

Intercultural Sensitivity of Educational Management Students as the Future's Educational Leaders in Indonesia

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3

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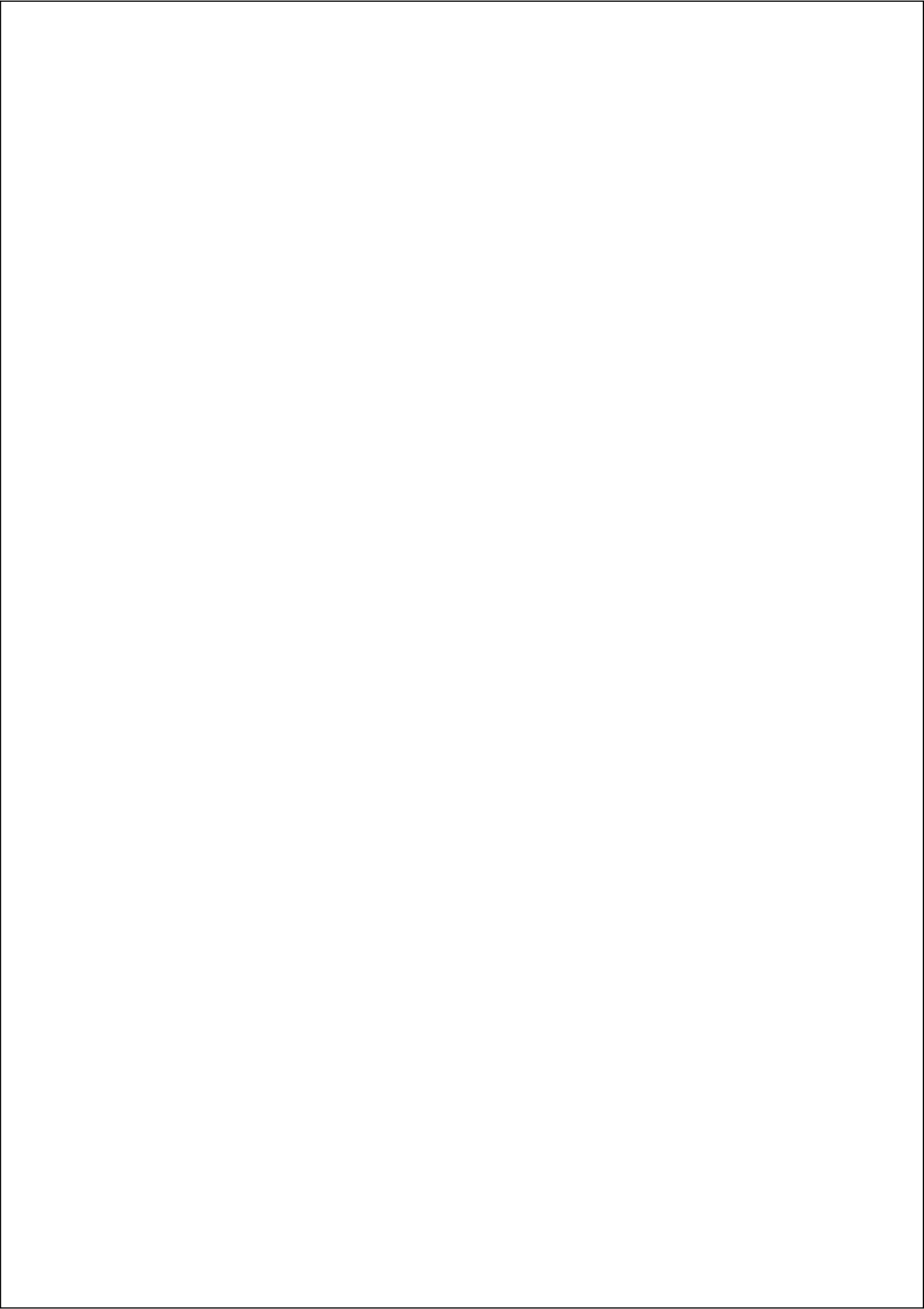
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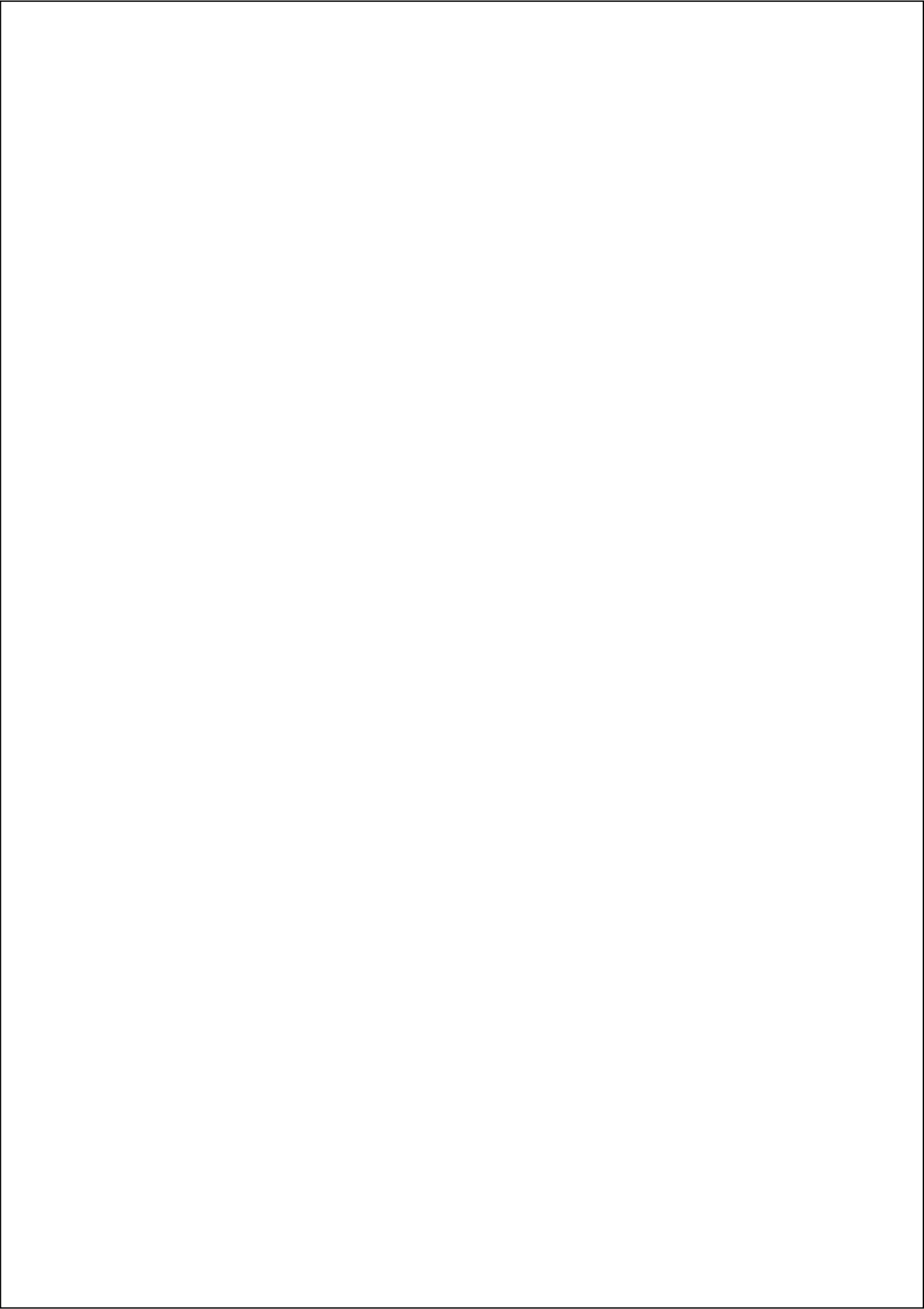
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Abstract

Multicultural education of Indonesia calls for future's educational leaders with a high level of intercultural sensitivity (IS). Hence, this mixed-method study investigated the IS of 784 educational management students from 10 universities in Indonesia, and their representatives' IS factors. They were recruited as the samples because their background knowledge supports their profiles as the future's educational leaders. The first objective was pursued by conducting a quantitative survey, and the second objective was pursued by undertaking an instrumental case study. This study revealed that the educational management students had a high level of IS as demonstrated by high values of all IS domains. Their high IS level was influenced by three factors which entailed experiences of living with diversity, noticing the multiculturalism of Indonesia, and accepting differences. At the end of discussion and conclusion sections, implications and suggestions for future's studies are given.

Keywords: educational leaders, intercultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, multicultural education



Sensibilidad Intercultural de los Estudiantes de Gestión Educativa como Líderes Educativos del Futuro en Indonesia

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Resumen

La educación multicultural de Indonesia exige líderes educativos del futuro con un alto nivel de sensibilidad intercultural (SI). Por lo tanto, este estudio de método mixto investigó el SI de 784 estudiantes de gestión educativa de 10 universidades en Indonesia y los factores SI de sus representantes. Fueron reclutados como muestras porque su conocimiento previo respalda sus perfiles como los líderes educativos del futuro. El primer objetivo se persiguió mediante la realización de una encuesta cuantitativa, y el segundo objetivo se persiguió mediante la realización de un estudio de caso instrumental. Este estudio reveló que los estudiantes de gestión educativa tenían un alto nivel de SI como lo demuestran los altos valores de todos los dominios de SI. Su alto nivel de SI estuvo influenciado por tres factores que implicaron experiencias de vivir con diversidad, darse cuenta del multiculturalismo de Indonesia y aceptar las diferencias. Al final de las secciones de discusión y conclusión, se dan implicaciones y sugerencias para estudios futuros.

Palabras clave: líderes educativos, competencia intercultural, sensibilidad intercultural, educación multicultural

1

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Indonesia is a multicultural country, and its multiculturalism can be positive due to the richness of cultural values and can be negative by virtue of being a potential factor that triggers cultural conflicts affiliated with races, religions, and ethnic groups (Morganna et al., 2020; Warsah et al., 2019, 2022). One of the causes of conflicts in the midst of cultural diversity is intolerance. The presence of diverse cultures as dynamic social affiliations (Syafri et al., 2020), if not accompanied by Indonesian people's acceptance of differences, will drive cultural conflicts very easily. Hence, resting upon *Pancasila* as the state ideology, the Indonesian government through the ministry of education and culture supports Indonesian children to be educated with a system of multicultural education so that the values of tolerance and diversity are embedded in their identities (Bhandari, 2019; Hoon, 2017).

Multicultural education is an educational system that incorporates the values of differences in socio-cultural affiliations (Barzanò et al., 2017). According to Gezer (2018), multicultural education is anchored in the postmodernist philosophy which views learning as a process of knowledge construction in contextual and socio-cultural ways, whereby cultural realities and cultural diversity are brought into learning processes and utilized as the potential modes of accessing knowledge. Multicultural education supports students to always respect cultural differences. The essence of multicultural education is to educate students to acquire intercultural competence (IC), provide equal educational opportunities for all students, and guide students to be socially just (Arphattananon, 2018; Dunn, 2017; Liu, 2020; Nieto, 2017). In multicultural education, educational leaders, e.g., headmasters of the head of educational institutions, are the cultural mediators for teachers and students in terms of both surface and deep cultures. This point implies that the role of educational leaders are to help teachers mediate students' learning processes so that students can develop their affective, cognitive, and behavioural competences in tolerance towards cultural differences (Barzanò et al., 2017). In other words, educational leaders help teachers also act as active facilitators to teach students IC. IC is one's affective, cognitive, and behavioural abilities to be actively involved in the dynamics of cultural differences (Barrett et al., 2014; Deardorff, 2006; Morganna et al., 2020). To help teachers provide students with ideal multicultural education,

educational leaders must have already acquired IC even since their college years (Jun, 2016).

Students can acquire IC if they have already acquired intercultural sensitivity (IS). According to Chen and Starosta (2000), IS refers to the affective aspect of IC that exhibits a person's desire to understand and accept cultural differences. In a psychological theory of attitude, Eagly and Chaiken (2007) posited that an affective aspect is the initial domain that shows a person's tendency to do something. Thus, IS represents an initial domain that students, teachers, and educational leaders need to acquire in order to develop their IC. As a cross-cultural affection, IS comprehensively represents an attitude that is capable of and potential to solving problems associated with intolerance. It cannot be denied that the problems of intolerance in Indonesia are mostly affiliated with the issues of cultural and religious differences. As echoed by Nan (2011) and Eko and Putranto (2019), an effective solution to cope with such issues is by means of cultural approaches, where the people of different cultures make efforts to realize their own cultures in tandem with respecting the presences of cultural differences from one to another so that a harmony can be embodied. The foregoing depicts an attitude that represents IS because those who have a high level of IS tends to realize, respect, willingly engage into, be confident in, and enjoy the dynamics of cross-cultural interactions (Alaei & Nosrati, 2018; Bae & Song, 2017; Demir & Kiran, 2017; Nameni & Dowlatabadi, 2018; Sarwari et al., 2017; Strekalova-hughes, 2017; Zhang & Han, 2019). In a nutshell, IS makes people inclined to behave well and become culturally tolerant.

Concerning the importance of IS as the initial stage of IC mastery, many studies on IS have been conducted. These studies were undertaken in various countries with different contexts of participants. They are the studies on international students' IS in Korea (Bae & Song, 2017; Kim, 2019), students' IS after undertaking an international mobility program in Andalusia (Rodríguez-izquierdo, 2018), Nebraska university students' IS after undertaking a study abroad program to Salamanca, Spain (Bloom & Miranda, 2015), primary and secondary school teachers' IS in Istanbul (Demir & Kiran, 2017), American students' IS (Mellizo, 2017; Snodgrass et al., 2018), the IS of adolescents taking a music subject in America (Mellizo,

2019), kindergarten teachers' IS in America (Monroe & Ruan, 2018), English teachers' IS in Iran (Alaei & Nosrati, 2018), medical students' IS in Iran (Nameni & Dowlatabadi, 2018), postgraduate students' IS in Malaysia (Sarwari et al., 2017), the IS of teachers who teach refugee children in America (Strekalova-hughes, 2017), and many more studies oriented towards IS.

However, to the best of our knowledge, there is a dearth of studies having been conducted on IS in Indonesia, especially for such studies with educational management students as the research subjects. Indonesian academicians tend to directly orient their studies towards the issue of intercultural communication, and oftentimes such studies are conducted in the contexts of English education and bilingual speakers (Idris, 2020; Morganna et al., 2020). In fact, the essence of multiculturalism in Indonesia includes many aspects other than mere languages. In this regard, studying IS in the Indonesian context covering the realm other than linguistics is worth doing. Thus, the present study is focused on fulfilling this gap in a way that investigates the IS of educational management students in Indonesia and delve into their impactful factors of IS. These educational management students are ones who will be the future's educational leaders in Indonesia. The present study is governed by the following research questions. First, to what extent is the educational management students' IS? And, second, what are the factors influencing the educational management students' IS?

Literature Review

A Brief Review of Intercultural Sensitivity

Ideally, the educational management students should have a high level of IS because they will be the future's educational leaders ²³ to lead the future's Indonesian multicultural generations at schools (Asha et al., 2022; Hamengkubuwono et al., 2022; Sutarto et al., 2022; Uyun & Warsah, 2022). With a high level of IS, they will also have a high level of IC (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2018). Subsequently, their IC will greatly determine the way they interact with teachers and students later on (Monroe & Ruan, 2018). As such, interactions with teachers and students they establish based on their IC

will provide opportunities for teachers and students to develop empathy, intercultural perspectives, awareness of differences, critical thinking skills, and abilities to be engaged into intercultural environments.

Intercultural sensitivity (IS) represents a constituent of intercultural competence (IC). IC is one of the goals of multicultural education wherein students are expected to have abilities to interact with people of different cultures and to respect the existing cultural differences (Jun, 2016; Tualaulelei, 2020). According to Byram et al. (2002), there are five elements of IC extending to intercultural attitude, knowledge of cultures, skills to compare, to interpret, and to build relationships, skills to find cultural information and to establish interactions, and critical awareness of cultures. Associated with Byram's et al. (2002) IC theory, the position of IS exists in the element of intercultural attitude. IS demonstrates one's ability to motivate himself to accept, appreciate, and understand cultural differences (Chen & Starosta, 2000). IS refers to an affective dimension as well as an initial stage before someone acquires IC (Alaei & Nosrati, 2018).

However, Benne (1993) defined IS in a different way, in which it is viewed as an ability to identify and respect both differences and similarities. He viewed IS according to the dynamics from ethnocentrism to ethno-relativism. The former covers three stages, namely negation, defence, and minimization. The latter subsumes three stages as well, namely acceptance, adaptation, and integration. The entirety of his model, however, seems to demonstrate cognitive responses to cultural differences. Theoretically, this model is quite conflicting because it can overlap with the so-called intercultural awareness. As can be learned from Chen and Starosta (2000), there are three elements under IC as the umbrella theory. Those elements consist of affection which refers to IS, cognition which is intercultural awareness, and behaviour which indicates intercultural adroitness. Nameni and Dowlatabadi (2018) and Sarwari et al. (2017) demonstrated that IS plays a role as the main factor supporting someone to capably build up intercultural interactions effectively. According to Bae and Song (2017), people who have a high level of IS will find it easier to adjust their behaviour and perceptions in a multicultural circle. Grounded in the IS model developed by Chen and Starosta (2000), IS possesses five domains comprising interaction engagement, respecting diverse cultures, interaction

confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. Such domains are imperative and can assist both teachers and students in executing multicultural education (Jun, 2016).

The five domains of Chen and Starosta's (2000) IS model become the yardsticks to recognize the extent to which one has acquired IS. According to this model, IS can be recognized in terms of not only one's consciousness in interactions but also his appreciation and respect for the information exchanged during cross-cultural communication as well as acceptance of others' individual complexities. Pursuant to the five domains, the domain of interaction engagement indicates someone with his empathetic attitude towards others and his willingness to actively and continuously take part in the complexities of cross-cultural interactions. The domain of respecting diverse cultures portrays someone with his open-mindedness to willingly express himself with his non-judgmental attitude and to willingly be receptive to others in the way they express themselves. The domain of interaction confidence represents someone who has high self-esteem with his own worth and values to take part in the complexities and ambiguities of cross-cultural interactions. The domain of interaction enjoyment demonstrates someone with his non-judgmental attitude leading him to enjoy receiving others' diverse views and cultures without making immature conclusions of any information he receives during cross-cultural interactions. Subsequently, the domain of intercultural attentiveness depicts someone with good self-monitoring to identify challenges that emerge in cross-cultural situations so that he can make behavioural adjustments to such situations. Grounded in the foregoing explanations, an intercultural sensitive person can be recognized from his/her empathy, active and continuous involvement, open-mindedness, high self-esteem, non-judgmental attitude, and good self-monitoring during cross-cultural interactions.

Method

22

This study applied an explanatory sequential mixed-method design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In so doing, the first problem of this study regarding educational management students' IS was answered quantitatively, and the second problem in respect of the impactful factors of IS was

answered qualitatively. The quantitative method applied a survey study (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012), and the qualitative method conducted an instrumental case study (Yazan, 2015).

Survey

The survey aimed to answer the first problem of this study regarding educational management students' IS. It was conducted on December 10th, 2021. It involved all educational management students who were studying at 10 universities located in Sumatera, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua Islands. Their population was 824 people. The educational management students were selected using a convenient sampling technique (Fraenkel et al., 2012). All students were given questionnaires about IS. Of 824, there were only 784 students who answered the questionnaires. Therefore, they were officially involved as the participants. They aged between 19 and 22 years old.

The survey deployed structured questionnaires to gather accurate data regarding educational management students' IS. The questionnaires adopted the IS instrument developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) because this instrument was convenient for the purpose of investigating IS in the context of multicultural societies (see table 1 for the instrument's blueprint). Indicators in the blueprint of IS instrument were adopted from the results of a piloting study conducted by Chen and Starosta (2000). According to the factor analysis of IS which involved 414 tertiary students, their study came up with five indicators of IS consisting of interaction engagement, respecting diverse cultures, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. All items of the five indicators had factor loading of $\geq .50$. Their study informed that those indicators comprising 24 items demonstrated empirical indicators of IS and exhibited a high internal consistency with the reliability coefficient of .86. Subsequently, their study involved 162 tertiary students from communication courses in testing the concurrent validity of IS scale. Seven interculturality-related instruments which were already developed by previous researchers were deployed. The scale of IS was further correlated with those of seven instruments using the formula of Pearson product-moment correlation. The analysis results of their

study indicated that the scale of IS had a significant correlation with those of seven instruments with $p < .05$ and r ranging from .17 to .74. This analysis proved that the IS instrument was valid. This instrument was already used by many researchers who studied IS such as Alaei and Nosrati (2018); Bae and Song (2017); Demir and Kiran (2017); Nameni and Dowlatabadi (2018); Sarwari et al. (2017); Strekalova-hughes (2017); and Zhang and Han (2019).

Table 1.

The blueprint of IS questionnaire adopted from Chen and Starosta (2000)

No	Constructs	Numbers of Items	Scales
1	Interaction engagement	7 items (items 1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23, and 24)	Strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), uncertain (U), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA)
2	Respecting diverse cultures	6 items (items 2, 7, 8, 16, 18, and 20)	
3	Interaction confidence	5 items (items 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10)	
4	Interaction enjoyment	3 items (items 9, 12, and 15)	
5	Interaction attentiveness	3 items (items 14, 17, and 19)	
Total of items		24 items	

In the process of collecting data, The IS questionnaire was copied into the Google Form. The Google Form link was further distributed to the participants via WhatsApp application. We obtained each of the participants' WhatsApp number from the data provided by the campus administrators. The survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics in order to obtain the values of means and standard deviations as suggested by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011). Following the procedure explained by Chen and Starosta (2000), of 24 IS questionnaire's items, items 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20, and 22 were reverse-coded before processing statistical analyses. Drawing upon the scoring indicators of IS measure, the present study relied on Alaei and Nosrati's (2018) classification in which a high level of IS was

represented by the mean scores from 3.5 to 5.0; a moderate level of IS was portrayed by the mean scores from 2.5 to 3.4; and a low level of IS was depicted by the mean scores from 1.0 to 2.4.

Instrumental Case Study

The instrumental case study aimed to answer the second problem in respect of the impactful factors of IS. It was conducted from January 5th to 20th, 2021. It incorporated 20 educational management students selected purposively (Yazan, 2015). There were a couple of criteria assigned to select the 20 student participants. First, they were easily accessed and contacted. Second, they were willing to be contacted in a direct way and via social media. Third, they were sufficiently communicative. Fourth, they were voluntarily willing to be interviewed across times. All student participants were affiliated with the essence of multiculturalism because they came from various regions and associated with a variety of ethnic groups in Indonesia. In the theory of interculturality, Byram and Wenger (2018) elucidated that multicultural societies already have IS potential, and this potential tends to be more easily constructed and developed. Thus, the essence of multiculturalism owned by the educational management students could help them acquire IS more easily. This study worked on proving the foregoing scientifically.

To garner data in regard to the factors influencing educational management students' IS, open-ended interviews with 20 participants were conducted. Interview questions were formulated to probe into motives (affection), reasons (cognition), and experiential conditions (behaviour) that led the participants' tendencies to five 8 indicators which subsumed interaction engagement, respecting diverse cultures, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. Those IS indicators were adopted from IS theoretical constructs proposed by Chen and Starosta (2000). In respect of the aforementioned Chen and Starosta's (2000) indicators of IS, the indicator of interaction engagement indicates someone with his empathetic attitude towards others and his willingness to actively and continuously take part in the complexities of cross-cultural interactions. The indicator of respecting diverse cultures portrays someone with his open-

mindedness to willingly express himself with his non-judgmental attitude and to willingly be receptive to others in the way they express themselves. The indicator of interaction confidence represents someone who has high self-esteem with his own worth and values to take part in the complexities and ambiguities of cross-cultural interactions. The indicator of interaction enjoyment demonstrates someone with his non-judgmental attitude leading him to enjoy receiving others' diverse views and cultures without making immature conclusions of any information he receives during cross-cultural interactions. Subsequently, the indicator of intercultural attentiveness depicts someone with good self-monitoring to identify challenges that emerge in cross-cultural situations so that he can make behavioural adjustments to such situations. The interviews were carried out via video calls and telephones considering the Covid-19 outbreak which impeded us to meet the participants in a face-to-face mode. Interviewing each participant took 30 to 50 minutes. As a whole, it took two weeks to solicit interview data from all participants. All interview data were recorded using a cell phone and a video recorder. Subsequently, every detail of interview data was duplicated in the form of written transcripts to be further analysed.

18

The data of interviews were analysed using an interactive model as recommended by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014).²⁴ This model operated in four dimensions of data analysis, namely collecting data, condensing data, displaying data, and drawing a conclusion.³ By adopting this model, all data collected were condensed by grouping the data resting upon the emerging representative themes. The criterion of consideration of such representative themes was the dominant foci or discourses negotiated by the participants during interviews. We learned all details of interview transcripts, and we made efforts to find out new emerging main themes representing all data instead of merely adopting the theoretical constructs that governed interview questions. Uncovering new themes of data in this case was critical so that the data could be reported to address the impactful factors of IS based on certain contexts of the participants. After learning the hard way to understand interview data in detail, we could finally come up with three representative themes which subsumed experiences of living with diversity, noticing the multiculturalism of Indonesia, and accepting differences. Interview transcripts were then grouped based on the three

themes in order to be selected for data presentations. Subsequently, the data were displayed in the form of tabulated data, selected interview transcripts which were the most representative, explanations, interpretations, and discussions. At the final stage, the data were concluded in a representative way.

Results

Educational Management Students' Intercultural Sensitivity

Anchored in the results of a survey conducted on 784 educational management students regarding their IS, the students had a high level of IS. This condition was proven by their IS mean of 3.988 (see table 2). From the survey results, the domain of interaction enjoyment reached the highest mean of 4.22 with a standard deviation of .715. The domain of interaction enjoyment was followed in descending order by the domains of interaction engagement with a mean of 4.15 and a standard deviation of .523, respecting diverse cultures with a mean of 3.94 and a standard deviation of .398, interaction attentiveness with a mean of 3.88 and a standard deviation of .406, and interaction confidence with a mean of 3.75 and a standard deviation of .551. Interaction confidence was the lowest domain of all. However, the mean value of interaction confidence was still classified into a high level.

Table 2.

Educational management students' intercultural sensitivity

Domain	Mean	SD	Level
Interaction engagement	4.15	0.523	High
Respecting diverse cultures	3.94	0.398	High
Interaction confidence	3.75	0.551	High
Interaction enjoyment	4.22	0.715	High
Interaction attentiveness	3.88	0.406	High
Total	3.988		High

Grounded in Chen and Starosta (2000) IS model, the high level of educational management students' IS exhibited that they tended to have positive responses to interacting with people of different cultures, would like to engage in active communication with people of different cultures, had tolerance towards differences in terms of cultures, would try to interpret and understand the existing cultural differences in intercultural communication, would be confident in the processes of meaning making, and would actively participate in intercultural interactions.

Factors Influencing Educational Management Students' Intercultural Sensitivity

Based on the results of interviews with 20 educational management students, there were three themes which represented the factors that influenced their high IS level (see table 3). These factors extended to experiences of living with diversity, noticing the multiculturalism of Indonesia, and accepting differences.

Table 3.

Factors Influencing Educational Management Students' Intercultural Sensitivity

No	Factors influencing intercultural sensitivity	Main information solicited from interviews	Participants providing the main information
1	Experiences of living with diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having friends who have diverse cultures • Often moving to different regions • Living in a region whose residents have diverse cultures • Being accustomed to collaborating during learning with peers who have diverse cultures • Having parents whose cultural origins are diverse 	Participants 2, 3, 5, 12, 14, and 17
2	Noticing the multiculturalism of Indonesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grasping the presence of multicultural realities around their residences • Having adequate knowledge pertinent to multiculturalism • Having a preference to establish interactions in the midst of multicultural people 	Participants 1, 4, 7, 10, 11, 13, 18, and 20
3	Accepting differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing cultural differences as a natural phenomenon • Enjoying discussions as well as interactions in the midst of differences and making the existing differences a mode of learning • Being open to cultural differences 	Participants 6, 8, 9, 15, 16, and 19

Experiences of living with diversity. Pursuant to the raw data of interviews, the first coded factor affecting IS was experiences of living with diversity. In this case, some of the participants indicated that they had friends of different cultures, often moved to different regions, and resided in a region whose residents had diverse cultures. The foregoing is portrayed in the following interview transcripts deliberately selected to represent others negotiating similar information.

Since I was young, I have had many friends of different cultures. Even my best friends come from three different ethnic groups. They are originally from Batak, Minang, and Palembang. We are used to building close relationships amidst our diverse cultures. For me, recognizing and understanding different cultures is interesting (Participant 12).

My father is a soldier who happens to frequently be sent to various regions. When he was sent to a new region, we all moved together with him. So, once I moved to reside in the other region, I got a chance to learn and interact directly with the prevailing culture and norms in that region (Participant 17).

I am a Minang descendant who was born in the land of Rejang. Even though Minang-governed familial norms apply at my home, I live with Rejang-based social norms outside. For me, I experience strong cultural integration. I even perceive that I have two social identities. The norms of Minang and Rejang have already been embedded in me (Participant 2).

Some of the participants also described their experiences of living with diversity in terms of being accustomed to collaborating during learning with friends of different cultures and having parents whose cultural origins were diverse.

Noticing the multiculturalism of Indonesia. The second factor influencing IS coded from interview data was noticing the multiculturalism of Indonesia. Some of the participants showed this factor by depicting that they understood the multicultural realities that existed in the regions where they resided in, and they had adequate knowledge in respect of multiculturalism *per se*. The foregoing is portrayed in the following

interview transcripts deliberately selected to represent others negotiating similar information.

Indonesia is a multicultural country. Even in a small region of Indonesia, let's say a regency, the residents are culturally diverse. For example, in the regency where I live, Rejang Lebong, there are some ethnic groups such as Rejang, Jawa, Minang, Batak, and even Tionghoa. I really understand the realities of multiculturalism existing in the regency where I reside in. Such realities drive me to learn to respect cultural differences (Participant 1).

I really understand the multiculturalism of Indonesia because I love civic education so much. Since I was at school, the civic education subject has given me much knowledge concerning the essence of multiculturalism (Participant 20).

As far as I am concerned, cultural differences are a social reality which undeniably exists in the midst of multicultural people such as Indonesian people. I don't like blaming whoever has a cultural perspective or belief different from mine (Participant 11).

Some of the participants also expressed their attitudes that noticed the multiculturalism of Indonesia in a way that they were willing to build interactions in the midst of multicultural people. As Indonesian people, they showed that they understood the multicultural realities which existed in the regions where they resided in, and they loved establishing interactions in the midst of multicultural people. The foregoing became the reasons for the high level of their IS.

Accepting differences. The third factor affecting the high level of educational management students' IS as coded from interview data was the acceptance of differences. Some of the participants showed their attitudes that accepted differences by viewing cultural differences as a natural phenomenon, enjoyed discussions as well as interactions in the midst of differences, made the existing differences a mode of learning, and became open to cultural differences. These attitudes are depicted in the following interview transcripts deliberately selected to represent others negotiating similar information.

For me, cultural differences, including differences in perspectives on social life, are very natural, and I really appreciate the differences that are associated with cultures. I am even interested in studying various cultural differences (Participant 19).

Studying at this university makes me accustomed to getting engaged into discussions because the learning system on campus tend to be oriented towards discussion activities. When holding discussions with colleagues, oftentimes my colleagues and I have different perspectives or opinions. I see that our cultural affiliations greatly influence the way we think and give opinions concerning an issue or a learning material. However, I like dealing with different opinions because the presence of such differences trains me to think more critically to find solutions during discussions (Participant 15).

In social interactions, I try to be open to other cultures which are certainly different from mine (Participant 8).

Their attitudes that viewed cultural differences as a natural phenomenon, enjoyed discussions as well as interactions in the midst of differences, made the existing differences a mode of learning, and became open to cultural differences indicated the reasons for their high IS level. As such, those 7 factors contributed to the high levels of their interaction enjoyment, interaction engagement, respect for diverse cultures, interaction attentiveness, and interaction confidence.

Discussion

The first stage of this study was to investigate the IS of educational management students at ten universities Indonesia. This study found that the educational management students had a high level of IS covering all IS domains. The IS domain with the highest mean was interaction enjoyment. The domain of interaction enjoyment was followed in descending order by other domains, namely interaction engagement, respecting diverse cultures, interaction attentiveness, and interaction confidence. Interaction confidence was the lowest domain of all. However, the mean of interaction confidence

was still classified into a high level. ¹³ The findings of this study are aligned with a study conducted by Alaei and Nosrati (2018) that examined EFL teachers' IS and intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The IS-related data indicated that their participants have a high level of IS across all domains. However, there is a difference in the order of IS domains viewed from the highest to the lowest means. The sequence of IS domains revealed by their study consists of respecting diverse cultures, interaction enjoyment, interaction attentiveness, interaction engagement, and interaction confidence in descending order. As a whole, the findings of the present study are also in line with those of Jantawej (2011); and Petrović and Zlatković (2009) revealing that that their participants have a high level of IS.

However, the findings of the current study are different from Nameni and Dowlatabadi's (2018) study investigating the IS and ICC of medical students in Iran based on four ethnic groups affiliated with the students. Regarding the IS data, their study revealed that regardless of ethnic group categorizing their participants, the participants have a moderate level of IS. As feedback, their study recommended that educators and policymakers ¹² design programs that can enhance the IS and ICC of medical students in Iran. Furthermore, the findings of the present study are at some point different from but to some extent aligned with the study executed by Sarwari et al. (2017) investigating the relationship between IS and ICC of post-graduate students at a university in Malaysia. Regarding the IS-related data, their study showed that the means of their participants' IS domains are moderate as demonstrated by interaction enjoyment of 3.7, interaction attentiveness of 3.4, interaction engagement of 3.2, interaction confidence of 3.1, and respect for diverse cultures of 2.3. Those moderate values differ from the high values owned by the participants of the current study. Learning from the data discussed in Sarwari's et al. (2017) study, there is a complex combination of seemingly positive and negative participants' perceptions of different cultures, leading to a moderate degree of IS. The foregoing condition implies a seemingly less multicultural demography of the participants because those of multicultural people will, by nature, be accustomed to building positive perceptions of different cultures. On the contrary to the current study's participants, the nature of their multiculturalism as Indonesian people inclined to make them accustomed to building positive views about different cultures and accepting

differences in the way things go. Byram and Wenger (2018) have explained that the multicultural nature of a society could inherit the people of such a society with the attitude of IS. However, there is a similarity to the current study in terms of the highest IS domain owned by Sarwari's et al. (2017) participants. Their participants have interaction enjoyment as the highest IS domain.

Opposite to the present study demonstrating the data of high IS level, some prior studies have also depicted direct impacts that can be noticed if the IS level is low. Learning from Kriauciūnienė's (2014) study, the low IS level can have a direct impact on the rise of conflicts due to immature decision making when dealing with differences¹⁴. Erdogan and Okumuslar (2020) also demonstrated that the low IS level is associated with a high level of ethnocentrism, wherein in the state of ethnocentrism, people will perceive that their cultures are the most powerful and dominant, later on leading to perceiving others' cultures as improper. The foregoing is also exhibited by the studies undertaken by Bulduk et al. (2017); Chocce (2014); and Ustun (2011). Furthermore, Liu (2016) depicted that people with a low IS level cannot collaborate with others as desirable. As a strong reflection, A reverse condition has been echoed in one of the data revealed by Warsah et al. (2021) who conducted a study on collaborative learning. As revealed, students who are open to diverse views, or in other words ones with high IS, demonstrate a good engagement in collaborations. Subsequently, as Echoed by Tabatadze and Gorgadze (2014) study, a low IS level is represented by low tolerance towards differences in languages, ethnicity, religions, and races. In such a way, tolerance can only be noticed in a merely intra-cultural dimension. In short, a low level of IS in the life of multiculturalism has impacts on the rise of conflicts, a high level of ethnocentrism, ineffective collaborations, and intolerance. As portrayed in the present study, the educational management students' high IS level likely makes them safe from the aforementioned negative impacts.

The second stage of this study was to reveal the factors that influenced the high level of educational management students' IS based on their contexts. As revealed from interviews, the first factor was the experiences of living with diversity. The educational management students depicted some conditions to represent their experiences of living with diversity such as

having friends of different cultures, often moving to different regions, residing in a region whose residents were culturally diverse, getting used to collaborating with friends of different cultures, and having parents whose cultural origins were diverse. These findings are aligned with the findings and discussions of studies conducted by Alaei and Nosrati (2018); and Nameni and Dowlatabadi (2018). Their studies informed that living in multicultural and multi-ethnic environments has the potential to increase IS. A study conducted by Tamam and Krauss (2014) also confirmed that getting engaged into ethnic diversity leads people to accepting and respecting cultural differences. The findings of the present study confirm those of Kirillova et al. (2015); Park (2013); and Yurur et al. (2018) informing that the habit of interacting with people of different cultures will enhance IS.

The second factor affecting educational management students' high IS level was noticing the multiculturalism of Indonesia. In this regard, as Indonesian citizens, the educational management students showed that they understood the multicultural realities existing in the regions where they resided in, had sufficient knowledge with regard to multiculturalism, and ¹³ed building interactions in the midst of multicultural people. These findings are in line with the studies conducted by Strekalova-hughes (2017); and Zhang and Han (2019) informing that viewing opportunities for intercultural communication in positive ways will increase IS. By recognizing the multiculturalism of Indonesia, educational management students had a low level of ethnocentrism because they did not seem to regard their cultures as the most ¹⁴ominant or superior ones. According to Demir and Kiran (2017), the low ^{level of ethnocentrism is} related to the ^{high level of IS}. Recognizing the multiculturalism of Indonesia also made the educational management students capable of controlling their emotions when interacting in the midst of multicultural people. This is confirmed by Yurur's et al. (2018) study showing that emotional intelligence, intercultural experiences, and exposure to other cultures are the factors affecting IS.

The third factor influencing educational management students' high IS level was acceptance of differences. Educational management students expressed this factor by viewing cultural differences as a natural phenomenon, enjoying discussions as well as interactions in the midst of differences, making the existing differences a mode of learning, and being

open to cultural differences. These findings are aligned with those of Alaei and Nosrati (2018); and Monroe and Ruan (2018) showing that being open-minded about other cultures and willing to accept different opinions from others can increase IS. There are several impactful factors of IS found by the previous studies but not revealed in the current study. For example, Yurur et al. (2018) found that gender is one of the impactful factors of IS wherein women tend to have a higher level of IS compared to men. Demir and Kiran (2017) conducting a study on the educational management students taking private courses in Istanbul also showed that although the levels of IS between male and female educational management students do not differ significantly, female educational management students, however, have a higher mean of IS. Furthermore, Zhang and Han (2019) found that ages also affect IS whereby adults tend to be correlated with many cross-cultural experiences which further contribute to the increase in IS specifically for the domains of interaction engagement and interaction attentiveness. According to our interpretation, differences in socio-cultural contexts affect the conditions of IS factors. In the present study, gender and age do not seem to be depicted as crucial factors underlying the reasons for educational management students' high IS level.

The current study showed that the educational management students already have the potential to be able to build cross-cultural interactions as proven by their high IS level supported by some contextual factors. They have a tendency to be able to build good interactions with teachers and students when they lead their teacher colleagues and students resting upon the system of multicultural education later on. They already have the potential to be able to become the educational leaders as aspired by the K13 curriculum which is governed by the multicultural education of Indonesia.

Conclusion

This study found that the educational management students have a high level of IS covering all IS domains. Their high IS level indicates that they tend to have positive responses to interacting with people whose cultures are different from theirs, favour getting engaged in active communication with people of different cultures, have tolerance for diverse cultures, seek to

interpret and understand cultural differences in cross-cultural communication, become confident in the processes of meaning making, and actively participate in interactions across cultures. There are three factors that underlie the high level of educational management students' IS, namely experiences of living with diversity, noticing the multiculturalism of Indonesia, and accepting differences. The factor *vis-a-vis* experiences of living with diversity is described in terms of having friends of different cultures, frequently moving to other regions, residing in culturally diverse regions, being accustomed to collaborating during learning with friends of different cultures, and having parents whose cultural origins are diverse. The factor associated with noticing the multiculturalism of Indonesia is depicted in terms of understanding the multicultural realities that exist in the regions where they reside in, having adequate knowledge about multiculturalism, and willing to build interactions in the midst of multicultural people. Furthermore, the factor pertinent to accepting differences is portrayed in terms of viewing cultural differences as a natural phenomenon, enjoying discussions as well as interactions in the midst of differences, making the existing differences a mode of learning, and being open to cultural differences.

It is recommended that further studies be conducted to investigate Indonesian educational management students' IS and observe their leadership skills as to confirm the conformity of the IS level to leadership skills. Studies on the foregoing ways can contribute much IS-related knowledge to academicians interested in the field of multicultural education.

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