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## How the English Language Students Perceive Cultural Diversity

Sukardi Weda,<sup>1</sup> Fathu Rahman,<sup>2</sup> & Andi Elsa Fadhilah Sakti<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1&3</sup>English Department Faculty of Languages and Literature State University of Makassar Jln. A. Pangerang Pettarani Makassar, Indonesia.

<sup>2</sup>English Department Hasanuddin University Jln. Perintis Kemerdekaan KM 10 Makassar Indonesia.

DOI - <http://doi.org/10.37502/IJSMR.2022.5214>

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### Abstract

This study is based on the perceptions of cultural diversity of higher education students in Indonesia. It aims at: 1) examining the students' perception on diversity in higher education, 2) investigating why it is necessary to respect people from different cultural backgrounds, and 3) exploring the benefits of interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. The present study also identifies an important aspect in interacting with students from a different cultural background, so that the policy maker could take the study as a source in new policy formulation in educational practices. It employed a mixed-methods research design under the paradigm of descriptive statistics illustrating mean, standard deviation, and percentage, followed by detailed explanation of the statements given by the students. The participants of the study were the students of the Graduate Program of English Education Study Program, State University of Makassar, Indonesia in the 2019/2020 academic year. The instrument of the research was an open-ended questionnaire. The study reveals that the most frequent source of students' intercultural communication practice comprehends that a great nation is a nation that understands and accepts cultural diversity and the participants strongly respect other people from different cultures. They also claim that difference is advantage that needs to be and openly accepted in a multi-cultural society. The study also concludes that there are many benefits associated with interacting with people from different cultures; some of those advantages are related to improving one's cultural knowledge, being an open-minded person, exchanging on differing life styles, and becoming a more open-minded person and tolerant person.

**Keywords:** cultural diversity, cultural barriers, ethnicity, diversity, cultural acceptance.

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### 1. Introduction

Indonesia is a multi-ethnic country which has approximately 1000 ethnic groups (Weda & Atmowardoyo, 2018). According to the 2010 census *Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS)*, Indonesia has more than 300 ethnic groups, more precisely there are 1,340 ethnic groups in the country (Indonesia.go.id). Weda and Atmowardoyo (2018) mention that as a large country with a variety of cultures and languages, everyone who lives in Indonesia needs to maintain good

relations with others and he is expected to have intercultural competence in his communication with people from other cultures. This idea is important to build social harmony and tolerance under *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* "Unity in Diversity." This is because, history records that there are a series of dark events concerning social disharmony and communal conflict that occurred in Indonesia, especially in Makassar as the capital of South Sulawesi. In Makassar, on October 1, 1967, Muslim students organized by the Muslims' Student Association (*Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam, HMI*) attacked nine Protestant churches, four Catholic churches, one nun dormitory, one academy of theology, one Catholic student association office and two Catholic schools (Mujiburrahman, 2006). The growth of ethnic prejudices between Buginese or Makassarese and migrants such as Javanese, Chinese, Arab, Toraja, and Flores which causes *SARA* (ethnic, religion, race, and inter-groups) conflicts in the city of Makassar (Arianto, et al., p. 2018). In Sulawesi, one case of the ethnic violence took place in Makassar on September 15, 1997, when a 9-year-old girl was stabbed to death in front of her own house by a schizophrenic Chinese youth. The girl and the youth had been neighbors and knew each other very well. The youth later was killed when the police and other neighbors tried to arrest him. The whole city of Makassar exploded in ethnic riots for three days after the incident, involving a lot of damage to Chinese properties (Kunarto as cited Sarwono, 2004). Another latent conflict which has been frequently occurred is a structured conflict that occurred in Bara Baraya, Makassar (Raharjo et al (2018). As a society that lives side by side in diversity, communication, mutual respect, and mutual understanding are very important to build harmony and tolerance.

Cultural diversity has emerged as an area of major concern at the turn of the new century (UNESCO World Report, 2009). Despite the fact that cultural diversity is important in our daily lives, it has become an invisible barrier to communication. Mazur (2010) argues that the issue of diversity is now considered important and it is projected to become more significant in the future due to increasing differences in populations of many countries. Jenifer and Raman (2014) who mention that cultural factors play an important role as invisible barriers, also add that with globalization, companies must focus on removing cross-cultural communication barriers. Cultural differences are considered to hinder a person's performance and are often a source of dissatisfaction, they do not prevent them from entering into intercultural communication (Gut, Arkadiusz, 2017). The impact of cultural diversity in the workplace can be favorable and unfavorable (Martin, 2014). Some negative effects include dysfunctional conflict, lost productivity, and difficult to achieve harmony in group settings and one negative effect of cultural diversity in the workplace is the increasing tendency of organizational personnel to engage in interpersonal conflict (Martin, 2014). Therefore, to reduce dysfunctional conflict in organizations or companies, inclusive organizations and effective strategies are needed to encourage cross-cultural communication. Mazur (2010) asserts that companies need to focus on diversity and look for ways to become a fully inclusive organization because diversity has the potential to produce greater productivity and competitive advantage. Furthermore, managing and valuing diversity is a key component of effective human resource management, which can increase productivity in the workplace. Diversity that is not managed in the workplace can be an obstacle to achieving organizational goals. Therefore diversity can be considered a "double-edged sword" (Mazur, 2010). On the other hand, the diversity of cultural workforce which is thought to greatly influence the 21st

century business world is very effective in organizational management styles, forms of behavior, communication styles and, in general, work relationships among individuals (Seymen, 2006). Cultural diversity represents a strategic and competitive advantage for modern organizations and societies.

The notion of an intercultural person seems more important in today's world, since the development of communication and transportation technology has enabled people in various countries to know each other (Mulyana, 2012). Effective and active communication in intercultural relations could be realized through mutual respect among people from different cultures. Similar studies were conducted by Vicente (2015) who argues that active communication would work towards actions that respect local diversity and the plurality of concepts involved in the process of overcoming conflicts in multi-ethnic society. Vicente (2015) adds that communication would be the tool to externalize the conflict of the members of the various communities involved in these locations. More recently, works by Horsaengchai and Mamedova (as cited in Chandler, 2015, p. 16) argue that positive stereotypes may aid to promote a mutual understanding across generations as well as giving people a basis for understanding and appreciating diversity. Since diversity or cultural differences are vital in international business, foreign direct investments, expatriates' work, and all international cooperation, active participants require an understanding of the differences between cultures (Routamaa & Hautala, 2008). They also mention that business negotiations, expatriate professionals, management of foreign personnel, and cross-cultural teams presuppose a good knowledge of cultural differences.

The research questions of this study are as follows:

- a. How do higher education students of English perceive cultural diversity in Indonesia?
- b. Why is it necessary to respect people from different cultural backgrounds?
- c. Can interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds be beneficial? If so, how?

## **2. Literature Review**

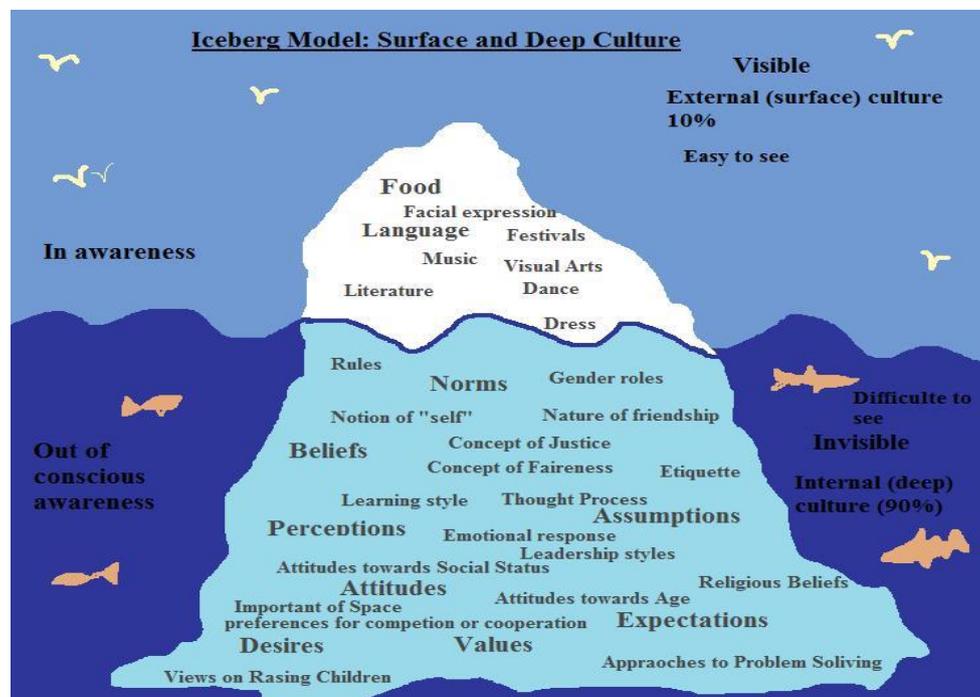
### **Culture**

The word 'culture' is derived from the Latin root *colere*, meaning 'to cultivate' (Liu et al, 2015). Liu et al (2015) then add that our language, customs, expectations, behaviors, habits – our cultivation within the specific physical environment and social context in which we were born, with which we grew up, and in which we presently live are vital in daily life. Culture and intercultural communication are the factors that have the greatest effect on how people communicate with others (Doman, 2015).

By definition, each culture is unique in terms of their languages, behavior patterns, and value systems (Milton, 1998). According to Cheney (2001) culture is the collective experience of a group of people that includes their thoughts, feelings, values, behaviors, communication, and their interpretation of sensory stimuli (sights, smells, sounds, and tastes). Culture functions as a set of material and spiritual values of society, comprising a variety of historical, social, and psychological aspects of the ethnic group, its traditions, attitudes, values, institutions, behavior, lifestyle, living conditions – in other words, all dimensions of its existence and consciousness, including its language (Breus, 2000 as cited in Malyuga et al, (2018).

Samovar, et al. in Mulyana (2012) present five categories which show that culture can affect our communication with other people from a different culture. These categories are: history, religion, values, social organization, and language. Bodley in Browaeyns and Price (2015) provide several definitions of culture. They are as follows:

- *Topical culture* which consists of everything in a wide variety of topics, or categories, such as social organization, religion and economy.
- *Historical culture*, is social heritage, or tradition, that is passed on to future generations.
- *Behavioral culture*, is defined as a shared, learned human behavior or a way of life.
- *Normative culture*, refers to ideals, values, or rules for living.
- *Functional culture*, it is the way humans solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together.
- *Mental culture*, is the complex notion of ideas, or learned habits, that inhibit impulses and distinguish people from animals.
- *Structural culture*, consists of patterned and interrelated ideas, symbols, or behaviors, and *symbolic culture*, is based on arbitrarily assigned meanings that are shared by a society. Some parts of culture can be observed while others cannot. Some parts of culture that can be observed are one's verbal and non-verbal behavior, performance, language, and ways people use their costume. The other aspects of culture that cannot be observed are: thinking process, assumption, value, distance orientation, time orientation, expectation, and perception (Mulyana, 2012 as cited in Weda & Atmowardoyo, 2018) Figure 1 presents the model of iceberg in the context of culture. Figure 1 shows the surface and hidden cultural aspects.



**Figure 1. Iceberg Model: Surface and Hidden Culture**

(<https://culturalconflict.wordpress.com/2013/11/09/what-is-culture-and-how-is-it-defined/>)

## **Cultural Diversity**

According to Liu et al. (2015), Understanding is the first step towards acceptance and the most significant benefit of accepting cultural differences is that cultural diversity enriches each one of us. Vicente (2015) argues that active communication would work towards actions that respect local diversity and the plurality of concepts involved in the process of overcoming conflicts in a multi-ethnic society. To maintain effective intercultural communication among people from differing cultures, ethnocentrism which may lead to prejudice, stereotypes, or discrimination need to be avoided, because they serve as a barrier to effective intercultural communication (Liu et al, 2015). They therefore argue that ethnocentrism prevents us from understanding people who are culturally different.

With regard to classroom activities, students should be given an opportunity to be engaged in meaningful conversations that expand their intercultural diversity competencies to incorporate intercultural concepts (Zikargae, 2013). In multi-ethnic society, prejudice, negative stereotypes, and discrimination are associated with intolerance and disharmony. We must actively strive to eliminate them in multi-ethnic societies to build social harmony and peace.

## **Intercultural Communication**

Intercultural interaction invariably reveals that communicating identities in the communication practices appear as main issues of a certain culture, which becomes an interesting phenomenon of a certain sociocultural community (Malyuga, et al 2018). Intercultural communication (IC) focuses on face-to-face (or at least person-to-person) interaction among people (Bennett, 1998). For this kind of communication to occur, each participant must see himself or herself as potentially people engaging in communication and are capable of giving and receiving feedback (Bennett, 1998). Indonesian people who live in Indonesia needs to maintain a good relationship to other people. They are expected to have intercultural competence in his or her communication with people from other cultures (Weda & Atmowardoyo, 2018). Students' communicative competence in the context of intercultural communication can be defined as their ability to take part in productive intercultural dialogues of meanings and relationships with people from different cultures (Klimova et al., 2019). The intercultural competence of a foreign language teacher is a very important component of his professional competence (Kostina & Mallaev, 2019). They mention that a cross-cultural constituent is a significant element of academic mobility, which, in turn, contributes invaluablely to the development of the teacher's professional competence. In the context of intercultural communication, communicative competence involves linguistic and pragmatic dimensions, but it also requires the ability to navigate between different cultural identities and awareness of different sets of cultural scripts or patterns of interaction which are unique to a particular culture (Klimova et al., 2019). Similarly, Byram as cited in Dai & Chen (2014) approaches IC from the perspective of teaching foreign languages. He states that competent intercultural speakers have linguistic and sociolinguistic or socio-cultural

knowledge and the ability to manage relationships between their own systems and other systems.

## Method

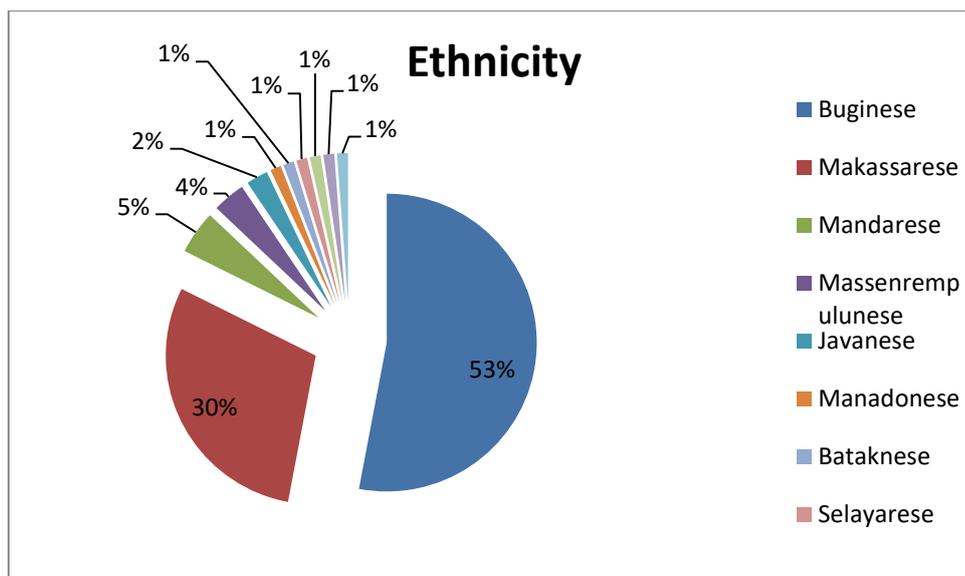
This study employed a mixed-methods (quantitative – qualitative) research design. In order to answer the research questions as stated in the introduction, 18 questionnaire items (15 close-ended questions and 3 open-ended questions) were distributed to students of the English Literature Study Program, in the State University of Makassar. The questionnaire was written in English and the Indonesian students were asked to rate their perception on how English language students perceive cultural diversity in the EFL classroom. In the present study, the students were asked to rate their perceptions with responses to the questionnaires on a 3-point scale (1 = agree; 2 = neutral, and 3 = disagree).

## Participants

There were eighty five participants in this study. The participants were 65 (76.47%) females and 20 (23.53%) males. Ranging in age from 22 - 40 years old, the participants were graduate students in an English education study program enrolled in Educational Psychology courses in the 2019/2020 academic year. The ethnic groups of the participants are revealed in Table 1 and Figure 2.

**Table 1. Demographics information of participants**

Demographic Information		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	65	76.47
	Male	20	23.53
Age	22 - 25	66	77.65
	26 - 30	15	17.64
	31 - 40	4	4.70
Ethnicity	Buginese	45	52.94
	Makassarese	25	29.41
	Mandarese	4	4.70
	Massenrempulunese	3	3.53
	Javanese	2	2.35
	Manadonese	1	1.17
	Bataknese	1	1.17
	Selayarese	1	1.17
	Tae'nese	1	1.17
	Luwunese	1	1.17
Torajanese	1	1.17	



**Chart 2. Ethnicity of Participants**

As seen in Figure 2, the ethnic composition was as follows: 53% Buginese, 30% Makassarrese, 5% Mandarese, 4% Massenrempulunese, 2% Javanese, and 1% Manadonese, Bataknese, Selayarese, and Tae'nese respectively. The ethnic groups were dominated by Buginese and Makassarrese because these two ethnic groups live in Makassar since their home town and other ethnic groups are from other islands or provinces.

### **Instrument and Procedure**

The questionnaire contained two sections. The first section asked for basic demographic information (gender, age, and ethnicity). The second section inquired about how English language students perceive cultural diversity. The participants of the study were presented with 15 statements concerning attitudes towards students from differing cultures and asked them to rate their response on a three-point scale of 'Agree' through 'Neutral' to 'Disagree.' The participants were then asked to answer two questions: 1) Why is it necessary to respect people from different cultural backgrounds?, and 2) Can interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds be beneficial? If so, how?

### **Measures**

Data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics 9.0 system, which showed the mean, Standard Deviation (SD), and percentage. The participants' responses of the questionnaire were transcribed and analyzed descriptively to show students' perception using qualitative content analysis with three main phases: preparation, organizing and reporting (Elo & Kyngäs 2008). Similarly, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) point out that qualitative content analysis is one of numerous research methods used to analyze data to show the characteristics of communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were coded and analyzed. The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics 23 to determine the mean scores, standard deviation (SD), skewness, kurtosis, and percentage. The qualitative data of responses to the 3 open-ended questions are coded with three steps: presenting raw data, making preliminary codes, and making final code (Saldana, 2010). The first and widest column contains the data themselves – interview transcripts, field notes, etc. The second column contains space for preliminary code notes and jottings, while the third column lists the final codes (Saldana, 2010).

Column 1 Raw Data	Column 2 Preliminary Codes	Column 3 Final Code
We have to respect people from different cultural backgrounds because we as Indonesian people apply unity in diversity in our soul and life. Indonesia is a country which has much cultural diversity, so we are Indonesians have to respect and explore other cultures to support Indonesia to be better country (Source: Participant 57)	“respect people from different culture”  unity in diversity  cultural diversity	Diversity or difference

## Results

1. How do English students perceive cultural diversity in higher education in Indonesia?

Table 2 displays the percentage, mean, standard deviation (SD), sum, skewness, and kurtosis of the research data.

**Table 2. Percentages, mean, standard deviation, sum, skewness, and kurtosis of students’ perception in the agreement between ‘perception’ and ‘intercultural communication’**

No.	Students’ Perception	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Sum	Skewness	Kurtosis	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
1.	I feel difficult to differentiate my culture and other cultures.	7.1	30.6	62.4	217.00	-1.095	.155	2.5529	.62689
2.	I find it easy to recognize people based on their cultural background.	49.4	32.9	17.6	143.00	.609	-1.009	1.6824	.75926

3.	I feel that people from a different culture have valuable wisdom and value.	65.9	28.2	5.9	119.00	1.236	.532	1.4000	.60159
4.	I feel more comfortable with people from the same culture than those from other cultures.	37.6	37.6	24.7	159.00	.233	-1.328	1.8706	.78359
5.	I feel closer to anyone regardless of their cultural background.	52.9	31.8	15.3	138.00	.736	-.803	1.6235	.73963
6.	I feel more comfortable with people who are open to receive people from other cultures than people who are close to receive others.	80.0	17.6	2.4	104.00	2.020	3.442	1.2235	.47249
7.	Most of my colleagues are from different cultures.	74.1	16.5	9.4	115.00	1.638	1.373	1.3529	.64928
8.	I usually look for chances to maintain relationship with people from other cultures.	58.8	32.9	8.2	127.00	.964	-.146	1.4941	.64777
9.	I like to help people from other cultures to solve their problems.	57.6	38.8	3.5	124.00	.763	-.418	1.4588	.56806
10.	I strongly respect other people from other cultures.	84.7	12.9	2.4	100.00	2.537	6.081	1.1765	.44122

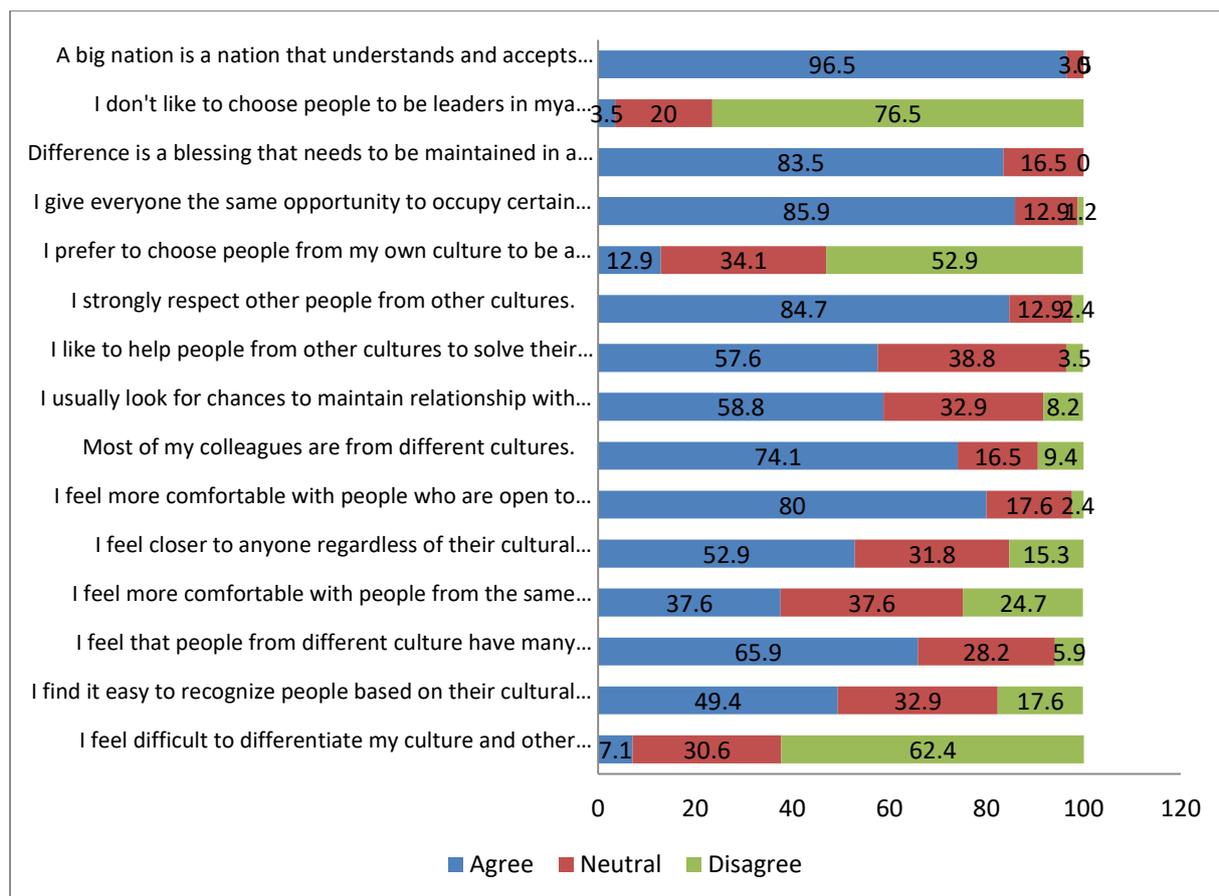
11.	I prefer to choose people from my own culture to be a leader in my community or group than other people who are from other cultures.	12.9	34.1	52.9	204.00	-759	-660	2.4000	.71047
12.	I give everyone the same opportunity to occupy certain positions regardless of their cultural background.	85.9	12.9	1.2	98.00	2.545	6.131	1.1529	.39358
13.	Difference is a blessing that needs to be maintained in a multi-cultural society.	83.5	16.5	0	99.00	1.841	1.421	1.1647	.37312
14.	I don't like to choose people to be leaders in my community if they come from different cultural backgrounds.	3.5	20.0	76.5	232.00	-1.798	2.454	2.7294	.52072
15.	A big nation is a nation that understands and accepts cultural differences.	96.5	3.5	0	88.00	5.128	24.879	1.0353	.18562

The means and standard deviations of students' perception on how English language students perceive cultural diversity are displayed in Table 2 and the proportion of responses of cultural diversity is displayed in chart 2. The findings illustrate that the students achieved a mean of 2.5529 and SD = .62689 for student's perception number 1 (I feel difficult to differentiate my culture and other cultures.). The students achieved a mean of 1.6824 and SD = .75926 for student's perception number 2 (I find it easy to recognize people based on their cultural background.). The students achieved a mean of 1.4000 and SD = .60159 for student's perception number 3 (I feel that people from a different culture have valuable wisdom and value.). The students achieved a mean of 1.8706 and SD = .78359 for student's perception number 4 (I feel more comfortable with people from the same culture than those from other cultures.). The means and SD for students' perception number 5 to number 10 are clearly revealed in Table 2. Finally, a normal distribution can be observed for all scales in this current study as revealed by skewness and kurtosis value as presented in Table 2. The highest

response for statement number 1 was Disagree with 62.4%. This means that the participants feel easy to differentiate their cultures and other cultures. The highest response for statement number 2 was Agree with 49.4%. The highest response for statement number 3 was Agree with 65.9%. The highest response for statement number 4 was Agree with 37.6%. The highest response for statement number 5 was Agree with 52.9%. The highest response for statement number 6 was Agree with 80.0%. The highest response for statement number 7 was Agree with 74.1%. The highest response for statement number 8 was Agree with 58.8%. The highest response for statement number 9 was Agree with 57.6%. The highest response for statement number 10 was Agree with 84.7%. The highest response for statement number 11 was Disagree with 52.9%. The highest response for statement number 12 was Agree with 85.9%. The highest response for statement number 13 was Agree with 83.5%. The highest response for statement number 14 was Disagree with 76.5%. The highest response for statement number 15 was Agree with 96.5%.

The majority of the participants argued that a big nation is a nation that understands and accepts cultural differences. This because we live in a country with 1340 ethnic groups and all people should maintain mutual understanding and accept differences. Walsh as cited in Mulyana (2012) mentions that the universal man is one who respects all cultures; he understands what other people of different ethnic groups think, feel, and believe, and he appreciates cultural differences. Baidhaway (2007) contends that developing mutual respect puts all human beings in equal relation: there is neither superiority nor inferiority. To respect each other in human society is a universal value of religions in the world. Baidhaway (2007) adds that mutual respect leads to mutual sharing among individuals and groups. The same comment is from Ip, Po-Keung (2014) who asserts that people living in the society would possess mutual respect and tolerance as the common attributes in realization of social harmony.

The participants of the study are moderate. They give other people the same opportunity to occupy certain positions regardless of their cultural background. Difference is a blessing that needs to be maintained in a multi-cultural society and the participants of the study strongly respect other people from other cultures. They feel more comfortable with people who are open to receive people from other cultures than people who are close to receive others. They also usually look for chances to maintain relationship with people from other cultures. They feel closer to anyone regardless of their cultural background. This in keeping with Vicente (2015) who argues that active communication would work towards actions that respect local diversity and the plurality of concepts involved in the process of overcoming conflicts in multi-ethnic society. Vicente (2015) adds that communication would be the tool to externalize the conflict of the members of the various communities. The same comment is from Williams (2005) who argues that exposure to various cultures was the greatest predictor of intercultural communication skills.



**Chart 2. Proportion of responses to cultural diversity**

In Chart 2, we explored the students' perception in diversity in EFL classroom in higher education. This figure shows the proportion of students' responses.

2. Why is it necessary to respect people from different cultural backgrounds?

**Table 3. Participants' different cultural background**

Participant 1	We respect people from a different cultural background because all people have their own culture. This means that there are many cultures and those cultures are different. Therefore, we as human beings must respect people from a different cultural background.
Participant 4	We know that there are lots of cultures in Indonesia and we must respect each other
Participant 10	Because as social beings, we need each other and we need to respect other people although we have different cultural backgrounds.
Participant 13	It is necessary to respect people from a different cultural background because we live with many kinds of different cultures.
Participant 19	It is necessary to respect people from a different cultural background because we live in a country which has many cultures. As human beings, we must accept and must not discriminate people just of their culture.
Participant 22	Our country has many cultures and each culture teaches people to be a better person.

Participant 23	Because we do not live alone in the world and our country has many cultures, so we should respect each other to keep our unity as Indonesian people. Our religion also teaches us to respect each other without looking where the people come from or what the people's culture is.
Participant 35	The main reason is because our nation is built by a wide range of cultures. Thus, in each ethnic group, we need to be wise and respect other people.
Participant 42	Because Indonesia has much cultural diversity, which means that we have to respect other culture. We are social creatures, we live in a society, means we have to accept and respect other cultures.
Participant 43	Because it is important for us. There are lots of cultures in Indonesia, therefore, we need to respect each other.
Participant 57	We have to respect people from different cultural backgrounds because as Indonesian people we need to apply unity in diversity in our soul and life. Indonesia is a country which has much cultural diversity, so we have to respect and explore other cultures to support Indonesia to be a better country.
Participant 71	Because, we live in Indonesia which has many cultures. We also need another help, so we must respect people from another culture.

Table 3 displayed that 12 participants say that it is necessary to respect people from a different culture because Indonesia is a multi-cultural country. The people in a multi-ethnic country need to maintain good communication with other people from a different culture because every culture has its own uniqueness and differences. Each people will hopefully understand other cultural identities and differences to employ mutual respect and avoid cultural misunderstanding in daily communication.

**Table 4. Different culture**

Participant 5	Because people from a different cultural background can show us their way of life, thinking, social interaction, and so on.
Participant 7	Because difference is beautiful, we can share our opinion with people who have a different cultural background and we can also know their culture.
Participant 8	Because, when we are only in the same culture and we do not respect people from different cultural background, we will not have good experience about other cultures.
Participant 11	Because people are social creatures. We cannot survive without other people and as human beings, we need to respect each other from a different cultural background.
Participant 12	Because it gives different culture knowledge, like its habit, dialect, and language.
Participant 14	Because if we are different, we can learn about culture and we can know about every culture around us, to enrich our culture knowledge.
Participant 20	Because each country has a different culture, different costume, and different perspective.
Participant 25	Because people from other cultures certainly have different cultures.
Participant 26	Because we are Indonesian people as a multi-ethnic country, we must respect people from different cultures.
Participant 29	It is necessary to respect people from a different cultural background because we cannot live without other people. If you want people respect

	you, you have to respect them. We should help people no matter what their ethnic group is. Difference is beautiful.
Participant 30	I think that we have to respect people from different cultural backgrounds because as human beings who live in Indonesia, we know about <i>Bhinneka Tunggal Ika</i> , which means unity in diversity.
Participant 33	Even though we are different but we are the same. As a human, I think all cultures have their own way to respect others.
Participant 36	It is necessary to respect other people from different cultural background because in this world we are not alone. Every culture has its own uniqueness. Respecting other cultures means there is no disunity or dispute. We can live peacefully by respecting each other.
Participant 50	Because respect to people is a must as a human. Diversity is not a reason to not to open to other cultures. People with a different cultural background make us know their habit and belief. So, we will understand that difference is important in our society.
Participant 51	Because as human beings, we must respect others even if they are from a different cultural background.
Participant 52	As a matter of fact that we need social interaction in our life and the consequence is to interact to other people whether they are from our culture or not.
Participant 53	We have to respect to people from a different cultural background because differences are amazing. We can know that culture is not an obstacle not to respect others. A different cultural background means we have diversity and need to be good people.
Participant 54	Respecting people from different cultural background means unifying differences. As social creatures, we need other people, wherever and whenever we travel, we are always respectful others.
Participant 55	Human being has been created by God with multiple cultural backgrounds. That is why, as creatures, we require respecting each other.
Participant 56	Because we are social creatures. We need other people to support our daily activities. We can imagine what happens if we do not respect to other people who are from a different culture.
Participant 50	Because respect to people is a must as a human. People with a different cultural background have their own habit and belief and we will understand that differences and respect them.
Participant 58	Because respecting other people from different cultures will prevent conflict.
Participant 61	It is necessary to respect people from different cultural backgrounds because we have a slogan " <i>Bhinneka Tunggal Ika</i> ," means unity in diversity. As creatures, we are human, we are the same.
Participant 63	Respecting cultural backgrounds means people respect their own culture. It shows that people can live with others from different culture.
Participant 65	It is necessary for people to respect people from a different culture because as human beings, we know that humanity is the number one issue that we need keeping.
Participant 66	It is necessary to respect people from different cultural background because we need unity.
Participant 67	Because we live in diversity and respecting people from different culture presents harmonious environment.

Participant 68	Because we are Indonesians and we live in different cultures, so we need to respect each other to maintain our unity.
Participant 69	Because every culture in our society is really different.
Participant 76	I think it is important to respect people from different cultural backgrounds because we can increase our horizon, inter personal communication and other cultural issues.
Participant 77	Because God creates people in different culture, and difference is a blessing. We must respect people from a different culture.
Participant 78	Because culture is beautiful and we can share many things with other people from different cultural backgrounds, such as sharing knowledge, experience, food, etc.
Participant 79	It is necessary because as human beings, we have many differences and having to know people from different culture is a blessing because we can learn from them.
Participant 81	Because we are humans, we have the same right, so we have to respect to each other even from a different culture.
Participant 82	We have to respect to others who have different cultural backgrounds. It is human rights.
Participant 83	Everyone has right as a human to be respected by others regardless of their cultural backgrounds.
Participant 84	Because we have <i>Pancasila</i> as our way of life and <i>Bhinneka Tunggal Ika</i> (Diversity in Unity) which means we are different but the same.

Table 4 shows that 37 participants mention that the reasons why they respect other people from different cultures is because they will maintain mutual understanding and harmony. This means that people from one culture respect people from different cultural background because they need to know their own differences and uniqueness. And to successfully maintain interaction with people from different culture, we need to know their behavior and traditions. In keeping with this, Matic (2008) argues that in order to successfully implement some practices originating from a different culture, it is necessary to identify domestic needs, values, and behavior, and then adapt the practices. This is because culture is often considered the driving force behind human behavior everywhere (Moran et al., 2007).

#### **Table 5. Mutual respect**

Participant 2	Respect people from different culture is necessary because respecting each other will bring meaningful life.
Participant 4	We know that in Indonesia, there are lots of cultures and we must respect each other.
Participant 6	Because, we are from Indonesia. We are one country although we come from other cultures, and we must respect each other.
Participant 9	Because as human beings, we need to respect each other.
Participant 16	We have to respect other cultural backgrounds if we want people respect us.
Participant 24	Because you cannot be respected by others if you do not respect someone else. This is because we live in a multi-cultural country, so it is important to respect others.
Participant 32	Because if we want to get respect other people, we have to respect others

	first.
Participant 38	It is necessary to respect other people to understand that no culture stands better, dominant, or superior to others.
Participant 40	It is because respecting people means respecting others without considering whatever their cultural background.
Participant 41	It is necessary to respect people from a different cultural background because it is part of us as human beings.
Participant 48	No one wants to get bad attitude from others. Everyone wants to have a good attitude and respect from others. So whatever the cultural and economic background, it is really necessary to respect all people.
Participant 62	Because if you want respect, you need to respect them first.

Table 5 shows that 12 participants say that mutual respect is necessary in maintaining communication with people from a different cultural background. It is a professional responsibility to become knowledgeable regarding these differences in strengths and values, and to use them as a fulcrum to increase mutual respect (Kalisch & Begeny, 2005 as cited in Kupperschmidt, 2006).

#### **Table 6. Diversity and Differences**

Participant 17	Because human beings are social creatures who cannot live alone. We need other people in our life. So a different culture must not become an obstacle in our life. Respecting each other is a way to grow or to make a good relationship with other people.
Participant 28	Because it is important to know or respect each other. We need each other to live, we cannot stand alone. The different culture is just the identity of people, we should respect others from a different cultural background because they have their own rule and it does not mean we do not respect them just because is different from ours.
Participant 37	Because everybody in this world has the right to be respected by others. In my opinion, differences are things that can make this life full of harmony. Life would be more beautiful if we respect other people's uniqueness.
Participant 39	Because I personally believe that difference is uniqueness and from the difference, we learn about unity and tolerance.
Participant 45	A big nation is a nation that understands and accepts cultural differences because our country is occupied by many ethnic groups. To keep the unity of our country we must respect and accept cultural differences.
Participant 47	In my opinion, human beings are equal, no matter what their cultures are. We need to respect each other, because difference is blessing.
Participant 57	We have to respect people from different cultural backgrounds because we as Indonesian people apply unity in diversity in our soul and life. Indonesia is a country which has much cultural diversity, so we as Indonesians have to respect and explore other cultures to support Indonesia to be better country.
Participant 59	Because we live in a different culture. We need some people from other cultures to enhance our knowledge, social awareness, and education to share our culture.
Participant 80	Because we live in diversity. It will be difficult for yourself if you limit your life.

As revealed in Table 6 diversity and differences are two frequent words which appear in the study. This reveals that as people who live in a multi-ethnic nation, diversity and differences cannot be avoided in everyday life, so mutual respect is very important in maintaining communication and interaction with people from different culture.

**Table 7. Peace**

Participant 27	God creates human different from another. We should totally accept that gift to make us unite. The world will also become a better place if we live peacefully.
Participant 46	It is necessary to respect everyone not only cultural background but also their religion, idea, interest, sexual orientation and so on. Respect is the key to have a peaceful life.
Participant 73	Respect is peace for everyone in the world.
Participant 75	Because we cannot live in peace if we do not respect people from different cultural backgrounds.

As we can see from Table 7, 4 participants say that peace is the reason why it is necessary to respect other people. Mutual respect and good communication can reduce conflict in intercultural communication and in turn can contribute to building peace and harmony in social life. MTBRE as cited by Baidhawry (2007) develops the awareness that peace requires mutual respect among followers of religion, and through this we prepare ourselves to listen to other voices and various religious perspectives; We respect the importance and glory of all individuals and religious groups. Sacrificing the dignity of others or using violent means to maintain self-esteem and dignity is never permitted. Respect causes mutual sharing between individuals and groups.

**Table 8. Learn from others**

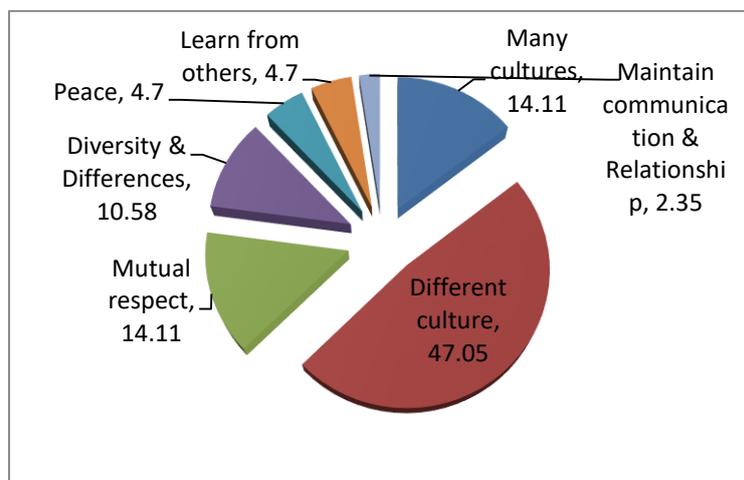
Participant 3	In today's world, if we all are able to respect and know about other cultures, and respect their values and beliefs, it would be easier for most of us, and we can learn a lot of good things from each other.
Participant 18	Because we can learn what culture people have. So we can get new knowledge and we have to respect each other.
Participant 21	Because people can learn each other from other cultures.
Participant 49	Respect people from different cultural backgrounds will make our life easier and we can learn a lot of good things from other cultures.

Table 8 illustrates that it is necessary to maintain respect to people from other cultures to learn many things from them. Maintaining mutual respect with people from different culture can give lots of benefit, one of the vital benefits is learning many things from other people who are from other cultures. We can learn their tradition, behavior, characteristics, value, and so on.

**Table 9. Maintain communication and relationship**

Participant 34	Because if we respect other people, we can maintain communication.
Participant 85	It is important to keep and maintain our relationship to each other. As we know, we are social human beings that need a good relationship and understanding with others.

As seen from the excerpt on Table 9 above, some participants emphasized the importance of maintaining respect to students from different cultures because they need to maintain communication and relationship as members of community. In maintaining communication and interaction with people from other cultural backgrounds, we need to respect each other, we need to understand that our cultures are equal. There is no superior culture.



**Chart 3. The reasons “Why it is necessary to respect people from different cultures”**

Chart 3 displays the proportion of statements from the participants in the study. There were 47.05% of the students who said that they employed mutual respect because there are cultural differences. 14.11% of the participants said that it was because there are many cultures and mutual respect. 10.58% of the participants said that diversity and differences were the reasons. 4.7% of the participants named peace and learning from others respectively and 2.35% of the participants said that to maintain relationship and communication were the reasons of participants to employ mutual respect.

3. Can interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds benefit? Why?

**Table 10. Improve knowledge**

Participant 1	Yes because interacting with students from different cultures can improve our knowledge.
Participant 2	Yes because it can improve our knowledge about other cultures.
Participant 3	Yes, because can know each other, know cultures, we can also develop our knowledge about other cultures, languages, and habits.
Participant 6	Yes, it can. Because students can exchange their cultures. Hence, we can learn new things and we can improve our knowledge about culture.

Participant 8	Yes, it can, because we will know other cultures and having friends from other different culture make us get more knowledge.
Participant 17	Yes, we can. Because it will increase our knowledge from other cultures.
Participant 22	Yes, it can. We can get many benefits with interacting students from different culture because we can get new knowledge from other cultures, their habits, their tradition, and so on. So, our insight or knowledge will get improvement.
Participant 24	Yes, interacting with students from different cultures will increase our knowledge.
Participant 32	Yes, it can. Because interacting with students from different cultures improve our knowledge about their cultures.
Participant 33	Of course yes. Interacting with others from different culture will help us to enrich our knowledge and perceptions.
Participant 37	Yes, we are able to improve our knowledge and experience through every culture that we meet.
Participant 46	Yes, because we can get new knowledge from students that have different cultures.
Participant 48	Yes, because we can get new knowledge from them.
Participant 67	Yes of course. If we have friends from different cultures, we can get more information and knowledge about their cultures.
Participant 74	It is beneficial since it can both improve our knowledge and enlarge friends.

As revealed in Table 10 the majority of participants say that the benefit of interacting with people from different culture is knowledge improvement. By interacting with people from different cultures, it can increase our knowledge of how to behave and speak well so that harmony and peace can be realized.

#### **Table 11. Open-minded**

Participant 34	Yes, it can. Interacting with students from different cultures will bring us into a wider perspective on every aspect of life. It will also lead us to be a more open-minded person.
Participant 43	Yes, interacting with students from different cultures can give benefit to us. It will make us more open-minded to accept the differences and we can be able to enrich our knowledge and perspective.
Participant 75	Yes, because we can know more about many cultures and we can also be an open-minded person.

Table 11 shows that the participants' comments on the benefit of interacting with people from different cultures are to be an open-minded person. In multi-ethnic society, diverse individual competencies are needed, e.g. Self-concept, open mind, non-judgmental attitude, empathy, self-regulation and interaction involvement (Baños, 2006). The same comment is from Davis and Cho (2005) who mention that the performance of culturally competent people is affective, behavioral, and cognitive abilities, such as openness, empathy, adaptive motivation, perspective taking, behavioral flexibility, and centered on person's communication.

**Table 12. Teach way of life**

Participant 44	Yes, because interacting with people from other cultures will teach us way of life.
Participant 49	Yes of course, because different cultures will teach us different way of life.

Table 12 displays that the benefit of interacting with people from different cultures is way of life teaching. This is because each culture has uniqueness and it will teach us the way of life and behave.

**Table 13. Tolerance awareness**

Participant 54	Of course, we can share our own culture to each other and we have to be tolerant to each other.
Participant 73	Yes, the benefits: 1) we know the other culture, 2) we know all about tolerance, and 3) we know about keeping relationship.

Table 13 revealed that the benefit of interacting with people from different cultures is tolerance awareness. The findings of this study are in line with Asmara (2018) which confirms that tolerance in interfaith life for Sasak people stems from an appreciation of the teachings of Islam and to maintain religious harmony, Sasak people realize that tolerance needs to be developed to avoid conflict.

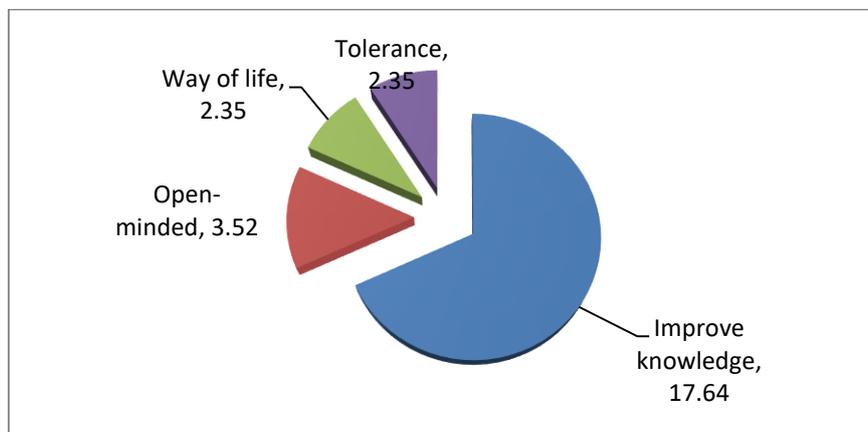
**Chart 4. The reasons “Can interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds benefit”**

Chart 4 shows the proportion of participants’ statements on what are the benefits of interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. 17.64% of the participants named improving knowledge, 3.52% – being open-minded, 2.35% of them said that tolerance and way of life respectively were the reasons of participants to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds.

### 3. Discussion

The study which examines on how English students perceive diversity in higher education, investigates why it is important to respect people from different cultural backgrounds, and explores the benefits of interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds.

In relation to the first research question, there are some important findings, those are:

- A great nation is a nation that understands and accepts cultural differences,
- It gives everyone the same opportunity to occupy certain positions regardless of their cultural background,
- They strongly respect other people from other cultures,
- Difference is a blessing that needs to be maintained in a multi-cultural society,
- They feel more comfortable with people who are open to receive people from other cultures than people who are close to receive others,
- They like to choose people to be leaders in their community even though they come from different cultural backgrounds,
- They feel easy to differentiate their culture and other cultures. These findings reveal that there are many cultural characteristics in our community from one culture and another culture and the differences are blessings from God. The cultural differences are potential to enhance our togetherness in our society if they are well managed. As human beings, we need to respect other people from different cultural backgrounds to promote social harmony and tolerance where we live.

These findings are consistent with previously mentioned research which states that these cultural differences become the main reason of the participants to maintain communication and interaction with people from different cultures. Cultural differences are the communication resources in intercultural communication and global communication in a wide variety of activities. Harris et al. (2004) argue that today, effective global leaders believe that cultural differences, if well-managed, are resources, not handicaps in communication and interaction. Mazur (2010) asserts that managing and valuing diversity is a key component of effective human resource management, which can increase productivity in the workplace. Schneider and Barsoux, 1997 as cited in Dafoulas and Macaulay (2001) argue that the most effective way to deal with cultural differences is to use any archetypes as starting points and continuously update them with new information. Therefore in multi-cultural society, mutual dialogue is important to promote understanding among people from different cultural backgrounds. The success of the multiculturalism policy lies in the systematic, consistent and continuous multicultural dialogue aimed at reaching a compromise and finding effective solutions (Kucheryavaya, et al. (2020). The same comment is from Lin (2019) who assert that dialogue is indispensable to teach about cultural diversity, this approach emphasizes that diverse cultures should be seen as treasure for human beings to have a more complete and comprehensive view of this world and preserve human culture.

The second finding reveals some other important findings. Those findings are many cultures, different cultures, mutual respects, diversity and differences, peace, learning from others, and maintaining communication and relationship. Many attributes from participants emerged from the research. The participants argue that they respect each other for a variety of factors, partly because they come from many cultures, different cultures, security, maintain

relationships, communication. Gut et al (2017) argue that ignoring or even disrespecting the different cultural values of interactants were regarded as basic barriers in intercultural communication, and such barriers can be avoided when a different cultural background is respected.

Certain activities occur across cultures, but their manifestation may be unique in a particular society. And that brings us to the opposite concept of cultural diversity (Moran et al., 2007). Walsh as cited in Mulyana (2012) mentions that the universal man is one who respects all cultures; understands what people of other cultures think, feel, believe, and they appreciate cultural differences. The third question shows some findings, such as knowledge improvement, an open-minded, way of life teaching, and tolerance awareness. The participants argue that many benefits can be obtained from interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds in the intercultural communication in a class, such as: knowledge improvement, and being an open-minded person, way of life teaching, and being a tolerant person. As Kuiper acknowledged (2017) that as a student in the class about intercultural communication opens more possibilities for transformative learning, not only because of the opportunity to learn about one's own culture and other cultures, but also because of the challenges that result from the basic concepts of identity. Accordingly, Zikargae (2013) mentions that on the belief that students should be given opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations that expand their intercultural diversity competencies to incorporate intercultural concepts. Liu et al (2015) mention that the biggest advantageous of cultural differences in multi-ethnic society is that cultural diversity enriches each of us.

The limitation of the present study is that this study only involved small participants (only 85 students) and the participants were from the same university. Future research will hopefully involve large number of participants and they will be from some universities.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study concludes that the students understand intercultural communication practice in a great nation is a nation that understands and accepts cultural differences. The students strongly respect other people from different cultures. They also claim that these cultural differences are a blessing that needs to be cherished in a multi-cultural society. This study also revealed that: 1) The participants feel that people from different cultures have wisdom, 2) Most of their colleagues are from different cultures, 3) They usually look for chances to maintain relationships with people from other cultures, 4) They like to help people from other cultures to solve their problems, and 5) They feel friendly to anyone regardless of their cultural background. In general terms, the students express that it is important to respect people from other cultural backgrounds because their society is made up of many diverse cultures, mutual respect, diversity and difference, peace, learning from others, and maintaining communication and relationships are important associated factors in a multicultural country. The study also concludes that there are some benefits associated with diverse cultural interactions. These benefits are knowledge improvement, the acquisition of qualities such as open-mindedness and tolerance, as well as learning about different lifestyles and ways of life teaching. Accepting cultural differences in our social life is a cornerstone to building social harmony and peace in a multi-ethnic society. Societies must work towards

mutual respect and an awareness of the needs of the ethical-moral and spiritual values shared by the communities in order to bring to a harmonious and peaceful population, both locally and globally (Siregar, 2016). The implication of this study is that educational practitioners and policy makers must include multicultural education under the umbrella of cultural diversity in higher institution curriculum. Further studies will be focused on larger participant populations in Indonesia in order to have a much more precise representation of the population with regard to the various ethnic groups.

### **Limitation of the Study**

The participant population and ethnicity composition is not balanced nor fully representative since this study was limited to one Indonesian university (State University of Makassar). As previously mentioned, in this case study, the participants were dominated by Buginese and Makassarese populations because these two ethnic groups live in Makassar, South Sulawesi and the other ethnic groups considered as migrants are from the other regions or islands.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks are due to anonymous reviewers and the editors who give comments and suggestions for improvement of the early draft of this manuscript.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The manuscript has not been submitted for publication in other journals and the authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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### Appendix

Sex :  
Age :  
Program :  
Ethnic group :

#### Questionnaire

Below is a series of statements concerning your perception of cultural differences. There are no right or wrong answers. Please write the number which corresponds to your answer into the space provided at the end of each sentence.

- 1) Agree
- 2) Neutral
- 3) Disagree

1. I feel difficult to differentiate my culture and other cultures.
2. I find it easy to recognize people based on their cultural background.
3. I feel that people from different cultures have valuable wisdom.
4. I feel more comfortable with people from the same culture than those from other cultures.
5. I feel closer to anyone regardless of their cultural background.
6. I feel more comfortable with people who are open to receive people from other cultures than people who are close to receive others.
7. Most of my colleagues are from different cultures.
8. I usually look for chances to maintain relationship with people from other cultures.
9. I like to help people from other cultures to solve their problems.
10. I strongly respect other people from other cultures.
11. I prefer to choose people from my own culture to be a leader in my community or group than other people who are from other cultures.
12. I give everyone the same opportunity to occupy certain positions regardless of their cultural background.
13. Difference is a blessing that needs to be maintained in a multi-cultural society.
14. I don't like to choose people to be leaders in my community if they come from different cultural backgrounds.
15. A big nation is a nation that understands and accepts cultural differences.

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Answer the following questions according to your opinion.

1. Why is it necessary to respect people from different cultural backgrounds?
2. Can interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds benefit? Why?