

Reaching a Central Place of Understanding Intercultural Sensitivity in ELT - Dynamic Frames for Intercultural Sensitivity

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Abstract

This paper builds upon a previous paper which 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. The data showed that the context and teachers' biography are two core and static frames of reference for intercultural sensitivity. The data also showed that a further two dynamic frames of reference need to be considered as prerequisites in understanding the place of intercultural sensitivity in English language teaching.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, English language teaching (ELT), intercultural communication, intercultural sensitivity, TESOL, worldview

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Introduction

In a previous paper (Etri 2015), two pre-existing frames of reference for intercultural sensitivity were identified as prerequisites for the investigation of the relationship between intercultural sensitivity and English language teaching (ELT). These were static in nature and included the contextual frame of ELT and each individual teacher's biographical frame. I contended that an expatriate teacher's entry to a foreign ELT contextual frame results in a circumstance of discordance between these two converging frames. The teacher's biographical frame must accommodate a new set of circumstances imposed by the foreign ELT contextual frame in order for their teaching to demonstrate appropriate responses and effectiveness; this essentially requires intercultural sensitivity. Therefore, to further understand the convergence of these two disparate pre-existing frames of reference for intercultural sensitivity, this paper identifies two additional frames of reference that need to be taken into account. The first is the teacher's attitudinal frame, related to their biographical frame, and concerns views about culture and intercultural sensitivity in ELT. The second is the teacher's situationally responsive frame, which relates to exposure and experience of the specific institutional ELT context and includes experiences of teaching English in their new context. These two frames are capable of change over time and in different conditions; they are consequently dynamic, and provide a potential site for professional learning. The attitudinal frame and the situationally responsive frame both need to be considered when looking at teacher displays of intercultural sensitivity in classroom practice. The analysis of these more dynamic frames drew primary data from the various interviews and observations of teachers in X University in Saudi Arabia who took part and given pseudonyms in this study.

Teachers' attitudinal frames for intercultural sensitivity

In this study, teachers' attitudinal frames for intercultural sensitivity were found to relate primarily to their understanding of the nature of culture and its place in ELT.

Views on culture - Definition of culture

Teachers in this study did not share the same understanding of culture, but did share a number of commonalities. For example, behaviour and way of living were seen as integral for a number of them, 'culture means value system ... or ... a way of life ... generally' (Hakeem); 'specific thoughts and behaviours particular to a group ... culture is expressed most clearly in certain activities such as cooking, sexual practices [and] gender roles' (Jake). Many teachers, however, understood culture to include religion, 'it is in fact a blend of religion, of ethnicity, of race and the different social groups' (Maheer); and

In my opinion, culture is the worldview of either a person or a community and that includes beliefs, customs, habits and social interactions, [and] social behaviours ... embracing a new religion for instance (Saeed).

As the literature shows, culture is an extremely difficult concept to define, with different meanings across different disciplines. However, in the context of language teaching, many scholars such as Kramsch (1993), Stempleski and Tomalin (1993), Seelye (1993), and Bennett, Bennett & Allen (2003) found it useful to show a fundamental distinction between big *C* culture and little *c* culture. This distinction is not made by teachers in this study if we refer to the

explanations in the literature which indicate a distinction between big *C* culture and little *c* culture as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 *Distinction between big C and little c culture*

Big C – visible culture	Little c – less visible culture	
literature	ideas	behaviours
folklore	beliefs	customs
art	legends	habits
music	values	dress
artefacts	institutions	foods
	language	leisure
Products	Perspectives	Practices

Source: Stempleski and Tomalin (1993)

Although much research on culture and its place in ELT by the aforementioned scholars and others shows that there had been a concentration on big *C* culture where facts and information about cultures were taught and commonly part of ELT textbooks, teachers in X University seemed not to attend to big *C* culture, but instead had a little *c* understanding. No teacher made mention of big *C* culture in any of their definitions and there seemed to be consensus among the teachers in X University that culture pertained to perspectives and practices and not products.

As mentioned, religion was notably part of Moslem teachers' understanding of culture and integral to its definition. Non-Moslem teachers, on the other hand, made no specific mention of religion but saw behaviour as integral to an understanding of culture. From this distinction we may delineate that the ubiquitousness of Islam in the Saudi context is similar to the ubiquitousness of Islam's role in how culture is understood by Moslem teachers in this study. Islam can be seen, as Saeed insinuated in his definition of culture, as a major shaper of the worldview of Moslems where religion is an integral part of understanding phenomena and the world.

Culture and language

Most teachers in X University were in accordance with the widely accepted view by scholars about the inseparability of language and culture. They not only spoke about the intimate

relationship between language and culture, but also of the impossibility of separating the two, 'ELT and culture is very complex in the sense that language can't be learnt without learning the culture' (Amjad); 'Of course, language and culture are inseparable' (Jake).

However, despite the largely homogeneous views teachers were seen to have about the relationship between language and culture, these views were not absolute, and some teachers seemed to contradict other statements which points to the dynamic nature of their attitudinal frames. Saeed for example, on one hand professes (above) that language and culture cannot be separated, while in another statement, he professes, 'students can easily learn language without the components of culture' (Saeed). Similarly, Azzam claims that his English learning experience did not include culture and claims that language can be learnt and taught in isolation of culture:

I've been trying to learn without having to know English culture itself you see.

I've never had the need to know culture. I think the same goes for Saudi students; they don't ... need [to] be taught about English or American cultures.

Things can be done without that, absolutely (Azzam).

Similar to Azzam's English learning experience, but in opposition to Azzam's ongoing belief, Amjad confesses how limited his English language was until he actually engaged and learnt the culture of its speakers. He affirms that his English was deficient because culture was marginalised from it during his learning of English in Pakistan and he only really came to understand the language properly when he engaged with its culture:

Till the time I didn't learn the culture, my language wasn't perfect; I didn't understand language properly [and] ... couldn't apply it properly. By the time I got an awareness about culture and I came to know their culture, then [my language] was better (Amjad).

In this example, Amjad was referring to his living and study experiences in a Western country where he completed his graduate studies. It also shows how different contexts affect their attitudinal frames and how teachers can bring about changes to them.

Both Azzam's and Saeed's views were in stark contrast to Jake's, a non-Moslem who not only believed language and culture could not be separated, but saw it as rather, 'ridiculous to learn a language and not the culture' (Jake). Furthermore, Jake believed that, 'there is no actual need to learn the language if you are not interested in engaging with the culture' (Jake). His view about the target (English) culture in language learning is emphasised to the point that the culture of learners is irrelevant, 'A student comes to learn the target culture ... the host culture is rather irrelevant' (Jake). Although Jake's view cannot be considered to represent the views of Western or Inner Circle teachers in general about these topics, they are importantly the views held by the only Western non-Moslem teacher in X University who participated in this study (see appendix). To him, interest in learning a language denotes interest in learning about the culture as well. So there seem to be contradicting views by some Moslem and non-Moslem teachers about the relationship between language and culture.

Views on culture in English language teaching - Culture teaching

By investigating the views teachers had of culture teaching, we may be able to identify what part of culture is viewed can be separated from language and why it should be. There is a striking view held by a number of teachers that the process of teaching the cultural component in ELT is tantamount to indoctrination, 'I am fully conscious and I think we are doing some kind of

indoctrination ... it's indoctrination ... of culture' (Azzam). Azzam professes that teaching the cultural component of English as it appears in the Cambridge textbooks is indoctrination; an uncontrollable consequence of teaching the English language. Indoctrination could not refer to big *C* and its material products, but could only refer to little *c* culture, which pertains to perspectives and practices, including inner beliefs, customs, and behaviours. Thus, we can infer that the part of culture that such teachers want to separate out from language refers to little *c* culture. Because Inner Circle little *c* culture clashes a great deal with Saudi culture, teaching it is seen as a threat to the students' Islamic culture and identity. In this sense, English is viewed as a missionary language and teachers are at the forefront of the missionary work. Khan succinctly described this phenomenon as 'cultural imperialism' (Khan). And this can be seen as a reason why teachers have a sense of guilt in teaching English to Saudi students, which several teachers expressed. Khan, for example, professes that teachers of English have been blameworthy for teaching English culture:

Consciously or unconsciously now, we've been guilty of teaching ... [English] cultural values ... deliberate [or] ... not ... it is there [and] ... a fact. Being ... English teacher[s] ... we have accepted ... the culture ... coming through [the] language and we are teaching it (Khan).

Up until this point, the discussion about indoctrination and guilt has exclusively pertained to some of the Moslem English teachers in X University. However, Corey, who was a non-Moslem, echoed a similar view to some of his Moslem counterparts about exposing students to foreign cultural content contrary to Islam:

But I wouldn't dare ... elaborate on [my first kiss] for the fact that I don't want to tempt anybody ... I wouldn't go [into] details ... because it's not appropriate in their culture (Corey).

Because Corey understood kissing as a taboo topic in Saudi culture, he did not have the temerity to delve into anything more than its mention, and believed that doing so would be inappropriate. Thus, there seemed to be a common view held by some Moslem and non-Moslem teachers that there were limits to how much exposure to foreign culture Saudi students should have, and that consideration should be given to the preservation of the students' culture and values.

Views on Inner Circle and Western cultures

The data showed that some Moslem teachers' attitudinal frames of reference for intercultural sensitivity incorporated negative attitudes towards Inner Circle and Western cultures. Some of these may have been religious and personal, while others may have been politically and historically motivated. For example, in an observation of one of Saeed's classes, there was a topic in the book about saving penguins. Saeed used this opportunity to disseminate to his students his views on Western people:

Saeed: Do you think the Arab countries or the Arab Moslem world would do this [save penguins]?

Student: No.

Saeed: Why not?

Student: Because they don't care about penguins.

Saeed: Because they don't care about penguins. And do you think the West care about people? (with a smile)

Student: No, they don't.

Saeed: See this is the contradiction ... people are dying in parts of the world and nobody helps them. People like the Palestinians dying in Gaza; nobody helps them. But the penguins, oh that's fine we're gonna help the penguins. But people, they have no value. See this is the contradiction ... they are good to animals but not to people. Humans, we kill them ... we let them starve..... People who committed crimes and because the jails in Britain, they were full. They sent them over there [Australia] ... And they started killing the Aborigines. You know the Aborigines of Australia? You know them? Where are they? The people who lived in New Zealand before the white people, where are they? The people who lived in America before the white people, where are they? ... Don't get fooled by saving the penguin thing (pointing to the book on his desk). Because what they do with people is worse. If they want to save, let them save people first ... that's how we should see these things. (Saeed).

In this observation, Saeed depicts a negative picture about Western people and exhorts his students to view the West as he described. His views of Western ELT teachers were also not spared of negativity in a diary entry because according to him, they 'believe that their culture is superior' (Saeed). Thus, Saeed had negative views about the West in general, and history and world affairs were seen to play a part in his views. Religion for him and other Moslem teachers also seemed like a key contributing factor for his views:

I'm not going to be the one who is doing the 'dirty thing' [partying and the social life of the West] ... I couldn't find one linguistic advantage ... in doing these activities or topics [with the students] ... But because it's the wrong thing to do, and because of my religion (Saeed).

The data seemed to suggest that teachers' biographical frames of reference affected their attitudinal frames, and in turn their teaching and concept of culture. They were not willing to suspend their beliefs when teaching and felt responsible for preserving the students' culture by exposing what they believed true of Inner Circle and Western cultures and by making pedagogical decisions conforming to their biographical and attitudinal frames.

Views on intercultural sensitivity - Definition of intercultural sensitivity

Because intercultural sensitivity is a complex phenomenon to describe due to the complexity of culture itself, it makes sense to use a framework to help make sense of teachers' views and descriptions of it. The main conceptual framework used in this study is Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which is a phenomenological framework because it describes subjective experience. Not only were foreign teachers' subjective experience in the ELT context a key interest of this study, but also how they make sense of that experience. The DMIS is a continuum of six stages, and the naming of each stage describes the underlying worldview of individuals as they progress towards intercultural sensitivity as indicated by their actions, behaviours and attitudes. Figure 1 is a summary of the DMIS and its stages.

Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity					
Experience of difference continuum →					
<i>Denial</i>	<i>Defence</i>	<i>Minimisation</i>	<i>Acceptance</i>	<i>Adaptation</i>	<i>Integration</i>
Denies different perspectives exist	Defends one's own perspectives	Similarities of different perspectives more important than differences	Respects and values other perspectives	Able to adapt to and communicate like others	Internalised different perspectives and able to easily shift perspectives
Ethnocentric Stages			Ethnorelative Stages		

Figure 1 Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett 1993)

As indicated, most teachers seemed to understand culture to be little *c* culture, and religion and behaviour were integral to that understanding. This had implications for the teachers' understanding of intercultural sensitivity, and a large number of teachers mentioned tolerance, respect and acceptance as integral to its understanding, 'intercultural sensitivity is the ability to accept and tolerate other people's beliefs and their culture (Khan). These descriptions fall in line with Bennett's *acceptance* stage in the DMIS, where individuals not only acknowledge differences, but tolerate and respect others, and accept the behaviours that underlie people's worldviews. For other teachers however, intercultural sensitivity meant something further:

It's basically cultural flexibility ... and adaptability. Not having prejudices, not living in your own little bubble saying that the rest of the world is wrong and the way I see the world is the only way (Saeed).

Saeed's statements speak of acceptance and adaptability where intercultural sensitivity is viewed as the skill of being able to change lenses to view the world as others do, and adapting to those views, avoiding prejudgements and bias. It is important to point out that although Saeed understood intercultural sensitivity in terms of displaying ethnorelative skills (Bennett 1993), some of his classroom actions, as seen in the section above, exhibited strong ethnocentric attitudes.

Other teachers expressed that intercultural sensitivity revolved around 'avoiding offence' (Jake), 'Cultural sensitivity ... mean[s] any action or set of actions undertaken by the ELT teacher not to offend ... students' (Saeed):

To be aware of who their learners are and constantly thinking about ... what kind of culture are they coming from so ... you avoid ... topics altogether or ... introduce [them] with some extra sensitivity (Safia).

Thus, it could be concluded based on the data presented that most X University English teachers generally understood intercultural sensitivity as the skills and dimensions described in Bennett's DMIS *acceptance* stage.

Summary of teachers' attitudinal frames for intercultural sensitivity

Moslem teachers generally saw religion as an integral characteristic of culture while non-Moslem teachers saw behaviour as more central. Although teachers generally viewed that language and culture were inseparable and dimensions of each other, some Moslem teachers held contradictive views. The main reasons for these contradictions were the negative attitudes teachers had of Inner Circle and Western cultures and the threat they were to their own cultures as well as to those of their students. Non-Moslem teachers also felt there should be limits to how much exposure students were given to Inner Circle and Western cultures. Many Moslem teachers maintained that cultural content in textbooks should be more attuned to the culture of their students. Some non-Moslem teachers, however, believed they can teach English and its culture to Saudi Arabian students because they assumed students were interested in English culture. Although teachers generally had an *acceptance* stage understanding of intercultural sensitivity when speaking about it; this understanding was not necessarily evident in their practice and their comments on practice.

I have argued that the pre-existing biographical frames teachers bring to their teaching incorporate potentially dynamic attitudinal frames which may be subject either to change or entrenchment as the teachers engage with a new setting. These attitudinal frames specifically concern teachers' views about culture, and intercultural sensitivity, which are a product of their unique biographical process of enculturation. Teachers' ongoing biographies, however, are further conditioned through their situational responsiveness to different institutional contexts and students, setting up an additional frame of reference for intercultural sensitivity, as the next section will show.

Teachers' situationally responsive frames for intercultural sensitivity

This section details a frame of experience conditioned by the ELT context: teachers' experiences of the administration, its curricula and programs, and the students. It includes a focus on students' views on English and learning, maturity, reactions to sensitive cultural material such as those considered taboo in Saudi society and their relationship with teachers.

Administration and Curriculum

Teachers affirmed that the university administration was the cardinal source of the curriculum and believed it was ultimately responsible for its content. They saw legitimacy in seeking refuge in the authoritative status of the administration during the teaching of sensitive materials that appeared in the curriculum. They generally felt immune from blame regarding the syllabus and its contents, 'The administration itself is responsible for putting them in the curricula ... so, we have nothing to do with that' (Maheer). Some teachers believed that students' antagonisms may have been more intense had teachers introduced from their own notes content sensitive to Saudi culture and beliefs:

If you as a teacher are to select your own material and you take them to the class ... probably there would have been greater uproar ... but because the books are selected and given to us by the administration, so we can get away with the blame (Amjad).

This is the main reason for the initiative administrative staff took to change the curriculum by asking publishers to replace inappropriate and sensitive content with ones more in line with the Saudi context, 'I had a meeting with the Head of the English [department]. He told me that he asked some publishers to 'Saudise' the English textbooks by replacing certain themes and removing certain pictures' (Khan).

Some teachers considered X University's education organisation as inflexible to teachers and one which restricted the full potential of the ELT environment. Essentially, teachers blamed the administration for the practices made standard for teaching in the university, which fundamentally revolved around completing a textbook and associated assessments, and focusing purely on the prescribed curriculum. Zarina cautiously describes how education in X University seemed to have its focus on marks and assessments and not other dimensions; education was described as routine and confined to the classroom:

We should not blame these girls. We should blame the system. I hope I am not saying too much. If we are [focused] too much [on] entering the marks ... too much on examination[s] ... too much on quizzes ... too much on the assignments ... we have too little time to go with them outside [this] box (Zarina).

It is this educational system in X University that was seen to reduce opportunities for teaching and learning. In addition, Dania echoes that the curriculum prescribed by the administration, 'would have to [be] based on achieving quality and not [merely] completing a text' (Dania). For some teachers coming from abroad, teaching through a book could be austere and boring; from an institutional perspective, it is as if books allocated for courses are a perfect and complete match for course objectives; a notion which did not resonate well with teachers.

Students

The teachers agreed that an English teacher is expected to develop some kind of bond with their students to understand them and their cognitive abilities for teaching purposes, as well as their sensitivities for intercultural communication purposes. Because culture is a complex phenomenon, teachers at X University were not in a straightforward teaching context; there were clearly clashes between the culture of the students and the culture presented in parts of the teaching syllabus, as well as clashes between the culture of the students and the culture of the teachers. There was a requirement for teachers, therefore, to establish communication with their students and be aware of their culture in order to understand their educational needs and sensitivities so they could effectively teach and engage them in books permeated with North American culture. As a result in engaging with their students, teachers experienced different attitudes different levels of students brought to the classroom.

Attitudes toward English

Because teaching is a two way process, the attitudes of students are important; the attitudes students have towards learning may either facilitate or hamper the process of teaching and learning. Teachers experienced various attitudes students had towards learning English. Some

had positive attitudes, which revolved mainly around interest in the West, ‘another group of students who are Westernised [and] fascinated by [the] West. Those who are looking to study English because they want to watch movies and listen ... to songs’ (Saeed). These groups of students who normally have access to Western culture outside university through satellite TV, internet, and other media were seen to understand cultural differences as normal and enjoyable. As a result, their enjoyment of these differences shaped their motivations to learn English in positive ways and showed dimensions of ethnorelativity. According to Bennett’s (1993) DMIS, such individuals who acknowledge and accept cultural differences and respect behaviours and values of others are showing dimensions of the *acceptance* stage of intercultural sensitivity. However, teachers also experienced a larger group of students who had negative attitudes towards learning English and such attitudes were widespread; ‘they have negative attitudes. Not all of them, I mean many of them. Negative attitudes ... towards learning the English language’ (Bassam). Some of these attitudes were a vivid demonstration of how ethnocentric the worldview of some students were, ‘English is considered the language of the disbelievers (Arabic - *kuffar*) [by students] ... in ... Saudi Arabia’ (Sohail).

Because teachers experienced students’ positive and negative attitudes toward the English language, they became highly aware of issues of intercultural sensitivity in their classrooms. Positive attitudes mainly stemmed from interest in the West while negative attitudes were seen to have roots in religion, both culturally related sources.

General attitude to learning

Quite a number of teachers noted immature attitudes shown by students towards learning and education. Jake, for example, mentioned that, ‘X University students are roughly comparable to an American eighth grader in terms of maturity and general education’ (Jake). Although we may be able to understand why there may be positive and negative attitudes towards the English language due to the religion and the enculturation of narrow worldviews, the students’ disinterested attitudes towards learning in general, however, may point to societal factors, ‘they are rich, they don’t care much about [learning]’ (Bassam); ‘They don’t see the need ... to learn ... apart from [a] very few ... you find all the students really not putting the effort. They are not interested’ (Amir).

The teachers’ experience of such attitudes may be why some spoke of the indolent behaviours of many students. Jake, for example, professes that, ‘laziness and lack of attention to detail’ could be ascribed to ‘Saudi society’ and not just be special characteristics of students (Jake). Amir also believes that the ‘parents influence’ the attitudes students bring to university (Amir). In this view, students are the result of the enculturation process shaped by the Saudi context. Despite the question about the veracity of these views, the effects these attitudes and behaviours have on the teachers are extensive. Amir maintained that such behaviours actually impeded their performance as teachers and made teaching a daunting challenge:

[It] puts so much pressure, and so many obstacles in our job ... I think it’s a big hindrance in terms of what we discussed ... about the lack of motivation ... laziness, and [lack of] urgency for them to learn (Amir).

Apart from all the pressures that come with shifting countries and coming to a new environment to teach, the experience of teaching students who come to university with negative attitudes further exacerbates teachers’ transitions.

Maturity

The teachers' experience in teaching and engaging students in the predominantly North American culture presented in the general English courses was challenging because teachers' general experience of preparatory year students was that they were immature, and therefore, not ready for exposure to the culture in the *Cambridge Interchange* books. Maturity in this context (see figure 2) denoted the scale between ethnocentricity and ethnorelativity: immaturity denoted students displayed dimensions of ethnocentricity, while maturity denoted they displayed ethnorelative qualities.

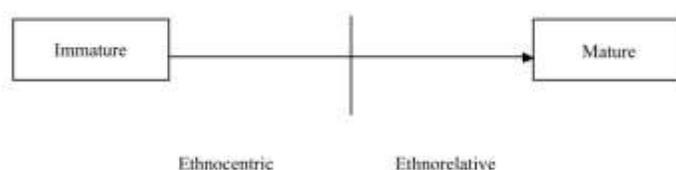


Figure 2 Maturity in relation to intercultural sensitivity

Based on his experience teaching preparatory year students, Saeed for example, categorically declared, ' [level one] students are not mature' (Saeed). Amjad further details:

Those who have ... [a] matured way of thinking ... would accept the topic as ... extra knowledge about the different cultures instead of ... a bigger rejection ... comparatively ... my [level one] group ... students [have] not so much ... matured yet. So, they can't accept ... certain cultural issues in the book. So it is something different between the matured students and the non-matured students (Amjad).

According to Bennett (1993), individuals judge culture relative to context in the ethnorelative stages of intercultural sensitivity. Individuals in the *acceptance* stage, which is the first of the ethnorelative stages, not only acknowledge cultural differences, but respect them as it is a normal part of human existence for people to be different. So, according to Amjad's experience of teaching in X University, mature students accept topics foreign to their culture and beliefs, and do not reject them like the immature students of the lower levels who typically do so.

Furthermore, mature students showed development in other skills which also meant foreign culture did not affect their language learning objectives. Azzam explains:

Students at [the] advanced level ... [are] wise enough to ... take the linguistic stuff directly, without having to count too much on cultural aspects ... so advanced level students are definitely ... mature (Azzam).

Culture did not impinge on language learning and development for the advanced students; they understood cultural differences were a natural part of language content and attentive about

learning the forms and functions of the language. Such development of intercultural skills that seemed widely absent from many students in the preparatory year may have led Saeed to conclude they were immature and incapable of language focused comprehension

Reactions to the taboo

It was clear to teachers that Saudi Arabian culture differs from Inner Circle and Western cultures found in the English course textbooks, especially those used in the preparatory year. The *Cambridge Interchange* series for example, included many discourses typical of North American life, like going to the movies, going on a date, celebrating Thanksgiving, etc. Some texts included customs in other parts of the world like the 'Day of the Dead' celebrations in Mexico, and greetings in different countries, such as bowing in Japan. Such topics and various pictures in the textbooks are considered taboo in Saudi culture, and depending on the level of ethnocentricity students had, they would react accordingly. One teacher, who happened to be a Moslem, experienced Saudi customs and beliefs regarding the dead and graves, and how sensitive and derisive Saudi students could be towards such teaching materials that opposed their views and fundamental beliefs:

I was talking about people erecting tombs ... on the graves of the dead; and this was something which was rather unacceptable for the students here in Saudi Arabia. And some of them really ... were very aggressive ... they were asking, 'Why are ... those tombs marble and all that ... lighting and ... arrangement? Are the dead people reading them something? ... So I tried to calm them down and ... tried to convince them that [that was] a different culture. ... whether Islamic or un-Islamic, that's another debate. But this was something which they just couldn't accept and digest (Khan).

Bennett, Bennett & Allen (2003) describe the students' display of such opposition as core ethnocentric dimensions of *defence*.

Dania had similar experiences with her students. Her students' reactions to taboo material showed language learning seemed like a futile exercise; students expressed irritation with the whole book which to them, was a barrage of taboos:

In another unit they were more vocal. They reacted with the words '*khalas*, Miss' (enough Miss) when the CD started playing. Lately, the students have moved away from the 'cultural' issues and simply state that they are not happy with the book. I have been told repeatedly, 'Miss, this is useless' (Dania).

Some teachers also reported antagonism towards mere words. In Azzam's class, a student equated the mention of an imaginary king as involving politics in the class. Although Azzam did not hint he was referring to the Saudi King, the student still disapproved the teacher's example:

I just came up with [an] example: The king here XYZ had all these roads and infrastructure constructed for you and one of the students said, 'teacher, no politics' (Azzam).

Not only was the comment by the student untrue as it was not a discussion about politics, it demonstrated how some students showed sensitivity to just mere words and passed judgement or suspicion on those who used them. These reactions and behaviours of mainly preparatory year students to taboo topics (founded or unfounded) in the books led some teachers to conclude that such reactions were a display of immaturity, and hence narrow-mindedness in contrast to higher-

level students. Higher level students generally seemed to display more interest in wanting to understand the worldview of the other:

... the question was, ‘Why do Americans think this way?’ They then asked again, ‘Yes. Why Miss?’ I had to explain that while this may be the belief of some, it's not the belief of all (Safia).

Although the question about why Americans think a certain way was posed by the text, students agreed that it was a worthwhile question to pose and showed interest in wanting to know more by directing the question to the teacher to enlighten and guide them to understand essentially why people have a certain worldview. A display of yearning to understand culture in the context of its people demonstrates a clear inclination towards ethnorelativity and not ethnocentricity as seen in the attitudes of many students in the preparatory year.

Teachers' experience at X University has shown the various reactions students had to taboo topics in class and these essentially had an affect on the course of pedagogy. These topics sometimes caused different reactions from students and seemingly perplexed some teachers. Students who displayed negativity seemed mostly to fit descriptions found in Bennett's stage of *defence* which describes an *us-and-them* mindset; other cultures are viewed as a threat and hence, individuals may resort to denigration to emphasise their culture's superiority. Although limited incidences pointed to students minimising differences and not seeing cultural differences as a cause for big concern, some of the reactions higher-level students displayed were consistent with the ethnorelative dimensions of *acceptance* and *adaptation* found in Bennett's DMIS.

Relationship with teachers

Teachers generally described their students as respectful. For example, both Amjad and Maheer mention students were, ‘really respectful’ in general. Based on the reports of some teachers, some students showed tendencies to speak to their Moslem teachers in a language that only a Moslem could understand and respond to, ‘Several students actually asked me to make *duaa* (supplication) for them for marriage’ (Dania). Although Dania is a native North American, she understood her students because asking fellow Moslems to supplicate is a common practice, and the word *duaa* is known to non-Arab Moslems. In the West, this is equivalent to asking someone to wish them good luck or success. It is not a norm in Western culture that somebody asks another to supplicate to God for them for whatever reason. Thus, students were seen to confide in their Moslem teachers, whose relationship resembled that of a parent and siblings and was fashioned by a common faith. The fact that a teacher was Moslem seemed to make many students comfortable to communicate Islamic concerns to them.

Unlike the unique relationship some students had with their Moslem teachers, the relationship students had with non-Moslem teachers seemed quite complex. Corey's experience with his students seemed at times fashioned by close-mindedness and inflexibility:

I frame this ... opinion based on the students that I've encountered for the past three years ... rarely do I find ... the students ... open minded about things ... especially when I discuss some of my thoughts on religion where ... I differ from them ... So most of the time they block me ... on just a simple thought [or] just a simple sentence (Corey).

In general however, respect was a common description teachers used to describe their relationship with their students. The students' relationships with their Moslem teachers were

unique in the sense that they showed a tendency to speak to them using religious terms which their biographies could relate to. Although they were generally tolerant of their non-Moslem teachers, they also showed intolerance, especially towards teaching material and topics they considered inappropriate.

Summary of teachers' situationally responsive frames for intercultural sensitivity

This section looked at foreign English teachers' experiences of X University's administration, curricula and programs, and students, seeing these as a frame of reference for intercultural sensitivity conditioned by the context of teaching and thus calling forth situational responsiveness.

In line with dimensions of collectivism, the administration was experienced as authoritative and taking entire responsibility for the English curricula and its contents. As a result, teachers did not feel accountable for any material considered offensive by students. Teachers reported difficulty completing textbook contents in the allocated timeframes and believed that textbook teaching restricted their teaching capabilities. For most teachers, the Saudi ELT context was a unique and new experience for them. This was especially true in regard to the nature of the students, where most of the data of the teachers' experience of teaching English at X University were largely focused. The effects of religion were clearly experienced by teachers through students' attitudes towards the English language, reactions to taboo and their relationships with their teachers. Teachers identified two distinct markers that could be used to describe their students; positive reactions to teaching content denoted maturity while negative reactions, immaturity. In the context of intercultural sensitivity, maturity denoted ethnocentricity while immaturity denoted ethnocentricity. Teachers' experience of this context showed the extent of its effect on their ongoing biographical and attitudinal frames of reference for intercultural sensitivity, and how it was incumbent on them to understand and respond to the teaching conditions of their new institutional context.

Paper Synopsis

This paper identified two dynamic frames for intercultural sensitivity, the first being attitudinal and the second, situationally responsive, and both being closely connected. The teachers' attitudinal frames relate to their views on culture and intercultural sensitivity in ELT, and can be seen as ongoing and dynamic in different teaching contexts. The teachers' situationally responsive frames are also ongoing and dynamic and shape the way they respond and adapt their teaching to different institutional contexts and requirements. These two frames are directly conditioned by the institutional context of ELT and participants' experience of it.

Although there are fundamental differences between the teachers' biographical, situationally responsive and attitudinal frames, they are closely interrelated and sourced from the teachers themselves, as distinct from the ELT context itself. Because of this interrelationship, these three frames collectively constitute what I refer to as the teachers' intercultural sensitivity frames of reference; teachers apply and adjust these frames as they experience the different conditions of different ELT contexts. The ELT contextual frames are independent of the teachers' intercultural sensitivity frames as teachers do not set the conditions surrounding ELT contexts, but instead need to be aware of, understand and respond appropriately to them, that is, be intercultural sensitive to them, in order to be effective teachers. Teachers' intercultural sensitivity frames of reference are thus crucial and cannot be excluded for any holistic understanding of intercultural sensitivity practices in ELT.

The collective three-fold convergence of teachers' intercultural sensitivity frames and the ELT contextual frames creates a central *place for understanding intercultural sensitivity practices* in the teachers' day-to-day teaching. This is illustrated in Figure 3, and I would argue that any attempt to try to understand intercultural sensitivity in ELT without first working through these four frames would indeed be deficient.

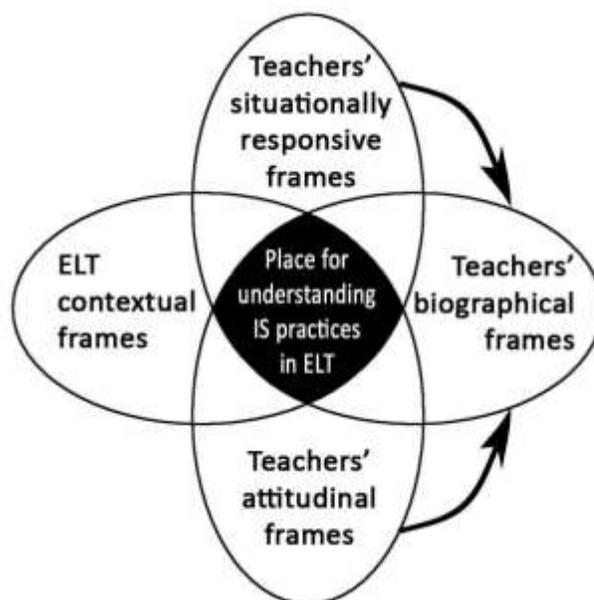


Figure 3 The place for understanding intercultural sensitivity practices in English language teaching

As the shaded area in Figure 3 shows, the *place for understanding intercultural sensitivity practices in ELT* is the place where all four frames converge. This place is fully situated in the ELT context, which is then overlaid by teachers' intercultural sensitivity frames – their biographical, situationally responsive and attitudinal frames. This place for understanding contextualises and helps explain teachers' practices of intercultural sensitivity, the choice for their pedagogies, and justifications for them which could go against their own beliefs, norms and pedagogies as practiced in their countries.

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	Islam		Nasreen Zarina	Islam Islam	7
	Amjad	Islam				
	Sohail	Islam				
	Azzam	Islam				
	Khan	Islam				
Philippines	Corey	Christianity		Jane	Christianity	2
Sudan	Hakeem	Islam				2
	Bashir	Islam				
UK	Amir	Islam				1
US	Jake	Christianity		Safia	Islam	3
				Dania	Islam	
Total	13			6		19