

# A Survey of the Intercultural Sensitivity of English Majors in Nationality University of China

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**Abstract:** Intercultural Sensitivity Scale formulated by Chen & Starosta was conducted on 163 English majors from a nationality university in Northwest China. The results showed that: Firstly, the Intercultural Sensitivity level of English majors in this university was undesirable on the whole ( $M=3.7216$ ). Among five factors, Respect for Cultural Difference ranks first ( $M=4.3497$ ), Interaction Engagement is the second ( $M=3.8624$ ), and Interaction Confidence is the weakest ( $M=2.9387$ ). Secondly, the IS level of Grade one ranks first ( $M = 91.6981$ ), Grade two is the second ( $M = 88.9333$ ), and Grade three is the weakest ( $M = 87.2600$ ). Through One-Way ANOVA, significant differences in Intercultural Sensitivity, Respect for Cultural Difference and Interaction Confidence among different grades were obtained. Thirdly, Pearson correlation analysis showed that IS was significantly positively correlated with five factors, of which the correlation with Interaction Engagement was the strongest ( $r=0.790$ ), followed by Interaction Confidence ( $r=0.686$ ), the weakest correlation with Interaction Attentiveness ( $r=0.520$ ). Correlation analysis among the five factors shows that Interaction Engagement and Interaction Confidence are the main factors that affect the IS level of English majors. Finally, exploring the factors that affect the IS level of English majors, strategies and suggestions are provided on how to improve it in the nationality university.

## 1. Introduction

China's 2010 National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan Outline and 2015 National Standards for Undergraduate Teaching Quality of English Majors clearly stated and highlighted the importance of intercultural communicative competence in the training of higher education talents and English majors. And it is further clarified in the corresponding ability requirements that, in the continuous promotion of intercultural communication, to enhance students' knowledge and understanding of different cultures, English majors should have intercultural skills. Intercultural communicative competence is the ability to appropriately use language and cultural knowledge with members of different cultures to carry out effective and appropriate communication practice, and is a decisive factor in intercultural communication activities (Jia Yuxin, 1997: 3). According to the latest and more complete model of intercultural communication competence proposed by Chen Guoming (2006: 224-241), the ICC includes three interdependent levels: cognition, which is intercultural awareness; emotion, which is intercultural sensitivity. and behavior, that is, intercultural effectiveness.<sup>[2]</sup> Intercultural sensitivity is one of the necessary elements to ensure successful communication in a intercultural context. Intercultural communication academic circles at home and abroad generally recognize its importance for intercultural communication skills. Moreover, the cultivation of intercultural sensitivity can promote communication activities participants to increase their sensitivity to cultural differences, cultivate their grasp of cultural commonality, and promote mutual understanding and smooth communication between the two parties.

## 2. Intercultural Sensitivity

Bronfenbrenner, Harding & Gallwey<sup>[3]</sup> first proposed the concept of "sensitivity" in 1958, and divided "sensitivity" into two parts: sensitivity to the generalized other and interpersonal sensitivity. Bennet<sup>[4-5]</sup> proposed on the basis of previous theories that intercultural sensitivity is an individual's

ability to transform from “ethnocentrism” to “national relativism” based on the three dimensions of cognition, emotion and behavior. And created the famous “Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity” (DMIS model for short). Bhawuk & Brislin <sup>[6]</sup> designed the “Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory” (ICSI) from the theoretical perspective of “individualism” and “collectivism” in 1992 to measure the individual's cognitive, intercultural sensitivity at the emotional and behavioral levels, but the effectiveness of this research tool has been questioned by scholars. Chen, G. M., Starosta, W.J. (1997) <sup>[7]</sup> proposed that intercultural communicative competence is composed of intercultural awareness at the cognitive level, intercultural sensitivity at the emotional level, and intercultural effectiveness at the behavioral level. Intercultural sensitivity is the ability of individuals to understand and appreciate different cultures, thereby promoting the adaptability and effectiveness of behavior in intercultural communication. Including 6 factors.: self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement and suspending judgment.

Foreign research on intercultural sensitivity mainly covers three aspects: developing measurement tools, analyzing the current status of intercultural sensitivity of specific groups, and studying the impact of specific environment or special means on intercultural sensitivity. However, domestic intercultural sensitivity research emerged at the end of the 20th century, from the initial introduction and evaluation of foreign research results to the measurement and cultivation of intercultural sensitivity of different groups. However, the research objects are mostly concentrated in college English and non-English major teachers and students or vocational students, and there are few intercultural sensitivity studies on English majors in ethnic colleges. Therefore, this research focuses on examining the current situation of intercultural sensitivity of English majors in nationality university, exploring influencing factors and improving strategies.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Question

This research attempts to answer the following questions through quantitative analysis:

- 1) What is the overall current situation of the intercultural sensitivity of English majors in ethnic colleges?
- 2) Is there any difference in intercultural sensitivity in different grades?
- 3) What is the correlation between intercultural sensitivity and the 5 factors?

#### 3.2 Participants

The survey respondents were all 169 English majors composed of freshmen, sophomores and juniors in an ethnic college northwest China. The questionnaire was issued in June 2019 and 169 questionnaires were issued. Since the survey of the research questionnaire coincided with the graduation of seniors, sampling was not successful. Before the test, the research purpose was explained to the participants and promised to keep the data confidential for research purposes only. It takes about 20 minutes to fill out the form. After the test, 169 questionnaires were returned with a recovery rate of 100%. Among them, 6 questionnaires were disqualified due to partial data missing. The final valid questionnaire was 163, and the valid recovery rate was 96.45%. See Table 1 for background information of valid subjects.

Table 1 Background Information of Percentage of Valid Subjects

Sex		Grade			Abroad Experience		English Level			
Male	Female	one	Two	Three	Yes	No	CET4	CET6	EMT Band4	No certificate
17	146	53	60	50	7	156	83	30	20	30
10.4%	89.6%	32.5%	36.8%	30.7%	4.3%	95.7%	50.9%	18.4%	12.3%	18.4%

#### 3.3 Instrument

Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) formulated by Chen, GM, Starosta, WJ (2000) <sup>[8]</sup> is currently

one of the few intercultural sensitivity measure instruments with high reliability in the world. It has been used by several famous foreign scholars to measure the intercultural sensitivity of subjects in a number of studies<sup>[9]</sup>. In this study, the questionnaire was adapted appropriately according to testing needs, and the information survey of subjects was added. The questionnaire was prepared in both English and Chinese language, which contains 24 items and 5 dimensional factors. The five dimensional factors are: Interaction engagement (item 1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23, 24), Respect for cultural difference (item 2, 7, 8, 16, 18, 20), Interaction confidence (item 3, 4, 5, 6, 10), Interaction enjoyment (item 9, 12, 15) and Interaction attentiveness (item 14, 17, 19). The options in the five-point Likert scale are: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) somewhat disagree, (4) agree, and (5)strongly agree. The subjects are required to make a choice of the degree of agreement based on their actual situation. The reliability of the ISS questionnaire has been repeatedly verified in this study, and the overall reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) coefficient is 0.782, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Reliability of Iss Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	Based on standardized items Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
.782	.790	24

### 3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The data was retrieved through Statistical Package for the Behavioral Science (SPSS) version 19.0 for data sorting and reverse question re-assignment, that is, 9 of the 24 items (2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20, 22) are recoded. Then descriptive analysis, One-way ANOVA and Pearson's correlation coefficient were implemented.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1 Analysis of the Overall is Level of Participants

The ISS has 24 items, 5 points each, with a total score of 120 points. As shown in Table 3, the highest score of subjects is 112 points, the lowest score is 63 points, the average score is 89 points, which is much higher than the theoretical average score of the scale, but compared with ordinary universities, the IS level of English majors in this school is not desirable on the whole. Among them, Respect for cultural difference is the strongest (M=4.3497), followed by Interaction engagement (M=3.8624), and Interaction confidence is the lowest (M=2.9387). The highest score of Respect for cultural difference indicates that English majors have a high level of awareness and cognition in understanding, accepting, and respecting cultural differences in intercultural communication; the middle level Interaction engagement indicates that students are willing to participate and have a positive and open attitude; However, the low scores of Interaction enjoyment and Interaction attentiveness indicate that although students have a willingness to communicate in intercultural communication, they lack communication continuity, and it is easy to cause communication frustration due to insufficient language knowledge and communicative skills, which leads to communication interruption . The lowest score in Interaction confidence indicates that although students are willing to participate, they may lack intercultural knowledge or necessary communicative practical experience. The conflict between strong communicative willingness and the reality needs thinking and reflection.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of ISS and 5 factors

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
IS	163	2.63	4.67	3.7216	.32817
Interaction engagement	163	2.29	5.00	3.8624	.47351
Respect for cultural difference	163	2.83	5.00	4.3497	.41788
Interaction confidence	163	1.40	5.00	2.9387	.53302
Interaction enjoyment	163	1.67	5.00	3.6074	.63712
Interaction attentiveness	163	1.67	5.00	3.5562	.49143
ISS Total	163	63.00	112.00	89.3190	7.87613
Valid Number of items	163				

## 4.2 Analysis of is Level in Different Grades

As shown in Table 4, the IS level of English majors in this college is ranked like this: grade one (freshmen) is the first (M=91.6981), grade two (sophomore) is the second (M=88.9333), and grade three (junior) is the third (M=87.2600). As shown in Figure 1, there are significant differences exist in the overall IS level in three grades, as well as in Respect for cultural difference and Interaction confidence these 2 factors. However, there are no significant differences in three other factors of five, such as Interaction engagement, Interaction enjoyment and Interaction attentiveness. Because this result is quite different from the research expectations, it was verified by one-way ANOVA.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics of ISS level and 5 factors in different grades

Grade		Interaction engagement	Respect for cultural difference	Interaction confidence	Interaction enjoyment	Interaction attentiveness	ISS Total
One	Mean	3.9326	4.5031	3.0830	3.6415	3.6038	91.6981
	N	53	53	53	53	53	53
	SD	.36914	.37051	.47464	.61272	.43391	6.62044
Two	Mean	3.8381	4.2917	2.9067	3.6500	3.6111	88.9333
	N	60	60	60	60	60	60
	SD	.49450	.43788	.54675	.69006	.49543	8.15292
Three	Mean	3.8171	4.2567	2.8240	3.5200	3.4400	87.2600
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50
	SD	.54229	.40295	.55053	.59917	.53214	8.24079
Total	Mean	3.8624	4.3497	2.9387	3.6074	3.5562	89.3190
	N	163	163	163	163	163	163
	SD	.47351	.41788	.53302	.63712	.49143	7.87613

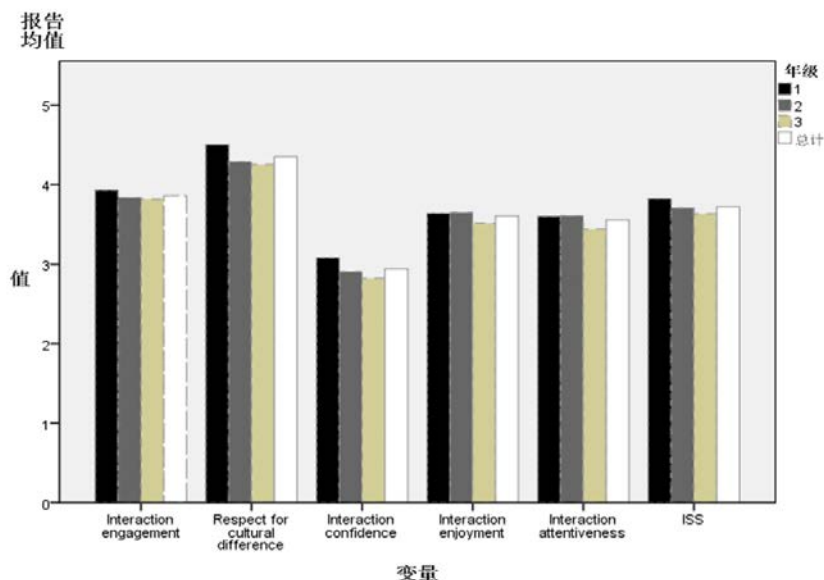


Fig.1 Iss Level and Mean Value of 5 Factors in Different Grades

One-way ANOVA is used to test whether there is a significant difference in the F value between IS level and 5 factors in three grade groups. As shown in Table 5, there are significant differences in the IS levels of participants in different grades, with an F value of 4.373 and a significance level of .014, as well as in Respect for cultural difference and interaction confidence these 2 factors.

Table 5 Test of ANOVA

		Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Interaction engagement	Between-group	.399	2	.200	.889	.413
	within-group	35.923	160	.225		
	Total	36.322	162			
Respect for cultural difference	Between-group	1.883	2	.941	5.704	.004
	within-group	26.407	160	.165		
	Total	28.290	162			
Interaction confidence	Between-group	1.823	2	.912	3.300	.039
	within-group	44.203	160	.276		
	Total	46.027	162			
Interaction enjoyment	Between-group	.552	2	.276	.678	.509
	within-group	65.208	160	.408		
	Total	65.760	162			
Interaction attentiveness	Between-group	.976	2	.488	2.047	.133
	within-group	38.147	160	.238		
	Total	39.123	162			
ISS	Between-group	.904	2	.452	4.373	.014
	within-group	16.543	160	.103		
	Total	17.447	162			

Table 6 Correlation between ISS and 5 factors

		Interaction engagement	Respect for cultural difference	Interaction confidence	Interaction enjoyment	Interaction attentiveness	ISS
Interaction engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.361**	.314**	.266**	.448**	.790**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.001	.000	.000
	N	163	163	163	163	163	163
Respect for cultural difference	Pearson Correlation	.361**	1	.095	.286**	.044	.580**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.227	.000	.578	.000
	N	163	163	163	163	163	163
Interaction confidence	Pearson Correlation	.314**	.095	1	.508**	.332**	.686**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.227		.000	.000	.000
	N	163	163	163	163	163	163
Interaction enjoyment	Pearson Correlation	.266**	.286**	.508**	1	.073	.631**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000		.353	.000
	N	163	163	163	163	163	163
Interaction attentive-ness	Pearson Correlation	.448**	.044	.332**	.073	1	.520**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.578	.000	.353		.000
	N	163	163	163	163	163	163
IS	Pearson Correlation	.790**	.580**	.686**	.631**	.520**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	163	163	163	163	163	163

Notes: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

### 4.3 Correlation Analysis of Iss and 5 Factors

As shown in Table 6, ISS and 5 factors are all significantly positively correlated at the P value of 0.01, which has the strongest correlation with Interaction engagement ( $r=0.790$ ), followed by Interaction confidence ( $r=0.686$ ), and the weakest correlation with Interaction attentiveness ( $r=0.520$ ). Specifically, the correlation between intercultural sensitivity and the 5 factors is ranked as follow: Interaction engagement > Interaction confidence > Interaction enjoyment > Respect for cultural difference > Interaction attentiveness. The correlation analysis within the 5 factors is shown

as follows: Interaction engagement is significantly positively correlated with other 4 factors, of which the correlation is the strongest with the Interaction attentiveness ( $r=0.448$ ); the Interaction confidence is significantly positively correlated with other 3 factors except Respect for cultural difference, which has the strongest correlation with the Interaction enjoyment ( $r=0.508$ ); There is a significant weak correlation between Respect for cultural difference and Interaction enjoyment ( $r=0.286$ ). It shows that the Interaction engagement and confidence of the English majors in this university are the main factors affecting their IS level, and the acquiring of Interaction enjoyment depends on the degree of their Interaction confidence.

## **5. Conclusions**

### **5.1 Findings**

The English majors of this university mainly come from Northwest, Midwest, and Southwest China, covering minority areas such as Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang. In terms of ethnic composition, there are 30 ethnic groups, including Han, Hui, Tibetan, Mongolian, Uygur, Kazakh, Manchu, Bai, Dong, Tujia, Li, Miao, Qiang, Yao, Yi, Zhuang, Dai, etc. . Among them, the Han nationality accounted for 42.3% of the ethnic source composition, and the Hui nationality and other minorities accounted for 58.7%. It is not hard to explain the rationality of the high level of respect for cultural difference among English majors of this nationality university. The ethnic composition of English majors in this colleges is more diverse and complex than that of common colleges. In the English learning environment where such diverse ethnic cultures converge, English majors generally have a high level of awareness and recognition of the cultural differences between the native language and the target language. Respect for cultural difference is one of the important factors that affect the IS level, while intercultural sensitivity is one of the necessary elements to ensure successful communication in a intercultural context. So it is an important gripper for cultivating and improving intercultural communication skills, and it is also an effective way to promote mutual understanding and smooth communication between the two parties in a intercultural context. Furthermore, it can be seen from the descriptive statistics of validity subjects that the English language proficiency level of the English majors in the university is poor. The number of participants who have obtained the certificate of English majors test Band 4 is 20, accounting for only 12.3%,. The number of respondents without any English level certificate is 30, accounting for 18.4%. Therefore, the poor English language proficiency and sufficient intercultural knowledge of English majors are the main reasons that limit their interaction engagement and confidence in intercultural communication, which are also important factors that affect the IS level of them. In addition, the IS level is also related to the practical experience and horizon of intercultural communication. Among the valid participants, only 4.3% had been abroad, and the rest 95.7% had no experience of going abroad any more. Since most of the English majors in this university are composed of ethnic minority students, which came from impoverished ethnic minority families, whose economic situation is not very well, which lead to large proportion of 40.4% impoverished students established impoverished files to get help from university or government. Among them, underprivileged students from Gansu, Guizhou and Yunnan province accounted for a relatively high proportion, 17.9%, 14.0% and 11.9% respectively. Moreover, among these students who have established impoverished files, more than 90% of those who are eligible to apply for temporary subsidies or scholarship offered by university or government. The economic status of less affluent families is the main factor restricting them from studying abroad and participating in cultural exchange activities. The results inferenced above also confirmed through random interviews

### **5.2 Implications and Suggestions**

Suggestions are provided on how to improve the intercultural sensitivity of English majors in ethnic colleges based on research findings and random interview results. Firstly, the overall English language proficiency of English majors is generally insufficient, and it is necessary to further

improve their mastery of English language and cultural knowledge and the ability to use language skills to consolidate their language skills continuously. Secondly, make full use of international cooperation in running schools and the state's support for ethnic minority students to broaden opportunities for English majors in ethnic colleges and universities to go abroad for exchanges in related university abroad to experience the real English language environment and intercultural communication opportunities. Such as, co-organizing short-term summer camps with foreign institutions, recommending outstanding students to foreign institutions as exchange students, summer paid foreign internship programs, etc. Thirdly, creating a various, diversified and authentic intercultural communication environment with the participation of foreign teachers and overseas students for English majors to experience. Such as International Foreign Language Cultural Festival, Foreign Language Song Contest, English Poetry Recitation Contest, etc. Fourthly, inviting domestic and foreign experts and scholars to hold intercultural seminars, and joining teachers with relevant overseas learning or teaching experiences and vivid authentic intercultural communication cases to share with English majors in ethnic colleges, and answer their encounters and puzzles in intercultural communication and help them to solve together. Fifthly, English majors should actively and consciously take selective course in certain social and cultural category, and acquiring necessary intercultural knowledges and abilities to increase their intercultural engagement and confidence in intercultural communication. At last, taking advantage of international competitions, cultural expos, commercial and cultural tourism activities hosted by provinces northwest China, such as the Lanzhou International Marathon, the Silk Road (Dunhuang) International Cultural Expo and the Qinghai Lake International Road Cycling Race, to encourage English majors students of nationality university participant as volunteers to experience and reflect in an authentic intercultural communication context.

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