

The Road to Understanding Intercultural Sensitivity in English Language Teaching (ELT) Pre-existing Frames for Intercultural Sensitivity

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Abstract

This study explored intercultural sensitivity in a natural English teaching environment in a Saudi Arabian university. A total of nineteen expatriate teachers took part in this case study. Descriptive qualitative data were generated through focus group discussions, interviews, observations and diary entries. Secondary data as well as anecdotal data were also used to describe the context of the study. The data showed that the context plays a major part in shaping the contextual frame of teaching and that all teachers bring to their work pre-existing biographical frames of reference for intercultural sensitivity. When these two relatively static frames converge in the ELT context, they essentially create a circumstance of discordance.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, English Language Teaching (ELT), intercultural communication, intercultural sensitivity, TESOL, worldview

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Introduction

There is a common belief among educators that language learning is indeed culture learning. Due to the importance of this intricate relationship (Buttjes 1990; Kramsch 1993), the pedagogical implications are challenging and teachers need to be both cognisant of their own intercultural competencies and considerate of their culturally heterogeneous group of learners. In other words, there is a need for teachers to be cognisant of their intercultural sensitivity with regard to teaching in general and concerning culture teaching more specifically. Intercultural sensitivity, therefore, becomes a core cognitive, behavioural and affective characteristic required by teachers.

Without delving into the complications the literature shows with culture as a term, for the purposes of this paper, I accept Moran's (2001) conceptualisation of culture as:

the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social contexts (p. 24).

This definition includes the distinction made between big *C* culture (products) and little *c* culture (perspectives and practices) based on Stempleski and Tomalin's (1993) report on the ELT perspective by Robinson (1985).

In addition, to reduce further complications with another term for which there are many definitions, intercultural sensitivity is defined, based on Bennett's (1993) conceptualisation of it, as a continuum of the awareness, understanding, and response that a person has towards people of other cultures. On account of this, the teachers' intercultural sensitivity frame denotes the frame that shapes their potential to notice and make sense of cues in the teaching context, and respond appropriately to them.

It is important to note here that culture is learnt through a process called enculturation, which is the process of becoming socialised into one's culture from childhood (DeCapua & Wintergerst 2004, p. 13) and includes the development of cognitive skills and patterns of thinking (Schütz 2004). The question of context is therefore particularly integral to the development of a teacher's culture, which makes it the basis required for any investigation into the relationship intercultural sensitivity has with ELT at any teaching context. As Duff and Uchida (1997) noted:

teachers' sociocultural perceptions, identities, roles, and images have an established biographical and professional basis but at the same time are subject to change in response to unexpected questions/problems or critical incidents that arise in each classroom context as the curriculum is lived out (p. 473).

This paper will look at what I have termed 'pre-existing frames' for intercultural sensitivity, the first of which relates to the context of ELT which is the context that teachers must be accountable to and which is widely recognised to regulate their teaching. The second frame is derived from teachers' own biographies which include their culture, education and teaching experience. This analysis of contextual and biographical frames drew secondary data from literature about Saudi Arabia and its ELT context, including some primary anecdotal data about the institution (X University hereon) of my case study, as well as primary data from the biographical survey and various interviews and observations of teachers who took part and given pseudonyms in this study.

Context of English language teaching (ELT) as a frame for intercultural sensitivity***Societal context***

I have acknowledged that culture is a complex term. Thus, to make our discussion less problematic, culture here will be discussed in terms of the dominant culture found in each society and not the smaller subcultures based on shared interests or particular orientations that groups of people may have. Within this perspective, Hofstede (2005), identified five cultural dimensions that are an imprint on people based on their cultures. These are:

- *Individualism/collectivism*– a distinction that explains societies whose ties between individuals are either loose (individualistic as in Australia and the US) or tight (collectivistic as in Japan and China).
- *Power distance*– the degree of equality, or lack of, among individuals holding different status in the society, illustrated, for example, in the degree of criticism a subordinate can/cannot make of their superior in different societies.
- *Uncertainty avoidance*– how people deal with uncertainty and ambiguity, illustrated by situations where people in some societies prefer clear instructions to follow while people in others can tolerate ambiguity and use their own initiative with instructions.
- *Masculinity/femininity*– how roles of the different genders are distributed in societies, for example, some societies may see a woman as a home person while in others she is a career person.
- *Time orientation*– the degree individuals in societies value long-term or short-term time orientations.

An important feature of culture to note for any context of ELT is whether it operates as more individualistic or collective. The basic difference between an individualist society and a collectivist one relates to where the emphasis on self is. In individualist societies, emphasis is on the individual, and relationships with others are loose. People in such societies 'are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contacts they have established with others' (Triandis 1995, p. 2). In collectivist societies, however, emphasis is on the group and the interest of the group as a whole. People are closely tied and family oriented; they see themselves as part of one or more groups (Triandis 1995, p. 2.). An example of such a society is Saudi Arabia, the context for my study. To detail, Saudi Arabia is a country ruled by a monarchy founded in 1932 by King Al-Saud, and is tribally oriented (Haniffa & Hudaib 2007, p. 185). The country's constitution is based on the Koran. The official language is Arabic and the official religion is Islam. These characteristics of a society are important to identify as they are core to the makeup of the fabric of the context of teaching for which teachers coming from abroad will need to be aware and work within those constraints which the next section will detail.

Educational context

The broader contextual features of a society no doubt influence education and the context of teaching. In the study I carried out in Saudi Arabia (Etri 2012), there was ample evidence to show that the country's official religion, Islam, had a particularly strong influence on education. Before the development of the modern Saudi state, education was mainly provided in mosques by clerics and religious teachers through their *khuttab* (lessons/weekly addresses) and Koran recitation and memorisation circles. Education centred mostly on religion and the method of teaching was through rote memorisation (Hussain 2007, p. 11). Despite major developments in

the latter half of the twentieth century on education mainly due to the wealth gained from oil discovery and export revenue, religion has played a cardinal role in shaping Saudi Arabia's present educational system as educational institutions continue to be segregated upholding an ingrained Islamic value. A main reason for that is societal since the country's constitution is entirely the Koran and Islamic scripture found in Prophet Muhammad's example. I would suggest that such levels of cultural and more specifically, religious influence on education are likely to be significantly less when governments intentionally seek this limit by adopting non-religious values such as those found in secularism. To illustrate and compare to another Islamic country, in Turkey, headscarves for women, which are considered a symbol of faith, were banned since the 1980's in government institutions and universities. Quite recently however (2008), there has been a move to lift the ban for essentially the reason of upholding the freedom of religion principle as the government and Turkey's Constitutional Court continue to dispute its ban legality (Library of Congress, 2012). Such examples illustrate how the fabric and broader societal context has an influence on the context of education.

Summary of the context of English language teaching as a frame for intercultural sensitivity

For the expatriate English teacher who comes from abroad, teaching in a context like Saudi Arabia may indeed be a challenging experience. Advancing to a modern state after the discovery of oil has done little to change Saudi Arabian fabric as a contextual frame for intercultural sensitivity. These contextual characteristics are also reflected in X University, the site of my research; it is permeated by Islam and Arab culture. Saudi gender segregation laws are fully implemented by the university, which has separate campuses for males and females. It also supports a teacher-centred educational culture. Being a natural product of enculturation, the Saudi ELT context is undeniably an ethnocentric one. Knowledge of this contextual frame for the expatriate ELT teacher is vital since it will require teaching to be within its confines and, as Paige et al. (2003) affirm, teachers may be required to work in ethnocentric environments or be constrained by institutional and societal factors (p. 222). The degree to which these notable characteristics of the Saudi context of ELT are familiar and acceptable to foreign English language teachers is clearly likely to be a factor in their display of intercultural sensitivity. Just as likely to be a factor are the biographical frames of reference teachers bring with them to this unique context of teaching, which is the focus of the next section.

Teachers' biographical context as a frame for intercultural sensitivity

This section details the teachers' biographical frames of reference as another pre-existing frame for intercultural sensitivity. It begins with their countries of origin and their education. This is followed by a discussion about their teaching experiences in Saudi Arabia, co-educational teaching experience and intercultural experience. The teachers' relationship with students is then discussed and the section concludes with a discussion about their experience and educational preparation for teaching in Saudi Arabia.

Countries of origin

Teachers in my study came from a number of countries: the US, UK, Pakistan, Philippines, Jordan, Morocco, Malaysia and Sudan (see Appendix).

For some of these teachers, Saudi Arabia is the first country they have lived in outside their country. For others it is not; especially those who left their countries to study abroad. Nearly all of X University's English teachers are non-native speakers of English, that is, English is their second language. Teachers from India, the Philippines and Malaysia, experienced the use of English as an official second language, as is typical of such Outer Circle countries. The remaining teachers, apart from those from the US and the UK, were enculturated in Expanding Circle countries where English was taught as a foreign language (Kachru 1998 p. 93–94).

Worldview and religion

The way teachers see the world is based on the enculturation process they experienced in childhood and progressively throughout their lives, and this view is heavily influenced by religion (Samovar, Porter & McDaniel 2005, p. 4). Most scholars agree that religion is the most pervasive 'determinate of worldview' and that even secular people are influenced by old religious traditions (Samovar, Porter & McDaniel 2005, p. 4). Because Moslem teachers share the same religion as Saudis, their worldviews are similar. Moslem teachers felt a connection with the Saudi contextual frame, had similarities with how Saudis viewed the world, and were easily adaptable, 'I mean for me the basic bond is the same religion. I share the same religion with them' (Amjad), and:

As I said, because most of us come from Islamic background[s], so practically it's a done deal. We're not really going to change ... or introduce that much (Amir).

This case is similar to one found with Chinese students who studied in Singapore. Ward and Kennedy (1999) found that sociocultural adaptation problems decrease as a function of ethnic and cultural similarity (p. 667). Although the Moslem teachers had much in common with Saudi people, not all had the same absolute understanding of Islam as Saudi people, for example, Saeed's view about gender segregation, 'And that [gender segregation] is not related to Islam' (Saeed).

Nevertheless, Moslem teachers seemed to have a general connection with their Saudi counterparts, especially the ubiquitous key status of religion in Saudi Arabia; some Moslem teachers elucidated a similar status for their religion with their teaching:

I think as a Moslem, our religion has got ... a lot to do with ... culture. Our culture is driven by our religion. So, in my case my religion helps me teaching (Sohail).

Religion for some Moslem teachers not only influences their teaching, but is at the core of the language they produce as well, ' ... the language we produce actually reflects a worldview or culture' (Saeed). Such a view affirms the notion in the literature (Buttjes 1990; Byram 1994; Kramsch 1993) that language and culture cannot be separated and are in fact, dimensions of each other.

Although the literature demonstrates that teachers are not always conscious of the cultural messages they transmit in class (Kramsch 1993), some teachers seemed conscious of the influence their culture, and specifically their religion, had on their teaching, ' ... I use morals of

our own religion ... in class' (Sohail); 'And being a Moslem, we have to keep intact those particular moral aspects' (Maheer).

Education

Teachers' education levels in X University are generally high. X University has strict recruitment criteria and basically aims to fill teaching vacancies with teachers who have post-graduate qualifications. Table 1 shows that the majority of teachers (84%) had their Masters degrees; only one teacher had a PhD while the remaining teachers had a Bachelor degree and a Graduate Diploma.

Table 1 *Education levels*

Education	Number	Percentage
BA Gdip	2	11
Masters	16	84
PhD	1	5
Total	19	100

X University's recruitment policy accepts qualifications in teaching, and in English literature and linguistics as well. A number of the English staff had qualifications and experience in teaching English literature, '... we Pakistani, ... all three have got our Master's degrees in literature' (Sohail); 'Back in Pakistan ... I was teaching ... *Hemingway* [and] *the Sun also Rises*' (Maheer). Only a small number of teachers had post-graduate qualifications in ELT, '... (it) relates to something that I studied for my Masters ... called International English' (Saeed). Just under a third of the teachers had post-graduate qualifications in ELT. Most teachers who came from non-native English speaking countries were qualified in linguistics and English literature, while it seemed common with teachers who completed their post-graduate studies in the UK or US to specialise in ELT. Other teachers came with post-graduate qualifications in linguistics and translation.

Besides formal qualifications, some teachers had completed some training in intercultural education, '... I took a class in intercultural teaching' (Safia); '... we had similar courses from a multicultural education' (Dania). There were a number of teachers, especially those from the Indian subcontinent and North Africa, who spoke more than two languages; usually Pashtu in the subcontinent, and French in North Africa (see Etri, 2012). The majority of teachers, however, were bilingual and spoke a native language and English as their second language.

Teaching experience in Saudi Arabia

Most universities in Saudi Arabia contract foreign teaching staff for a minimum of two years; others set the minimum contract period to one year. This means that any teacher who taught in Saudi Arabia before moving to X University would have had a minimum of one year's

experience of English teaching in Saudi Arabia, assuming they met their contractual obligations. The majority of teachers, however, were fairly new to the Saudi ELT context; most had less than six-months experience. Table 2 shows the breakup of the total ELT experience in Saudi Arabia.

Table 2 *ELT Experience in Saudi Arabia*

Time	Less than 6 months	6 months to 2 years	2 years to 5 years	More than 5 years	Total
Number	7	2	6	4	19
Percentage	37	11	32	21	100

The advantages of having experience teaching in Saudi Arabia revolve around adaptation to its ELT context, which means having knowledge of the culture of education and the culture of Saudis in general, which as Hofstede (1986) maintains is core to developing intercultural sensitivity. Teachers with some experience in Saudi Arabia already come to X University with a biographical frame of reference influenced by, and with knowledge about, the general teaching context; a teaching context which may not be identical to their last, but in the same country bound by the same government, and religious laws and customs. Others, however, come with a biographical frame based on their native contexts, and hence Saudi Arabia is a whole new teaching context for them; they are still bound by their home customs and culture of education, and only starting to adapt to a new context. Thus, the Saudi ELT context is more challenging for these teachers because the cultural and educational values of experience, as Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) assert, are not universal and cannot simply be automatically transferred and assumed valid in other cultures and contexts.

Co-educational experience

Most of X University's English teachers were educated in co-educational institutions and taught in them as well, 'I have been teaching co-education in Pakistan for the last four years' (Nasreen); '... we had female teachers teaching us' (Sohail). None of these experiences, however, are possible in Saudi Arabia due to the country's segregation laws (explained earlier). Thus, teachers come to X University with extensive co-educational learning and teaching experiences, but are unable to capitalise on these skills in a gender-segregated setting. When asked whether teachers could experience possible problems teaching co-educational classes in Saudi Arabia, Jake viewed the question as a nonstarter, based on his biographical frame of reference, and was firmly opposed to the idea of segregation, '... our job is to teach both sexes equally. I don't think we should seek justification for segregation or sexism' (Jake).

Similar sentiments could be seen in the statements of Moslem teachers. It is worthwhile remembering that not all people of the Moslem faith adhere to the Islam understood and practiced in Saudi Arabia. Amir, for example, has a view that Islam permits co-education, 'I

don't see anything ... prohibited, [with] a male teaching a female' (Amir). This point illustrates that although Moslem teachers have an advantage because they share the same religion as Saudis, it does not mean their biographical frame of reference enculturated the same understanding of it. And whatever the notion of gender segregation in Islam is, Amir's understanding of it clearly does not entail the context of education.

Experience of curriculum and methodology

The biographies of teachers from Outer and Expanding Circle countries showed different experiences of curriculum and methodology to those from Inner Circle countries. Teachers who came from Outer and Expanding Circle countries seemed to rely on books to the extent that books were the syllabi, controlled by governments, and whose cultural contents were tailored to suit the culture of the local people, ' ... I remember from primary school for instance, everything is ... custom-made ... culturally' (Amir):

Even in my country, all the primary books ... have to be localised on the specific culture of the country because of the policy made by the government and I understand that for the tertiary (Suhaimi).

One difference in Suhaimi's case is that the books at the tertiary level were also restricted to the local culture. These circumstances were unlike other teachers' previous contexts, especially concerning English literature courses, which is in essence about learning English-associated cultures, ' ... I used to teach the students of literature [at] the masters level' (Maheer). Due to the absence of control of the cultural content of some teaching books, some teachers provided an account of the advent of culturally offensive material in their teaching, ' ... when you are teaching Hemingway you have to be careful about all that' (Maheer); ' ... in one of the units, there was ... mention of ... boys and girls dancing together and drinking ... I was confused whether I should do it or not' (Khan). Culturally offensive material found in teaching materials was not uncommon despite government control and the religiosity of certain communities. Control of such content meant teachers had to make pedagogical decisions to strike a balance between the books that constituted the syllabi, and degree of censorship:

in one ... important book I was confused whether I should do it or not! I talked to one of my seniors, and I consulted him ... because there were boys and girls sitting together ... my senior told me to skip the activity ... so I had to skip that (Khan).

The attitude towards culturally offensive material by Inner Circle English teachers markedly differs from that of Expanding and Outer Circle teachers. Based on their biographical frame of reference for intercultural sensitivity, there is no such thing as altogether offensive material and any assertion that there was could only be considered immaturity:

It is irrelevant if something is contrary to your beliefs. You're there to learn. Some things are different. You're here to learn about them. The world is not all like you. You learn about the differences in university. That's the point (Jake).

For some teachers, such negative views and practices towards foreign cultures were a cultural obligation. For others, they were not, especially at the university level where the concept of student maturity also plays a part.

Intercultural experience

Some teachers were fortunate to have had wide intercultural experiences, ‘I should call myself a little ... fortunate that I have a better chance to be in different places, Nigeria, Dubai, Sharjah ... Canada ... Oman’ (Zarina). Jake had overseas teaching experience in Korea, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates, and the Philippines, (Jake) while Saeed had taught in Spain, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, France, Italy, Portugal, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and the UK (Saeed). For many other teachers however, Saudi Arabia was their first teaching context outside their native country, ‘... when I was teaching, culture ... was ... not so much of an issue because I [was] teaching my own people’ (Suhaimi). Table 3 shows that over one third (37%) of teachers had no prior experience teaching overseas before coming to Saudi Arabia.

Table 3 *Experience outside native country*

	Number	Percentage
No experience	7	37
Experience	12	63
Total	19	100

An absence of foreign teaching experience did not necessarily denote that teachers had not previously interacted with culturally diverse people or had underdeveloped intercultural skills. Some teachers like Dania, despite Saudi Arabia being the first country she taught in outside the US, had previous intercultural experiences with large sub-cultural and minority groups in her country:

like in the States you have Latinos who even though they are amongst this culture of ours they really hold on to that identity ... They don’t assimilate so much that you can’t tell the difference. These are some of the only people who in America if everyone is speaking English, they will make you speak Spanish ... for me ... having lived around Arabs for so long [in the US] that I feel like I’m always conscious of certain things (Dania).

Other teachers explicitly had intercultural teaching experiences within their own countries, ‘... I have been teaching Saudi students in Pakistan’ (Maheer). Maheer was one of the more fortunate teachers who had specific exposure to Saudi students before coming to Saudi Arabia. Although the context of intercultural communication was in the context of teaching, he had also visited

Saudi Arabia previously for religious reasons, ‘And I have been here thrice before, once for *hajj* and twice for *umrah*’ (Maheer).

Amir echoes similar views about intercultural competence from his previous English learning experience, and has strong views about how experiences of a language context helps understand the language better:

I think culture ... [is] crucial ... to ... fully understand the language itself. And this comes from my own experience ... when ... I studied ... English prior to ... studying it in an English ... environment; it’s absolutely crucial that for you really to understand ... the language ... you have to ... understand the cultural elements (Amir).

Various studies show that the more interaction a person has with people of other cultures, the more competent they become when dealing with different people (Martin 1987; Ward & Kennedy 1999); they begin to develop skills of empathy, become well prepared for culture shock and the acceptance of differences, are open to learning about others, and are quick to adapt to their new contexts. Crucial to developing these skills, although not automatic (Halse 1999, p. 69; Nunan 2000, p. 140), is the experience of extensive periods of intercultural interaction, especially when an individual chooses this experience (Sowden 2007).

Relationship with students

Hofstede (2005) mentions that teachers from individualist societies tend to experience problems with students from collectivist societies who have different learning cultures, and where people are closely tied (Triandis 1995, p. 2). Except for the three native speakers, all teachers in this study came from collectivist societies (see Appendix). The biographical frame of reference held by some of these teachers saw the relationship between teacher and student as being similar to one tied by blood; a parental relationship, ‘... I ... definitely would have censored that ... considering her as my daughter’ (Maheer). Others had a more moral view of the status and relationship between teachers and students. Saeed confesses that it is not just language materials that are discussed in his classes, but other things relating to general life experiences, human development and maturity. Teaching to him encompasses more than just teaching the subject content, ‘Because I believe I’m not just a teacher, I’m also an educator’ (Saeed). Similarly, Susi believes teachers have more than a traditional chalk and talk role to play in their teaching, ‘And a teacher should be described as an ambassador of human values’ (Susi).

There are others, however, who see the respect of students not as the result of discovering the sincerity of the teacher, but as a response to the power of the teacher:

Everyone in my country Pakistan, they’re really respectful ... of the teacher. But, again, the reason for that can be because the teacher has a lot of power (Amjad).

This relationship sometimes resembles one that may be found in schools. Furthermore, Amir views parents as crucial for his relationship with his students. For example, he views parents as part of ensuring student progress, and teachers are therefore not enough, ‘... I contacted the parent because the student was doing so poorly and there was no chance for him to progress’

(Amir). Such level of care for the students was echoed by others whose previous experience was to organise special meetings among the teachers to tackle issues with students:

When we used to have meetings in Pakistan about our students, we used to discuss the same things about the students (like) not studying, not learning hard, not paying attention, not (being) interested (Amjad).

The biographical frame of these teachers places importance on the teacher in the learning process and reflects collectivist ideals. Teachers are viewed as solely responsible for curriculum development and students' education and progress; students seem absent from this equation.

Experience and educational preparation for teaching in Saudi Arabia

Making a shift from one's native country to a foreign one is a considerable change for a teacher: a change in culture, language, climate, pedagogies, and the whole context of teaching, calling for some kind of familiarisation process which could aid in reducing culture shock and allow smooth transition. Identifying some of the teachers' contact experience and educational preparation made before embarking on a minimum two-year contract with the university in Saudi Arabia, provides further details about their biographical frames of reference for intercultural sensitivity.

There were a number of teachers who had prior experiences with Saudi and Arab people. Some teachers had experience teaching Saudi students and as a result learnt a lot from them about their culture:

Saudi student[s] ... go to Pakistan and they study in Pakistani universities as well ... so to some extent, we also know about their own lifestyle and everything as well (Maheer).

It seemed common with the Moslem teachers from the Asian subcontinent that studying Islam and the Koran entailed studying Saudi culture as well. Sohail comments that studying about Saudi people is part of the religious study curricula found in Pakistan, '... we study a lot about them and here in our country ... we study Koran, we study the religious mythology and all that' (Sohail). Their biographical histories, which included knowledge and experience of learning about Saudi people, seemed to be sufficient for these teachers in terms of preparation for the Saudi context. Although other teachers did not have contact with Saudi people as such, nor formally learnt about them, they did teach people of similar Arab cultures, and also interacted with them back in their countries, 'Somehow I was mentally prepared because I taught like two years in Oman and I was exposed [to] ... some Arabs in Canada' (Zarina); 'having lived around Arabs for so long [in the US] ... I feel like I'm always conscious of certain things' (Dania). Because both teachers were Moslem, and as a result shared similar worldviews as Saudi people, coming to teach in Saudi Arabia did not pose a considerable challenge to them as it would have for non-Moslems unfamiliar with the Saudi context.

Teachers generally asserted that they engaged in background reading about Saudi Arabia before deciding to commit to working there. The internet seemed to be the main hub where information about Saudi Arabia was sought, '... the internet and other places where you can get a lot of information about the culture' (Amjad). Both Moslem and non-Moslem teachers acknowledge the importance of reading as part of their transitional preparations for the Saudi context, 'So, obviously I think most of us, we have been studying about the culture, about the Saudi people' (Maheer); 'I studied the language and the culture in great detail, without the cloud of religion

making everything incomprehensible' (Jake). Jake's reading evidently did not prepare him for the way in which he later saw Islam permeating nearly everything about Saudi culture.

No mention of the formal learning of Arabic was made except by Jake. One reason that could be given for this is that non-Arab Moslems generally know how to read and write Arabic because of the Koran. The Koran is in Arabic and hence readers must learn Arabic in order to read and memorise it. So most, if not all, of the Moslem teachers knew how to read Arabic because of their Koran education. Some teachers did not take formal Arabic lessons like Jake, but did try to learn, on their own accord, basic conversational Arabic words:

I was quite prepared to that extent ... I bought some basic Arabic books just to understand some words like, 'be quiet in class' or 'just listen to me' ... daily Arabic conversation (Suhaimi).

Moslem teachers were seen to have a high expectation of the religiosity of Saudi people, stereotyping Saudi people as all equally religious:

We start expecting too much from this society. We ... associate that every person over here walking in the streets, moving along ... would be so religious ... so I believe ... we are all stuffed [with] these different ideas (Maheer).

One reason that could be given for this high expectation of religiosity is that Saudi Arabia is home to Islam's holiest mosques, so that foreigners may believe there is a strong connection between the general Saudi population and these sites.

Summary of teachers' biographical frames for intercultural sensitivity

The biographies of teachers participating in my study showed that they came from eight different countries and are each a product of a unique enculturation process. Only a small number of teachers (three) in X University came from individualist societies of whom two were of the Islamic faith and one Christian. Most teachers, however, were of the Islamic faith and came from collectivist societies. They shared the same religion as Saudi people and similar collectivist enculturation processes and worldviews. Although Moslem teachers had similar religious understandings to Saudi people, they also had many differences as well. For Moslem teachers, Islam permeates their lives and indeed their teaching. Teachers often held high their culture and felt threatened by other cultures, particularly English-associated and Western cultures.

Most teachers had their masters degrees. Experiences were mixed between having no intercultural teaching experience to having many years in different countries, including Saudi Arabia. Nearly all teachers had co-educational teaching experiences and unlike the view shown in the Saudi ELT context, Moslem teachers generally believed Islam permitted co-education. Teachers from Outer and Expanding Circle countries shared a history of textbook reliance and a consciousness of their culture in their teaching. Because their societies are collectivist, their biographical frames of reference for intercultural sensitivity indicated teacher-centred education as a standard and that student progress is the responsibility of teachers. Unlike the three teachers whose biographical frame was fashioned by individualism, teachers from collectivist societies treated offensive cultural materials as threats to their, and their students', cultures and consequently engaged in censorship pedagogies. Relationships with students were viewed by teachers from collectivist societies as close and even family-like; even at the tertiary level of education, parents were seen as integral for student progress. Many teachers, especially those

from Pakistan, were familiar with the Saudi ELT context and some had experience teaching and interacting with Saudi people. Others learnt about Saudi culture and the Arabic language in preparation for their new teaching context.

The preceding accounts of teachers' biographical frames demonstrate that they are fundamentally represented by three constituents: society, religion and worldview, and educational experiences as depicted in Figure 1

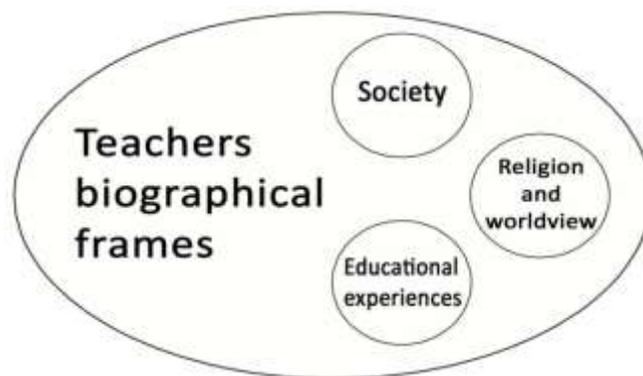


Figure 1 Teachers biographical frames

The society's imprint includes the level of individualism and collectivism teachers experienced during their upbringing. The data also show that for those from collectivist societies, as found by Canagarajah with his Tamil students (1999, p. 61), the religion and worldview constituent has a greater imprint on the teachers' biographical frames than is the case with teachers from individualist societies, except for the Moslems who lived in such societies. The teachers' own educational experiences, whether in their native context or more broadly, is another notable imprint on the teachers' biographical frame. These imprints make this frame static and not easily changeable except through ongoing biography. It is thus distinguishable from other more dynamic frames that teachers bring to ELT.

Summary

This paper discussed two important pre-existing frames of reference for intercultural sensitivity: the ELT contextual frame, and the teachers' biographical frame. The importance of identifying and detailing an understanding of these two frames is a prerequisite for the investigating of intercultural sensitivity in the context of ELT. In the introduction, intercultural sensitivity was conceptualised as the awareness, understanding and response that a person has towards people of other cultures (Bennett 1993) which includes being 'sensitive to cues that are often subtle or unfamiliar and to adjust behaviour and expectations accordingly' (Stone 2006). When teachers come to teach in the Saudi ELT context, this creates a circumstance of discordance between two different frames (the shaded area in Figure 2 below).

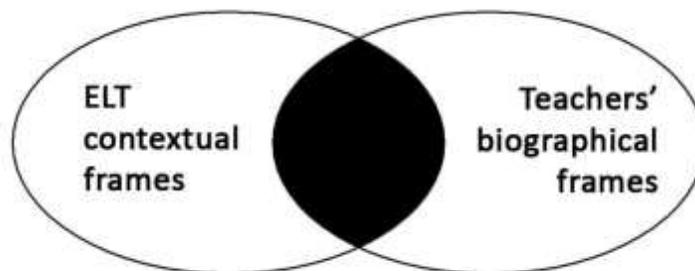


Figure 2 Pre-existing frames of reference for intercultural sensitivity in English language teaching

The teachers' biographical frame is no longer in its normal zone of function but in a foreign one, and hence teachers will require awareness, understanding and appropriate response (i.e. intercultural sensitivity) to the new set of contextual conditions imposed by the ELT contextual frame to function harmoniously and effectively inside it. Because these two pre-existing frames are static and not easily changeable, intercultural sensitivity in this circumstance of discordance will be a dynamic process and therefore likely to emanate from more dynamic frames of reference. Hence, identifying such dynamic frames of reference is crucial for the path to understanding intercultural sensitivity in practice: these will be discussed in the next part of this series with particular reference to X University.

About the Author

Walead Etri holds a PhD in Education from the University of South Australia. His main interests are the relationship between language and culture, and how this relationship affects English teaching around the world. He has taught in Australia and while heading an English department for the Saudi Arabian Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, he became drawn to the importance of intercultural sensitivity in the English teaching context.

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Appendix

Nationality, gender and religion						
Country	Male	Religion		Female	Religion	Country Total
Jordan	Bassam	Islam				1
Malaysia	Suhaimi	Islam		Susi	Islam	2
Morocco	Saeed	Islam				1
Pakistan	Maheer Amjad Sohail Azzam Khan	Islam Islam Islam Islam Islam		Nasreen Zarina	Islam Islam	7
Philippines	Corey	Christianity		Jane	Christianity	2
Sudan	Hakeem Bashir	Islam Islam				2
UK	Amir	Islam				1
US	Jake	Christianity		Safia Dania	Islam Islam	3
Total	13			6		19