
Tomy Kartika Putra²

¹Department of Islamic Psychology, Faculty of Usuluddin and Da'wah, Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Mas Said Surakarta, Sukoharjo 57168, INDONESIA

²Department of English Education, Sekolah Tinggi Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan (STKIP) Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia (PGRI) Ponorogo, Ponorogo 63491, INDONESIA

Abstract

Globalization inevitably increases communication among people from different languages and cultural backgrounds. This phenomenon dramatically demands changes in the traditional aims of language teaching which rely on the norms and values of native-speaking countries. A large body of literature encourages language teaching to be concerned more with intercultural competence (hereinafter IC), which is allegedly effective to help students achieve successful intercultural communication. Nonetheless, in the Indonesian context, there is still an iota of evidence regarding pre-service teachers' understandings of the terms culture and IC. Thus, this study attempts to gain insights into Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pre-service teachers' understandings of culture and IC. It is considered as a single case study employing questionnaires and interviews. In total, 26 EFL pre-service teachers participated in this study by answering a questionnaire, with mainly close-ended and some open-ended questions. From these participants, seven pre-service teachers were interviewed. The results suggested the discrepancy in the participants' understandings of culture and IC. This condition may hinder the meaningful goals of cultural teaching and the effective pedagogical practices in their future EFL classrooms. Drawing on the results, the present study provides some recommendations for the pre-service teachers

* Corresponding author, email: arief.atmojo93@iain-surakarta.ac.id

Citation in APA style: Atmojo, A. E. P., & Putra, T. K. (2022). Investigating Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers' conceptions of culture and intercultural competence. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 9(2), 483-500.

Received September 14, 2021; Revised January 31, 2022; Accepted April 14, 2022; Published Online May 23, 2022

<https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v9i2.22673>

and teacher education in an attempt to develop cultural teaching in English Language Teaching (ELT).

Keywords: Culture, English language teaching, intercultural communication, intercultural competence, EFL pre-service teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century brings human interactions into unprecedented realms. This era is marked by advanced technologies which create far swifter communication among people around the globe. As a consequence, English is no longer considered the language of English-speaking countries, but the language of worldwide society. English earns its status as a *lingua franca* (Ishikawa, 2016; Jenkins, 2012) to connect people from various cultural backgrounds. Such a phenomenon dramatically affects the missions of English language teaching (ELT), as Baker (2012a) claims that ELT is supposed to “go beyond the predominant focus on grammar, vocabulary, and phonology based on a single native speaker variety of English” (p. 33). A large body of literature recommends English language teaching to acknowledge the importance of helping learners acquire intercultural competence (IC) which is generally defined as an ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in different cultural contexts (Baker, 2012a, 2012b; Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2002; Deardorff, 2006; Kramsch, 2013; Rajprasit, 2020).

Byram (1997) introduces the framework of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in an attempt to refine Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Piatkowska, 2015). In his framework, Byram (1997) proposes the extended version of CLT in which he puts communicative competence and intercultural competence together. Byram's ICC model pertains to knowledge, skills, attitude, and critical cultural awareness which are considered valuable in attaining successful intercultural communication. Knowledge is associated with one's knowledge of what culture and whose culture. It concerns how an individual perceives other cultural beliefs, practices, and artifacts at both individual and social levels as well as what influences the process of interaction. Attitudes, in this context, can be understood as senses of curiosity and openness toward other cultures as well as readiness to suspend judgment or disbelief to those cultures. Meanwhile, skills are divided into two streams, namely skills of interpreting and relating, as well as skills of discovering and interacting. The former represents the ability to compare the target culture with one's home culture. It allows learners to recognize and interpret the cultural perspectives of the target culture and to establish relationships between the target and their own culture. The latter allows individuals to skillfully operate those previous knowledge, attitudes, and skills in real-time intercultural interaction. Critical cultural awareness itself is defined as the competence to critically evaluate cultural perspectives, practices, and artifacts in one's own and other cultures.

We believe that English teachers should first mind the term ‘culture’ since it lies at the heart of the concept of intercultural competence. Culture is a multifaceted concept with many layers of meanings (i.e., culture as structure, function, process, product, refinement, and group membership) (see Faulkner et al., 2006, for detailed discussion). The way teachers treat ‘culture’ heavily affects their approaches to

understanding and teaching intercultural competence. To grasp the comprehensive meaning of intercultural competence, teachers should consider culture not only based on the essentialist view (i.e., culture as a static and solid creation) but also the anti-essentialist view (i.e., culture as a dynamic and fluid process) (Baker, 2012b; Elsen & St. John, 2007). Although the essentialist view assists to comprehend and appreciate the diversity of cultural realities (e.g., products, practices, and perspectives), it is allegedly still insufficient to accommodate a circumstance that English as a lingua franca exists. The anti-essentialist view is required since it helps to anticipate such a dynamic form of communication and establish strategies to cope with it.

As intercultural communication gathers plenty of interest and raises awareness of the importance of intercultural competence in language learning, the number of studies investigating how English teachers perceive intercultural competence shows enlargement in many contexts in the world, such as Thailand (Cheewasukthaworn & Suwanarak, 2017), China (Gu, 2016; Zhou, 2011), Iran (Alaei & Nosrati, 2018), New Zealand (Oranje & Smith, 2018), Turkey (Saricoban & Oz, 2014), Colombia (Olaya & Gómez Rodríguez, 2013), U. S. A. (Young & Sachdev, 2011), and some European countries (Czura, 2016; Larzén-Östermark, 2008; Sercu et al., 2005; Young & Sachdev, 2011), just to name a few. Drawing on the previous studies, English teachers are not only supposed to have sufficient intercultural competence but also able to promote such competence in their classrooms. It is quite obvious that language learning and intercultural communicative competence are intertwined. The lack of intercultural communicative competence may lead to frustration and failure in language learning as well as conflict and misunderstanding (Alaei & Nosrati, 2018; Saricoban & Oz, 2014). Although teachers mostly have positive attitudes toward IC and willingness to operationalize it in their classrooms, there is still a disconnection between IC theories and their actual pedagogical practices (Cheewasukthaworn & Suwanarak, 2017; Czura, 2016; Gu, 2016; Oranje & Smith, 2018; Young & Sachdev, 2011). As a result, scholars recommend more support from educational institutions (e.g., education faculty and teacher professional development) to equip pre-service and in-service teachers with both theories of IC and appropriate models of how to put IC into a practical plan, implementation, and assessment.

In the Indonesian context, there is a large body of studies focusing on the notion of an intercultural approach to English language teaching (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2018; Gandana & Parr, 2013; Hermawan & Lia, 2012; Idris, 2020; Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018; Munandar & Ulwiyah, 2012; Putra et al., 2020). Abduh and Rosmaladewi (2018) scrutinize intercultural values and intercultural teaching strategies from the perspectives of bilingual teachers (Mathematics, Economics, and Political Sciences). Kusumaningputri and Widodo (2018) examine the use of intercultural tasks based on digital photographs to promote English literature students' critical intercultural awareness. Idris (2020) attempts to provide evidence of secondary school English teachers' level of intercultural competence and its correlations with teaching locations. Gandana and Parr (2013) concern the notion of a teacher educator's identity at the higher education level for Cross-Cultural Understanding subject. Other researchers focus on the manifestation of the intercultural approach in English textbooks (Hermawan & Lia, 2012; Munandar & Ulwiyah, 2012; Putra et al., 2020). However, the aforementioned studies did not put forward pre-service teachers' understanding of intercultural competence. It makes the notion of pre-service English teachers' understanding of intercultural competence in the Indonesian context remains

limited or almost non-existent. Nonetheless, it is believed that any innovation in teacher education should not proceed without taking pre-service teachers' perspectives into account (Zhou, 2011).

Although studies focusing on English teachers' perspectives of intercultural competence in abroad countries are redundant, we still know little about similar studies focusing on how pre-service teachers view intercultural competence in the Indonesian context. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill the gap by addressing intercultural competence from the English pre-service teachers' perspectives. This study basically functions as a contextual study (Ritchie, 2013) which attempts to investigate phenomena as experienced by the study population in terms of their understandings and perspectives. In light of this, Ritchie's work is helpful to formulate research questions that the present study would like to answer.

- How do the pre-service teachers conceptualize the term culture?
- How do the pre-service teachers express their understandings of intercultural competence?

The results of this study may contribute to the development of English teacher education and future relatively similar studies.

2. METHODS

This present study employed a single case study design (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2016). The methodological approach offered by a case study is in line with the spirit of the present study. The investigation of pre-service teachers' views towards IC requires an in-depth understanding. It can give a clear and deep understanding of how the participants perceive the intercultural approach in English language teaching.

2.1 Participants

The participants were pre-service teachers whose major was English Education Program at one Indonesian state university. The program offers an undergraduate degree in English Language Teaching. It provides instructions and preparations for those who are interested in teaching the English language in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. Like most programs in Indonesia, the program is designed to be accomplished in eight semesters. The completion of the program is gained by semester credits (or *Satuan Kredit Semester*, abbreviated as SKS) in which students normally need to take at least 144 SKS in total. In the credit system, each course is completed in one semester that lasts for 14 weeks, excluding the mid-term test and final test. The participants of this study were pre-service teachers who have been taking and had taken the Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) course. The CCU course was set to be in the fourth semester. The CCU course or sometimes called Intercultural Communication in ELT is a compulsory course for English pre-service teachers in Indonesia. Thus, they had enough awareness of the importance of culture in language learning. The training does not only prepare them to elevate English proficiency but also be well-educated on teaching theories and methods related to the integration of culture and IC in ELT.

Twenty-six pre-service teachers were available and willing to respond to and return the questionnaire. The questionnaire participants were 17 females and 9 males, aged 18-23 years old. Out of these participants, seven pre-service teachers were then engaged in the interview sessions voluntarily. They expressed their willingness to be involved in the interview sessions. The interview included four female and three male pre-service teachers. This study used pseudonyms (i.e., P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, and P7) to identify the interviewed participants for ethical concerns.

2.2 Procedures

The participants' definition of culture and intercultural competence was first elicited by questionnaires, with mainly close-ended and some open-ended questions. We distributed the questionnaire invitations to the participants through WhatsApp. The questionnaire invitations gave them a brief explanation regarding the purpose of the study. It also showed the link to access the questionnaire in Google Forms. The questionnaire regarding the participants' definition of culture consisted of eight items which followed [Faulkner et al.'s \(2006\)](#) layers meaning of culture. When it comes to IC, the questionnaire was derived from current relevant studies ([Almawoda, 2011](#); [Byram, 1997](#); [Czura, 2016](#); [Sercu et al., 2005](#); [Zhou, 2011](#)) that contained nine items, including the dimensions of attitude, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness. We utilized the Likert scale in which the participants were asked to respond to a series of statements by indicating whether they strongly agree (SA), agree (A), not sure (NS), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD). The questionnaire consisted of 18 closed-ended questions that attempted to unearth participants' views of culture and views of intercultural competence. The statements were formulated in Bahasa Indonesia so that it would be easier for the participants to grasp the meaning. At the end of the questionnaires, we attached an interview invitation in which the participants had total freedom to accept or reject it.

Interviews have commonly proceeded in the field of teachers' belief and cognition studies (e.g., [Macalister, 2010](#); [Oranje & Smith, 2018](#); [Young & Sachdev, 2011](#)) as they may yield more in-depth data about individuals' experiences, knowledge, opinions, beliefs, and feelings ([Sercu et al., 2005](#)). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was almost impossible to conduct face-to-face interviews. Therefore, we decided to utilize one of the WhatsApp features called voice notes to investigate pre-service teachers' understandings of intercultural competence. We sent them questions in the form of voice notes and they were asked to respond to our questions through the same feature. In one-on-one interviews, we asked questions and recorded the answers from one participant only at a time. Interviews allow participants not to be hesitant to speak, to speak articulately, and to share ideas comfortably ([Creswell, 2012](#)). The number of interview questions varied from one participant to another participant (5-8 questions) based on their sufficient information.

The questions in the interviews were developed from the research questions of the present study. The interviews were aimed at confirming and enriching data that had been earned through the questionnaires. They were done in Bahasa Indonesia and recorded. Each interview lasted from 20 to 40 minutes, varying among participants. The interviews were transcribed and returned to the participants for confirmation. As the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, they were translated into English for the report of data analysis.

2.3 Data Analysis

The information on the participants' understanding of intercultural competence obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed by descriptive statistics. We reported the means, standard deviations, and percentages to make readers easily grasp the quantitative results of the participants' thoughts regarding culture and intercultural competence. When it came to the interview data, we categorized the information provided by the participants into themes through an interactive model (Miles et al., 2014). The themes were generated from the coding process of the entire interview transcripts and then compared with the results of the quantitative data analysis. To increase the accuracy of our interpretation, the analysis was double-checked and cross-checked by the two authors.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Participants' Understanding of Culture

This section attempts to report the participants' voices in understanding 'culture' as suggested in the literature and how teachers' approach to the term 'culture' heavily affects the way they understand and teach intercultural competence. The results from the questionnaire are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. EFL pre-service teachers' definitions of culture.

Definitions of Culture	Response (%)					Means	Std. Dev.
	SD	D	NS	A	SA		
1. People's behavior (customs and traditions).	0.0	0.0	0.0	26.9	73.1	4.73	0.44
2. Systems of social interaction/ communication patterns among a group's members.	0.0	0.0	0.0	34.6	65.4	4.65	0.48
3. Concrete items, including clothing, art, architecture, food, etc.	0.0	0.0	15.4	30.8	53.8	4.38	0.74
4. Cognitive structure, including, thoughts, beliefs, and perspectives.	0.0	0.0	23.1	46.2	30.7	4.08	0.73
5. Process of differentiating one group from another.	0.0	0.0	34.6	38.5	26.9	3.92	0.78
6. Process of transmitting a way of life.	0.0	11.5	26.9	30.8	30.8	3.81	1
7. Process of the development of moral value.	0.0	11.5	38.5	30.8	19.2	3.58	0.98
8. Process of the development of intellectual value.	0.0	15.4	46.2	26.9	11.5	3.35	0.87
9. Results of political dominance.	11.5	23.1	30.8	19.2	15.4	3.04	1.2

The analysis shows that the participants had various ways to approach the definition of culture. However, the analysis also allows us to conclude that they primarily held the essentialist view of culture which tended to see culture in its solid, static, and isolated form. It is apparent from the questionnaire result (see Table 2) that some of the participants' main definitions of culture fell under the terms 'people's behaviors' (e.g., customs and traditions) ($M=4.73$, $SD=0.44$), 'systems of social

interaction/communication patterns among a group's members' ($M=4.65$, $SD=0.48$), and 'concrete items' (e.g., clothing, art, architecture, and food) ($M=4.38$, $SD=0.74$). At the same time, the participants seemed to struggle to see culture from its anti-essentialist point of view. Table 2 demonstrates that the participants had the least attention to definitions of culture within the anti-essentialism or critical paradigm indicated by their preferences for 'process of the development of moral' ($M=3.58$, $SD=0.98$) and 'intellectual values' ($M=3.35$, $SD=0.87$) and 'results of political dominance' ($M=3.04$, $SD=1.2$).

Participants' voices in the interviews also reflect what they had conveyed in the questionnaire. They frequently categorized culture into three major themes. First, they perceived culture as 'a structural element of life'. Second, they acknowledged that culture is 'a process of transmitting and sharing ways of life'. Third, culture was often understood as 'a distinctive feature of a country or a region'.

3.1.1 *Culture as a structural element of life*

From the analysis of the participants' voices during the interviews, it is clear that most of them associated culture with a structural element of life. At this point, the participants looked at culture in terms of cultural systems held by a certain group of people. First, they frequently referred to culture as a structure of behaviors of people consisting of customs and traditions. Examples of the evidence can be seen in the voices of P1 and P2.

- (1) To me, culture is a tradition. It is a kind of habit which is carried out by a group of people in social settings. (P1)
- (2) Culture is something inherent in people, depending on where they live. It is like customs or values held by those people. That is what I know about culture in a nutshell. (P2)

P1 and P2 understood culture as an observable thing that is utilized by a particular group of people. They believed that people's customs and traditions are at the heart of the concept of culture. For a more practical example, let's have a look at P3's response. He said, "...an example of traditions is a ritual that is meant to express gratitude before harvesting periods. It is called *Wiwitan*". To give the context, *Wiwitan* is a traditional ceremony that is usually performed by Javanese farmers before they harvest their crops, especially rice. In the ceremony, they commonly provide a variety of offerings, such as grilled chickens, traditional snacks, and rice cones. The offerings are meant to express their gratitude to the deities. Another participant, P3, acknowledged culture as the structure of behaviors in terms of social interaction patterns among a group's members. He said, "...tradition is not the only example of culture. Another example is politeness". P3 viewed culture as a social phenomenon. He emphasized politeness as one of the key elements of culture. He implicitly said that culture highly deals with how people should behave in a certain context to maintain an interpersonal relationship with others. It is evident that rather than seeing culture as physical products (e.g., painting, architecture, and literature), the participants saw culture as social behaviors including norms, values, traditions, and customs.

3.1.2 Culture as products of meaningful activities

Another sub-theme of culture that can be drawn from the participants' voices is 'culture as products of meaningful activities'. In light of this, participants perceived culture as concrete items produced by societies, such as clothing and traditional dances. The evidence can be seen from the responses delivered by P4 and P3.

- (3) Culture is something that is created in the past such as a piece of clothing and the way people wear it. (P4)
- (4) Traditional dances can also be other examples of culture. (P3)

P4 viewed that culture has something to do with clothes. Meanwhile, P3 argued that traditional dances can be included as one of the elements of culture. The information provided by both participants shows that culture meant to them as concrete items or materials which are produced by a certain group of people. These responses can be said as traditional responses to the meaning of culture. Unlike the previous voices which view culture as behavioral processes within societies, these views perceived culture as extrinsic products or artifacts created by people.

The other two participants, P5 and P6, frequently considered culture in terms of 'people's perspectives'. These perspectives or cognitive structures are an unconscious process in certain cultural groups, including systems of values, attitudes, and beliefs. Here are the voices echoed by P5 and P6 in the interview sessions.

- (5) In my opinion, culture is values or norms which are formed in a community or region. It can be decisive for them to think and behave. (P6)
- (6) In my opinion, culture is a value which develops in a society or a group of people. (P5)

These excerpts of the data suggest that both P5 and P6 perceived culture as a system of values or beliefs that take place inside people's minds. P6 treated culture as philosophical perspectives which underlie the way those people act and behave. These responses are interesting because instead of describing culture as visible aspects (e.g., behaviors and traditions) like the previous responses, P6 and P5 illustrated culture as the inner or mental processes of people in a shared-culture condition.

3.1.3 Culture as a process of transmitting and sharing ways of life

The previous paragraphs have shown that the participants regularly associated culture with structural elements of humans' life, such as products, values, norms, behaviors, and perspectives. This paragraph gives an elaboration showing that there are three participants (P5, P4, and P3) who believed that culture fell under the notion of a process of transmitting and sharing ways of life from one generation to the next generation.

- (7) Culture is something which is created by forefathers and passes down from one generation to the next. (P3)

- (8) Culture is something which is created in the past such as a piece of clothing and the way people wear it. Then, it is passed down to and followed by many people. In the end, it is called culture or something normal because many people commonly do it. (P4)

Based on the participants' voices, the process of transmission from one generation to the next generation is one of the key themes of culture. They believed in culture as a process that never stops. It is an ongoing process that has been inherited by the past generation and will be passed on to the next generation. P5's response can be another piece of evidence. She mentioned, "...it (culture) is passed down from one generation to the next generation and is always preserved, (and the culture) still exists until now". Through her eyes, culture can be further described as a process that can be preserved by people in their community. It implies that culture is not merely transmitted to the next generation but also can be learned and developed by the people within the process of transmission.

3.1.4 Culture as a distinctive feature of a country or a region

Most of the participants (P4, P6, P2, P3, P7) evoked that every cultural group has its unique cultural characteristic. It is impossible if there is only one culture in the world. A culture possessed by a particular group is different from the cultures owned by the other groups.

- (9) Geographical areas where people live determine their culture. (P5)
- (10) In my opinion, culture is something inherent in a person, depending on a region or where he lives. (P6)
- (11) To me, culture is an identity. It can be an identity of an individual or maybe a group. It can be even greater as the identity of a country. Each culture cannot be the same as another culture. (P7)

The responses from the participants express that culture includes unique aspects which differentiate one cultural group from another. They seem to sound culture as a feature that classifies the distinctiveness between their cultures and other cultures. The participants had tendencies to see culture as the concept of differentiation rather than the concept of culture as a space to share commonalities or mutual interactions.

3.2 Participants' Understanding of Intercultural Competence

The results suggest that the participants simply and superficially referred IC to as one's knowledge of cultural information which helps to communicate in intercultural conditions. Many of them seemed to avoid elaborating intercultural competence into bigger details. Other findings indicate that most of them identified IC as the factual knowledge of particular cultures and the acquisition of a respectful manner to other cultures. However, the participants had a fragmented understanding of the term. Instead of conceiving intercultural competence as a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, they understood those dimensions as isolated parts. Besides, further analysis conspicuously suggests that they failed to raise the issue of critical cultural awareness (CCA) within their understanding of the definition of IC.

As shown in Table 2, the participants agreed that one of the most instrumental aspects of intercultural competence falls under the term cultural knowledge concerning

'the knowledge of cultural practices from different cultural backgrounds (e.g., festival, tradition, habit, fashion, etc.)' (M=4.50, SD=0.58). Another knowledge dimension, namely 'the knowledge of the way of life of other people from different cultural backgrounds (e.g., values and beliefs)', was also considered the most suitable description of intercultural competence (M=4.42, SD=0.70). The affective dimensions related to 'the attitude dealing with openness towards other cultures' (M=4.38, SD=0.64) and 'the attitude dealing with curiosity to learn from other cultures and interact with other people' (M=4.19, SD=0.80) were also considered as the next instrumental keys. From this point, it is obvious that the participants predominantly saw intercultural competence from the point of view of knowledge and affective dimensions.

The dimension of skills (i.e., 'the abilities to ...') is reported as the third important aspect. Unlike the knowledge of cultural practices and perspectives of other cultures which has the highest position, the knowledge of cultural products was dramatically considered by the participants as the least important aspect of intercultural competence. The results also show that the participants relatively saw the dimension of critical cultural awareness which is illustrated as the ability to see the positive and negative side of one's own cultures and target cultures as the least crucial element of intercultural competence.

Table 2. EFL pre-service teachers' definitions of intercultural competence.

Definitions of IC	Response (%)					Means	Std. Dev.
	SD	D	NS	A	SA		
1. The knowledge of cultural practices from different cultural backgrounds (e.g., festival, tradition, habit, fashion, etc.).	0.0	0.0	3.9	42.3	53.9	4.50	0.58
2. The knowledge of the way of life of other people from different cultural backgrounds (e.g., values and beliefs).	0.0	0.0	11.5	34.6	53.9	4.42	0.70
3. It is an attitude dealing with openness towards other cultures.	0.0	0.0	7.7	46.2	46.1	4.38	0.64
4. It is an attitude dealing with curiosity to learn from other cultures and interact with other people.	0.0	0.0	23.1	34.6	42.3	4.19	0.80
5. The ability to understand and express the similarities and differences between students' own cultures and English-speaking countries' cultures.	0.0	0.0	11.5	57.7	30.8	4.19	0.63
6. The ability to interact and establish a good relationship with people whose cultures are different from them.	0.0	7.7	11.5	53.9	26.9	4.00	0.85
7. The ability to see the positive and negative sides of students' own cultures.	0.0	0.0	26.9	46.2	26.9	4.00	0.75
8. The ability to see the positive and negative sides of other cultures.	0.0	3.9	23.1	50.0	23.0	3.92	0.80
9. The knowledge of cultural products (e.g., music, arts, literature, historical places, etc.) from both students' cultures and the target cultures.	0.0	0.0	34.6	50.0	15.4	3.81	0.69

3.2.1 *Intercultural competence as the factual knowledge of cultures*

During the interview sessions, we asked the participants to share what intercultural competence means to them. The results of the interviews were relatively consistent with those of the questionnaires. Out of seven interview participants, five predominantly echoed intercultural competence as factual cultural knowledge. They argued that knowledge of practices and perspectives of other cultures is essential to building intercultural competence. In the interviews, the participants shared their thoughts.

- (12) It is about the cultural information of the people we are talking to. (P1)
- (13) Intercultural competence is a kind of knowledge of what to do or what not to do when we are positioned in particular cultural conditions. (P4)
- (14) IC is an ability to understand the culture of the target language—the culture of English or the culture of the people we are talking to. (P6)
- (15) Intercultural competence embraces the way we get or dig up information about the culture of the people we are communicating with such as how they behave and their values. (P2)

P6 and P2 further realized that knowing only the cultures of other people whose cultures are different from their cultures is still inadequate. They suggested that one should possess the knowledge of his own culture. They realized that the knowledge of other cultures and one's own culture was believed to be an important starting point to knowing the differences and similarities among cultures.

- (16) However, it is not only understanding others' cultures but also understanding ours. If we have knowledge of other cultures as well as our culture, we may see the similarities and the differences". (P6)
- (17) How we understand our culture is also essential because it helps us to know the differences among cultures. (P2)

It is worth noting that the participants unanimously agreed that knowing the practices and perspectives of other people is positioned as the most crucial element within the framework of intercultural competence. It is an unsurprising result since we have already discovered that such kinds of knowledge earn the highest score on the questionnaires.

3.2.2 *Intercultural competence deals with positive attitudes towards other cultures*

As explained earlier, the participants' perceived cultural knowledge as one of the key elements of intercultural competence. Besides such a cognitive element, fewer of the participants mentioned the affective element as an instrumental factor of intercultural competence. They believed that an interculturally competent individual has a positive attitude (e.g., tolerance and respect) towards other cultures. This view is evidenced by the voices of P1 and P2 in the interview sessions.

- (18) Also, it is an ability to tolerate others' cultures, not just ours. So, intercultural competence allows us to communicate with people from different countries without offending their cultures. (P1)

(19) Intercultural competence creates respect for our culture and other people's cultures. (P2)

From the excerpts in (18) and (19), it can be understood that both participants acknowledged that an individual who has sufficient intercultural competence can tolerate and value cultural diversity among people around the world. As a result, it allows him to act respectfully and cooperatively in certain multicultural conditions. Doing so may minimize any misunderstanding and avoid unsuccessful interactions. Although the literature suggests that having positive attitudes is indispensable, there are P1 and P2 who gave sufficient attention to it.

3.2.3 Intercultural competence as an ability to skillfully operate knowledge and attitude in an intercultural condition

Further results indicate that only P2 realized that the aforementioned aspects – knowledge, and attitude– should be carefully integrated. She believed that intercultural knowledge and positive attitudes towards other cultures constitute successful real-time intercultural communication. Without having sufficient knowledge and attitudes, effective or appropriate intercultural communication will not be possible to achieve. P2 elaborated her view on intercultural competence as follows:

(20) From cultural knowledge, we can draw a relationship between foreign cultures and our culture. So, in an interaction, we can know that 'oh, although it is common to talk like that in my country, it will be rude if we do so to people from other countries'. For example, Indonesians usually ask people about their ages or families. However, such questions will be sensitive for native speakers. It may be impossible to ask such questions for the first time to them. (P2)

P2 knew that it is not only about having existing knowledge of different cultures but also having the ability to identify the relationship between those cultures. Besides, she further implied that an interculturally competent person is someone who can be a mediator between people of different cultures or identities. This means that the person can notice the misunderstanding which may occur during intercultural interactions. Later on, she tried to explain them in the Indonesian context as she stated that private matters such as age, family, or marital status are commonly discussed by Indonesian people. Many Indonesians consider them as a form of hospitality; thus, they believe that it is normal to ask and answer such personal questions. P2 implicitly said that successful interactions make use of the existing cultural knowledge (how foreigners and our people perceive the private questions) and attitude (the willingness to avoid such sensitive questions) together.

4. DISCUSSION

Throughout this section, we would like to discuss the results from the views of previous relevant studies and, in turn, formulate alternatives that may be useful to overcome some limitations of intercultural teaching in teacher training and education. We first discuss the pre-service teachers' understanding of the notions of culture. Next, it continues with the discussion of the pre-service teachers' understanding of intercultural competence.

The EFL pre-service teachers in this study provided rich and diverse definitions of culture. Most of the participants associated cultures with the structure of behaviors of people (e.g., custom and tradition) and products of meaningful activities (e.g., clothing and traditional dance). Only one participant was concerned that cultures have something to do with mental processes or perspectives held by people. Furthermore, they often referred to culture as the distinctive feature of a region that is transmitted from one generation to the next generation and shared within a society. The results of the present study are more or less in line with those of the previous studies (Larzén-Östermark, 2008; Olaya & Gómez Rodríguez, 2013; Önalán, 2005). Definitions of culture provided by our participants, to a certain degree, differ from what Önalán (2005) and Olaya and Gómez Rodríguez (2013) depict in their studies. They report that the participants' understanding of culture is limited and superficial. They argue that the participants only defined culture based on traditional and aesthetic points of view. The present study reports the opposite since our participants delivered a wide range of definitions of culture ranging from cultural products to cultural perspectives. Besides, they often tried to link language and culture by emphasizing the notion of politeness. This result occurs because our participants had different learning experiences from those of the previous studies. The courses that our participants were experiencing in their training might provide more cultural learning inclusion and offer richer cultural perspectives. Therefore, they were already well-informed about and more aware of the wide-ranging definitions of culture. Since this study, however, focuses only on the participants' cognitive aspect, more investigations about how intercultural language learning is carried out in the classroom should be conducted to clarify our claim.

The commonality between this study and the previous studies occurs when the EFL pre-service teachers predominantly saw culture in the essentialist view in which they often explained culture in its static and stable forms. No participant argued that culture is changeable and flexible. The responses like 'culture is transmitted from one generation to the next generation' and 'culture is a distinctive feature' imply that they assumed culture to be unquestionably transferred without changing or reshaping any possible alteration or transformation. Nonetheless, an effective intercultural education also requires constructivist thinking or an anti-essentialist view which sees culture as something fluid and flexible that is always built and reshaped during social activity and interactive communication (Baker, 2012b; Elsen & St. John, 2007). If language learners conceive culture as a dynamic process of meaning-making, they will possibly be able to communicate in fluid, open-ended, and unpredictable processes which are the potentials to build understanding to a bigger perception of reality and, in turn, can feed the development of their language skills.

The results of the questionnaire and interview shed light upon the participants' understanding of intercultural competence. In a broad sense, intercultural competence is defined as an ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in different cultural conditions (Baker, 2012a, 2012b; Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2002; Deardorff, 2006; Kramsch, 2013; Rajprasit, 2020), which requires one's intercultural knowledge, attitude, skill, and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). The results of the interview and questionnaire are relatively consistent. It is apparent that the EFL pre-service teachers perceived intercultural competence as factual knowledge of foreign cultures and one's own culture which allows someone to find similarities and differences between those cultures. In addition, the participants had a robust belief

that intercultural competence requires a positive attitude towards other cultures which can be reflected in having respect for cultural diversity. Since the participants predominantly viewed culture as solid and static forms instead of dynamic and unpredictable, it is unsurprising that they did not grasp the essential spirit of intercultural competence. To understand intercultural competence, [Baker \(2012b\)](#) asserts that someone needs to approach “culture as an emergent, negotiated resource in communication which moves between and across local, national, and global contexts” (p. 64). Besides, the results also acknowledge that the participants delivered the aspects of intercultural competence in a fragmented way. They still considered the aspects of intercultural competence as isolated aspects that are disconnected from each other. Meanwhile, the aspects should be considered as integrated aspects to build successful intercultural communication ([Byram, 1997](#); [Deardorff, 2006](#); [Sercu et al., 2005](#)).

Further results suggest that the EFL pre-service teachers missed the aspect of critical cultural awareness (CCA). CCA, based on [Byram \(1997\)](#), is “an ability to evaluate critically based on explicit criteria perspectives, practices, and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries” (p. 53). Their responses imply that gaining knowledge, having a positive attitude, and operating such knowledge and attitude in communication are already sufficient. Those, to a certain degree, reflect typical traits of Indonesian people called ‘*rasa*’. We, Indonesians, know that ‘*rasa*’ leads Indonesians to have acceptance, a relaxed manner, or a comfortable feeling when encountering equivocal or unfamiliar situations. These results are partly aligned with several previous studies that took place in different contexts ([Castro et al., 2004](#); [Cheewasukthaworn & Suwanarak, 2017](#); [Olaya & Gómez Rodríguez, 2013](#)). Moreover, [Cheewasukthaworn and Suwanarak \(2017\)](#) point out that some major conditions of Southeast Asian cultures which are harmony orientation, blind obedience, and conflict avoidance contribute to the lack of students’ critical awareness. These conditions are believed to be not very conducive for an individual to do a critical evaluation of other cultures or his own culture.

To address the results, the EFL pre-service teachers are encouraged to reflect on the comprehensive concept of culture. They need to approach culture from both the essentialist side and the anti-essentialist side. By doing so, it may assist to shape the meaningful goals of their future cultural teaching and the actual pedagogical practice in EFL classrooms. The reflection on intercultural competence as a whole concept which covers dimensions of knowledge, attitude, skill, and critical cultural awareness is also suggested. Besides, we believe that EFL pre-service teachers need sufficient information to gain a firmer understanding of the notion of culture and intercultural competence. Education stakeholders are encouraged to give more attention to providing EFL pre-service teachers with activities that can lead them to reflect and critically evaluate products, behaviors, and perspectives of the target culture as well as their own culture. Teaching strategies suggested by literature such as addressing and conflicting debatable topics about discrimination, xenophobia, homophobia, race, gender roles, hatred, human rights, etc. ([Byram et al., 2002](#); [Olaya & Gómez Rodríguez, 2013](#)) can be fruitful learning activities to provoke students to be culturally reflective and critical. Literature also reported inviting students to engage in asynchronous online discussions ([Rajprasit, 2020](#)) and critically evaluating images and descriptions in textbooks ([Baker, 2012b](#); [Byram et al., 2002](#)) and digital forms ([Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018](#)) may be beneficial to consider.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study attempts to shed light upon EFL pre-service teachers' understandings of culture and intercultural competence. The results show that the participants gave relatively accurate definitions which are, to a certain degree, in line with the definitions proposed by experts. Nonetheless, they still acknowledged that the intercultural dimensions (i.e., attitude, knowledge, and skills) are isolated and disconnected from each other. It is problematic since, to acquire worthwhile intercultural competence in language teaching and learning, one needs to consider all dimensions to be integrated and connected. Further results suggest that most of the pre-service teachers missed the dimension of critical cultural awareness—the ability to critically evaluate one's own culture and foreign cultures.

Although every effort has been made toward firm research design and analysis, the limitations of this study are still acknowledged. This study investigated a relatively small number of EFL pre-service teachers and the participants are only from one university. As a result, it limits the generalizability of the study. In other words, it can be said that the results may not apply to many other contexts. Therefore, it recommends future relevant studies to design multiple case studies or wide-area examinations to grasp more comprehensive results related to the study of intercultural competence in English language teaching. Besides, it has limitations to observe the real phenomena which occur in face-to-face classrooms or online classrooms due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study are merely based on the data which were gained from the voices of EFL pre-service teachers. Future researchers are suggested to scrutinize EFL pre-service teachers and their education for a longer time intensively and observe the classrooms directly so that they can get a deeper understanding of the phenomena. The results of future studies hopefully can pave further discussions or debates on cultural teaching, especially in the English language classrooms.

REFERENCES

- Abduh, A., & Rosmaladewi, R. (2018). Promoting intercultural competence in bilingual programs in Indonesia. *SAGE Open*, 8(3), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018788616>
- Alaei, M. M., & Nosrati, F. (2018). Research into EFL teachers' intercultural communicative competence and intercultural sensitivity. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 47(2), 73-86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2018.1424020>
- Almawoda, K. (2011). *Exploring secondary teachers' perceptions towards teaching intercultural competence in Bahrain in English language classroom* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Exeter]. Open Research Exeter. <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10036/3688>
- Baker, W. (2012a). Global cultures and identities: Refocusing the aims of ELT in Asia through intercultural awareness. In T. Muller, S. Herder, J. Adamson, & P. S. Brown (Eds.), *Innovating EFL teaching in Asia* (pp. 23-34). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230347823_3
- Baker, W. (2012b). From cultural awareness to intercultural awareness: Culture in ELT. *ELT Journal*, 66(1), 62-70. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccr017>

- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M., Gribkova, B., & Starkey, H. (2002). *Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching: A practical introduction for teachers*. Council of Europe.
- Castro, P., Sercu, L., & García, M. D. C. M. (2004). Integrating language-and-culture teaching: An investigation of Spanish teachers' perceptions of the objectives of foreign language education. *Intercultural Education*, 15(1), 91-104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1467598042000190013>
- Cheewasukthaworn, K., & Suwanarak, K. (2017). Exploring Thai EFL teachers' perceptions of how intercultural communicative competence is important for their students. *PASAA: Journal of Language Teaching and Learning in Thailand*, 54, 177-204.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage publications.
- Czura, A. (2016). Major field of study and student teachers' views on intercultural communicative competence. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 16(1), 83-98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2015.1113753>
- Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241-266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002>
- Elsen, A., & St. John, O. (2007). Learner autonomy and intercultural competence. In M. J. Raya & L. Sercu (Eds.), *Challenges in teacher development: Learner autonomy and intercultural competence* (pp. 15-38). Peter Lang.
- Faulkner, S. L., Baldwin, J. R., Lindsley, S. L., & Hecht, M. L. (2006). Layers of meaning: An analysis of definitions of culture. In J. R. Baldwin, S. L. Faulkner, M. L. Hecht, & S. L. Lindsley (Eds.), *Redefining culture: Perspectives across the disciplines*. Routledge.
- Gandana, I., & Parr, G. (2013). Professional identity, curriculum and teaching Intercultural Communication: An Indonesian case study. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 26(3), 229-246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2013.833620>
- Gu, X. (2016). Assessment of intercultural communicative competence in FL education: A survey on EFL teachers' perception and practice in China. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 16(2), 254-273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2015.1083575>
- Hermawan, B., & Lia, N. (2012). Traces of cultures in English textbooks for primary education. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1(2), 49-61. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v1i2.84>
- Idris, M. M. (2020). Assessing intercultural competence of state junior high school English teachers in Yogyakarta. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 9(3), 628-636. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v9i3.23213>
- Ishikawa, T. (2016). World Englishes and English as a lingua franca: Conceptualising the legitimacy of Asian people's English. *Asian Englishes*, 18(2), 129-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2016.1171672>

- Jenkins, J. (2012). English as a lingua franca from the classroom to the classroom. *ELT Journal*, 66(4), 486-494. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccs040>
- Kramsch, C. (2013). Culture in foreign language teaching. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 1(1), 57-78.
- Kusumaningputri, R., & Widodo, H. P. (2018). Promoting Indonesian university students' critical intercultural awareness in tertiary EAL classrooms: The use of digital photograph-mediated intercultural tasks. *System*, 72, 49-61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.10.003>
- Larzén-Östermark, E. (2008). The intercultural dimension in EFL-teaching: A study of conceptions among Finland-Swedish comprehensive school teachers. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 52(5), 527-547. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313830802346405>
- Macalister, J. (2010). Investigating teacher attitudes to extensive reading practices in higher education: Why isn't everyone doing it? *RELC Journal*, 41(1), 59-75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688210362609>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A method sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Munandar, M. I., & Ulwiyah, I. (2012). Intercultural approaches to the cultural content of Indonesia's High School ELT textbooks. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 8(5), 67-73. <https://doi.org/10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020120805.975>
- Olaya, A., & Gómez Rodríguez, L. F. (2013). Exploring EFL pre-service teachers' experience with cultural content and intercultural communicative competence at three Colombian universities. *Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, 15(2), 49-67.
- Önalan, O. (2005). EFL teachers' perceptions of the place of Culture in ELT: A survey study at four universities in Ankara/Turkey. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 1(2).
- Oranje, J., & Smith, L. F. (2018). Language teacher cognitions and intercultural language teaching: The New Zealand perspective. *Language Teaching Research*, 22(3), 310-329. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817691319>
- Piątkowska, K. (2015). From cultural knowledge to intercultural communicative competence: Changing perspectives on the role of culture in foreign language teaching. *Intercultural Education*, 26(5), 397-408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2015.1092674>
- Putra, T. K., Rochsantiningsih, D., & Supriyadi, S. (2020). Cultural representation and intercultural interaction in textbooks of English as an international language. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 10(1), 163-184. <https://doi.org/10.23971/jefl.v10i1.1766>
- Rajprasit, K. (2020). Critical 'intercultural awareness' enhancement: Effects of using asynchronous online discussion with Thai tertiary students. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(1), 118-131. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v10i1.25020>
- Ritchie, J. (2013). The Applications of qualitative methods to social research. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp. 24-46). Sage.
- Saricoban, A., & Oz, H. (2014). Research into pre-service English teachers' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in Turkish context. *The*

Anthropologist, 18(2), 523-531.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09720073.2014.11891570>

- Sercu, L., Bandura, E., Castro, P., Laskaridou, C., Lundgren, U., Garcia, M. del C. M., & Ryan, P. (2005). Teaching foreign languages in an intercultural world. In M. Byram & A. Phipps (Eds.), *Foreign language teachers and intercultural competence: An international investigation* (Vol. 10). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853598456-003>
- Young, T. J., & Sachdev, I. (2011). Intercultural communicative competence: Exploring English language teachers' beliefs and practices. *Language Awareness*, 20(2), 81-98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2010.540328>
- Zhou, Y. (2011). *A study of Chinese university EFL teachers and their intercultural competence teaching* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Windsor]. <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/428/>