Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL), Vol. 14, No. 1, March 2011, 109-134

Teachability of Intercultural Sensitivity from the Perspective of Ethnocentrism vs. Ethnorelativism: An Iranian Experience

Ali Rahimi [*]
Assistant Professor of TEFL, University of Kashan, Kashan, Iran

Ali Soltani [†]
Assistant Professor of TEFL, Zanjan Medical University, Zanjan, Iran

Received 14 May 2010; revised 2 December 2010; accepted 28 December 2010

Abstract

This study investigated the probable relationship between Iranian EFL learners' language proficiency and intercultural sensitivity. It also looked into the feasibility of enhancing their intercultural sensitivity through actual classroom training. To this end, 36 male and female college seniors were randomly selected from two classes after being homogenized. The participants were required, initially, to complete an Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS).They, then, attended a half-a-semester-long intercultural sensitivity training course and completed the same scale once again at the end of the semester. The data obtained through pre-test and post-test were subjected to some statistical techniques such as the Wilcoxon Signed-rank test and the Chi-square test. The results of data analysis indicated that intercultural sensitivity training promoted Iranian EFL students' intercultural sensitivity level significantly and that there exists a statistically significant relationship between students' language proficiency and intercultural sensitivity.

[*] *Email address*: rahimijah@yahoo.com
Corresponding address: English Language Department, University of Kashan, Kashan, Iran

[†] *Email address:* ali_soltani49@yahoo.com

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

This study in turn confirms the possibility of teaching intercultural sensitivity and is hoped, if generalized nationwide, to enrich foreign language teaching. It can also encourage ELT practitioners to give due weight to intercultural competence as a crucial component of modern language education.

Keywords: Iranian EFL Learners; Intercultural Sensitivity; Intercultural Training; Ethnocentrism; Ethnorelativism

Introduction

Culture and language are believed to, "play two complementary roles in educational processes as all human activities are linguistically and culturally mediated" (Kasper & Omori, 2010, p. 455). However, culture seems to be often neglected in EFL and ESL learning processes (Tseng, 2002). Parallel with the recent advancements in the fields of science and technology which have resulted in the drastic reduction of the distance between people from different cultures (Peng, Lu, & Wang, 2009), the EFL profession needs a fundamental shift of attention from such fields as syntax, phonology, and semantics to pragmatics and sociocultural issues (Widdowson, 1992). One alternative, to achieve this goal, is intercultural language learning which emphasizes that preparing language learners for intercultural communication is a necessity in such a multicultural world (Ho, 2009).Yet, the development of interculturally competent students which is one of the outcomes of internationalization of the English language is addressed by few language institutions (Deardorff, 2006).

Given the trend towards globalization and internationalization in the contemporary world of expanding technology and shrinking geography, training interculturally competent learners with sufficient ability to communicate effectively with people of different cultural backgrounds seems more important than ever.

Intercultural Competence and Intercultural Sensitivity

Defining intercultural competence is difficult due to its complex cultural components. One attempt to define this concept is made by Byram (1997). According to him, intercultural competence consists of five factors: knowledge about social groups,

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

skills of interpretation and relation, skills of interaction, attitudes toward people of different cultures, and critical cultural awareness.

Intercultural competence has also been claimed by Zakaria (2000) to be comprised of affective, cognitive, and behavioral components. The cognitive component is concerned with cultural awareness which leads to a change in one's thinking about his/her environment based upon the understanding that one should not limit oneself to his/her own perspectives due to the fact that there are multiple perspectives. This alteration in one's manner of thinking can bring about changes in their behavior (behavioral component) on the basis of the impacts of culture on one's behavior (cultural awareness). The affective component of intercultural competence, labeled sometimes as (inter)cultural sensitivity, deals with varied feelings which are caused by changes in people, environment, and communicative encounters while refraining from ethnocentrism (Chen & Starosta, 1996).

Although intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity are sometimes used interchangeably by some scholars to refer to the same thing, Hammer, Bennet, and Wiseman (2003) have asserted that intercultural sensitivity is the prerequisite for intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is in fact the behavioral manifestation of intercultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity (Peng, Rangsipaht, & Thaipakdee, 2005).

Intercultural sensitivity is defined by Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) as, "a sensitivity to the importance of cultural differences and to the points of view of people in other cultures" (p. 414). Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) also believe that language learners need to possess certain qualities in order to survive in a new community with dissimilar culture. These qualities include: a) being interested in other cultures, b) being sensitive to cultural differences, and c) being respectful towards people with cultures different from their own.

In addition to the above-mentioned characteristics, there is one more skill EFL learners need to be equipped with in order to act successfully in their intercultural communications. Their language proficiency also plays a crucial role in their success. The significant effect of language proficiency on intercultural sensitivity has been emphasized by some scholars including Peng, Rangsipaht, and Thaipakdee (2005).

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

Iranian Culture and Intercultural Encounters

Under the strict influence of their culture deeply rooted in their psyches, Iranians have frequently proved unable to act successfully in their intercultural communications. In this respect, Eslami (2005, as cited in Sharifian, 2007) comments, "I have witnessed that Iranians sometimes take Americans' genuine invitations as ostensible (not to be taken seriously) and therefore reject them, while Americans may take Iranian ostensible invitations as genuine and accept them"(p.41). This assertion is based on her long observation, research and intercultural experience in the United States.

A variety of such schemata as the schema of face (*aberu*), the schema of ritual politeness (*tarof*), the schema of modesty *(shekasteh-nafsi),* and emotion schema, among many others, which are numerously applied in Persian culture as a sign of respect towards others, bring about various fundamental misunderstandings, some irremediably offending, in intercultural encounters. Take the following case in which an Australian lecturer congratulates his Iranian student on his recent achievement.

Lecturer: *I heard you've won a prestigious award. Congratulations! This is fantastic.*
Iranian student: *Thanks so much. I haven't done anything. It's the result of your effort and your knowledge. I owe it all to you.*
Lecturer: (appearing uncomfortable) *Oh, no!!! Don't be ridiculous. It's all your work.*

Extracted from Applied Cultural Linguistics by Sharifian and Palmer (2007, p.43)

This conversation between an Iranian student and an Anglo-Australian lecturer, according to Sharifian (2007), causes the lecturer a feeling of discomfort because he thinks his student has overestimated his contribution. This pragmatic failure can also be accounted for by the assertion made by (Chastain 1988). He believes that awareness of cultural elements enables students to function effectively in the second-language society.

Getting help from corpus linguistics, we can avail ourselves of a large number of such cases which can, if analyzed carefully from the perspective of pragmatic failure, open up new horizons in this regard. They could also make us more determined to give due weight to pragmatics, metapragmatics as well as ethnic background in order

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

to be able to delve into the real causes of such pragmatic failures in intercultural contexts. As cultural diversity is characterized by different beliefs, values, and ethnicity (Bennett & Bennett, 2001), one of the causes might be the high ethnic diversity in our country with different types of ethnic groups such as Turkish, Kurdish, and Persian, among others.

Adopting a pedagogical perspective on the relationship between language and culture, Mirdehghan, HoseiniKargar, Navab, and Mahmoodi (2011) carried out a study on cultural barriers hindering effective language learning. The major focus of their research was on the negative effects of cultural barriers on English language teaching/learning process in Iran. To collect data with regard to crucial cultural elements fostering or hindering the learning process, they administered a questionnaire to 80 students at Shahid Beheshti University. The findings of their study revealed that learning English can be more effective if both Iranian and English cultures are included in the process of teaching. They also discovered that diagnosis and notification of cultural barriers related to taboo words, political relations, and religious factors can influence ELT positively.

Ethnocentrism versus Ethnorelativism

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) was developed by Bennett (1993) to explain how individuals interpret cultural differences. The fundamental assumption of this model is that the more sophisticated one's experience of cultural differences becomes, the more competent one gets in intercultural encounters (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). Bennett (1998) has organized the developmental stages of increasing intercultural sensitivity, based on this model, into two general categories: ethnocentric and ethnorelative stages which are illustrated in Figure 1 below (Source: Hammer & Bennett, 2001).

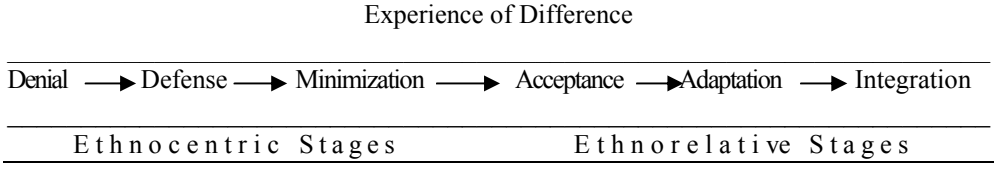


Figure 1: Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

Bennett (1998) describes ethnocentric stages as, "using one's own set of standards and customs to judge all people, often unconsciously"(p.26) and ethnorelative stages as, "being comfortable with many standards and customs and ... having an ability to adapt behavior and judgments to a variety of interpersonal settings"(p.26).The stages are briefly defined as follows:

Ethnocentric Stages: In these stages, one's own culture is regarded as central and is preferred to dissimilar cultures. Racism, as an example, is one of the outcomes of this kind of worldview. The stages are as follows:

- *Denial*: Cultural differences at this stage are either experienced with some sort of indifference or are not experienced at all (Bennett, 1993). It is "the purest form of ethnocentrism" (Bennett, 1993, p.30).
- *Defense*: One considers one's own culture as "the only viable one" at this stage (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003, p. 242). It is different from defense in that a different culture is not considered as a threat anymore.
- *Minimization*: Various elements constituting one's own culture and worldview are considered and "experienced as universal" (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003, p. 424).Cultural differences continue to exist at a minimized level.

Ethnorelative Stages: These three DMIS orientations appear to be more ethnorelative and individuals experience their own culture "in the context of other cultures" (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003, p.425). The stages are as follows:

- *Acceptance*: Individuals are more inclined to respect cultural differences at this stage, and values and assumptions are "perceived as manifestations of human creativity"(Bennett, 1993, p. 50).
- *Adaptation:* It is the stage at which ethnorelative acceptance to intercultural communication is put to practice (Bennett, 1993) and the outcome of the new culture is a different behavior which is considered appropriate to that culture (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003).
- *Integration*: At this stage, one's experience of self becomes so expanded that it includes "the movement in and out of different cultural worldviews" (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003, p. 425).

In the process of moving from ethnocentric stages to ethnorelative stages, one admittedly undergoes changes in one's skills, and attitudes, among others, which

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

are believed to be the "manifestations of changes underlying the worldview" (Bennett, 2004, p. 75).

Merits of Including Cultural Elements in L2 Learning

The advantages of including cultural elements in ESL/EFL curricula have been stressed by a large number of prominent scholars in our field. Cultural elements can stimulate and maintain students' motivation and interest; they can also help them develop global awareness and international understanding (Chastain, 1988).

Pedagogically speaking, teaching culture, according to Oxford (1994), can make L2 learners more conscious of their own learning style, and cause second language acquisition more interesting and fun. Cultural elements can help learners understand the L2 meaning more easily, and can also lead to attainment of a higher level of target language competence (Stagigh,1998).Teaching culture can influence the learning process of language learners through its humanizing and motivating effects (Genc & Bada, 2005).They also argue that cultural classes cause learners to pay more attention to cultural differences and similarities. It has also been argued that the inclusion of intercultural components in EFL curricula would lead to an effective and successful language education (Byram, 1997; Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 2003).

Adopting a different perspective, Ho (1998) believes that L2 learners can develop a sense of reality if we familiarize them sufficiently with the values, attitudes, and behaviors of the members of the target language community.

The Importance of Intercultural Sensitivity (ICS)

Intercultural sensitivity has been considered as the core of transcending ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism in the developmental process (Hammer & Bennett, 2004). Thus, any attempt to raise individuals' intercultural sensitivity level will assist them in realizing and understanding why cultural differences are important.

The significant role of intercultural sensitivity has also been shown empirically in a number of studies. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992), for instance, conducted a study with the purpose of testing intercultural sensitivity inventory among graduate students in Hawaii and concluded that people who enjoy higher level of intercultural

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

sensitivity were more successful in their cross-cultural interactions. In 2001, Olson and Kroeger also carried out a survey of 52 New Jersey City University faculty and staff in order to examine the relationships among their international experience, levels of intercultural sensitivity, and global competencies. To do so, they employed Milton Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. The results of their study made explicit the relationship among ethnorelativism, experience abroad, and second language acquisition revealing that intercultural development is necessary for both faculty and staff of that university.

The "magic-carpet-ride-to-another-culture syndrome" is a term coined by Robinson (1978) to reflect the necessity of due attention to cultural elements. By this term, Robinson means the assumption that language study per se can open the door to another culture is a mistaken one. Language teaching, according to him, should be supplemented with specific treatments to increase intercultural understanding and interaction.

To signify the importance of intercultural sensitivity training, some scholars such as Young, Sachdev and Seedhouse (2009) argue that intercultural training has positive effects on individuals' methods of thinking, behavior, and interaction. The findings of a study conducted by Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) also revealed that intercultural training causes individuals to act successfully due to improved perceptions, and relational skills. Supporting the necessity of intercultural training, Byram (2008), as one of the pioneers in this line of research, also asserts, "acting interculturally pre-supposes certain attitudes, knowledge and skills that need to be learnt" (p.69).

It is also argued that there exists a positive correlation between greater intercultural sensitivity and greater potential for exercising intercultural competence (Hammer, Bennett, &Wiseman, 2003).Thus, creating such a potential in EFL learners by enhancing their intercultural sensitivity as well as their language proficiency can help them better cope with real-life intercultural interactions.

The Present Study

The initial stimulus of our investigation into intercultural competence in general and intercultural sensitivity in particular came from Milton Bennett's (1997) article. He maintains, in this highly thought-provoking article, that many teachers

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

and students view language as groups of words and rules, and learning a foreign language is equated by them with learning how to substitute specific words using some rules to get the intended meaning with a tool different from their own. He, then, argues the results of this kind of thinking will be some fluent fools who are good at conversation but know little of sociocultural issues.

Given the importance and the dearth of research on the relationship between language proficiency and intercultural sensitivity particularly in Iran, the present study attempted to explore the probable relationship between intercultural sensitivity and language proficiency. Besides, this study aimed at investigating the effect of intercultural training on the enhancement of the participants' intercultural sensitivity level thus their tendency to move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

1) Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' intercultural sensitivity level and language proficiency?

2) Does intercultural sensitivity training enhance Iranian EFL learners' intercultural sensitivity level?

Method

Participants

The participants included 36 senior students majoring in English-Persian Translation at Tabriz Daneshvaran University. They were both male and female, aged 21 to 35, and came from three different ethnic backgrounds: Turkish, Persian, and Kurdish. The participants were randomly selected from among 52 students. They were provided with sufficient information regarding the purpose of the study. Every participant was assured that participation in this study was voluntary and their personal information would remain confidential.

Instruments and Materials

The instrumentation used to collect data included:

(1) A general proficiency test, January 2004 version of TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) PBT, (TOEFL ACTUAL TESTS, 2005, pp.7-36) was used

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

to evaluate the participants' level in terms of language proficiency and to homogenize them. We were restricted to use a paper-based TOEFL due to lack of technological facilities in administering other versions. The students who scored between one standard deviation above and below the mean on the normal distribution of this TOEFL test were selected as the participants of the study. The test consisted of three sections: 1) Listening comprehension (50 items), 2) Structure and written expressions (40 items), and 3) Reading comprehension (50 items). This standardized test was pilot-tested prior to the administration and the reliability index obtained through Kuder- Richardson (KR-21) formula was 0.78.

(2) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), developed by Chen and Starosta (2000), was piloted and administered to the participants both at the beginning and at the end of the course. This scale includes twenty four five-point Likert items with a five-point rating scale: strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree, and strongly agree. It was employed to measure the participants' intercultural sensitivity level**.** This scale is normally applied to test how individuals feel when communicating with people having cultural backgrounds other than their own. This scale has an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.86 according to the study conducted in the United States by Chen and Starosta (2000). Another study with a German sample validated this scale through a confirmatory factor analysis. It also reported the internal consistency values of its five subscales to range from 0.58 to 0.79 (Fritz, Mollenberg, & Chen, 2001). Based on the results of the pilot study, the reliability indices of the instrument as estimated by Cronbach alpha coefficient turned out to be 0.78 and 0.81(See Appendix A).

(3) A course book entitled Mirrors and Windows, by Huber-Krieger, Lazar and Strange (2003), was used to train intercultural sensitivity. It has been written specifically for this purpose. The researchers made it explicit to the participants that the major objectives of the course was to increase their awareness and their curiosity towards their own culture as well as the target culture through highlighting the similarities and the differences between their native and target cultures. The topics included in the book were time, money, silence and turn-taking, eating habits, non-verbal communication, religion, taboo questions, personal space, directness: complaining and criticizing, proverbs and sayings, gendered identities: men and women, girls and boys, household chores, slang and informal terms, romance, marriage, dislocated polygamy, mixed marriages, metaphors and similes and strange dialogues.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

Pilot Study

The researchers conducted a pilot study in the spring semester of 2010 with two intact groups of 50 college seniors from Zanjan University. The TOEFL test was first administered to confirm the homogeneity of these participants in terms of language proficiency. The reliability of the test as estimated against Kuder-Richardson (KR-21) formula was found to be 0.78. Subsequently, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale was administered twice with a two-week interval. The reliability indices for the students' responses to the inventory was estimated using the Cronbach alpha formula and high consistency indices turned out to be 0.78 and 0.81. Kuder-Richardson (KR-21) formula was given priority because, as Brown (1996) argues, it tends to produce a more conservative estimate of reliability compared to other formulae.

Procedure

Having evaluated the participants' level in terms of language proficiency, the researchers pre-tested their intercultural sensitivity level through administering the intercultural sensitivity scale at the outset of the instruction. The researchers used *Mirrors and Windows*: *An intercultural communication textbook* as a guide in order to highlight similarities and differences between Iranian and English cultures. Some specific instructional steps were routinely taken in almost all of the sessions. A number of thought-provoking warm-up questions were, first, asked regarding the topic of each unit in order to introduce the topic. A short lecture was delivered and the participants were required to reflect on their own culture and compare it with target culture in terms of values, customs, behavior, attitudes, etc. by doing the tasks provided at the end of each section. They were, then, asked to read a number of short passages about different aspects of the topic which were followed by some questions, discussions, and tasks. In one of the tasks, for instance, they ranked themselves on a punctuality scale from 1-5 (1 = very punctual, 5 = hardly ever punctual), ranked the majority of people in their culture on this scale and finally discussed whether or not punctuality connotes the same thing in different cultures. The discussions were usually followed by pair and group works. Finally, in the *language work* section of each unit, the participants were usually asked to work on different topic-related proverbs, idioms, and vocabulary in order to compare and contrast them with their equivalents in their mother language from the perspective

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

of cultural differences. Extreme care was always exercised by the researchers in order not to pass value judgments on cultural differences.

Finally, the same scale was administered again in order to probe students' enhancement in terms of intercultural sensitivity. Later, students' intercultural sensitivity levels were evaluated through comparing the results obtained in the pretest and the posttest.

Results

The first research question probed the probable relationship between students' language proficiency and intercultural sensitivity. The Spearman correlation was employed to assess the relationship between students' intercultural sensitivity level and language proficiency due to the abnormality of these two variables which was verified by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov technique ($p > 0.05$). The correlation was statistically confirmed at 0.95 confidence level confirming the first hypothesis. Table1 demonstrates the correlation coefficient between language proficiency and intercultural sensitivity of the students.

Table 1
Correlation between students' intercultural sensitivity and language proficiency

		ICS_pre	TOEFL	ICS_POST
ICS-pretest	Spearman Correlation	1	.775**	.827**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	36	36	36
TOEFL	Spearman Correlation	.775**	1	.731**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	36	36	36
ICS-posttest	Spearman Correlation	.827**	.731**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	36	36	36

As Table 1 depicts, there exists a positive correlation between students' language proficiency and intercultural sensitivity. The correlation coefficient

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

between these two variables, before and after the training, turned out to be 0.78 and 0.83 respectively which indicates a statistically significant correlation.

The second research question addressed the effect of intercultural sensitivity training on promoting intercultural sensitivity of Iranian EFL learners. The distribution of intercultural sensitivity variables before and after the training was, first, specified by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov technique. Since their distribution was found not to be normal ($p<0.05$), the Wilcoxon Signed-rank test was utilized to evaluate the impact of the intercultural sensitivity training through comparing the mean ranks gained in the pretest and the posttest. As Table 2 depicts, intercultural sensitivity training did enhance students' intercultural sensitivity. There was a significant difference between the mean ranks of the students obtained for the pre- and post-test at the level of $p < .05$.

Table 2
Wilcoxon Signed-rank test for students' ICS levels before and after ICS training

Test	Group	N=36		Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Wilcoxon Z-Score	Sig.
ICS	Post-test - Pre-test	Negative Ranks	2	2.5	5	-4.142	0.000
		Positive Ranks	28	16.3	456.4		
		Ties	6				

While the intercultural sensitivity level of 28 students (out of 36) increased after the training, only 2 students were observed with decreased intercultural sensitivity level. In other words, the results indicated that the students made a substantial progress in increasing their intercultural sensitivity level. Therefore, the second hypothesis was also confirmed. In order to get into the details of the students' reactions to different aspects of intercultural sensitivity before and after the treatment, the students' responses to all items of the scale are tabulated and summarized in Table 3 (See Appendix B).

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

Further, in order to compare the degree of increase in the students' intercultural sensitivity before and after the treatment, we ran a Chi-square test on the frequency distribution of the students' intercultural sensitivity levels (Low, Low to Moderate, Moderate to High and High). Table 4 shows the results of the Chi-square for students' intercultural sensitivity prior to the training.

Table 4
Chi-square test for students' ICS levels prior to training

Choices	1	2	3	4	Chi-square	Sig.
Frequencies	19	9	7	1	18.66	0.00
	Low	Low to Moderate	Moderate to High	High		

d.f=3 α=0.95 Critical χ^2=7.38

Table 5 displays the results of the Chi-square for students' intercultural sensitivity after the training.

Table 5
Chi-square test for students' ICS levels after training

Choices	1	2	3	4	Chi-square	Sig.
Frequencies	3	5	10	18	14.89	0.003
	Low	Low to Moderate	Moderate to High	High		

d.f=3 α=0.95 Critical χ^2=7.38

The number of the students with increased intercultural sensitivity in the high level group, as observed in Tables 4 and 5, changed from 1 before the training to 18 after the training. That is, the training enhanced the intercultural sensitivity of half of the students (50 %) in this group. Similarly, the number of the students with low level of intercultural sensitivity decreased from 19 before the training to 3 after the training. Similar changes occurred for the other two groups as well.

Discussion

The results of the current study indicated a statistically significant relationship between intercultural sensitivity and language proficiency of the participants.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

Interestingly, this finding is consistent and at the same time inconsistent with some research findings. It is incongruent with views held by Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby (2003) who believe in absence of any developmental relationship between the two. In contrast, it lends support to the assertion made by William (1989) who believes newspapers, radio, computer, magazines, books, etc. can pass cultural elements on to individuals. This means that EFL learners are subconsciously affected by these channels interculturally which in turn might result in the enhancement of their intercultural sensitivity. This enhancement should not, however, be construed as identical with the development of intercultural competence. As Byram (1997) and Kramsch (1998) hold, intercultural competence may not develop simultaneously along with the growth of language proficiency. The product, thus, may be a learner who is not equally competent linguistically and interculturally. As there is a strong association between greater intercultural sensitivity and the greater potential for exercising intercultural competence (Hammer, Bennet, & Wiseman, 2003), intercultural sensitivity training is suggested as an alternative to make up for this shortcoming (Gudykunst & Hammer,1983; Fowler & Blohm, 2004).

A further concern of this study was the efficiency of intercultural sensitivity training. Like Paige (1993) and Pruegger and Rogers (1994), the results of our study indicated a noticeable increase in the intercultural sensitivity level of the participants. In support of the findings of this study, Byram (1997) also found a direct relationship between the development of intercultural competence and instructing intercultural elements.

With regard to moving from ethnocentric to ethnorelative stages, the participants of our study seemed to have started this movement. This can be verified by the significant increase in their intercultural sensitivity level which resulted from the intercultural sensitivity training.

It has been argued that intercultural sensitivity is based upon one important premise according to which people should be encouraged to cross the boundaries existing between cultures (Bennett, 1997).The findings of this research, which confirmed the teachability of intercultural sensitivity, showed that it is possible to provide EFL learners with such an encouragement in an effective way. In order to provide this encouragement, EFL teachers may need to reconsider their methodology which can in turn help them get rid of the confinements of the

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

commonly adopted methods such as grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods and attempt to adopt more communicative task-based methods.

Given that there is a wide gap between Iranian and English cultures, EFL learners, if trained interculturally, may also become motivated to participate more open-mindedly in class discussions which can focus on similarities and differences between native and target cultures. However, sufficient attempts should be made not to ignore influential factors like learners' ethnic backgrounds. As mentioned before, the intercultural sensitivity of a small percent of the participants decreased after the training. This may, to my understanding, be accounted for by the way people with different ethnic backgrounds perceive new phenomena and also their prejudice in favor of their own culture. As Wiseman (1995) argues, different perceptions of the same new thing can be due to different factors one of which is ethnic background.

A number of limitations can be considered for this study. First, the number of the participants could have been larger. However, the researchers had to limit themselves to this number due to practical restrictions and the lengthy process of training. A second limitation of the present study concerns the level of the participants. This study included merely graduate students. Postgraduate students were not incorporated into the study.

Conclusion

This study attempted to investigate whether intercultural sensitivity training contributes to the enhancement of Iranian EFL students' intercultural sensitivity. It also probed the relationship between their Intercultural sensitivity and language proficiency. Intercultural sensitivity training, as the findings of this study indicated, did enhance the participants' intercultural sensitivity level. It may be concluded that intercultural sensitivity training can, as a component of foreign language curriculum, contribute to the betterment of EFL programs. It can also help EFL learners prepare themselves for intercultural contexts.

The findings of this study also showed that students with lower level of language proficiency are also at low level in terms of intercultural sensitivity and vice versa. This finding leads to the conclusion that improving language proficiency may also result in the enhancement of EFL learners' intercultural sensitivity. It remains to be seen whether it is possible to achieve the right balance

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

between language proficiency improvement and intercultural sensitivity enhancement in a single EFL program.

To shed more light on the efficiency of intercultural sensitivity training and the generalizability of the findings, further research can be carried out with a larger population in order to build a more concrete evaluation of the efficacy of intercultural sensitivity training in an Asian context. Furthermore, this study may be replicated to examine the extent to which teaching cultural components might impact on EFL learners' self-confidence, anxiety, and interest in learning a foreign language. Finally, further research can be conducted on other domains such as intercultural attitudes, skills, knowledge, etc. in order to address intercultural communicative competence more comprehensively.

References

Bennett, M. J. (1993). Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R. M. Paige, (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience*, (pp.21-71). Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Bennett, M. J. (1997). How not to be a fluent fool: Understanding the cultural dimentsions of language. In A. E. Fantini, (Vol. Ed.) & J. C. Richards (Series Ed.), *New ways in teaching culture. New ways in TESOL series II: Innovative classroom techniques* (pp.16–21). Alexandria, VA: TESOL

Bennett, M. J. (2004). Becoming Interculturally Competent. In J. Wurzel (Ed.). *Toward multiculturalism: A reader in multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 62-77). Newton, MA: Intercultural Resource Corporation.

Bennett, M. J. (1998). Intercultural communication: A current perspective. In M. Bennett (Ed.), *Basic concepts of intercultural communication* (pp.1-34).Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, Inc.

Bennett, J. M., & Bennett, M. J. (2001, July). *Developing Intercultural Sensitivity: An Integrative Approach to Global and Domestic Diversity*. Paper delivered to the Diversity Symposium, Diversity Collegium, Bentley College, Waltham, Mass.

Bennett, J. M., Bennett, M. J., & Allen, W. (2003). Developing Intercultural Competence in the Language Classroom. In D. L. Lange & R. M. Paige (Eds.), *Culture as the Core* (pp.237-270). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

Bhawuk, D. P. S., & Brislin, R. (1992). The measurement of intercultural sensitivity using the concepts of individualism and collectivism. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 16*(4), 413-436.

Brown, J. D. (1996). *Testing in language programs*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Byram, M. (1997).*Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Chastain, K. (1988). *Developing Second Languages Skills: Theory and Practice*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.

Chen, G. M., & Starosta, W. J. (1996). Intercultural communication competence: A synthesis. In B. R. Burleson & A. W. Kunkel (Eds), *Communication Yearbook* (pp. 353-383). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Chen, G. M., & Starosta, W. J. (2000). The development and validation of the intercultural communication sensitivity scale. *Human Communication, 5*(3), 1-15.

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.

Eslami, R. Z. (2005). Invitations in Persian and English: Ostensible or genuine? *Intercultural Pragmatics*, *2*(4), 453-480.

Fowler, S. M., & Blohm, J. M. (2004). An analysis of methods for intercultural training. In D. Landis, J. M. Bennett & M. J. Bennett (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training* (3rd ed., pp.37–84).Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Fritz, W., Mollenberg, A., & Chen, G. (2001, July). *Measuring intercultural sensitivity in different cultural context.* Paper presented at the Biannual Meeting of the International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies, Hong Kong. (*ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 456 491*).

Genc, B., & Bada, E. (2005). Culture in language learning and teaching. *The Reading Matrix, 5*(1), 73-84.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Hammer, M. R. (1983). Basic training design: Approaches to intercultural training. In D. Landis & R. W. Brislin (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training: Issues in theory and design* (pp.118–154). Elmsford, NY: Pergamon.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

Hammer, M. R., & Bennett, M. J. (2001). *The intercultural development inventory*. Portland, OR: Intercultural Communication Institute.

Hammer, M. R., & Bennett, M. J. (2004). *The intercultural developmental inventory (IDI) manual*. Portland, Oregon: Intercultural Communication Institute.

Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M. J., & Wiseman, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27*(4), 421-433.

Ho, M. (1998). Culture studies and motivation in foreign and second language learning in Taiwan. *Language, Culture, and Curriculum, 11*(2), 165-182.

Ho, S. T. K. (2009). Addressing culture in EFL classrooms: the challenge of shifting from a traditional to an intercultural stance. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 6*(1), 63-76.

Huber-Krieger, M., Lazar, I., & Strange, J. (2003). *Mirrors and Windows*: *An intercultural communication textbook*. European Centre for Modern Languages. Council of Europe Publishing.

Kasper, G., & Omori, M. (2010). Language and Culture. In N. H. Hornberger & S. L. McKay, *Sociolinguistics and Language Education*. Multilingual Matters.

Kramsch, C. (1998). The privilege of the intercultural speaker. In M. Byram & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Language learning in intercultural perspective* (pp. 16-31). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mendenhall, M., & Oddou, G. (1991). *Readings and Cases in International Human Resource Management*. Boston: PWS-KENT Pub. Company.

Mirdehghan, M., HoseiniKargar, N., Navab, S., & Mahmoodi, T. (2011). Cultural Barriers: Pros and Cons on ELT in Iran. *International Journal of English Linguistics, 1*(1), 15-20.

Olson, C. L., & Kroeger, K. R. (2001). Global Competency and Intercultural Sensitivity. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 5*(2), 116-137.

Oxford, R. (1994). Teaching culture in the language classroom: Toward a new philosophy. *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics,* 26-45.Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Paige, R. M. (1993). On the nature of intercultural experiences and intercultural education. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp.1-20). Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Paige, R. M., Jorstad, H. L., Siaya, L., Klein, F., & Colby, J. (2003). Culture learning in language education: A review of literature. In L. Lange & R. M. Paige (Eds.), *Culture as the core* (pp. 173-237).Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing Inc.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

Peng, H., Lu, W., & Wang, C. (2009). A framework for assessing high school students' intercultural communicative competence in a computer-mediated language learning project. *Journal of Interactive Learning Research. 2*(1), 95-116.

Peng, S. Y., Rangsipaht, S., & Thaipakdee, S. (2005). Measuring Intercultural Sensitivity: A Comparative Study of Ethnic Chinese and Thai Nationals. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 34*(2), 119-137.

Pruegger, V. J., & Rogers, T. B. (1994). Cross-cultural sensitivity training: Methods and assessment. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 18*(3), 369–387.

Robinson, G. L. (1978). The magic-carpet-ride-to-another-culture syndrome: An international perspective. *Foreign Language Annals, 11*(2), 135-146.

Sharifian, F. (2007). L1 cultural conceptualizations in L2 learning: The case of Persian speaking learners of English. In F. Sharifian, & G. B. Palmer (Eds.), *Applied Cultural Linguistics: Implications for second language learning and intercultural communication* (pp.33-51). Philadelphia: John Benjamin's Publishing Company.

Sharifian, F., & Palmer, G. B. (2007). *Applied Cultural Linguistics: Implications for second language learning and intercultural communication.* Philadelphia: John Benjamin's Publishing Company.

Stagigh, T. (1998). Cultural context and meaning in foreign language learning. *General Linguistics, 36*(2), 71-79.

Tseng, Y. (2002). A lesson in culture. *ELT Journal, 56*(1), 11-21.

Widdowson, H. G. (1992). ELT and EL teachers: Matter arising. *ELT Journal, 46* (4), 333-339.

William, F. (1989). *The new communication* (2nd Ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Wiseman, R. L. (1995). *Intercultural communication theory.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Young, J. T., Sachdev, I., & Seedhouse, P. (2009). Teaching and learning culture on English language programs: a critical review of the recent empirical literature. *Innovations in Language Learning and Teaching, 3*(2), 149-169.

Zakaria, N. (2000). The effects of cross-cultural training on the acculturation process of the global workforce. *International Journal of Manpower, 21*(6), 492-511.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

Appendices

Appendix A

Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)

The purpose of this scale is to examine intercultural sensitivity by asking your perceptions regarding interactions with people from different cultures. **There are no right or wrong answers**. Please rate how much you personally agree or disagree with these statements or how much these statements reflect how you feel or think personally.

---

1. I often engage people from different cultures in conversation or outside school activities.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□
2. I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□
3. I am pretty sure of myself in speaking with people from different cultures.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□
4. I find it very difficult to talk in front of people from different cultures.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□
5. I know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□
6. I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□
7. I don't like to be with people who have values different from mine.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□
8. I respect the values of people from different cultures.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

9. I get embarrassed easily when interacting with people from different cultures.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

10. I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

11. I actively look for people from different cultures with whom I can speak another language.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

12. I enjoy interaction with people who have cultural or language differences.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

13. I am open-minded to people from different cultures.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

14. I am very thoughtful when interacting with people from different cultures.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

15. I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

16. I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

17. I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

18. I would ignore the opinions of people from different cultures.
a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

19. I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

20. I think my culture is better than other cultures.

a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

21. I really put my best effort into trying to interact well with people from different cultures.

a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

22. I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.

a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

23. I often use verbal or nonverbal cues when I encounter communication difficulties with people from different cultures.

a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

24. I try to more actively participate in interaction with people from different cultures than I have done in the past.

a) Strongly Disagree □ b) Disagree □ c) Uncertain □ d) Agree□ e) Strongly Agree□

Appendix B

Table 3

Relative Frequency Percentage of Participants' Responses Prior to and After Training

Items	Pre-Test							Post-Test						
	S.D*	D	U	A	S.A	M	SD	S.D	D	U	A	S.A	M	SD
1. I often engage people from different cultures in conversation or outside school activities.	2.8	8..3	58..3	30..6	0	3.16	0.69	2.8	2.8	19.4	50	25	3.91	0.90
2. I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.	5.6	66.7	27.8	0	0	2.22	0.54	63.9	22.2	8.3	5.6	0	1.55	0.87
3. I am pretty sure of myself in speaking with	0	13.9	41.7	44.4	0	3.30	0.70	2.8	8.3	27.8	33.3	27.8	3.75	1.05

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

people from different cultures.														
4. I find it very difficult to talk in front of people from different cultures.	2.8	41.7	44.4	11.1	0	2.63	0.72	22.2	36.1	22.2	16.7	2.8	2.41	1.10
5. I Know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.	0	5.6	58.3	33.3	2.8	3.33	0.63	2.8	2.8	27.8	41.7	25	3.83	0.94
6. I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.	0	5.6	30.6	61.1	2.8	3.61	0.64	2.8	5.6	11.1	30.6	50	4.19	1.03
7. I don't like to be with people who have values different from me.	5.6	61.1	27.8	5.6	0	2.33	067	44.4	25	19.4	5.6	5.6	2.02	1.18
8. I respect the values of people from different cultures.	0	11.1	22.2	58.3	8.3	3.63	0.79	2.8	2.8	5.6	38.9	50	4.30	092
9. I get embarrassed easily when interacting with people from different cultures.	0	5.6	38.9	52.8	2.8	2.52	0.65	22.2	44.4	13.9	16.7	2.8	2.33	1.09
10. I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.	0	5.6	47.2	44.4	2.8	3.44	0.65	2.8	8.3	22.2	41.7	25	3.77	1.01
11. I actively look for people from different cultures with whom I can speak another language.	0	8.3	38.9	44.4	8.3	3.52	0.77	2.8	5.6	19.4	27.8	44.4	4.05	1.06
12. I enjoy interaction with people who have cultural or language differences.	0	5.6	22.2	66.7	5.6	3.72	0.65	2.8	5.6	8.3	25	58.3	4.30	1.03
13. I am open-minded to people	0	0	19.4	77.8	2.8	3.38	0.44	0	2.8	8.3	33.3	55.6	4.41	0.76

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

from different cultures.														
14. I am very thoughtful when interacting with people from different cultures.	0	2.8	33.3	44.4	19.4	3.80	0.78	0	2.8	11.1	41.7	44.4	4.27	0.77
15. I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.	11.1	63.9	22.2	2.8	0	2.16	0.65	55.6	38.9	2.8	2.8	0	1.52	0.69
16. I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.	0	0	25	72.2	2.8	3.77	0.48	0	0	5.6	52.8	41.7	4.36	0.59
17. I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.	0	2.8	33.3	50	13.9	3.75	0.73	0	2.8	2.8	33.3	61.1	4.52	069
18. I would ignore the opinions of people from different cultures.	11.1	55.6	30.6	0	2.8	2.27	0.77	56.6	27.8	11.1	2.8	2.8	1.69	0.98
19. I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.	5.6	25	38.9	27.8	2.8	2.97	0.94	11.1	22.2	19.4	30.6	16.7	3.19	1.28
20. I think my culture is better than other cultures.	8.3	56.6	19.4	16.7	0	2.44	0.87	33.3	38.9	11.1	8.3	8.3	2.19	1.23
21. I really put my best effort into trying to interact well with people from different cultures.	0	0	16.7	75	8.3	3.91	0.50	0	0	2.8	36.1	61.1	4.58	0.55
22. I avoid those situations	13.9	44.4	36.1	5.6	0	2.33	0.79	36.1	33.3	19.4	5.6	5.6	2.11	1.14

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.														
23. I often use verbal or nonverbal cues when I encounter communicati on difficulties with people from different cultures.	0	2.8	52.8	38.9	5.6	3.47	0.65	2.8	0	25	47.2	25	3.91	0.87
24. I try to more actively participate in interaction with people from different cultures than I have done in the past.	0	5.6	36.1	55.6	2.8	3.55	0.65	0	0	16.7	44.4	38.9	4.22	0.72

S.D=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, U=Uncertain, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree, SD=Standard Deviation

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]