An investigation into Foreign Language Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence: Case of First year students at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine. Setif 2 University

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Résumé

Cette étude examine la compétence communicative interculturelle des étudiants du département de langue et littérature anglaises à l'Université Sétif 2. Les données recueillies ont révélé que malgré que de nombreux étudiants manifestent des attitudes positives vers les personnes de cultures différentes de la leur, la majorité d'entre eux étaient incertains de leurs réponses et de leurs opinions. En effet, la majorité des étudiants ont été motivée par ce type de communication, cependant, beaucoup d'entre eux ont exprimé une sorte de méfiance dans l'interaction. Cela pourrait être interprété par leur faible conscience interculturelle due à un manque de flexibilité comportementale et un niveau de relaxation et de gestion des interactions très bas, confirmant, ainsi, les résultats de l'échelle de sensibilité interculturelle.

Mots-clés : Compétences communicatives interculturelles, Conscience interculturelle, Efficacité interculturelle, Sensibilité interculturelle, Interculturalité, Culture.

Abstract

This study examines the intercultural communicative competence of English students at Setif University 2. The data collected revealed that although many students maintained positive attitudes towards people from different cultures, the majority of them were unsure of opinion toward them. In addition to this, the majority were motivated to communicate with the other. Many of them expressed limited confidence in interaction, which can be interpreted by their low intercultural awareness. Furthermore, many students showed a low behavioral flexibility and a low level of relaxation and interaction management, confirming the results of the intercultural sensitivity scale.

Mots-clés: Intercultural Awareness, Intercultural Sensitivity, Intercultural Adroitness, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Culture, Interculturality.

الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة الكفاءة التواصلية بين الثقافات لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة سطيف2. أظهرت البيانات التي تم جمعها أنه على الرغم من أن العديد من الطلاب اظهروا مواقف إيجابية تجاه أشخاص من ثقافات المختلفة ، فإن معظمهم كانوا غير متأكدين من آرائهم تجاههم. بالإضافة إلى ذلك كانت الأغلبية متحمسة للتواصل مع الآخر. أعرب كثير منهم عن ثقة محدودة في التفاعل ، والتي يمكن تفسيرها من خلال انخفاض الوعي ما بين الثقافات. علاوة على ذلك أظهر العديد من الطلاب مرونة سلوكية منخفضة ومستوى منخفض من الاسترخاء في إدارة التواصل ، مما يؤكد نتائج مقياس الحساسية بين الثقافات.

الكلمات المفاتيح: التواصل التفاعلي البين ثقافي ، الوعي ما بين الثقافات ، الحساسية بين الثقافات ، الثقافة المستهدفة.

Introduction

In a globalized world, one cannot ignore the growing importance of intercultural communication in bridging up different cultures, and narrowing down the existing differences. Whether in business, communication, or education, interculturality has become indispensable. Interculturality is one of the key concepts in contemporary education, as part of a wider debate on globalization and regarding its impact on society and education, in a widely mobile world. The importance of promoting interculturality in the foreign language classroom has been recognized worldwide, Algeria is no exception.

1. Background of the Study

In today's educational research, intercultural communication is undoubtedly one of the most crucial elements in foreign language learning and teaching. Thus English as foreign language (EFL) learners' awareness, sensitivity, and adroitness toward the differences and similarities between their own culture and the target one should be cultivated, especially in the foreign language context where English might be needed for purposes rather than pedagogical ones. Intercultural awareness is one of the key elements that allow EFL learners to recognize the differences and similarities between their own culture and the target or foreign one, thence helps them in developing their intercultural communicative competence as well, particularly in non-native context. Accordingly, raising awareness towards the target culture is one of the major interests of both teachers and learners.

2. Purpose of Study and Research Questions

With the ultimate objective of promoting interculturality in the foreign language classroom, and enhancing learners' intercultural communication skills, this study aims at investigating the intercultural communicative competence of first year students at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif 2 University. In order to reach this aim, the following research question is raised:

 Are first year students of English interculturally competent? i.e., are first year students aware, sensitive and effective intercultural communicators?

3. Literature Review

3.1. Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is defined by Chen & Starosta (1998) as "the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors that negotiate each other's cultural identity or identities in a culturally diverse environment" (cited in Penbek, Yurdakul&Cerit, 2009). In addition, Spitzberg(2000, p. 375) claims that "intercultural communication competence is entrancing "in behavior that is appropriate and effective in a given context". In other words, ICC means being able to interact effectively with people having different cultural backgrounds. Besides, Chen and Starosta (1996) state that intercultural competence contains three main aspects: first, the affective aspect named intercultural sensitivity, second, the cognitive aspect labeled intercultural awareness, and finally the behavioral aspect of intercultural competence entitled intercultural adroitness (cited in Chen &Starosta, 1998, p. 28).

Moreover, Scholars of intercultural communication explored ICC from different perspectives, for instance, Byram(1997) investigated ICC from the prospect of foreign language teaching. For him a person who owns a linguistic understanding along with a sociolinguistic or a socio-cultural one and who is capable of maintaining relations between his own and the other's system is a competent intercultural speaker (cited in Chen &Dai, 2014, p. 2). In the same vein, Wiseman (2002, p. 209) says that "appropriate communication entails the use of messages that are expected in a given context and actions that meet the expectations and demands of the situation" (cited in Ko, 2008). From the above definitions it can be concluded that ICC is the capacity to engage effectively in an intercultural interaction.

3.2. Models of ICC

Different scholars have developed many models to assess ICC, for instance Byram's model of ICC and Chen &Starosta's model of ICC.

3.2.1 Byram's Model of ICC

According to Lange (2011), Hymes and van Ek's model of communicative competence was the basis on which Byram's model was built. At first the author provides a detailed analysis on aspects (i.e. knowledge, skill and attitudes) affecting intercultural communication. In addition, Byram (1997) states that despite its complications, this suggested model should serve FL teachers within specific beliefs and perceptions of their role as instructors. Moreover, Stefanidou (2013) claims that "Byram's model is a systematic approach aiming at a comprehensive description of what intercultural communicative competence involves in order to facilitate its assessment" (p. 1). In other words, this model provides an explanation to what ICC is in order to assist the progress of its evaluation. According to Byram (1997), intercultural communication consists of three factors which are attitudes (i.e. only these that have to do with people from different cultures), knowledge (i.e. individuals' knowledge when interacting with people from others countries), and skills (i.e. the capacity of interpreting texts based on one's own understanding and of the other).

3.2.2. Chen and Starosta' s Model of ICC

Chen and Starosta (2008) established their own model of intercultural communicative competence. According to them, ICC consists of three dimensions: intercultural awareness (cognitive aspect), intercultural sensitivity (affective aspect), and intercultural adroitness (behavioral aspect). These three aspects together form what is labelled as ICC. The scholars start by the affective aspect of ICC, which is intercultural sensitivity. They say that interaction with others requires an individual to be sensitive and respects others' culture. In addition to sensitivity, the authors claim that a person who possesses a high level of intercultural awareness (cognitive aspect) is seen as an intercultural competent communicator. Moreover, they found that interaction with people from different cultures needs also what they call intercultural adroitness which is the behavioral aspect of ICC (cited in Jackson 2014, p. 311).In other words, a person who possesses intercultural sensitivity, awareness, and adroitness together is someone who possesses ICC.

3.3. Intercultural Speaker

According to Skopinskaja (2003) a person who is able to communicate with people from different cultures and accepts their viewpoints is considered as an intercultural speaker. In addition, Posada (2016) state that the intercultural speaker has the ability to engage in an interaction with his/her culturally distinct counterpart, putting aside any kind of stereotyping and taking into account language proficiency. Moreover, House (2007, p. 19) defines the intercultural speaker as "A person who has managed to settle for the In-between, who knows and can perform in both his and her native culture and in another one acquired at some later date".Furthermore, Kramsch (2002) refers to the intercultural speaker as an individual who owes sympathy and broad mindedness and capable of engaging in an interaction with different cultures paying attention to cultural variations; the intercultural speaker is someone who is aware of cultural differences and possesses intercultural competence that permits him/her to interact and communicate with people from different cultures respecting their cultural traits.

3.4. Intercultural Awareness Assessment

Chen and Starosta (1998) state "Although a thorough literature review shows that presently there is no instrument used to directly measure intercultural awareness in the field, there are measurements developed to assess our understanding of the basic factual information of the culture and cultural values" (p. 45,46). Though it is claimed that there is no direct tool to measure IA, some measurements can be used to assess it.

3.4.1. Kitao's Test of American Culture

Kitao (1981) proposed a test to particularly measure informants' understanding of the Americans' cultural characteristics. It is a test of 100 multiple choices items dealing with 49 diverse areas of Americans culture. This test was designed specifically for Americans' culture (Chen &Starosta, 1998)

3.4.2 Harris and Moran's Pre-deployment Area Questionnaire

Harris and Moran (1989) developed a questionnaire of a ninety two (92) items. It is a "yes"

"no" items questionnaire established to assist managers who are willing to travel abroad. It aims at making the cultural aspects of the country being visited well known to managers and aids them to become more familiar within these aspects. These items were designed to reverse the cultural features in relation to business communication (Chen &Starosta, 1998).

3.4.3 Benett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Benett (1993) suggested a model for cultural learning and intercultural training that provides an idea about how to acquire or improve intercultural awareness. This model consists of five stages from denial to adaptation. These stages are devised into two categories: ethnocentric (one's culture regarded as the best one) and ethno relative (one's culture is equal to other's culture). This model was developed to assess people's attitudes and behaviors towards people having distinct culture. (Hoven, 2003)

3.4.4. Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

Chen and Starosta (1998) developed the intercultural sensitivity scale .According to Aydoğan and Akbarov(2014) the ISS is a five-point Likert scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The ISS consists of 24 items divided into five dimensions which are: Interaction engagement items (1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23 and 24), Respect for cultural differences items (2, 7, 8, 16, 18 and 20), Interaction Confidence items (3, 4, 5, 6 and 10; α), Interaction enjoyment items (9, 12 and 15), and Interaction attentiveness items (14, 17 and 19). The first dimension which is interaction engagement deals with the feelings of informants when engaging in intercultural interplay. The second one is respect for cultural differences. It is related to the participants' tolerance and orientation towards the people's culture and thoughts. The third is interaction confidence. It has to do with the participants' level of confidence in an intercultural context. The fourth dimension is interaction enjoyment. This dimension is concerned with the participants' responses, which can be positive or negative towards interacting with people from different cultures. The last one, which is interaction attentiveness, has to do with the exertions

the participants make to comprehend what is going on in intercultural communication (Hou2010, p. 327). Items 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20, and 22 were reverse-coded before summing the 24 items

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Exploratory Research Design

Since the aim of this study is to investigate the learners' intercultural communicative competence, this work opts for an exploratory design. McNabb (2002) describes exploratory studies as "small-sample designs used primarily for gaining insights and ideas about research problems and the variables and issues associated with those problems" (p. 96). The current study opted for exploratory research for its numerous advantages; for instance, it provides a high amount of flexibility and discloses the limitations of a setting where barriers, obstacles, and threats are expected to lie (Malczewska-Webb, 2014). In other words, this exploratory research is conducted to help the investigator gains deep understanding about the problem and insights about the issues at hand.

4.2. Case Study Design

The type for this research is a case study. In his definition of a case study Simons (2009) states " case study is a study of the singular, the particular, the unique" (p. 3). In other words, case study research investigates a specific phenomenon in a particular context. Discussing some of the case study's advantages, Dörnyei (2007)states that case studies provide a good understanding that no method can offer and permit the investigator to explore the way a couple of conditions meet to form the surrounding environment. Another advantage provided by the author is that a case study is regarded as one of the most important methods for gaining deep insights about a social phenomenon rooted within a cultural setting. This research type is appropriate for this work, since the researcher intends to investigate the EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence. The case study of this research is First year LMD English students at the University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif 2, Department of English language and literature.

4.3 Research Participants

The population of this study is first year LMD students of the University Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif 2, Department of English language and literature with a total number of 802 students. 200 students were conveniently selected to be the sample of this study. The reason behind choosing this sample is that first year student are learning English as a specialty for the first time, and raising learners' awareness towards the target culture should start from the beginning. In other words, first year English students are beginners and they are learning English as a foreign language which means they do not need English only for the sake of language skills, grammar, and vocabulary they may need it to communicate with people having different cultures, and to communicate effectively, learners should be aware and more open-minded toward people from different cultures.

4.5 Research Tools

For this study, the instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire, composed of three scales: intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural adroitness. The tool was pilot tested before the final administration.

4.5.1. The Questionnaire

In order to test students' Intercultural in order to test the students' Intercultural communicative competence, the model of Chen &Starosta (2000) was employed. It contains three scales: Intercultural awareness scale, intercultural Sensitivity Scale, and intercultural adroitness scale. The whole test contains of 64 items was administered to two hundred (200) participants, which is the fifth of the population (802 students during the academic year 2017).

4.5.2. Piloting the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was pilot tested with fifteen (15) students. By doing so, some modifications were taken to ascertain the clarity of the items. As an illustration, the word "culturally-distinct counterpart" was turned into "people from different culture". Besides, the word "observant" was evolved to "pay attention" to avoid any kind of ambiguity. The time allocated for answering the questionnaire shifted from 20 to 30 minutes.

4.6. Data Analysis Procedures

After the process of data gathering, the next step is the analysis of data in order to answer the research questions raised earlier. This work made use of a questionnaire. The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed through the SPSS software.

5. Analysis and Interpretation of Students' Questionnaire

Two hundred (200) copies were distributed to two hundred (200) first year students; the response rate was 100 %. The data obtained through the questionnaire were analyzed using the SPSS software and then interpreted. The outcomes of this tool answered the research question raised in this study…

5.1. Analysis of the Questionnaire

5.1.1 Analysis of Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)

The analysis of the ISS' items will provide an understanding of the participants' attitudes, reactions, responses and particularly opinions and thoughts about people from different cultures.

1: Students' Interaction Enjoyment.

Item one investigated the extent to which the participants enjoy interacting with their culturally distinct counterpart; the results indicate that 89 (44.5%) out of 200 participants "strongly agree" with the statement. The participants who answered by "agree" represent 45.5% (91) of the whole sample which is approximately equivalent to half of the participants. This implies that the majority of the participants enjoy engaging in an interaction with people from different cultures. On the other hand, 11 participants out of 200 (5.5%) were "uncertain". The remaining 9 (4.5%) participants answered that they "disagree".

2: Students' Opinions towards People from Different Cultures

After analyzing the responses obtained from item 2, it seems that the majority of the participants under study, representing 34.5% of the entire sample, disagreed with the statement "I think people from different cultures are narrow-minded". It is

remarkable that a big number of participants, 27%, were "uncertain" about their opinions. The remaining rates represent 20% for "strongly disagree", 16% for "agree", and 2.5% for "strongly agree".

3: Confidence in interacting with people from different cultures.

Concerning this item, the majority of the participants answered that they "agree", representing 44.5% of the sample. This demonstrates that most of the participants have a sense of confidence when interacting with their culturally distinct counterpart. Next are the participants who replied that they are "uncertain", with a percentage of 22.5%, followed by the participants who answered that they "strongly agree" (21%). The rest of the participants' answers were ranged between "disagree" (7.5%), and "strongly disagree" (4.5%)..

4: Students' Attitudes of Talking in Front of People from Different Cultures.

For this item, 42 (21%) answered that they"strongly agree", when 89 of the participants, 44.5% of the sample, said that they "agree". This confirms that the extreme majority of the participants face difficulties when talking in front of their culturally distinct counterpart. On the other hand, 45 participants, representing 22.5%, were "uncertain". 15 out of 200 participants responded that they"disagree" (7.5%), and the few remaining participants, 4.5% of the sample, claimed that they "strongly disagree" with the statement; that is to say they faced no difficulties when talking in front of people from different cultures.

5: Ability to interact with People from Different Cultures.

Among the 200 participants, 31 (15.5%) answered that they "strongly agree"; 51 of the participants, 25.5%, replied that they "agree". On the other hand, the majority of the students, 41.5% of the sample, were "uncertain" whether they always know what to say when communicating with their culturally distinct counterpart. 11.5% of the participants answered that they "disagree", and the remaining 6% of the participants responded that they "strongly disagree".

6: Students' Sociability when Interacting with People from Different Cultures.

Concerning item six, the majority of the participants replied that they "agree", 45% of the sample, when 20.5% answered that they "strongly agree". This indicates that the majority of the participants have a sense of sociability when communicating with their culturally distinct counterpart. On the other hand, 22% of participants were "uncertain", and the remaining participants' answers ranged between "disagree" (8%) and "4.5%strongly disagree".

7: Attitudes of Being with People from Different Cultures

To know about the participants' likelihood of being with people from different cultures, item seven was used. As presented in table7, the participants who replied that they "strongly disagree" constitute the highest percentage (44.50%). The next highest percentage is attributed to the participants who answered that they "disagree" (33.5%). This implies that the majority of the participants like being with people having different cultures. On the other hand, 11% of the participants were "uncertain", when 6% of the participants opted for "agree", and the rest of the participants, 5%, answered that they "strongly agree".

8: Respecting the Values of People from Different Cultures.

To know whether the participants respect the values of their culturally distinct counterpart, item eight was considered. From the answers, 104 out of 200 participants answered that they "strongly agree" which represents the highest percentage of the whole sample (52%). Then, the participants who answered that they "agree" represent 30.5%. This shows that the majority of the participants respect the values of people from different culture. At the other end, 10.5% of the participants were "uncertain", and the remaining participants' answers were between "disagree" (3.5%) and "strongly disagree" (3.5%).

9: Students' Confusion when Interacting with People from Different Cultures.

As shown in table 7, 77 out of 200 participants, performing 38.5% were "uncertain"

about their answers. This indicates that most of participants doubt whether they get confused or not when interacting with their culturally distinct counterpart, when 25% answered that they "disagree". 42 participants, introducing 21% of the entire sample replied that they "agree". The Answers of the remaining participants were ranged between "strongly agree" (8.5%) and "strongly disagree" (7%).

10: Students Confidence towards Interacting with People from Different Cultures

Regarding this item, 87 out of 200 participants, performing 43% agreed with the statement "I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures", followed by 25 % which represents quarter of participants answered that they "strongly agree". This implies that the majority of participants possess a sense of confidence during their interplay with people from different culture. Then, 33 of participants were "uncertain" (16.5%), while 20 of them said "disagree" (10%), and the few remaining participants said "strongly disagree" (5%).

11: Waiting before Forming an Impression about People from Different Culture.

The results of this item have shown that 30 (15%) out of 200 participants answered that they "strongly agree". 62 participants (31%) replied that they "agree", while 84 (42%) of the participants were "uncertain". 17 (8.5%) out of 200 participants answered that they "disagree", and the remaining 7 (3.5%) participants answered that they "strongly disagree". This indicates that the biggest part of the participants were uncertain about whether they wait or not before forming impressions about their culturally distinct counterpart.

12: Students' Discouragement of Being with People from Different Cultures

After analyzing the answers obtained through this item, 31% of the participants under study answered that they "disagree" which means that the participants do not have a feeling of discouragement when they are placed with people having different cultures. Then there are the participants who claimed that they are "uncertain" (22.5%). 21,5% of participants replied that they "agree", followed by

35 out of the 200 participants (17.5%) who responded that they "strongly disagree". The few remaining participants (7.5%) wrote that they "strongly agree".

13: Students' Open-Mindness towards People from Different Cultures.

Table2 displays the participants' open-mindedness towards people from different cultures. It indicates that 37.5% of the participants responded that they "strongly agree", while 85 participants, representing 42.5%, answered that they "agree" which confirms that the big majority of the participants are open minded towards people from different cultures. On the other hand, 25 participants (12.5%), wrote that they are "uncertain", when 13. participants (6.5%) replied that they "disagree", and only 2 participants (1%) answered that they "strongly disagree". This implies that less than a quarter of the participants are not open-minded towards people from different cultures.

14: Paying Attention when Interacting with People from Different Cultures

Item fourteen was considered to determine whether the participants pay attention when interacting with their culturally distinct counterparts. As shown in the table above, the participants who answered that they "agree" constitute the biggest percentage (41.5%). Then there are the participants who wrote "strongly agree", 30.5%. This shows that the majority of the participants pay attention when interacting with people having different cultures for 17% of the participants was "uncertain", and a minority of them chose to answer that they "disagree"

15: Feeling Useless when Interacting with People from Different Cultures.

Regarding this item, 29% of the participants claimed that they were "uncertain" about their feelings, 54 participants, and 27%, stated that they disagreed with that claim. While 24% of the entire sample strongly disagreed, 27 participants, 13.5%, agreed within the statement. The rest of the participants, 6.5% of the sample, answered that they "strongly agree".

16: Respecting the Behaviors of People from Different Cultures

As shown in table 16, 39% of the participants "strongly agree" and the participants who answered that they "agree" represent the highest percentage of the sample (40%). This signifies that over half of the participants respect the way others behave. 31 out of 200 participants (15.5%) replied that they are "uncertain", while 9 participants (4.5%) wrote that they disagree, and only 2 out of 200 participants (1%) answered that they "strongly disagree".

17: Obtaining Information when Interacting with People from Different Cultures

As shown in table3, the statement "I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures" recorded the biggest percentage of 44% on the category "strongly agree" followed by participants who answered that they "agree",36% of the sample. On the other hand, 13% of the participants were "uncertain". 10 participants with a percentage of 5% replied that they "disagree", and only 2% of the whole sample wrote that they"strongly disagree".

18: Students' Acceptance of People from Different Cultures' Opinions

Regarding the results obtained from item 18, it seems that the highest percentage (45%) was achieved by the participants who replied that they "disagree", followed by the participants who answered that they "strongly disagree" (31.5%) . This reveals that the majority of the participants accept their culturally distinct counterpart's opinions. The remaining participants' answers fall into three categories, "uncertain" (11.5%), "strongly agree" (6.5%), and "agree" (5.5%).

19: Students' Sensitivity of People from Different Cultures' Subtle Meanings.

To see whether the participants are sensitive toward their culturally distinct counterpart's subtle meanings, item nineteen was presented. The participants who answered that they are "uncertain" marked the highest percentage (49%). This means that approximately half of the participants were not sure about their reactions. 39 (19.5%) out of the 200 participants replied that they "agree", while35 (17.5%) of the participants disagreed with the statement. The responses of the remaining participants fall into two categories: "strongly agree" (6.5%) and "strongly disagree" (7.5%).

20: Students' Opinions on their Culture.

For this item, as shown in table 16, the highest percentage went for participants who responded that they "disagree" (28%). This indicates that the majority of the participants do not regard their culture as the best on, then the participants who were "uncertain" recording a remarkable percentage of 24% of the entire sample. Next in order are the participants who wrote that they "strongly agree", 17.5%. The remaining participants' answers come into two categories: "strongly disagree" (16%), and "agree" (14.5%).

21: Students' Responses to People from Different Cultures.

For this item, 21% of participants answered that they "strongly agree", followed by 83 participants saying that they "agree", which represent a considerable percentage of 41%. This means that more than half of the participants often award their culturally distinct counterpart positive responses during their interplay. 43 participants, 21.50%, were "uncertain", 9% of participants said that they "disagree", and the remaining 14 participants, 7%, of the sample answered that they "strongly disagree".

22: Avoiding Situations where Dealing with People from Different Cultures Avoiding Situations where Dealing with People from Different Cultures.

Considering the answers to this item, 10 out of the 200 participants answered that they "strongly agree", while46 of the sample agreed to the statement. On the other hand, 68 out of the 200 participants responded that they are "uncertain", followed by 53 of the participants who wrote that they "disagree", and the remaining 23 participants answered that they "strongly disagree". This entails that the majority of the participants were not sure whether they avoid or not situations where they have to deal with people from different cultures.

23: Students Showing Verbal and Nonverbal Understanding.

As presented in table 9, 44 (22%) out of 200 participants answered that they "strongly agree", when 72 (36%) replied that they "agree". 64 (32%) of participants responded that they are "uncertain", whereas 11 (5.5%) out of 200 participants answered that they "disagree", and only 9 (4.5%) out of 200 participants said "strongly disagree". This indicates that the majority of the participants show their cultural distinct counterpart their understanding either through verbal or nonverbal cues, when in fact a considerable number of participants were uncertain.

24: Students' Enjoyment of Cultural Differences

From the results shown in table 4, it seems that the statement "I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between people from different cultures and me" recorded a highest percentage of 37.5% of those who "strongly agree", followed by the participants who replied that they "agree", 37%. This means that the participants have a feeling of enjoyment towards the differences between them and their culturally distinct counterpart. By contrast, 19% of the entire sample were "uncertain", and the remaining participants' answers ranged between "disagree" (5%) and "strongly disagree" (1.5%).

5.1.2 Summary of ISS Items' Analysis Findings

The questionnaire was conducted to measure the students' level of intercultural awareness. A thorough analysis of the above tables indicates the degree to which the students' reactions, opinions, and attitudes are positive or negative towards people from different cultures. From the results it can be said that the participants differ in their thoughts and attitudes when it comes to their culturally distinct counterpart. Some of them enjoy interacting with people from different cultures, whereas others do not really appreciate this. Moving to respect of others' cultural values, norms and behaviors, the majority of the participants do respect other people's culture and way of living. In addition to respecting others' culture, most of the participants believe that they are self-confident when communicating with people having a distinct culture. What was remarkable is that the participants were doubtful about the extent to which they may be sensitive to their culturally distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during an intercultural interplay. Moreover, the majority of the participants show a kind of confusion at the actual time of communication with people from different culture. The findings entail that the participants' attitudes and beliefs towards people having distinct culture are positive to a large extent. However, the participants most of the time showed a sense of uncertainty, particularly for the items that are directly related to the cognitive aspect of ICC, i.e., the intercultural awareness toward people from different cultures.

5.2 Factor Analysis of ISS' Items

It is quite important to look at the means and standard deviations of the ISS' items to have a good understanding of the study's findings. "While means show respondents' consensus around an answer for an item, standard deviations show respondents' consensus around the actual item" (Ambayec2011, p. 47). For this study, respect for cultural differences items marked the highest mean (M= 3.8483, SD= .63782), followed by interaction engagements items (M=3.7586, SD= .48448). The third highest mean went for interaction attentiveness items (M=3.6767, SD=.59956). After that, there came the interaction confidence items (M=3.5350, SD=.64221). Finally, there are the interaction enjoyment items (M=3.2633, SD=.79332). The biggest part of the Participants show respect for the cultural differences of other people; they would engage in interactions with people from different cultures, but they show uncertainty of whether they would enjoy it or not. The results also indicate that uncertainty was dominant in most of the items related to interaction confidence.

5.3 Descriptive Statistics of Intercultural Awareness' Items

Table 7 provides the results of the analysis of the Intercultural awareness scale. Item 14 recorded the highest mean (M= 3.8800, SD= 1.03971) , followed by item 2 (M= 3.5350, SD= 1.06038). Next in order, item 5 (M= 3.3300, SD= 1.06148). After that comes item 20 (M= 3.1050, SD= 1.32770).

Finally, there is item 9 (M= 3.0100, SD= 1.04179). The scale's results indicate that the majority of the participants seem to be ignorant of some the culturally distinct features of the target culture's native speakers, which may lead to a misunderstanding during the interaction with this people. It is also worth stating that the results revealed that the majority of the participants are uncertain in answering most of the items related to social and cultural values of the American society; they seem to be reluctant also to express judgment on how Americans would behave in certain situations. The overall analysis of the Intercultural awareness scale indicates a lower awareness of the participants regarding the people from different culture, their values, they cultural features and behaviors.

6. Interpretation of the Questionnaire's Findings

6.1 Interaction Engagement Items (1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23, and 24)

The findings regarding this construct that is concerned with the feelings of participants when engaging in intercultural communication (Hou 2010) indicate that the majority of the participants show positive attitudes or feelings towards their culturally distinct counterpart during their interplay. This is maybe due to the fact that the participants probably possess a considerable amount of information that enables them to interact with people having different cultures, or perhaps liking the difference between their own culture and that of others brings a sense of enjoyment among them. Though a considerable number of participants were uncertain about their attitudes, the majority of the participants had positive attitudes.

6.2 Respect for Cultural Differences Items (2, 7, 8, 16, 18, and 20)

For this dimension, the majority of the participants asserted that they respect the values, differences, and behaviors of people from different cultures. This may come into light to indicate that either the participants have an ethno relative view, considering others' culture as important as their own, or the participants are aware of the fact that people perceive things in different ways because of

many reasons, and thus they avoid misinterpretations or misunderstanding. As Pilhofer (2011) states "miscommunication arises if one is unaware of cultural differences and therefore perceives the counterpart's perspective to be similar to her/his own" (p. 5).

6.3 Interaction Confidence Items (3, 4, 5, 6, and 10)

Hou (2010) states that the interaction confidence dimension is related to the participants' level of confidence in an intercultural context. Concerning this study, though the participants' answers to item five (5) shows a high degree of uncertainty, there is a major accord among them in that they maintain a reasonable degree of confidence when interacting with their culturally distinct counterpart. This may lead us to claim that the participants possess a hunk of data about people from different cultures that gives rise to a sense of confidence among them to engage in interplay with people having different cultures.

6.4 Interaction Enjoyment Items (9, 12, and 15)

The Interaction enjoyment factor is concerned with the participants' responses which can be positive or negative towards interacting with people from different cultures (Hou 2010). With regard to the results of these items, the biggest number of the participants shows a sense of uncertainty concerning their feelings when put in situations which require interaction with their culturally distinct counterpart. This might be related to the lack of knowledge about others' culture or because the participants do not appreciate the differences between their culture and that of other people, which in turn results in a feeling of discomfort, discouragement, and even uselessness.

6.5 Interaction Attentiveness Items (14, 17, and 19)

Though the results obtained from item 19 indicate a high degree of uncertainty, the majority of the participants show people from different cultures their understanding during their interplay. This may appear to show that the participants strive to comprehend what their culturally distinct counterpart state at the time of interaction, possibly

because they are attentive to the significance of diverse perspectives, which broaden their horizon about others' culture.

6.6 Intercultural Awareness Items (2, 5, 9, 14, 20)

Regarding the participants' level of intercultural awareness, the majority of the participants show a sense of uncertainty; this can be interpreted as having a low level of intercultural awareness. Being unaware of the differences and similarities between their culture and the authors' cultures may be because of the fact that the participants are not exposed to real life situations and activities that simulate the real context of the foreign culture through which they can observe others' behaviors, values, and traditions. This, in turn, aids in raising their awareness. In this context, Byram (1997) claims that besides teaching learners how to communicate, foreign language courses should also expose them to another culture and make them perceive it in its own community.

Conclusion

This study aimed at examining first year EFL students' intercultural communicative competence. The data obtained through the questionnaire revealed that the majority of the students were uncertain about their responses and opinions toward their culturally distinct counterpart. This can be explained by the fact that students have somehow a low level of awareness. Though a considerable number of students show through their answers that they possess positive attitudes, reactions, and understanding toward people from different cultures, most of them were uncertain. Therefore the majority of the students may be considered as being interculturally unaware. Regarding intercultural sensitivity, the analysis of the data shows that the majority of the students show a readiness for interaction with people from different cultures; they stated that they would be more engaged in interactions with them; this is though a considerable number of students expressed their limited confidence and enjoyment of the interaction; this

would be interpreted in relation to their low intercultural awareness. The students also revealed high attentiveness and interest in interaction with people from different cultures. These findings confirm the finding of the intercultural adroitness scale, where the majority of the students showed a limited behavioral flexibility in interaction with culturally different counterparts, and exhibited also a low interaction relaxation level, and management. Nonetheless, the findings revealed a high level of respect by the students toward their interacting partners which confirms the findings of the intercultural sensitivity scale. In addition to this, the majority of the students as well as the mean indicated a high level of identity management.

7. Recommendations and Pedagogical Implications

The outcomes of the present study trigger the need for many pedagogical implications to be drawn. At first, the policy makers and course designers should implement a course or a module for intercultural communication studies that highlights the significance of interculturality and intercultural awareness in foreign language teaching and learning as there is a positive relation between both of them (Van Ek and Trim 1991). Hence a course of this type should be designed for first year EFL learners as they are beginners; the exposure to such notions at an early stage will have the best results in cultivating the learners' intercultural communicative competence. The analysis, interpretation, and discussion of data and the literature review have provided an answer to the research question. Though the participants showed positive attitudes toward people from different cultures, the findings revealed that they generally were uncertain, which indicates their level of intercultural awareness needs improvement. Accordingly, teachers of English should consider integrating all the elements of the target culture in their classrooms, as this exposure to the cultural elements will be fruitful in raising the learners' awareness, sensitivity, and prepare them to become more effective intercultural communicators.

Tables: (all tables below are designed by the researcher herself)
Table N° 1: Interaction Engagement

	Interaction Engagement						
	Iterm1	Item 11	Item 13	Item 21	Item 22	Item 23	Item 24
SA	89	30	75	42	10	44	75
A	91	62	85	83	46	72	74
Un	11	84	25	43	68	64	38
D	9	17	13	18	53	11	10
SD	0	7	2	14	23	9	3
Total	200	200	200	200	200	200	200

Reference: (made by the researcher)
Table N° 2: Respect for Cultural Differences

	Respect for Cultural Differences					
	Item 2	Item 7	Item 8	Item 16	Item 18	Item 20
SA	5	10	104	78	13	35
A	32	12	61	80	39	29
Un	54	22	21	31	98	48
D	69	67	7	9	35	56
SD	40	89	7	2	15	32
Total	200	200	200	200	200	200

Reference: (made by the researcher)

Table N° 3: Interaction Confidence

	Interaction Confidence			
	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6
SA	46	42	31	41
A	85	89	51	91
Un	35	45	83	44
D	30	15	23	16
SD	4	9	12	8
Total	200	200	200	200

Reference: (made by the researcher)

Table N°4: Interaction Enjoyment

	Interaction Enjoyment		
	Item 9	Item 12	Item 15
SA	17	15	13
A	42	43	27
Un	77	45	58
D	50	62	54
SD	14	35	48
Total	200	200	200

Reference: (made by the researcher)

Table N° 5: Interaction Attentiveness

	Interaction Attentiveness		
	Item 14	Item 17	Item 19
SA	61	88	13
A	83	72	39
Un	34	26	98
D	15	10	35
SD	7	4	15
Total	200	200	200

Reference: (made by the researcher)

Table N° 6: Descriptive Statistics of ISS' Items

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Interaction engagement items	200	3,7586	,48448
Respect for cultural differences	200	3,8483	,63782
Interaction confidence items	200	3,5350	,64221
Interaction enjoyment items	200	3,2633	,79332
Interaction attentiveness items	200	3,6767	,59956
TOTAL	200	3,6623	,40551

Reference: (made by the researcher)

Table 7: Students' Level of Intercultural Awareness

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
Item 2	3,5350	1,06038
Item 5	3,3300	1,06148
Item 9	3,0100	1,04179
Item 14	3,8800	1,03971
Item 20	3,1050	1,32770

Reference: (made by the researcher)

Table 8: Students' Level of Intercultural Adroitness Scale

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Behavioral Flexibility	200	2,7586	,46352
Interaction Relaxation	200	2,8483	,59871
Interacting Respect	200	3,8390	,63358
Message skills items	200	2,2633	,72888
Identity Maintenance items	200	3,9767	,69876
Interaction Management	200	2,9941	,45332
TOTAL	200	3,123	,50228

Reference: (made by the researcher)

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