



# Teachers' Intercultural Profile Development Three Case Studies of English Language Teachers in Indonesian Universities

Muhammad Aulia

*Universitas Syiah Kuala*

*Email: [muhammad.aulia@unsyiah.ac.id](mailto:muhammad.aulia@unsyiah.ac.id)*

## ABSTRACT

Intercultural communicative competence appears to be inevitable for languages education nowadays. Due to the interconnectedness of the world, the nature of languages education has changed particularly in linguistic and cultural diversity in English as a Foreign Language Teaching (EFLT). The change has led to re-conceptualisation on the status and function of English as a global language as well as recognition on multiple national and local languages and identities in a teaching context. All of these suggest an intercultural approach of language pedagogy to achieve intercultural communicative competence, that is, a competence where skills and language development are paralleled with attitudinal development. An EFL teacher must be equipped for intercultural pedagogy readiness with not only skills for integral reflection but also a sort of awareness entrenched into their own individual development. Indeed, an individual intercultural development is complex and contingent upon his/her past, present and future. Therefore, this study strives to explicate such complexities in order to contribute the conceptualisation of intercultural pedagogy across the world. Through three case studies at university level, some factors of university teachers' intercultural profile were found, which shape teachers' positioning towards intercultural pedagogy. It was found that these aspects have been influenced by personal lived knowledge construction, degree of intercultural awareness, and teaching context. It is suggested that intercultural pedagogy is potential to be incorporated into (pre/in-service) EFL teacher education in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Intercultural communicative competence, Indonesian EFL teachers, Intercultural pedagogy.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It seems to be naïve to set a norm-reference of how a language works “the one nation one culture one language model” (Dasli & Diaz, 2016). The nature of all aspects of languages education have changed: the students have transformed from monocultured to be multicultural language classroom; languages education cannot be separated from the cultures of the languages (Kramsch, 2013); the teaching methods have changed to be more inclusive and adjusted with the current situation (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). All of these bring a sort of complexity for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher who teaches in a multilingual and multicultural situation.

Teachers tend to be overwhelmed with such a demanding format of English Language Teaching in this era. Some teachers were entrapped with essentialist

practices in language teaching whereby the more dominant and powerful languages and cultural groups were more salient over the others (Cole & Meadows, 2013). The rest of the teachers stuck to conventional ways of sharing cultural information (Gandana, 2015). Even, it is known that the teachers' overseas study experiences are not a guarantee for developing intercultural competence (Fleming, Alred & Byram, 2003).

The gap of the present study is that there is no language educational approach that suits these complexities with the traits of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the context of languages education, especially in EFL contexts. This demand has advocated a newly-revised set of competence what-so-called Intercultural Communicative Competence or Intercultural Competence (Byram, 1997). This set of

competence not only equips language learners with language skills, but also attitudinal development with skills of relativising oneself and others, being critical at self-positioning, and capable at negotiating with others. The growth of intercultural communicative competence of one's individual throughout his/her lifespan development in this study is referred as intercultural profile development.

Sociocultural theory is the foundation for this study due to its ability to explain how individual mental capacities develop from participation in social activities (Vygotsky, 1978). The work of sociocultural theory is to explain how individual mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional, and historical context. A strong linkage between Sociocultural Theory, personal experience, and belief can be explained by the ultimate function of language (Halliday, 1978). Halliday stated that language is created by a social system, used in social sphere, and learned through interactions in which personal experiences and beliefs reside and are internalised by individuals.

Language, therefore, can be taught by understanding how the social system works and how the expression of language is used. Though there is 'a set of variations', contextual factors related to culture define how a language can be understood, such as the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor, formal or non-formal situation, academic or non-academic, and many others. All of these variations (family, religion, community, occupation, and so forth) shape one's personal experience and belief in a specific context (Holliday, 2010).

Last not the least, lived experience and belief have always become the base of knowledge for an individual to make decision in their own professional activities (Borg, 2015; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Therefore, they are always united, intersecting, and inter-relating one another. The study focuses on a question: How do personal experiences and beliefs shape teachers' practice in teaching an intercultural pedagogy?

## 2. METHOD

With multiple case study approach, this qualitative study involved three universities representing the west, the central, and the eastern parts of the Indonesian archipelago. Two university teacher participants of each university were interviewed by two sessions. Each session took about 1 (one) hour maximal in order to avoid fatigue. The teacher interviews were conducted in both Bahasa Indonesia and English or their combinations. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated before the data were inputted into NVIVO 12 software for further analyses.

Data analysis employed Narrative Data analysis by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013). It started from

data condensation where all of the data were compacted to be free nodes labelling based on phrases, topics, and issues per participant. Next, such nodes were analysed and compared and contrasted with other data within the same participant in order to create coding. These coding and decoding processes subsequently proceed to themes. Thus, each participant would have their own themes. These themes were then compared and contrasted with other participants. Each participant has his/her own distinctiveness in positioning him/herself in this study. All of the themes were then displayed in the form of diagrams. The diagrams finally revealed the relationships, patterns, and clusters in which the themes were found out to have relations one another. In addition, the display of the themes was able to be connected by theoretical development of intercultural communicative competence.

Last not the least, these themes were then verified through a confirmatory data validation. One of them adopted checking representativeness of the themes. Each quotation was re-checked by their coding. Next, the coding was re-verified with their theme. Besides, the same data were also triangulated with the same emerging theme from different participants. Data triangulation functioned to build uniqueness of an individual in reflecting on his/her personal life development.

These condensations, displaying, and verification worked iteratively as far as the themes were concluded because the data analyses have already reached a saturation point. This point was indicated by the stagnant thematic development in data analyses.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the teacher interview data, the analyses resulted in some major factors influencing these teachers' intercultural profile development were found. The presentation of data only covers three teacher participants due to the limitation of space.

The study revealed that personal live experiences, heightened awareness of individual teacher, and contextual factors in teaching have shaped their beliefs, which have in turn affected their practices in teaching an intercultural pedagogy. These three themes become major aspects and are reflected on their quotations in teacher interviews as elaborated in the following subsections.

### 3.1. *Personal Lived Knowledge Construction*

First, these teachers were affected by their own personal lived experiences especially in foreign language learning and overseas studying experiences. One of the respondents stated: "When we move to another place, we are moved to follow the new culture. So, you will adjust yourself and it is not possible to be reserved. It is not

possible. We must follow the culture. When moving to another place, we will also follow the host culture". The same respondent also stated that "Not only one can take his or her identity from him or her, but also he or she can adapt to the new culture". The above respondent emphasized becoming a sojourner in a new place that brings a sense of a new person. The respondent seems to be open-minded with negotiating identity through personal experiences.

Similarly, the next respondent stated that "When she migrated from a different part of Indonesia, the cultural adaptation she encountered was one of the most significant experiences that shaped her life". The same teacher also claimed that "If I reflect on to my experiences as a child and also as a teenager, then I felt it was really hard, actually. It was a tough experience because when I moved to another place, then I had to adapt, yeah, to adapt myself with the new environment, the new language, the new people". The respondent stated that these experiences played a key role and quite challenging. The respondent also called these experiences as intercultural experiences.

The last respondent also claimed an identical stance via the following quotation:

"During my study in Australia for two years, I really tried to understand the Australians. And I had many experiences with the people. Indeed, I had some experiences with not only Australians but also other students from other cultures: The Indians, Thai, Japanese, etc. It was a very wonderful experience".

The respondent also mentioned that "I think it is very important for people to know other cultures, to be more mobile because mobility is now very demanding. For people nowadays, moving from one place to another place is a need".

For this respondent, studying and migrating are two dominant personal lived experiences when intercultural skills were exercised, and intercultural understanding was restructured accordingly. It can be seen that the personal experiences were positive for the respondent's intercultural profile development.

### **3.2. Intercultural Awareness**

Second, these teachers' critical awareness has been gradually transformed via these experiences. This sort of awareness is indeed multiple-layered from the minimum to the maximum level of criticality: from basic general knowledge to compare between the self and the other, to be more conceptual, namely the role of cultures and languages in intercultural communication (Baker, 2011). The first respondent reiterated: "It is good to have a comparison. Let us say, ok start from greeting in the conversation. There must be some sort of cultural aspects in greeting and compare to your own culture! Why do

you say this? How do you greet people? I think it is a good to have a comparison". In another session, the same respondent teacher also said "Like Australia, for example, what is Australian culture? We cannot identify it anymore. What is the original Australian culture? because Australia itself has been multicultural". The respondent stressed comparison skills between the way the native/first language and the target language work in some uses and to be more aware of defining and grouping of people. The respondent seems to be aware of the relationship between language and culture. The respondent also raised the tenuous one-to-one language and culture relationship in some migrant nations including Australia.

Next, another respondent also deeply claimed: "What we need to learn is actually not learning the culture but learning how to experience the culture, or, more precisely learning how we should behave in that kind of situation, that is, an intercultural situation". The respondent added: "Language changes, culture changes along with the changes of the way how the way people live. That is culture". The second respondent appeared to shift the orientation from focusing on cultural identity to enacting intercultural experience, which indicates his/her strengthened intercultural awareness. The respondent stated that the culture also changes through the way a person from a particular cultural identity manages his/her life. This reveals the significance of experiencing the culture for the respondent.

The last respondent stated: "We may need to equip our future generation with the mindset or beliefs of the cultural adaption so that they know that the most important thing is to respect one another and to appreciate the differences, others' beliefs, and their ideologies". The respondent accentuated the knowledge of relating and the skills of adapting with unfamiliar people and situation. The respondent also highlighted attitudinal development with intercultural values to recognise other's differences. More interestingly, the respondent included ideology as an inseparable part of cultural identity. All these reveal that the respondent's awareness towards culture and other relevant socio-cultural dimensions has increased indicating individual intercultural profile development.

### **3.3. Teaching Context**

The third major theme is the teachers' teaching context. The teaching contexts of these teachers have also played integral part in the creation of the teachers' intercultural profile development. From the data, it is evident they strived to negotiate with their challenges and resorted to some strategies accordingly in managing their intercultural unit teachings.

The first respondent argued: "Authentic materials were selected (for example, current newspaper or scholarly journals) to be discussed and real interaction

with foreigners was encouraged". The same respondent also claimed "You should ask students to focus on the meaning of the text while you know learning the language. So, I think in that way they can get both the culture and the language". The respondent believed in using text in understanding and analysing culture. Text here is interpreted as semiotic element of language where it contains interpersonal, textual, and ideational functions of delivering meaning (Halliday, 1978). In addition, interaction with the user of target language is still maintained with its benefit for language learners.

Another respondent also claimed: "Reflection and dialogue as part of teaching practice... Then, the class works to relate the outcomes of reflection and dialogue to the skills and knowledge of English". The second respondent proposed the role of reflexivity on the self and reflective activities in intercultural pedagogy. These two skills of interpreting and relating are central for the elevation of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997). The former is a personal private practice where an individual continuously relates his/her worldview with experiences in life, whereas the latter is to interpret the language phenomena with the lens of a particular culture's values, behaviours, and beliefs. These two have been claimed to be determining to an individual intercultural profile development (Dervin, 2020; Moloney & Turunen, 2020).

The last respondent put forward the way how intercultural pedagogy implemented in his/her context: "I think we need to focus on one culture first, especially with students with basic or intermediate level (of proficiency). Afterwards, we need another stage in which students learn about various cultures. So, after they learn the language with one of the cultures, they need to take another stage in which they study several cultures and compare between cultures". The respondent closed with "Whenever you talk to people from whatever culture they are from, and if we have already had the appropriate attitude and mindset about (said) culture, you would be fine". This respondent revealed the main challenge of implementing intercultural pedagogy in an EFL context in the way language and culture should be simultaneously learned and taught. Most of the students need to struggle with the communicative language ability with accuracy and fluency before being exposed to the knowledge of culture. Then, they continue with multiple cultural comparison once they are ready to communicate with the language at a certain proficiency level. These strategies seem to be realistic for the respondent in his/her teaching context. The respondent strives to construe the interdependence between language and culture in different perspective. The respondent also shows that this strategy is deployed due to contextual need and situation of language learners.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, personal lives and beliefs have mutually shaped these individuals' intercultural profile development. To be specific, personal lived knowledge construction (learning and studying experiences), critical intercultural awareness, and teaching context were exercised within an embedded individual intercultural profile development. The present study reveals the consistency between teachers' personal lives, beliefs, and practical teaching of an intercultural pedagogy in three university contexts. The present study also indicates that the varied intercultural teaching and learning activities are determined by the university teachers' intercultural profile development. This development is provisional, changeable, and aligned with the progress of intercultural competence in other studies to date, which claims there are multiple unpredictable factors affecting the grounding of a personal positioning. These factors may potentially affect one's intercultural profile development along with intercultural communicative competence. There is not a single set methodological box or guidebook that works in every encounter. This study becomes an initiative for understanding the complexity of Indonesian context for intercultural pedagogy with multiple-layered cultural identities (local and national identities). There still need further investigation to analyse identical case studies with a larger scale in the context of Indonesia for future potency of Intercultural EFL pedagogy.

#### REFERENCES

- Baker, W. (2011). Intercultural Awareness: Modelling an Understanding of Cultures in Intercultural Communication through English as a Lingua Franca. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 11(3), 197-214.
- Borg, S. (2015). *Teacher cognition and language education: Research and practice*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.
- Cole, D., & Meadows, B. (2013). Avoiding the essentialist trap in intercultural education; Using critical discourse analysis to read nationalist ideologies in the language classroom. In A. J. Liddicoat (Ed.), *Linguistics for Intercultural Education* (pp. 29-47). John Benjamins Publishing Company.  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/mqu/detail.action?docID=1161967>
- Dasli, M., & Diaz, A. R. (2016). *The critical turn in language and intercultural communication pedagogy: Theory, research and practice* (Vol. 5). Taylor & Francis.

- Dervin, F. (2020). Creating and combining models of Intercultural Competence for teacher education/training - on the need to rethink IC frequently. In F. Dervin, R. Moloney, & A. Simpson (Eds.), *Intercultural Competence in the Work of Teachers: Confronting Ideologies and Practices* (pp. 57-72). Routledge.
- Fleming, M. P., Alred, G., & Byram, M. (2003). *Intercultural experience and education* (Vol. 2). Multilingual Matters.
- Gandana, I. (2015). Critical thinking,(inter) cultural awareness and pedagogical dilemmas: Stories of three university teachers in Indonesia. In W. M. Chan, S. K. Bhatt, M. Nagami, & I. Walker (Eds.), *Culture and Foreign Language Education: Insights from Research and Implications for the Practice* (Vol. 10). National University of Singapore.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic*. London Arnold.
- Holliday, A. (2010). Complexity in cultural identity. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 10(2), 165-177. <https://doi.org/DOI:10.1080/14708470903267384>
- Kramsich, C. (2013). Culture in foreign language teaching. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 1(1), 57-78.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012). Individual identity, cultural globalization, and teaching English as an international language. In L. Alsagoff, S. L. McKay, G. Hu, & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Principles and practices for teaching English as an international language* (pp. 9-27). Routledge.
- Liddicoat, A. J., & Scarino, A. (2013). *Intercultural language teaching and learning*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. SAGE.
- Moloney, R., & Turunen, T. A. (2020). Two teacher educators 're-thinking' practice: Intercultural competences in teacher education pedagogy. In F. Dervin, R. Moloney, & A. Simpson (Eds.), *Intercultural Competence in the Work of Teachers: Confronting Ideologies and Practices* (pp. 139-156). Routledge.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. *Readings on the development of children*, 23(3), 34-41. <https://ia.eferit.com/ea/a6589cd862231ed3.pdf>

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

