

Intercultural Sensitivity and Cultural Othering in English Language Pre-Service Teachers

February 2023 – Volume 26, Number 4

<https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.26104a5>

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Abstract

Developing intercultural communicative competence has become an inevitable need within 21st-century demands, mobilizing global efforts to promote unity through diversity. However, within the Colombian context and supported by an economic interest in bilingualism, most English language teaching programs still advocate educational practices that reaffirm cultural homogenization and legitimation. This presupposes a challenge for pre-service language teachers, who may not be interculturally prepared to overcome their ethnocentrism, and yet have to face a language classroom. The study explored the intercultural sensitivity level of a group of 50 pre-service English language teachers from a Colombian private university, its influencing factors, and explained its relationship with the representation of the Other. A two-stage explanatory sequential mixed-method design was employed, involving, in the first stage, quantitative data from a self-awareness intercultural sensitivity questionnaire and in the second stage, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and two in-class observations. Findings indicated that the participants demonstrated ethnocentric intercultural sensitivity arising from a traditionalist culture teaching approach, misleading artificial means to culture learning, and limited overseas cultural experience, which led them to perpetuate Cultural Othering, a social representation materialized through mechanisms of overgeneralization, cultural pride, and cultural underestimation. The conclusions and implications are further discussed.

Keywords: ELT, intercultural assessment, Self/Other binary, social representations, teacher education

Over time, language has been considered a means of constructing, reconstructing, and understanding the social world and its multiple realities by which ideologies, perceptions, practices, and political institutionalizations constitute repertoires of being (Byram & Guilherme, 2000). This function of language as a social action has attracted international interest among researchers of all disciplines, policymakers, and educators, who seek to analyze and explain cultural phenomena from an unbiased, flexible, and respectful disposition.

Within the educational setting and especially in the language field, initiatives have been directed to actively engage individuals in the transformation of their society (Giroux, 1992). Thus, learning a foreign or second language not only implies being linguistically competent and possessing an overall knowledge of social groups but also seeing the world through another's eyes and acting upon the diversified experiences one may encounter (Byram, 2008). Learners and future language teachers are then expected to progressively gain awareness of the different cultural conflicts, biases, and incongruities they might have towards the target language so that they can build a more comprehensive and neutral view of it.

Scholarship on intercultural communication and intercultural sensitivity has emerged during the last decades to prepare people to live in a diverse world. This includes contributions by recognized intellectuals like Bennet (1993), Byram (1997; 2008), Hammer et al. (2003), and Kramersch (1993) along with the ongoing deeds by intergovernmental organizations (e.g., the Council of Europe, the United Nations, UNESCO, etc.) and governments (e.g., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, etc.). In the case of Latin America, and particularly Colombia (i.e., the geographical location of this study), the Ministry of Education since 2004 has sought to improve the English language learning processes and thus the country's international competitiveness through national bilingualism programs addressed at all levels of education. The current program 'Colombia Very Well (2015-2025)' continues to broaden students' communicative competence, but unlike its predecessors, this version claims to emphasize the promotion of intercultural awareness within the curriculum framework.

However, without much success in real-life practice, recent literature has shown that in Colombia, EFL classrooms still conceive education from an outcomes model that replicates a traditional conception of the target language and its cultures (Robayo & Cárdenas, 2017). According to Cabrales and Loaiza (2018), Colombian students are mainly educated in a technocratic paradigm, language teaching is restricted to achieving linguistic and pragmatic knowledge, and culture teaching is focused on folklore and stereotypes. It is not surprising to find that future language educators are not fully satisfied with their undergraduate academic experience, especially with regard to their training in intercultural competence, as they are not given enough and adequate opportunities to learn the importance of being interculturally sensitive (Rojas-Barreto, 2019; Cuartas, 2020; Esteban-Núñez, 2020).

This reductionist approach to language education may therefore influence the development of learners' intercultural communicative competence and their experience as intercultural mediators. Being language classrooms sites where divergent voices emerge and are challenged on the grounds of hierarchical and hegemonic structures of social power and discourses, students are subjected to produce and reproduce distorted representations of individuals and their cultural identity (Kramersch, 1993; Moreno-López, 2004). They are susceptible to nurture ethnocentric beliefs and behaviors in the form of Cultural Othering, limiting the dialogue with the Other's cultural diversity, complexity, and uniqueness (Byram, 1997). Studies around the world have evidenced that both language teachers and students, who have not achieved a critical and agentive disposition, are more likely to uphold practices of neglected alterity (e.g., exclusion, denial, prejudice, etc.) that maintain social divisions and deepen miscommunication and misconceptions across cultures (Chavez, 2020; Song, 2019; Tabatadze & Gorgadze, 2018, among others).

Given the above, the present study aimed to explore the level of intercultural sensitivity held by a sample of pre-service English language teachers from Bogotá, Colombia, and explain its

relationship with Cultural Othering. This objective was addressed via the following research questions:

1. Intercultural Sensitivity: *What is the level of intercultural sensitivity in English language pre-service teachers? And what are the contextual factors that influence their intercultural sensitivity level?*
2. Social Representation: *How does the intercultural sensitivity level of English language pre-service teachers affect their representation of the Other?*

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Intercultural Communicative Competence and Intercultural Sensitivity

The notion of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) emerges as a direct reaction to the never-ending negative interpersonal manifestations of stigmatization, racialization, and discrimination of social groups and the pressing need to prepare globally competent language learners. By promoting this competence, educators seek to foster: (a) relational knowledge of self and the Other's social identity regarding their products, perspectives, and practices (*savoirs*); (b) skills to listen, interpret, relate, discover, and interact between cultures (*savoir comprendre/faire*); and (c) attitudes of openness, curiosity, and willingness to decenter from their cultural misjudgments and misbeliefs (*savoir être*) (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006).

The foregoing implies developing an Intercultural Sensitivity (ICS) performed through the ICC (Bennett, 1993; Hammer et al., 2003) by which learners are affectively, cognitively, and behaviorally transformed to openly comprehend, recognize, and accept the Others' cultural differences, as well as to deal with their own cultural meanings. They are expected to gradually move through an intercultural sensitivity developmental continuum (see Figure 1), departing from a 'very low or low ICS' (i.e., ethnocentric stage) to ideally reach a 'high ICS' (i.e., ethnorelative stage) (Bennett, 1993; Hammer et al., 2003). The level at which they occupy signals their intercultural sensitivity; therefore, a low ICS is commonly characterized by limited exposure and experience to cultural plurality and the withholding of negative attitudes, behaviors, and judgments. A medium/moderate ICS indicates confidence and awareness when dealing with cultural diversity, accommodative behaviors in line with target cultures' sociocultural norms and values, and a self-reflexive disposition. And a high ICS reflects integration, empathy, and acceptance of the Other by becoming an intercultural communicative person able to internalize several stances, switch between them, and function cross-culturally.

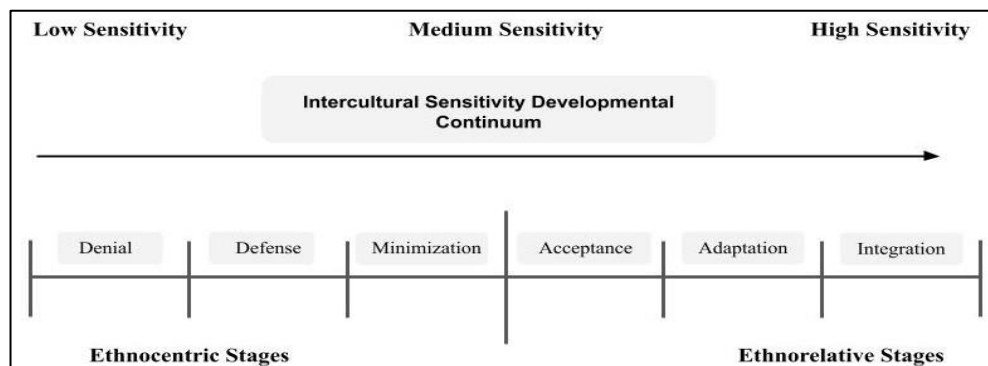


Figure 1. Intercultural Sensitivity Development (adapted from *Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity*, by M. Bennett, 1993).

Those language learners capable of “discriminat[ing] and experienc[ing] relevant cultural differences, [are more likely to] think and act in intercultural[ly] appropriate ways” (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 422) as they evolve toward an ethnorelative position of personal growth and an intercultural mindset that allows them to successfully adjust their knowledge, attitudes, and skills. However, those with low ICS, according to Brinkmann and van Weerdenburg (2014), are restricted to explore culturally different perspectives since they possess little understanding of cross-cultural situations, rely overly on their values and norms without finding alternative interpretations, opt for a superficial adaptation to new environments, and struggle to respect other cultures, which may lead them to culturally Other people, as stated by Byram (1997) and Kramersch (1993).

Social Representations: Cultural Othering

Social representations have been widely addressed by many authors in the fields of psychology, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, education, and others. Inspired by Durkheim’s work (1898) and expanded by Moscovici (1988), the concept, in essence, refers to ‘ways of world making’ (p. 231) by which social groups construct themselves and each other in comparable terms. Social representations are produced and coexist in the values, images, and practices of individuals and are subject to anchoring (i.e., categorizing an unfamiliar concept to make it intelligible) and objectification processes (i.e., naturalizing and simplifying an abstract concept to make it more concrete) that enable perceiving, interpreting, evaluating, and describing reality.

According to Jodelet (2008), individuals’ common-sense understanding of the world results in the creation of representations as forms of sociopsychological knowledge that incorporate the figurative, symbolic, and affective content of a social object (i.e., a situation, a person, a place, etc.). These representations, as stated by Abric (1994), are governed by a central and peripheral cognitive system that predisposes and justifies people’s attitudes and behaviors toward the object apprehended and their interaction. Its central system is linked to a high consensus and consistent collective memory (e.g., history, ideology, norms, etc.) resistant to change, and its peripheral system integrates new notions into existing representations so that the meanings of a specific object can be modified according to the experiences of individuals.

Therefore, the way human beings perceive and represent their experiences of the world is the same way they manage relationships. Through the interaction subjects constantly live, they find themselves building, deconstructing, and rebuilding their and others’ social identities based on their cultural schemata (Salmi & Dervin, 2009; Woodward, 1997). This interplay between the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ has traditionally been conceived as radical alterity irreducible to the sameness. It has originated from alienating discourses based on ethnocentric views of the ‘Self’ that marginalize people and create their ‘others’ under uneven conditions (Bhabha, 1994). Such is the case of ‘Cultural Othering,’ a social representation defined as a dualistic, unequal, and generally unfavorable sociocultural opposition by which the ‘Us’ is regarded against an inferior ‘them,’ excluded from ‘Our’ superior group, and reduced to less than ‘they are’ (Dervin, 2012; Holliday et al., 2010; Woodward, 1997). Othering, being a subjective understanding of the Other, allows the creation/re-presentation of the own and others’ cultural identity as a condition to establish differentiation (i.e., in-group and out-group) and to reaffirm the Self. As stated by Holliday et al. (2010) and Udah (2019), Othering becomes the materialization of the negative impact of stereotyping (i.e., an idealistic depiction of the foreign Other based on his/her cultural/ethnic background, location, political leanings, religion,

socioeconomic status, sex, etc.); prejudice (i.e., a judgment formed based on personal interest and a misguided generalization rather than emergent evidence); and culturalism (i.e., a reduction of individuals to a restricted group determined by their pre-defined cultural labels).

Research on Othering and intercultural education has been the focus of attention and subject of debate for numerous scholars. Authors like Byram (1997) and Kramsch (1993) have noted that both students and teachers are prone to making biased evaluations of others and even themselves as a result of their discriminatory and derogatory representations toward external social groups. For example, in a study on imagined communities, Chavez (2020) reported that a sample of 296 US university students of five foreign languages (i.e., German, French, Spanish, Russian, and Japanese) held stereotypical imagines of both German native speakers and German language learners. The German society was mostly portrayed via descriptors that emphasized people's negative traits such as "overweight, unhygienic, conservative, hate Americans, loud and yell, drunkards, punk rockers" (p. 7). Meanwhile, German language learners were depicted as "being fun, being from the Midwest (US), male, and wealthy (...) looking for a challenge and being rule-oriented (...) being weird and liking the sound of the language (...) being White or European (...) liking sausage and beer," etc. (p. 10). Findings revealed an imagined self/other-exclusion scenery around the overall German-speaking communities.

Cultural Othering has also been identified in teaching discourse, as evidenced by Song (2019). She observed how a Saudi female student from an ESL class faced race and gender-based Othering that restricted her class participation, intensified her marginal social status as a minority woman, and affected her access to further learning opportunities and linguistic and cultural resources. The woman experienced misjudgments and racialized comments from her instructor and Saudi peers, which simplified her culture and imposed a fixed identity on her. This was the case when her 'silence' was wrongly taken as a cultural convention instead of poor language proficiency and unfamiliarity with discipline-specific terms. Likewise, Fernández-Agüero and Garrote (2019) in their research on intercultural identity found that a group of language pre-service teachers projected a patronizing attitude founded on an ethnocentric disposition by which they centralized their position, belittled other cultures, and showed lack of agency and unwillingness to engage in intercultural situations. This proved their low sensitivity to cultural differences and the necessity to enhance teacher training programs in interculturality and self-reflection.

The aforementioned literature evidenced the enactment of Cultural Othering within the language instruction setting, where both language learners and teachers demonstrated to perceive cultural differences from an ethnocentric worldview, a rather opposite approach to what is expected from an interculturally sensitive person with the potential to exercise intercultural competence as part of the demands of the 21st century. This panorama coincides with the results of the present study shown below.

Method

Design

The study was informed by a two-stage explanatory sequential mixed-method design (Creswell & Plano, 2018). The first stage consisted of gathering quantitative data to provide an overview of the research problem (i.e., pre-service teachers' Low ICS level). The second stage collected qualitative data to understand the reasons behind the research problem (i.e., traditionalist

culture teaching, misleading artificial means to culture learning, and limited cultural experience) and to explain its relationship to Cultural Othering.

Participants and Setting

The first stage of the study involved a purposive sample of 50 pre-service teachers from the fifth to the eighth semester, who were enrolled in a five-year (i.e., 10 semesters) bachelor’s degree program in English language at a private university in Bogotá, Colombia. There were 35 female and 15 male participants from 20 to 35 years old, whose language proficiency varied from B1 to B2 according to the CEFR. They were co-teaching elementary English language courses from first to sixth grade in different official and private schools under the guidance of a supervisor. This teaching practicum made part of a compulsory component of their teacher education curriculum and a pre-requisite to graduate degree completion.

The second stage included a sample of five pre-service teachers from the same target population, all of them participated in interviews and only two of them volunteered for in-class observations. They were chosen based on their responses to an ‘Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire’ applied during the quantitative stage of the research (i.e., the two respondents with the lowest score, the two with the highest score, and one with an average score). To offer a general panorama of their particular characteristics and without any cross-tabulation purpose, their corresponding names (replaced by pseudonyms to safeguard their anonymity) and some sociodemographic information are shared in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Information of the Five Pre-service Teachers

Pseudonym	Gender	Academic semester	Pre-service teaching time (months)	Prior teaching experience	Participated in	
					Interview	Class observation
Camila	Female	Sixth	1	No	X	X
Roberto	Male	Eight	4	No	X	-
Gerardo	Male	Seventh	3	Yes (Private school)	X	X
Julián	Male	Fifth	1	No	X	-
Patricia	Female	Seventh	4	Yes (Language institute)	X	-

It should be noted that all pre-service teachers signed informed consent for voluntary participation, the retrieval of data and its analysis, together with the publication of results. Ethical issues were carefully monitored throughout the research to ensure the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of the participants.

Instruments

Intercultural sensitivity level questionnaire. The ICS questionnaire aimed to establish the level (degree) of intercultural sensitivity of the participants (i.e., from very low to very high) and not the precise developmental substage of intercultural sensitivity, as previously proposed by Bennett (1993). This worldview-weighted assessment (see Appendix A) consisted of a sociodemographic section (i.e., gender, semester of enrollment, practicum institution, and serving time) and an inventory of 32 agreement statements to be marked on a five-point Likert scale (being 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=generally, 4=often, and 5=always). For analytical purposes and to achieve an understanding of the respondents’ intercultural sensitivity performed through

intercultural competence, the questionnaire included statements pointing to specific dimensions of the ICC (i.e., statements 1-11 addressed the knowledge dimension, statements 12-21 the skills dimension, and statements 22-32 the attitudes dimension).

To consolidate the initial version of the questionnaire, the literature on the assessment of intercultural competence from a quantitative approach was carefully reviewed. Hence, the items (i.e., verifiable attitudes and opinions) of accredited questionnaires (Deardorff, 2006; Hammer et al., 2003; Lázár, 2012) with prior psychometric evidence were either modified, borrowed, or removed to address the particular context of the study, as suggested by Deardorff (2006) and Tabatadze and Gorgadze (2018). The resulting instrument was then improved following the recommendations of two experienced colleagues in the field of educational measurement and psychometrics, who verified its content and construct validity. Its reliability was confirmed using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient test with a value of .78.

The questionnaire was employed as it efficiently and objectively profiled the worldviews of the participants toward cultural differences by providing summative data. It has been empirically confirmed to be statically and cross-culturally valid owing to its extensive implementation in several contexts (e.g., intercultural education, language training, professional development programs, etc.).

Additionally, as recommended by Deardorff (2006), the following two instruments were used to gain insight into pre-service teachers' knowledge, observable behaviors, and attitudes about culture, cultural differences, and culture teaching.

Semi-structured interview. The interviews encompassed 15 questions resulting from literature on intercultural communication, intercultural education, and cultural identity. Each, five in total, was 30 minutes long, except for one that lasted approximately 8-10 minutes (i.e., Camila). These interviews invited participants to recall their English-language experiences throughout their academic life and to talk about their current teaching practice with a particular focus on the notion of culture. All of their answers were requested to be supported by examples and reasons to elicit more specific details, opinions, and attitudes. Some of the interview questions included, 'how do you define culture?' 'how would you describe your knowledge and understanding of the target culture?' 'what are the usual topics/themes and activities promoted in the language classes?' 'whose culture is commonly represented in the language classes?' 'do you include culture in your lessons? If so, how do you do it?' 'have you had contact with people from the target cultures?' 'how do you think of yourself in terms of cultural group membership?' 'how do you think other cultures see you?'

Moreover, the content and face validity of the interview items regarding their clarity, accuracy, meaningfulness, and grammatical correctness was reviewed by the same two colleagues who previously assessed the ICS questionnaire. During their judgment-validation process, the preferred items were confirmed and refined while three were excluded as these were not easily comprehensible and out of the scope of the research.

Non-participant class observation. The observations allowed the researcher to obtain first-hand data on pre-service teachers' pedagogical interactions in terms of the relationship between language, culture, and teaching. A detailed observation form was developed from literature on culture teaching and interculturality (e.g., Byram, 1997, 2008; Kramsch, 1993; Lebedko, 2013, etc.), it consisted of three parts: (a) a general background section about the school name, the observation date-time, and the class language level; (b) a focused section about the learning

objective(s), the learning activities and materials, the role of language and culture, the role and relationship among participants (i.e., pre-service teacher and students) together with their conversations, and (c) a reflexive section for further comments, raising questions, and initial interpretations.

Data Collection and Analytical Procedure

To tackle the first research question (i.e., what is the level of intercultural sensitivity in English language pre-service teachers?), a quantitative stage was adopted. A paper-based intercultural sensitivity questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 50 voluntary English language pre-service teachers, who were given 40 minutes to answer the 32 self-report items. Descriptive statistics, mean scores, and standard deviations were used to analyze the data, which were purposely clustered around the ICC dimensions (i.e., knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to obtain individual but complementary scores. This is a statistical practice commonly employed when processing Likert-type interval data (Boone & Boone, 2012) and has been previously adopted, for example, by Hammer et al. (2003).

In general, the mean indicator permitted the classification of the respondents' intercultural sensitivity level in terms of being high, moderate, or low for which the ICS assessment scale by Paige et al. (2003) was employed (see Table 2). Higher scores suggested greater intercultural sensitivity (i.e., less ethnocentric or ethnorelative) while lower scores indicated lower sensitivity (i.e., ethnocentric).

Table 2. ICS Assessment Scale

Rating	Mean	ICS Level
1	4.51 - 5.00	Very high
2	3.51 - 4.50	High
3	2.51 - 3.50	Medium/Moderate
4	1.51 - 2.50	Low
5	1.00 - 1.50	Very low

For research questions number two and three (i.e., what are the contextual factors influencing the intercultural sensitivity level of the English language pre-service teachers? and how does their intercultural sensitivity level affect their representation of the Other?), a qualitative stage was followed, which included two data collection instruments. On the one hand, five pre-service teachers participated in a 30-minute individual face-to-face interview conducted in English (except for one that lasted less time due to an unexpected schedule conflict with the interviewee), from which 15 open-ended prompts were given to elicit free responses. On the other, two observation rounds were conducted in the English language classes of two volunteer participants, who were invited to deliver a two-hour culture teaching session.

Descriptive data (i.e., pre-service teacher's behaviors, practices, and attitudes together with the classroom activities and discussions) from both instruments was audio-taped and recorded in field notes respectively, to provide greater specificity on what participants knew and were able to do. Subsequently, it was systematically transcribed, reviewed, grouped, and coded to generate major categories of recurring themes as a result of the applied thematic analysis (Graff, 2016).

It is noteworthy that the researcher did not teach the participants or intervene in any of their teaching sessions despite being a professor at the same educational institution. This role was assumed to avoid influencing their teaching performance and causing bias.

Findings

First Stage: Quantitative

This stage was designed to answer the first research question, namely, what the English pre-service teachers' level of intercultural sensitivity is. Descriptive statistics of the respondents' ICS summative score in terms of mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (SD) together with the ICS mean score in its three ICC dimensions (i.e., knowledge, skills, and attitudes) are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of 50 Pre-Service Teachers' Intercultural Sensitivity Level

ICC Dimensions	Lowest	Highest	\bar{x}	SD	ICS Level
Knowledge	1.94	2.72	2.23	2.14	Low
Attitudes	1.54	2.26	1.82	1.62	Low
Skills	1.52	2.08	1.84	1.68	Low
Total score			1.96	1.81	Low

The questionnaire reported that participants' total mean score was 1.96, corresponding to the '2=rarely' option as the predilect choice across the five-point Likert scale, and with a standard deviation of 1.81 that ranges from the '1=never' to the '4=often' option. Although there was not a statistically significant difference among the ICC dimensions, their mean scores showed that the highest mean value and the most variable results were on the 'knowledge dimension' (\bar{x} =2.23 and SD=2.14) while the lowest mean value and the most consistent or similar results were on the 'attitudes dimension' (\bar{x} =1.82 and SD=1.62).

The knowledge dimension, which comprised the highest mean score (\bar{x} =2.23) but still remained Low according to the ICS assessment scale (see Table 3), showed that the pre-service teachers possessed little understanding of the Other's social identity, particularly in terms of sociocultural (e.g., interpersonal relations and social conventions together with values, beliefs, and attitudes) and sociolinguistic knowledge (e.g., linguistic variations, register, paralinguistic features, etc.). Therefore, they may be prone to making superficial misattributions and misjudgments that are reflected in inappropriate behaviors and, in turn, create cultural shock and conflict. The attitudes (\bar{x} =1.82) and skills (\bar{x} =1.84) dimensions indicated a lower mean distribution, placing respondents as well at a Low level on the ICS scale (see Table 3). In the attitude dimension, pre-service teachers self-reported to have a rather fixed mindset, mainly concerning their confidence to face new intercultural challenges and their self-awareness when reflecting upon their cultural behaviors and mistakes, which consequently may restrain them from deconstructing their taken-for-granted worldviews. Similarly, in the skills dimension, they indicated that they struggle when navigating in diverse intercultural contexts, especially when interacting and discovering the Others' cultural backgrounds, which could make it challenging for them to establish relationships and adopt strategies to mediate between ethnocentric stances.

Broadly, pre-service teachers obtained Low scores in all the ICC dimensions as in the summative mean score, revealing that they exhibited a Low intercultural sensitivity level (see Table 3) and therefore positioned themselves from an ethnocentric viewpoint (Bennett, 1993).

Second Stage: Qualitative

Based on the previous findings, two qualitative research issues were additionally considered.

Through the second research question, it was identified the following contextual factors that influenced pre-service teachers' Low intercultural sensitivity level.

Traditionalist culture teaching and learning approach. The sample of five pre-service teachers appeared to have little cross-cultural background knowledge, skills, and experience to bring to their classroom. Their monolingual language education has typically been supported by a culture teaching approach in which cultural topics are addressed isolatedly in every other session but not fully integrated within the language learning contents. Additionally, they manifested that most of their school and undergraduate classes have focused on the dichotomy between High and low culture (i.e., thoughts, practices, and works created by and for elite people -classical music, fine art- vs. cultural production for the masses -popular music, reality shows-) from which it can be inferred that issues concerning deep or 'invisible' culture (e.g., gender, poverty, multiculturalism, among others) have been ignored or constructed discursively as undesirable. Below are some of the most illustrative answers from the interviewees as originally expressed in English:

Camila:

In the classes sometimes teachers talk about clothing, music, literature, and some other things related to the culture in the United States and the UK...I remember that two classes ago we had to present a role-play in which we were Hollywood actors...I proposed this same activity to my students but with the [sic] British accent.

Roberto:

Also...I think that if teachers only follow books, they cut [sic] the culture.

Gerardo:

And about you [sic] question if [sic] I incorporate the cultural factor in my classes, I can say that I haven't reflected [sic] this; however, I think that when I use in classes some didactic material, it sometimes has something implicit about the Americans...as [sic] luxury cars, skyscrapers, etc.

Julián:

I usually use videos in my classes about extreme sports or other topic [sic], I have also put [sic] videos about Madonna, who represents the American culture, and songs, too.

Patricia:

I think when teaching culture, taboos should be avoided because are hidden things and the [sic] society mention [sic] it [sic], for example, tattoos and piercings aren't a good influence because youngsters [sic] want to experience them.

This conventional language teaching-learning approach could, therefore, lead to consolidating inadequate pedagogical learning processes directly reflected in the teaching practices of the participants. Thus, during the observations, it was noted that both pre-service teachers opted for delivering a non-reflective and overgeneralized culture teaching session. For instance, the pre-service teacher Gerardo (observation #1), played a rap music video in which 'white people'

were portrayed as ‘individuals with luxury cars and beautiful women,’ while ‘black people’ were represented as ‘sexualized men whose hobbies are getting drunk and tattooing.’ Subsequently, he introduced a worksheet activity that required students to fill in the gap the missing words from the lyrics and the correct verb conjugation, to finally sing the song. Similarly, the other participant, Camila (observation #2), spoke about North American food habits and contrasted them with Colombia; she stressed that people from the United States are addicted to fast food due to their laziness to buy and cook healthier options and their unwillingness to exercise (e.g., *as you know, most of them they [sic] are really fat...[sic] only eat hamburgers, pizza, hotdogs, Coca-Cola...they don’t like to walk like we are [sic]*). They also proposed some other activities that followed the same cultural approximation such as observing two videos and comparing typical dances of ‘Americans’ (i.e., hip-hop and breakdance) to those of Colombians (i.e., Salsa and Bambuco) to discuss why the latter are better dancers (Gerardo, observation #1) and listening to the audio description of three ‘white American people’ to choose the adjectives that best characterize their physical appearance (Camila, observation #2).

Misleading artificial means to culture learning. Pre-service teachers’ primary sources to portray target cultures come mainly from artificial means such as their language learning classrooms and mainstream media. These means may perpetuate distorted and fragmented visions of others that could result in non-accurate cultural representations and, therefore, in the exclusion of diversity. For example, data showed that participants demonstrated an unclear understanding of socio-cultural knowledge (e.g., daily life, values, beliefs, etc.), little awareness of nonverbal communication mechanisms (e.g., body language, gestures, voice tone and pitch, etc.) and the linguistic variations (e.g., dialect, idiolect, register, etc.), together with disinterest in social issues (e.g., immigration, political debates, sexual orientation, etc.). The following responses exemplify this point.

Camila:

From my experience, I can say that the British pronunciation is better, politer and purer than the American, so, I do my best to imitate their accent and not look rude when talking...my teachers put [sic] audios of people talking in British English and it sound [sic] too elegant different from the one black people speak in the USA.

Roberto:

I think the English culture is well presented in the movies and [sic] Internet; they show nice big houses, nice cars, a lot of money, big cities, the American flag, the fights among white and black people...and I take this into account to talk with my students about how most Americans live.

Gerardo:

When we think about developed countries and how it is show [sic] in the media, there’re [sic] wealthy people, expensive cars and...this is something that is more attractive to kids...I think it’s nice teaching in this way. This is what I learn in my classes too...but also, nowadays in the media, there’re [sic] some bad examples, they show gays, sex, drugs, guns and these go against my beliefs.

Julián:

From the things I've read and seen [sic] TV, I can say that, for example, American people are too rigid when talking about trusting [sic]...they also suffer mental disorders that cause killings.

Patricia:

I'm not used to read [sic] about politics and other topics related [sic] that...and when you see [sic] news, it's always about people in the United States, smoking or selling drugs, wars with other countries, or big massacres...it's depressing...they're crazy for money and power, food...and also hate immigrants.

The 'Other' has then been created and recreated from socially taken-for-granted discourses of prejudice and even ignorance that reproduced misleading assertions and biased identity markers widely legitimated by participating pre-service teachers. It became evident their need to gain a sense of agency that motivates them to analyze how misrepresentations are embedded in the cultural artifacts and how these could affect their teaching practices and their students' learning processes.

Limited international cultural experience. Finally, the data revealed that the five pre-service teachers have never had the opportunity to study, travel, or work in foreign countries to be directly exposed to cultural differences, and thus possess an intercultural mindset to perform effective culture teaching practices and enhance their intercultural competence. They manifested that their financial limitations and the lack of internationalization opportunities (at home and abroad) offered by the Colombian government and their educational institution are some of the barriers they have encountered. Nonetheless, most of the participants shared their desire to live abroad and experience the target language and other cultures firsthand when they achieve a stable and prosperous future as a result of their personal growth and career path. Some of their comments in this regard are:

Camila:

I think the most easy [sic] way to be abroad is to be a nanny, but I also have to save money to apply.

Roberto:

The University has a program to study one semester of English in Missouri, but it is too expensive, they don't give us money [sic] support...we are students that [sic] come from poor neighbors [sic] and if we pay for the semester, we don't have more money to pay for a trip.

Gerardo:

I will [sic] love to go to [sic] United States but first I have to work...I don't have the money in this [sic] moment.

Julián:

As in other countries, our university should bring visitor professors and assistants...for us to have a [sic] close contact with the English culture...that would be great...also we would need government scholarships.

Patricia:

Maybe in the future when I get a teacher [sic] job and have a solid economic life.

Moreover, the second part of this qualitative stage aimed to explain how pre-service teachers' intercultural sensitivity level affects their representation of the Other, as implied in the third research question. Thus, data from the interviews and the in-class observations indicated that their Low intercultural sensitivity led them to perpetuate and reinforce the social representation of Cultural Othering embodied in the interconnected mechanisms of overgeneralization, cultural pride, and cultural underestimation.

Overgeneralization. Participants employed overgeneralizations to conceptualize, classify, and label certain traits of the US Anglophone culture and its people, who were identified by any of these collective nouns 'Americans,' 'Yankees,' or '*Gringos*.' It is noteworthy that although they were told that they could refer to several existing English-speaking countries, all of them opted for the United States as a reference point. This choice coincides with a study by Rojas-Barreto (2019), who concluded that approximately 80% of the research population were more familiar with the North American culture owing to Colombia's geographical location and media influence.

Table 4 shows the hetero-stereotypes mentioned by the five pre-service teachers and which are coupled to the identity markers of physical appearance, personality, behavior, and social values. In particular, it displays the number of times (i.e., frequency 'f') the participants referred directly or indirectly to any hetero-stereotype during interviews and observation sessions, together with their total percentage.

From Table 4, it can be concluded, on the one hand, that the five pre-service teachers possessed hetero-stereotypes of North Americans (i.e., citizens of the United States) mostly with a negative connotation (12), just a few positive references were made (5), and some others, apparently favorable, indeed conveyed negative evaluations that could become sources of bias and prejudice (8). Thus, for example, through qualifying adjectives linked to the figurative, symbolic, and affective dimensions of social representations, they categorized, naturalized, exaggerated, and reified the most salient sociocultural differences of the Other. In addition, the constant use of metonymies by which nouns reflected explicit socio-cultural attributes endowed with the 'Caucasian people' set fixed markers from which North Americans were stereotypically evaluated. Some examples of metonymies included: the Yankees (referring to the political, social, and economic imperialism of the USA over other countries), Hollywood (referring to the celebrity culture), smoke herb (referring to marijuana), ordinary Americans (referring to the US middle class), white people (referring to a light-skinned social group), etc.

On the other hand, the misleading pictures of the Other drove participants to make inaccurate and essentializing predictions about how individuals in the United States are and act. With a higher percentage value, people were pictured primarily as exponents of laziness (12.02%), obesity (11.06%), armed violence and drug abuse (10.10%), patriotism (9.13%), and racism (8.17%). This could be evidenced in the interviews through comments of the type "*Americans drive to every place, I don't see them to walk [sic]...even in the supermarkets they use carts*" (Julián, interview), "*you always see it, they are...carry a lot of guns, they don't care [sic] the safe [sic]*" (Patricia, interview), "*The Bronx is full of junkies...Los Angeles too*" (Julián, interview) "*they don't like any other country...they are selfish*" (Roberto, interview). Or in some notes taken by the researcher during in-class observations, such as "*after playing the music video, the pre-service teacher stressed that the 'American society' is a good example of*

capitalism, money is everywhere, and people spend it on cars, jewelry, big houses, etc.” (Gerardo, observation #1); and “[she] asked some students to discuss how Colombians are physically different from people in the United States and why these latter tend to be obese” (Camila, observation #2).

Table 4. Pre-service Teachers’ Hetero-stereotypes of North Americans (United States)

		Interviews (f)				Observations (f)			
		Camila	Roberto	Gerardo	Julián	Patricia	Gerardo	Camila	(%)
Identity markers and related Hetero-stereotypes									
Physical appearance	Obese body composition due to their obsession with junk food (-)	3	4	2	5	4	0	5	11.06%
	Taller than average (-)	2	0	1	2	2	1	0	3.85%
	Physically attractive (+/-)	1	0	2	1	2	1	0	3.37%
	Blonde, blue/green eyes, and white skin color (-)	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2.40%
Personality	Party people, who are very outgoing and friendly among their equals (+/-)	0	0	0	2	0	3	1	2.88%
	Uncomplicated when dressing and completing the household chores (+/-)	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	1.92%
	Active-minded and smart in the scientific and video games field (+)	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	1.44%
Behavior	Lovers of guns and drugs (-)	1	4	4	3	3	6	0	10.10%
	Racist towards immigrants and Afro-Americans (-)	0	5	0	2	3	7	0	8.17%
	Extremely violent (e.g., serial killers, rapists, etc.) (-)	0	1	5	2	2	4	0	6.73%
	Compulsive hoarders (-)	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1.92%
	Eager for power and money (-)	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1.44%
	Extremely informal when addressing someone (+/-)	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1.44%
	Gambling lovers (-)	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.96%
	Lazy (-)	3	4	0	5	5	0	8	12.02%
Social values	Very patriotic and united among their equals (+/-)	3	5	0	4	3	4	0	9.13%
	High self-esteem, considering themselves the ‘center of the world’ (+/-)	2	2	1	3	1	0	0	4.33%
	Middle class and materialistic (+/-)	2	1	2	3	1	0	0	4.33%
	Uphold National history and democracy (+)	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	2.88%
	Individualistic	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	2.40%
	Have freedom of speech (+)	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1.92%
	Religious and sports fanatics (+/-)	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	1.92%
	Have a strong sense of family (+)	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1.44%
	Impolite when talking in comparison with the British (-)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.44%
	Very punctual and practical (+)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.51%

Cultural pride. The participating pre-service teachers also exhibited assertions of national self-glorification and self-enhancement bias that nourished their image at the expense of

derogating and marginalizing the Other. Throughout their discourses, they frequently employed dualistic ‘we-they’ presuppositions, emphasizing the idea of superiority and justifying the difference with constructed auto-stereotypes that reinforced an unrealistic perception of the world, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Pre-service Teachers’ Auto-stereotypes (Colombia)

		Interviews (f)					Observations (f)		
		Camila	Roberto	Gerardo	Julián	Patricia	Gerardo	Camila	%
Identity markers and related Auto-stereotypes									
Physical appearance	Physically attractive people, especially women	2	3	2	0	4	1	5	14.29%
	Manly men	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	2.52%
Personality	More open-minded and extroverted	2	0	2	3	2	3	1	10.92%
	More warm-hearted	1	0	2	1	0	1	3	6.72%
	Very communicative	0	2	1	0	2	1	0	5.04%
	Trustworthy (<i>de palabra</i>)	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	3.36%
	Ashamed to say ‘no’ to someone	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.84%
Behavior	Hard-working nature	3	6	1	4	2	0	4	16.81%
	Go-getters (<i>echados pa’lante</i>)	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	2.52%
	Not drug addicts	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1.68%
	Very creative and resourceful	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1.68%
Social values	Better dancers	1	1	1	4	0	6	1	11.76%
	Attached to family and traditions	2	3	0	0	4	2	1	10.08%
	Hospitable	1	1	3	0	2	1	1	7.56%
	Happy	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	2.54%
	Good football players	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1.68%

The participants’ pride reflected an ethnocentric disposition whereby they utilized their subjective perception as cultural references to read and analyze North Americans versus themselves. They made homogeneous in-group-out-group evaluations and chose from the attributes that they considered best portrayed their social identity and distinguished them from others; thus, those with the highest percentage included a hardworking spirit (16.81%), physical attractiveness (14.29%), dancing aptitude (11.76%), an easy-going personality (10.92%), and a sense of family attachment (10.08%). Some remarks comprising these self-stereotypes were “*compared to them; we can work in [sic] any job and do our best, Colombians aren’t ashamed of working*” (Roberto, interview) “*for example, ... women in Medellín are one of the most beautiful woman [sic] in the world...their bodies and healthy [sic]*” (Camila,

interview) “we have typical dances like Bambuco...and most of us know how to dance Salsa well, right?...Americans dance Salsa like zombies, no movements” (Gerardo, interview) “everybody loves Colombians, we are friendly and make good jokes” (Julián, interview) “family is first” (Camila, interview). The observation notes also highlighted this sense of cultural pride: “[he] asked the students to compare cultural dances from two YouTube videos and to discuss in groups why Colombians are better dancers” (Gerardo, observation #1).

Cultural underestimation. As a result of the creation and reproduction of narrowed identity markers and hierarchy distinctions that characterized the Other as a homogeneous group of patriotic, unhealthy, money-oriented, and aggressive individuals, it could be noted that the five pre-service teachers projected cultural underestimation that restricted them from negotiating cultural meanings and building positive cross-cultural interactions. It is problematic for them to culturally relativize themselves and overcome any type of prejudices and cultural ignorance, which consciously or subconsciously, are rooted in their mentality and strengthened by their cultural schemata.

For example, most of the identity markers that emerged from the participants’ depictions of the USA implied negative meanings that overestimated its cultural complexity and dynamism. ‘Patriotism and high self-esteem’ were primarily perceived as a ‘threat to the freedom of other nations and egocentrism,’ ‘individualism’ was viewed as ‘selfishness with other cultural groups,’ ‘religion affiliation’ was interpreted as ‘fanaticism,’ ‘informal register’ as ‘rudeness,’ among others. During interviews and the observations, the pre-service teachers made comments such as “there are American flags everywhere all the year” (Roberto, interview), “they think they control all [sic] the world ” (Gerardo, interview); “wars with other counties...and also hate immigrants” (Patricia, interview), “immigrants are not welcomed...they don’t like any other country” (Julián, interview); “like in the video...American [sic] like being drunk, take drugs...and have you see [sic] that they go to church every weekend, is contradictory” (Gerardo, observation #1); “they’re loud when talking and...some words, phrases are rude” (Camila, interview). Moreover, the ongoing use of stereotyped comparisons via adjectives of opposing meaning (e.g., better-worse), adverbs (e.g., too, little), and correlative morphemes (e.g., more/-er than -for superiority- and less...than -for inferiority-) appeared to accentuate the cultural differences between the United States and Colombia as a form of unequalness that relegates the former to an inferior position. Some remarks illustrating this point included: “there...in the US people are more violent” (Gerardo, observation #1), “they are more lazy [sic] than we are” (Camila, observation #2), “women and men are very tall” (Patricia, interview), “Americans are worse in [sic] exercising” (Julián, interview), among others.

This cultural overestimation can become the principal element of cultural conflict speakers of any language might face since owing to their ethnocentrism, they deny the legitimacy of multilevel cultural identities. It seems that their understanding of their own and other cultures is the only accurate and valuable one, which could drive them to maintain communication boundaries based on misconceptions and misinterpretations.

Discussion

This research sought to explore the intercultural sensitivity level, its influencing contextual factors, and explain its relationship to Cultural Othering in a sample of pre-service English

language teachers. It was conducted employing quantitative and qualitative data sources, namely the ICS questionnaire, interviews, and in-class observation sessions.

The first research question revealed that the participants' intercultural sensitivity level was rather below average across the three ICC dimensions, placing them in an ethnocentric stage from which they could respond adversely to cultural differences (Bennett, 1993). It was empirically evident their pressing need to either acquire, strengthen or adjust the essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes to gradually enhance their intercultural sensibility, and therefore become interculturally competent as suggested by Byram (1997), Dearsdorff (2006), and Hammer et al. (2003). The outcomes of the present study coincide with findings by Genç and Boynukara (2017) and Yurtseven and Altun (2015), who identified a monocultural disposition in Turkish EFL pre-service teachers, and Tabatadze and Gorgadze (2018), who noted that a group of prospective Georgian teachers self-reported Low intercultural sensitivity scores.

Concerning the second question of this study, it was discovered that the intercultural sensitivity level of the 50 pre-service teachers was mainly influenced by their previous language learning experiences. Their ethnocentric inclinations were greatly shaped by their engagement as students in traditional classes that adopted an essentialist view of culture, as observed also by Cuartas (2020), Esteban-Núñez (2020), and Peña-Dix (2018). This simplistic approach was later reproduced by participants in their role as pre-service teachers. Their teaching practices reflected an 'employment' of culture as a toolkit to either transmit decontextualized knowledge of cultural artifacts, practices, and facts; perform cultural comparisons; introduce linguistic points, or enhance the learning atmosphere. It has been evidenced that mainstream educators and especially Colombian teachers lack previous experience and understanding of how to tackle, rethink, and integrate culture methodologically (Cuartas, 2020) to foster learners' reflection, critical analysis, conscientization, and agency (Bennett, 1993).

Moreover, the participating pre-service teachers exhibited minimal exposure to cross-cultural environments and therefore an absence of direct personal contact with other cultural groups. As identified by Cuartas (2020), Khan (2018), and Rojas-Barreto (2019) in related studies, their immediate approach to target cultures both inside and outside the classroom was primarily mediated by television, music, digitalized media, etc. from which they constructed and negotiated their meanings about the world, including those regarding the Others' social identity (Wang, 2017). Their sole reliance on these artificial cultural means to support their language learning and teaching showed, however, to be counterproductive, as according to Stein et al. (2019) and Stopar (2015), these may promote narrow images of outgroups by oversimplifying their identity and negating their plurality.

The qualitative data from the present study also unveiled that there are few or no opportunities of physical mobility for participants to be immersed in authentic intercultural contexts and situations despite being a key factor for measuring the national education quality. This reality may hinder language students' and teachers' understanding and integration into the target cultures for them to successfully exercise their ICC in their personal and professional lives. Such finding is in line with the remarks by Cabrales and Loaiza (2018) and Corrales et al. (2021), who noticed that the language education sector in Colombia has a low rate of participation in internationalization programs that involve gaining abroad experience in English speaking countries. This is partly due to its high cost; the little governmental and institutional funding; the lack of a co-constructed plan between the national authorities and the

academic sector; and the urge to implement public initiatives for strengthening foreign language education.

The three preceding factors were revealed to trigger in participants distorted sociocultural constructs on their sense of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other,’ which in turn led them to perpetuate Cultural Othering mechanisms about US citizens and their culture, as shown in the outcomes of the third question.

Cultural Othering manifestations are commonly found within the educational context since language classrooms become continuations of the sociocultural reflections of societies (Bhabha, 1994; Kramsch, 1993). When facing difference, Overgeneralizations are among the most frequent mechanisms employed by learners to convey their interpretations of outer cultural groups. Although accepted universal aspects of human cognition, overgeneralizations can however become socially harmful as they reinforce out-group distinction and leave no room for individualization (Dawes, 2021; Warren, 2012). That is the case of the five pre-service teachers, who showed to possess and publicly transmit inaccurate generalizations of the so-called ‘white Americans’ and ‘Afro-Americans’ in terms of their ethnicity, gender, physical appearance, social practices, etc. To illustrate, the identity marker ‘overweight’ became a common denominator across the participants’ comments, who perceived ‘Americans’ as homogeneous representatives of fatness and associated them with notions of laziness, unattractiveness, and unhealthy eating, even when research has shown that an “alarming proportion of [the Colombian] adult population - almost sixty percent - suffers from (...) obesity (Jiménez-Mora et al., 2020, p. 1893). Moreover, it should be noted that the rest of the racial and ethnic groups present in the United States, either natives, descendants, immigrants with citizenship status, among others, were not even recognized by participants; these populations were invisibilized by being discursively excluded and their presence overlooked, as previously noted by Khan (2018). Similar results in further studies coincided that EFL students tend to depict other nationalities via generalizations that usually stress their negative characteristics over others (Chavez, 2020; Stopar, 2015).

Cultural pride has also been widely used by language learners as a Cultural Othering mechanism (Chikvaidze, 2018; Lebedko, 2013). This is typically enacted through the reproduction and reification of affirmative national stereotypes. An appreciation of the collective self that, although reinforces group identity and integrity, could also delineate borders between communities and generate hostility. Results of this study suggested that the participating pre-service teachers opted for constructing their national character against the identity of the Other (i.e., US nationals) and for exaggerated opinions about their own cultural dignity, merit, and importance as if these were the norm and applied to everyone. This sense of over-affirmation and thus distortion of their own culture prevented them from taking a critical stance towards the possible artificial and deceptive boundaries of race, citizenship, class, etc. they could have formed and are conveying as practice teachers. Research has shown that an elevated national self-image could be explained, among other reasons, by people’s patriotic spirit and their negative perception of other cultures (Abdzadeh & Baker, 2020; Stein et al., 2019) through which they build social loyalty and justify their othering attitudes and behaviors.

Finally, as interrelated Cultural Othering mechanisms, both overgeneralization and cultural pride are, in turn, empowered by Cultural underestimation, a primary source of ethnocentrism (Rozaimie, 2018). Hence, from individuals’ inventory of real or imagined identity markers, the

differences between ‘Us’ and ‘them’ are accentuated and drawn as contrasting and stratified opposites that cause subordination of the ‘Other’ on the grounds of cultural devaluation (Cuartas, 2020; Chikvaidze, 2018; Woodward, 1997). This becomes counterproductive in intercultural education since by validating a particular culture over others, the five pre-service teachers established a root for social prejudice and discrimination that might directly impact their behavioral, affective, and cognitive responses, and ultimately, promote and reproduce cross-cultural gaps and conflicts (Kramsch, 1993; Lebedko, 2013).

Conclusions and Implications

The participating pre-service teachers’ limited understanding of what others do and why they do it and their lack of cultural agency (key components and pre-conditions for being interculturally competent), revealed their low degree of tolerance towards ambiguity; uneasiness to go beyond their comfort zone and explore new cultural perspectives; and the need for openness to imagine themselves in other’s shoes. In this sense, it becomes paramount to guide future language teachers to decenter from their ethnocentric mindset and transform their Othering discourses into more positive beliefs, values, and behaviors to acknowledge and embrace cultural diversity as legitimate and important.

From the findings of this study and related local literature, it could be stated that one of the main purposes of language academic programs in Colombia would be to build constructive and inclusive learning-teaching environments that facilitate pre-service teachers and the general student population to participate in cross-cultural dialogues and thus manage themselves in diverse socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, internationalization of the curriculum, co-curricular activities, co-articulated research studies and networks, study-abroad programs, governmental and institutional financial support, and more comprehensive and inclusive policies constitute some of the efforts that could contribute to their academic, social, and intercultural learning. Language classrooms themselves could also become the core for the establishment of intercultural education from which lesson plans, materials, assessment practices, teaching methods, and the needs and interests of students are culturally, socially, and politically situated. Such is the case of the class activities and pedagogical tools that stimulate their critical meta-awareness, problem-posing, dialogue, engagement, collaborative problem solving, and research attitude.

Moreover, it should be noted that some limitations of the present study may offer opportunities to future researchers within this thematic cluster. On the one hand, participants represented a homogeneous and reduced population, making it difficult to generalize the results, it is suggested to broaden the sample to include English language pre-service teachers at other institutions or nations. On the other, the Intercultural Sensitivity questionnaire (ICS) used depended solely on the participants’ self-report, which could result in inaccuracy and underestimation of their actual sensitivity level; therefore, it is also advisable to rely as well on open-ended questions to obtain elaborate and deeper responses that would have been unanticipated.

Finally, research on the following issues is recommended: (a) the effects of pedagogical tools (i.e., role-plays, skits, case studies, ethnography projects, telecollaboration projects, etc.) in overcoming Cultural Othering and (b) the impact of internationalization at home strategies on the enhancement of intercultural communicative competence.

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Acknowledgments

This research was financially supported by the Universidad La Gran Colombia under the Colciencias research group ‘Pedagogy and education for social inclusion and equity’ (*Pedagogía y educación para la inclusión y la equidad social*). Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers and editors for their insightful comments and suggestions that helped improve this article.

To Cite this Article

Linares, S. M. (2023). Intercultural sensitivity and cultural othering in English language pre-service teachers. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 26(4). <https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.26104a5>

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Appendix A. Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire

I-Statements	Mean	SD	ICS Level
Knowledge Dimension			
Q1. I recognize topics related to the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the target cultures.	2.18	2.10	Low
Q2. I acknowledge the essential norms and taboos underlining the target cultures (greetings, words, eating habits, religion, morality, sexuality, etc.).	1.98	1.84	

Q3. I distinguish and use the intended meanings of a variety of colloquialism, slang, regionalism, etc.	1.98	1.84	
Q4. I communicate in the target language in specific situations concerning sociocultural context (formal/informal, appropriate, politeness, avoiding the sensitive subject, etc.).	2.42	2.30	
Q5. I know that there are socio-political implications of cultural diversity.	2.32	2.33	
Q6. I recognize and use the intended paralinguistic features of the target language (gestures, facial expressions, posture, intonation, rhythm, stress, etc.).	1.94	1.85	
Q7. I am aware that as well as me, other people think, behave, and feel different.	2.36	2.26	
Q8. I am eager to learn about the geographical, environmental, demographic, economic, and political features of other cultures.	2.72	2.65	
Q9. I know that different forms of interaction imply several rules and communicative intentions.	2.04	1.98	
Q10. I am aware of my cultural context and how I might be perceived by others.	2.36	2.32	
Q11. I try to clarify what I intend to communicate to avoid misunderstandings.	2.18	2.06	
Skills Dimension			
Q12. I am eager to acquire new knowledge of the Others' cultural practices.	1.78	1.59	
Q13. I ask questions and search for further information when I do not know something related to the Other's culture.	1.98	1.90	
Q14. I identify, analyze, and explain ethnocentric perspectives in different kinds of text (books, videos, images, etc.).	1.92	1.84	
Q15. I express my standpoint concerning conflicting or supporting opinions.	2.04	1.94	
Q16. I recognize the particularities of verbal and nonverbal interactions of the target cultures.	1.80	1.66	Low
Q17. I identify problems that need to be solved.	1.76	1.64	
Q18. I work in-group to find a possible solution for any source of misunderstandings.	1.68	1.43	
Q19. I identify and comprehend possible areas of cultural misunderstanding.	2.08	2.02	
Q20. I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people.	1.80	1.60	
Q21. I negotiate meanings among interlocutors of different cultural backgrounds.	1.52	1.23	
Attitudes Dimension			
Q22. I maintain my values even among those who do not share them.	1.96	1.72	
Q23. I avoid making judgments on people's culture (food, sexual orientation, religion, etc.).	1.96	1.72	
Q24. I pay attention to how people's cultural differences affect their perceptions of the world.	2.26	2.19	Low
Q25. I allow others to express themselves freely and respect their point of view.	1.84	1.72	
Q26. I take advantage of every opportunity to meet new people.	1.88	1.79	
Q27. I feel confident when confronting unfamiliar or unknown experiences.	1.54	1.28	
Q28. I show curiosity about new cultures.	1.60	1.25	

Q29. I imagine being in another's shoes.	1.82	1.69
Q30. I know that I can make mistakes and learn from them.	1.58	1.25
Q31. I self-reflect on my behavior towards others.	1.62	1.26
Q32. I make an effort to understand what others think and how they feel in any given situation.	1.96	1.91

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