INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCE IN UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA

SYARIZAN DALIB

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA

2014

PERAKUAN KERJA TESIS / DISERTASI
(CERTIFICATION OF THESIS / DISSERTATION)

**Awang Had Salleh
Graduate School
of Arts And Sciences**

Universiti Utara Malaysia

PERAKUAN KERJA TESIS / DISERTASI
(Certification of thesis / dissertation)

Kami, yang bertandatangan, memperakukan bahawa
(We, the undersigned, certify that)

SYARIZAN DALIB

calon untuk Ijazah   PhD
(candidate for the degree of)

telah mengemukakan tesis / disertasi yang bertajuk:
(has presented his/her thesis / dissertation of the following title):

"INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCE IN UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA"

seperti yang tercatat di muka surat tajuk dan kulit tesis / disertasi.
(as it appears on the title page and front cover of the thesis / dissertation).

Bahawa tesis/disertasi tersebut boleh diterima dari segi bentuk serta kandungan dan meliputi bidang ilmu dengan memuaskan, sebagaimana yang ditunjukkan oleh calon dalam ujian lisan yang diadakan pada : **16 Disember 2014.**
That the said thesis/dissertation is acceptable in form and content and displays a satisfactory knowledge of the field of study as demonstrated by the candidate through an oral examination held on: **December 16, 2014.**

Pengerusi Viva: *(Chairman for VIVA)*	Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sharipah Soaad Syed Yahaya	Tandatangan *(Signature)*
Pemeriksa Luar: *(External Examiner)*	Prof. Dr. Ezhar Tamam	Tandatangan *(Signature)*
Pemeriksa Luar: *(External Examiner)*	Prof. Dr. Mohammed Zin Nordin	Tandatangan *(Signature)*
Nama Penyelia/Penyelia-penyelia: *(Name of Supervisor/Supervisors)*	Assoc. Prof. Dr. Norhafezah Yusof	Tandatangan *(Signature)*
Nama Penyelia/Penyelia-penyelia: *(Name of Supervisor/Supervisors)*	Dr. Minah Harun	Tandatangan *(Signature)*

Tarikh:
(Date)   December 16, 2014

Permission to Use

In presenting this thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree from Universiti Utara Malaysia, I agree that the Universiti Library may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for the copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purpose may be granted by my supervisor(s) or, in their absence, by the Dean of Awang Had Salleh Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to Universiti Utara Malaysia for any scholarly use which may be made of any material from my thesis.

Requests for permission to copy or to make other use of materials in this thesis, in whole or in part, should be addressed to:

Dean of Awang Had Salleh Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

UUMCollege of Arts and Sciences

Universiti Utara Malaysia

06010 UUM Sintok

Abstrak

Kajian berkaitan bidang kompetensi antara budaya kian berkembang. Walaupun banyak kajian telah dilakukan, terdapat dua isu penting yang perlu diberikan perhatian. Pertama, kajian kini banyak didominasi oleh perspektif barat yang menekankan penilaian kompetensi antara budaya individu. Kedua, kompetensi antara budaya sering kali dianalisis berdasarkan budaya sesebuah negara yang dianggap bersifat homogen. Kecenderungan ini tidak dapat menggambarkan kepelbagaian etnik yang wujud di dalam sesebuah negara dan tidak mencukupi untuk menjelaskan pengalaman antara budaya di luar konteks budaya barat. Sehubungan itu, kajian ini dilakukan untuk meneliti semula model kompetensi antara budaya oleh Deardorff yang dibangunkan pada tahun 2004 dengan meneroka pengalaman antara budaya pelajar di Universiti Utara Malaysia dan meneliti konsep kompetensi antara budaya berdasarkan pengalaman mereka. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah fenomenologi. Temubual bersemuka dan kumpulan fokus melibatkan pelajar yang berbilang etnik digunakan sebagai kaedah pengumpulan data. Persampelan secara berantai dilaksanakan dalam kajian ini. Data dianalisis menggunakan teknik yang disarankan oleh Moustakas pada tahun 1994. Hasil kajian menunjukkan, pertama, pengalaman antara budaya pelajar merangkumi dua tema utama iaitu identifikasi diri sebagai anggota kelompok etnik dan pengalaman merasai perbezaan di antara budaya sendiri dengan budaya orang lain. Kedua, konsep kompetensi antara budaya merangkumi tiga tema utama iaitu pemahaman budaya, rasa hormat dan kebolehan berbahasa. Hasil kajian menunjukkan perbezaan dengan model Deardorff kerana tema utama yang dikenal pasti menekankan pembinaan hubungan berbanding individu dalam menilai kompetensi antara budaya. Kajian ini juga menghasilkan perspektif baharu dengan menjelaskan kepentingan identiti etnik dalam pengalaman antara budaya pelajar sebagai elemen penting dalam membina kompetensi antara budaya. Justeru, model Deardorff diperkembangkan dengan menitikiberatkan pembinaan hubungan dan pengalaman antara budaya yang menggambarkan kepelbagaian identiti etnik dalam menjelaskan kompetensi antara budaya. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada penilaian semula konsep kompetensi antara budaya daripada perspektif barat dan menghasilkan perspektif baharu dengan memberi penekanan kepada pembinaan hubungan serta pengalaman antara budaya.

Kata Kunci: Kompetensi antara budaya, Identiti etnik, Pengalaman antara budaya, Fenomenologi, Model Deardorff.

Abstract

Studies in the field of intercultural competence are expanding. Although numerous studies have been done, there are two important issues that need to be considered. First, current studies are dominated by the Western perspective that places a focus on the individual in evaluating intercultural competence. Second, intercultural competence is often analyzed by looking at a national culture that is treated as homogenous. This tendency falls short to illuminate ethnic diversities within a nation and it is inadequate in capturing the intercultural experiences in the non-Western context. Accordingly, this study is conducted to re-examine an intercultural competence model developed by Deardorff in 2004 by exploring the nature of students' intercultural experience in Universiti Utara Malaysia and the conception of intercultural competence in the light of their experience. This study utilized a phenomenological method. In-depth interviews and focus groups involving ethnically diverse students were used as methods of data collection. Snowballing sampling was implemented in this study. Data were analyzed using techniques advocated by Moustakas in 1994. The findings of this study indicate that, first; students' intercultural experience comprises two core themes which include identifying self as an ethnic being and encountering differences between self and the Other. Second, the conception of intercultural competence encompasses three core themes which include cultural understanding, respect, and language ability. The findings differ from that of Deardorff's model since the identified core themes emphasize on relationship building rather than the individual in analyzing intercultural competence. This study also shows a new perspective on intercultural competence that highlights the salience of ethnic identities in the students' intercultural experience as an important element in developing intercultural competence. Thus, Deardorff's model is extended by including a focus on relationship building and intercultural experience that illuminates diverse ethnic identities in explaining intercultural competence. This study contributes into a re-conceptualization of intercultural competence from the Western perspective and explains a new perspective with a focus on relationship building as well as intercultural experience.

Keywords: Intercultural competence, Ethnic identity, Intercultural experience, Phenomenology, Deardorff's model.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Appendices

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research background

The imperatives for intercultural competence in this 21st century are undeniable in today's global world. The process of globalization links every part of the world leading to an increase in the amount of intercultural interaction. The process of emigration and immigration is occurring at a rapid pace in many parts of the world resulting in a remarkable population change across national borders. As individuals live within an increased multicultural population, this presents numerous opportunities for experience with others who come from vastly different cultural backgrounds. Intercultural interaction has now become ubiquitous in every facet of life; they occur in workplaces, educational institutions, family, and community. This great cultural mixing means that intercultural competence is no longer an option. It is critical for accommodation and understanding among people who differ from one another.

As intercultural interaction intensifies in every part of the world, the field of intercultural competence is evolving and expanding outside the United States. Such development has given rise to the challenge of applying theories developed in a Western context into other cultural locations. As scholars argued that different cultural contexts adopt different views on the workings of competency, the Western derived conception of intercultural competence has been questioned whether it is adequate to assist understanding of similar phenomenon in non-Western cultures (Chen, 2009a; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Yeh, 2010; Yum, 2012).

The challenge in the field of intercultural competence does not only include questioning the applicability of the Western perspective; but also how "culture" is referred to in studying intercultural competence (Yep, 2014). Scholars noted that the study of intercultural competence is permeated by a national emphasis resulting in the problem of oversimplification of culture (Martin, 1993; Moon, 1996; 2010; Yep, 2014). As today's nation-states are facing rich internal diversities due to globalization process, it points to the fact that the simplistic ways to define cultural boundaries by means of nationality can no longer be pursued (Arasaratnam, 2007; Banks, 2009; Bhopal & Rowley, 2005; Moon, 2010). Given the multicultural turn in many nations leading to the emergence of rich ethnic diversities (Banks, 2009; Stiftung & Cariplo, 2006); an extension of culture to include ethnicity seems to be one of the choices that enables more complex analysis of intercultural competence.

Malaysia provides an interesting setting for examining the conception of intercultural competence. In view of this, one meaningful research laboratory that enables interesting and complex examination of this phenomenon is within a Malaysian higher learning institution. The internationalization efforts of Malaysian higher education have resulted in an immense number of international students (Pandian, 2008; Singh, 2012). The influx of international students alongside the plural society of Malaysia (which is made up largely by the Malays followed by Chinese and Indians) produces an increased level of diverse students' body in Malaysia's campuses. This phenomenon has resulted in the creation of the university as the place presenting immense opportunities for students to interact with ethnically diverse others. Certainly, such intercultural experience serves as an important

13

resource for students to draw their perspective on what it means to be communicatively competent with others.

This study seeks to investigate the phenomenon of intercultural competence in a non-Western setting. Specifically, this study contextualizes its inquiry by examining the conception of intercultural competence that is drawn from intercultural experience of ethnically diverse students in a multicultural Malaysian campus. Given the inadequacy of the Western perspective to capture diverse communication experiences and given that Malaysia is a country that celebrates ethnic pluralism (Evans, Anis, & Shamsul, 2010; Kader, 2012; Shamsul, 2008), it is interesting to examine what intercultural competence would look like from this particular cultural location.

1.2 Problem Statement

Previous studies have provided descriptions of skills, trait, and behaviors that contribute to the understanding of intercultural competence (e.g., Deardorff, 2004, 2006, 2011; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Spitzberg, 2000, 2012). Although previous studies have contributed valuable insights, an examination of literature on intercultural competence reveals two important issues.

The first issue concerns the fact that much of current conceptualizations of intercultural competence came from the West (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Chen, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 2008; Deardorff, 2004, 2006, 2009b; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Syarizan, 2011; Syarizan, Minah Harun, & Norhafezah, 2013). Martin (1993, p.18) remarked that the Western scholarship on intercultural competence is centred

on "a specific speech community – the Euro-American community and largely middle-class, college educated strata within this community". Accordingly, such centrality has led to delineation of Western theories and perspectives that were Eurocentric in origin (Hecht, Collier & Ribeau, 1993; Martin, 1993; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Yep, 2014). As Sardar (1999) and Gunaratne (2009) indicated that "the West" connotes a perspective that represents an allegiance to the Eurocentric orientation, it is pivotal to note that the discourse on "Western" perspective is closely knitted with the "Eurocentric" tradition in intercultural competence studies (see Martin, 1993).

Miike (2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2012b, 2014) contended that if the Eurocentric (Western) scholarship is used to analyze communication experiences in the West, it is a legitimate framework for such an analysis. However, the problem arises when the single perspective is often presumed for its universality in many intercultural studies (Chen & Starosta, 2008; Chen & Miike, 2006; Martin, 1993; Miike, 2012b; Miyahara, 2004; Yum, 2012). Influenced by such presumed universality, researchers who studied other cultures often demonstrated that were also able to see through the similar lens as those Western scholars who have advanced in this field (Asante, Miike & Jin, 2014). As Chen (2009a) indicated, "to introduce a foreign seed into the local soil without considering the possible maladjustment or incompatibility due to potential differences caused by the cultural, geographical, or other disparities, is no doubt inappropriate" (p.406), imposing such a Western standard leads researchers to run the risk of misinterpreting the behaviors of other cultures (Chen & Starosta, 2008; Martin, 1993; Miike, 2012b; Miyahara, 2004).

The presumed universality of Western theoretical propositions is also tied closely to the Eurocentric methodological orientation (Miike, 2010a; 2010b). Miike (2010b) noted that for so long, there is a preponderance among Western researchers in the intercultural communication field to adopt a "widespread obsession with quantification, objectivity, value freedom, replicability, generalizability, and predictability" (p.194). Within such methodological underpinning, culture is predominantly treated as a "laboratory" for testing the generalizability of Western theories (Chen, 2009a; Kuo & Chew, 2009; Moon, 1996; Shuter, 2008, 2014). Influenced by the tendency to validate Western theories, researchers often ignored local conditions and treated cultural differences as 'errors' in their analysis (Kuo & Chew, 2009). As a result, a pseudotic concept in which an emic idea developed in the Western cultures is simply assumed to be etic and universally generalizable across different cultural contexts (Chen & Miike, 2006; Lustig & Spitzberg, 1993; Martin, 1993; Miike, 2003, 2012b).

As Western cultural origins and orientations seem to disregard certain elements that have been historically valued in non-Western cultures, the Western perspective has been critiqued for its lack of resonance with the non-Western world (Chen, 2009a; Chen & Miike, 2006; Miike, 2007, 2010a, 2012b). In view of this, much of the problem on applying the Western perspective rests on the fact that non-Western cultures adopt a distinct ontological standpoint to human nature that gives critical implication on how competency is perceived (Chen, 2009a; Yeh, 2010; Yum, 2014). For example, Xiao and Chen (2012) proposed that the core differences between the Confucian and Western orientation toward competency is a moral and philosophical view of people and the world. In the West, given the ontological presupposition that

each person is born unique and independent from all other people, expressing individuality is viewed as a hallmark for communication competence. In contrast to the Western ontological standpoint, the Confucian perspective posits that the universe and all people form an interrelated whole and thus; interdependence is the core attribute of competent communication. Given such distinct ontological standpoints on competency, Deardorff (2004, 2006, 2009b) remarked that much of the unit of analysis for intercultural competence in non-Western cultures tend to reside within interpersonal relationships. Such emphasis is in mark contrast with the Western cultures that place more emphasis on a single individual in analyzing intercultural competence. Nonetheless, the distinct Western and non-Western emphasis on intercultural competence does not suggest that both perspectives are totally divergent. Deardorff (2009b) posited that although there are major distinctions on emic conception of what constitutes intercultural competence in Western and non-Western cultures, there are also some elements that indicate intersections. Given that communication is a symbol exchanging process, in which it can be considered as a universal phenomenon in human societies, there may be similar views on some fundamental elements of communication in both Western and non-Western cultures (Chen & Miike, 2006). As Miike (2012b) remarked that conflict arises not from cultural difference but from the ignorance of that difference, what needs attention is for researchers to recognize and appreciate possible differences in viewing intercultural competence.

The argument levied against the Western perspective has led to the emergence of many non-Western perspectives (Chen, 2009a). However, much of the perspectives is primarily about Korean, Japanese, Chinese and Indian cultures (e.g., Chen, 2014;

Chen, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 2003; Chen & Miike, 2006; Chen & An, 2009; Gunaratne, 2009; Ishii, 2006; Ishii, Klopf, & Cooke, 2012; Miike, 2007; Miyahara, 2004; Xiao & Chen, 2009; Yeh, 2010; Yum, 2012). Undeniably, there is an underrepresentation of research from South East Asia (Miike, 2006). Malaysia serves as an example of culture within the South East Asian region which may provide an interesting non-Western insight on intercultural competence. Despite the call to move beyond treating non-Western cultures as the peripheral target for Western lens (see Asante, Miike & Yin, 2014; Miike, 2010b, 2014), the current status of intercultural competence research (although researchers may not precisely adopt similar labels) in Malaysia indicated that most, if not all, local researchers tend to engage in theory-validation research (e.g., Aida Hafitah & Maimunah, 2007; Pandian, 2008; Ramalu, Rose, Kumar, & Uli, 2010; Ramalu, Rose, Uli, & Kumar, 2010).

Given that much of previous intercultural studies in Malaysia tend to apply Western models, little is known as to whether the Western concepts help us to sufficiently make sense of intercultural competence in our own terms. Miike (2012b) attested that, if we use the Eurocentric view to understand other cultures, such adoption is most likely to distort cultural realities as it is viewed from an outsider's point of view. Nonetheless, Miike further remarked that this assertion does not mean discounting the Eurocentric scholarship. Rather, it brings to the forefront other ways of theorizing communication which contributes to an enriching, re-consideration, and re-creation of the existing Western body of knowledge. Miike (2012a) further advocated:

It is our own culture becoming central, not marginal, in our story without completely ignoring other cultural viewpoints of our culture. If we can see ourselves only through someone else's eyes, there will not be our agency. If we always speak in the voices of others, no one will hear our voices. (p.2)

As Miike (2012a) proposed researchers need to view their own culture as resources for insights that will more accurately represent their cultural realities, I argue that it is time for us to learn from our own experiences upon which the notion of intercultural competence can be drawn. Such exploration helps to create self understanding of our own setting and a perspective that offers some set of criteria or specificities needed for becoming competent within our own context. Placing our own experience at the centre of our inquiry also provides an important impetus for us to re-conceptualize and enrich the existing Western body of knowledge on intercultural competence.

The second issue is associated with current approach to "culture" in the studies of intercultural competence. Given there is a need for a re-conceptualization of intercultural competence, addressing such an issue is fundamental because it gives important implications on how we examine intercultural competence. Most, if not all, of current intercultural competence studies treat culture as synonymous with national membership (Martin, 1993; Yep, 2014). While treating culture as nationality reflects the views of the larger discipline of intercultural competence, such an approach is problematic in two ways. First, taking nationality as the unit of analysis often forces researchers to analyze the unifying elements that describe the whole populations (Hofstede, 1997; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010; Moon, 2010). Consequently, as researchers are influenced by the idea that "national culture" is

shared by all cultural members, diverse groups of people are treated as homogenous and differences between groups are ignored in such homogenizing views of culture (Moon, 1996, 2010). Second, as Yep (2014) argued, "in spite of the pretension and appearance of representation, a nation never fully or adequately reflects the individuals and the lives of diverse people living in it" (p. 345), approaching culture as nationality is problematic in capturing the experiences of diverse people living in a nation. Given the problem on equating culture as nationality, a number of scholars proposed that current approach to culture must be questioned (Martin, 1993; Moon, 1996, 2010; Yep, 2014).

Yep (2014) suggested for an extension of current definitions of culture to include various social positions such as race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality that may provide us with rich insights on intercultural competence. Following Yep's (2014) proposition, I argue that extending culture by considering ethnicity is worthy of note. Ethnicity is relevant since studies indicated that the ethnic population in many nations are radically changing. For example, in the United States, there is a wide growth of Asian and Latino communities in areas historically dominated by Whites (Halualani, Chitgopekar, Morrison, & Dodge, 2004; Jandt, 2010; Lustig & Koester, 2010). It is also predicted that Whites may become a minority in the next century in the United States leading to a challenge to the previously held idea of "American-ness" that has always been defined as being "White." (Banks, 2009; Chideya, 2006; Gudykunst, 1998).

Moon (2010) indicated that while diverse groups in many nations are thought to share collective properties, it is less likely the case in today's world. As people leave

their current home countries in search of work, Moon further remarked that we can expect to see an increase in migrating population. This trend has led to the re-assertion of ethnic identities and the attention on ethnic differences as an important agenda for many societies (Banks, 2009; Chen & Starosta, 2008; McDaniel et al., 2012). Given that the population in today's nation-states is getting more ethnically diverse than it was in many years ago (Bhopal & Rowley, 2005; Levine et al., 2007), how do we get by with such diverse people? Does ethnicity matters in our interactions with others? What it means to be competent when we interact with ethnically dissimilar others?

Conducting studies on conceptualizing intercultural competence that draws attention on ethnicity seems to be highly needed in Malaysia. Despite the fact that Malaysia claims to be a state constituting multiethnic groups (Shamsul, 2014), an examination of literature indicates that most, if not all, of the current intercultural competence research in Malaysia tend to approach culture as national membership. Malaysian researchers most often interrogated sojourners' adjustment into the general Malaysian culture to develop intercultural competence (e.g., Aida Hafitah & Maimunah, 2007; Mustaffa & Illias, 2013; Pandian, 2008; Singh & Thuraisingam, 2007; Thangiah, 2010; Yusliza, Jauhar, & Chelliah, 2010; Zuria et al., 2010). Given that using the nation as a unit of analysis hides more than what it illuminates (Moon, 2010), the tendency to investigate intercultural competence through a national perspective seems to neglect rich ethnic diversities in Malaysia. When researchers studied ethnicity, as they were driven by the agenda of national integration, much of their attention is based on examining ethnic relations between domestic ethnic groups namely the Malays, Indians, and Chinese (e.g., Tamam, Fazilah, & Yee,

2011; Tamam, Yee, Fazilah, & Azimi, 2006; Tamam, Yee, Fazilah, & Azimi, 2008; Faisal, Abdul Muati, Tamam, & Jusang, 2009; Idris, 2008). There has been very little work on intercultural competence that centralizes ethnicity and begs for more investigations in Malaysia.

When we take the two issues that have been presented, suffice to say that, there is a need for examining the conception of intercultural competence that captures ethnic diversity within the Malaysian setting. Given this need, a Malaysian higher learning institution provides a meaningful site for such an investigation. As it has been noted previously, when ethnicity becomes the focus of research in Malaysia, most often it includes the major ethnic groups namely the Malays, Indians and Chinese. While focusing analysis on the three ethnic groups have considerably offered valuable insights, I argue that such focus seems to be inadequate to capture the complexity of intercultural competence in today's Malaysian campuses. Malaysian higher education is fast becoming an industry in which a large amount of promotion has been done to encourage international students especially from Arab, Africa, and South East Asian regions (Nazri & Rozita, 2012; Pandian, 2008; Singh, 2012). The influx of international students has further expanded Malaysia's ethnic diversity and it is projected that ethnic diversity will continue to rise in the coming years in Malaysian campuses (Singh, 2012). This development has resulted in rich ethnically diverse students' body and it can be expected that students may interact with ethnically diverse others, locally and internationally. The intermingling among students has certainly brought along new and complex phase of intercultural interaction to the various ethnicities that co-exist within Malaysian campuses (Muslim & Ibrahim, 2012; Pandian, 2008; Singh, 2012). As Miike (2012b) proposed

that we need to learn from diversity rather than ignoring it, the complex interactional realm among ethnically diverse students needs to be acknowledged in conceptualizing intercultural competence.

Intercultural interaction is often characterized by challenges with cultural differences (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; McDaniel et al., 2009, 2012). Gudykunst and Kim (2003, p.22) posited that "when we are confronted with cultural differences, we tend to view people from other cultures (or groups) as strangers." It is through this lens that intercultural communication is viewed by a number of researchers as encounters with "the Other" - which is likened to strangers who come from a different world (e.g., Chai & Zhong, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Ladegaard, 2011, 2012; Minah Harun, 2007; Ning, 2012; Syarizan, 2011, 2012; Syarizan et al., 2013; Takahara, 2013). The Other in intercultural communication is essentialized through individuals' description of their impersonal and unfamiliar experiences with somebody from other cultures who does not belong to the individuals' cultural group (Yep, 2014).

Although individuals may experience uncertainties with the Other, I argue that individuals do not passively enter interaction. Rather, they are active social actors who seek to understand what is going on in their interactions (Bird & Osland, 2005; Osland, Bird, & Gundersen, 2007; Rasmussen, Seick, & Osland, 2010). As Fantini (2009) proposed that people learn conception of cultural competence over the course of living within their own cultural groups, similarly, it is possible that people may learn what it means to be competent through their own experience living within a multicultural setting. Such a standpoint and interest to investigate the conception of

intercultural competence arises from my own personal lived experience with the Other. The following section illuminates my personal connection to the study.

1.3 Personal Connection to the Study

The significance of intercultural competence and ethnicity stroked me strongly when I reflected on my personal intercultural experience in 2005. I travelled from Malaysia to Bond University, Gold Coast, Australia alone for my first Master's degree program. My experience in the university meeting people from diverse cultural backgrounds led me to think that a university is indeed an "intercultural pot." As I reflected my own experience, at the initial stage of getting to know others in the campus, it was common for people to be identified through their nationalities. However, as I eventually developed friendship with two international students from Canada and the U.S., I began to get acquainted with their specific ethnic identities. Rather than looking at these friends "simply as Canadian or American," I learned about their specific ethnic heritage.

The most outstanding and interesting part of my graduate life was the experience living in a townhouse with the Other who was an Indian Canadian. Her name was Rita, an exchange student doing a Bachelor's degree in Law at the university. As I developed friendship with Rita and engaged in everyday interaction with her, I found that it was not an easy process since both of us had to learn our "different ways of doing things." As I recounted my experience, for example, it was "normal" for Rita to invite her male friends to our house on a frequent basis but it was considered otherwise for me. Being a Malay Malaysian, I learned that "when you are single and live with other female friends, bringing male friends or even a special boyfriend

home is inappropriate" (the Malay people say this as *tak manis dipandang orang* or "not nice to be seen by others"). Thankfully, Rita respected my "cultural way." Every time Rita brought any male friends home; she made sure to knock the front door first, informed me (as I remembered Rita always said "Sha, I'm bringing my friends") and she did not open the door (even though she had the keys to the house) until I was ready (i.e. putting on the head scarf and opening the door for them).

Interestingly, Rita had strong ties to her ethnic Indian roots. It was from her that I learned about Hinduism and the Indian tradition. I remembered there were certain days that Rita would fast for four hours and when I asked her about such religious practice, she answered "it is so complicated to explain my religion." It is through this experience that evokes my thoughts about how two individuals from different ethnic backgrounds were able to live and co-exist. I began to think of "good" communication with the Other as a mutual appreciation of differences. If Rita and I were not able to be aware of our differences and respect such differences, both would end up being uncomfortable with one another. Such intercultural experience provided valuable lessons for me to learn what it means to be competent. I began to think that intercultural competence can be best understood and learned from people's lived intercultural experience. Although theories may help people to understand and guide their interactions with others, it is people's experience that becomes the "best teacher" that informs what is needed for successful interaction. This personal experience drives my scholarly interest to interrogate the phenomenon of intercultural competence.

1.4 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Following my own desire (see Syarizan, 2011) to re-conceptualize Western conceptions of intercultural competence and to move beyond approaching culture as national membership, this study aims to identify the conception of intercultural competence in a Malaysian setting through the lens of ethnicity. In a departure from the calls to consider the internal diversity within a cultural location, the present study seeks to investigate intercultural competence by including students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in a Malaysian university.

As intercultural experience provides an interesting foundation from which the notion of intercultural competence can be examined, two aims were established in this study: (i) to explore the nature of intercultural experience as it is lived by students and (ii) to examine students' notion of intercultural competence in the light of their intercultural experience. In interrogating the conception of intercultural competence that is drawn from students' lived intercultural experience, phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study since phenomenology orients toward interrogating the essence of a phenomenon through people's lived experience (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). The challenge in preparing to conduct a phenomenological inquiry is to arrive at a question that contains social meaning and personal significance (Moustakas, 1994). The question grows out of an intense interest in a particular topic from the researcher's personal history that inspires the researcher's interest and brings the core of the problem into focus (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). Drawing from my personal experience that drives me to explore the phenomenon of intercultural competence, this phenomenological study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is it like to experience interaction with the Other for students?

2. What constitutes intercultural competence in the light of students' intercultural experience?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the domain of intercultural competence in terms of theory and practice. In terms of theoretical contribution, as this study is one of ongoing efforts to illuminate the conception of intercultural competence in a non-Western context, it contributes into enriching current knowledge of intercultural competence that is dominated by the Western perspective. More importantly, as this study takes into account the intercultural experience of students from various ethnic backgrounds, it offers rich insights of intercultural competence that includes diverse ethnic voices. Such insights are valuable to assist in defining intercultural competence that capture students' realities and comprehending what is necessary for students from different ethnic backgrounds to get along with one another.

In terms of practical contribution, there is an urgent need for students to develop intercultural competence. Nowhere is the need for intercultural competence felt more keenly than in educational institutions. Educational institutions must play an important role to help prepare students for a global world that bounds them to interact with diverse people. Despite having invaluable resources within educational institutions (such as highly trained faculty who specialize in teaching intercultural communication) to develop intercultural competence among students, educators are still far from understanding what is intercultural competence and how to impart something as intangible as intercultural competence (Bok, 2009). What does the

informed perspective from this study tell us about producing students at tertiary level? Perhaps, the identified criteria of intercultural competence can be transformed into soft skills for educators to guide students on how to interact successfully with diverse people. As students will enter the job market upon graduation, such soft skills are significantly needed to produce employable graduates.

The trend toward global economy brings people from diverse ethnic backgrounds to work together that necessitate greater intercultural understanding in the workplaces (Bok, 2009; Chen & Starosta, 2008; Lustig & Koester, 2010). Consequently, employers have articulated the need for hiring graduates who are well equipped with the skills to work with diverse people (Bok, 2009; Roselina, 2009; Stiftung & Cariplo, 2006). Accordingly, it is crucial for graduates to have the ability to work well alongside others in order to function effectively at work level. As intercultural competence is labeled as the 21st century most needed skill (Stiftung & Cariplo, 2006), students who received early training of skills to interact with diverse people are likely to master the work environment and succeed in their future careers. Additionally, the ability to deal effectively at interpersonal level with cultural differences will not only be required at work level but also at societal level for establishing social cohesion. In view of this, the parameters for competency that is derived from this study can be transformed into social skills that help students to exist harmoniously with others in a pluralistic society.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the imperatives for intercultural competence. It has also outlined two major issues that need to be considered in the study of intercultural

competence which are: (i) the inadequacy of Western perspective to capture other ways of viewing intercultural competence and (ii) the inadequacy of approaching culture as national membership in studying intercultural competence. Drawing from these issues, there is a need to re-conceptualize the Western derived perspective of intercultural competence and to extend culture at the level of ethnicity. The following chapter provides a review of the literature that offers justification and sets the points of departure for this study.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Two major issues in the existing literature of intercultural competence have been addressed in Chapter One, which are the Western perspective of intercultural competence and the conception of "culture" in intercultural competence. The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate these two issues in greater detail. This chapter presents a review on the conception of communication competence, its application into the intercultural context from the Western perspective, and how such a perspective differs from non-Western cultures that indicate its inadequacy for application in other cultural contexts. This chapter then moves into examining how the term "culture" is usually approached and its implication to the study of intercultural competence.

2.2 The Western Perspective of Intercultural Competence

Given that the conception of communication competence and its application into intercultural context is mainly derived from Western cultures (Chen, 2009c, 2011; Deardorff, 2009a; Koester & Lustig, 1991; Martin, 1993; Moon, 1996; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Syarizan, 2011), it is important to begin our understanding by examining how communication competence is defined in the West.

Defining communication competence seems to be elusive since scholars viewed this construct from their own disciplinary perspectives resulting in various modifiers in the literature such as interpersonal competence, social competence,

linguistic competence, communication competence, and relational competence (Bennett, 2009; Bradford et al., 2000; Cooley & Roach, 1984; Deardorff, 2006, 2011; McCroskey, 1984; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Apart from such elusiveness, scholars in the early 1980s noted that the definition of communication competence was also marked by the confusion on the behavioral perspective of communication that led researchers to equate competence with performance (Cooley & Roach, 1984; McCroskey, 1984). In his early work on clarifying the definition of communication, McCroskey (1984) remarked:

> Communication is a behavior-based discipline. Unlike some of our sister disciplines, knowing the content of our discipline is not enough, our bottom line is doing. While this is one of the strengths of our discipline, it has also tightened our blinders as we have looked at communication competence. Often we have assumed that if we know about communication, we will be able to do it. Even more often, we have assumed that if we can do it, we understand it. (p.263)

Based on such a view, McCroskey (1984) argued that competence is commonly referred to as an individual's ability to use knowledge, while performance concerns with actual doings or behaviors in actual situations (Cooley & Roach, McCroskey, 1984). In view of this, McCroskey (1984) further maintained a competent person can do the intended behaviors and not whether he or she always does those behaviors. Although competence and performance are viewed as separated, both constructs are interrelated in that some state of underlying competence can be inferred to explain performance. McCroskey (1984) also proposed that competence requires not only

the ability to demonstrate certain communication behaviors, but also the cognitive ability to understand and make choices among behaviors. From this standpoint, McCroskey defined communication competence as an "adequate ability to make ideas known to others by talking or writing" (p.263). Other scholars contended that the difference between competence and performance is only skin deep as action occurs on both cognitive and behavioral aspects (Parks, 1994; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Parks (1994) maintained that both knowledge and performance are merely different aspects of the same larger process.

As the conception of communication competence continues to develop, efforts toward theory construction and current research in communication competence have been significantly influenced by the development of interpersonal communication field (Bradford et al., 2000; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Spitzberg, 2012). Taking the realm of interpersonal communication, competence involves interaction between people and it is conceived as social evaluation of behavior that constitutes two primary criteria of effectiveness and appropriateness (Bradford et al., 2000; Chen & Starosta, 2008; Spitzberg, 1991, 2000, 2012). Effectiveness is referred to as a successful goal achievement in which it is closely related to maximizing an individual's rewards or desired outcomes (Chen & Starosta, 2008; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Liu, 2012; Lustig & Koester, 2006; Lustig & Koester, 2010; McCroskey, 1982, 1984; Xiao & Chen, 2012; Yeh, 2010; Yum, 2012). Appropriateness reflects politeness and concerns with avoiding or violating social or interpersonal norms, rules, or normative expectations for interaction (Bradford et al., 2000; Chen & Starosta, 2008; Liu, 2012; Lustig & Koester, 2006, 2010; Xiao & Chen, 2012; Yeh, 2010). Lustig and Koester (2010) proposed that in order to know

what is appropriate, a communicator needs to identify the rules of a given situation. His or her sense of what is acceptable and unacceptable provides the knowledge to perform what behavior follows or violate rules in a given context. Competent communicators are considered as those who are able to co-orient and coordinate their behaviors (verbal and non-verbal) to accomplish personal goals as well as fitting themselves in the expectation of a given situation.

Intercultural competence in the literature has been defined in much the same way as it does to communication competence (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Chen & Starosta, 2008; Lustig & Koester, 2006; Lustig & Koester, 2010). Intercultural competence has also been used interchangeably with such modifiers as multicultural or cross cultural competence, cultural learning, global competence, cross cultural knowledge, intercultural understanding, cross-cultural adjustment, cross-cultural adaptation, cross-cultural effectiveness, cultural competence, and cross cultural awareness (Bennett, 2009; Bradford, Allen & Beisser, 2000; Deardorff, 2004, 2006, 2011; Fantini, 2006, 2009; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Although the terms are highly diverse, these terms shared a similar foundational definition (Bennett, 2009). There is a consensus in the literature that it is most often viewed as a set of cognitive, affective, and skills that produce effective and appropriate behavior in intercultural situations (Bennett, 2009; Deardorff, 2004, 2006). Additionally, amongst the terms, many scholars generally prefer to use either "intercultural competence" or "intercultural communication competence" due to its reflective relationship with communication competence (Bradford et al., 2000; Deardorff, 2004, 2006; Fantini, 2009). What distinguishes the conception of intercultural competence is the emphasis on contextual factors in addition to effectiveness and appropriateness

(Chen & Starosta, 2008; Spitzberg, 2012). Spitzberg (2012) proposed the following definition of intercultural competence:

> Communication competence is defined as social behavior that is perceived as relatively appropriate and effective for a given context… to qualify as communication, behavior must have a potential social audience and context in mind, and that to qualify as competent, and this behavior must achieve some acceptable functional level of appropriateness and effectiveness in a given context. (p.425)

Appropriateness refers to the ability to meet expectations, rules, and norms in any given interaction; while effectiveness refers to the ability to accomplish personal goals or outcomes (Deardorff, 2004, 2006; Liu, 2012; Spitzberg, 2000, 2012; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). The contextual factors imply that judgments of intercultural competence depend upon cultural rules that prescribe the permitted behaviors and the ability of an individual to achieve his or her goals within such cultural rules (Liu, 2012; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Spitzberg, 2012).

In addition to the criterion of appropriateness and effectiveness, Spitzberg and Changnon's (2009) review of over 20 intercultural competence models indicated that the most common components that constitute intercultural competence include motivation, knowledge, and skills; although scholars do not always label their models precisely with these terms. Based on Spitzberg and Changnon's (2009) review, Spitzberg (2012) proposed:

> Motivation refers to the many positive and negative valences that move a communication toward, against, or away from a particular path of activity.

34

Knowledge represents the possession and understanding of resources that inform the enactment of skills in a given context, including the ability to acquire informational resources, whether by questions, observation, cognitive modelling, or creative introspection. Skills are repeatable goal-directed behavioral sequences producing some level of goal achievement. (p.431)

Given the fundamental components of intercultural competence, it is conjectured that the more a person knows, feels motivated and engages in skilled behaviors, the more it is for the person to achieve the outcome of being perceived as competent in intercultural interaction (Deardorff, 2004; 2006; Spitzberg, 1991, 2000, 2012). The following section provides a discussion on theoretical models of intercultural competence from the Western perspective.

2.3 Theoretical Models of Intercultural Competence

The literature indicated that there is a plethora of choices that guides scholars' investigation of intercultural competence in the West. In regard to what choices are made by researchers, it is worthy to discuss meta-theoretical assumptions that influence a researcher's investigation of intercultural competence. Wiseman (2002, p.212) remarked that "a meta-theory is a set of assumptions that a researcher makes regarding the nature of the concept (ontology), what is important about the concept and its relations to human phenomena (axiology) and how the concept should be investigated (epistemology)". As such, Wiseman suggests there are three major meta-theories governing communication research; (i) the covering laws, (ii) systems, and (iii) human action perspectives.

The covering laws perspective assumes that a phenomenon can be observed, measured, and quantified; there are regularities of a phenomenon that transcends time, culture and situation which are known as *laws;* it can be understood through cause-effect relationship to enable researchers to make predictions or explain about the phenomenon; and the goal of covering laws is to generalize the phenomenon under study.

The systems perspective adopts an open system approach to communication. As such, it assumes that communication interacts with the social and physical environments, it is hierarchical (consists of sub-system and supra-system); the balance between the environment and within the system; and systems are oriented toward achieving specific goals. One important features of the system perspective is that communication process constitutes interdependent units that functions together to adapt to a changing environment. To better understand the phenomenon under study, the perspective focuses on the breadth of interactions and relationships within a communication event.

The human action scholars argued on the strict positivism of the covering laws perspective and proposed that the 'truth' about the phenomenon under study resides in the actor's subjective experience. Hence, the human action perspective focuses on illuminating the actor's interpretation of the phenomenon and the way the phenomenon relates to the actor's goals through rules. To understand the phenomenon, human action researchers explore meaning, interpretation, and the rules governing the actor's behavior.

The covering laws and systems meta-theories are roughly equal to the positivist paradigm that seeks to find causal relationship and prediction to understand a phenomenon. These meta-theories or paradigm guide scientific theories and researchers following this paradigm usually utilize quantitative methods in their inquiry. For example, the cross cultural adaptation model (Kim, 2001) seeks to explain cross cultural adaptation by sojourners that lead them to acquire host competence. Kim posited that the model integrates macro and micro level perspectives on the conceptions of cross cultural adaptation. It takes into account "the individual and the environment that co- define the adaptation process" (p.15). As such, Kim identified the key dimensions and factors that facilitate or impede cross cultural adaptation process.

The first dimension which is the strangers' host communication competence (i.e., cognitive, affective, and operational aspects) serves as a stimulus that guides them through the adaptive journey. The second dimension which is host social communication is inseparably linked to host communication competence. It describes the strangers' participation in host interpersonal and mass communication activities. The third dimension which is the ethnic social communication emphasizes the role of the strangers' sub-cultural experiences with the co-ethnic. The fourth dimension which is the new environment includes the receptivity and conformity pressure of the host environment and the ethnic group strength that interact with the personal and social communication dimensions. The fifth dimension which is the strangers' own predisposition displays preparedness for change, ethnic proximity, and adaptive personality that function as important factors for constraining or facilitating personal and social communication activities. These five dimensions

collectively and interactively influence and are influenced by the intercultural transformation which constitutes the sixth dimension of the model. Successful adaptation results in three outcomes of the intercultural transformation which include functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity.

Kim's (2001) interactive model displays the linkages of mutual rather than unidirectional causations reflecting the open system perspective "that emphasizes reciprocal functional relationships between and among a system, its parts, and its environment" (p.86). The pre-dispositional conditions of the strangers are the least interactive since personality traits tend to remain relatively constant during the communication process. However, some of the personal attributes may undergo the change process as the strangers experience gradual adaptive transformation. The dimensions and factors in the model help predict whether or not strangers may succeed or fail in cross cultural adaptation. This theory certainly helps to explain and predict intercultural competence in which it is defined as "the ability to communicate in all types of encounters regardless of cultural context" (p.99). However, this theory is largely based on the assumption that strangers are immigrants or sojourners moving to a new country and addresses ethnic factor in the strangers' cross cultural adaptation of the host environment. Kim maintained that the strangers (immigrants/sojourners) may seek interaction with their co-ethnics who have adapted in the new environment to ease their adaptation process. Accordingly, Kim claimed that the strangers' ethnicities influence their adaptation. Heavy use of ethnic support networks may impede their adaptation process and as such, it needs to be reduced in order to develop host communication competence.

Human action meta-theories are orthogonal to the interpretive, qualitative inquiry as it seeks to uncover reality through human subjective experience. Amongst the theories that corresponds to the interpretive philosophy of inquiry is cultural identity model (Collier, 1989; Collier & Thomas, 1988; Martin, 1993). Collier (1989) posited that many definitions of culture in the early stages of intercultural communication research constitute a list of background characteristics such as histories, institutions, core values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, verbal and nonverbal patterns. Yet, culture is often measured by means of a check list of cultural labels (e.g. ethnic or national group labels) instead of measuring all the components. As such, defining culture in a priori term and making predictions from one's cultural label seems to be inadequate to capture these areas: the boundary between intra and intercultural communication; the degree of importance and impact of the different components on certain culture; the salience of the characteristics in communication research and the experience of participants. In many cases, researchers tend to oversimplify and make inappropriate assumptions about culture that leads to misrepresentation of the phenomena. Such definition of cultural affiliation is also problematic that one ethnic label such as "Chicano" or "Mexican American" in the United States mean different things to different individuals (Collier, 1989).

Collier and Thomas (1988) suggested a cultural identity model that is founded on ethnographic research tradition and later attempts had been made to centralize the notion of cultural identity in intercultural communication. Through this approach, culture is viewed as "a historically transmitted system of symbols and meanings and norms" (p.102). This definition entails a broad understanding of intercultural communication and it encompasses ethnicity, gender or any other symbol system

that is salient to individuals. Communication is rendered intercultural when it occurs at the interface between two cultural systems of rules and meanings. Participants experience intercultural contact by means of their self identification and their interlocutors as a representative of a different cultural group. Hence, cultural identity is posited to be the underlying theme that characterizes intercultural communication. Collier (1989, p.296) defined cultural identities as "identifications with and perceived acceptance into a group which has shared systems of symbols and meaning as well as norms for conduct." Culture and cultural identity emerge through interaction with others and it may take the forms of pattern of meanings, interpretations and behavioral rules (Wiseman, 2002). Collier (1989) further posited that identity adopted, managed and negotiated during an encounter is important. However, it is important to note that identity depends upon context.

Collier and Thomas (1988) proposed that culture contains a system of messages that can be identified through norms or rules and functions through the outcomes. As such, they posited that one useful way to study rules and outcomes is to study cultural competence. Epistemologically, cultural competence corresponds with cultural identity in that a person is perceived to be a member of a culture to the extent that he or she articulates and understands symbols and follows norms. Identity can be captured by identifying similarities and differences between persons who "belong" in some way to a cultural group. Ontologically, identity emerges in a given context and occurs in discourse at a variety level across situations. As such, Collier and Thomas (1988) explicated two assumptions: persons negotiate multiple identities in discourse and communication is intercultural by the discursive ascription and avowal of differing cultural identities. The avowed identity pertains to the self and

how one defines herself or himself based on cultural membership, while the ascribed identity entails attribution by others as identity is partly shaped by how others view the person (Collier, 2006).

Collier and Thomas (1988) asserted that cultural competence is appropriate and effective conduct for the particular cultural identity. Appropriateness is achieved by prescribing rule following behaviors. Collier and Thomas proposed the rule/system approach to identify normative dimensions or patterns and constitutive dimensions i.e. the meanings of a cultural system. Effectiveness is the preferred outcomes from the rule following behaviors. Rule is central to identity and to perform cultural membership competently, one is expected to know what rules are followed through the use of symbolic forms and meanings. Intercultural competence then is referred to as appropriate and effective conduct through the match of avowed and ascribed identity. Collier and Thomas define intercultural competence as the "demonstrated ability to negotiate mutual meanings, rules, and positive outcomes" (p.109). In other words, competent intercultural communicators are able to understand identities that are manifested in their discourse; able to describe differences in meanings and norms; and able to negotiate appropriate and effective conduct for both the avowed and ascribed identity. Ultimately, cultural identity theory posits that intercultural competence is not founded on the list of skills; rather it is manifested through rule-following behaviors that define appropriateness and effectiveness.

The cultural identity model has certainly shed light into understanding of both cultural and intercultural competence. Collier and Thomas (1988) posited that competent people are those who can mutually negotiate and follow rules for

appropriate behaviors and attain preferred positive outcomes that confirmed both cultural identities. The cultural identity approach utilized recalled conversation within specific context as the data. Since the methodology of this approach requested the participants to reflect and describe other person's behavior, not their own, this has yielded the tendency to understand behaviors of "the Other." In addition, the analysis used a macro level approach in that it is perceived as a group phenomenon by identifying rules pertaining to ethnic groups. In this case, researchers asked participants open ended questions about their perceived (in)appropriateness and then attempts to find patterns that emerge from the text (Wiseman, 2002, 2003). As the approach of cultural identity model focuses on appropriateness by rule following behaviors and outcomes, it is inadequate to capture the complexities of intercultural competence. In view of this, key questions arise pertaining to this model - How do intercultural participants negotiate rules, meanings, and outcomes of their interaction? What kind of rule-following behaviors and what outcomes are experienced in participants' interaction? How do individuals make sense of intercultural competence when expectations are violated? In the light of these questions, the requirements needed to negotiate competent communication by interlocutors are left unexamined in the theory. Such inadequacy is further addressed in Deardorff's (2004) work.

Since there is a plethora of choices about what specifically constitutes intercultural competence, Deardorff's (2004) study attempts to provide the key foundational components of intercultural competence as an agreed upon definition by experts in the intercultural field in the West. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) claimed Deardorff's (2004) study as one of the relatively few efforts to identify components

of intercultural competence that utilized both quantitative and qualitative processes, and the first research study to document consensus among intercultural experts. Using a grounded theory approach, Deardorff (2004) excluded previous conceptions and asked twenty one experts (who are nationally known in the United States) what constitutes intercultural competence to allow definitions to emerge from the experts themselves. Based on the data generated from the intercultural experts through a Delphi study, intercultural competence was defined as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes"(p.194). This finding suggests that experts' definitions focused primarily on communication and behaviors in intercultural situation. In addition, intercultural experts preferred to define intercultural competence that was broader in nature rather than describing what constitutes specific components of the concepts (which are knowledge, motivation and skills).

Deardorff (2004) synthesized the resulting consensus in two visual ways of defining intercultural competence, one if which is presented as a pyramid model and the other as a process model. The pyramid model (Figure 2.1) places components of intercultural competence within a visual framework that can be entered through various levels. Deardorff contended that the previous levels enhance the next levels and mindfulness or being aware of the learning process is the key to each level. Deardorff proposed that intercultural competence develops from the individual level to the interactive level. The pyramid model of intercultural competence allows for degrees of competence suggesting that the more an individual acquires or develops

<table>
<tr>
<td colspan="2" align="center">

DESIRED EXTERNAL OUTCOME:
Behaving and communicating effectively and
appropriately (based on one's intercultural
knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to achieve
one's goals to some degree

</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="2" align="center">

DESIRED INTERNAL OUTCOME:

Informed frame of reference/filter shift:

Adaptability (to different communication styles & behaviors;
    adjustment to new cultural environments);
Flexibility (selecting and using appropriate communication
    styles and behaviors; cognitive flexibility);
Ethnorelative view;
Empathy

</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>

Knowledge & Comprehension:

Cultural self-awareness;
Deep understanding and knowledge of culture
    (including contexts, role and impact of culture &
    others' world views);
Culture-specific information;
Sociolinguistic awareness

</td>
<td>

Skills:

To listen, observe, and
interpret

To analyze, evaluate,
and relate

</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="2">

Requisite Attitudes:

Respect (valuing other cultures, cultural diversity)
Openness (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, withholding
       judgment)
Curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty)

</td>
</tr>
</table>

- Move from personal level (attitude) to interpersonal/interactive
  level(outcomes)

- Degree of intercultural competence depends on acquired degree of
  underlying elements

Figure 2.1. Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence
       (Deardorff, 2004, p. 196)

components of intercultural competence, the greater it is for the individual to enhance his or her level of intercultural competence as an external outcome. While the pyramid model suggests specific variables within each component of intercultural competence, it is not bounded to those components included in the model only. Instead, the pyramid model embraces both general and specific definitions of intercultural competence. In view of this, the pyramid model enables researchers to develop specific indicators to assess competence within a context or situation while at the same time providing a basis for general assessment of intercultural competence.

The pyramid model also emphasizes the importance of attitude and knowledge. Attitude is the critical starting point for a person to develop intercultural competence. What is unique about this model is its emphasis on the internal and external outcomes of intercultural competence. The internal shift within an individual's frame of reference enhances the external or observable outcome of intercultural competence. The external outcome concerns with effective and appropriate behaviors in intercultural situations. Deardorff (2004) remarked that communication behaviors are rendered as appropriate when an individual avoids violating valued rules and effective when his or her valued objectives are achieved.

The process model (Figure 2.2) is another way of conceptualizing intercultural competence. Although this process model constitutes the same elements as the pyramid model, it depicts more of the movement and process that occurs between the various interrelated elements of intercultural competence.
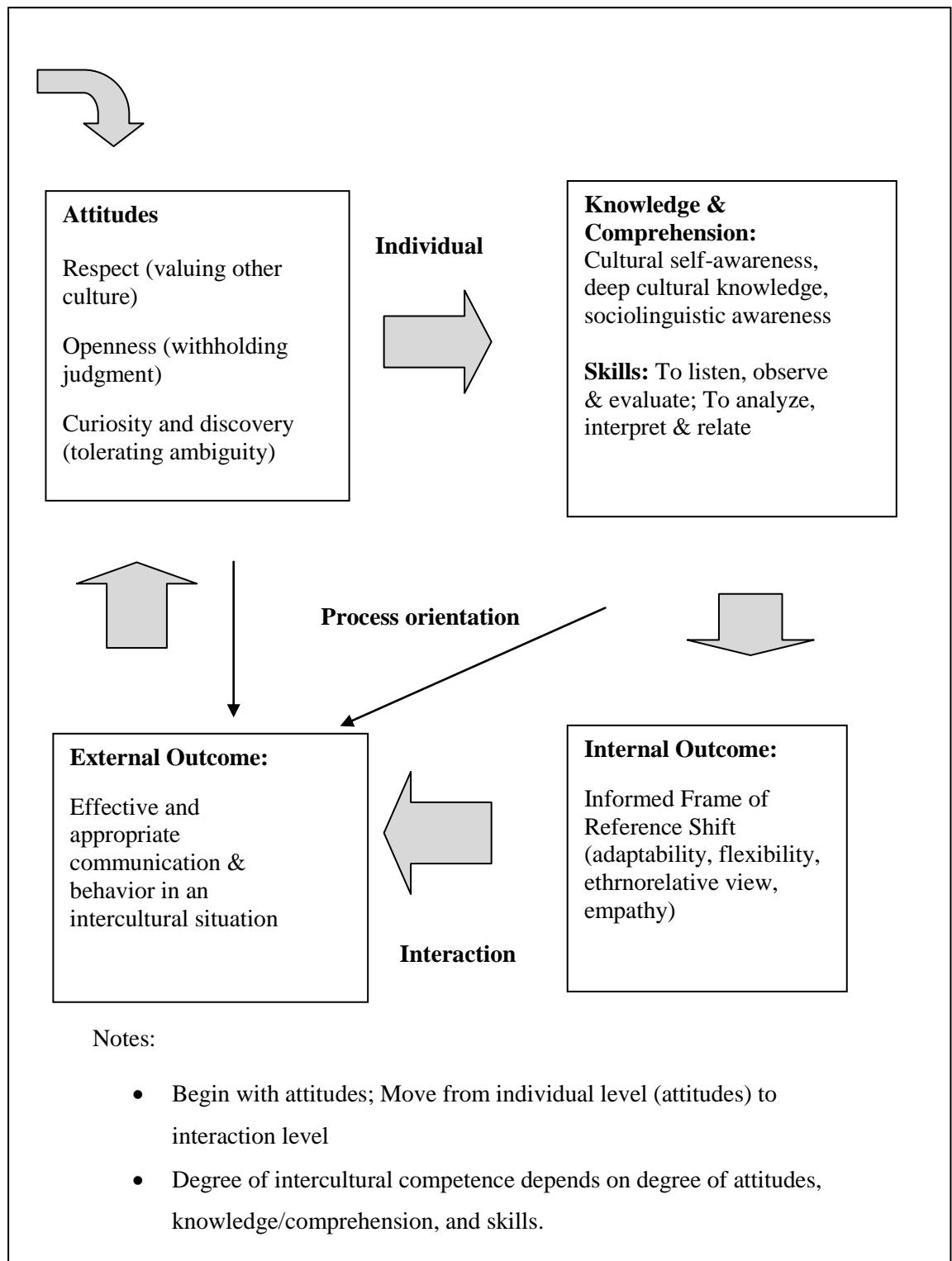
Figure 2.2. Process Model of Intercultural Competence
(Deardorff, 2004, p.198)

The process model also demonstrates the cyclical ongoing process of intercultural competence development. In accordance to the pyramid model, the process model also moves from the personal (or individual) to the interactive level. Deardorff (2004) remarked that it is possible to begin from attitudes and skills or knowledge directly to the external outcome. Nonetheless, Deardorff contended that the outcome may not be nearly as strong as when an individual completes the entire cycle. The attitudinal element is the key and indicates the starting point in this cycle. Deardorff highlighted that although an individual can enter the model at any particular point, attitude is viewed as the fundamental starting point. Specifically, Deardorff suggested that having the attitude of openness, valuing cultures, and tolerating ambiguity serve as the foundation of intercultural competence. Deardorff (2004) cautioned that most experts in the study were from a Western cultural orientation. As such, the finding of her study inevitably reflects Western intercultural experts' view on intercultural competence.

2.4 The Western Bias

Having presented the theoretical models of intercultural competence in the previous section, much of current conceptions on intercultural competence has been extensively developed in the West (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Chen, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 2008; Deardorff, 2009b; Martin, 1993; Stiftung & Cariplo, 2006; Yep, 2014). At this juncture, it is worthy of note to enlighten what "the West" and the Western bias are referred to in the literature. Sadar (1999) indicated:

> The real power of the West is not located in its economic muscle and technological might. Rather, it resides in its power to define. The West

defines what is, for example, freedom, progress and civil behavior; law, tradition and community; reason, mathematics and science; what is real and what it means to be human. The non-Western civilizations have simply to accept these definitions or be defined out of existence. To understand Eurocentrism we thus have to desconstruct the definitional power of the West. Eurocentrism is located wherever there is the defining influence of Europe, or more appropriate, the generic form of Europe – "the West." Wherever there is the West, there is Europe, and Eurocentrism is not far behind. (p.44)

In a similar vein, Gunaratne (2009) remarked that "the West" connotes a tradition among Western trained scholars who avowed themselves to the Eurocentric worldview. In the field of intercultural competence, Martin (1993) similarly remarked that the impressions of competence in the West are centred on a specific speech community, that is, the European American community. Lustig and Koester (2010) reiterated as they acknowledged the perspective of intercultural competence predominantly represents the cultural experiences of European Americans and their European cultural ancestry. It is within such acknowledgement that the discourse on "Western" perspective in the academic literature is treated synonymously with the "Eurocentric" view (see Asante, Miike & Jin, 2014; Martin, 2003; Miike, 2010a).

Miike (2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2012b) contended that the Eurocentric scholarship is not a problem if it is used as the legitimate analytical tools for Western cultures. As Asante, Miike and Yin (2014, p.3) attested, "there is the presumption in most cases that the West have found the truth, and the only thing left is the application of that

truth to various cultures of the world", such a presumption contributes to the issue of ignoring possible cultural differences. Influenced by the presumed idea of discovering the truth as it is seen by those Western scholars who have pioneered many advances in the field of intercultural communication, researchers often lack critical attention in explaining specific behaviors that are influenced by their own cultures (Chen & Miike, 2006; Craig, 2007; Koester & Lustig, 1991; Martin, 1993; Miike, 2003, 2006; Shuter, 2014). Many non-Western communication scholars studied their own cultures by placing the Eurocentric experiences as the central framework for their Western analysis rather than resources for insight (Asante, Miike, & Yin, 2014; Hofstede, 1997; Martin, 1993; Miike, 2003, 2007, 2012a, 2012b, 2014; Yum, 2012). Miike (2007) argued on the Eurocentric (Western) bias as he identified two important issues:

> First, Eurocentric theory often proclaims itself "human" theory without recognizing and incorporating non-Western counterparts. The problem here is not its theoretical propositions themselves but its one-sidedly presumed universality and totalizing tendency. Second, Eurocentric theory favors some phenomena over others due to their cultural origins and orientations. Consequently, Western theory disregards or downplays certain elements that have been historically embraced in non-Western cultures. The lack of resonance of Eurocentric theory with the non-Western world emanates from these two types of Eurocentric bias. (p.1)

In his current work, Miike (2010b) claimed that such theoretical bias was also closely tied with the presumed universality of Eurocentric methodology that is

characterized with a "widespread obsession with quantification, objectivity, value freedom, replicability, generalizability, and predictability" (p.194). Such methodological underpinning of Western theories has produced a pseudotic concept in which an emic idea that is developed in the Euro-American community is simply assumed to be etic and universally generalizable across different cultural contexts (Chen & Miike, 2006; Kuo & Chew, 2009; Lustig & Spitzberg, 1993; Martin, 1993; Miike, 2003, 2012b). Influenced by the belief that the Eurocentric methodology is value-free, culture is predominantly treated as variable in positivist research projects and served as a "laboratory" for testing the generalizability of Eurocentric theories (Kuo & Chew, 2009; Moon, 1996; Shuter, 2008, 2014). Kuo and Chew (2009) lamented that local conditions had been ignored by researchers who published theory-validation research and any cultural differences were generally treated as 'errors'. However, the rise of development communication field that coincided with rapid globalization in the 1980s has introduced tension on the inapplicability of Western theories as Kuo and Chew (2009) further remarked:

> Non-Western scholars who were trained in the Western tradition brought theories back to their native countries and observed a greater among of 'errors' in the application of the Eurocentric theories to non-Western phenomena. There was growing evidence that cultural differences accounted for more than just random errors in theory-building. (p.423)

Nonetheless, Chen (2009a) argued that the inapplicability of Eurocentric methodology is not warranted. Chen particularly noted that survey research method is adjustable and thus, it is possible for researchers who engaged in applicability

testing of Western theories to re-interpret their findings and propose new elements that fit their cultural contexts. Accordingly, Chen pointed that the issue at hand was not whether foreign elements can be used in another cultural context, but whether the foreign elements can be handled suitably in a specific culture. In view of this, Chen further remarked:

> In the Western world, the survey research method is the one widely applied to the discipline of communication studies. The survey method is powerful is and accurate in asking questions about the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of a small sample of the respondents in order to apply to the large population the sample represents… the survey method has been adopted by scholars in different cultures to study the indigenous concepts and problems…there is no question that as a tool of social scientific research the survey method is embedded in Western cultural values, especially freedom of expression, which leads the participants to be more able to disclose their beliefs and opinions regarding personal, social, and politically sensitive questions. The Western cultural value of openness is in contrast with the Chinese reserved style of expression, especially in regard to public affairs. Thus, in answering a survey question, the Chinese might say 'no' while the real answer is 'yes,' or answer the question in a subtle or indirect way which tends to complicate the process of data collection and in turn mislead the results. (pp. 405-406)

The 1980s saw a growing concern on the inadequacy of the Western perspective to explain similar phenomenon in non-Western cultures and such concern continues to be addressed in the literature (Chen, 1987; Chen, 1993; Chen & Miike, 2006; Craig,

2007; Hofstede, 1984, 1997; Hofstede et al., 2010; Kuo & Chew, 2009; Woelfel, 1987; Yeh, 2010). Much of the concern on applying the Western perspective is centred on sensitizing cultural differences in which ignorance of that differences on human behaviors may produce misleading interpretations (Chen & Starosta, 2008; Hofstede, 1997; Kuo & Chew, 2009; Miike, 2012b; Miyahara, 2004). Scholars pointed that communication behaviors of an individual are bounded by their cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs (Cooley & Roach, 1984; Hofstede, 1984; Ishii et al., 2012; Xiao & Chen, 2012). Individuals learn how to behave and interpret behaviors based on their own cultural rules that prescribe what behaviors are considered as competent and incompetent (Chen & An, 2009; Collier, 1988; Gudykunst, 1998; Hecht et al., 1992; Hecht & Ribeau, 1984; McDaniel et al., 2012). As cultures vary in terms of values, behaviors that are understood as competent in one culture may be perceived as incompetent in another (Chen, 1993; Cooley & Roach, 1984; Miyahara, 2004; Xiao & Chen, 2009; Yum, 2012).

The consciousness on culture has also brought about the concern on cultural values of the scholars who study intercultural communication. Hofstede (1997) has long noted the importance of the cultural origins of the researchers' minds as he posited that culture affects our daily practices as well as theories that we developed to explain our practices. When Western researchers developed theories, the issues that they study are relevant to the Western cultures and they may be oblivious to other issues that the Western minds would not normally find important. Nonetheless, other scholars such as Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) argued that it is intricate to determine whether the Western bias on current conceptions of intercultural competence can be warranted. Spitzberg and Changnon further attested that it is

commonplace to find that the Western conceptions of competence tend to emphasize on individuality, whereas the Eastern perspectives tend to focus on empathy and sensitivity due to their collectivistic orientation. However, they noted that, even within the U.S. social scientific approaches to social skills, assertiveness is not emphasized. Rather, empathy serves as important in most models of intercultural competence regardless of the researchers' cultural origins. Drawing from Spitzberg and Changnon's (2009) contention, there is a need to expand literature in other cultures to re-examine the Western perspective of communication and elucidate what can be known as universal issues and what is considered as residing within such perspective. In order to elucidate the source for what constitutes Western perspective, understanding Western philosophical stance is fundamental.

Philosophy is important because it provides the basis that explains communication as a process and an activity (Chen, 1987; Cushman & Kincaid, 1987; Woelfel, 1987). Chen (1987) pointed out three important ways how philosophy is related to communication theory. First, philosophy is the content of communication and the way of communication bears upon the philosophy itself. Second, philosophy is the context for communication. In this sense, philosophy functions as a system of beliefs and orientation that shape the implicit conditions or background understanding of communication. It is important to note that communication is employed to achieve understanding but it makes no sense to speak of understanding without addressing the interacting community that understands, believes, and acts. The context (i.e. belief or background orientation) needs to be established as the starting point to achieve understanding. Third, philosophy provides a method of communication.

Philosophy as a method defines the nature, scope, and limitation of communication. In essence, philosophy forms the basis of the communication method because it speaks the most fundamental aspirations, values, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions of a culture. Cushman and Kincaid (1987) added that communication in its general sense refers to a process and consequence of information shared by two or more persons. Much of the debate on cultural perspectives rests on how the "process" and "consequence" of communication should be defined and approached. Cushman and Kincaid posited that communication is about successful transfer of symbolic information but the question is for whom the transfer is successful. Does it refer to the source, receiver, or both? In order to understand how communication is viewed, they proposed three fundamental principles that provide the basis on how different cultural perspectives perceive communication. First, philosophical principles that consider background presuppositions that shape the attitudes, values, and beliefs of a particular culture. Second, process principles that look at how communication is shared and interpreted in daily interactions within a particular cultural context.Third, practical principles that is oriented toward how communication can be employed in order to achieve goals. How do these three fundamental principles manifest themselves within Western communication models?

Woelfel (1987) traced the development of communication theory in the West. Communication as a formal discipline in the West is rooted far back to the Greeks through which Aristotle's rhetoric plays important contribution to the training of many Western communication scholars. Interestingly, the beginning period of Western philosophy during pre-Socratic philosophers such as Thales denoted a loosely defined tradition and much of the philosophical thoughts shared many

similarities with the East. The similar model can be attributed to Miletus which was the largest commercial trading center of the Greek and the East. The pre-Socratic philosophy of the West resembles to the Chinese philosophy in that humans are not distinguished from nature but form an integral part of being. Accordingly, much of the establishment of Western thoughts during the pre-Socratic period can be understood in the light of Eastern thoughts. It was during Socrates era that established the boundary between the philosophies of the Greek and the East. In contrast to the Eastern philosophy, Socrates believed that people are separated from nature and this thought continues today in the Western academic field. The separation of mankind from nature gave serious implications to the epistemological question pertaining to people's connection to the world of experiences.

Woelfel (1987) claimed that most Western communication theory roots lie in Aristotle's philosophy. Aristotle assumed that there are a set of behaviors from which an individual person may choose in any situation and choices are made based on the individual's beliefs and attitudes. Deriving from Aristotle's philosophy, Cushman and Kincaid (1987) asserted the primary goal of communication in the West is to provide self realization and manipulate others to assist one to achieve personal goals. Self analysis, rational reflection, audience analysis and message adaption are the important means for the individual to achieve personal control. Self analysis considers developing one's potential in order to achieve one's personal goals. Rational reflection involves analyzing what resources can be used that must be brought under human control. Audience analysis calls for rational determination of other individuals' values, attitudes and beliefs whose cooperation is needed to achieve one's goals. Message adaptation is used to know what communication

strategies are needed to motivate others to assist attaining one's goal. In essence, the core principle of Western philosophy rests on the notion of personal or individual control and one needs to be able to manipulate others to achieve one's goals. These ideas formed the underlying assumption of communication that sees someone as being in charge to gain his or her personal desired outcomes (Krippendorff, 1987).

In contrast to the West, the philosophical principles that guide human nature in non-Western cultures such as in China, India, Japan, and Korea is derived mainly from religious worldviews (predominantly Buddhism, Hinduism or Taoism) (Chen & Miike, 2006; Chen & Starosta, 2003; Cushman & Kincaid, 1987; Ishii et al., 2012; Miike, 2003). The roles of individual are not about self realization but to gain spiritual harmony between man and nature which demands an individual to transcend personal interests to become one with nature (Chen, 1987; Chen & Starosta, 2003; Miike, 2003; Yeh, 2010). Accordingly, the goal of communication is oriented toward submission of the individual's interest to a collective institutional structure and such submission is achieved by establishing harmony with others (Chen, 1987; Chen, 2011, 2013; Chen & Starosta, 2003; Xiao & Chen, 2009; Yeh, 2010).

The philosophical thoughts of personal control that represent the West and harmony for the East can be further explained through the individualism-collectivism dimension. Since the publication of *Culture's Consequences* by Hofstede in 1984, individualism/collectivism has gained popularity within the intercultural communication field (Hofstede et al., 2010). This dualism has also been used to delineate similarities and differences across cultures (Chen, 2009a; Gudykunst,

56

2003; Gudykunst & Lee, 2003; Kuo & Chew, 2009). The individualism-collectivism dimension essentially describes the nature of relationship between the individual and the collectivity such as family, clan, or tribe (Hofstede, 1984, 1997; Hofstede et al., 2010).

Hofstede (1984) explained that individualism-collectivism can be basically observed in a broad range of human societies such as in the complexity of family units that people live in. Some people live in nuclear families while others live in extended families or clans with grandparents, uncles, aunties, or tribal units based on kinship ties. Hofstede asserted that children who live and grow up in extended families learn to think of themselves as part of "we" group and this in-group is the major source of their self concept. The in-group is the only secure protection of oneself and one owes lifelong loyalty to the group. There is a mutual dependence relationship between the self and the in-group. These societies are collectivist in which people from birth are bounded into strong, cohesive in-groups which continue to protect them throughout their lifetime in exchange for loyalty. In individualist society, most children were born into families of two or single parents. As children grow up, they learn to think of themselves as "I" which is not classified according to group membership but individual characteristics. Children are expected to stand on their own feet, leave the parental home, and reduce relationships with their parents after leaving home. It is unhealthy and embarrassing for a person in the individualist culture to be dependent on a group (such as family). Individualism seems to manifest in societies that tend to hold loose ties between individuals and everyone is expected to look after themselves and their immediate families. In Western countries such as the United

57

States, individualism is viewed as good and the root of their country's greatness. On the other hand, collectivism is valued in the East.

The individualism orientation seems to pervade Western conceptions of intercultural competence. Parks (1994) identified three interrelated themes that provide the core fundamental concerns of most Western conceptualization of communication competence which reflects such individualism orientation: (1) control, (2) adaptation, and (3) collaboration. The concern for control that manifests in manipulating one's environment or influencing the responses of others was the core element in most definitions of communicative competence in the West. Parks further remarked that personal control is fundamental to achieve competency which enables an individual to influence the outcomes of his or her communication with others. Western scholars have generally agreed that communication is inherently goal-directed which suggests that an individual must have a keen sense of personal control in order to be competent. Parks (1994, p.592) claimed that "there would be no reason to communicate if we were not dependent upon others for the fulfillment of our wishes. These wishes or needs are fulfilled by influencing or controlling others' responses to us." The concern for achieving effective and appropriate control over others brings about the notion of adaptation. In order to adapt, an individual must be able to identify situational constraints and modify communicative strategies accordingly. An individual also needs to exercise control in interactive context that brings about the notion of collaboration. Given that the accomplishment of personal goals can only be attained through the aid of others, Parks asserted that competency occurs when individuals allow each other to achieve personal and mutually satisfying outcomes.

Scholars contended that placing personal control at the heart of communication competence strongly reflect Western bias in which it may fall short to explain the workings of competency in other cultures (Chen & Starosta, 2008; Deardorff, 2009b; Martin, 1993; Stiftung & Cariplo, 2006). As communication field has developed world wide, many scholars have focused attention on delineating alternatives to the dominant Western perspective (e.g., Arasaratnam, 2007, 2009; Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Asma, 1996; Chen & An, 2009; Chen & Miike, 2006; Chen & Starosta, 2003; Chua, 2004; Craig, 2007; Manian & Naidu, 2009; Miike, 2003, 2006, 2010a, 2012b; Nwosue, 2009; Romlah, 2013; Yum, 2012; Zaharna, 2009). For example, the Chinese perceived harmony as the key to smooth communication which leads them to avoid conflict and pursue group oriented system of human relations (Chen, 1993, 2011, 2013; Chen & Starosta, 2003). Chen and An (2009) added that the Chinese believe in the union of *Yin* and *Yang* (complementary opposite forces) and to achieve harmony is the ultimate goal for humans. Accordingly, the Chinese model of competent behaviors values interconnectedness and indirect or implicit communication as the appropriate way to interact (Chen, 2009c; Chen & An, 2009). Similarly, Yeh (2010) remarked that for Chinese, communication is a means to establish and to maintain interpersonal relations rather than merely an expression of one's ideas to others. Since relationship is primary in social interactions, Yeh further contended that appropriateness is more important than effectiveness. In this sense, speaking and behaving appropriately are far more important than speaking explicit, accurate, and direct messages to be effective. The Chinese tend to observe the situations to interpret subtle or concealed meaning and respond with speech that reflect relational status, and sacrifice effectiveness for the sake of saving themselves

and others from embarrassment. In view of this, effectiveness seemed to take a back seat in Chinese perspective on competence.

Xiao and Chen (2012) currently proposed four attributes of competency from a Confucian perspective which include (i) moral competence, (ii) the ability to apply rules of moral communication, (iii) the ability to follow the regulative rules, and (iv) the ability to exploit constitutive rules. As Xiao and Chen reflected differences between the Confucian and the Western conception of communication competence, they suggested that Confucians view communication as a course of moral cultivation rather than the means for an individual to achieve his or her goals. Xiao and Chen further elaborated:

> The Western approaches to competence have philosophical origins, but these philosophical origins do not seem to have anything to do with the cosmic and ethical process. On the contrary, the Western conception of competence presupposes that every living being is distinct and unique in its own right, that human beings are born equal and independent of one another, and that human relationships are built externally on the basis of common interests rather than internally on the basis of predetermined organic unity or sentimental linkage. (p.443)

Other alternative perspectives seem to reflect similar preponderance with the Chinese perspective on viewing communication as a relational process. Nwosue (2009) examined the concept of intercultural competence from an African perspective. Nwosue proposed five critical dimensions which include approach to self and other, approach to social relations, approach to time, approach to work, and

communication forms and styles. All these dimensions essentially encapsulate the idea of self among Africans which is strongly influenced by communalism and a symbiotic relationship between an individual and the group of which the individual belongs to. The primacy of relational self is paramount in African culture as Nwosue attested, "in African contexts, the burden of shame to the family or the group is stronger than the guilt to the individual" (p.176). Another important attributes of the African worldview that informed what constitutes intercultural competence are Africans' preferences for an indirect, nonlinear way of communication. Given that communication messages are implicit, competent communication takes into account the responsibility on the listener's part to decipher what the speaker is saying.

Zaharna (2009) explicated a conception of intercultural competence from the perspective of the Arab world. Zaharna asserted at the outset that it is difficult to define 'the Arab world' given its complexity and diversity. Although the diversity may magnify the difficulty of achieving intercultural competence in the Arab world, Zaharna remarked that relationships and social contexts are critical components of intercultural competence. In delineating an Arab perspective of intercultural competence, Zaharna proposed an associative view of communication that accentuates the notion of relationships and social contexts in the Arab culture. This associative view places the importance of significance, meanings, and communication purpose that are derived from relationships among people and the social context within which communication occurs. The salient components that informed competent communication across the Arab world include linguistic ability, sensitivity to and knowledge of dialectical differences of spoken colloquial Arabic,

modesty and humility as the guiding features of exemplary behaviors, and ability to build and maintain social networks.

Manian and Naidu (2009) offered an Indian perspective of intercultural competence. This perspective is centered on the concept of oneness that carries the notion "the entire universe and all its forms are seen as one and at the core of all beings is one divine consciousness" (Manian & Naidu, 2009, p.245). Manian and Naidu further posited that the Indians value relationships over time and view oneness as core to existence which notably differs from the Western models. The Indians believe that the philosophy of oneness is important for spiritual well-being in life. Manian and Naidu claimed that India's contribution to intercultural competence is in the core of the principle of oneness that recognizes differences while focusing on commonality.

This millennium indicates the coming-of-age of Asian communication research and the growing emergence of Asian scholars that has given significant impact on the way communication theorizing is taking place (Kuo & Chew, 2009; Shuter, 2014). One paradigmatic assumption that was conceived as offering a possible answer to the dominant Western perspective is the notion of Asiacentricity that provides the meta-theorical lens to view Asian communication practices (Kuo & Chew, 2009).

Miike (2003) defined Asiacentricity as "the theoretical notion that insists on placing Asian values and ideals at the centre of inquiry for viewing Asian phenomenon from the standpoint of Asians" (p.251). Miike further noted that the Asiacentric paradigm focused primarily and confined to these four countries: China, India, Japan, and Korea. Based on his review of literature on Eastern cultural and communication practices, Miike (2003) outlined Asiacentric philosophical assumptions which

include the ontological, epistemological, axiological stance of human nature. The ontological assumption of Asiacentric paradigm rests in the form of relationality that views everyone and everything as interrelated. Miike maintained that many Asian traditional ways of thinking is based on the fact of humans as interdependent and interrelated beings. Miike further contended that such ontological assumption is much more explicitly recognized in Eastern cultures than in Western cultures that are traditionally dominated by the theme of individualism and independent self. The foregoing ontological assumption leads to the epistemological assumption that since everyone and everything is viewed as interrelated, they can be meaningfully understood in relation to one another. Individuals do not exist in isolation from others leading to the nature of interconnectedness or non-separateness of all things, events, phenomena, and beings. The axiological assumption in Asiacentric paradigm is intertwined with the previous assumptions. In Asian communicative practices, the valued goal is harmony that is crucial for the survival of society. Miike noted that this Eastern axiology of harmony is in mark contrast to the Western axiology that places freedom and control as the ultimate goal for communication.

Based on his previous writings (Miike, 2002, 2003, 2007), Miike (2012b) currently proposed five Asiacentric propositions which include (1) circularity, (2) harmony, (3) other-directedness, (4) reciprocity, and (5) relationality that gives implication on communicative practices. These propositions essentially reiterated the themes of interconnectedness and mutual dependence that forms an integral worldview of Asian communicative practices. Nonetheless, it is important to be cautious that Asian nations are plural societies that constitute remarkable varieties of communities that are divided by language, religion, case, and ethnicity. (Chen & Starosta, 2003;

Miike, 2012a, 2012b; Shamsul, 2006). Accordingly, Miike's (2012b) propositions do not necessarily reflect real-life communication among Asians but they can be used as theoretical lenses to see an Asian version of communication.

The above mentioned alternative conceptualizations of intercultural competence have given impact on the need to rethink the relevancy of Western conceptions in other cultural contexts. In her synthesis of varieties of non-Western cultural perspectives in defining intercultural competence, Deardorff (2009b) remarked the importance of relationship as the unit of analysis which is in contrast to the Western perspective that largely views intercultural competence as an individual concept. Accordingly, Deardorff posited that the emphasis on a single individual was a noted gap in the existing Western conceptions of intercultural competence. Thus, Deardorff called for the need to move beyond the individual and to focus more on relational aspects in developing future models of intercultural competence.

There is clearly no shortage of calls that have been made in the literature for re-examining Western conceptions of intercultural competence and proposing more of non-Western perspectives. One pertinent matter that needs to be considered is that much of research in the past was formulated based on culture specific perspectives (Arasaratnam, 2004, 2007, 2009; Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Koester et al., 1993; Martin, 1993). As Zaharna (2009) claimed that the premium placed on relationship provides the distinguishing features within the Arab societies and sets the benchmark for cultural and intercultural competence; much of insights on intercultural competence by other non-Western scholars used a similar approach. The culture specific insights offered by non-Western scholars who have studied intercultural

competence have certainly provided insightful cultural comparisons and the imperative to re-think the Western conceptions of intercultural competence.

Although cross cultural comparisons of the culture specific perspectives are useful for eliciting important insights on how specific culture differs in perceiving intercultural competence, Chen (2004, 2009a, 2014) argued that researchers tend to ignore the internal diversity which has resulted in oversimplification of culture as one homogenous unit (such as Chinese as being collectivist and Americans as being individualist). Such oversimplification seems to be problematic as Chen (2009a) pointed that it may misinform results of research which may lead to cultural misunderstandings. Additionally, given that past non-Western researchers tend to confine their inquiries of intercultural competence by illuminating their cultural experiences within one specific cultural group, little is known about the conception of intercultural competence that illuminates what transpires when different groups of people interact (Chen, 2014; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; LaRocco, 2011). As a matter of fact, Casrnir (1999, p.92) has long argued on intercultural communication as "an artefact for cultural comparisons" which contributes to insufficient understanding to the process of communication. According to Casrnir :

> The study of intercultural communication has been an artefact of culture-comparisons resulting in studies that have not been based on actual communication processes involved when those from different cultural backgrounds interact…to the extent that scholarly work related to intercultural communication has been driven by model based on expectations within the cultures of social scientists, the use of non-process oriented

research models has insufficiently contributed to our understanding of what specifically happens when individual human beings communicate with one another. (p.92)

The literature also indicated that many of the non-Western perspectives illuminate insights primarily from China, Korea, Japan and India (e.g., Chen, 2014; Chen, 1993; Chen & Miike, 2006; Gunaratne, 2009; Ishii, 2006; Ishii et al., 2012; Manian & Naidu, 2009; Miike, 2007; Miyahara, 2004; Xiao & Chen, 2009; Yeh, 2010; Yum, 2012) and there is little insight from South East Asian region (Miike, 2006). Looking into Malaysia as a culture that resides within such a region, the current status of research pertaining to intercultural competence (although researchers may not precisely use similar label) indicated most local researchers engaged in theory-validation studies and adopted Western theoretical lens to analyze similar phenomenon in Malaysia. (e.g., Aida Hafitah & Maimunah, 2007; Pandian, 2008; Ramalu, Rose, Kumar et al., 2010; Ramalu, Rose, Uli et al., 2010; Rose et al., 2010; Singh, 2012; Yusliza, 2010, 2011; Yusliza & Chelliah, 2010; Zuria et al., 2010). Although these studies are useful for analyzing intercultural competence, as Miike (2010b) noted researchers tend to use their culture as text for Western analysis rather than drawing new insights from their own culture, such theory-validation research from the lens of Western scholarship leads to little insights that capture the reality of people's experience in a multicultural Malaysia. The deficit on theoretical insights from Malaysia can also be observed in the literature. For example, the *Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (2009) claims to be the first comprehensive volume that brings together various cultural voices on the complex concept of intercultural competence missed out a perspective from Malaysia. The latest

publication of *The Global Intercultural Communication Reader* consisting of a collection of 32 essays claims to be the first anthology to take a distinctly non-Eurocentric approach on intercultural communication also indicated a missing perspective from Malaysia.

As Miike (2012b) noted that although there are commonalities of Asian values that cut across many Asian nations; the remarkable diversities within Asian societies such as in the aspect of religion and language cannot be ignored. In view of this, Malaysia certainly provides a unique resource of insight that may contribute to enriching the extant knowledge on intercultural competence. Given that Malaysia is well-known for having a harmonious multicultural society, (Asma, 1996; Asma & Pederson, 2004; Evans et al., 2010; Fenton, 2010; Minah Harun, 2007; Shamsul, 2005, 2008), what would intercultural competence look like when it is viewed from this setting? Does the perspective indicate similar resemblance to the perspectives that have been proposed by scholars in other non-Western cultures? What would intercultural competence look like when it takes into account intercultural experience of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds in Malaysia? This has certainly offered an interesting area of further inquiry.

As this study intends to interrogate the conception of intercultural competence, fundamentally, it needs to include a definition of culture since how this term is defined will give implications for aspects of research (Levine et al., 2007; Moon, 2010). This leads to an examination of how researchers approach "culture" in the study of intercultural competence.

2.5 The Conception of "Culture" in the Study of Intercultural Competence

Defining "culture" is not an easy task since there are over more than a hundred of its definitions in the literature (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor, 2007; Gudykunst, 2003; McDaniel et al., 2009). The study of culture originates from anthropological studies in which anthropologists explored culture by immersing themselves into the life of the people under study (Hall, 1959). The earliest definition of culture was written by a British anthropologist, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor in that culture is a complex whole that include knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs, capabilities and habits that are learned as a member of society (Tylor, 1871). Hall (1959) asserted that culture has long been defined by anthropologists as "way of life of a people, for the sum of their learned behavior patterns, attitudes, and material things" (p.20). He further claimed that culture "controls behavior in deep and persisting ways, many of which are outside of awareness and beyond conscious control of the individual" (p.25). Culture has also been defined as a system of knowledge or implicit theories of the games being played by relatively large number of people to know how to communicate and interpret behaviors of others (Gudykunst, 1998; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Similarly, McDaniel et al. (2009) proposed an applied definition of culture as the rules of games of life that are ingrained subconsciously enabling the cultural members to behave in familiar situations. Regardless of the specific definitions adopted by researchers, Levine et al. (2007) remarked that culture, by its definition is referred to as "something that is shared among people belonging to the same socially defined and recognized group. Culture is something people have in common with some people but not with others." (p.205)

As culture is usually viewed as a collective or group phenomenon, to a large extent, intercultural communication is considered to be types of intergroup communication (Gudykunst, 2003; Kim, 1988; Levine et al., 2007; Singer, 1998; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Accordingly, there are various operational definitions for "culture" within intercultural communication studies. Researchers used "culture" to include studies of communication between people from different national, ethnic, or racial groups, intergenerational communication, able and disabled communication, gay and lesbian, and other areas of research under the heading of intercultural communication. (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Bippus & Dorjee, 2002; Collier, 2006; Lustig & Koester, 2006; McDaniel et al., 2009; McDaniel et al., 2012). This simultaneously reflects the expansiveness of the term "culture" and at the same time brings ambiguity to what "culture" is actually referred to in the study of intercultural communication (Bippus & Dorjee, 2002; Syarizan, 2011). Nonetheless, most scholars usually study intercultural communication between people from different national cultures who engage in face-to-face communication (Gudykunst, 2003; Oetzel, 2009).

In the field of intercultural competence, Yep (2014) contended that much of current research treats culture as nation-states which have resulted in "culture" to be viewed as synonymous with national membership. Researchers most often focused their attention on explaining development of intercultural competence by comparing national cultural differences between the host members and that of the sojourners' (e.g., Caraway, 2010; Chen & Starosta, 2008; Flaherty & Stojakovic, 2008; LaRocco, 2011; Lough, 2011; Miner, 2008; Munz, 2007; Stallman, 2009; Tomoko, 2010; Yang, Webster, & Prosser, 2011). The tendency to approach culture as nation-

state can be understood by going back to the history of intercultural communication. The study of intercultural communication started some 40 years ago from intercultural problems that triggered the interest from communication experts (Vijver & Leung, 2009). Intercultural communication as a formal study began in 1946 when the Foreign Service Institute was established in the United States to provide cultural training for foreign diplomats (Moon, 1996; Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). Rogers and Steinfatt (1999) remarked that the development of intercultural communication as a field of study was associated with the role played by an anthropologist, Edward T. Hall who published a book entitled "The Silent Language" in 1959. Hall's work on providing a communication approach to culture marked the beginning of the intercultural communication field.

Moon (1996) pointed out that after World War II, the U.S. sought involvement and investment in foreign lands and many were sent overseas to carry international assignments. However, expatriates failed to accomplish their assignments and returned because they could not cope with different cultures. Other problems that were encountered by sojourners include culture shock, personal adjustment, cultural adaptation, and cross-cultural effectiveness. The need to train individuals to serve effectively in a foreign environment stimulated scientific interest in the conception of intercultural competence. At the early stage of intercultural communication studies, Ruben (1989) remarked that the perspectives of intercultural competence were needed to meet these goals: to explain failures and predict overseas success, to develop strategies for personnel selection and to assess sojourner training and preparation methodologies. These goals guide theory and research directions of

intercultural competence since its early development (Martin, 1993; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

As the nation has been treated synonymously with culture within the study of intercultural competence, it is worthy to explain how a 'nation' is defined. In his groundbreaking volume, *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (1991) proposed the following definition of a nation:

It is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is an imagined political community because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion… it is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations…it is imagined as sovereign, because the concept was born in age of Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Finally, it is imagined as community because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as deep horizontal comradeship. (pp. 6-7)

Hofstede et al. (2010) echoed that nations are political units that divide the entire world and one of which people are supposed to belong as manifested in one's passport. Whereas nations can have multiple cultures, it is often assumed that people in one nation may have a unifying national identity and values (Hofstede et al., 2010; Levine et al., 2007; Shamsul, 2008). As political units, many nations exert strong

71

forces for integration which may manifest through commonalities in language, political, economic and educational systems that provide sources for considerable collective properties ascribed to their citizens (Collier, 2006; Hofstede et al., 2010; Levine et al., 2007).

Approaching culture on the basis of national membership has produced interesting insights on intercultural competence. However, the issue that needs to be considered is whether nations and culture can be meaningfully equated and, the implications of conflating culture and nations (Levine et al, 2007, Moon, 1996; Yep, 2014). In her genealogical investigation of the concepts of culture in the intercultural communication field, Moon (1996) identified many of the published works are grounded in defining culture in terms of nation-states or in terms of Hofstede's individualism/collectivism dimension in which two or more national cultures are compared and contrasted. In light of seeing culture as nationality, Moon further attested:

> The contested nature of culture gets lost in homogenizing views of "culture as nationality" where dominant cultural voices are often the only ones heard where the preferred reading of "culture" is the only reading. Many of the studies in the 1980s investigate experiences and self reports of the privileged members of the United States and Japan that represent "culture" for all cultural members. (p.6)

In her current review of the intercultural scholarship, Moon (2010) remarked from its original signification of culture as nation-state, the meaning of culture has been broadened to include race, gender and ethnicity. However, much of the published

work continues to define culture as nationality despite the critique levied against equating culture with nations. Moon asserted that using nation as a unit of analysis hides more than what it illuminates since researchers most often focused their attention on discovering unifying elements that describe the whole population which may result in stereotypes that blanket a society. Such stereotypes are often taught as tools for survivals for individuals who may need to communicate with the persons described by the stereotypes. This approach seems to fall short in preparing individuals for a complex world. Moon further contended that in today's global economy, people leave their current home countries in search for work leading to mobile population that may give significant impact on the new markets. Accordingly, Moon attested that such complexity in the today's world needs more intricate ways of understanding its populations.

Yep (2014) reiterated that given the influence of treating culture as nation-state that reflects the larger views of intercultural communication, intercultural competence researchers continue to adopt and embrace similar conceptions in their theories and research. Yep proposed that such definitions of culture need to be questioned as he pinpointed several problems:

> The approach to culture as a nation-state is highly problematic in several ways: (a) it can never represent the lives and experiences of people in everyday life; (b) cultural members are homogenized and represented by the language of the privileged; and (c) an individual agency, particularly of those who are less privileged in the group, is erased. (p.345)

This argument in defining culture provides the impetus for us to think about how we examine "culture" and in turn, how we conceptualize intercultural competence. Given the problem of treating culture as nationality, a number of scholars called for extension of current definitions of culture to include race, ethnicity, and gender, among others that can provide rich insights about culture (Martin, 1993; Moon, 2010; Shuter, 2014; Yep, 2014).

Since the most feasible fraction of society can be identified through ethnic groups (Schemerhorn, 1996), ethnicity provides one possible way to move beyond approaching culture as national membership and to offer complex understanding of intercultural competence. Extending culture to include ethnicity seems to be significant as Shuter (2014) indicated the absence of studies on ethnic groups in current intercultural research:

> In the last twenty-one years, culture has become more central to research in intercultural communication. Unlike 1990, recent intercultural research has multiple and diverse threads…..although all world regions are represented in studies conducted after 2006 – a welcome departure from 1990 – the research has concentrated more on Asia, with more limited analysis of Europe, Middle East, Africa, and Central and South America. Particularly troubling is the near absences of published co-cultural research on ethnic groups, races or religious groups within the USA and countries worldwide. This trend was noted in 1990 and, surprisingly, continues unabated despite the critical need for mutual understanding and cooperation between co-cultural groups. (p.52)

It is important to note that the issue of ethnicity is not new since many societies have long been ethnically diverse. However, as the world's population continues to result in a complex multicultural society at a quickstep, ethnic differences have now become the most important agenda for many societies (Banks, 2009; McDaniel et al., 2012). Although it is possible for people to generally share an overarching national culture as a result of a period of socialization in a particular country; ethnic differences are not ultimately obliterated (Bhopal & Rowley, 2005; Hecht et al., 2003; Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008; Syarizan, 2011). There are ethnic cultures whose characteristics have not been universalized or become part of the shared national culture that significantly shapes an individual's sense of self (Banks, 2009; Collier, 2006; Hecht et al., 2003; Hecht & Ribeau, 1984). In many parts of the world where once people might have hidden their ethnic identity through fear of discrimination, the trend is now in the opposite direction in which people take ethnicity with pride leading to a re-assertion of ethnic identities (Chen & Starosta, 2008; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Mackerrass, 2003; McDaniel et al., 2012). Furthermore, ethnicity continues to persist for several reasons such as the need for symbolic meaning and community by individuals that can be satisfied through ethnic cultures (Gudykunst, 1998; Hecht et al., 2003; Kim, 2008, 2009; Mackerras, 2003; McDaniel et al., 2012).

The emergence of complex multiethnic society in today's world necessitates ethnically diverse people to learn to co-exist with one another. Yet, we do not seem to be able to accept differences as Kim (2009) remarked that the posturing of different ethnicities often exacerbates ethnic rivalries that render alarming daily news. McDaniel et al. (2012) noted that the international community is beleaguered with sectarian violence due to ideological, cultural, and ethnic differences. Such

violence can be seen in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the exhibited animosity toward government policies by the indigenous Uygur ethnic minority in western China favouring immigration into the region by other Chinese ethnic groups and the ineffective governmental control continue to exaggerate ethnic and religious violence in Africa. McDaniel et al. (2012) further indicated that increased diversity and intolerance of differences is a continuing issue. If we are to prepare ourselves to embrace differences, we must learn to cope with diverse customs, values, and behaviors of others. Banks (2009) pointed out that the changing ethnic landscape has major implications for schools, colleges, universities, and workforce which necessitate transformations of these institutions in order to meet the needs of diverse groups who will work and be served by them. As today's workforce constitutes ethnically diverse individuals, Banks further attested that neglecting ethnicity is no longer sustainable. Accordingly, it is time to re-visit the needs for conceptualizing intercultural competence that must consider ethnicity.

As it is imperative to highlight ethnicity in studying intercultural competence, the term 'ethnicity' certainly needs further elaboration. It was in 1953 that the term ethnicity was first employed in social science in which it refers to the character or quality of an ethnic group (Ahmed, 1996; Fenton, 2010; Hutchinson & Smith, 1996). The etymology of 'ethnic' derives from 'ethnos' which is an ancient Greek word that refers to a sense of people who claim to have shared ancestry or common origin (Fenton, 2010; Hraba, 1979; Hutchinson & Smith, 1996; Schemerhorn, 1996; Tonki, McDonald, & Chapman, 1996). Additionally, the word 'ethnic' in English appears to have the sense of 'foreign' and as the term develops, it is used to refer to ethnic minority and minority issues (Eriksen, 1996; Fenton, 2010). Hutchinson and Smith

(1996) pointed that the English and American scholars tend to reserve the term 'ethnic' for immigrant peoples as in the frequently used term of 'ethnic minorities'. However, Hutchinson and Smith further indicated that from the mid-nineteenth century, scholarship has made 'ethnos' to refer to 'group of people of shared characteristics' (p.21) which contributes to ethnicity to lose it foreign sense and to be defined in a more general sense.

What is then an ethnic group? Schemerhorn's (1996) well-known definition is useful to illuminate the definition of an ethnic group:

> An ethnic group is a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their people hood. Examples of such symbolic elements are: kinship patterns, physical contiguity, religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical features, or any combination of these. A necessary accompaniment is some consciousness of kind of among members of the group. (p. 17)

Mackerass (2003) remarked that shared language, religion, kinship, history, common ancestry, and common territory forms important features of a recognizable group of people. However, he cautioned that one does have to exercise care in not being too rigid about applying definition of an 'ethnic group'. In the modern world, diasporas have become very common and often adopt the language of their new home. Accordingly, not all people of the same ethnic group necessarily share any common territory or religion, yet they still belong to the same ethnic group.

77

Lustig and Koester (2006, 2010) suggested that the nature of ethnicity depends upon a number of characteristics. For example, many people such as in the United States still identify themselves with their ancestors' ethnic group who emigrated from other nation. Taking this view, ethnic groups may include, for example, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Mexican Americans. In other cases, ethnicity may coincide more completely with nation such as in the case of the former Yugoslavia where the three major ethnic groups – Slovenians, Croatians, and Serbians – each with their own distinct language and culture were forced into one nation-state. Ethnic group may also share common identification although they belong to many different nations such as Jewish people who share a common ethnic identification although they are citizens of many different nations. Thus, what becomes important in defining ethnicity is consciousness of members of an ethnic group on their sense of belonging to the group.

Given the emphasis on consciousness, scholars have proposed that ethnicity involves both sociological and psychological perspectives (Collier & Thomas, 1988; Hecht & Ribeau, 1984; Hecht et al., 1989; Kim, 1986; Singer, 1998). Kim (1986) explained this dual perspective on ethnicity:

> Sociological tradition defines ethnicity primarily in an objective sense which is a label to designate social groups and differentiate one group from another… the label is based on symbolic markers such as race, religion, language, national origin and combinations of these characteristics… psychological approach views ethnicity as the subjective identification of

individuals with an ethnic group that is the identity felt by members of the ethnic group. (p.10)

Kim (1986) further proposed that when understanding ethnicity, this dual perspective should be taken into consideration because it is the basis to understand a person's dispositions and how it influences communication. Labelling the distinctions made by ethnic markers such as language, religion, and national origin of ethnic cultures is useful to indicate similarities within group as well as differences between groups. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that no two ethnic individuals may possess similar identical personal attributes including ethnic characteristics and their subjective identification with the ethnic group.

Given the subjective-objective orientation, ethnicity can be conjectured as a self conscious collective of people in its common ancestry, history, religion, tradition, religion, and language that may be external or precede present nation-state (Collier, 2006; Hecht et al., 1993; Hecht et al., 2003; Kim, 2001). As the term ethnic is somehow related to nation, it is worth attempting to be clear about ethnic group and nation. Fenton (2010) remarked that ethnicity and nationality as social identities and social constructions are typically about descent and cultural differences that provide the meanings for people to build around their idea of a community. In view of this, ethnic and nation share core meaning in that both convey descent and cultural communities. However, each has distinctive connotation as he clarified:

Nation refers to descent and culture communities with one specific addition: the assumption that nations are or should be associated with a state or state-like political form. Ethnic group refers to descend and cultural communities

with specific additions that (i) the group is a kind of sub-set within a nation-state, (2) that the point of reference of differences is typically cultural difference, and cultural markers of social boundaries rather than physical appearance, and (3) often that the group referred to is 'other' (foreign) to some majority who are presumed not to be 'ethnic'. (p.22)

At this juncture, it is worthy to look at how "culture" is approached in the studies of intercultural competence in Malaysia. An examination of the literature indicates that most researchers dealt with culture at national level and much of their focus was oriented toward investigating adaptation among sojourners or expatriates into the Malaysian culture (e.g., Aida Hafitah & Maimunah, 2007; Mustaffa & Illias, 2013; Pandian, 2008; Singh & Thuraisingam, 2007; Thangiah, 2010; Mohd Yusof Yusliza et al., 2010; Zuria et al., 2010). As Moon (2010) contended that approaching culture as nation forced researchers to discover the unifying elements to describe the whole population, such tendency led researchers to accentuate homogeneity and miss out the complex nature of heterogeneous environment where people of different ethnic groups reside in Malaysia. Malaysia is a multiethnic society with a population of 28.33 million people comprising three major ethnic groups namely the Malays (64 percent), Chinese (28 percent) , and Indians (8 percent)(Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2012). Although these three major ethnic groups may share many general commonalities as Malaysians, specific ethnic differences in terms of degree and priorities of values exist. For instance, while the Malay values accentuate their identity to Islam and Malay cultural world, the Chinese derive their values from Confucian philosophy (Aida, 2008; Asma, 1996; Asma & Pederson, 2004; Isma Rosila & Lawrence, 2012; Minah Harun, 2007; Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008; Shamsul,

2001). Such value differences give significant influence on management and social practices of each ethnic group (Asma & Pederson, 2004; Dahlia, 2008; Tamam et al., 2011; Isma Rosila & Lawrence, 2012; Minah Harun, 2007; Lailawati, 2005; Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008).

If nationality seems to be the major focus on studying intercultural competence, in what particular realm does ethnicity receive great attention by local researchers? As local researchers were mainly driven by the agenda of national integration, much of the research scope that considers ethnicity in Malaysia has been predominantly based on examining ethnic relations between domestic ethnic groups, namely the Malays, Chinese and Indians (e.g., Abdul Rahim et al., 2010; Awang Rozaimie et al., 2011; Tamam et al., 2006; Tamam et al., 2008; Faisal et al., 2009; Idris, 2008; Khalim & Norshidah, 2010; Khalim et al., 2010; Nazri & Rozita, 2012; Shamsul, 2005, 2008, 2014). Although these studies provided valuable findings on the status of ethnic relations between ethnic groups in Malaysia, which is important for national unity, little is known about the conception of intercultural competence that centralizes ethnicity within Malaysian setting and begs further investigation. As most local researchers tend to confine their studies to the Malays, Chinese and Indians, does investigating intercultural competence mean to include these domestic ethnic groups only? Perhaps, this question can be answered by looking at current situations in Malaysia. As Malaysia has become globally connected and plays an active role in the globalization process (Freeman & Lindsay, 2012; Kennedy, 2002), it is possible that the Malaysian population has become more diverse than it was previously with the local ethnic members co-existing with those coming from the outside. This diversity can be particularly observed within Malaysian higher learning institutions.

The current trend indicated that Malaysian higher education is fast becoming an industry where promotions at international levels lead to increasing numbers of international students especially from Arab, Africa, and South East Asian regions (Nazri & Rozita, 2012; Pandian, 2008; Singh, 2012). A recent report indicated there were 22,456 international students in 2009 and the number has increased to 24,214 in 2010 (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011a). This development brings along a new phase of intercultural encounter to the various ethnicities that co-exist within Malaysian campuses (Muslim & Ibrahim, 2012; Pandian, 2008; Singh, 2012). As intermingling is highly encouraged and promoted among students in Malaysian universities (Tamam, 2013; Tamam et al., 2011), it can be expected that students coming from different ethnic backgrounds (whether local and non-local) do not only interact with other ethnic individuals from their own country but also from other places on an everyday basis. This phenomenon has certainly contributed to an increasing complexity of intercultural interaction among students.

Given the ethnically diverse students' body that came with a new form of intercultural interaction, studying intercultural competence with a national emphasis seems to be no longer adequate to capture the rich internal diversity among students in Malaysian campuses. Equally, confining research to domestic ethnic groups seems to be insufficient to capture the experience of students who might interact with diverse people. Given the complex realm of intercultural interaction occurring within Malaysian campuses, I argue that Malaysian researchers should seek for a more complex analysis of intercultural competence that responds to students' experience with diverse people. Moreover, studies have also shown that students claimed being in a multicultural university makes them interact with culturally diverse others more

frequently and as such, necessitate them to be competent (Halualani, 2008, 2010). As Tamam et al. (2011) remarked that the quality of interpersonal interaction is important for students to engage in meaningful communication, what it means to be competent with ethnically diverse people for students? Given that ethnicity is viewed one of the most salient self identities that individuals may enact in their social behaviors with others (Gudykunst, 1998; Hecht et al., 2003; Higginbotham & Andersen, 2006), how does ethnicity came into play in students' interaction with others? What would intercultural competence look like when it takes into account students' position of ethnicity?

McDaniel et al. (2012) proposed that through interaction in the cultural group that we exist; the proper ways of thinking, feeling and behaving are communicated to us and we learn cultural behaviors of our own specific cultural group. We internalize the "unwritten" societal rules to guide the proper way to act, what to say, and what to expect in our interaction with others. When individuals perceive a situation as familiar, individuals may call up past experience that provides some predictions or certainties on how events should unfold and how they will behave (Bird & Osland, 2005; Gudykunst, 1998, 2003). As individuals live and interact within their cultural groups that consists social networks of people similar to them, interaction may be relatively satisfying since there are shared cultural expectations (Collier et al., 1986; Hecht & Choi, 2012; Hecht et al., 2003; Hecht & Ribeau, 1984). However, when individuals cross their cultural group and interact with cultural others who hold different cultural expectations, it is likely that individuals may experience uncertainties leading to difficulties or challenges in interaction (Brislin, 1981; Gudykunst, 1998; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

Experiencing difficulties with cultural others does not suggest that communication within individuals' cultural group is a problem-free process as Hecht et al. (2003) pointed that people always differ in their interpretations and need to negotiate meanings. However, the process can be even more difficult when people hold differing cultural expectations on how they should conduct behaviors in their interaction (Barna, 1994; Hecht & Choi, 2012; Hecht et al., 1992; Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2010). It is through the experience of confronting cultural differences that Gudykunst and Kim (2003) proposed intercultural communication as a process of interaction with strangers. According to Gudykunst and Kim:

> Strangers represent the idea of nearness because they are physically close and the idea of remoteness because they have different values and ways of doing things. Strangers are physically present and participating in a situation and, at the same time, are outside the situation because they are not members of the in-group. (p. 23)

It is through this lens that numerous researchers analyzed intercultural communication as encounters with "the Other – which is likened to a stranger who comes from a different world (e.g., Chai & Zhong, 2006; Ladegaard, 2011, 2012; Minah Harun, 2007; Ning, 2012; Syarizan, 2011, 2012; Syarizan et al., 2013; Takahara, 2013). In analyzing intercultural communication, the Other is essentialized through individuals' description of their impersonal and unfamiliar experiences with somebody from other cultures who does not belong to the individuals' cultural group (Yep, 2014). Social scientists use the term in-group to refer to groups that individuals identify with and the out-group to refer to groups with cultural

characteristics that are distinct from the in-group that the individuals belong to (Adler et al., 2007; Gudykunst, 1998; Ladegaard, 2011).

Although individuals may experience discrepant expectations when interacting with the Other, it is contended that individuals do not passively enter interaction. Rather, they are active social actors who seek to understand what is going on in their interaction (Bird & Osland, 2005; Osland et al., 2007; Rasmussen et al., 2010). As Fantini (2009) proposed that people develop conception of cultural competence over the course of living within their own ethnic groups, similarly, it is possible that people may also learn what it means to be competent through their own experience living within a multicultural setting. Nonetheless, the process of learning competent behaviors within and outside one's cultural group may not be alike. Living within a cultural group, cultural assumptions of individuals are less to be frequently questioned and they are deeply internalized that lead individuals to operate on automatic pilot (Hall, 1959; McDaniel et al., 2012; Osland et al., 2007; Osland & Bird, 2000). As such, learning communication competence within a cultural group occurs at unconscious level for individuals (Osland & Bird, 2000).

The process of learning competent behaviors outside individuals' cultural group, on the other hand, involves mindfulness to cultural differences (Gudykunst, 2003; McDaniel et al., 2009; Osland, 2010; Osland & Bird, 2000). Experiencing differences in intercultural situations trigger the need for people to seek for explanation that prompt the process of learning intercultural competence (Aquino-Russell & Russell, 2009; Holmes & O'Neill, 2010, 2012; Osland et al., 2007). Taking such proposition, it is contended that intercultural experience is an important

source for students to draw on their conception of intercultural competence. Given that intercultural competence is an evaluative inference about interaction (Spitzberg, 2012), these questions are posed: What it is that students experienced in their interaction with the Other as it is viewed from their ethnic perspectives? What do students think and say about their interaction? What is specifically needed for ensuring good interaction? Since students are the target audience and "product" of higher education institutions (Deardorff, 2004, 2006, 2011), their voices would be valuable to give some lights into expanding the inquiry of intercultural competence.

2.6 Points of Departure: Establishing the Research Paradigm

Based on the issues that have been presented, the gap that warrants a further investigation is for the researcher to explore the conception of intercultural competence in a multicultural non-Western setting and to approach culture at the level of ethnicity. It is worthy to point out that such an exploration does not suggest it is grounded in the contest with the Western paradigm. While exploring the concept of intercultural competence in a non-Western realm is useful for challenging the existing Western paradigm, it should not be treated as a tool to exclude the existing Western concepts. Given that much of the discourse on applying Western perspective to the non-Western world rests upon the issue of dichotomizing ontological standpoints on intercultural competence, I argue that the dichotomous concepts that characterize the East and the West should not be treated in contest with one another. Rather, the dichotomizing positions offer an opportunity for a full embracing of dialectical and dialogical relationship in our intellectual inquiry. Chen (2009a) attested:

The dichotomized categories should imply a dialectical and dialogical relationship. Both are different, but also similar. The ultimate goal of this dialectical and dialogical relationship is to reach a state of multicontextual co-existence. (p.407)

In the spirit of Chen's (2009a) call for finding a co-existence that embodies the ideal of accepting foreign elements and integrating them into one's cultural milieu, the interpenetration between the Western and non-Western perspective in intercultural competence studies should be sought. Considering the mark influence of Western standpoint in the field, what I am interested in is to re-conceptualize intercultural competence from the Western orientation to the Eastern (non-Western) realm. This attempt does not only contribute into providing an alternative outlook to the conception of intercultural competence, it also provides a tool for a further refinement of the existing Western theoretical models.

As the literature indicated every researcher begins inquiry with different assumptions, goals, and methodologies when studying intercultural competence, the researcher is obligated to make clear as to what choice is undertaken when investigating this construct (Koester et al., 1993; McCroskey, 1985). In accordance to this view, it is also vital at this juncture to lay out the research paradigm which include ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) that informs the choices made in this study.

Ontologically, it is critical for researchers to decide which level of competence needs to be studied (Fantini, 2009; Martin, 1993; Vijver & Leung, 2009). This choice leads to the two schools of thought in approaching the phenomenon - one of which study

intercultural competence as trait-like that direct attention to personal characteristics and another as state-like that focuses upon behaviors of an individual (Hammer, 1987; Koester et al., 1993; Martin & Hammer, 1989; McCroskey, 1985; Ruben, 1989; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Xiao & Chen, 2012). In this sense, the domain of inquiry rests on the question whether the study of intercultural competence should look into an individual's personality/characteristics or behaviors that produce the impression of competence (Koester et al., 1993; Martin, 1993).

Early attempts on assessing intercultural competence have been largely based on traits or personal characteristics of prospective sojourners that might predispose the individual's success or failure in overseas assignments (Ruben, 1989). Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) indicated that competence in the current literature continues to be largely based on personality attributes and it is almost measured accordingly. The construct of intercultural competence using this approach has been conceptualized in terms of "universal communicators", "multicultural persons," and "universal persons." Lustig and Koester (2010) asserted that the trait approach presumes communicators are able to behave competently across various communication situations. The trait orientation adopts personality based theory to explain competence. Personality patterns that are associated with competence, among others, include interpersonal sensitivity, openness, empathy, self involvement, resourceful individual, and mindfulness. In view of the trait orientation, people are competent because they are empathic, assertive, and good listeners.

The trait approach is useful for selection and training of candidates for successful completion of international assignments. However, such perspective presents

problem to identifying specific behaviors needed to engage in competent intercultural communication (Hammer, 1987; Lustig & Koester, 2006; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Ruben, 1989; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Viewing competence as a trait may be overly simplistic and paradoxical since people vary in their competent behaviors as they interact with different people in different physical and social contexts (Lustig & Koester, 2006; 2010). The state-like approach is proposed to overcome the inadequacy of the trait approach. A state or situational approach views competence as a function of behaviors, not a person that indicate competence is learned and not an inherent trait (Chen, 1990; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003).

Drawing from the trait or state concerns of competence, it is contended that the trait approach falls short to explain how one must behave in order to produce competent interaction with cultural others. For example, being an open minded person is important in intercultural interaction but it falls short to answer the question of how intercultural participants go about achieving successful interaction. Possessing certain traits that elicit the impression of competence (such as an attentive listener and open minded) is necessary. However, it is not sufficient to explain effective functioning or what one needs to do in order to produce competent communication. As such, the state-like approach to study intercultural competence seems to be more useful in this study. This approach is also congruent with the idea presented earlier that through the socialization process; we learn culture from family, friends and personal observation which serves as the sources that inform us the preferred way to conduct our behavior (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006; Gudykunst, 2003; McDaniel et al., 2009; McDaniel et al., 2012). As individuals' cultural experience provides an important source for people to learn competent behaviors within the cultural group

that they live in. Similarly, individuals may learn about intercultural competence from their lived intercultural experience.

As Miike (2012b) proposed that we need to learn from cultural diversity rather than ignoring it, this study intends to examine the conception of intercultural competence by including students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in a Malaysian university. As such, this study incorporates diverse ethnic voices in conceptualizing intercultural competence. In congruence with such an approach, this study adopts a micro level approach that concerns with students' account of their intercultural experience. It is important to be mindful that when examining intercultural communication, interaction between individuals from different cultures should not be automatically treated as intercultural communication (Levine et al., 2007). The term intercultural communication is a misnomer since communication does not occur between cultures but between people who are differentially influenced by their cultural backgrounds (Spitzberg, 2012). As Gudykunst and Kim (2003) proposed a framework in which intercultural communication is viewed as a process of interaction with strangers which is likened to the Other, this study intends to examine intercultural competence on the basis of students' lived experience with those whom they perceived as ethnically different from themselves (designated as the Other).

In parallel with the ontological standpoint that intercultural competence can be explored through people's experience, the epistemological standpoint of this study falls within the social constructivism paradigm that is oriented toward gaining in-depth understanding of subjective meanings of people's experience of the world in which they live in (Cresswell, 2009). Based on the arguments made about the

inadequacy of Western models to explain communication experiences in other cultural contexts, the Western presuppositions of intercultural competence need to be re-examined in this study. Accordingly, this study does not begin its inquiry by imposing a Western theoretical framework of intercultural competence. Rather, this study is committed to examine the phenomenon of intercultural competence based on students' intercultural experience with the Other as it is lived by them. Once I have identified the emergent themes from data analysis, possibilities of intersections or differences with Western conceptions can be identified. As the literature indicated that Deardorff's (2004) study documented an agreed upon definition that provides foundational understandings of intercultural competence in the West, Deardorff's work is useful for the purpose of comparison.

The epistemological assumption naturally leads to the methodological choice of this study. Methodologically, qualitative research design is appropriate to answer my research questions. This study does not seek to construct theories of intercultural competence as in grounded theory methodology that claims to not having theories to a phenomenon, or finding patterns or rules of competent behaviors as a group phenomenon as in ethnography, or finding how intercultural competence is experienced in a period of time as in case study. Rather, the aim of this study is to interrogate what constitutes intercultural competence based on students' intercultural experience. In view of this, phenomenology is an appropriate methodology since the fundamental question in phenomenological research is to examine the nature of a phenomenon as we experience it rather than as we theorize it (Giorgi, 1997; Lindolf & Taylor, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Van Manen, 1990). Based on this rationale, phenomenology is utilized as the underlying methodology guiding this

study. A more detailed explanation about the reiterative and rigorous process of phenomenological method is presented in Chapter Three.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a review of literature pertaining to two important areas of concern: (i) the Western perspective that permeates current conceptions of intercultural competence and (ii) the tendency to equate "culture" as national membership in many studies of intercultural competence. As this study approaches the phenomenon of intercultural competence using phenomenology as its underlying framework, the following chapter provides further details on phenomenology.

CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive explanation of phenomenological method that guides my inquiry. As this study seeks to explore what constitutes intercultural competence in the light of students' lived intercultural experience, phenomenology fits such aim. This chapter describes phenomenology in its broadest sense, discusses the important features of Husserl's phenomenology, and presents the rationale for choosing this specific framework as the methodology for this study. This chapter also describes the study setting, data collection methods, research participants, the unit of analysis, steps of data analysis, and validation of data. Given that the nature of this study calls for examining the conception of intercultural competence from the perspective of ethnically diverse students, in-depth interviews were used as the primary method. Focus group interviews were used as the secondary method that helps to validate findings from the in-depth interviews and to offer rich understandings of intercultural competence.

3.2 Methodological Framework

Phenomenology studies the lifeworld (*lebenswelt*) -- the lived everyday world as we experience it; rather than as we theorize it (Kvale, 2007; Lindolf & Taylor, 2011; Lofland, 1995; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology seeks to discover anything that presents for itself to discover meaning by exploring expressions, thoughts, perception, and feelings of the experiencing person to uncover

the essence of the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994; Orbe, 2000; Pierson, 2007; Van Manen, 1990). The central aim of phenomenology is to study the essence of a phenomenon by capturing a person's experience and how s (he) articulates the lived meanings of her or his everyday world (Moustakas, 1994; Lindolf & Taylor, 2011, Kvale, 2007).

Edmund Husserl is acknowledged as the founder of phenomenology who inaugurated the phenomenological movement as an alternative to the positivist paradigm (Dowling, 2007; McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009; Moran, 1999; Orbe, 2000). The movement continued to develop and include other sets of phenomenological figures such as Heidegger, Jasper, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre (Orbe, 2000). Although they may share similar basic grounding of phenomenology that allows the phenomenon to present itself as it is consciously experienced by humans, they are extraordinarily diverse in their interests, interpretations of the phenomenon, and applications of phenomenological methods (Cohen & Omery, 1994; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009; Moran, 1999; Palmer, 2010; Ray, 1994). Accordingly, it is important to note that there is no such thing as "the one phenomenology" given the fact that phenomenology is a philosophical tradition comprising a number of thinkers (Cerbone, 2006; Moran, 1999). In finding which phenomenological school of thought that is appropriate for the phenomenon under study, the researcher needs to be mindful about the thinkers' belief of reality underlying their phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 2000; Pierson, 2007). Choices made by the researcher to which phenomenological school of thought to utilize gives implications toward his or her methodological framework on the phenomenon under inquiry (Cohen & Omery, 1994). Accordingly, the researcher needs to be cognizant

of the philosophical framework underlying the phenomenological approach adopted in his or her study (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009).

Husserl's phenomenology has been labelled as descriptive or transcendental since the philosophical grounding rests on Husserl's attitude to describe and clarify the essential structures of the conscious experience without preconceptions (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Giorgi, 2000; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Ray, 1994). The operative word in Husserl's phenomenology is to describe the phenomenon under study in order to uncover its underlying meanings (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). In view of this, descriptive phenomenology is epistemological in that it is geared toward answering the question of "how" and "what" of a person's experience (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, & Irvine, 2008; LaRocco, 2011; Ray, 1994). As such, the fundamental concern for Husserl's phenomenological philosophy is to describe the phenomenon under study as it is experienced by a person in its own terms (Dowling, 2007; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009; Ray, 1994; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). In essence, Husserl's descriptive phenomenology emphasizes these principles: (i) describing universal essences that is shared by humans, (ii) engaging in self reflection by the researcher, (iii) suspending previous knowledge to describe phenomenon as it appears free from the researcher's preconceived ideas, and (iv) the commitment to establish scientific rigor through stringent method to describe the essences of the phenomenon under study (Luft, 2004; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Ray, 1994; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Moustakas (1994) proposed three important processes that facilitate derivation of knowledge from a descriptive phenomenological perspective which are: "Epoche," "phenomenological reduction," and "imaginative variation." Moustakas claimed that these core processes mark the distinctive characteristic of descriptive phenomenology from other qualitative approaches. Although these processes are described in a linear manner, it is not the sums of its parts but rather the relations created between them that make up the whole picture of the phenomenon (Lanigan, 1977). "Epoche" is a Greek word that carries the meaning "to suspend belief" or "abstain from judgment" in which it is in contrast to the natural science that derives knowledge from presuppositions (Cerbone, 2006; Orbe, 2000; Palmer, 2010). Moustakas (1994) asserted that the Epoche is the first necessary step to seeing things that is free from preconceptions. The Epoche process demands the researcher to examine the phenomena without preconceptions and to derive knowledge from experiencing the phenomena just as it is in its own (Giorgi, 1997). To conduct the Epoche, the researcher has to set aside his or her preconceived ideas about things that exist in the world as Moustakas (1994) posited:

> As I reflect on the nature and meaning of the Epoche, I see it as a preparation for deriving new knowledge but also an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilection, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time. (p.85)

Moustakas (1994) further proposed that the Epoche does not eliminate everything or deny the reality of everything with which it becomes the attitude of natural science to

96

place everyday knowledge as a basis of truth and reality. What the Epoche intends to achieve is to know things from internal reflection and meaning rather than "knowing things in advance from an external base" (p.85). The Epoche is likened to the process of bracketing (Miner, 2008). The term "bracketing" is derived from mathematics in that in a mathematical equation, brackets are used to separate one part from another, allowing one to focus on that part in isolation from the other (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). It is a fundamental methodological principle of Husserl's phenomenology that place the phenomenon "in" brackets, isolated from past or present knowledge that direct our thinking and to keep such knowledge "outside" the bracket (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Lanigan, 1977). Husserl believed that philosophical theorizing distorts the pure consideration of experience and as such, placed great stress on the principle of bracketing in favor of careful description of the phenomena (Moran, 1999). Given this attitude, the researcher must engage in self reflection and conscious "stripping" of foreknowledge (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). What this means is that the world in which the researcher intends to interrogate is placed in the bracket, cleared of ordinary thought to allow the researcher to see the phenomenon in an open way (Moustakas, 1994).

"Phenomenological reduction" as coined by Husserl is regarded as unfortunate because it is not similar to reductionist in the natural science methodology that remove the lived contexts of human phenomena and reducing it to cause and effect (Hycner, 1999). Phenomenological reduction enables the researcher to gain insights into the nature of consciousness (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009; Moran, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) explained the nature of phenomenological reduction:

Each experience is considered in its singularity, in and for itself. The phenomenon is perceived and described in its totality, in a fresh and open way. A complete description is given of its essential constituents, variations of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, sounds, colors, and shape. (p. 34)

Accordingly, Moustakas (1994) asserted that the operative task in phenomenological reduction is to go back "to the things themselves" which demands the researcher to describe just what the subject experienced in regard to the phenomenon under study. Through phenomenological reduction, the researcher derives a textural description of the meanings and essences or the constituents that comprise the experience. It is within this principle that Moustakas pointed out that phenomenology is committed to describing the essence of experience rather than explaining the experience. Moustakas maintained that phenomenological reduction is a reiterative attempt in that the researcher derives the meanings of the experience by looking, noticing, and looking again to capture the full nature of the phenomenon under study. The researcher must engage in the process of putting aside personal past and existing theoretical knowledge and withholding the existence of the object that the researcher is observing in order to pay attention to the appearance of the object (Giorgi, 2006). Caelli (2001) claimed that phenomenological reduction is an important matter of concern because it is the key ingredient to the practice of phenomenology.

"Imaginative variation" follows the phenomenological reduction in which it aims at grasping the structural description of experience (Giorgi, 2006). Specifically, Moustakas (1994) asserted that the task of imaginative variation is to seek for the underlying or precipitating conditions that account for what the subject experienced.

This is achieved by looking at the conditions or the "how" that speaks to conditions that illuminate what is being experienced. In other words, Moustakas remarked that imaginative variation aims to describe how the experience of the phenomenon came to be what it is. Moustakas pointed that imaginative variation is targeted toward describing the dynamics that underlie, account for, and provide understanding of how it is that particular feelings, thoughts, and awareness of the experience are evoked in the subject's consciousness. Moustakas proposed that through imaginative variation, the researcher understands there are varying frames of reference and countless possibilities that are closely connected with the essences and meanings of the experience.

The descriptive approach to phenomenology has been criticized by Heidegger as he contended that humans are interpretive beings and capable of finding significant meaning in their life (Dreyfus, 1987; Ray, 1994; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Heidegger contended that phenomenology has to answer the question of the meaning of being that can be carried through the hermeneutical method (Dowling, 2007; Dreyfus, 1987; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Based on this contention, Heidegger rejected suspending foreknowledge in phenomenological inquiry and viewed the researcher as a self interpretive being; and as a pre-reflexive being, the researcher actively co-create meanings with the participants to understand the phenomenon in context (Cerbone, 2006; Dowling, 2007; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Accordingly, Heidegger advocated interpretive phenomenology that focuses on examining contextualized lived experiences that is generated from the researcher, and participants' meaning and understandings (Palmer, 2010; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Heidegger criticized Husserl's "being-of-the-world" philosophy

that is derived from the Cartesian duality (separating object and subject) that postulates consciousness is always consciousness about something (Dreyfus, 1987; Giorgi, 2000; Moran, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). Accordingly, Heidegger advocated the philosophy of "being-in-the-world" and contended that humans' lived world is not always about subject contemplating object (Dreyfus, 1987). In view of this, he advocated the concept of *Dasein* to move away from the Cartesian duality underlying Husserl's phenomenology (Dreyfus, 1987; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009; Spiegelberg, 1960). McConell-Henry et al. (2009) described that "although not directly translatable to English, in colloquial German, *Dasein* means human existence with the entity to ask what it means to be"(p.9). Dreyfus (1987) maintained that Heidegger's phenomenology is developed on the basis that humans are not primarily observing objects but humans are coping with their life that reflects the notion of *Dasein*. Heidegger was concerned with explicating the meaning of being through which depends upon the context of that being. *Dasein* allows humans to wonder about their own existence and derive meaning of their being-in-the-world.

Heidegger asserted that humans are at all times immersed in their world and thus, context had a significant impact on humans' experience regardless of the phenomenon (Dreyfus, 1987). Heidegger was concerned with deriving meaning from being and posited that prior understanding of the research and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon is a legitimate part in phenomenology (Cerbone, 2006; Dreyfus, 1987; Moran, 1999). However, Hamill and Sinclair (2010) argued that our foreknowledge can minimize our ability to thoroughly investigate the topic as we unconsciously bring assumptions about the topic under study in the research process. Through acknowledging, examining, and putting aside the researcher's

beliefs, the researcher should be able to attain fresh data transcending their presuppositions about the existence of the objects of experience. Spiegelberg (1960, p.66) remarked that Heidegger's approach to phenomenology has been viewed as "a corruption to the phenomenological enterprise". The ultimate aim of phenomenology was to describe experience of the other, not the researcher's own experience or agenda (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). As interpretation seems to reside outside the limits of descriptive phenomenological research, researchers must adhere to the commitment of constructing pure description of the phenomenon under study (Van Manen, 1990). Nonetheless, Giorgi (2012) argued that although descriptive phenomenology adheres to the commitment of describing a phenomenon as it appears within participants' consciousness; there are some interpretive aspects within descriptive phenomenological method. In view of this, Applebaum (Personal Communication via e-mail, May 14, 2013) suggested that it is important for phenomenological researchers to think through what "interpretation" means rather than assuming "interpretation" as a self-explanatory concept when interrogating a phenomenon.

Applebaum (2009) proposed that interpretation in a broadest sense refers to bringing a perspective assumed in working with the data, and this interpretation can be applied into descriptive phenomenological method. Giorgi (2012) clarified how such broadest sense of interpretation works within descriptive phenomenological method:

> There are psychological interpretations of life-world events that are broader than the psychological understandings we bring to them. However, these analyses are done by means of a descriptive method. The method is

descriptive because the researcher posits that there is a specific expression that will satisfy the problem with which he is confronted (a good psychological description of the participant's life-world expression) but he does not yet know what it is. That is, the intentional object (the desired expression) is lacking; the act is empty or unfulfilled. He or she begins the process of imaginative variation, examining various possible expressions, and then the researcher comes across a description that fits precisely the intentional act he or she was seeking to fulfill. The fulfilling expression is then precisely described. (p.8)

Applebaum (2009) further posited that interpretation in a narrow sense refers to the activity of adding to what is given to the data and this kind of interpretation is not congruent with Husserl's philosophy. Giorgi (Personal Communication via e-mail, May 21, 2013) explained that in this kind of interpretation, one brings in extraneous factors such as a hypothesis or an assumption that is not in the data to help explain the data.

Giorgi (2012) reiterated that doing interpretation by bringing assumption to help account for the data does not become the practice of descriptive phenomenological method. Giorgi further contended that the method is considered descriptive in so far as the researcher sticks to whatever is "given" or found about the phenomenon under study. Descriptive phenomenological method demands the researcher to avoid theorizing the findings and to focus attention on describing the structures that emerge from the analysis. Once the structures have been described, researchers draw attention to the perspective of their own respective discipline to interpret life-world

events. Despite the arguments made about Heidegger's standpoint in favor for Husserl, Wojnar and Swanson (2007) suggested that the most important issue to examine at hand is questioning the relevance of each philosophical stance to the researcher's study. In view of this, choosing the right phenomenological approach depends upon the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher (Giorgi, 2000; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

As the research paradigm or the philosophical assumption needs to be consistent with the research aims and questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), I found the descriptive phenomenological method more relevant and congruent to the ontological and epistemological assumptions discussed in Chapter Two. Based on the criticisms found in the literature regarding the applicability of the Western perspective into discovering the conception of intercultural competence in other places, I contended that the descriptive phenomenological method is useful to elicit new insights that can enrich the existing body of knowledge in the work of intercultural competence. Furthermore, Husserl's phenomenological thought is much more popular than Heidegger and his method is most utilized today to describe the experience of any phenomenon (Dreyfus, 1987; Palmer, 2010). The process of Epoche, phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation can be used as a heuristic tool to revisit Western conceptions and to explore new knowledge of intercultural competence within a non-Western multicultural environment.

Moustakas (1994) also asserted that in descriptive phenomenology, perception is the primary source of knowledge because perception adds something important to the experience. Perception allows us to see one side of the experience while at the same

time experiences the thing as a whole subject. In view of this, phenomenology sought to describe the essence of human perception and consciousness that orders the way we "see" the world as we encounter something (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). By invoking the students' perception of what intercultural competence looks like in their own terms, it opens up new possibilities for re-thinking the relevance of the Western concepts of intercultural competence.

Given that this study seeks to rethink Western conceptions of intercultural competence, it does not imply that Western theories should be discarded. Giorgi (2006) attested descriptive phenomenological method demands the researcher to withhold existing theories and the themes have to emerge from the data itself rather than applying a pre-determined theoretical framework. As such, Western theories on intercultural competence are 'delayed' rather than being imposed as a predetermined framework for this study to give way for the core themes and sub-themes to surface from the data itself. Once the emergent themes have been described, this opens the possibility for thinking through in what ways they may enrich the existing Western perspective.

Taking the tenets of descriptive phenomenology, I am committed to interrogate intercultural competence from the perspective of multiethnic students with an openness to see whatever appears in their consciousness through the process of Epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Based on this phenomenological methodology, the conception of intercultural competence can be explored through students' accumulation, reflection and evaluation of their intercultural experience. In so doing, I pose the following questions: What is it like

to experience interaction with ethnically dissimilar others (designated as the Other) for students? What is helpful for communicating successfully with the Other in the light of students intercultural experience? What commonalities do multiethnic students share in their experiences that indicate the essential features of intercultural competence?

3.3 Study Setting

The research setting for this study is a public university in the northern region of Malaysia. In terms of student population, local students constitute about 28,672 of the statistic, and another 2,527 are non-local students coming from mostly Asian and African countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, China, Somalia, Jordan, Yemen, and Nigeria (Corporate Planning Unit, Chancellery, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 2014). The university aims to produce highly competent human capital that is committed to serve in the nation's development. As such, the university is committed to produce graduates who carry leadership qualities in managing human resources. In producing the aforementioned qualities of graduates, the university also sees the imperative to be global in providing knowledge that transcends the borders of Malaysia.

The major aim of the university is to produce competent graduates, through which corresponds with the country's development agenda that emphasizes human capital and enhance intellectual capacity (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011b). In response to the above objective, the Ministry of Higher Education announced that public universities must incorporate soft skill or "people skills" elements in their curriculum design (Chan, 2011; Mai, 2012; Osman, Girardi, & Paull, 2012; Roselina, 2009). Roselina (2009) proposed that there are at least two critical reasons

underpinning the needs to increase Malaysian students' skills in Malaysian higher learning institutions. First, there are criticisms from employers that graduates are generally academically competent but lack communication skills. Second, increasing globalization in the workforce necessitates graduates to be able to have higher skills and techniques. Companies are now seeking graduates who possess both technical and good communication skills. As Roselina (2009) maintained that soft skills are not easily taught in classrooms yet needed by companies, the study setting provides the platform to gauge some insights of intercultural competence from the multiethnic students' lived intercultural experience. Given that public universities in Malaysia share relatively similar characteristics in terms of students' body (which include diverse ethnic groups from the local and internationals) and their goals are confined within the Ministry of Higher Education's agenda, choosing a public university as the research setting shed some light on general conditions of intercultural competence.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

The adequacy of a research method depends upon the research aims and questions being asked (Seidman, 2006). This study aims to describe the cognitive content of how students make sense of their intercultural experience in order to assist their understanding of intercultural competence in their social world. Seidman (2006) proposed that if the researcher is interested in subjective understanding that deals with what meaning people make out of their experiences, then it seems that in-depth interviews are the most appropriate method of inquiry. Moreover, in-depth interviews are considered one of the primary methods in phenomenological studies

(LaRocco, 2011; Lofland, 1995; Moustakas, 1994). In-depth interviews allow participants to express their experience from their own perspective and in their own terms (Kvale, 2007).

I utilized in-depth interviews as the primary method to understand participants' conception of intercultural competence. Given that the study intends to find the essential elements of intercultural competence that are commonly shared by the participants, focus group interviews were used as the secondary method. Focus groups can also be used as a triangulation strategy complementing the in-depth interviews by looking for multiple realities of a topic and collaborative process of meaning construction (Hollander, 2010). Lindolf and Taylor (2011) asserted that the most important reason for using the focus group method is to take advantage of the fact that it exploits the "group effect" where people draw upon a shared fund of experience that is less accessible in in-depth interviewing. Having focus groups also enable the researcher to observe participants' responses to the initial findings from the in-depth interviews in which their responses are useful to improve understanding of the phenomenon under study (Walden, 2012). In the context of this study, participants' discussions aids into knowing whether the core themes that have been identified earlier from the in-depth interviews are something that also transcend in their own lived experience. The use of focus groups also enables confirmation and critique of the core themes that have been identified in the in-depth interviews. The following section elaborates in a further detail of each data collection method.

3.4.1 In-Depth Interviews

Interviews are typically dyadic encounters between a researcher and a participant, and interviews enable the researcher to describe participants' experience, knowledge, perspectives, and worldviews of a particular topic or situation (Cresswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kvale, 2007; Lindolf & Taylor, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher asks open-ended questions that would elicit concrete examples, stories, accounts, and explanations in order to gain insights into participants' voices of their experience (Cresswell, 2012; Lofland, 1995; Neuman, 2000; Seidman, 2006). Given that all people have the innate ability to narrate, Lindolf and Taylor (2011) suggested that interviews provide an opportunity for people to articulate their experiences in words that enables an understanding of how they perceive their worlds. Although in-depth interviews may function as a "tool" that the researcher used to achieve certain purposes, it is a joint production between the researcher and participants in order to construct deeper understanding in the interview (Kvale, 2007).

In this study, in-depth interviews enable participants to describe accounts, explanations, and stories that illustrate their feelings and thoughts about intercultural competence as they draw its meaning from their intercultural experience. Phenomenology requires extensive engagement with persons through in-depth, intensive, and iterative interviews (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). This leads to the structure of the in-depth interviews used in this study. Given that Seidman's (2006) three-interview series allows for an in-depth phenomenological inquiry, this approach was employed in this study to explicate participants' experience within the topic being investigated. The three series of interviews include (1) participant's life

history or background in light of the topic, (2) the details, and accounts of the participant's experience, and (3) a reflection on the meaning of the experience. The following section provides further details of each interview series.

3.4.1.1 Interview Structure

The task of the first interview (Focused Life History) was to put participants' experience in context by asking them to describe as much as possible about themselves in the light of the topic. In this study, participants were asked to provide some background information about themselves, their program of study and the number of months or years spent in the university. Then, I guided participants toward providing a description of how they self- identified their own ethnicity. I also asked participants to describe past lives they have had before enrolling as postgraduate students in the university. Because the study focuses on intercultural experience, I guided participants to reconstruct their early experiences with those who are ethnically dissimilar from themselves before coming to study in the university as postgraduate students. In asking participants to put intercultural interaction in the context of their life history, questions such as "why did you interact with ethnically dissimilar others?" were avoided. Instead, I asked questions such as "how do you describe your experience of interacting with ethnically dissimilar others?" This approach aided participants to reflect on a range of accrual events in their past lives that place intercultural interaction in the context of their lives.

The second interview (The Details of Experience) concentrated on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience of the topic being investigated. In this second interview, I asked participants to reflect on their daily experiences being

a postgraduate student such as going to classes or discussions and how much they interact with those who are ethnically different from themselves. Participants were asked to recount situations that were memorable in which they find as both satisfying and dissatisfying. They were asked to recall any incidents that provide greatest insights about their intercultural interaction such as the kind of intercultural challenges they experienced and how they cope with such challenges. In this phase of the interview, I did not ask for opinions but rather the details of participants' experience, upon which their perceptions may be built. The major task in this second interview was to describe the myriad details of participants' experience of intercultural interaction that assists their understanding of intercultural competence.

The third interview (Reflection on the Meaning) requires the researcher to ask participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience. Seidman (2006) proposed that the question of "meaning" interrogates the intellectual and emotional connections that participants attached to their experience. Seidman maintained that reflection on the meaning requires exploring past events that led participants to their present experience. Describing the concrete details of their past experience establishes the context for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives. Seidman further claimed that the third interview can be effective only if the foundation of it has been established in the first two interviews. Although it is in the third interview that the researcher focuses on the participants' meaning of their experience, participants are actually imparting meaning through all three interviews. While each phase of the interview focuses on a different task, all three series of interview were designed as "a build up" tool for participants to put their experience in the context of the phenomenon under study. When I asked participants to describe

their prior experience in regard to intercultural interaction, participants selected events in their experience and in so doing impart meaning to them. When participants provided stories of their experience, they framed some meaningful aspects of the topic. However, the third interview was focused solely on illuminating the meaning which becomes the central attention. In facilitating participants to reflect their meaning of their intercultural experience that would assist them to think of what is helpful to communicate competently with others, I used related terms suggested in the literature such as "good communication", "satisfying" and "successful interaction". The questions that I asked to explore participants' meaning include, for example, "Given what you have said about your experience, what is helpful in achieving good communication with people from different cultures? What sense does it make to you?"

Based on this three-interview structure, general questions were constructed to guide my investigation into the lived experience of participants (Appendix A). I asked follow-up questions, with responses to the original questions serving as prompts. Subsequent questions were built upon participants' responses to develop a richer understanding of how they construe intercultural competence. Since it is important that the interview questions make sense to participants, I conducted two pilot interviews of the actual questions before engaging in the fieldwork. By piloting the questions, it helps the researcher to determine if the questions yield informative responses indicating whether the questions can be further improvised and honed (Kilbourn, 2006).

Seidman (2006) suggested the three-interview structure works best when the researcher designates the spacing of each interview from three days to a week apart and the length of each interview is suggested within a 90-minute format. However, the researcher may explore alternatives to the structure and length of time. Seidman contended that as long as the three-interview structure is preserved that allows participants to reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives, alterations of the duration and spacing of interviews can be explored by the researcher depending upon schedules of participants. Seidman also suggested that it is important for the researcher to decide the length of time before the interview process begins with the participants.

In this study, most participants preferred to go through the three series of interviews on the same day. This is necessitated due to the postgraduate schedule of participants in which they felt some constraints to be interviewed in another day or week. Each interview ranged in length from 60 to 90 minutes and this timeframe has yielded reasonable results for an in-depth description of participants' lived experience. Upon meeting, I asked for participants' consent to audio record their voice at the outset of each interview session and most participants agreed. However, two participants were not comfortable with their voice being recorded and thus, I conducted the interviews by taking notes of their responses.

I used English as the medium of interaction in interviews with non-local participants. For local participants, I conducted interviews by following their preferences of either using English or Malay to encourage meaningful descriptions. Four participants who were Malay Malaysians preferred to be interviewed in the Malay language while

112

others felt comfortable to be interviewed in English. The interviews in the Malay language were transcribed in the same language and once they were done, the transcription was translated into English. I conducted a total of fifteen interviews over a six months period from February to August 2012.

3.4.2 Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups are used as a secondary method for data collection to elicit more valid and reliable construction of meanings by participants (Golafshani, 2003; Walden, 2012). Moreover, focus groups have been used by phenomenological researchers to validate the 'shared' experience as participants were brought together to discuss and elaborate points raised by other members (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2008; Hollander, 2010; Jasper, 1996). This collaborative process of meaning construction is less accessible through the in-depth interviews and provides the means for adding richer descriptions on the complexity of the phenomenon under study (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2008; Cresswell, 2012).

A focus group is a special type of group that is formed to achieve certain purposes by the researcher (Morgan, 1996). A focus group is typically composed of four to six participants who are selected because they share certain characteristics that relate to the topic of the focus group (Cresswell, 2009, 2012; Krueger, 2001; Morgan, 1996). The analysis from focus groups allows for an in-depth description of the context and components of the experience (Krueger, 2001). Despite the feasibility of focus groups, it is important to be cognizant about possible tensions of using focus groups in phenomenological inquiry. Two schools of thought can be observed within phenomenological research pertaining to the use of focus groups (Bradbury-Jones et

al., 2008). The first school of thought claims that focus groups are incompatible with phenomenological study (Webb & Kevern, 2000). This school attested that the fundamental principle of phenomenology is to thematize the lived experience that belongs to a single person (Giorgi, 1997). Accordingly, Webb and Kevern (2000) argued that following the strict rigorous method to explicate the essence of the phenomenon under study from an individual's account is sufficient to be considered as "valid". Furthermore, they argued on the basis that focus groups centralize interaction between participants who would tend to bring in their preconceptions into the discussion and such "group" basis of looking at experience of the phenomenon would "contaminate" the description of individual experience as well as phenomenological endeavour.

The second school of thought views focus groups as the means for phenomenological researchers to enrich their understanding of the phenomenon under study (Webb & Kevern, 2000). Bradbury-Jones et al. (2008) argued that the one who needs to bracket previous assumptions is the researcher and not the participants. As such, phenomenological research can still preserve the individual story within focus group context and challenge the researcher's preconception of the phenomena (Sorrell & Redmond, 1995). Bradbury-Jones et al. (2008) further argued that from their examination of literature, phenomenological focus groups may enrich data and provide clarification as well as verification for both participants and the researcher. They have also demonstrated in their study how focus group participants were able to draw and share their own unique lived experience and how the researcher was able to use the individual experience of participants to arrive at a clearer and richer description of the complexities of the phenomenon under study.

Additionally, focus groups are valuable in phenomenological research to create a context that gives synergy to insights concerning the phenomenon and involve participants in the thematization process (Orbe, 1996). Also, focus group discussions that follow after initial thematization can provide valuable feedback to the researcher regarding earlier descriptions (Morgan, 1996). Nonetheless, Bradbury-Jones et al. (2008) cautioned deciding the utility of focus groups in phenomenological research is rendered to the researcher's aim. As this study seeks to explore the conception of intercultural competence from the perspective of multiethnic students based on their intercultural experience, utilizing focus groups as a secondary method is useful. Such a method helps to clarify responses and validate findings from the in-depth interviews that would lead into an improved understanding of participants' experience and perspective (Walden, 2012).

It is important to note that the distinguishing feature of phenomenological focus groups is that it stresses on preserving individual stories by participants (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2008). Bradbury-Jones et al. further asserted that based on their own experience and research, it is crucial that each individual participant is given an equal opportunity for his or her story to be heard with minimal interruptions. Other members of the group can add valuable inputs as each participant's story unfolds adding more information related to the shared constructed meanings (Sorrell & Redmond, 1995). Following phenomenological focus groups approach suggested by Bradbury-Jones et al. (2008), I presented participants with descriptions of the emergent core themes that describe the essential elements of intercultural competence taken from the in-depth interviews. When conducting the focus groups, I began with asking each participant to give some background information (such as

name, program and ethnicity), how much intercultural experience each participant has had with friends from other ethnic groups, how the findings from the in-depth interviews resonate with the participant's own experience and their own thoughts about intercultural competence.

3.5 Research Participants

A phenomenological study utilizes a criterion sample in that participants must experience the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This study seeks to examine the phenomenon of intercultural competence. In so doing, this study is based on the ontological assumption that through the experience of social interaction with family and friends in individuals' own cultural life-world, individuals learn how to behave and conform to their living styles. This process of enculturation speaks volume for individuals to know how to function competently within the in-group that individuals live in. Equally, it is also possible that through the experience of social interaction with friends from other ethnic groups, individuals develop a conception on what to do and what not to do in interaction, and such intercultural experience provides an insightful resource for tapping into their conception of competent communication. Based on this contention, the first criteria for selection of participants were students who had friends who are ethnically different from themselves in the university. Moreover, given that the literature indicated face-to-face interaction is an important condition for interrogating intercultural competence (Gao, 2011; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; LaRocco, 2011; Spitzberg, 2012; Tan & Goh, 2006), it is most likely that students who had friends from other ethnic groups had the experience of face-to-face intercultural interaction on a daily basis.

Second, I employed Kim's (1986) communication approach to ethnicity to identify participants' ethnicity. Kim proposed that when understanding ethnicity, the objective and subjective identifications of participants' ethnicity should be taken into consideration. This approach provides an important basis to understand people's ethnic dispositions and how such dispositions influence their communication with others. The objective perspective distinguishes one's ethnicity by using sociological markers such as racial characteristics, language, religion, and national origin. This objective perspective is also imposed by institutions such as the government or media that informs ethnic group differences. The subjective perspective acknowledges that no two ethnic individuals may have similar ways of looking at their own ethnic characteristics. Singer (1998) posited that cultural identity is the learning process that occurs through socialization in the group that makes a person able to distinguish between her or his in-group and out-group. As such, individuals are ethnic being to the extent that they are able to function within their ethnic groups by sharing the ethnic group's values, norms and worldviews, and provide subjective interpretations as an ethnic individual (Banks, 2009; Collier, 2006).

For local participants, the objective identification of ethnicity is normally informed by the identification card that shows the demographic details of the person. In addition, as a Malaysian, I believe there is sufficient familiarity on my part to identify Malays, Chinese or Indians (that constitute three major ethnicities in Malaysia) based on their sociological ethnic markers (usually through typical physiological appearance, religion, and first language). For non-local participants, identification would be referred to their student campus card or passport that informs their status as international students. Although this approach may render choosing

participants based on nationality or countries they come from, Kim (2001) proposed that sojourners (i.e. international students) can be viewed as an ethnic individual since they have at least some access from their ethnic communities of their home or original culture. They may also engage in ethnic social activities and gain social support from the ethnic communities. Kim provided examples that the ethnic communities may take the form of Chinatown in Tokyo, British compounds in India, or Japanese student associations in Canadian universities. Such communities are important because they form a sub-cultural group that would be part of the larger society in the host environment they live in. By the same token, the international students in the university setting may also establish and participate in ethnic social activities through their respective association related to their home culture. As the subjective identification is important to gain insights about participants' interpretation as ethnic individuals, participants were asked how they self-identify their own ethnicity. This approach provides more intricate understanding of participants' unique way on constructing their own ethnicity and their experience of intercultural interaction through such ethnic lens.

Third, participants must be able to articulate their experience. In view of this, participants must have the capability to verbally express themselves fully, accurately, and provide accounts of actual rather than hypothetical situations to illuminate their act of consciousness from their lived experience. Moustakas (1994) maintained that the whole process of uncovering the essence of the phenomenon depends upon an ability to provide clear reflection. Participants' ability to attend, recognize, and describe with clarity is important to grasp their meaning of the phenomenon. Given such criterion, participants in the present study included postgraduate students. This

is based on the assumption that these students may have reached a certain level of maturity that would allow them to be able to articulate their experience more fully.

Based on the methods of data collection, participants of the study were categorized into those who participated in the in-depth interviews and those who participated in the focus groups.

3.5.1 In-Depth Interview Participants

In locating participants who met the established criteria for an in-depth interview, it is essential to have potential participants nominated by people who had developed intercultural social networks. In view of this, this study utilized a snowballing sampling. Snowballing is a method that expands the sample by asking one participant to recommend others for interviewing (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). In thinking through how the beginner of the snowballing chain could be chosen, I categorized the chain into local and non-local participants.

The beginners of the chain for local participants include representatives of the major ethnic groups in Malaysia and these representatives were Malay, Chinese, and Indian. For non-local participants, I obtained statistics of international students from the Department of Statistics in the university. This helped me in having an informed decision on choosing non-local participants for the study. Based on the statistics, I gathered that international students in the university came from three main geographical regions which are South East Asia, Middle East, and Africa. As such, I decided to choose participants who represent each region. Accordingly, the beginner of the snowballing chain included participants from Indonesia (South East Asia),

Jordan (Middle East) and Nigeria (Africa). These countries were chosen because they represented the top three major populations of non-local students by each region. This was a reasonable choice given that it included a myriad of ethnic representatives. The snowballing sampling began with six participants, with each representing the major ethnic groups within the campus.

Given that past studies indicated students are likely to engage in intercultural interaction in a heterogeneous environment (Arasaratnam, 2004; Halualani, 2008, 2010), it is reasonable to begin the snowballing sampling from a faculty that is most ethnically diverse in the study setting. In view of this, Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School has been identified as the faculty that fits such criterion. I sought assistance from the Deputy Dean of Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School to locate students who met the established criterion and who may have the interest to participate. Unfortunately, this approach failed to get any interested participants. Yet, I received assistance from a postgraduate student who was willing to locate potential participants for the study. Since this student lived in a residential college within the campus comprising ethnically diverse groups, it was feasible for her to identify participants who met the established criterions for the study and asked for their willingness to participate (as the beginner of the referral chain). Once the assistant identified the students who volunteered to participate, I asked preliminary questions to check whether they were qualified for participation, such as, "Do you have friends from other ethnic groups in this campus?", "Which ethnic groups do they come from?", "How often do you interact with your friends?", "Where do you normally interact?" and "What do you think of your experience with friends who are

ethnically dissimilar from yourself?" These questions provided me with important cues whether or not participants really met the established criterion for this study.

I then sent an invitation letter explaining details about the study and a consent form for participating in the study. I contacted each participant to arrange a time and place that was convenient for the interview to take place. As Moustakas (1994) emphasized that the researcher as the experiencing person must carry out the Epoche, I engaged in the process of Epoche (see "Researcher as Instrument" in validity section) before conducting the interviews. I am committed to be open regarding my prejudgments and preconceptions of what intercultural competence is supposed to look like and to set aside these predilections to be open to participants' way of perceiving the phenomenon. I bracketed the primary research questions at the beginning of each interview and approached conversations with participant as if I do not know anything about their experience. As each interview with participants progressed, I focused on what it is that participants experienced and how their experience came to be what it is. After completing the in-depth interview sessions, students who agreed to participate in the study were asked to refer to other students like themselves for research participation.

The snowballing chain for non-local participants began with an individual from Indonesia (Participant 1), Nigeria (Participant 2), and Jordan (Participant 3). The snowballing chain for local participants started with a Chinese as the fourth chain beginner of the study (Participant 4). Initially, I planned to choose a Malay and an Indian for the other two chain beginners. However the fourth participant referred me to other students who were Malay and Indian. This referral resonates with the

purpose of the study, that is, to have local representatives from the three major ethnic groups. Instead of having six chain beginners, the four chains were sufficient. The chain referral began to snowball and the in-depth interviews were conducted until they reached a point of "saturation" where researchers look for instances that represent participants' experience and to continue looking until further interviews yield new information that does not provide futher insight into participants' experience (Cresswell, 2007; Kvale, 2007). The in-depth phenomenological interviews reached "exhaustive" description of lived experience with fifteen participants being interviewed (Moustakas, 1994). This number of participant is "sufficient" to eludicate rigorous analysis of the interview data that is representative of the experience that only this group of participants has within the study setting (Moustakas, 1994).

I developed a profile for each participant that provides some background information regarding his or her intercultural experience (Appendix B). Most participants reflected their interaction with friends that they knew from classes and from their residential colleges. Their frequency of interaction ranged from everyday to monthly basis. Specifically, by ethnic categories, non-local participants included two ethnic individuals from Indonesia, three Arabs, two ethnic individuals from Nigeria, and one Chinese from Mainland China. Local participants included four Malays, two Indians, and one Chinese. I assigned each participant with a number and quoted their statements accordingly in the analysis. The table below (Table 3.1) provides a detailed background of participants.

Table 3.1

In-Depth Interview Participants

Participant	Ethnicity	Nationality	Program of study	Semester	Gender
1 (P1)	Bugis-Makasar	Indonesia	PhD Accounting	8	Female
2 (P2)	Hausa	Nigeria	PhD economics	2	Male
3 (P3)	Arab	Jordan	Msc International Accounting	3	Male
4 (P4)	Chinese	Malaysia	PhD Economics	2	Male
5 (P5)	Malay	Malaysia	PhD Economics	2	Male
6 (P6)	Arab	Palestine	PhD Accounting	5	Male
7 (P7)	Indian	Malaysia	PhD Economics	2	Female
8 (P8)	Malay	Malaysia	PhD Economics	2	Female
9 (P9)	Arab	Jordan	PhD Human Resource Management	5	Male
10 (P10)	Yoruba	Nigeria	PhD Communication	2	Male
11 (P11)	Malay	Malaysia	PhD Multimedia	3	Male

12 (P12)	Indian	Malaysia	PhD Human Resource	2	Female
13 (P13)	Chinese	China	PhD Economics	4	Female
14 (P14)	Sunda-Balinese	Indonesia	PhD Multimedia	2	Female
15 (P15)	Malay	Malaysia	PhD economics	2	Female

3.5.2 Focus Group Participants

Participants for focus groups comprised students from different ethnic groups who were not involved in previous in-depth interviews. Since it is important that the interview questions made sense to focus group participants, I conducted one pilot focus group (this group is referred as Focus Group 1) before engaging with the actual focus group (this group is referred as Focus Group 2). Focus Group 1 was intended to see whether the interview questions could stimulate informative discussions among participants. Through the assistance of a postgraduate coordinator, I contacted several postgraduate students in the Faculty of Multimedia Technology and Communication who met the criterions needed for the study to become members of the pilot focus group. Five postgraduate students agreed to participate. Participants were contacted to arrange time and place convenient to them for the discussion to take place. However, an unexpected clash of class schedule prevented one participant from joining the group leaving the focus group with four members only. This session of focus group lasted for about one hour and 44 minutes. Data

analysis was done concurrently following the discussion and the results help to improvise interview questions that can be used for the actual focus group.

Focus Group 2 was recruited by the assistance of an instructor who taught postgraduate students in the study setting. I provided information regarding criterions that need to be met for the study (that members of the focus group must include multiethnic students who had friends from other ethnic groups). The instructor selected the students who were willing to participate and ensured that they met the established criterion. Initially, I aimed to have six members for Focus Group 2. However, the instructor informed me that two more students volunteered to join the focus group. Accordingly, the group comprised eight participants. I contacted the students to arrange for a meeting, and set the place and time to have the focus group discussion. This session of focus group lasted for about one hour and 51 minutes which was both taped and video recorded after receiving the participants' consent. Then, I transcribed their discussion following each session. I used English as the medium of interaction since the groups had both local and non-local participants. The table below (Table 3.2) provides a detailed description of the participants in both focus groups:

Table 3.2

Focus Group Participants

Focus Group	Participants	Ethnicity	Nationality	Program of study	Semester	Gender
Focus Group 1 (FG-1)	Participant 1 (P1)	Yoruba	Nigeria	PhD Communication	2	Male
	Participant 2 (P2)	Chinese	Malaysia	PhD Communication	2	Female
	Participant 3 (P3)	Indian	Malaysia	PhD Communication	3	Female
	Participant 4 (P4)	Arab	Palestine	PhD Communication	3	Male

	Participant	Ethnicity	Country	Programme		Gender
	Participant 1 (P1)	Kurdish	Iraq	PhD Education	2	Male
Focus	Participant 2 (P2)	Chinese	Malaysia	PhD Education	2	Male
Group 2	Participant 3 (P3)	Minang	Indonesia	PhD Education	2	Female
(FG-2)	Participant 4 (P4)	Thai	Thai	PhD Education	2	Female
	Participant 5 (P5)	Malay	Malaysia	Msc Statistics	2	Male
	Participant 6 (P6)	Yoruba	Nigeria	PhD Communication	2	Female
	Participant 7 (P7)	Indian	Malaysia	PhD Education	2	Female
	Participant 8 (P8)	Chinese	Malaysia	PhD Education	2	Female

3.6 Data Analysis

I followed rigorous and systematic steps of data analysis as advocated by Moustakas (1994) to analyze data from the in-depth and focus group interviews (Figure 3.1). The following section explains in greater detail the steps that were taken into analyzing the data.

```
┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  ┌──────────┐    ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐           │
│  │          │    │   Listing and Preliminary Grouping      │           │
│  │          │    └────────────────────────────────────────┘           │
│  │          │                      ↓                                   │
│  │          │    ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐           │
│  │ Phase 1  │    │       Reduction and Elimination          │          │
│  │Description│   └────────────────────────────────────────┘           │
│  │ for each │                      ↓                                   │
│  │participant│   ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐           │
│  │          │    │  Cluster Invariant Constituents into Themes│        │
│  │          │    └────────────────────────────────────────┘           │
│  │          │                      ↓                                   │
│  │          │    ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐           │
│  │          │    │      Construct Textural Description      │          │
│  │          │    └────────────────────────────────────────┘           │
│  │          │                      ↓                                   │
│  │          │    ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐           │
│  │          │    │     Construct Structural Description     │          │
│  │          │    └────────────────────────────────────────┘           │
│  └──────────┘                      ↓                                   │
│              ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐               │
│              │  Construct Textural-Structural Description│             │
│              └────────────────────────────────────────┘               │
│  ┌──────────┐                      ⇓                                   │
│  │          │    ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐           │
│  │ Phase 2  │    │ Construct a Composite Textural Description│         │
│  │Description│   │   of the Experience of the Phenomenon    │         │
│  │ for the  │    └────────────────────────────────────────┘           │
│  │whole group│                     ↓                                   │
│  │          │    ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐           │
│  │          │    │Construct a Composite Structural Description│        │
│  │          │    │   of the Experience of The Phenomenon    │         │
│  │          │    └────────────────────────────────────────┘           │
│  │          │                      ↓                                   │
│  │          │    ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐           │
│  │          │    │ Construct Composite Textural-Structural  │          │
│  │          │    │    Description for the Whole Group       │          │
│  └──────────┘    └────────────────────────────────────────┘           │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 3.1. Stages in Phenomenological Data Analysis
        (Moustakas, 1994)

i) Listing and Preliminary Grouping

A software analysis (Nvivo 10) was used to aid data management. I began the process of data analysis by importing the recording of each participant into the software. I then listened to the recording, transcribe each interview verbatim, read, and re-read transcription of each participant while listening to the recording to check for accuracy. In the process of transcribing each interview, I tried to retain as much as possible each participants' words in order to preserve their voices that could uniquely present meanings from the participants' point of view. However, when the verbatim impedes understanding, editing was done in order to make participants' statements more comprehensible. At this stage, Moustakas (1994) advocated the process of phenomenological reduction which include the activity of "horizonalization" that demands the researcher to pay attention to every relevant statement and not marginalize any aspect of the experience. In this regard, the unit of analysis that I observed was every relevant statement that indicates each participant's experience in regard to the phenomenon under study. I was fully engaged in this process by listing every statement of each participant that is important for examining his or her experience. The listed statements were labelled carefully as horizons (see Appendix C for an example of horizons)

ii) Reduction and Elimination

To reduce the horizons into invariant constituents of participants' experience, in this phase, I tested each horizon for each participant against two requirements to determine the invariant constituents as proposed by LaRocco (2011):

a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is necessary and sufficient for understanding the phenomenon?

b. Is it possible to abstract and label it?

Each horizon that adheres to the above requirements was labeled for its specific meaning unit and was considered as the constituent of the experience. Horizons that were not in accordance to the above requirements were eliminated. Also, overlapping, repetitive, and vague horizons were removed. The remaining horizons now become the invariant constituents or the meaning units of the experience.

iii)   Clustering the Invariant Constituents into Themes

The invariant constituents of each participant's experience were clustered into a thematic label. I coded the themes by staying closely to the unit of meanings that each participant articulated when describing his or her experience. Most often, such meanings were presented in the terms that each participant used to describe his or her ideas. However, in other cases when it was appropriate to use existing terms suggested in the extant literature, I used the terms in coding the themes.

In terms of coding schemes, I followed three coding stages which involve open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In open coding, Corbin and Strauss (1990) suggested that fracturing data helps the researcher to reduce bias. Based on this suggestion, I analyzed the fractured data in the form of invariant constituents and initially coded each invariant constituent to develop a preliminary framework for analysis. Once coding of each invariant constituent was done, conceptually similar invariant constituents were clustered together to form initial categories.

In axial coding, I gradually re-examined the initial categories that have been coded in the previous stage of open coding. Through such re-examination, few preliminary

codes were eliminated because they seemed to express more of personal characteristics than those of interaction as an intercultural one (such as participants' description of different personal hobbies). I then interpreted how the categories that have been retained are connected. Interconnections of the categories were examined by looking at participants' experience, the conditions that gave rise to the experience, and the contexts or situations in which the experience occurred. Through this process, I was able to systematically seek for a full variation of the phenomena under study.

I then moved into the final stage of selective coding. In this final part, a process of identifying categories was done that can be unified around central core categories that help to answer the research questions. The core categories were identified by asking questions, such as, "What is the main idea presented by this particular participant?" The core categories were labeled as the core themes that correspond to the questions that this study sought to answer (See Appendix D for an example of invariant constituents and the core themes). I checked the invariant constituents and their accompanying categories against the complete record of the participants for validity by adhering to the following criteria as proposed by LaRocco (2011):

a.   Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription?

b.   Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?

c.   If they are not explicitly expressed and compatible, the constituents and themes should be deleted.

iv)   Individual Textural Description

I engaged in the process of phenomenological reduction to construct textural description of the experience for each participant. The task of textural description

was aimed at elucidating what participants experienced which inform the essential constituents that represent the meanings and essences of the phenomenon. Description was constructed by using only what was given by participants as their experience without imposing opinions or explanations. Over the course of clustering the invariant constituents into categories and identifying the core categories that represent the main idea of participant's experience, I found that they seemed to indicate what each participant experienced in their intercultural interaction. Such core categories indicate the essential elements of intercultural competence that reveal the essences of the phenomenon. Accordingly, using the invariant constituents and the core categories (in which were labeled as the textural themes), I constructed textural description that illuminates the essential constituents of each participant's experience (see Apppendix E for an example of individual textural description).

v) Individual Structural Description

Using the textural description, I engaged in the process of imaginative variation to explore the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced (Moustakas, 1994). In this sense, I sought to answer this question; "How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is?" In engaging with the imaginative variation process, I considered different perspectives and varying frames of reference to understand how each participant experienced intercultural interaction and how they came to understand intercultural competence based on such intercultural experience. In this particular stage of looking at the underlying conditions that illuminate what is being experienced by each participant, I noted that such conditions are naturally presented in the sub-themes that accompany the

132

identified core categories. Using the sub-themes (that were labeled as the structural themes); I then constructed for each participant an individual structural description of the experience (see Appendix F for example of structural description).

vi)   Individual Textural-Structural Description

I integrated the structural description with the textural description and constructed each participant a textural-structural description. Such synthesis of textural-structural description reflect the meanings and essences of the phenomenon being investigated (see Appendix G for example of textural-structural description)

vii)   Composite Textural-Structural Description

Given that the essences of the phenomenon are present in the relationship between what it is that participants experienced and how participants experienced the phenomenon, the final step requires integrating the composite textural-structural description into a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole. Working from the individual textural and structural description of each participant, I identified the unifying elements, and developed a composite textural and structural description representing the whole group. Then I integrated both composite textural and structural description resulting in a composite textural-structural description. The composite textural-structural description of the meaning and essence of the experience was synthesized into description of the phenomenon. Such synthesized description was presented in the forms of textural and structural themes that make up the whole picture of participants' experience. In general, the textural themes work as the core themes that elucidate the essential features of participants' experience while the structural themes serve as the sub-themes that underlie the conditions that describe how participants' experience came

to be what it is. It is noted that the essence can never be totally exhausted in the study. However, as Moustakas (1994) contended, the fundamental textural-structural synthesis through rigorous analysis in the previous stages was legitimate in reflecting the essences of the phenomenon being investigated.

3.7 Validation

Validity is often thought in association with quantitative studies (Golafshani, 2003). However, in explaining phenomenological research methods, Moustakas (1994) used the term 'validation of data' to refer to trustworthiness of the findings. Two common criteria found in the literature to establish trustworthiness of data are: (i) statement of the researcher as the instrument, and (ii) participant validation. The following section provides a detailed explanation of these two criterions.

3.7.1 Statement of Researcher as Instrument

Since qualitative research is interpretive in nature with the inquirer being involved in an intensive experience with participants, the researcher functions as the primary instrument in research and serves as an important element of validation (Cresswell, 2009; Patton, 1999). With this concern in mind, the researcher must take responsibility to reflexively and visibly identify his or her assumptions, biases, beliefs, values, personal background, (such as gender, culture, and socioeconomic status) and experience that may shape interpretations of his or her study (Cresswell, 2009; Giorgi, 2012; Ortlipp, 2008). Recognizing personal bias or own value system is the major point in conducting phenomenological research and not raising one's bias or predispositions means leaving room for bringing researcher's personal

perspective into the study (Giorgi, 2006). In descriptive phenomenological method, addressing the researcher's bias is advocated through the process of Epoche (Moustakas, 1994; Giorgi, 2012). In engaging with the Epoche, Moustakas (1994) emphasized that the researcher should focus on returning to his or her own memory, perception, feeling, or judgment that he or she can review regarding the phenomenon. The major difficulty in phenomenological study is the question of what the researcher needs to do to free his or her assumptions as far as it is possible (Caelli, 2001; Pringle, Hendry, & McLafferty, 2011). In overcoming such difficulty, the researcher is recommended to disclose personal narrative and assumptions in order to make him or her more aware of presuppositions and personal beliefs toward the phenomena under study (Ganeson, 2006; Garner, 2012).

In this study, I utilized the process of Epoche (before each interview with participants and throughout the data analysis process) by reflecting upon my own background as an academic who has a keen interest in the studies of intercultural communication. Given my background as an academic for seven years and previous academic training in the United States and Australia, such background has indirectly shaped my assumptions and predispositions on the phenomenon under inquiry. Over the course of several years teaching intercultural communication and given the Western domination on intercultural communication studies, I noted that most of my teaching resources (such as textbooks and case studies) were of Western scholars' perspective. As a "student" of Western theoretical frameworks, I learned Western models and taught such models to students to help improve their knowledge on intercultural communication. Based on the Western perspective, I eventually developed understanding of intercultural competence as the ability to communicate

appropriately and effectively to achieve an individual's goal in intercultural situations. Given that most of the models have been developed in a Western context which might contradict with other cultural perspectives, I sought to put aside this bias by not seeking to prove this particular perspective to reach a preconceived conclusion. For example, rather than imposing a prior definition of intercultural competence and exploring how participants described appropriate and effective communication, I oriented participants to reflect on their intercultural experience and prompted their own understanding of what is needed to communicate successfully with the Other.

I also self-reflected on my own intercultural experience that may impose some preconceived ideas on the phenomenon under study. When I reflected on my own lived experience especially during undergraduate years in a Malaysian university back in the year of 1999, much of my social interaction was with Chinese Malaysian and Indian Malaysian friends. During that year, it was very rare to find any non-local students within the communication program in the university and even within the residential college where I lived in. At interpersonal level, I felt there were not much challenges and difficulties to relate with my Chinese and Indian friends. Perhaps, this is taken from a dominant ethnic group position. Being a Malay Malaysian and coming from the majority ethnic group in the country, my native Malay language is used as an official language among the multiethnic groups in Malaysia. Thus, being a native speaker of the Malay language, language is definitely a taken-for-granted aspect in my interaction with the Other. Apart from language, I felt there is some form of cultural familiarity and perceived my experience with Chinese and Indian friends as "normal." Looking at my own socialization with the Other, I felt my

cultural ways of being Malay (such as consuming *halal* foods) is normalized, understandable, and accepted without questions. Equally, I did not pay much attention to my Indian and Chinese friends' cultural ways of living since they are already normalized in my own everyday existence.

The consciousness of my own cultural ways came to the fore when I crossed my national boundary and lived as an international student pursuing a Master's degree in Australia and the United States. As I reflected my experience attending classes in the university on an everyday basis, I eventually developed friendship with classmates who came from diverse cultural backgrounds. As I reflected further my experience particularly in Australia, being the only student wearing the headscarf, I remembered how such physical appearance "stood out" in the classroom. I recounted situations where I had to confront curiosities from fellow friends who wanted to know why it is important for me to wear the headscarf in which made me feel uncomfortable at times. Such uncomfortable feelings may have been derived from my own experience back home in which I have never experienced similar kind of curiosities.

The experience of encountering the curiosities from the Other who wanted to know my beliefs has raised awareness of how my own culture can be so intriguing and how much aspect of other cultures that could offer interesting insights that I took for granted. Reflecting upon my own experience back home, I admitted how little I knew about my Chinese or Indian friends' culture such as their religious beliefs and traditions. Such experience was an eye-opener in realizing how having friends from diverse ethnic backgrounds provides valuable resources into understanding other cultural beliefs and values. When I reflected on my current experience of being a

137

PhD student in the study setting, I developed friendships with fellow postgraduate students coming from diverse ethnic backgrounds. I felt the challenge of intercultural interaction was mostly evident when talking to non-local ethnic individuals such as from Nigeria. Most often, an interaction between two ethnic individuals from different nationalities in the study setting (except interaction between ethnic Malay Malaysian and Indonesian) is carried out in English. I remembered facing some difficulties to understand accented English of my Nigerian friends and how effortful it was to interact successfully. However, after getting used and listening closely to their way of pronunciation, I began to reduce such language barriers. It was also enlightening that I gained interesting insights about specific ethnicities among my Nigerian friends and their cultural ways.

Through intercultural experience in a foreign land and in my home country, I developed some assumptions about intercultural competence. I felt that becoming competent takes into account how much a person understands his or her own culture, how much a person is interested to mix and learn about the Other, and how much a person is able to cope with language and cultural differences. As a researcher, I need to think about these biases that form my preconceptions on intercultural competence and set them apart in order to hear participants' voices of their own experience from their own point of view. Although addressing researcher bias seems to be viable to address the researcher's predispositions toward the topic under study, there are doubts whether this procedure works and reflection upon past experience before the actual analysis guarantee the researcher to have a bias-free attitude (Giorgi, 2006). In response to researcher bias, Hofstede (1984) asserted:

Even in purest phenomenological research, the value of the researcher determines to a large extent the way he or she observes, describes, classifies, understands, and predicts reality. (p.20)

Accordingly, Hofstede (1984) noted the inescapability of value judgments and there is no way out from this dilemma but to try to be explicit as possible about one's own bias. Patton (1999) contended that the social construction nature of the phenomenological paradigm indicates that data about humans inevitably represent some degree of perspective rather than absolute truth. In the light of researcher's role in qualitative research, Patton suggested the notion of "empathic neutrality" in which the researcher is perceived as caring about and being interested in the phenomenon under study, but taking the stance of neutrality about the findings. LaRocco (2011) attested that neutrality does not mean detachment but rather it enhances the researcher's awareness to be sensitive to participants' experience. In view of this, my previous experience has contributed positively to the present study and does not negate my role as a researcher. Such commonality helps me in working with the participants and empathizing with their experience.

3.7.2 Participant Validation

In improving validity within phenomenological research, Moustakas (1994) maintained that it is important to follow rigorous steps in data collection and data analysis. Phenomenological researchers need to ascertain that the data collected provides a vivid description of what it is that participants experienced and the data analysis illuminates the essential meaning that participants attached to their experience. Moustakas further remarked that participant validation is important for

increasing validity of the data. Participant validation demands the researcher to share the individual textural-structural description with each participant to verify whether or not the description portray participant's experience of the phenomenon (LaRocco, 2011). In this study, I sent the individual textural-structural description of each participant via their e-mail addresses. I requested participants to review the description and checked whether or not the description vividly represents their intercultural experience and the meaning they make of intercultural competence out of such experience. I also asked for any necessary additions or corrections so as to confirm whether there were any misunderstandings of their meaning. Such participant validation helps to ensure that the researcher is aware on her own perception that influences the study (Patton, 1999).

Thirteen participants gave their feedback on the description. Most participants verified that the description represented their experience and identified no misinterpretation of their perspective on intercultural competence. Two participants provided more clarification of the meanings that they attached to their experience. For example, Participant 13 was in disagreement with my use of "uncomfortable" term to portray her experience when she was called as "sister" by her Arab friends. She wrote in her e-mail:

> "Uncomfortable" should not be used here, too strong. I know they meant well. Just felt a little bit strange. Might be too fast to get that "close"☺? Then I thought it might be because of the language… like we call friends or even strangers dude, mate, bro in English. We also have similar informal addresses

in China or we might have different understanding of "sister." Actually, it is

also common for Christians to call each other like this." (P13)

This misunderstanding was corrected and discussed with the participant. In

accordance to the discussion, the participant agreed when I quoted her statement as

"feeling a little bit strange" to accurately represent such specific experience.

Participants' confirmation on the textural-structural descriptions ensured that the

data collection and analysis capture their perspective on intercultural competence

based on their intercultural experience.

3.8   Limitations and Delimitation

This study used snowball sampling to locate participants. This approach is beneficial

because of the personal aspects inherent in recruiting participants that shorten the

time and less expensive to assemble a participant group (Sadler, Lee, Lim, &

Fullerton, 2010). However, snowball sampling presents a number of limitations. The

existing literature suggests that snowballing sampling is chain referral and once it is

started, it proceeds on its own (Eland-Goossensen, Van De Goor, Vollemans,

Hendriks, & Garretsen, 1997; McLean & Campbell, 2003; Rosemarie, Mary, &

Jackie, 2004; Sadler et al., 2010). However, this simply is not the case since the

original contacts the researcher used to start chains may have been exhausted and the

researcher is faced with the need to initiate new chains (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

In view of this, it is possible that the chain may revert back to the student who first

made the referral and reach its exhaustion. This is called reflexive bias in that an

individual's referral to another would theoretically give the chance for the first

individual of being nominated again (Eland-Goossensen et al., 1997). I overcame

141

this limitation by using different participants (that functions as the beginner to the chains) to allow for more initiation of chains rather than depending on one key participant.

Biernarcki and Waldorf (1981) proposed that contacts and referral chains can be initiated fortuitously. Fortuitousness means that the researcher takes maximum advantage of opportunity that presents "by chance" in the pursuit of locating participants However, this is not a process of chance, but it came from attentiveness to information as the researcher entered the research area. In the present study, fortuitous chance occurred when I attended a postgraduate seminar where the attendees were ethnically diverse postgraduate students. This opportunity provided me with the feasible way to find potential participants for this study and with whom I could approach personally.

Another constraining factor concerns with obtaining participants' feedback on the data. For example, Caelli (2001) discovered in her research that after transcribing the recording verbatim and returned the participant for clarification and validation for the subsequent interview, several participants did not bother to read the transcripts and were unable to see meaning in the data provided. In regard to getting participants' feedback, Giorgi (2006) raised an interesting question in that if the participants have the privilege for validating meaning of experience, then why not simply ask what it means to them rather than going through a long painstaking phenomenological method. Giorgi contended that the researcher is a "validation instrument" given the expertise in the ways of phenomenology and the amount of effort that went into the analysis. Giorgi asserted that participants have the privilege

when it comes to know what they experience but not necessarily concerning the meaning of experience. Having participants to read or give feedback of the results is a nice gesture since they have spent energy and time for interviews. Although member checks and corrections offered by participants are adopted in a phenomenological research as part of the process for increasing validity of research, the researcher is responsible to delineate the meaning of participants' experience. In view of this, Giorgi (2006) further attested that the primacy of the researcher may overcome the limitation to obtain hundred percent feedbacks from participants that have been encountered in many phenomenological studies.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the principles of descriptive phenomenology that informs the underlying methodology for this study. In general, two methods of data collection were used that include in-depth and focus group interviews. These methods helped this study in providing rich insights on the conception of intercultural competence. The attitude of Epoche, phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation was followed in order to focus attention on describing the phenomenon as lived by participants. Moustakas (1994) phenomenological method on analyzing data was followed through to illuminate descriptions of participants' experience from the interview transcriptions. The following chapter provides phenomenological description of participants' intercultural experience and what constitutes intercultural competence in the light of such experience.

CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the essence of the phenomenon of intercultural competence in the light of participants' lived intercultural experience. Given that intercultural experience serves as the basis from which participants build upon their thoughts about intercultural competence, it is important to begin with presenting the themes that highlight the nature of participants' intercultural experience and then focus on the themes that enlighten participants' conception of intercultural competence. As in-depth interviews were used as the primary method in this study, the following section begins with findings from this method followed by focus group interviews.

4.2 Analysis of In-Depth Interviews

Each participant was prompted with questions during the in-depth interviews that orient them to reflect their own intercultural experience. The following section illuminates the core themes (or textural themes) that emerged which are organized according to the aims of this study.

4.2.1 Finding One: The Nature of Intercultural Experience

The first aim of this study is to explore the nature of intercultural experience as it is lived by participants. Data analysis using Nvivo 10 software found two core themes that illuminate participants' intercultural experience: (i) identifying oneself as an

ethnic being and (ii) encountering differences between self and the Other. In addition, from the analysis through the Nvivo 10 software, each textural theme is explained by sub-themes (or structural themes) that explicate the underlying and precipitating factors that invoke participants' experience. Figure 4.1 below illustrates the emergent core themes and sub-themes that represent participants' intercultural experience.
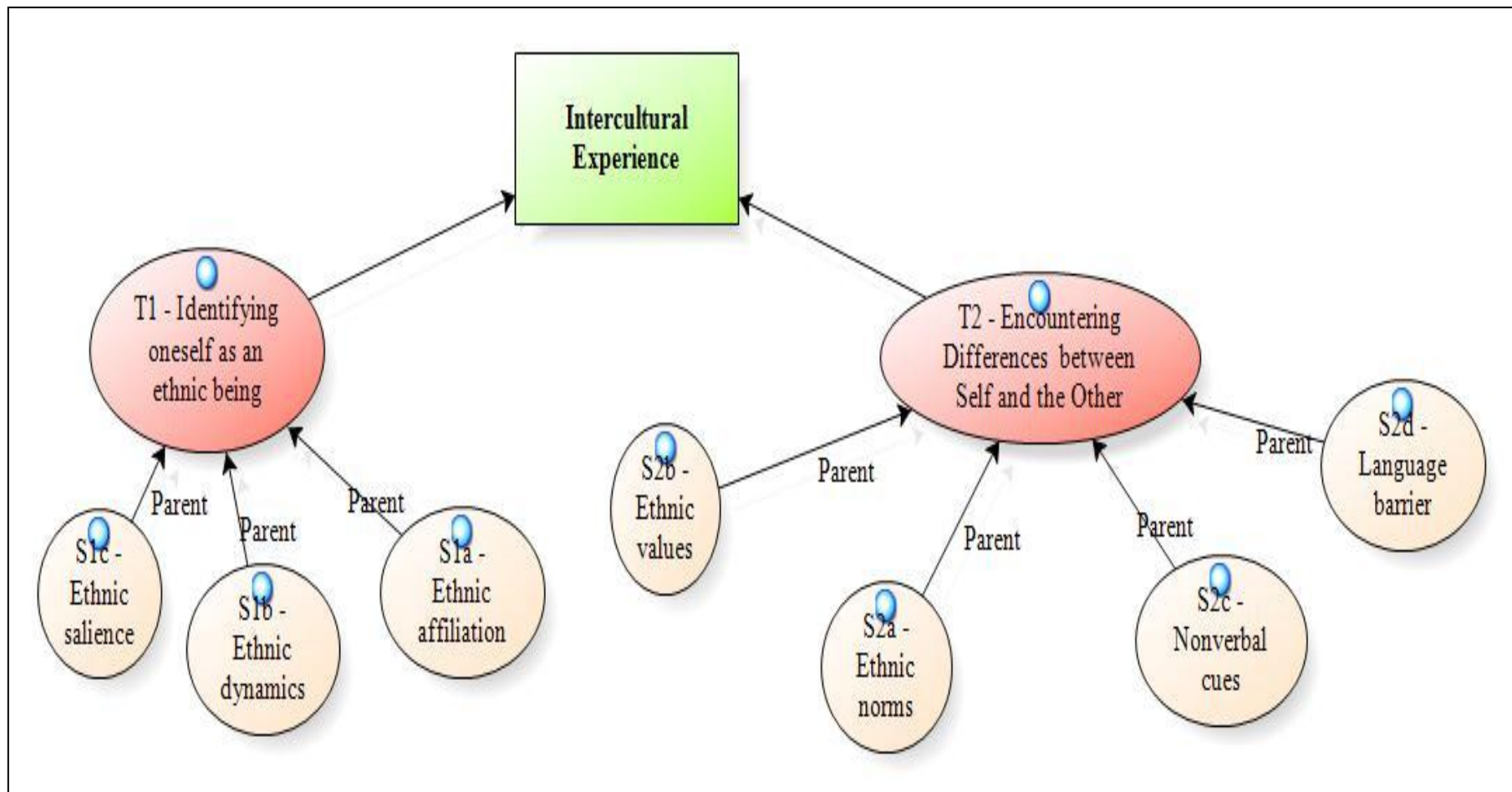
Figure 4.1. Core Themes and Sub-themes for Intercultural Experience - In-depth Interviews

4.2.2 Textural Theme 1: Identifying Oneself as an Ethnic Being

This core theme offers an understanding of how participants came to view who they are as ethnic individuals. For example, if a participant, for instance, sees or 'labels' himself or herself as Malay Malaysian, what it means to be Malay from this participant's standpoint? What is entailed with being an ethnic individual? Participants' meaning of being ethnic individuals includes three important elements which are: i) ethnic affiliation, (ii) ethnic dynamics, and (iii) ethnic salience. The figure below (Figure 4.2) summarizes these sub-themes that contribute to ethnic identification and the sources that they are coded from. The following section describes in greater detail on each of these structure that contributes to how participants came to identify themselves as ethnic beings.
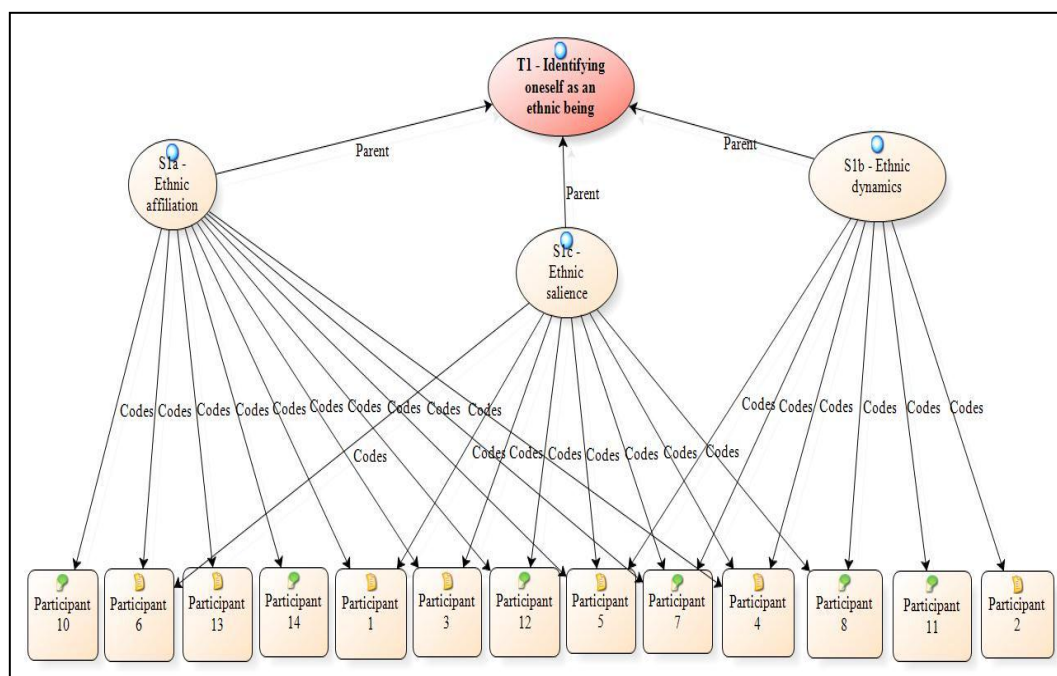
Figure 4.2. Intercultural Experience – Identifying Oneself as an Ethnic Being

4.2.2.1 Structural Theme 1a: Ethnic Affiliation

As participants reflected on their lived experience, participants primarily identified their ethnicity based on the obvious features that characterize and distinguish ethnic groups – language, religion, color of skin, ancestral lineage, common territory values, and practices. Participants described how the features intersect with one another as they are manifested into their own lived experience of being an ethnic individual. This understanding is important as it provides the meaningfulness of ethnicity from participants' standpoints. The description that follows delineates in a further detail of the features that came into participants' consciousness of their ethnic affiliation.

Language was perceived by participants as the first and most visible feature that enables an individual to differentiate his or her own ethnicity from others. For example, Participant 4 viewed ethnicity in relation to physical features, language, and religion. However, he felt that language is "the sharpest thing" that can obviously informs one's ethnicity since once a person speaks a language different from others, it indicates ethnic differences:

> "I feel it is the color of the skin that reflects one's physical. Language is the sharpest thing. Once you speak… people will identify that you are not from the same culture. So people will question which group are you from… and then also religion…I mean for Malaysia case…so far religion can be used to differentiate cultures." (P4)

Arab participants viewed language as the most significant feature that they use to affiliate self with the Arab culture. For example, Participant 9 said:

"We have Christians 1500 years ago they still are Arabs because they speak Arab. If you are Arab, it depends on language." (P9)

In the same vein, Participant 5 (a Malay Malaysian) viewed language as an important ethnic marker for identifying the Arabs as he commented:

"If I want to say country... I don't see it. Whatever country they come from, they are all Arabs. I looked at them as Arabs even though they are Libyan or African. I look at them as Arabs because they use Arabic language. If Africans they have dark skin color and they used English...so I see them as Africans but if they are black and use Arab language, they are Arabs. I look at their language." (P5)

Participant 10 who came from Nigeria claimed that language is the most important feature for identifying one's ethnicity. The following conversation elucidates his experience of being an ethnic individual in his country:

P10 = Participant 10

R   = Researcher

P10   : My town is multicultural in background. My town happens to be Yoruba in language. The *Amir* (leader) of my town came from Fulani. It's a different ethnic group. The language we speak is not Fulani. It's Yoruba.

R   : What about Yoruba that makes it distinct?

P10 : If you know the geography of Nigeria. Ilorin is central. The north is here... the Yoruba is here. It's like bridge between the two of them. when we go to a Yoruba land we speak Yoruba.

R : So you have like division of Yoruba and Hausa in Nigeria?

P10 : Oh sure. I don't know if you know Nigerian map. We have something like this. We have too big long rivers... the Niger and Benue…so here is north and here is the east.

R : So you are on the Western part of Nigeria?

P10 : We are in between that's why we are unique. We are in between the north and the west.

R : If I go to Nigeria, how would I know if that person is a Yoruba or Hausa?

P10 : You have to know the basic vocabulary for each of the language. You know when you hear someone says *sanuku malam* that's probably a Hausa person. If you can pick...you know basic vocabulary...greeting anybody you meet. If you say *sanuku,* a Hausa is likely to look at you. If you say *eliau...* or it depends...if it's morning afternoon... you know Hausa will say... *sanuti rana* means good afternoon. *kuaso* ..good afternoon for Yoruba.

Participant 2 who came from Nigeria expressed a similar standpoint. As such, it is not surprising that he viewed ethnicity as synonymous with language. He described

that since each ethnic group in Nigeria has its own language, communication between ethnic groups occurred in English. He shared his experience:

"I simply took ethnic as language. When you speak different language, it means you have different ethnic… yeah because actually you see for example in Nigeria…some of the ethnic groups, we only communicate in English. I don't understand their language and they don't understand my language. Africa is not a country. When we say Africa it's a continent... and that continent has more than 40 different countries and one of the countries is Nigeria. So you cannot begin to imagine having an African language actually." (P2)

Nevertheless, Participant 2 further commented that while language may be viewed as an important marker, it does not necessarily indicate one's ethnic affiliation. He gave an example of Hausa as a widely spoken language in Nigeria. This language does not only belong to the people who are originally Hausa but also functions as a language for interaction. Thus, he said that speaking Hausa does not necessarily made a person to view self as "originally Hausa" but rather "a Hausa speaking person" as he explained:

"I'm not a hundred person Hausa. My families are mixed…Hausa Fulani. It's also a very big ethnic group in Africa. It cuts across all parts of Africa. We only say Hausa speaking people. They have intermarried. Their physics changed. You can find they look like Malay. Actually from what other people say Hausa people are very hospitable and they like sharing their culture with their people. I think that is why the language is not only spoken by the Hausa

people. That's why it's very difficult to find Hausa people. We have Hausa speaking people because there are many people who are not originally Hausa. They have been acculturated by the Hausa people and the Hausa language. They cannot speak their traditional language but only Hausa. So it is hard to find originally Hausa people but we have Hausa speaking people." (P2)

In the same vein, Participant 4 commented that while language that is typically associated with an ethnic group serves as the significant marker for one's ethnic identification, similar way of identification may not be felt by others. In this sense, he explained that being a Chinese Malaysian does not necessarily indicate a person speaks Mandarin as his or her first language. It is rather subjectively defined by the extent a person "sticks to the Chinese culture":

"Although there are Chinese who don't speak Mandarin but they still stick to the Chinese culture. They still pray the Chinese way…they still apply the Chinese way. Then another group…they are more to Christianity. This group is not the majority. They start their education in *Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan* (primary school)" (P4)

Ancestral lineage and common territory provides an important source or some historical root for participants' ethnic identification. For example, Participant 4 identified his ethnicity as a Chinese Malaysian by looking at the historical context of Malaysia:

"My ethnic is Chinese…the background of Chinese is due to history. We were brought as a labor to come to Malaysia. If we look at our ancestor…we are from the south part of China. China itself breaks into two big

152

groups…one is north, one is south. The cultures and the attitudes are different. So we are more to the south part... we can say that we are more to Taiwan." (P4)

Similarly, Participant 7 associated her ethnicity as an Indian Malaysian with her ancestral lineage from the southern part of India. She explained her ethnicity in the following excerpt:

R : Could you describe your ethnic background?

P7 : Actually I'm not good in my ethnic but I'll try to explain. Ok... I'm from India. It is mostly from South India. We follow all the culture in South India.

R : What is it about South India that is still practiced within your family?

P7 : Like prayers… *perayaan* (celebrations)…we have different types of *perayaan* actually. We celebrate Ponggal. In India also…they celebrate Ponggal then Deepavali. In December, we have *karti kadivan*. All the Indians light up their house. This is something different if we compare with the northern side of India. Then our traditional costume is sari.

Despite associating her Indian Malaysian cultural practices with people in South India, she noted differences in the practice of caste that becomes an important characteristic of Indian Malaysians as she said:

"They give more priority for like caste. We... in Malaysia we don't care… there are some people who still care but nowadays it's reduced. People

153

pegang kuat kat kasta (holding strongly to caste) is less here but in India…they still follow caste. Yeah…they do not let other of low caste to come into the house. Let say people from lower status come to the house, they have to stay outside. They won't let them to come in. If they want to come, they come at the back side of the house and not in front of the house. If they want to marry they will also look for the same caste. Here in Malaysia we don't care." (P7)

Participant 1 commented that being an ethnic individual coming from Indonesia; she primarily identified her ethnicity based on ancestral lineage. Such ancestral lineage is closely knitted with the regions or common territory to which an ethnic group originates in Indonesia. She explained:

"In Indonesia…there are many ethnic groups stemming from Sabang to Maroket...there are hundred ethnic groups because every island has their own ethnic culture… the source of ethnic comes from the place… the early resource… especially in south part of Sulawesi and there are many areas of Sulawesi…north, south, central. I came from south Sulawesi and we have four major ethnic groups… I see myself as a Bugis Makassar… our ancestors came from Bugis Makassar. My grandmother and grandfather were originally of Bugis descendants. The Bugis areas can be found in several parts in Sulawesi such as Bugis Bone, Bugis Senggang, and Bugis Sidrap…but they are all of Bugis origin. There are other districts but the source is Bugis and they are the original inhabitants of Sulawesi." (P1)

Participant 14 likewise explained that ethnicity in Indonesia originates from a certain area that can be characterized by "the way they talk" or ethnic dialects. Even when ethnic groups can be categorized based on regions in Indonesia, each of the region constitutes many parts which indicates more sub-ethnic groups. The following excerpt reveals ethnic identification in her home country:

> "Since I'm an Indonesian…so ethnic culture is based on where you come from. The area, the custom…and the way you talk…your dialect. If you are from Sumatra, you are Sumatran...Sumatra there are many parts. Each has different habit." (P14)

Interestingly, Participant 14 has parents of two distinctive ethnic groups and the integration of both ethnic cultures shapes the way she viewed her own ethnicity:

> P14 : My dad is from Bali, my mom is from Sunda...some of them are different…of course like different custom...different ways of thinking.
>
> R : So how do you identify your ethnicity?
>
> P14 : You mean…
>
> R : Do you think you are a mixture of Bali and Sunda or just Indonesian?
>
> P14 : Even though my dad is from Bali...but I don't stay in Bali. I stay in Bekasi. It's like modern city. I used to go to visit my grandma in Chengkabumi. It's near Sunda. So I don't really have Bali culture but I learn some dance and then I learn Bali culture from my dad and family in Jakarta. Finally I know when I went there. For Sunda culture...we are not different from the Javanese...we're so polite.

155

Sundanese are soft...Bali is totally different…even it is simple talk. They will talk like they are angry. If you listen to them...are you angry? No... It's just the way of talking. So it's kind of different.

R : So you are prone to Sunda rather than Bali when you talk?

P14 : I'm prone to Sunda I think... because it's near...takes about four-hour drive from where I live. Bali is like three days drive. I can speak Sundanese better than Bali but I really want to learn it because now I realize that my passion...I love arts... which means more to Bali...maybe my dad genes or I don't know.. I love painting...I love writing...Sundanese they don't have exact arts... they have but mostly in Bandung... for me now I realize I'm more like my dad.. Bali is unique...many artists come from Bali.

Participant 13 who came from China explained that ethnic groups in her country are normally associated with their specific areas or provinces which are marked by similar language, tradition, and culture. She described:

"Ethnic originates from one area…people in this area use the same language, culture, tradition and gradually this may become ethnic. People from this area may go to other places but they still carry their ethnic characteristics of their origins. This area is the formation of ethnic and it becomes fixed. The area has some characteristics of the ethnic group." (P13)

Participant 13 further added that ethnic groups in China inhabit certain provinces such as Xinjiang, Ningxia, and Guangxi. Unlike Malaysia in which the country has three major ethnic groups, the same ethnic identification may not apply in China.

156

She admitted that sometimes it is hard to identify one's ethnicity by physical looks (she noted that it could also stem from her unfamiliarity with differences as she used to work with the majority group). She also described that the term "majority-minority" is used to identify ethnic groups in China and Han is the majority group in China. Although she described her specific ethnicity as Han, she preferred to be identified as Chinese (or a citizen of China).

Religious beliefs play a vital role in participants' lives of being an ethnic individual. For example, Participant 9 explained much of his Arab cultural practices are rooted in Islamic tradition to which it permeates the majority of Arabs lives:

> "My ethnic culture is Arabic. Once you mention Arabic culture...you have to mention something about Islam...it plays role. So we have many things before Islam and many things after Islam. It is Allah's religion. Allah creates us so we know how to understand our life because of religion…whatever you are..there is a root in the religion."(P9)

In the same vein, Participant 5 explained that his Malay cultural practices are synonymous to the Islamic tradition:

> "Malay… our culture is synonymous with the Islamic tradition like praying five times a day... then reciting the Quran and praying for parents, praying for wishes to find someone to marry…like me I'm single.. So I need to pray to get good fortune. Other religious rituals for the Malays include the Friday prayer, celebrating *Eid* and celebrating the birth of Prophet Muhammad." (P5)

Participant 4 described the salience of Buddhism and Christianity for Chinese Malaysians:

"Majority of Chinese are Buddhist and Christian...for me I'm a Buddhist. Buddhism covers everything…actually inside the Buddhism we break into something like the Muslims call as *mazhab* (sect)… it's hard to classify that. Buddhism...those pure Buddhist people they're different they only pray to the Gautama. Mine is we will pray to our emperor god...there's more slightly different." (P4)

Participants described several aspects within their own ethnic group that they considered important and prescribe the values that they hold as ethnic individuals. For example, Participant 4 explained Confucian moral that shapes the behaviors of Chinese Malaysians:

"Values for Chinese… we have to respect people, remember our parents. Take care of parents. We have to tolerate with people. The major is Confucian teachings. He emphasized on moral including how you treat people...how you treat your parent. If we want to put the value of Chinese…we can take the Confucian study as the one of the value for Chinese. "(P4)

Participant 1 explained that the Bugis Makassar stresses on the value of high respect for the elderly people. This value is something that they need to preserve for future generations:

"We have to understand our custom especially when one talks. The younger ones must speak politely with the older people. The language tone must not be too big or too low. The words must make the older people feel being much more respected like *iyeek* which means "yes" in our Bugis Makassar language. So yeah respect those who are older than you...polite talking. That is what we teach our kids." (P1)

Participant 10 described the communal value of his Yoruba culture that interweaves with the Islamic tradition. Despite the consciousness of the communal value, he addressed the penetration of Westernization into his own ethnic culture that creates some challenges to preserve such traditional value:

"Using my community…there are modern challenges. We have high westernization penetrating into every community. That's why we have *bokoharam* in Nigeria. *Bokoharam* is a Hausa language. *Boko*...corruption… *haram* you see...Westernization *haram* (unlawful). In an attempt to reject penetration of Westernization… the challenge is there. Islam in African culture…we are communal not individual. Communal…you have cousins living with different uncles. The uncle takes care of them as if they are his children. The Western culture is the opposite. They don't care so much about such extended family where they take care of such thing… but in Africa and Islamic community you are expected to be your brother's keeper. Individualism now is penetrating so much into our culture. That is one challenge." (P10)

Participant 9 explained the importance of living in groups for the Arabs:

"The Arabs live in groups, cooperative, know each other very well, and take care of each other. We have to be generous, dignity, brave, patient, tolerant and we have to help others as much as we can even if we lose many things. This is the most important thing... if I invite anyone… I have to take care of him or her as much as I can… even I lose something. It's okay. For example if I have food or something…I have to share even if I feel hungry…whatsoever I have to share. As I told you…we have to be collaborative." (P9)

Participant 6 provided examples of how the value of living in groups manifests into Arab cultural practices:

"This is common in Arab countries. For example, when I make wedding, my friends support me. They help me. We have *walimah* (a wedding ceremony). They bring something with them. For example it's not one kilo or two kilo rice…very big one. Sugar...very big one. After that you can return them with the soup as an exchange. Also if someone passed away... our neighbors...they cook food and then send to our home... we help by giving food and staying with them…we have to stay three days because when someone loses somebody, when he sees people around him…. It's easy for him. For example, two days ago…my Libyan friend's brother passed away. All Arabs went there and stayed with him." (P6)

4.2.2.2 Structural Theme 1b: Ethnic Dynamics

As participants live in a changing environment, it gives an impact on their way of identifying selves as ethnic beings. In this sense, being an ethnic individual is also related to how participants are constantly changing and constantly becoming. Two important factors which indicate the dynamic aspects of ethnicity were identified in participants' description.

The first factor includes the fact that participants' identification of their own ethnicity seems to be present-oriented. In this sense, participants described that when they looked into their own ethnic roots, they have lost touch with the cultural heritage of their ancestors. As such, how they identify their ethnicity is much based on the kinds of cultural socialization that they currently experienced rather than tracing their historical roots. For example, Participant 4 felt the younger generations of Chinese Malaysians, including himself, may not know much about their own customs and traditions. As such he noted some worries because although majority of Chinese Malaysians know they are Chinese since they speak Mandarin, he expressed "there are lot of traditions have been lost." Participant 4 further commented that he felt embarrassed of lacking knowledge about his own ethnic culture as it was important for his ethnic identification:

> "I feel that to identify you as a Chinese… you cannot forget your own culture. That's why sometimes when I was telling people I'm Chinese…when people asked about my religion deeply, my culture deeply… I feel very shameful on that matter because I really lack of information on that …I feel the group of Indian also will face this problem." (P4)

161

Other participants also noted losing some heritage from their own ancestors due to interethnic marriages and cultural assimilation. Participants expressed although they may mixed heritage of their ancestors, because of losing touch on their ancestral heritage, they identified selves to one ethnic group. For example, Participant 5 shared his family background to which his mother is Malay from Kelantan (an eastern part of the states in Peninsular Malaysia) and his father is of Thai descend and speaks Thai language. However, he identified self as Malay given that he speaks Malay rather than Thai language and most often socializes with the Malay people:

"I don't feel that I am Siamese. I feel I am Malay and enmeshed myself with the Malay culture. I've never spoken any Thai language. I speak with my friends in Malay language... when speaking with Chinese I use Malay, with Indians I also use Malay." (P5)

Participant 11 claimed having a German cultural heritage on his great grandmother's side. However, since his German ancestor had assimilated into the Malay culture, he felt that he had lost such ancestral heritage. Participant 8 likewise described that her mother was originally a Chinese Malaysian. She was adopted by a Malay family as an infant. Accordingly, she described that her mother had assimilated into the Malay culture and married a Malay. As such, Participant 8 noted that she had lost the Chinese ethnic heritage from her mother's side.

The second factor includes participants' experience on how their contact with the Other has transformed who they were. In this sense, participants described how contact with the Other led them to modify behaviors which gave impact on how they view selves as ethnic beings. For instance, Participant 2 claimed "I may not be exact

reflection of my ethnic group because of my interactions with different cultures." He reflected one situation of how he came to view self in such a way:

"One time somebody caught my attention…you know. I can't look into his eyes…when I was having discussion... he told me if you are doing like this (looking away) that means you're not interested… I'm not honest. It's a sign of…you know… it's like hypocrite or something like that. From then I said okay not to be seen as that. So I forced myself… if I'm talking to somebody… I make sure I look at him ... we are not normal reflection of our real culture because of the influence of other cultures… we must be different." (P2)

Nonetheless, he re-adjusts his behavior when talking to the elders in his own culture:

"Whenever I was talking to somebody because of concentration… if I'm talking like this… you know…when I'm talking to an elderly person…I cannot at all look into the person's eyes. When I see him looking at me… I'll take mine away. If I'm talking to younger ones or friends… it's normal" (P2)

In the same vein, Participant 5 shared how he was influenced by his Arab friends in terms of attire that he usually wears to Friday prayers:

"In this university, I wear casually (jeans and t-shirts) to Friday prayer. It's okay because I've mixed with the Arabs but if I go back to my kampong…wearing *baju melayu* (a traditional Malay attire) is a must. I wonder if I wear jeans….how the villagers would look at me." (P5)

163

Additionally, Participant 14 expressed that since she had been to other countries and mixed around with people of different ethnicities, such life experience has changed the way she behaves. She described her experience as "being open with feelings" when interacting with a Chinese American friend in Tunisia. She compared such experience and realized that it is something she can hardly apply in her own culture as she said:

> "Two weeks ago…I asked from my friends… I don't like this and this…and she was so angry. I was like of my god... I cannot do this like before… before also I had the same experience…we just kept silence and they replied with many cues…with my friend who are Americans and Poland. I tell them and they understand...it's kind of open. It's different even when I went back to Indonesia… my mom told me. You changed a lot…you can't be like this…we are Eastern people …so you cannot do it. You cannot apply it at home. Oh okay I said." (P14)

4.2.2.3 Structural Theme 1c: Ethnic Salience

This theme represents the extent to which participants felt ethnicity matters in their interaction. Participants noted that ethnicity is significant for them because it shapes their values and behaviors. For example, Participant 12 viewed her ethnicity is important because her culture is something that she "has to follow" even though people now live in a multicultural environment. Similarly, Participant 10 expressed the importance of ethnicity for identification in that his own cultural values are something that he believes in as he said:

"My ethnicity is important to the extent that Allah creates for identification. I believe I'm a traditional person. I believe in the cultural values of my community. I encourage people to retain it to the extent that is not in conflict with Islam. I believe in close knit interaction that's important in my culture." (P10)

Since Participant 10 came from Nigeria, this participant was asked whether his ethnicity matters when he crossed national boundaries and began his postgraduate study in Malaysia. Participant 10 commented that he preferred to be identified as Nigerian. However, he noted that ethnicity is something that "sticks to him" even though he has left his home country. In this sense, he believed that people are somehow shaped by their own ethnic values that manifest in the way they behave when interacting with others. Nonetheless, such consciousness on the salience of ethnicity does not hinder his interaction. The following conversation illuminates his view on the salience of his ethnicity:

R : In Nigeria, of course you would stick to your ethnic identity right?. what about outside Nigeria, in Malaysia..do you prefer to see yourself as a Nigerian more so than a Yoruba?

P10 : I prefer to be identified Nigeria but the truth of the matter is that by conduct, by value, by behavior you can know if someone is Hausa, a Yoruba. Those values inform the level of your interaction with the other ethnic groups. There are certain things I believe we can do together. Those things I don't allow ethnic identity to come in between us. We are all Nigerians…we should be able to share ideas, share

165

things. When it comes to the issue of personal matters, I believe a Hausa person for example…the woman is always you know in close knit...you don't go to Hausa's place and see the ladies. For Yoruba, no problem for women to be seen.

One participant (Participant 4) commented that ethnicity is salient for the purpose of "presenting yourself" and it is something that needs to be preserved as it provides a sense of identity for people. Interestingly, he felt that his national identity (being a Malaysian) is more important to which he takes more pride. He expressed that such national identity serves as the unifying element for diverse ethnic groups in Malaysia:

"We group ourselves in Malay, Chinese and so on. I feel the important is your identity for you when you present yourself. If this world is so homogenous…we will lose a lot of fun. Although we have lot of arguments, I feel that it's life… because we are heterogeneous, that makes the world. I feel that's the things about ethnicity. I feel that if this question goes to any other races, they will come to the same thing. We will keep the importance of ethnic…we have to keep our identity. In Malaysia case, I feel we should first Malaysian…that's why we say Malaysian Chinese…Chinese at the back. The reason is no matter you are Chinese, *Bumiputera* or what…you are Malaysian … and then the next thing…for me…if people ask me "are you from China"… I'll be quite unhappy with that question. Yeah…even last time if people said "you all look same like the Chinese" (from Mainland China) …actually in the class…most of the Chinese people voice up and say no…we

identify ourselves as Malaysian first. I feel that's good. Ethnic is important but the national also will be at the first place." (P4)

A number of participants felt that their religious identity is far more important and affiliated self more with religion rather than their own ethnicity. For example, Participant 3 perceived religion and the feeling of brotherhood among Muslims are more important than viewing self as an Arab because it enables him to relate well with the Other who are Muslims. In the same vein, Participant 11 claimed that being Malay is something that he takes pride. However, being a Muslim takes a front seat in his view of self as he said:

"I am proud to be Malay but what makes me prouder is being a Muslim because Islam takes us to the hereafter world. If you do good deeds you will be rewarded with paradise but being Malay does not guarantee you to have good rewards in the hereafter world." (P11)

Participant 5 viewed religion as most important in how he viewed self. He expressed that religion is something that he needs "to hold on to" more so than the Malay cultural traditions:

"What needs to be preserved in Malay culture is the religion. Religion is the most important thing. Malay is just identification. I do have some issue with the Malay tradition. When we want to get married, we have to pay high amount of dowry…we want this and we want that. It's a burden to follow Malay culture. So what needs to be preserved is Islam. That is something we need to hold on to." (P5)

It is telling that participants described how they view the Other in terms of ethnicity. It seems that ethnicity becomes salient when conversations include two ethnic individuals coming from a similar country. Since this present study includes ethnic individuals of both locals and non-locals, it is interesting that participants remarked whether the ethnicities of the Other are significant in their eyes especially when their interactions involve those coming from different countries. For local participants, they expressed that they tend to notice those coming from foreign countries in terms of their nationality rather than ethnicity. The following conversation with Participant 7 elucidates such consciousness:

> R : Let's move to your present experience now as a postgraduate. Do you have friends from other ethnic groups?
>
> P7 : Yeah…Nigerian. When I did my Master's degree... I had Arab friends but now I have only Nigerian friends … no Arab.
>
> R : When you mention about Nigerians, were you aware of their ethnicity?
>
> P7 : Not much.

Participant 8 likewise noted that she was not aware of the specific ethnicities of her non-local friends from Somalia, Libya, China, and Palestine. She added that conversation with her Palestinian friends most often revolved around what their life is like in Palestine. Despite the limited knowledge about their ethnic backgrounds, she noted one of her friends from Somalia talked about ethnic groups in terms of a specific area and characteristics. She explained in the following excerpt:

> R : Do you have friends from different ethnic groups?

168

P8   : Is it just Malay and Chinese?

R   : Malay, Chinese, others…

P8   : Now I have more friends...Indian, Chinese (Malaysians) and from China.

R   : Do you know the specific ethnicity of your friend from China?

P8   : I was not aware of it. I should ask after this (the interview)

R   : What about other countries?

P8   : I asked my Palestinian friend, he said he's a Palestinian. Somalia…he said ethnic was area... I didn't really pay attention to it because it was not important at that time…from what I remember… he said Ethiopia and Somalia are two groups which are in conflict. I have two friends of Ethiopia and Somalia and both of them had the same name. I am more comfortable with that Somali than that Ethiopian.

Non-local participants, on the other hand, seemed to notice the specific ethnicities of their local friends in the study setting. The following are several statements that illuminate such consciousness of ethnicity:

"When I came down from the plane in KL...I started to identify... this one is Malay...this one is Chinese...I have to learn this. Just like you can easily identify an Indian, a Chinese, and Malay" (P10)

"I have from my class Malay Malaysians, Chinese Malaysians…when we see, we say hi. How are you this and that? I have friends from some China also. Among the ethnic group, the Chinese are the few ones" (P2)

"I have many Malay friends. I love them. Last time…two of my friends are

my neighbour. We used to be closed. We have similarities with the Malay

culture because of the religion" (P9)

4.2.3 Textural Theme 2: Encountering Differences between Self and the Other

This second core theme captures what transpires in participants' experience as they

carried self as ethnic beings and interact with the Other. The data analysis indicates

the participants' experience encountering the behaviors of the Other that they found

as "different" from what they usually experience within their own ethnic group. Four

structural themes emerged that illuminate how participants experienced differences

in the aspects of ethnic norms, ethnic values, nonverbal cues, and language barrier.

The following Figure 4.3 illustrates these sub-themes and the sources that they are

coded from.
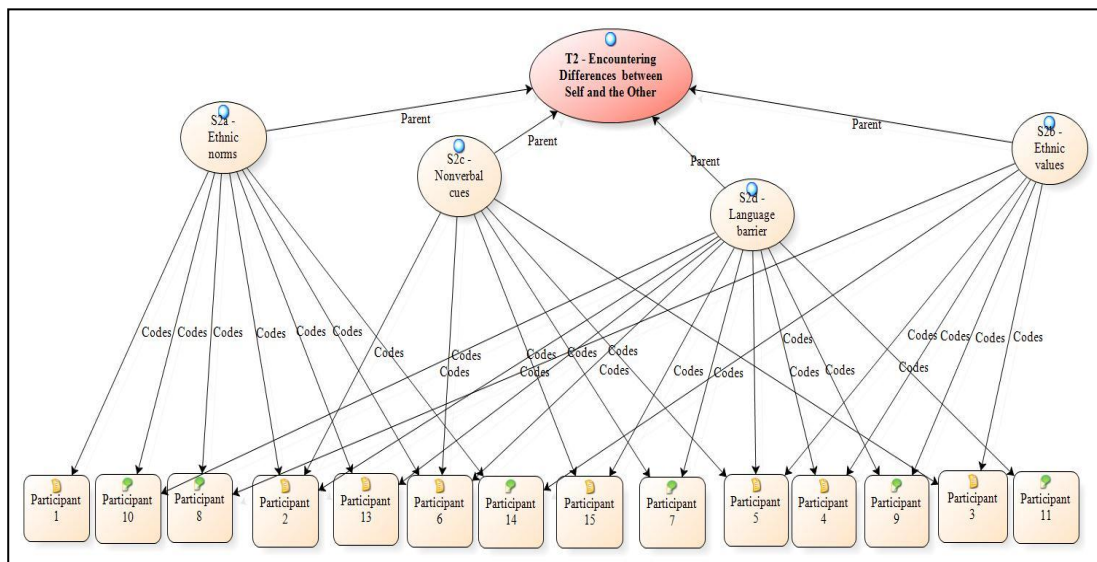
Figure 4.3. Intercultural Experience - Encountering Differences between Self and the
Other

4.2.3.1 Structural Theme 2a: Ethnic Norms

Participants described differences they found in terms of what is considered as the ethnic norm of the Other in which they considered as "something we don't do." For example, Participant 10 described his experience being surprised when he was asked about his family by the Malay Malaysians during the first meeting. Such a conversational topic is considered as personal and it is not normally discussed in his ethnic group. He shared his experience:

P10 : For example my experience from Kuala Lumpur to this campus, it's like that with everybody. It was a night journey… I stopped at two points and a person asked…where do you come from? Nigeria.. oo Nigeria. This is your first time? Where are you studying? If you stay longer…the next question you'll get is "are you married?" ah…What's happening here… (laughter).

R : Who asked you?

P10 : Local people.

R : Is it Malay?

P10 : Yes Malay. The Malay person…yesterday came the technician to repair in my room. He asked...you have your family? You come with your wife? …what's happening here… he was curious to know…that will be my experience.

R : Why are you surprised when they asked "are you married?"

P10 : Ok…from cultural perspective there are certain things we don't normally discuss when we meet first time. We don't normally ask

questions we consider personal. The Malays are open person. Open in the sense something we consider personal they consider as not personal. That's the difference. You know like I will not go all out. I do respect. I've had my friends saying in class…you discuss your wife. It's not bad. It's just not something we do.

Participant 13 shared how she felt "a little bit strange" when the Arabs called her "sister." Nonetheless, as she shared how such feeling came into existence, she associated her experience with cultural differences:

"I felt strange when someone called me "sister" because I don't think we know each other very much. Arabs used it more. I use "sister" for my siblings and very close friends but it is ok for me. I respect culture and religion. I know they meant well. Just felt a little bit strange. Might be too fast to get that "close"? Then I thought it might be because of the language…like we call friends or even strangers dude, mate, bro in English. We also have similar informal addresses in China or we might have different understanding of "sister." Actually, it is also common for Christians to call each other like this." (P13)

Participant 6 observed that it was normal to see males and females engaged in a friendly conversation with one another in the campus. However, in his Arab culture, casual conversations between males and females are strongly prohibited. Talking to a female (with no kinship ties) is allowed only if there is a need such as asking for direction:

"In Palestine, Yemen or most of Arab countries, we never talk to women like here. For example in the university we have parts for girls and men. They can

172

talk. I'm in my country… I want to ask direction, I can do it by asking women. It's okay but every time talk, every time follow that girl… that makes trouble." (P6)

Participant 11 also experienced similar ethnic norm about casual conversations between different genders among the Arabs. He noted he had very little chance to talk to any Arab females and interact mostly with their husbands and male relatives. Thus, his interactions with the Arabs tend to involve more males rather than females. Participant 11 added that he can speak Arab as his third language and most often mixed around with the Arabs in the campus. He found the use of certain words by the Arabs may be viewed as "rude" when it is translated to his Malay language. He shared his experience in the following excerpt:

> P11   :   In terms of talking… for example in the Malay language, we used polite words and we felt okay. In the standard Arab language, we want to say "you go" means *izhab* but the Arabs use this one word. For us (Malays) it seems rude which is *rukh*. This word means "get lost!" That's the difference.

> R   : So that word doesn't give any problem to them?

> P11   : No problem… because that's their manners but for us, we might feel shocked. I've heard a child called his father *kalb*. *Kalb* in the Malay language is "dog" … I don't think any Malays would accept that.

> R   : So the father had no problem with it?

P11 : He had no problem at all…I was shocked too…his father was okay.

That's why I said the Arabs are rough in talking.

R   : When you compared them to the Malays?

P11 : Yes.

4.2.3.2 Structural Theme 2b: Ethnic Values

Participants described their experience encountering differences pertaining to what is considered important in their own culture vis-à-vis the culture of the Other. As participants engaged in cultural comparisons, they noted their ethnic values influence the way they perceived the nature of relationships. For example, Participant 6 explained that the Arabs value strong bonding between friends. Within such value orientation, he claimed that the Arabs show "more caring" for friends such as by frequent calling and visiting. He shared his experience in the following excerpt:

P6   : I have an Indonesian friend. He's also doing PhD. He talked with me in a very good way but not like Arabs. Arabs will ask about me. For example you are my friend. I didn't see you for three days or five days. I have to send message and call you. How are you? I didn't see you? For Malays they don't. They're not asking about me but for our Arab culture we have to talk to ask why. For example my friend if he didn't see me for two days not coming to mosque, he thinks I get sick and visits me.

R   : Maybe in Arab culture is different? People always come to you?

P6   : Yea visit… asking about you…most of the time.

174

Participant 9 likewise noticed that "a friend" for the Arabs means someone whom he can easily get closer and it is something he could not do with the Other:

"Maybe the meaning of friend is different. I feel like that. I have friends…they are easy to be close, easy to ask for help. It's like strong relationship. He's your friend, help him. In comparing with other cultures, you're friend just say hi... *Salam aleykum* (Peace be upon you)...no more than that. Some of them help but not that much." (P9)

Because of the different values, Participant 9 further noted that it was hard to build close relationships with the Other as he said:

"They are not trying to ask…do you need help. They don't have the sense they are with you. They feel with you. They would protect do anything for you. I have friends from Europe…it's hard to deal with them it's really hard. It's not easy." (P9)

Additionally, Participant 3 noted differences in how his Arab and Malay friends viewed the nature of relationship. He explained:

"The main thing for us is visiting. Visiting friends…visit family. *Silaturahim.* Arab people are together because they visit each other. Relationship for us is very strong. For Malaysians, it is difficult to communicate even if I have friend. After we finished semester, they just say hi. I invited them to my house one time … two time, after that, they are gone." (P3)

Other participants described their comparison of ethnic values in other aspects. For example, Participant 14 shared her experience mingling with friends of Makassar ethnicity in the university and she was surprised by their generosity:

"Now I'm like mingle in this area (her residential college)...there are many people from Makassar. They are like my family now and Makassar people they talk with their own language. Maybe they are more comfortable in that way and they use their language…they are also hardworking people... they are very… oh my gosh… they are like super generous...even my roommate bought 25 kg souvenirs for all her relatives at home. So that one big suitcase just for her children, for her niece, for her cousin, for her neighbors. She brings all for them (laughter). So I mean I don't know. I just met once and then they admit that people from Makassar they are really kind to their beloved ones. So it's normal for them because for me I mean since before... I haven't had any friends from Makassar since my degree before. No one brings one big suitcase just for relatives… so for me it's quite new kind of experience." (P14)

Participant 5 compared the Malay Malaysians and Chinese Malaysians of the value placed on thriftiness. He shared his experience:

"There's one day I car pool a Chinese friend. He asked for twenty ringgit and the other friend who joined us also had to pay twenty ringgit. Another friend paid ten ringgit. So he collected fifty ringgit. It was not a far travel…we wanted to get to Kangar... with fifty ringgit...he gets a full tank of gas…so calculative…money is everything. I think for Malays...when it comes to money we are not so

176

calculative...oh well... if it's only ten to twenty ringgit…there's no need to fight over it. I just gave but I will not car pool him again." (P5)

His experience having a Chinese Malaysian roommate had re-affirmed his perception on such thriftiness as he described:

> "The Chinese are also stingy among themselves. I don't know… so far I've met maybe they are business minded… Fong (a pseudonym of his Chinese roommate) like me for one thing... I am not stingy...if there's food I just give... Just take it… drink...take as much as you want…he said…I'm not stingy and I don't want to be stingy with you... look at my friend...this Chinese... I took him from Alor star with gas and toll… he gave me ten ringgit only. Actually I see my roommate as calculative also… So for Chinese, money is everything. My conclusion since I make friends with Fong is that money is a big problem to Chinese." (P5)

Participant 8 compared her Malay Malaysian and Chinese Malaysian friends in terms of how both ethnic groups value hard work. She noted many of her Chinese friends work hard more than the Malays when it comes to studying. She shared her prior experience studying in a Chinese primary school which re-affirmed such perception:

> "One thing I learned is that until now…when I was in Chinese school, it was so different with Malay schools…I can feel it myself...in terms of academic or friends, relationship with teachers, environment… I don't mean to favor the Chinese… I learn the culture...the Chinese are very hardworking… I agreed on that hundred percent." (P5)

4.2.3.3 Structural Theme 2c: Nonverbal Cues

Nonverbal cues illuminate participants' experience of interaction that moves beyond the use of words. Participants described that they experienced dissimilarities in how the Other exhibited nonverbal behaviors. Categories of nonverbal cues that emerged from the data analysis include physical contact, eye contact, and head touching.

One participant (Participant 6) explained differences on how physical contact is practiced among the Arabs and how the Other may misinterpret such behavior. He described that hugging between men and "the kiss for men" (cheek-to-cheek kiss) especially in public spaces is normal. It does not symbolize being gay which may be viewed by other cultural standpoints:

> "Hug… this culture also. I heard that in Malaysia there is understanding. In my culture for example if you had an accident…the people come to you and kiss you. This is normal. Some people here misunderstood that but for us the kiss for men is okay. Some of them hug. It's ok. It's not like gay or lesbian. For example, when someone loses his brother I hug him…encourage him."(P6)

While Participant 6 gave a general description of physical contact within the Arab culture, Participant 11 who has many Arab friends shared his experience of such behavior. He noted that it depends upon situations and the relationship distance between people:

> "For Arab culture when they meet, they will shake hands or hug for those who have known each other for quite some time. I used to bring an Arab to touring in Langkawi and he came for the second time to Malaysia. So for the

second meeting I hug him. It depends also on situation. So there are lots of touching, handshakes, and hugging but for me I use lots of handshakes rather than hugging since hugging is only for those who are really close." (P11)

Participant 11 also compared the practice of physical contact between the Malay Malaysians and Arabs. He explained that the Malay Malaysians tend to use more handshakes than hugging between males. If the person is older, younger people would normally kiss the person's hand even though they may not know that older person very much:

R   : In terms of physical contact like touch with the Arabs, how do you feel?

P11   : Touching is dangerous (laughter). Touching among males is okay. I feel okay. Arabs like to hug and cheek-to-cheek kiss.

R   : So you did the same thing to them?

P11   : Not really, depends upon what I told you just now. If we are close, we hug.

R   : Then did you behave in a similar way with your Malay friends?

P11   : Malays…no. Malays I tend to hand shake… depends anyway. If the person is older, then I would kiss that person's hand. That's the difference.

R   : So if the Arab is an old person, did you kiss his hand?

P11   : No. I just shake hands and if I know that person and I haven't met him for a long time I will shake hands and hug.

R   : Yeah…for Malays when meeting an older person even though we

179

don't really know. Well, we will kiss the hand.

P11   : Yes right.

Participant 14 described an incident with Arab friends. She expressed her uncomfortable feelings with their eye contact in which she perceived it as "staring" as well as the loud voice they used when talking to her:

P14   : From the Arabic guys... if I go to class...they see me like their eyes for me it's kind of staring. I mean it's kind of my psychology is in the soft way... I don't like that…and then they asked for my Facebook and get angry…like not angry... it's like "why why you don't want"(with a loud voice).

R   : So you think that would affect your interaction?

P14   : I mean I'll avoid if they talk to me but if I know them before then I will just speak as long as not much talk.

Participant 7 noticed how her Arab friends used intense eye contact. She feld uncomfortable with "the way they look at her":

P7   : Sometimes I feel scared the way they look.

R   : How did you feel about that? What makes you scared?

P7   : Err…The way they look.

R   : Do you also look directly into their eyes?

P7   : Sometimes I look, sometimes I don't look. I looked at the book and talked. Not only me. A few friends also feel uncomfortable the way they look. Why are they looking like that?

180

While the aforementioned participants tend to perceive nonverbal cues exhibited by their interlocutors, Participant 6 was conscious on the use of high pitch when talking in his own Arab culture and how such behavior may be perceived by the Other. He explained why "raising voice" is considered normal among the Arabs:

"It's normal for us to raise our voice because I think...like ... in Hadith.. Saidatina Aisyah…she said Umar bin Khattab…when he talked he made people hear him. When you talk, talk strongly. I think it's normal for us. Some people think we have trouble when talking like this. Also, I make fighting with my friend…after one hour never become enemy. In Malaysia, if you make trouble you make enemy forever (laughter). We cannot keep fighting forever." (P6)

In the same vein, Participant 3 was aware how the Malays (and Malaysians in general) perceived the high pitch and the animated gestures among the Arabs. He shared his experience in the following transcript:

P3 : For Malaysians, they see us fighting when the Arabs talk. When we talk we start moving our hands. They see us fighting.

R : How did you know that Malaysians see you as fighting?

P3 : Because I have a book about Malaysian culture when I was working in Kuala Lumpur International Airports. So they told us, for example if you talk, we start to move our hands. This is that you're fighting.

R : How do you know Malaysians don't use loud voice?

P3 : Someone told me as well. When I'm speaking to Malay, I have to be

181

careful not to speak very loudly.

Interestingly, Participant 3 also compared the use of voice between his Arab and Nigerian friends:

P3 : Hmm…they (Nigerians) are tough but they are acting like us, normal for them.

R : When you say tough, what do you mean?

P3 : They are speaking louder than us (laughter). Sometimes when you are speaking to them, they may leave you and go. It is normal for them.

R : Like in the middle of conversation?

P3 : Yeah...ok...ok... and go.

R : So what do you think about that?

P3 : First time...I was surprised totally…but after that I asked one of them…he was staying in Saudi Arabia in Islamic university in Medina. He said this is for some people normal.

In regard to head touching, one participant (Participant 6) was aware of the rules pertaining to head touching by the Malay Malaysians and compared such rules with his own Arab culture. He explained that it is acceptable for the Arabs to touch the head but it is otherwise for the Malay Malaysians:

"If there are mistakes for example… for Malay people... touching the head for boy is normal for us. I think it's not good for Malays, right? Or touch the hair because someone told me it is not good to touch the head. Boy's head. If you want to play, we touch the head. It is okay for us...accepted. Even now in

this age...if someone comes to touch my hair… It's okay." (P6)

Participant 5 reflected an incident where an Arab friend patted his head and how he felt about such behavior that is considered as "rude" in his Malay Malaysian culture. He shared his experience in the following interview transcript:

P5   : That day…an Arab pats my head... *geramnya* (a feeling of anger that was suppressed or concealed). I know he was joking and I love joking too. He does not know…he came and pat my head... Ishhh *geramnya…* I knew he meant joking but I was like… I feel like I'm getting close to get mad (laughter).

R   : Did you say anything?

P5   : I just kept quiet. There's no need to get angry. It's his culture but I can't follow that...he's a Libyan.

4.2.3.4 Structural Theme 2d: Language Barrier

Language barrier is notably a problem that participants encountered as they reflected their interaction with the Other. Data analysis showed that participants' experience of language barrier ranged from the experience of grappling with dialects of a language to the experience of using English as a lingua franca in their interaction. Participant 4 who is a Chinese Malaysian noted that language is not much of an issue in his interaction with the Malay Malaysians given that Malay is the official language among Malaysians. Even when he was able to speak the Malay language, the language as it is spoken by his Malay Malaysian friends include local dialects which present some difficulties for him to understand. Accordingly, he felt the

problem to understand dialects led him to experience some barriers and difficulties to mix with the Malay Malaysians. Moreover, he noted that although Chinese Malaysians are able to use the Malay language, as this language is used by his Malay Malaysian friends, it contains some Malay cultural expressions or what he called as "the deep word" which may not be intelligible for the Chinese Malaysians. As such, it takes time for him to grasp its meaning when it is spoken by the Malay Malaysians. He shared his experience in the following conversation:

> P4:   I found that sometimes although I can speak a standard Malay but sometimes their dialects like Kelantan and Terengganu… I don't really understand what they're actually saying. There's the one barrier. There's difficulty when you want to mix. Of course when you stay in your own ethnic culture it will be easier because we use Mandarin. We get used of it more. So it'll be easier as compared to other races. When we use the national language… sometimes the Chinese…what they learn in *Bahasa* (Malay language) also they cannot get hundred percent. Sometimes Malays have the deep word we cannot get. So I think this is one of the barriers why sometimes Chinese and Malay cannot mix together. Sometimes maybe Chinese could not get what the Malays are trying to tell (laughter) like in instructions were not clear. When I was in Master's degree...I face that also… I need time.

> R   : What were the problems?

> P4 : Sometimes the words and dialects. I have to ask…it takes time.

Participant 14 described a different insight pertaining to the language barrier. Being an ethnic individual who came from Indonesia, she explained that the Indonesian and Malay language are relatively similar which made it easier for her to interact. Despite such commonality, she noted the existence of similar words in both languages that may carry different connotations. Such cultural differences in the meanings of words present some problems in her interactions. In addition to differences in the standard language, Participant 14 had difficulties to understand her Malay Malaysian friends' local dialects. She shared her experience in the following excerpt:

R : When you speak with your Malay friends, do you speak in Malay?

P14 : In Malay.

R : You have no problem understanding Malay language?

P14 : Before this I have problem because I communicate mostly with my Indonesian friends but since I come here… I can understand (standard Malaysian language) but I cannot get when start speaking Kedah dialect (the local dialect). I can't get it.

R : When you communicate in Malay language, do you use Malay or Indonesian language?

P14 : Sometimes I talk Indonesian sometimes in Malay. In Malay it's just like everyday conversation...the problem is some of the words are the same with Indonesian but have different meanings. For example if I say *saya ingat kamu sudah makan*. In Indonesia it's like "I remember you took lunch already" but in Malay it's like "I think" right? It's like ah...I don't know what that is… and what else

yeah…some of the words... yeah some of them with *saya ingat* (I think)

R : Why were you surprised when they say *saya ingat* (I think)?

P14 : Before I don't know I forget what was the situation…and then my roommate… she told me "no…*saya ingat* means *saya fikir* not like s*aya ingat* as in Indonesia" (*saya ingat* means I think not like I remember as in Indonesian language) oh.. I see...I just know *rasuah*...corruption... in Indonesia it has no meaning.

Participant 11 learned the Arabic language (which he considered as a third language) since school and preferred to use the language when interacting with his Arab friends. Despite learning the standard Arab language, he found out that many of his Arab friends used dialects in their interactions that caused some problems for him to understand their speech. Nonetheless, it does not inhibit his interaction given his friends could switch from the dialect into the standard Arabic language.

"I didn't encounter many problems when interacting with them...it's just problem in terms of... the Arabs have their own dialects…sometimes I didn't understand when they used *amiyah* language (dialects). I learned about dialects in Arab language as well. Many Arabs speaks Arab *amiyyah*. So that's the difference. For example in Malay language, if I speak in the northern dialect it will sound like *hangpa nak pi mana* (where are you going). If in the standard Malay language you have to say *kamu hendak kemana* (where are you going). If people don't understand, they don't. So I asked them to speak *fushah* Arab (standard Arab language) and said… I didn't

understand you speak *amiyah* Arab language. Then he speaks the standard Arab language or the *fushah.* " (P11)

Other participants talked about limitations in interaction to which the ability to use a common language that enables interaction to take place was not available for both interlocutors. For example, one participant (Participant 2) explained since he is a non-local student in the campus, the only second language that he could use as a lingua franca in the campus is English. However, he noted that not all his local friends can speak English. Since he could not speak other languages, he felt that it was a constraining factor for him to interact:

"The main problem with some ethnic groups I came across was especially when it comes to communication. There's a communication barrier. Yeah…so some of not them they are not very good at relating with another person because you as a person you have communication barrier. From my experience, there is one Malay girl talking to me saying that my problem is that I can only speak English, why can't I speak *Bahasa* (Malay language)." (P2)

Participant 7 noted that many of her co-local friends were reluctant to interact with non-local students because they use more Malay than English in daily interactions. Such limited use of English creates a gap that inhibits interactions especially between local and non-local students. She described her experience in the following excerpt:

P7   : Most Malaysians are afraid to talk with non-local students but they are

friendly, once we make friends with them then only we know their characters. Different people have different characters. Most of them are friendly. Same like us.

R : I see. Why do you think most Malaysian students were afraid?

P7 : Maybe because language problem. Because we as Malaysians we use more *Bahasa Malaysia* (Malaysian language) than *Bahasa Inggeris* (English). Maybe there's the gap.

Participant 15 acknowledged that it was a challenge for her to speak in English. She noted that she struggled to express thoughts through the language which caused her to take long pauses and had inadvertently affected the smoothness of interaction. Participant 12 was concerned about her own English language ability due to less practice that makes it difficult for her to interact. She expressed such thoughts in the following interview transcript:

P12 : Sometimes I feel… because if you communicate with international students, they will prefer English. We will also use English to communicate with Malay friends. Sometimes when communicate using English language, it is difficult.

R : Is it because of fewer practices?

P12 : Yes because less practice. If we make it a practice… it becomes normal.

It is interesting that even when the ability to use English is available for the participants, they experienced difficulties to understand their interlocutors' accents or the way English words were pronounced. For example, the following participants

noted differences in pronunciation that presented challenges in interaction:

> "What we have also learned here...I'm facing the fact that Nigerians speak big grammar... apart from accent problem...with pronouns... English words not the same way. The Malaysian person pronounce this way." (P10)

> "I try to explain by different words. There are also other words. For example "disclosure"...arises to something. I used this in my thesis. My friends didn't understand me…the accent." (P3)

4.2.4 Finding Two: Conception of Intercultural Competence

The second aim of this study is to examine participants' perspective of intercultural competence in the light of their intercultural experience. Since participants have shared their intercultural experience, I asked how such experience prompts their understanding of intercultural competence. Nvivo 10 analysis has generated three core themes that constitute intercultural competence which are (i) cultural understanding, (ii) respect, and (iii) language ability as demonstrated in Figure 4.4 below. Each core theme is explained by the structural themes that enlighten how participants' thoughts and feelings about intercultural competence are invoked in their consciousness.
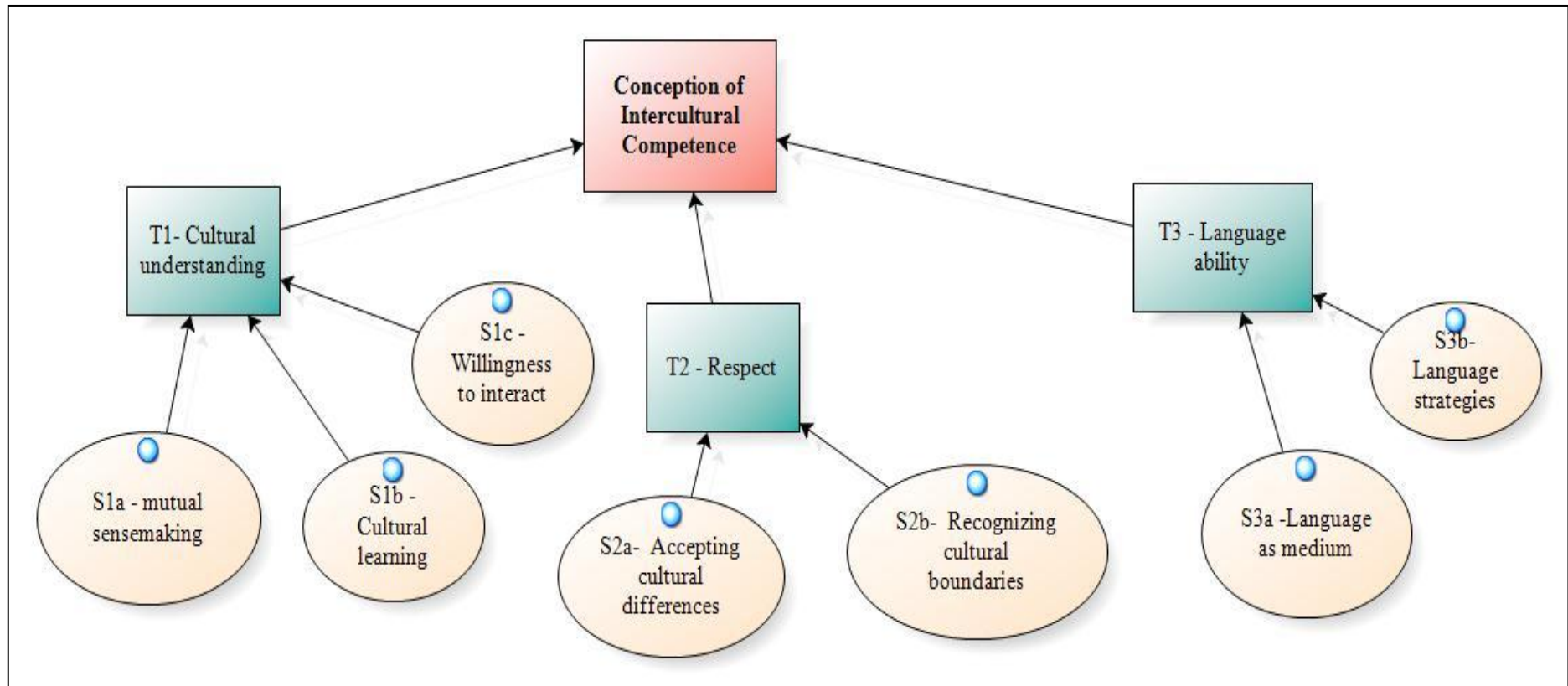
Figure 4.4. Core themes and Sub-themes of Intercultural Competence Conception- In-depth Interviews

4.2.5 Textural Theme 1: Cultural Understanding

Intercultural experience gave participants a lot of insights about how their standpoints on what is "right" or "true" in life is likely to be different from the Other. Thus, participants felt that understanding their own cultural beliefs, values, and views about the world vis-à-vis that of the Other is an important condition for competent communication. Three structural themes surfaced that describe participants' thoughts about cultural understanding: (i) mutual sensemaking (ii) cultural learning, and (iii) willingness to interact. These sub-themes and the sources from which they are coded are represented in the following Figure 4.5.
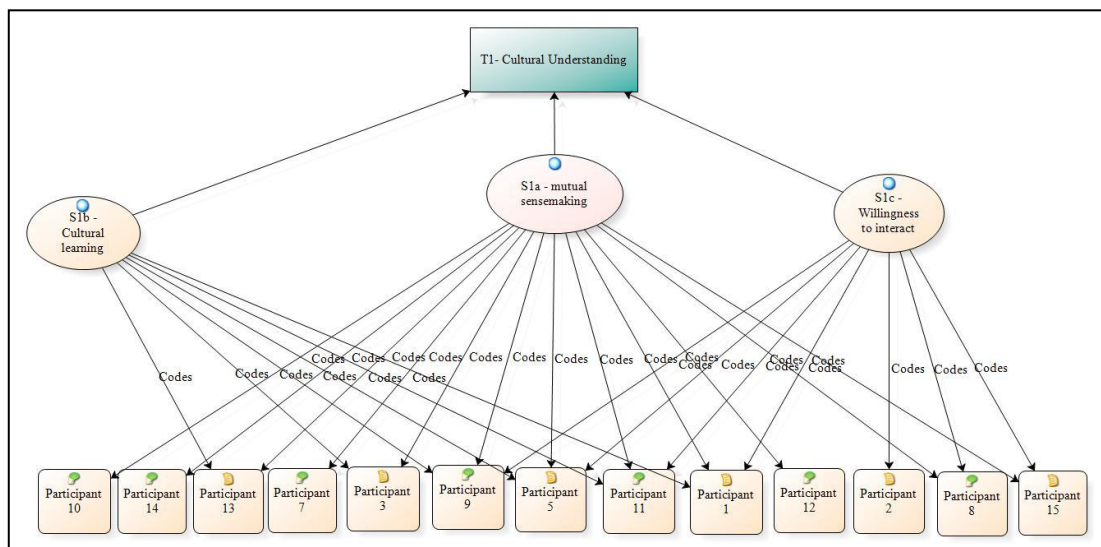
Figure 4.5. Conception of Intercultural Competence – Cultural Understanding

4.2.5.1 Structural Theme 1a: Mutual Sensemaking

The presence of the Other heightens participants' awareness of how the "unwritten script" of "right" and "wrong" that tells what behaviors are usually expected within their own group is much likely to be different. It was through the ongoing process of

observing how the Other behave and how participants behave in relation to the Other that move participants to make sense of the expected script of behaviors that are manifested in various ways. Accordingly, participants felt that it is important to avoid using their own cultural standpoints as the benchmark for interpreting the behaviors of the Other. This process of sensemaking essentially contributes to cultural understanding. For example, Participant 10 noted differences between how people in his own culture (the Yorubas in Nigeria) and the Malays usually speak that gives him some understanding about what is expected when it comes to using voice tone. He shared his experience:

> "When I call...we speak louder. I know when a Malay person is calling…Hello (using low voice tone). If a Malay person shouts…we ask what happens. The person must understand those dimensions before you can say you are culturally competent. The approved and expected behavior is what makes you competent in that culture. The level to which you conform with the approved used coded of interaction and the way you are expected to use those code."(P10)

Participants pointed out that making sense of cultural differences is not instantaneous. Rather, it is a process that necessitates participants to "take time" to see "how culture works." One participant (Participant 4) expressed:

> "When I start my master... We have only two Chinese. We actually work together with the Malays and Indians and so on. At first...we have to really understand the culture first and the way of working to mould the thing together. So it takes time." (P4)

Given that it was through the presence of the Other that participants made sense about culturally expected behaviors of their own culture, sensemaking is perceived by participants as a mutual process that necessitates both ethnic individuals to know in what ways each other's culture differs in prescribing expected behaviors. Without this condition, participants pointed out that competent communication is unlikely to occur. For example, Participant 1 expressed her view:

> "If we are not able to have mutual understanding so we are not competent. So the point is mutual understanding… meaning with interactions of different cultures within this community...if we have mutual understanding of tradition and culture...ours are like this...theirs are like that we understand and do not force others to follow us…that's a competent community…good community". (P1)

By the same token, Participant 4 expressed:

> "I feel that understanding between us. University is the place for all races to mix...I felt that to understand more culture. It's not just understanding from one side. It's a two way. Maybe university should emphasize on that. So it helps communication. Once you have a good communication and understanding... then lots of problem can be settled." (P4)

Participant 13 echoed that mutual understanding is the "basis for harmonious society." It begins with making sense of how different cultures view the world that helps to understand her own as well as the behaviors of the Other :

"Although we have differences, we do things differently but we can understand each other. It's the basis for harmonious society. It's about trying to understand differences. Get meaning of talking is only the first step to understand other people. The next step should be figuring out why they say or behave like that. From such cultural understanding, one is able to be considerate. He or she is able to think from other people's cultural standpoint and provide convenient ways to communicate with them." (P13)

4.2.5.2 Structural Theme 1b: Cultural Learning

Participants described that their experience provides important lessons that enables them to gain cultural understanding. The process of learning religious beliefs and cultural norms of the Other provides valuable cultural information for the participants to move from ignorance to awareness of cultural differences. For example, Participant 1 expressed that her intercultural experience serves as a learning process of cultural differences that moves her to be aware of her own cultural rules that may not be accepted by the Other. Participant 5 added that learning cultural differences necessitates people to know cultural rules:

"We can learn about our differences…what is considered sensitive to other race. We know for example the Chinese…what is their sensitivity…what they don't like such as white *angpau* for Chinese New Year. They don't really like to wear black clothes even though I like them."(P5)

Participant 12 shared her experience learning the cultural norms of her Nigerian and Arab friends which is in contrast to what she usually experienced as an Indian

Malaysian:

> "If we go for lunch or gathering…in Malaysia we pay individually...that day...one Nigerian friend said "why you didn't pay everybody." He said "our culture… the one who is calling us to gather will pay". They see weird…"oh you all didn't pay for me" he asked. Sometimes we simply call right…come *lah* join to eat... if we ask the Nigerian or Arab…that means we have to pay for them because we are the one calling them to eat"(P12)

Participant 4 (who is a Buddhist Chinese Malaysian) learned about Islam from his Malay roommate which led him to have an informed understanding of the religion:

> "With my roommate… he has to pray five times...I also will remind him. I actually remind him sometimes...when we were staying in one room...there's a lot to share. A lot of people they don't like. I can learn a lot…because I feel that Islam covers the whole life. Why it is like this…I learn. For me…one thing…you learn other people's culture. Now I actually can tell people what is Islam and who Muhammad is. I get this information from my roommate. I have a clear picture rather than being easily influenced by other materials that are not really reliable." (P4)

Interestingly, participants noted that sometimes they may not be fully aware of what is culturally acceptable until they inadvertently engaged in behaviors that may cause the Other to feel offended. Such experience serves as another avenue for participants to learn what is not acceptable for the Other to which it should be avoided in future interactions. For example, Participant 11 recalled an incident where he "accidentally

asked" a question that is "normal" in his culture which is viewed otherwise by his Arab friend:

> "I have an Arab friend…one day I accidentally asked how is your mother. He responded for Arabs, asking about mother is rude for them. It is something that should not be asked." (P11)

Participant 3 pointed out an interesting point of view with regards to cultural misunderstandings in which he referred to as "mistakes that happen by accident." He remarked that in order to gain cultural understanding, both ethnic individuals need to accept the mistakes and learn each other's cultural expectations. Such reciprocal learning helps him to improve interactions. He shared his experience and thought about cultural learning:

> "Understand each other and excuse us for mistakes because mistakes happen by accident. So you have to excuse each other especially we are from different cultures. That Nigerian guy... when I'm talking to him... He left me... okay... I see you later... I told him that this is not good for me. This is not good for my culture. So just please don't do this again or if you know something wrong with me just tell me… to avoid any problem in the future. . I tell them as well if I say something not acceptable within your culture you have to tell me as well." (P3)

Participant 5 admitted that because people may not be fully aware of cultural differences, it is important to provide some information on "what is okay and not okay" across different cultures:

"Like giving a clock as a present for Chinese people… I don't know that. I think there's no need for Chinese to take it personally when people do something that offend them. Sometimes others just don't know and we need to tell them. Don't do this because of this… we need interaction between races... I don't know how. Maybe in the classroom or having a program... knowing what is considered as acceptable for the Malays. What is not okay for the Chinese… so we can avoid misunderstanding between races... if we don't like something…we tell them. If we pray...tell them not to make noise…then they won't make noise "(P5)

Interestingly, Participant 7 mentioned that learning other cultures made her want to adopt some aspects of other cultures that she found beneficial into her life. This participant gave an example of drinking alcohol and gambling that are strictly prohibited in Islam which she learned from her Malay Malaysian friends. She viewed such religious rules as something good to be adopted:

P7 : For example like Malay people… they said drinking alcohol is *haram* (prohibited). So for me it's not wrong to follow that. For me drinking doesn't give you any benefit. Why don't we just follow this rule? Even though it's not *haram* for my culture but there's nothing wrong to follow this rule. If good thing we have to follow. That's my opinion.

R : What are other good things you learn about other cultures?

P7 : *Judi* (gambling)...is not good. For me... the money from gambling is not good. For me I don't like people gambling and I don't want that

money because some of my friends did gambling. They have money.

They said come I *belanja* (treat) you. I said I don't want.

R : In Indian culture it's okay to gamble?

P7 : Yeah.

R : What makes you think gambling is not good?

P7 : I feel like it's not your money. It's somebody's money. We get it just

like that.

4.2.5.3 Structural theme 1c: Willingness to interact

Participants expressed that in order to acquire cultural understanding, interaction is necessary. This view led participants to reflect on the importance of having the willingness to interact that enables them to gain cultural understanding. Willingness to interact seems to manifest in participants' readiness to seek interactions with the Other. For example, Participant 4 asserted he has all the willingness to interact as it gives him the opportunity to know more about the Other:

"The willingness for me to interact is hundred percent and I'm ready. In fact I started to get to know other races since secondary school. For me it's interesting to get to know other people. That's why I always ask my roommate to tell me more on Islam. So I feel that knowing is good. It's knowledge." (P4)

Participant 11 described his willingness to interact by taking the initiative to interact with the Other. This participant further explained how he initiated interaction by learning the languages of the Other:

"I'd ask few Chinese words that I don't know. So when I asked questions about their culture, about them...they became interested in. So it's from there I had interaction with the Chinese. It is the same with Indians. I used to work at one Indian restaurant so I learned few Tamil words. Then I stopped working there and continued my study in this university. When I met Indian friends... I asked them few Tamil words. When I started using their Tamil words, they became interested in. Once they are interested in, they started knowing me and our friendship began." (P11)

Despite the desire to interact, participants noted a real challenge that they experienced with regard to people's predispositions toward those coming from different cultural backgrounds. Such challenge includes how people give feedback that may influence participants' feelings on reaching out to other cultures. Accordingly, showing willingness to interact was not easy because it is also dependent upon people's readiness to interact. For example, Participant 4 commented:

"I'm very willing to mix with them, start to talk with them and show I'm sincere. Sometimes you will not get hundred percent what you expect. Sometimes you will still feel…the failure is still there…people do not respond as what you expect. I feel that to overcome it first of all you must take the step to accept other people then only people will start to accept you. This one also has to judge whether they are willing or not. So the willingness is the question." (P4)

In regard to people's predispositions, Participant 7 claimed that she has an interest to interact with the Other. She observed that some of her Indian Malaysian friends tend to cling to their own ethnic group because "they are not used to differences". She shared her thoughts in the following conversation:

P7 : Some of the Indian friends they don't like to mix with other cultures. I can see that.

R : So do you find your Indian friends are not like you?

P7 : Yeah, most of them are not like me. I can see the difference. They prefer to be with Indians. If Indians they prefer with Indians. They don't like to mix with other cultures. Most of the time, they are not that friendly. Like with me they are friendly. I can see the differences in the way they talk like between us. They are very good. When we see between other cultures we can see the difference. The way they talk.

R : What do you think comes into their mind?

P7 : Maybe because cultural differences. They can feel culture is different so they are not willing to mix. Maybe because of culture I think.

R : Maybe because they are afraid of certain things?

P7 : Afraid… I don't think so. Maybe they are not used to differences.

Participant 2 acknowledged that people may have a certain predisposition stemming from their own personal experience that may influence their willingness to interact. Thus, he suggested that it is important to expect and understand people's predispositions:

"Already people have a kind of predisposition or something like that. When I came into my class... I was not only a foreigner. Maybe they have some stories and even some experience as regard to contact with people from my race. So they have a kind of predisposition. Definitely you should expect this …this will guide their relationship with you at the beginning but with time maybe when they put aside their prior knowledge…then the real interaction begins." (P2).

4.2.6 Textural Theme 2: Respect

The second component that constitutes intercultural competence from the participants' standpoint is respect. The structural themes that describe the idea of respect include: (i) accepting cultural differences and (ii) recognizing cultural boundaries. Figure 4.6 illustrates these structural themes and the sources from which they are coded, and the section that follows illuminates the details of each sub-theme.
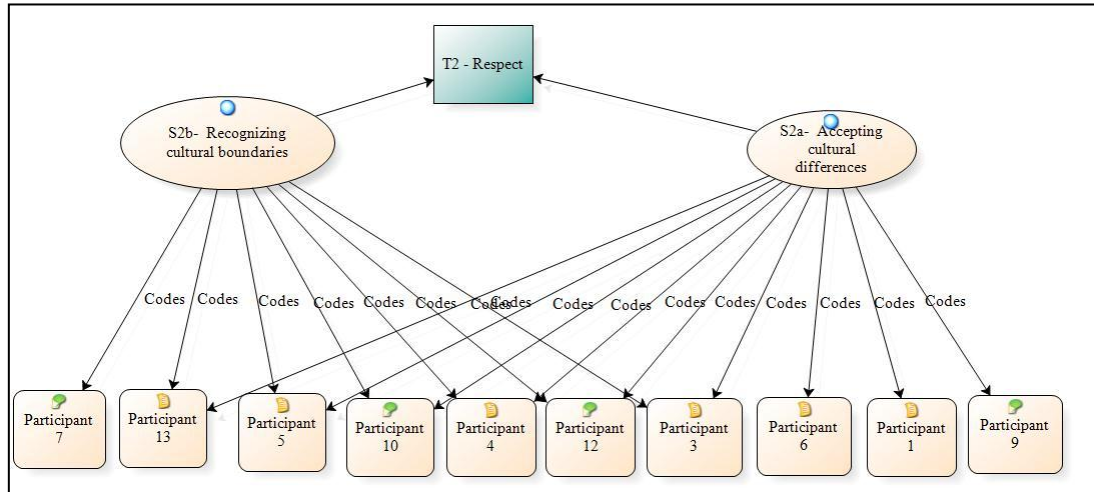
Figure 4.6. Conception of Intercultural Competence- Respect

4.2.6.1 Structural theme 2a: Accepting cultural differences

Accepting cultural differences refers to the idea of acknowledging the Other for "what they are." Participants expressed that when people accept differences, they are able to suspend judgment on other cultures. For example, Participant 3 recalled an incident where his Malay friends used a hand gesture to which he interpreted as "rude" within his Arab culture. Since he was able to eventually accept cultural differences, he managed to avoid from thinking the behaviors of the Other as "bad" because "it is their culture." The following conversation illuminates his experience:

P3　: When we are talking and they (Malay friends) give us (showing palm facing outward). This one is not good for us. This means STOP. When someone is speaking to you… It's not ok.

R　: Is this something rude in your culture?

P3　: Yeah. That's okay in their culture. I was disappointed once I come here but after we ask, it's ok.

R : Did you get angry when the Malays do that to you?

P3 : No. When I first encountered that I was angry. It's culture, so respect. No one can get angry. During my experience in Malaysia, I try to accept everything. So I don't think they are bad or something like that because it's their culture.

Participant 2 expressed that when a person looks at other cultures as inferior, this will inevitably lead the person to hardly accept cultural differences. As such, it is important to be "free" or opening oneself to cultural differences. He noted that accepting cultural differences helps him to interact with the Other:

"I enjoy meeting people. Whenever I see people, I want people to feel free because I always feel free with anyone. Anywhere I go I feel very free. That's why within one semester I know many Malays... but to my surprise many of them became my friends. Many of them invited me to their houses... some in Alor Star, in Terengganu, in Kelantan because I'm so open." (P2)

Since intercultural experience taught participants about how ignorance of cultural differences may lead people to feel uncomfortable, they felt it is important to pay attention on producing positive feelings in interaction. For example, Participant 13 noted that sometimes she may not be conscious of cultural differences that may cause offensive feelings. As such, she was careful in her interaction by attempting to ask the "do's and don'ts" of other cultures that would help her to modify her behavior. The concern for creating positive feelings may manifest in small ways such as when she knows that her Malay Malaysian friends are fasting to fulfil their religious obligation, she avoided drinking in front of them. Participant 5 described

his view of accepting cultural differences as "taking care of sensitivity" by evading any offensive remarks that will harbour ill-feelings:

> "In terms of interaction… we have to take care of sensitivity... don't find problem with it. If they are different... for example praying...don't disturb... don't say "you Chinese don't pray five times a day"… don't say that. It's their religion. We just do our way." (P5)

Participant 4 provided an example of being "alert" for the feelings of his Malay friends pertaining to their religious expressions such as saying *Assalamualaikum* (Peace be upon you) or *InsyaAllah* (By God willing). He remarked that such religious norms should not be taken as a joke which might cause the Malays to feel offended:

> "I have a Malay friend. He actually tells me that non-Muslim cannot use *InsyaAllah* … or *Assalamualaikum*. He said that if you all say… he as a Muslim cannot respond. I cannot understand why. That's why I put this as sensitive. I worried that I might disturb the Malay friends. I do not use that as a joke. According to him it's not good for us to use that. I remember. This is sensitive. Once people tell you it's like an alert."(P4)

Participant 10 noted sometimes the Other may not be aware about his cultural practices. He expressed that it is important to consider such possibility and to find ways to deal with cultural differences in a tactful manner. This is important so as not to "disgrace" the Other. Claiming that Islamic values are closely knitted with him being a Yoruba, he shared how he confronted differences in terms of religious values:

204

"Islam does not expect a Muslim to shake hand with the opposite sex. Now when living in a multicultural environment… actually in a multi-religious environment where they don't have such values… it becomes difficult to go against the norm. I have one particular female friend but we still maintain our friendship. So what I do is to apply the principle of necessity in Islam. If the person is greeted for the first time and she's not aware on my position… I take her hand and find the way to explain to her. It's just a matter of courtesy. Next time I'll not do it. My value does not allow me to shake hands with the opposite sex. Next time if we do it again, if I didn't respond you know that you cause it. So that's mechanism for coping with different situations."(P10)

4.2.6.2 Structural Theme 2b: Recognizing Cultural Boundaries

The notion of cultural boundary resembles the "sacred territory" that refers to certain cultural aspects or values that participants choose to maintain in their interaction with the Other. Participants expressed that cultural boundaries need to be acknowledged which nessitates both ethnic individuals to inform each other's sacred territory in interaction. It is within this consciousness that participants viewed respect as a mutual process that necessitates both communication partners to recognize each others' cultural boundaries. Without mutual respect, participants felt it is almost impossible for two individuals of different ethnic backgrounds to co-exist and live together.

Interestingly, one aspect of cultural boundaries that was given most attention by participants pertains to differences in religious beliefs. For example, Participant 4 shared an aspect of religious belief which was related to rules in food consumption.

He noted it is important to be sensitive to his Malay Malaysian friends' obligatory religious demand to consume *halal* food. Recognizing this cultural boundary that he should not undermine, he showed respect by getting *halal* food for his Malay roommate. The following statement illuminates his experience of this boundary:

"Because Islam is religion…we are talking about *halal* food. If we said we want to make it same identity…it's quite difficult because Muslim cannot eat the Chinese food although the Chinese and Indian can eat Muslim's food. That's why when I buy things for my Malay friends I always look for *halal* one. One of thing is that there is barrier for Muslim. It's very tough for them to come to us. It's just that I cannot share Chinese food... that's sad case because sometimes when my roommate's mother cooks he could share with me… actually for me it's quite nice but it's unfortunate I cannot share mine. I checked with him if let say this food is *halal* but it's cooked in Chinese way. The answer I get he's actually very unconfident. He said maybe okay...not confident. So that's why I dare not try to cook… this is the barrier... one thing I can only share is the *limau lah* (mandarin orange). Even I dare not buy the biscuit but now in market there are *halal* ones. Maybe in future I'd like to buy some for him." (P4)

Participant 4 expressed that since he recognized his Malay Malaysian friends' religious belief; he expected mutual respect in that his friends should also know his religious belief:

"For me… I don't eat beef...I don't eat because my religion. Actually some Buddhists eat. It's just that my belief. I don't eat. So sometimes another

friend he eats… he's a Chinese. Sometimes Malay friends don't know which one is which one. How come this person can and another person can't? For me I always mention to my roommate I don't eat. I respect that you don't eat non-*halal* food. I expect that you also respect that I don't eat beef. It's fine if you eat beef in front of me as long as you don't force me to eat." (P4)

Given such expectations, Participant 4 pointed out the importance of mutual respect which makes it possible for individuals of different cultures to co-exist as he shared his experience:

"I have a lot of Malay friends… I have no problem. Even my roommate now is Malay, he prays five times a day in a room. There's no problem for me. I pray also in my room. Even sometimes we pray together. I pray mine he prays. So for me I feel that it depends on two people." (P4)

Participant 5 shared his experience of mutual respect between him as Malay Malaysian and his Chinese Malaysian roommate. He expressed that sharing a room does not make him feel uncomfortable as both sides were able to respect each other. He shared his experience in the following conversation:

P5   : When sharing a room with ethnic other… there's nothing to it. He prays…I pray as well. He prays in the morning around 8-9am. That's okay…just pray.

R   : Don't you feel comfortable praying?

P5   : No problem…If I pray and he wants to call his girlfriend, he would call her outside the room. If he had a laptop and wanted to listen to music, he put on his headphone. He knew he couldn't make noise.

Likewise, Participant 7 described her experience with Malay Malaysian friends that indicate mutual respect in performing their religious obligations:

> "I have to attend prayers in my house like *Thaipusam*. On that time they said they will have discussion. I want to go home because I have prayers. They said it is okay. We'll do it next time or maybe we'll do first and later we'll explain to you. Same thing goes to me because when they said it's time to *buka puasa* (Iftar). We don't have class now or sometimes *waktu subuh* (dawn prayer). Maybe I want to do gathering they said no cannot…we want to pray first then later on we do gathering. I said okay. They respect us then we have to respect them." (P7)

4.2.7 Textural Theme 3: Language Ability

This third theme encapsulates participants' consciousness on the crucial role of language in their interaction. This consciousness is derived from the participants' experience encountering challenges with language. Accordingly, participants felt the importance of having language ability that enables them to not only understand the exchanged messages, but also to relate well with the Other. Figure 4.7 illustrates two structural themes and the sources from which they are coded that describe participants' thoughts about language ability. These themes include: (i) language as the medium for interaction and (i) language strategies.
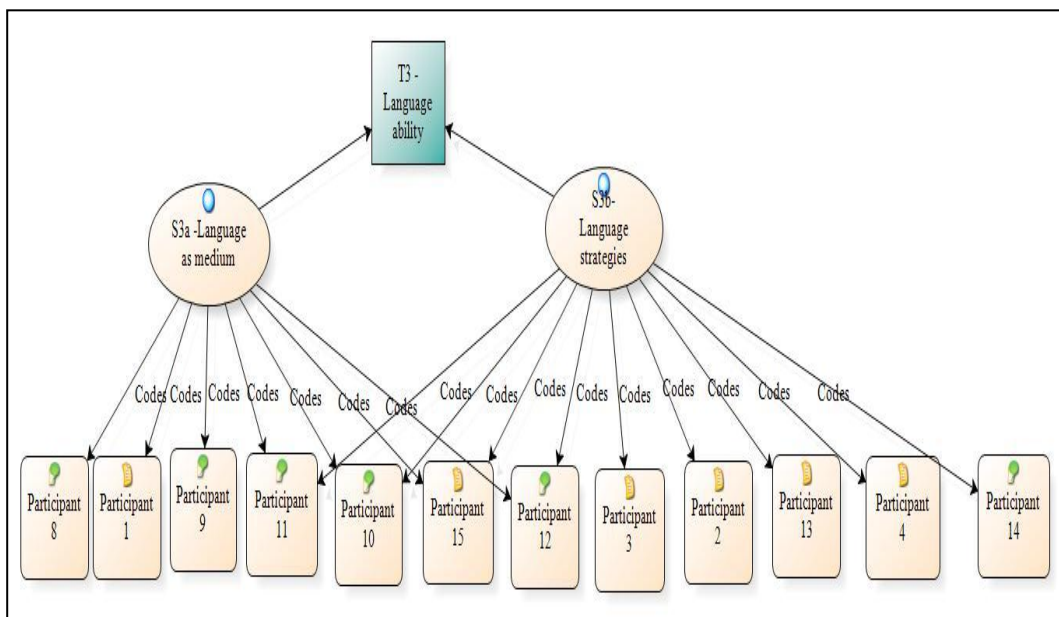
Figure 4.7. Conception of Intercultural Competence – Language Ability.

4.2.7.1 Structural Theme 3a: Language as the Medium for Interaction

This theme represents participants' awareness on the important role of language as the medium for interaction. Participants described that without language, it is hard for them to express thoughts and to establish meaningful interaction with the Other. Accordingly, participants felt that language is the key enabler for their interaction to take place. When participants acquire language ability that enables them to convey verbal messages, interactions are perceived as effective. For example, Participant 8 noted that language is an important tool because it helps her "to get the message across" to her interlocutor:

> "Language is the medium...if one uses language and the other draws
> pictures...It's hard to get the message across. Then communication is not
> precise...once you get wrong information... we can't achieve goal." (P8)

Participant 12 commented that it is hard to achive shared meanings if both ethnic individuals talk in different languages. Thus, she viewed competent communication as "good understanding of language". This view suggests the important role of language that permits both ethnic individuals to understand each other's speech. The following conversation reveals her perception:

P12 : Good communication means the good understanding language...we try to speak out the way everybody can understand...that is the most important thing we want to communicate.

R   : What makes you think language is an important thing?

P12 : Because sometimes we cannot understand if they talk in different language. If you want to talk that means everybody can understand your language.

Participant 11 commented that for both ethnic individuals to be able to relate well with one another, they have to develop their language ability to convey verbal messages. As such, he claimed that competent communication requires individuals to learn vocabulary and to construct sentences within a particular language that helps them to achieve effective interaction. Interestingly, this participant also viewed language as culture since he can gain insights about other cultures by learning their language. The following interview transcript elucidates his perspective:

P11   : Competent communication depends upon individual to the extent he or she learns language and memorizing words. Competence came from how we construct sentences and the level of vocabulary itself. So intercultural competence is about how we send

information to other people so that others understand what we want to convey. So it depends on language.

R : So you are saying language is important?

P11 : Yes… language is culture. If we want to know one's ethnic culture or race, we have to know their language first.

Interestingly, the sphere of interaction that mostly heightened participants' insights on the importance of language ability pertains to situations where neither communication partner was able to understand each other's native language. Within this particular context of interaction, participants noted that they had to rely on a lingua franca (mainly English) to communicate. For example, Participant 10 expressed the importance of English language ability since it is the medium he had to "rely on" when interacting in the campus:

"My own communication competence is basically to survive in English language. They don't understand my own language... I don't understand their own language …I don't understand Arabic. So I rely on English. I expect the person to be competent in English language." (P10)

Participant 7 had similar thoughts on the need for English language ability. Unless she know other languages, it is imperative "to be good in English" since it is the only language that enables her to interact. As such, she remarked that mastering English makes it easier for her to say "what actually she wants to say". The following interview transcript revealed her perception:

P7 : I think language. We have to be very good in English. I think if you

want to befriend with other cultures we must make sure our English is good because we cannot use other language to explain unless we know their language. So we must be very good in English.

R : What makes you think having good English is important?

P7 : We cannot use other language to say whatever we want to say. They won't understand if we didn't use English. So we have to master English so that we can say what actually we want to say. We can understand what others said. Only through English from my experience because English is the only language we can use anywhere. So we have to master English if we want to befriend with people from other cultures.

Despite the central concern on English language ability, a number of participants pointed an equal awareness of improving their ability in other languages. The salience of Malay language was raised especially within the context of interaction among ethnic Malaysians. For example, Participant 4 who is a Chinese Malaysian commented that having good Malay language is also important alongside the English language:

"Once you have a good communication and understanding…lots of problem can be settled. That's why to have a good language like *Bahasa* (Malay language) is also very important. At least the standard one you must have. This I feel on communication." (P4)

Since Malays generally do not speak the language of other ethnic groups in Malaysia (Mandarin or Tamil), Participant 11 reflected his experience encountering difficulties

to understand the "improper or colloquial Malay language" when interacting with the Other. He shared his experience in the following conversation:

> P11 : It depends on situations, if the Indian or Chinese talked in Malay language which is not good for me...I mean when I found it's hard to understand I'll speak in English. It depends on situations. If the Chinese speaks improper Malay language, I'll keep talking to him and try to correct his Malay words.

> R : Have you done so?

> P11 : Yes to my post graduate friends. Many wrong words being used. I'll correct them because many Chinese and Indian use colloquial Malay language and not the standard Malay language. So sometimes I can't understand what they tried to tell me but there are Indians and Chinese who know good Malay language and they had no problem. I'm referring this to a group of Chinese who are used to living in their own community and not mixing with the Malays. They may have difficulties to talk in good Malay language.

4.2.7.2 Structural theme 3b: Language strategies

This theme encapsulates participants' thoughts on the important role of language as the tool for them to move beyond cultural differences. Participants described what they can do to deal with cultural differences in the use of language and how the use of language enables them to connect with the Other. It was apparent that difficulties of language were mostly felt by the participants in situations where both ethnic

individuals had to rely on a second language (mainly English) as their lingua franca. Some of the difficulties they felt includes understanding each other's accents and expressing themselves. In this interactional realm, participants remarked that in order for both ethnic individuals to function, they need to devise effective ways that enable them to interact successfully. For example, Participant 8 noted that she had difficulty to understand the spoken language of the Other to which she referred mostly to her non-local friends. She noted that sometimes she experienced problems to decipher words that were uttered because of the different ways on how they are pronounced. One of the ways she used to work on such confusion was to ask her non-local friends to "write down what they meant". This particular strategy helped her to have an accurate comprehension of the exchanged verbal messages. She expressed:

> "For Malaysians, no problem...but I had problem with non-local friends... but they also had problem with us... they write what they meant... this is what I mean...ok I understand… so I did likewise…now I can understand when writing and giving notes to them."(P8)

By the same token, Participant 2 felt that sometimes he faced situations where the Other pronounced words that he could hardly decipher that influenced his understanding of the spoken language. Acknowledging this problem, he felt it is crucial to make sure that communication takes place. To achieve this goal, he made an effort to verify his understanding by writing out the words that he heard and asked for clarifications. As this participant reflected on his experience further, he remembered how using such a strategy had also enabled him to build confidence for the Other to talk:

214

"I remember there is one girl from my master's class. Her English was not good at all. She found it very difficult to speak English but at times she can write. If I text her and she writes… I can understand what she writes but with speaking… she couldn't do it. With time, when I understand her situation I encouraged her. Now she can even call. I build the confidence between us to talk." (P2)

Participant 15 noted that she had some difficulties to convey her thoughts through words especially within situations that necessitate her to use English. When facing such difficulties, she used gestures to convey her thoughts to complement her verbal points. Participant 10 remarked that competent communicators should not make themselves "handicap" by limiting the strategies that can be used to improve interaction. Accordingly, he suggested a strategy in which he called as "dual approach" that helps to reduce the problem of understanding different accents. Such a dual approach strategy was based on his idea of "complementing" interaction by using both verbal and nonverbal cues that helps him "to get meaning" in interaction :

"We communicate by symbol, we communicate by color, we communicate by sound, we do nonverbal, and we use writing. We use each of them appropriately to complement one another. If I find difficulties to interact I use dual approach. If I want to understand one thing I look... you understand in this language. If I have difficulties of English maybe because of accent… what I do is to look for example for you. So that if I say a word… I look for complement. If I say "comprehensive"…it's something whole…complete. You know…I expect people to interact. A communicator should not make

215

himself handicap. When I'm interacting with you...I rely on vocalized words and the total behaviors to get meaning. That's what I expect from other person. "(P10)

Apart from the strategies that help participants to gain effective understanding of what the Other said, language itself serves as a tool for participants to relate effectively with the Other. Participants remarked the importance of being able to be adaptive through language as another important strategy. For example, Participant 14 expressed the importance of being able to adapt to cultural differences. Being an ethnic individual from Indonesia, she developed social networks with her co-national ethnic groups in the campus. Although they speak the same Indonesian language, she noted variations of dialects within the language which signify sub-ethnic differences. As she reflected her experience spending time with these different groups in the campus, she learned how to adapt "by speaking like them":

"As long as you can adapt to the new one...I think it's no problem if you have friends with the same ethnicity but if you mingle with others… you will see the differences as long as you can adapt and see what's the different and that's all…ever since I spent most of time with Sumatera people I learn how to speak with people from different ethnic groups…when I mingle with Sumatran, I speak like them. If I speak with people from Javanese, I speak like them."(P14)

Participant 11 spoke Arabic when conversing with his Arab friends. He recalled a situation where he found his Arab friends used certain words in the Arabic language that he felt as "rude" from his Malay Malaysian cultural standpoint (when the words

are translated into his Malay language). He shared his experience in the following interview excerpt:

P11　　: If Arab used *rukh*… I used that word as well... which means "get lost!"

R　　　: Yes…that word is normally used when the Malays are angry…

P11　　: Sometimes not necessarily when you are angry…sometimes it is used when you are joking.

R　　　: Yes but it is still rude, right?

P11　　: Yes…for some people who don't understand, they felt they are rude. Like me, I'm used to it. I felt okay. When they are rough, I get rough too even though I'm a Malay. I practice *sopan santun* (politeness) language, soft when interacting... I adapt myself to them.

Participant 10 noted that some Malay Malaysians wanted to interact with him in the campus but since they had limited ability to use English and he did not "understand Malay language to complement", he felt this situation created a serious language gap. Thus, being a non-local student crossing his own national border to Malaysia, he expressed that it is important to adapt by learning some basic language of the host environment (Malay language) that helps interaction with his Malay Malaysian friends. In this regard, he attempted to learn some "basic interactional vocabularies" of the language. He shared his experience:

"Of course generally to interact very well in any community you have to know some basic language of that community. So that's why one has to learn the basic interactional vocabulary like greeting for different period…morning, afternoon, night and evening. You know and I'm still learning the new one until now I have to learn correct way of saying it...*selamat tengahari* (good afternoon)… *selamat petang* (good evening)."(P10)

4.2.8 Summary of Findings from the In-depth Interviews

The previous section has illuminated the core themes that elucidate the nature of intercultural experience for participants and how such experience prompts their understanding of intercultural competence.

The nature of intercultural experience begins with how participants identified selves as ethnic beings. Participants' way of being ethnic individuals is associated with their affiliation with an ethnic group. The consciousness of self as an ethnic being came into existence through the features that characterize ethnic groups and the extent that those features resemble participants' sense of belonging to an ethnic group. Ethnicity was perceived by participants as an important part of their beings because it influences their values and behaviors. Interestingly, the salience of ethnicity relates to other identities that include nationality and religion in participants' views of selves. Being an ethnic individual was also perceived in a dynamic sense as participants noted they live in a changing environment that has somewhat changed their sense of selves.

218

As participants established an understanding of selves as ethnic individuals and partook in interaction with the Other, intercultural experience is about encountering what is "normal" and what is "different" as participants interpret the behaviors of the Other against their own cultural standpoints. For example, conversational topic that includes marital status during the first meeting is considered "normal" for a Malay Malaysian but may be "surprising" for a Yoruba Nigerian participant. An Arab who pats his friend's head is a sign of "joking" but may be viewed as "rude" for a Malay Malaysian participant. Coming into contact with the Other also presents issues with language and cultural differences for participants that contribute to some constraints in their interaction. The issue of language was keenly felt within situations that necessitate participants to rely on a lingua franca. Such situations seemed to present more challenges for participants to interact.

Given participants' views of selves and how such views influence their interpretation of the Others' behaviours, these experiences prompted participants to offer their perspectives on intercultural competence. Three important elements of intercultural competence emerged which are cultural understanding, respect and language ability. Cultural understanding demands participants to make sense of how their own culture and the culture of the Other prescribe "acceptable" behaviors. This process was perceived by participants as mutual and without it; participants felt that intercultural competence does not take place. Cultural understanding also emanates from cultural learning that derives from lessons that participants learned from their intercultural experience. Such cultural learning moves participants from ignorance to awareness of cultural differences. Cultural learning also occurrs through participants' interests to gain information about other cultures and unintentional violation of cultural

expectations that made them learn what is not acceptable for other cultures. Willingness to interact is another condition that necessitates participants to have the desire to initate interaction with the Other. Without this condition, it is hard for participants to reach out to other cultures and to acquire cultural understanding.

Respect entails the idea of accepting cultural differences and recognizing boundaries of self and the Other. Accepting cultural differences necessitates participants acknowledge the rights of the Other to practice their cultural ways in their own terms. Recognizing cultural boundaries is related to the "sacred territory" that includes cultural aspects that are important to be maintained because it provides participants a strong sense of being ethnic individuals. One aspect of cultural boundaries that was given most attention by participants pertains to religious beliefs. It is in this realm that participants think of respect as a mutual process that necessitates both ethnic individuals to know each other's boundaries in their interaction.

Participants' experience with language barriers contributes to the emergence of language ability as an important element of intercultural competence. Accordingly, participants felt that language is the key enabler for them to interact effectively with the Other. It is also within this consciousness that participants felt the importance of improving their language ability, especially within intercultural situations that necessitate them to interact using a lingua franca (mainly English). Acknowledging that it is important for participants to be able to move beyond language-cultural differences, several strategies were used by participants to achieve successful interaction. The strategies include working through confusion of the spoken

language such as using the written form of language and complementing their verbal points with nonverbal cues that helps them to convey their communication messages more clearly. Participants also viewed language as a crucial tool for them to relate effectively with the Other. The following Table 4.1 summarizes the core themes that gave meaning to participants' intercultural experience and their construal of intercultural competence.

Table 4.1

General descriptions of intercultural experience and intercultural competence

Intercultural Experience	Intercultural Competence
Identifying oneself as an ethnic being	**Cultural Understanding**
Being an ethnic individual means to express the sense of belonging to an ethnic group, to view self as a changing entity and to determine the extent of ethnic salience to one's way of being.	The ability to engage in a mutual sense making of culturally accepted behaviors, to take intercultural experience as important lessons to learn about the Other and to be willing to initiate interaction with the Other.
Encountering differences between self and the Other	**Respect**
Confronting differences as an ethnic individual made comparison between his or her culture with that of the Other.	The ability to accept cultural ways as it is lived by the Other and to engage in a mutual recognition of cultural boundaries.

Differences were manifested in cultural norms, values, nonverbal cues, and language.	**Language ability** The ability to use language through strategies that help to reduce misunderstandings of the spoken language and to use language as a crucial tool to relate effectively with the Other.

4.3 Analysis of Focus Groups

The data analysis of the in-depth interviews shed the core themes of intercultural competence that are derived from participants' intercultural experience. Focus group was used as the secondary method of data collection. This method helps to ascertain whether the emergent core themes that have been identified in the in-depth interviews resonate with focus groups participants' lived experience of intercultural interaction. Focus group interviews were also useful to triangulate findings that emerged in the in-depth interviews. General descriptions (Table 4.1) that were developed from the findings of the in-depth interviews were presented to both focus groups. Subsequently, participants were given open ended questions for comments and discussions in the light of the findings. The following section illuminates the findings of focus groups through which it begins with an analysis of participants' intercultural experience.

4.3.1 Finding One: The Nature of Intercultural Experience

Thematic analysis of participants' discussion identified two core themes: (i) identifying oneself as an ethnic being and (ii) encountering differences between self and the Other. The former emanated from how participants came to identify selves as ethnic beings through ethnic affiliation and ethnic salience. The latter derives from participants' experience encountering differences in terms of nonverbal cues, language, and religion. The core themes that emerged from the focus groups were similar to those themes identified in the in-depth interviews. As such, the findings from both focus groups relate to the core themes that had been identified in the in-depth interviews. The analysis also showed that the sub-themes (or structural themes) appeared to be relatively similar, while *religion* was an additional feature. Figure 4.8 below illustrates the core themes and sub-themes that emerged from both focus group interviews.
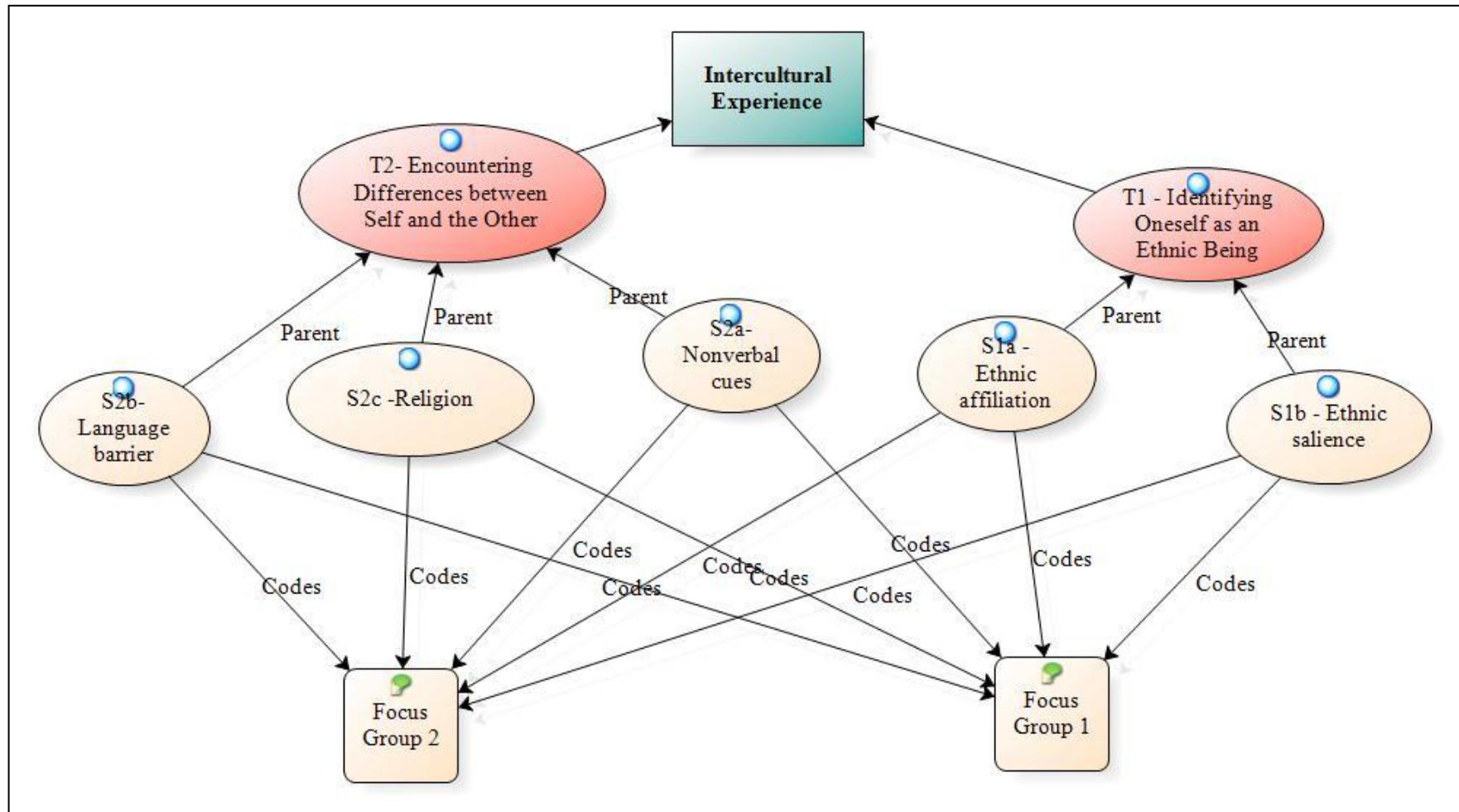
Figure 4.8. Core Themes and Sub-themes of Intercultural Experience - Focus Group Interviews

4.3.2 Textural Theme 1: Identifying Oneself as an Ethnic Being

I presented a description of the first core theme that was identified in the in-depth interviews to focus group participants and invited their comments on how they identified their own ethnicities. Participants' discussion of how they came to identify selves as ethnic beings can be explained through the following structural themes: (i) ethnic affiliation and (ii) ethnic salience.

4.3.2.1 Structural Theme 1a: Ethnic Affiliation

As participants in focus groups reflected how they came to see selves as ethnic beings, participants described that one's first language provides the most fundamental feature for ethnic identification. The participants noted that language can immediately inform one's ethnicity and the discussion revolved on how language plays a role in their ethnic identification. It is telling that participants discussed language in terms of different dialects that they speak at home, which in part, informs their ethnic identity. The following statements reveal participants' discussion on dialects:

> FG2-P2: For Chinese…we categorize ourselves in terms of dialects. For example, we have Hokkien, Hakka, and Teochew. There are different types of dialects, cultures, and celebrations. For example in Hokkien culture, the biggest day is to celebrate the ninth day of New Year because there is a special date for them. For me, I'm a Hokkien. We follow all Hokkien's culture. For example when we

get married… in terms of preparation and how we set up for the wedding. I mean celebration is different from others. When it comes to family… I'm a male and when I get married…my kids will follow my dialect and they don't follow the mother's side. My father is Hokkien…so definitely I'm a Hokkien. My mother is Teochew.We will learn the language of Teochew but we don't belong to the culture of Teochew.

FG2- P8: I'd like to add what he said about dialects. Even in northern and southern part of Malaysia, they speak different languages. Even the same dialect like Penang Hokkien. It is different from Johor Hokkien. It's a different type of Hokkien even if we compare it with China. The Hokkien resides in Fujian province where they originate. Although I'm a Hakka, I don't practice Hakka culture much. I don't really know Hakka actually. I speak a little bit of Hakka normally we speak Chinese. Our food is also different.

R   : So do you see yourself a Chinese more than a Hakka or Hokkien or vice versa?

FG2-P2: I think we consider Malaysian Chinese.

FG2-P8: Normally if we see another Chinese we will speak Chinese. After that we will ask where you come from and which dialects you practise at home. Normally we use dialect at home. When we go outside… we normally use Chinese. That is practised among

Chinese. If Penang Chinese when they go outside they will use Penang Hokkien but at home they will use Chinese or whatever they prefer.

FG2-P1: It becomes strange and complex. Outside you speak one language…inside the house you speak another language. You spend your life just for learning language. (laughter)

FG2-P7: Yeah… It's quite similar with Indians. We have different denominations as well … just like the Malays. They come from Kelantan and Terengganu. In India, there are different parts with different types of language. Those of different kind of Indians we also find in Malaysia but generally they will speak Tamil. It is only probably within their minority group or when they get back to the parents at home they will speak their own dialect. Well…you can actually identify them by their names. The Melialese they usually carry the name Rao. You can identify by names but now with Americanization, everybody has an English name.

In response to discussions about language that becomes an important ethnic identification by ethnic communities in Malaysia; one participant (FG2-P3) compared the Chinese in Indonesia with that of Malaysia:

"Also in my hometown there are Chinese but they cannot speak Chinese. They speak our hometown language. I asked them "can you speak Chinese?" they said no. They have to take course to learn Mandarin. In Indonesia…

people already assimilate. It's not like in Malaysia. Every Chinese can speak Chinese but in Indonesia… maybe one or two." (FG2-P3)

Participants further discussed that language alone does not necessarily determine one's ethnic identification as it intersects with other features such as religious beliefs, history, and culture. This was evident from the discussion of Focus Group 1:

FG1-P1: I think the basic feature of identifying an ethnic group is language. See African for example. We have about 52 countries within in Africa. You see a Somali…a Sudanese…they are black as I am. The physical feature is almost the same. How do you identify ethnic group they belong to? It's because of language. Even in Nigeria you can have someone … maybe in Changlun people speak in different language; here in Sintok people speak another different language. On the basis of that they identify themselves as belonging to different ethnic groups.

FG1-P4: For me it's not only language. I give you an example. The guy who's staying with me in the house right now…. I thought he's Arab because we speak the same language but he's not Arab. He is Berber from Algeria. Berber is not Arab. For example in Iraq… there is Kurdish and they speak Arabic. I consider them as Arabic because they speak Arabic but they are not Arab. Then I discovered Kurdish, they have their own ethnicity. I consider it's not only language. Language is very important but there are many aspects. Religion, history, culture..language. For example now we

have 22 Arab countries before we have three regions. The first region is Palestin, Lebanon, Jordan… Egypt one area. Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia in one area. Algeria, Morocco, Libya in one area. It's very easy to identify with each other because we have the same language…same culture, some religion, same history. For example Palestinians… we read Egypt, Arab and Saudi Arabia history when at school. So for me ethnicity is connected with history, language, culture, religion.

FG1-P1: To some extent I will agree. In Nigeria for example you see those guys from Nigeria speaking Hausa…please don't make the mistake they are all Hausa. They are just Hausa speaking people. In fact at times they say Hausa-Fulani. It's like Hispanic-America or Indian-American. That's why I agree it is much more language. Someone whose mother language is Hausa yet he says he's Fulani. He cannot speak any language other than Hausa yet he says he's Fulani. If you asked his ethnic group … he says Fulani but the language is Hausa.

A further discussion by participants revealed that the feature that is most important for ethnic identification varies depending upon how ethnicity is experienced in their own countries. For example, local participants in Focus Group 1 discussed that race is considered equal to ethnicity in the Malaysian context. However, this notion may not work in other countries. The following excerpt exemplifies participants' discussion on such consciousness:

FG1-P2: For me ethnic is race because ethnic we differentiate it with physical appearance…color...you are Malay, Chinese Indian. Sabahan Sarawakian.

FG1- P4: I agree with her. Only in Malaysian case. Yeah… I give you for example… Malaysian themselves cannot distinguish an Arab and an Iranian. Iranian has different ethnicity. They are Persian. For Malaysians…they see whoever looks like my face they will consider as Arab. They are not Arab. They are Iranian. We don't speak the same language. Even the religion and their habits are different from us. That's why Malaysians see those Iranian wearing scarf, she's Muslim, she' Arab (laughter)

Two participants (FG2-P6 and FG2-P1) explained that language was the most important ethnic identifier in their countries. They described:

"In Nigeria there are three major ethnic groups but we have dialects…we have about 250 languages. When you move to a particular place…we will be speaking another language. The language I speak is Yoruba but within Yoruba we have dialects. I'm from Barakuta and another person from Egypt. We speak different languages but we are still Yoruba. I can still pick a little word from the Egypt person.. So Nigeria is complicated but majority of the people understand "pidgin English" or working English. It's not like Malaysia. Majority people here cannot speak English. If I want to buy something…I need to pick this thing (a can) and tell what I want."(FG2-P6)

"In Iraq we have the Kurdish and Arabic. We have two languages… the Kurdish and Arabic. The Kurdish language and Arabic are two different languages. It looks like the Malaysians speak and the Arabs speak. For Kurdish…we can be found in Iran, Syria, Turkey Iraq, some parts in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. In Iraq, Kurdish people's number is about five millions. So the language is different hundred percent." (FG2-P1)

4.3.2.2 Structural Theme 1b: Ethnic Salience

Participants discussed whether ethnicity forms an important part of who they are and whether it matters in their interaction with the Other. In view of this, it is telling that participants expressed their consciousness of knowing an individual's personality that helps them to relate well with the Other. However, participants noted that it is hard to get through one's personality without overcoming cultural barriers. Accordingly, participants noted that ethnicity matters because it exerts influence on how they interact with the Other. The following excerpt illuminates participants' discussion:

> FG1- P4: I think when you share with someone such as same hobbies… same political views. It contributes to interact with other people in good way. This thing gives us the chance to know each other more. Maybe I know you for sports.

> FG1-P2: I have one example. I don't care if you are Chinese or Malay if we can talk and share the same interest…then it is okay for me. I have one example. I have one Chinese friend… although we are

Chinese… we speak Hokkien but when we went out for lunch... I'm a kind of very simple… today I treat you… tomorrow you treat me but that fellow didn't do that. When she orders something she orders only for herself…I don't like it.

FG1-P1: Actually everybody feels safe being in his or her culture because of similar orientation…you can easily predict. For example in campus… the campus gives us certain kind of orientation. If the person is from this university, I can predict how he behaves but beyond that…what is important is the personal behavior of that person. For example… the general perception of Arab is that they are highly temperamental… but the first time you meet an Arab person… he may not be temperamental. For me what is important is your behavior. For example, if a person breaks his promise with you... you get back to that person. For me… that's a universal behavior. There are certain universal behaviors from any human being.

FG1- P4: Sometimes the person's nature... I think there are lots of cultural barriers. You cannot know someone's nature until you overcome these barriers. When you overcome the language... cultural norms... then you can judge whether his nature if he doesn't talk too much. You cannot judge and go to advance stage until you have gone through the stages of overcoming cultural barriers.

The importance of ethnicity does not only include the extent to which it matters to self; participants also discussed their consciousness on the specific ethnicity of the Other. Discussion from both focus groups indicates that ethnic individuals who are non-local participants in the study were more conscious of ethnic differences among Malaysians. For example:

> FG1- P1: Before I come to Malaysia… I don't have that competency to easily identify a Chinese. They look the same but now I can identify them.

> FG1-P4: I agree with him. In the beginning when I came to this country… it's not easy to identify Indians, Chinese, or Malays... You know… the first *Hari Raya* I was here… I used to say to an Indian non-muslim *Selamat Hari Raya* (laughter). Then one of my friends scolds me and says "those are not Muslim… how come you say to him *Selamat Hari Raya."* Even I'm studying here for one year and a half for Master's degree… I don't think that one year half is enough to understand the culture here because Malaysia has three major ethnicities… Indian, Malay, Chinese. As students we come here to finish our study and go back. We don't have time to know culture but students who stay here for more than five years …they can speak little bit *Bahasa Melayu*. Maybe dialect a little bit. They know this person is Indian, Malay, or Muslim. For someone who just come here and spend one year… they don't have this opportunity. I know some of my friends who could finish master in

one year. They don't know anything about outside because they want to finish as soon as possible and they go back.

While FG1-P4 claimed that it may take more than one year for non-local students to identify different ethnic groups in Malaysia, one participant (FG2-P1) who has been studying in the university for about nine months was able to identify the multiethnic groups among Malaysians. He expressed his awareness:

> "I'm about nine months here. There's something I saw in Malaysia...the Indians gather in one group... also the Chinese and the Malay. I don't know why. I'm sorry to ask. I saw it. What's the difference? In my country… sometimes the Arabs marry Kurdish. Turkman marry Arabs. We don't think Arabic or Turkish. Here... I saw the Malays are in one group… the Indians are in another group … also the Chinese "(FG2-P1)

Ethnic individuals who are local participants, on the other hand, tend to identify those coming from other countries in terms of their nationalities. Accordingly, participants pointed that nationality needs to be considered alongside ethnicity because it is the general culture that binds different ethnic groups within a particular nation. This perception is revealed in the following excerpt of Focus Group 2:

> FG2-P1: One important point here... in my opinion...it's not important if I'm Kurdish or Arabic. I belong to Iraq....from the East or from the West… my country is Iraq...that is my nationality…so I mean it's not a problem to be Chinese, Malay, or Indian. The importance is Malaysia.

FG2-P6: In Nigeria we have different cultures with particular ethnic dialects. They have their own own food, dressing and wedding. Yeah...another one way to think is that we are still binded by a national culture. That's all.

4.3.3 Textural Theme 2: Encountering Differences between Self and the Other

As participants carried their own ethnic identification and interact with the Other, participants encountered behaviors which they found "different" from what they normally experienced when they socialized with members of their own ethnic group. This elicits cultural comparisons which can be described through participants' experience with regard to (i) nonverbal cues, (ii) language barrier, and (iii) religion.

4.3.3.1 Structural theme 2a: Nonverbal cues

Participants described how they interpreted nonverbal cues exhibited by the Other and how it is interpreted within their own culture. They discussed three types of nonverbal behaviors that include eye contact, voice, and smiling. In terms of eye contact, an Arab participant (FG1-P3) noted that using direct eye contact with the opposite gender is prohibited in his culture. He explained that this practice is due to the fact that most of Arab cultural practices are influenced by the Islamic religious values. In contrast, FG1-P1 described that using direct eye contact is valued in Yoruba's culture because of their view that "the conversation is in the eye contact." The following excerpt reveals participants' discussion on this difference:

FG1-P3: About the nonverbal, when they look at us when we are communicating…the nonverbal plays big role. We prefer the

person don't look someone else when communicating. When eyes go somewhere else and we feel uneasy to communicate. I went through this type of communication with foreigners.

FG1- P4: In our culture we are supposed not to look at eyes especially when we are talking to girls. We don't have to look at the eyes or the face also. We have to look down, look up or look somewhere else because our religion. The first look is *halal* (acceptable) and the second one is *haram* (prohibited) because the first one is to distinguish. Second one is not allowed to look.

FG1- P1: But to me in Nigeria...even in my culture... there's a proverb "the conversation is in the eye contact." You know when you look the other way and you are talking to the person it's like you are disinterested. Even between males and females except if you want to strictly observe Islamic requirement. If you are talking to me and suddenly you look up...it's interpreted to me you are no more interested in what I'm saying. That's the importance of eye contact. He's able to read your reaction better and be able to modify his own communication by looking for a sign whether what he said is acceptable to you or not.

Participants described their experience encountering dissimilarities in how voice is used in interaction. In this case, participants commented on the loud voice that they noted being used by Arabs and Nigerians in the campus. They were aware that this

behavior may be perceived by the Malay Malaysians as "shouting" or "fighting." The following excerpt illuminates participants' discussion:

> FG1-P1: Several times the principal of my residential college has complained to us. You know… when Malays are on a phone call... "Hello, how are you?" (speaking with a low tone). We hear nothing. Observe Nigerians when we have two or three Nigerians around… everybody will hear what we say. Others see us as almost fighting.

> FG1-P4 : Yeah…I think the Arabs speak loudly but Nigerians speak louder than Arabs.

> FG1-P1: The principal would come and say why are you fighting? We say "we are discussing… no problem."

> FG1-P4: Sometimes my neighbour…when I go out of my room to check what is going on because they are shouting very loudly.

> FG1-P1: With the Arabs they don't shout but if an Arab makes a call at night...you won't sleep. "What is this one? Don't you know we are in the middle of the night?"

Participants discussed how smiling is viewed in their own culture. One participant (FG1- P4) shared his experience noticing that it is normal for many Malays as well as other ethnic groups in Malaysia to smile at the opposite sex (or non-acquaintances) as it signifies a friendly gesture. However, in his own culture, similar behavior is interpreted as a sign of interest:

"When I came here… during my first year… people are always smiling. Even the girl can smile to you. In our country, girls can't smile to boys. She cannot even say *Assalamualaikum* (Peace be upon you). So here some Arab males when they come here and when a girl smiles, they will be very happy. This girl loves me (laughter) because she smiles at me. He doesn't understand the culture. Ok this is culture. It's normal for girls to smile at boys." (FG1-P2)

Similar viewpoints were expressed in Focus Group 2. During the discussion, non-local participants talked about smiling as they compared their own culture with that of ethnic Malaysians:

FG2-P1: It's not only girls. Sometimes men also smile. Everybody smiles but in our culture… people don't smile at strangers. Sometimes we only say *Assalamualaikum.*

FG2- P6: Yes about smiling (laughter). Malaysians…they smile a lot. We don't smile too much. We smile in Nigeria but here we consider they smile too much. In Nigeria when you smile the way Malaysians smile… we think you are making fun...maybe you are laughing at them or maybe you are thinking about a person you are smiling. Malaysians smile too much… at first I was surprised they were smiling but later I got used to it.

4.3.3.2 Structural Theme 2b: Language Barrier

The experience of language barrier was most often addressed by non-local participants in both focus groups. One aspect that contributes to such a barrier includes accented English. Participants noted that they had to take some time to apprehend the words being uttered by the Other. The following statements elucidate participants' experience of the language barrier:

> FG2- P6 : Language is a problem…when I talk to Malaysian friends they don't know how to express themselves. I talk, talk and talk…they don't understand…most of the time I just kept quiet. When I see Malaysians or Indonesians who can speak English well, I appreciate it. I'll tell them you speak good English.

> R : I think it's because of accent. How you pronounce words are different from how we pronounced.

> FG2-P6 : I think Malaysians… they drag word too much and too slow. Nigerians…. we want it to be fast...we want to say things quickly and go.

> FG2-P1 : Accent is difficult. Sometimes I have problem to understand the other side. For the language as you said… accent is very difficult. Maybe for the culture… we learn since we were child…we began to have accent. It's different. I can't understand others' accents...I need some few seconds to understand.

Although most participants noted having difficulties to understand the Other because of accented English, one participant (FG2-P4) viewed accented English as something normal since the language is not native to many students in the university. Despite discussion on language difficulties by other members in the focus group, she noted having no problem to understand accent:

"About accent sometimes I think... it's normal. We are not English native speakers. Malaysian friends are not native too. The problem about accent occurs… for me it's not a problem because we can understand each other." (FG2-P4)

An Indonesian participant (FG2-P2) noted some barriers even though the language of both Malaysia and Indonesia are relatively similar. She noted that there are similar words in both languages but they carry different connotations. Although she could switch language between Indonesian and English in her interactions, she preferred to use English to avoid miscommunication as she said:

"My experience in Malaysia...the language of Indonesia and Malaysia almost the same but there are some words that have different meanings in Malaysian language. That's why if I am not sure… I use English. I don't know the term in Malaysia. So I just speak English because there are some words that have bad meanings in Malaysia but good meaning in Indonesian language. Besides, it's better to use English to avoid miscommunication with other people." (FG2-P3)

4.3.3.3 Structural Theme 2c: Religion

Religion emerged as one structural theme that was not found in the in-depth interviews. It is telling that participants described what becomes pertinent in their interaction with the Other is sharing a common religion. Specifically, the Arab and Nigerian participants who are Muslims in Focus Group 1 commented that it was much easier for them to relate with those who share similar religious beliefs regardless of their specific ethnic backgrounds. Accordingly, the Arab and Nigerian participants described that it was easier to interact with the Malay Malaysians who are predominantly Muslims than Chinese Malaysians and Indian Malaysians who are largely non-Muslims. Participants further mentioned that sharing similar religious values is an important bonding aspect that provides them with some form of familiarity in their interaction. For example, one participant (FGI-P4) said:

> "As a Muslim, I am familiar with the Malay culture because we have the same religion but with other ethnicity...Indian and Chinese…I found major differences." (FG1-P4)

Participants viewed that religion is the key link that facilitates intercultural interaction. The following excerpt reveals participants' discussion on the commonality in religion that matters for them in their intercultural experience:

> FG1-P4: When you are sure about someone's religion…it's like easy to identify because we can understand each other. I know how he feels…I know what I feel but if i'm mixing with someone of not the same religion... I just say the standards... hi how are you…good evening we feel we are not bonded.

241

R   : Maybe you would like to expand more on that?

FG1-P4: For example if I find a Muslim friend regardless of his ethnicity, once I said "Peace upon you" then I feel comfortable. He will say "Peace upon you too". I'm sure he will not feel badly about me. I'm sure he will not hurt me… will not cheat me...because in Islam when we say peace upon you… you are safe. I will not hurt you. I will not do anything bad to you. This is how we interpret each other but when I meet someone who is not Muslim… I dont' know whether he is honest … he's not honest... I'm not sure whether he speaks the truth.

FG1-P1: The only problem is actually connected to religion… if I want to deliberately initiate discussions with a Malay person…all I need to do to pin him or her down is to say *Salam alaykum*...but a Chinese person…I don't know how to greet. I don't know whether saying hi is ok...I don't really know how to initiate interaction...I don't really know what is acceptable as a form of greeting...you know cultural differences.

Similar views were expressed by participants in Focus Group 2 who are non-Muslims on the idea of seeking commonality based on religious beliefs:

FG-P8 : I'm a Buddhist. When I was posted in Johor… I was alone. I need certain support and I'll pick religious support. My friends of the same religion bring me to temples. That helps me.

R   : Even though they are from different races?

FG-P8 : Yes

FG-P7 : That's the thing when I first came here. The first thing is we have church here...there's something to reach out to.

A further discussion led participants to conclude that having a similar religious belief offers more opportunities for them to interact with one another (such as meeting each other after Friday prayer at the Mosque). Such commonality aids them to develop relationships as described by FG1-P1:

"Already there are commonality that we can build friendship around whether we like it or not. We go to the mosque… we meet five times a day." (FG1-P1)

Since religion serves as an important link, participants felt that what becomes a barrier to develop relationship is having very few chances to meet with those who do not share similar religion. The following excerpt elucidates participants' discussion on such standpoint:

FG1-P1: I'd like to have more Chinese and Indian friends.I've not had…

FG1-P4: Same with me. I have few Chinese…non-muslim Indian friends.

FG1-P1: Like me and my Chinese friends… the first two months we didn't meet much because there are no forum....it's just like that. I think it's not because hard core barier... the forum for meeting a non-muslim is very few for me. Maybe that's the reason.

FG2-P4: For me I'd like to know the Indians and Chinese but I don't get the chance. For example I attended Chinese wedding ceremony to know the culture. I went to see Thaipusam and entered the temple. I saw how they pray but I didn't go deep.

4.3.4 Finding Two: Conception of Intercultural Competence

Participants were asked to provide their perspectives on what qualifies any given interaction to be perceived as competent in the light of their intercultural experience. Thematic analysis of participants' discussion revealed three core themes: (i) cultural understanding, (ii) respect, and (iii) language ability. These findings relate to those core themes that were identified in the in-depth interviews. The analysis also showed that the underlying conditions that account for the core themes appeared to be relatively similar, while *language learning* was an additional feature. Figure 4.9 illustrates the core themes and sub-themes for the conception of intercultural competence.
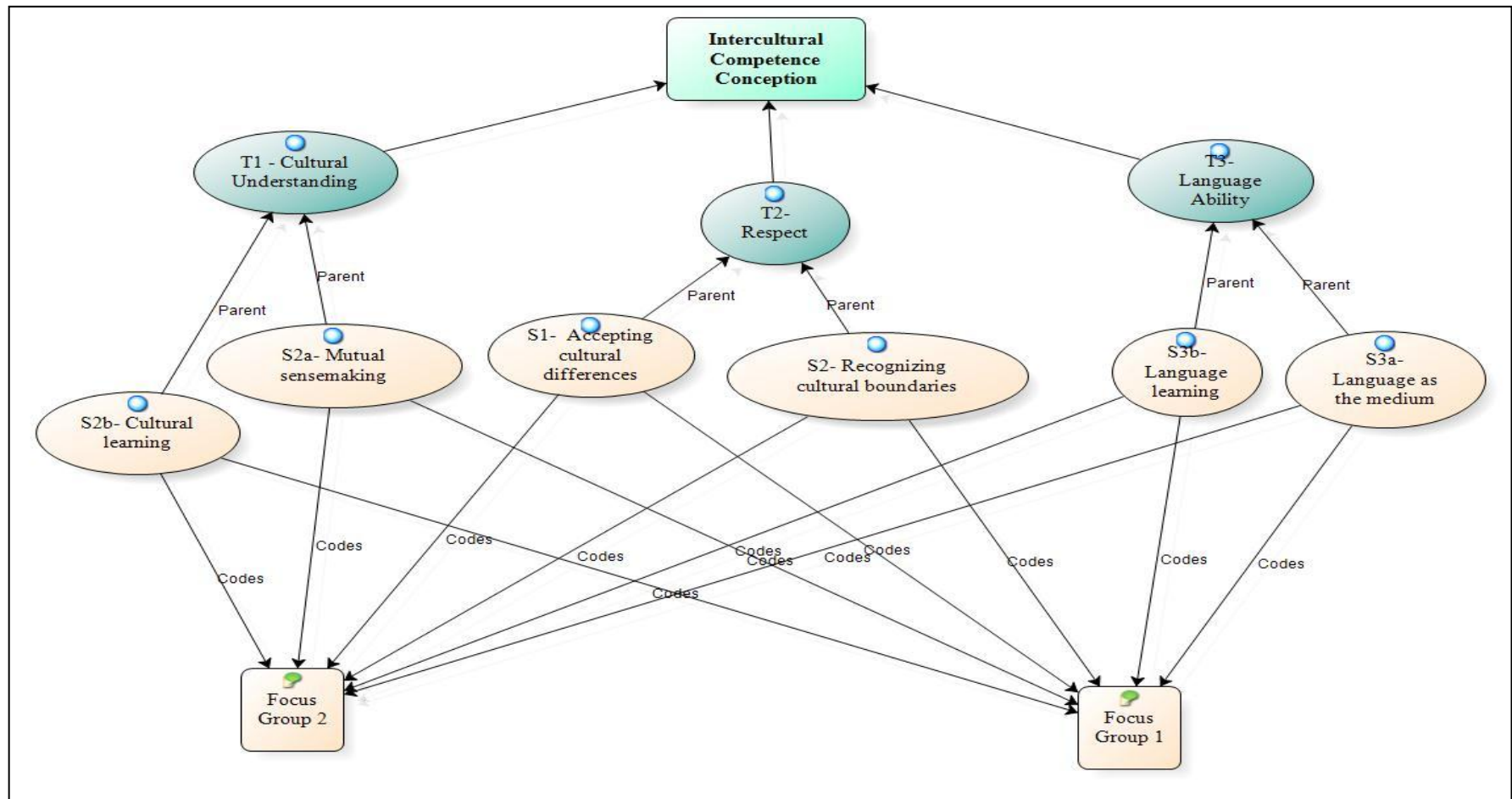
Figure 4.9. Core themes and Sub-themes of Intercultural Competence Conception- Focus Group Interview

4.3.5 Textural Theme 1: Cultural understanding

The first component that emerged from the data analysis was the element of cultural understanding. Participants noted that it was through their intercultural experience that participants learned how their beliefs on what is "true" or "right" in life are likely to be different from the Other. Such experience prompted participants in both focus groups to think about the importance of understanding their own culture vis-à-vis the Other for having competent communication. Two structural themes surfaced that describe cultural understanding: (i) mutual sensemaking and (ii) cultural learning

4.3.5.1 Structural Theme 1a: Mutual Sensemaking

It was through intercultural experience that participants began to make sense of how the Other live their culture that may diverge from participants own way of living. For example, FG2-P8 commented that through her socialization with Malay Malaysian friends, she learned how the Other may perceive the world in a way that contradicts with her own :

> "I have lots of Malay friends because of my course. I also knew friends from different cultures. The experience was very enriching because I gained insights from different races. Sometimes it contradicts mine but it makes me understand myself more actually. Why I think like that and why others think the other way around. It makes me understand them all." (FG2-P8)

Additionally, FG2-P8 associated her process of sensemaking with how much familiarity she had with other cultures. She expressed that when cultural familiarity with the Other seems to be lessening, she needed to take to time make sense of their differences. She shared her experience:

> FG2-P8: For me I can relate a bit more with Thai people and Indonesia maybe because we are close and I've travelled to those countries. I felt more familiar to these people but Arabs and Nigerians… I'm not familiar with them. So maybe I feel bit weird to understand their culture. It may take time for me to be friends with them.

> R : When you say you do not understand their culture, is it that you are not sure what to ask or how to start conversations?

> FG-P8 : Yes yes… what kind of conversation… what common things we share because we are not familiar with them.

Participants further discussed that making sense of cultural differences is a mutual process that needs both communication partners to know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in each other's culture. Interestingly, participants noted that mutual sensemaking is not instantaneous. Rather, it is something that progresses through the relationship that they develop with the Other. This perspective adds a deeper understanding on the perspective of mutual sensemaking that has not been identified in the in-depth interviews. The following statements show participants' discussion:

FG2- P1: It's important to understand culture. When you understand culture, you understand your friends. If I use something that my friends cannot accept… there could be communication problem. This comes not by one minute or two minutes. It's day by day or months. It depends on relationship of the two people. I agree with this. Culture is very important to make relationship continues.

R   : So it has to be both ways?

FG2-P1   : Yes

R   : Meaning that if I interact with you, I should know about Iraqian culture and you know Malaysian culture?

FG2- P1: For example my Chinese friend tells me about what is not acceptable. He is my friend… I accepted him as a friend. He's Chinese and I'm from Iraq. I must understand what he believes, what he knows, what he likes from the Chinese culture. It's very important.

4.3.5.2 Structural Theme 1b: Cultural Learning

It was through cultural learning that participants gained insights of what it is that they do not know about other cultures that move them into cultural understanding. This element is evident in several of the participants' remarks. For example, FG2-P7 shared how she learned other cultures through discussion of religion. Such discussion made her acknowledge in what ways religions differ that enabled her cultural understanding:

"In my degree…I met lots of friends for six years. We are like brothers and sisters. We were very close, we went out together, and we learn about others... the Chinese and the Malays… we had discussion about religion as well. So my friends were very open about it. We were able to share, understand, and agree to disagree. Definitely there are different views about things but we accepted that we are all differrent." (FG2-P7)

Another participant (FG2-P2) shared how he learned obligatory religious demands among Malay Malaysians such as in the aspect of consuming *halal* foods:

"I have lots of friends who are Malays and we go to lunch together during lunch time. So we're thinking about *halal* food at the same time. We ask Malay friends what *halal* means and we learn. We learn what is *halal*.. It's obviously about how you pay sympathy for something that you kill. It is called *halal*. So it means something special. I thought *halal* as you pay sympathy to the animal. Something we have to learn." (FG2-P2)

4.3.6 Textural Theme 2: Respect

The second component that emerged from the data analysis was the idea of respect. Both focus groups felt that respecting cultural differences is crucial when interacting with the Other. Participants' perspective of respect was similar to the findings of in-depth interviews. Respect is represented in the following two structural themes: (i) accepting cultural differences and (ii) recognizing cultural boundaries.

4.3.6.1 Structural Theme 2a: Accepting Cultural Differences

Participants described that respect takes into account "accepting a person's culture for what the culture is" which signifies recognition of a person's way of being as an ethnic individual. Accepting cultural differences makes it possible for two individuals from different cultures "to live in peace." For example, one participant (FG2-P6) said:

> "I think it's very important to respect other cultures. Just accept that person's culture for what his or her culture is. Accept me for I am. Accept me for what I believe. That's the only way we can live in peace. This is the way of life."
> (FG2-P6)

Participants remarked that acceptance of cultural differences needs to be co-created by both ethnic individuals. Accordingly, participants viewed respect as a mutual process. The nature of mutual respect represents the idea that if one expects the Other to accept his or her culture, one needs to initially display such acceptance for the Other. Likewise, if one feels his or her culture is accepted by the Other, this will increase one's desire to reciprocate such positive feeling. Mutual respect is something that participants expect when interacting with the Other and serves as a mandatory criterion for successful interaction. These perceptions are represented in the following statements:

> "I also expect other person to respect my culture. If I don't respect you and you don't respect me…there will be conflict and the conflict can lead to so many things. So I think respect is very important for all to live in peace."
> (FG2-P6)

"The thing that we always look for is mutual respect...your respect me, I respect you. I'm fine to you, you're fine to me. That's all. As long as we are human being…we have perception…we have to respect each other on the basis of humanity. I think the most important thing is respect." (FG1-P4)

Interestingly, FG1-P1 viewed mutual respect as "universal" because it is a characterstic shared by all human beings regardless of their cultural backgrounds. He forms his understanding based on the idea that if an individual wants to be treated by other people the way he or she expects, the individual must first treat other people in the same way. He commented:

"If you say it is mutual… I think in Christianity… in Islam…we call this as the golden rule … Do unto others what you want others do unto you… so that is the best line for mutual respect. Do you like to be shouted at, you don't like...so don't shout at other people. What you don't naturally like… don't do that. You maintain that. You don't want the other forms wrong impression about you. There are fine details about all these things. There are basics you can learn as the interaction progresses. You don't lie. There's no culture that say you must lie. So don't lie. Don't try to be agressive. For example if we are going out now and I hold the door open so the other person can also pass. Nobody orders that you must do that but at least you don't deliberately close the door. So those things they are universal. Once you maintain that I don't think there will be problem. That's my understanding." (FG1-P1)

4.3.6.2 Structural Theme 2b: Recognizing Cultural Boundaries

Participants discussed how lack of sensitivity to cultural differences is a sign of disrespect that may cause unpleasant feelings in interaction. Accordingly, participants remarked the need for informing their "boundaries" in the sense of telling "what they can do" and "what they can't do." By knowing cultural boundaries, it allows participants to think how best to respect each other. This may include willingness to modify behaviors as an indication of respect. It is telling that participants felt recognition of cultural boundaries is important to avoid negative feelings in interaction. Such experience came out clearly in Focus Group 1. For example, one participant (FG1-P3) described her experience of how the Other elicit "inappropriate" topic of conversation or a joke through her cultural standpoint. Her experience served as a starting point for other participants to discuss their thoughts about recognizing cultural boundaries. Consider the following discussion:

> FG1-P3: I think Participant 2 has also experienced with me when we are communicating with people from African country. I think they are not respecting us when they are communicating…sometimes they don't understand our feelings when communicating. So when they communicate…we feel uneasy with them. For example, there is a guy in Africa and we are in class. Suddenly he mentioned the person's name and said "If can… I want to marry you"… He said it very openly. We don't like even if it's a joke… we don't prefer. We don't know if he's serious. We don't prefer that kind of word from him because we are communicating in term of friendship in the class.

When he says like that it feels embarrassing…you know.

FG1-P4: I think the most important thing is respect. Whenever you communicate with someone… you have to take consideration that you will be polite… respect and care about his feeling. For example when I talk to you… I look at your eyes. It's just because I want you to understand I pay attention and I listen to you even though from my religion point of view I must put my eyes down.

FG1-P1: Because this person is different religiously, all I need to do is to identify those boundaries of differences and respect. That's what I look for and I demand the same thing from the other person. If as a Muslim you want to interact…for example I don't shake hands with the opposite sex. All I need to do is tell that person...ok because I'm a Muslim...I can't do that. I don't see that as a problem. If there are any fundamental thing that you dont' do just tell me and we respect.

4.3.7 Textural Theme 3: Language Ability

Language ability surfaced as the third core theme that represents another important component of intercultural competence. This theme can be described through participants' acknowledgement on the salient role of language as a medium that enables them to interact and willingness to learn language that helps them to relate well with the Other.

4.3.7.1 Structural theme 3a: Language as the medium for interaction

Participants expressed that language is important because it is the basic means to express thoughts and to facilitate the process of understanding communication messages. Participants noted that when they interact with the Other of the same nationality such as among Malaysians, language was less problematic since they were able to understand each other through a shared national language. The vital role of language to smoothen interaction was keenly felt when participants had to partake in interaction in which both speakers were not able to understand each other's language. In this particular context of interaction, participants expressed the importance of developing language ability in a lingua franca (mainly English) that enables them to interact successfully. The following statements revealed participants' discussion on the significant role of language:

> FG2- P4: I think I agree that we need to understand each other. If we have more language abilities…we can explain what we think, what we need and understand each other better.

> FG2-P5: I think English is important. If the person is able to speak in English…we will know what the person wants.

> FG2-P2: In my experience…my neighbour is Malay. My mother cannot speak Malay. I don't think language is a barrier for my mother to become good neighbours. My mother always uses body language. They go jogging together… I don't know how they overcome language barrier. They have a group of Chinese, Malay and

Indian… they can still communicate. I don't think language is a

barrier in Malaysia.

R : But when it comes to foreign people than you need English

language, right?

FG2- P2: Right.

FG2-P7 : I have a Malay friend. His English is not so good, my Malay is not

good. So he speaks in *Bahasa* and I speak in English. We can still

understand each other and we are best friends. So it's not a

problem.

R : Maybe because you know Malay language ?

FG2- P7 : Yeah because we are both Malaysians.

4.3.7.2 Structural Theme 3b: Language Learning

Language learning emerged as a new structural theme that was not identified in the in-depth interviews. Although participants primarily noted the importance of improving their ability to use English as a lingua franca, they expressed an equal desire to learn the language of the Other because it gives them an opportunity to gain some insights of their cultures. For example, one non-local participant (FG1-P4) noted that "not everyone here can speak English." Accordingly, he expressed a keen interest to learn Malay language as it helps him to interact and to get to know the Malay people and their culture:

"Language is very important since not everyone here in Malaysia can speak English. I am very keen to learn *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language) so that I can interact and know more about Malay people. Language is a big barrier… sometimes when I go to *kampung* (village)… they cannot speak English. If I want to know the culture…I have to speak *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language)" (FG1-P4)

It is telling that language learning can be achieved once participants developed interpersonal relationship with the Other. Discussion on language learning, as it is associated with interpersonal relationship, was clearly emphasized by participants in Focus Group 2:

FG2- P2: Firstly we need a common language to speak. When we develop close friendship…we can learn each other's languages as well…day by day.

FG2-P1: What this word means and what that word means, right?

FG2- P5: Learning language is very good.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the emergent core themes that represent participants' intercultural experience and their conception of intercultural competence that is derived from their intercultural experience. In general, the findings of focus groups relate to the core themes that emerged from the interview data. As the descriptions of intercultural experience of participants from the interview data were presented to focus group participants, they noted that they too had similar experience. Findings

from both in-depth and focus group interviews contribute to identification of elements that represent the conception of intercultural competence from the participants' perspective. Given that participants' intercultural experience is characterized by how they came to identify selves as ethnic beings and how they encountered differences in intercultural interaction; such experience led participants to think of cultural understanding, respect, and language ability as important components for intercultural competence. It was also apparent that intercultural experience prompted participants to think of intercultural competence as a mutual process that occurs through interpersonal relationships. The following chapter provides discussion of the findings in the light of theory and relevant literature.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings that have been presented in Chapter Four according to the research questions. The following section begins with establishing how interpretation works within descriptive phenomenological research. This chapter then moves into examination and interpretation of the findings in light of related theories and research in the literature. The contribution of this study is then discussed followed by suggestions for future research.

5.2 Interpretation and Implications of the study

As noted in Chapter Three, Giorgi (2012) acknowledged that there are some interpretive aspects of descriptive phenomenological research. However, the researcher must be cautious on the kind of interpretation that is construed within Husserl's philosophy (Applebaum, 2009). The kind of interpretation that is not congruent with descriptive phenomenology is that when the researcher brings in some extraneous factors that are not in the data to help explain the data (Giorgi, 2012). Giorgi (2012) argued that such extraneous factors are arbitrary and it is not necessary to use them. Giorgi further pointed out that descriptive phenomenology can be interpretive in the sense of bringing a perspective assumed in working with the data. Once the findings have been determined, it is acceptable to draw attention to relevant theories so that the researcher can dialogue with theories and findings in the literature that have not been phenomenologically determined (Giorgi, Personal

communication via e-mail, May 21, 2013). Given this parameter of descriptive phenomenological research, I interpret the findings by sticking to the content of participants' experience and highlighting the intercultural communication perspective to work with what is "given" in the data. I discuss in what ways the findings may correspond or may be dialectical with the theories and findings in the literature.

5.2.1 Finding One: The Nature of Intercultural Experience

Since intercultural experience serves as the basis for elucidating the conception of intercultural competence in this study, the first question that guides this study addresses what is it like to experience interaction with the Other for students?

As presented in Chapter Four, two core themes emerged that illuminate the nature of participants' intercultural experience: (i) identifying oneself as an ethnic being, and (ii) encountering differences between self and the Other. These core themes essentially capture how participants self identify their own ethnicity and how such identification led to the experience of cultural differences. Each of these core themes will be discussed thoroughly in the light of relevant theory and literature in the following section.

5.2.1.1 Textural Theme 1: Identifying Oneself as an Ethnic Being

The finding indicates that the participants' lived world of experiencing interaction with the Other begins with how they came to identify selves as ethnic beings. Although the structures that contribute to the emergence of this core theme are separately divided into three sub-themes which include ethnic affiliation, ethnic

dynamic and ethnic salience; these structures weave themselves together to form a composite whole of participants' ethnic identification. In the discussion that follows, the findings are discussed by taking into account the interweaving connections of these structures and how it corresponds with the literature.

Participants' identification of self as an ethnic being points to the notion of identity in the literature that centralizes the concept of being - a sense of who we are and who others think we are (Minah Harun, 2007; Kim, 2008; Martin & Nakayama, 2013). In examining the ethnic identification of participants and how it influences their interaction with the Other, Communication Theory of Identity is useful because it provides the means for explaining aspects of ethnic identity that can only be captured through a communication orientation (Baldwin & Hecht, 2003; Hecht, Collier & Ribeau, 1993; Hecht & Choi, 2012). Hecht et al. (1993) predicated their theory on the assumption that ethnic culture "is socially and historically emergent, is co-created and maintained as a function of identity, and is constituted as a system of interdependent patterns of conduct and interpretation" (p. 160). Based on this assumption, this theory places the centrality of identity to the study of ethnic culture and the centrality of communication to both identity and ethnic culture. In an attempt to articulate a communication approach to identity, Hecht et al. (1993) integrated the divergent perspectives (sociological, anthropological and psychological approaches) on identity and extended identity beyond the individual and societal constructions to the interaction by adding a relational dimension and a communicative emphasis. Accordingly, Hecht et al. proposed the basic premise of this theory rests on the assumption that "identity is inherently a communication process and must be understood as a transaction in which messages are exchanged. These messages are

symbolic linkages between and among people that, at least in part, are enactments of identity." (p. 161)

In addition to the basic premise, this theory builds upon important concepts that include core symbols, prescriptions, codes, conversation, and community that set the bases for explicating a communication perspective on identity. The core symbol becomes a way of understanding how societies orient themselves around their concept of identity. Identity also prescribes modes of conduct that tells individuals what they should be doing. In this regard, Hecht et al., (1993) remarked that the successful enactment of identity indicates competence on an individual level and relationally, it can be said that competent conversation confirms the identities of communication participants. Identity is a code for being because it provides the means for understanding self, interaction, relationships, and society and it is enacted as a way of doing conversation. The notion of community reflects the function of cultural communication that provides shared identity as it is derived from communal membership. Hecht et al. attested that the notion of community is fundamental to identity. Based on these important concepts (core symbols, code, prescriptions, conversation, and community), Hecht et al. explicated that identity can be examined at four levels which include the personal, enacted, relational, and communal levels. These four levels define the "location" or the "layer" of identity from which it can be examined and provide a more comprehensive view of identity that integrate community, communication, social relationships and self concepts (Hecht & Choi, 2012). Hecht et al. (1993) claimed that these frames are part of the lived experience of social actors and thus, they are useful to researchers as the means for interpreting the ways people have of conceptualizing their own identity.

261

Baldwin and Hecht (2003) posited that the four frames or levels of identity are the central feature of this theory that distinguishes it from other theories. The personal level is an individual's self perception of his or her identity that signifies the avowal aspect of identity (Collier, 2006; Hecht & Choi, 2012; Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007). This personal layer is a characteristic of an individual's self concept that provides an understanding of the individual's feelings about self and how the individual defines herself or himself in general as well as within particular situations (Hecht et al., 1993). Jung et al. (2007) explained that the relational layer takes an individual's perception of others' communicated views of the individual's identity that reflects the ascribed aspect of identity. The relational layer reveals that identity is not constructed in a vacuum; rather it is relational and co-created between self and relevant others. Hecht and Choi (2012) added that there are three aspects of the relational layer. First, an individual defines his or her identity through social interaction with others and as such, a person's identity is influenced by the views of others of that individual. Second, an individual defines his or her identity through relationships with others and this aspect of identity is particularly shaped by social roles such as marital partners, co-workers, and friends. Third, identity is shaped by the relationship itself. For example, a person describing himself as a boyfriend of someone is articulating a relational identity. The enacted layer refers to identity as it is expressed in communication while the communal layer is the group's conception of identity (Jung et al., 2007). Hecht and Choi (2012) pointed that the communal layer indicates that the collectivity itself has their own identity. Such communal layer is internalized as group members share common features, histories, and collective memories that bond this group together. Hecht and Choi further added that

262

this communal level of identity may be in a form of stereotypes or it can be projected through the cultural code that defines the social construction of the individuals at the group level.

Hecht et al. (1993) attested that the four levels should not be treated in isolation from each other; rather they may overlap and interpenetrate with one another to explain identity. For example, the personal and communal frames may operate jointly or there may be a dialectical tension between and among the levels. Hecht and Choi (2012) pointed that the levels are often defined and understood separately for the purposes of analysis. However, Hecht and Choi further argued that the four levels make up the composite whole of identity. In view of this, each of the level can be analyzed independently but the analysis can be enriched if they consider how each level is entwined with others to make up a whole view on identity. Given such interpenetration of the four frames, Hecht proposed that "a communication analysis of identity considers how individuals frame and enact their personal identity and how it is relationally and communally expressed, negotiated, and defined" (p.165). The interpenetrating frames provide the bases for delineating the basic assumptions of the theory. Hecht and Choi (2012, p.139) proposed that this theory has 10 axioms that further define identity:

1. Identities have individual, social and communal properties

2. Identities are both enduring and changing

3. Identities are affective, cognitive, behavioral and spiritual

4. Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation

5. Identities involve both subjective and ascribed meanings

6. Identities are codes that are expressed in conversations and define membership in communities

7. Identities have semantic properties that are expressed in core symbols, meanings and labels

8. Identities prescribe modes of appropriate and effective communication

9. Identities are source of expectations and motivations

10. Identities are emergent

The proposed four levels on identity can be used as the framework to explain the complexity of participants' way of identifying self as an ethnic being. It is also important to note at this juncture that scholars remarked that culture is a broad term that can be used inclusively and interchangeably with ethnic identity (Collier, 2006; Kim, 2008). As such, in the discussion that follows, the term cultural/ethnic identity is used interchangeably.

Based on the participants' description of how they identify their own ethnicity, it is interesting that participants' ethnic identification seems to be primarily based on the sociological markers that generally characterize and distinguish one ethnic group from another such as language, religion, and common territory. This indicates that the relevant layer of identity that emerges indicates interpenetration between the personal and communal frame. Phenomenologically speaking, participants' sense of self as an ethnic being suggests a co-existence between self and the community that invokes a sense of "our people" for participants. This finding indicates the significance of cultural socialization that shapes an important part of the participants' ethnic identity. The literature proposed that through socialization with relevant

others such as family and friends within the ethnic group that individuals exist; individuals learn to be an ethnic member by speaking the language, learning beliefs and values, and performing cultural norms of the group (Byram, 1997; Chen, 2009b; Filpisan et al., 2011; Hecht et al., 1993; Hecht et al., 2003; Kim, 1986; Martin & Nakayama, 2013; Minah Harun, 2007). The cultural socialization that the individuals experience in turn influences their consciousness of the group to which they feel a sense of belonging as well as their sense of selves (Hecht et. al, 1993; Filpisan, 2012; Martin & Nakayama, 2012; Minah Harun, 2007)

It is also interesting to note that since participants in this study include diverse ethnic backgrounds of both locals and non-locals, participants described the most important sociological marker for their ethnic identification is influenced by the societal context (or country) in which they exist. This finding further illuminates the interpenetration between the communal and personal frame of identity. As the finding suggests, for example, Nigerian participants pointed out that language (such as Yoruba and Hausa) is the most dominant marker for one's ethnic identification. This is in contrast to Indonesian participants as they described that one's ethnic territory within the country is the most important marker for one's ethnic identification. The finding corroborates with the literature that indicated the discourse of ethnicity and the importance of ethnic components differed widely among groups and necessitates positing it in relation to dominant or majority group within a larger society (Cox & Ephross, 1998; Fenton, 2010; Phinney, 1990).

Participants' societal context in which they exist is something that cannot be ignored as Cox and Ephross (1998) claimed that without such contextualized understanding,

one's ethnicity is meaningless. Although participants primarily identified their ethnicity based on the sociological markers, it is telling that participants discussed the extent they felt the sociological markers resemble how they identify self as an ethnic being. It is at this juncture that the personal and communal frame seems to be dialectical as participants noted how their views of selves may differ from the stereotypes of an ethnic group that are typically used for one's ethnic identification. The views corresponds with the literature that pointed there is no one way of defining ethnicity as it differs across different individuals (Minah Harun, 2007; Kim, 1986; Chen, 2009; Collier, 2006). For example, it appears that even when there is a language that broadly characterizes an ethnic group, there are some "layers" of how participants came to identify their own ethnicity in the light of their own lived experience as ethnic individuals. As the finding indicates, within the consciousness of language that reflects cultural groups, individuals may avow their ethnic identity through dialects that characterize sub-ethnic groups. For example, apart from identifying self through the "Chinese Malaysian" level, participants in Focus Group 2 also identified their ethnicity based on the dialects they speak at home. The dialects signify the existence of various Chinese sub-groups in Malaysia such as Hakka, Hokkien, Teochew, Baba and Hainanese (Minah Harun, 2007; Mohd Anuar & Mohamad Aizat, 2012). The finding corresponds to Cox and Ephross (1990) assertion of ethnicity:

> Our sense of uniqueness of being rooted in one space to one group comes from our membership in families. When we examine ourselves we find that who we are and who we can become depend in great part upon who we started out to be. This is found within our families. Ethnicity cannot be

266

separated from families. Almost all families may be considered to be from one or another ethnic group. (p.11)

In other cases, language as a way of identification may not apply for other individuals. A person may not be able to speak a language that is commonly used by members of an ethnic group but affiliates self to the group. Conversely, one may speak the language of an ethnic group but may not necessarily affiliate self with the group. As it has been indicated in the findings, for example, Participant 2 who speaks Hausa felt that language functions as a medium for interaction rather than a definite marker for his ethnic identity. Accordingly, he viewed himself as a "Hausa speaking person" and identified his ethnicity as a Hausa-Fulani. It is also interesting that participants felt other identities such as nationalities and religions intersect with their ethnicities that together make up their sense of self. This finding concurs with Kim's (2008) argument on the oversimplification of cultural identity that positions a person to belong to one and only one particular group category. This finding also supports Phinney's (1990) assertion that people may feel that a single label is inaccurate since they may be part of two or more groups. The literature indicated that identification of self pertaining to ethnic-national identity may be strongly felt especially by individuals who live within countries encompassing diverse ethnic groups that have achieved national unification (Banks, 2009; Collier, 2006; Phinney, 1990; Wong & Meng, 1985). It is also possible that the ethnicity of the dominant group members becomes indistinguishable with their state citizenship that in turn led them to identify ethnicity as it coincides with nationality (Byram & Fleming, 1998; Lustig & Koester, 2006; Wong & Meng, 1985). In other cases, in parallel with Zaharna's (2009) explanation of the Arab identity, participants in the study who

identified themselves as Arabs centers their identity on the Arabic language and Islamic traditions that overrides their nationalities. Religion was also viewed as synonymous to ethnic identity since it is closely knitted with ethnic practices that lead individuals to perceive religion as closely entwined with their ethnicity (Minah Harun, 2007; Mohd Nor, 2011; Nazri & Rozita, 2012; Shamsul, 1999, 2001).

As Hecht and Choi (2012) proposed that the levels of identity can be identified independently, this study provides phenomenological evidence that illuminates the personal frame of identity which interweaves with the assumption of the theory that identity is enduring and changing. The finding indicates how participants described selves as a changing entity. Such consciousness is captured in the idea that who they used to be, who they are in the present context, and who they will become are dynamically negotiated within a changing social context. The changing nature of identity can be observed as participants noted that because they do not have strong ties to their ancestral lineage, such factors become less important for their ethnic identification. Instead, their meaning of being an ethnic individual is more oriented toward present cultural socialization that they experienced. Additionally, the changing nature of identity is evident as participants described how their intercultural experience has led them to change their behaviors. This experience has somewhat given an impact on participants as they transformed self into one that is substantially different from what it used to be. This finding supports current studies that revealed how intercultural experience has an impact on cultural identity and changed worldviews on self (e.g., Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010; Caraway, 2010; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Moore & Baker, 2012). Lustig and Koester (2010) claimed that even in the briefest encounter with members from other cultural groups, the sense of

self at that instant may well be altered, at least in some small ways. This dynamic aspect of identity recognizes the fact that as an evolving entity, rather than passively entering interaction, humans are constantly changing through continuous negotiation between self and others (Charon, 2004; Collier, 2006; Hecht & Choi, 2012; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Kim, 2006). Nevertheless, the dynamic aspect does not suggest that participants' sense of self is ultimately changed from the original. Participants' modification of behaviors due to their intercultural experience reflects what Kim (2008) called as acculturative learning which is about acquiring new cultural practices. Acculturative learning does not occur automatically following intercultural exposures; rather it is a process over which a person has a degree of freedom to control based on his or her predispositions. Such change may occur in the "surface" areas or expressive behaviors such as choices of dress to deeper-level changes in social behaviors or fundamental values. The changing aspect that participants claimed to experience seemed to occur at the "surface" level. It is at this juncture that participants acknowledged the enduring aspect of their own ethnic culture (such as ethnic values and language) plays a significant role in shaping their behaviors.

Given there is an enduring aspect of identity as the theory suggests, this puts forth the idea of the salience of ethnic identity which can be analyzed through the personal and relational frame of identity. Hecht et al. (1993) proposed that the emergence of identity depends upon with whom one interacts and how one identifies each other. In the context of the present study, participants' interaction with the Other can be categorized according to different kinds of ethnic groups that they came into contact. For local participants, their interaction with the Other included (i) other co-national ethnic individuals (such as between Malay Malaysian and Chinese Malaysian) and

(ii) other ethnic individuals from countries different from participants' own (such as between Malay Malaysian and Yoruba Nigerian). In the eyes of ethnic individuals who were non-local participants in the study, their interaction can be further divided into contact with (i) other ethnic individuals of the host society, (ii) other ethnic individuals who are their co-nationals, and (iii) other ethnic individuals from countries different from their own.

The personal and relational frame of identity seems to match within situations that involve ethnic individuals of the same nationality to which there is some form of familiarity with each other's ethnic culture (such as Malay Malaysian participants in the study who described their experience with Chinese/Indian Malaysian friends or the Indonesian participant of Sunda-Balinese ethnicity who described her experience with Makassar friends). Within this particular experience, the specific ethnic identity of both interlocutors seems to be salient in their interaction. In situations that involve two ethnic individuals of different nationalities, most often, the personal frame of identity (or the avowed ethnic identity) of an individual holds no significance in the eyes of their interlocutor. It is more likely that the participants are viewed in terms of their nationalities than their specific ethnicities. Nonetheless, the absence of ethnic identity does not suggest it is ultimately obliterated. As the finding suggests, although participants may be identified in terms of nationality, ethnicity influences expectations that participants bring into interaction. This view is congruent with Hecht et al.'s (1993) contention that a person's ethnic identity plays an important role because it guides their behaviors. The ethnic properties are likely to become part of the person's consciousness even if the person leaves the ethnic culture and lives as a sojourner. Minah Harun (2007) argued that people are superficially categorized

together and only when one meets with the person at an interpersonal level or on daily basis, they become acquainted with her or his ethnic identity. According to her:

> One cannot escape being a member of ethnic group…ethnic designation becomes so commonplace that its labeling sticks like a glue even though the mundane everyday life might or might not necessarily be associated with one's identity. (p.162)

The acquaintance of ethnic identity was evident in the data where non-local participants noted that over a period of time socializing with the local students in the campus, they become aware of the different ethnic identities that exist among the locals. Such identification is significant because it informs how they should navigate interaction with the locals. As the findings suggest, for example, the Arab or Yoruba Nigerian participants who are Muslims and claimed Islam as central to their ethnic identity felt it was much easier to initiate conversations and relate with the Malays who are predominantly Muslims than with other ethnic groups.

The emergence of participants' ethnic identity in this study can be conjectured as multifaceted and complex to which it may overlap with other identities. This study provides the evidence that it is possible for participants to identify self by considering their religion, ethnicity, and nationality. The finding of this study also corresponds with the current direction of intercultural communication field that seeks to examine the fluid conceptualization of culture by looking at how various social positions interplay and intersect with one another (Moon, 2010: Yep, 2014). Given the interplay between ethnicity-nationality-religion in participants' view of self as the finding suggests, this raises the questions: How do participants take on one or

more identities when they interact with the Other? Does a participant accept self as Malay? Does a participant accept self as Malaysian or a Muslim and thus decide to sideline her or his Malay identity? Does a participant view self not as one of these traits but as a composite of the whole? How do participants' positions of their identities influence their interaction with the Other? It is within how participants position self in relation to the Other that becomes the defining characteristics for how they identify intercultural exchanges. Such a position leads to the discussion of the second core theme that emerged from the data analysis.

5.2.1.2 Textural Theme 2: Encountering Differences between Self and the Other

The Communication Theory of Identity suggests that the focal point of analyzing identities through a communication perspective is to describe identity as it emerges in interaction (Collier, 2006; Hecht & Choi, 2012; Hecht, Jackson, & Pitts, 2005; Hecht et al., 2003). The present study provides phenomenological evidence of how participants described their experience encountering cultural differences as their ethnic identity emerges in interaction. Such experience includes differences that participants felt with regard to ethnic values, ethnic norms, language, nonverbal cues, and religion.

The literature suggested that cultural identity is central to a person's sense of self because it is influential in the majority of one's interaction with others (Hecht et al., 1993; Hecht et al., 2003; Lustig & Koester, 2006; Martin & Nakayama, 2012; Minah Harun, 2007). Culture is an important source for a person to reduce uncertainties and assigning meaning to human interaction as it develops expectations of how people

will behave (Bird & Osland, 2005; Osland & Bird, 2000). When individuals interact, the individuals' interpretation of their interaction is very much filtered by their cultural standpoints (Hecht & Choi, 2012; Kim, 2009; Martin & Nakayama, 2013). Cultural identity is significant as Deardorff (2009b) claimed that what makes any given interaction as intercultural is determined by people's perceived membership to a cultural group and to what extent it affects their interaction. In congruent with the literature, the present study provides phenomenological evidence on what transpires when participants described their interaction with the Other as it is filtered through their ethnic identities.

As the findings indicate, participants' meaning of being in an intercultural life-world is associated with recounting differences as they compared the behaviors of the Other against the culture in which they exist. Phenomenologically speaking, Ishida (2005) suggested that when a person identifies something as different; the object of experience is compared to something else. Viewing an object of experience as "normal" signifies that the object has its legitimate existence and "different" as a dubious existence. How a person knows which object of experience is "normal" and which one is "different" relates to one's cultural system which is pre-consciously ingrained from the cultural context one lives in. By viewing self as belonging to a cultural group, a person learns what it takes be the member of the group through the shared agreement of rules that informs socially expected behaviors (Byram, 1997; Collier, 2006; Collier et al., 1986; Hecht et al., 1993; Hecht et al., 1992; Lustig & Koester, 2006). As the shared rules become normal routines of life and situations unfold in one's culture in a familiar way, they are very much deeply embedded that may be expressed in behaviors beyond one's consciousness (Bird & Osland, 2005;

Hall, 1959; Hofstede, 1984, 1997; Hofstede et al., 2010). Phenomenologically speaking, the shared rules that are deeply manifested in one's cultural life-world set the framework that defines "our ways of doing things". Such "doings" are inherent in participants' ethnic identity and when such identity is enacted in their interaction with the Other, it influences how participants interpret their behaviors.

Bird and Osland (2005) proposed that when people perceive a situation as familiar and match up to their past experience, they call up regularities that provide expectations of behaviors. While culture provides communicative repertoires on responding to situations, it also sets some constraining factors for people to comprehend the behaviors of the Other as they might hold different communicative repertoires. Because culture prescribes and constrains people's meanings of the world, people unconciously begin the process of interaction by carrying their own cultural expectations. When interactions involve individuals with different cultural identities, discrepancies about interactional rules are likely to surface leading people to make false attributions that may result in miscommunication. Jandt (2010) claimed that intercultural problem arises from cultural nearsightedness as people assume similarity between cultures and caught unaware of important differences. Moreover, when one has less knowledge about other cultures, it is most likely for the person to behave as one should in the person's home culture leading to miscommunication. This study provides phenomenological evidence as to how participants make sense of their interaction with the Other through their ethnic identities. For example, the topic of conversation that includes one's marital status which is considered "normal" for a Malay Malaysian participant during the first meeting may be "surprising" for a Yoruba Nigerian participant. Touching or patting

274

the head is viewed as "rude" by a Malay Malaysian participant but a "friendly joke" by an Arab. Smiling to a non-acquaintance of the opposite gender is considered as "a sign of interest" by an Arab participant but may be viewed as a "friendly gesture" by a Malay participant. Using higher pitch in conversation, as claimed by Arab and Yoruba Nigerian participants in the study, is considered as "talking" but similar behavior may be interpreted as "fighting" by other ethnic individuals.

This study also indicates that participants' experience do not only include the presence of the object of experience to which they found as "different" but also how much "different-ness" was possible in interaction. As the finding suggests, participants felt they could relate with the Other based on how much cultural familiarity was available in their interaction. This finding corresponds to scholars' argument in the literature that cultural differences are not an either-or dimension but vary with respect to degree of cultural distance that present some strangeness and/or familiarity in a given interaction (Chen, 2009a; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Sarbaugh, 1988). Gudykunst and Kim (2003) proposed that when intercultural participants felt there is a presence of high cultural familiarity, the level of cultural distance is low and communication seems to proceed with minimal effort. Conversely, when there is low cultural familiarity, cultural distance tends to expand and communication requires greater efforts.

Participants' experience with cultural distance was evident in regard to language barriers. The literature indicated that language problem is relatively common in intercultural communication since it usually involves people who speak different languages (Baker, 2012; Barna, 1994; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Zuria et al., 2010).

Lustig and Koester (2010) remarked that even when intercultural participants seem to be speaking the same language, differences in the specific dialect of the language and cultural practices can baffle the participants and they can be portrayed as two people speaking different languages. Such view was evident in the finding as Participant 14, who is an ethnic individual from Indonesia, experienced having some difficulties to understand the dialects of her Malay Malaysian friends.

Even when two ethnic individuals such as a Chinese Malaysian conversing with a Malay Malaysian using the Malay language, as the finding indicates, the regional dialects and cultural values of the Malay Malaysians that are embedded within the language may be non-comprehensible for the Chinese Malaysian participant. Although it can be suggested that there is no trouble-free interaction within these circumstances, participants reported less intercultural problems given their repertoire of each other's culture and language. This finding concurs with Minah Harun's (2007) study where she found Malay Malaysian and Chinese Malaysian participants claimed they had no problem at all to interact with one another in daily situations. Such a situation is a sphere for social interaction where there is not much communication difficulty and different ethnic individuals share a collective consciousness as "us." As such, it appears that the presence of high cultural familiarity led participants to relate more effectively with the Other.

Much of the challenges that require more effortful communication can be phenomenologically epitomized through participants' experience dealing with situations where they encountered that "I don't understand their language and they don't understand my language." Within this particular circumstance, both ethnic

276

individuals had to rely on a lingua franca (mainly English) to interact. Being non-native speakers of a language that is used in interaction presents greater challenges for participants to express thoughts and to grapple with the accents of their interlocutor. LaRocco (2011) attested that learning to interact in a language as a non-native speaker is a challenging task. This difficulty is further exacerbated when speakers learn to communicate in another language in ways that are both effective and appropriate.

The finding on language barrier as it regards to using a foreign language supports extant research on the challenges of language within intercultural interactions especially from the non-native speakers' vantage point (e.g., Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010; Gao, 2011; Ishida, 2005; Keles, 2013; LaRocco, 2011; Schreiber, 2011; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Yang et al., 2011; Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2006). Nonetheless, much these studies focused attention on non-native speakers' experience with language barriers as they adjust into the Western environments where English is normally the host language. In a geographical location where English is not the native language of many of its members, it was evident in the data that difficulties and challenges associated with speaking in a second language (mainly English) were equally felt by ethnic individuals who interact with one another. As such, this study expands the extant literature on the experience of language that moves beyond the Western context.

Apart from the experience with the language barriers, another aspect of participants' lived intercultural experience that relates to cultural distance is religion. This study shows cultural differences seemed to be lessened when participants found that they

shared a common religion with the Other. In view of this, participants felt that having similar religious beliefs is an important bonding factor for them to relate with the Other. As the findings indicate, for example, the Arab and Yoruba Nigerian participants in the study who claimed Islamic practices as almost synonymous to their ethnic identity found it was easier to identify and interact with the Malay Malaysians who are predominantly Muslims rather than other ethnic groups who are mostly non-Muslims.

While the literature primarily views religion as one crucial bases for ethnic differences (e.g., Mohd Anuar & Mohamad Aizat, 2012; Mohd Anuar Ramli & Mohamad Aizat Jamaludin, 2012; Razaleigh et al., 2012; Suraya et al., 2013), this study reveals that religion provides some form of familiarity for participants to interact with the Other. This commonality through religion led participants to feel a sense of "us-ness". As Hecht and Choi (2012) remarked that identity is fluid, this study provides phenomenological evidence on how participants define and re-define their identities in their interaction with the Other. This fluid identity orientation of the individuals responds to Kim's (2009) assertion on the primacy of the personal dimension of identity in affecting intercultural interaction. Although there are sociological markers that primarily inform participants' ethnic identity and set the in-group/out-group boundaries, participants were able to find ways to associate or disassociate self with the Other. This association/disassociation aspect seems to be based on how much "different-ness" or the "bonding aspects" that are available in participants' interaction with the Other.

The literature indicated that researchers most often interrogate intercultural experience by comparing one set of cultural systems such as between the individualist and collectivist identities to analyze cultural differences (e.g., Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010; Holmes, 2005; Imamura, Zhang, & Harwood, 2011; LaRocco, 2011; Lin, 2007; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Tan & Goh, 2006; Yang et al., 2011). Theoretically speaking, the ethnic individuals in the study came from societies that tend to value collectivism (such as Malaysia, Nigeria, Arab, and China). Using the collectivistic orientation is inadequate to capture what transpires as participants experienced intercultural interaction within a non-Western multicultural setting.

The finding on participants' experience with cultural differences extends the literature in providing knowledge on how variables such as language, religion, and communicative practices play significant role in their intercultural interaction. Additionally, this study extends the literature by considering cultural distance that speaks volumes on how much participants know about the Other which in turn influence how they identify intercultural exchanges. Accordingly, this study provides an understanding of intercultural experience that moves beyond encounters between two different cultural systems such as between collectivist and individualist identities that pervade the literature on intercultural communication (see Kim, 2009; Moon, 2010; Yep, 2014). Given the framework of ethnic identity that provides the intricacies of participants' intercultural experience, how does such experience prompt participants to think about what is specifically required for successful interaction? This question is answered in the following section.

5.2.2 Finding Two: Conception of Intercultural Competence

The second research question sought to explore what constitutes intercultural competence in light of students' intercultural experience?

The data shows three core themes emerged that represent the characteristics of intercultural competence from the participants' standpoint. The themes are cultural understanding, respect, and language ability. These emergent core themes can be compared to Deardorff's (2004) process model noted in Chapter Two in this study. As Deardorff's (2004) study was the first to document consensus among leading intercultural experts offering fundamental components of intercultural competence, this work is considered as the strongest available in the field and influences current understanding of intercultural competence (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; LaRocco, 2011). Thus, it is significant to compare the findings of the present study with that of the model in order to illuminate in what ways the findings may deviate or converge from the Western perspective. Deardorff (2004) defined intercultural competence as the process of managing interactions to elicit appropriate and effective outcomes based on one's knowledge, attitude, and skills. Deardorff organized these core elements of intercultural competence into the personal level and interactional level. The components of the personal level constitutes: requisite attitude (the attitudes of openness, respect by valuing cultures, curiosity and discovery); knowledge and comprehension (cultural self awareness, deep cultural knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness), and skills (listening, observing, analyzing and relating). The components at the interactional level constitute desired internal and external outcomes. Internal outcomes involve a shift

in the frame of reference which is manifested in an individual's ability to adapt to different communication styles and behaviors, to be flexible in choosing appropriate communication styles, to be empathic and to adopt an ethnorelative view of other cultures. The external outcomes manifest in one's ability to behave appropriately and effectively based on one's knowledge, attitude and skill to attain one's goals.

The process model illustrates the complex nature of acquiring intercultural competence. The components in the model are portrayed in a circular movement suggesting that intercultural competence is a continual process of improvement. The model suggests that developing intercultural competence moves from the personal/individual level to the interpersonal level (intercultural interaction). Deardorff (2004) suggested that intercultural competence develops by degrees, and accordingly, the model allows for degrees of competence through the individual and interaction levels. The more an individual acquires attitudes, knowledge and skills; the more it is for the individual to develop a greater degree of intercultural competence. In acquiring intercultural competence, it is possible for an individual to enter the model at any particular point such as from attitude or knowledge and comprehension directly to the outcome. However, the level of appropriateness and effectiveness may not be achieved as high as when an individual completes the entire cycle. In regard to the outcomes, it is also possible for an individual to achieve the external outcome of behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately without fully achieving the internal outcome. However, the degree of appropriateness and effectiveness would be more minimal than if the internal outcome had also been achieved. Deardorff (2004) further suggested that the attitudinal element is the fundamental starting point and as such, attitudes are

281

indicated as the starting point in this cycle. Given the complex process in the conception of intercultural competence as suggested by the model, the researcher now returns to three themes and discuss the findings in light of this theory as well as how the findings relate to the extant literature.

5.2.2.1 Textural Theme 1: Cultural Understanding

Cultural understanding emerged as the first component that constitutes intercultural competence. The finding indicates that participants came to understand culture through the process of making sense about culturally acceptable behaviors, learning about culture, and projecting the willingness to interact with the Other.

The finding of cultural understanding reflects an interweaving connection between knowledge, attitudinal and skill components depicted at the personal level of Deardorff's (2004) process model. As the finding indicates, the need for cultural understanding moves participants to acquire knowledge about the Other. Such knowledge is supported by their attitude of openness and curiosity toward cultural differences. It is attained through the ability to observe and analyze their own behaviors vis-à-vis that of the Other that heightens their knowledge about cultural differences. Deardorff (2004) proposed that cultural knowledge necessitates an individual to have cultural self awareness of his or her own and other cultures. It moves beyond the surface knowledge of culture (such as food and greetings) and requires an individual to gain deep cultural knowledge to understand other worldviews (Deardorff, 2004, 2006, 2011). It was evident in the findings that participants developed cultural self awareness that signifies deep cultural knowledge. As the findings indicate, participants gained insights about themselves as cultured

individuals and how their views of what is "right" or "true" in life is likely to be similar or different from the Other.

While Deardorff's (2004) process model pays limited attention on how individuals acquire deep cultural knowledge, the finding of cultural understanding provides phenomenological evidence on this realm. It was evident in the finding that gaining cultural knowledge includes participants' ability to engage in a process of sensemaking. Minah Harun (2007) asserted that the crucial point in interaction is that the individual does not only initiate actions but also responds to his or her own actions. Minah Harun further attested that the process of sensemaking involves people's thought processes in rationalizing the realities of others' behaviors as well as their own behaviors in relation to others. Osland (2010) proposed that intercultural sensemaking is triggered when people encounter novel situations and when they deliberately attempt to learn other cultures. In order to make sense, people look first for "reasons" that enable them to explain events or situations and such reasons are taken from one's past experience that provide the framework for assigning meaning to situations (Bird & Osland, 2005; Osland, 2010; Osland et al., 2007; Rasmussen et al., 2010; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). This framework that enables people to search for meaning in life is very much shaped by their identities (Bird & Osland, 2005; Fisher & Hutchings, 2013; Weick et al., 2005). This study indicates that the presence of the Other led participants to draw on their own cultural identity leading them to engage in the process of sensemaking by recounting similarities and differences of their own cultural framework with that of the Other. As culture is deeply internalized through re-occurring regularities in terms of values, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral conventions that form expectations of what can be accepted

283

within social groups (McDaniel et al., 2009; McDaniel et al., 2012; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009); participants began to learn how such regularities that they usually experience within their own ethnic group may not be shared with the Other. This lends support to the literature that indicated cultural understanding can only make sense when it is situated within the cultural context to which it is lived by people (Bennett, 2009; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Jandt, 2010; King, Perez, & Shim, 2013). This sensemaking of culturally acceptable behaviors reflects the notion of appropriateness that forms the core conception of intercultural competence. As Deardorff (2004, 2006) posited that appropriateness is a question of rules of interaction, it was evident in the finding that participants acknowledged the importance of acknowledging varied rules of behaviors that culture prescribes when they interact with the Other. This finding also confirms the literature that proposed judgment of appropriateness is culture general since it is about social coordination that helps people to establish shared communication meanings of their behaviors (Yum, 2012)

The process of acquiring cultural knowledge does not only necessitate a single individual to make sense of his or her own behaviors. It was also viewed as a mutual process that must consider collaborated efforts from both ethnic individuals to make sense of each other's culture. Without this mutual condition, as the finding suggests, achieving intercultural competence is unlikely. More interestingly, the finding indicates that the process of mutual sensemaking of cultural differences that move participants into cultural understanding necessitates development of interpersonal relationships. In this sense, relationship serves as the building block that enables two ethnic individuals to develop an understanding of each others' culture. Thus, it

appears that the ultimate goal of communication from the participants' perspective is about developing interpersonal relationships. This view reflects judgment of effectiveness to which it is about achieving valued goals in interaction (Deardorff, 2004, 2006).

While Deardorff (2004) centered the notion of effectiveness as achieving personal goals, this study indicates that the notion of effectiveness rests on the preponderance of participants to value relationships. This finding seems to be congruent with the epistemological assumption of Asiacentric paradigm that indicates "everyone and everything become meaningful in relation to others" (Miike, 2003, p. 254). This epistemological assumption signifies that the meanings of beings are meaningfully situated in relation to one another that accentuate mutual dependence in Asian communication (Chen & Starosta, 2003; Dissanayake, 2003). This finding further reinforces non-Western perspectives in the literature that place more emphasis on interpersonal relationships than the individual in the conception of intercultural competence (e.g., Chen & An, 2009; Deardorff, 2006, 2009b; Manian & Naidu, 2009; Nwosue, 2009; Yeh, 2010; Yum, 2012; Zaharna, 2009). The implication of this finding is that it provides an important impetus for us to re-think the Western conceptions of intercultural competence by taking into account the importance of interpersonal relationships. As Ishida (2005) attested that relational perspective means forming relationship with others, this study extends Deardorff's (2004) work in viewing deep cultural knowledge as a relational process between two ethnic individuals to co-create intercultural competence.

In addition to the relational perspective, the finding of cultural understanding through cultural learning provides the reality that participants experienced in gaining deep cultural knowledge. As the finding indicates, understanding culture is a process that progresses through pariticipants' intercultural experience. Such experience provides valuable lessons for participants that move them into having an informed understanding about cultural differences. This finding supports the literature that indicated learning as a necessary starting point for a deeper exploration of cultural differences as it occurs through actual intercultural experience (Bowe & Martin, 2007; Chang, 2007; King et al., 2013). As the finding indicates, cultural learning can be attained in various ways. For example, it may take place when participants found how their cultural norms came as a surprise for the Other. Such events led participants to gain awareness on different ways of doing things and seeing things.

Cultural learning may also take place when participants unknowingly engaged in violation of cultural rules of the Other such as prompting an inappropriate topic for conversation. The uninentional violation of cultural rules in which participants referred to as "mistakes" are considered as part of the process of gaining an informed understanding of appropriate ways to interact. The finding supports the literature that cultural learning in real situations does not necessarily focus on positive aspects by knowing cultural expectations (Bowe & Martin, 2007; Chang, 2007; LaRocco, 2011). Chang (2007) proposed that the process of becoming competent in real life is often haphazard as people unconsciously bring their own cultural baggage that would naturally generate conflicts in encounters. What becomes important in achieving competent communication is having the attitude to learn from unintentional violation of rules. In congruence with the finding of this study, cultural

learning enables participants to develop knowledge about cultural appropriateness as they identify areas of cultural misunderstanding. This finding is also similar with the process of "trial and error'' noted in the literature that illuminates the reality of intercultural experience that people experienced as they engage in inappropriate behaviors (Aquino-Russell & Russell, 2009; Russell & Dickie, 2007). Aquino-Russell (2009) posited that the trial and error process through actual experiences is essential in learning and developing cultural knowledge that helps individuals to achieve appropriate communication. Such cultural knowledge assists individuals to look for the causes of communication dysfunctions, to decode their cultural behaviors and to refine their communicative strategies in order to develop appropriate expectations in intercultural interaction (Bird & Osland, 2005; Osland & Bird, 2000). The implication of this finding into the conception of intercultural competence is that, while it is pivotal to become sensitive with different cultural rules, it is also equally important for intercultural participants to pay attention to unintentional violation of rules when they interact. Thus, it can be said that the process of becoming competent is an ongoing activity as participants learned appropriate and inappropriate behaviors that will be useful for future interactions. In view of this, the finding of this study reinforces Deardorff's (2004) process model that views intercultural competence in a cyclical sense as it requires an ongoing process of learning about cultural differences.

As Deardorff (2004, 2006, 2009b) attested that the process of acquiring intercultural competence is intentional, the finding of cultural understanding that occurs through willingness to interact supports this view. The finding indicates that in order for participants to gain cultural understanding, the desire to seek for intercultural

interaction is necessary. Participants expressed the interest to seek information about other cultures by intentionally seeking interaction with the Other. This finding reflects the attitudinal component as it indicates the extent that one wants to approach or avoid intercultural communication (Spitzberg, 2012). This finding confirms Deardorff's (2004) process model that indicates attitude is the fundamental starting point for gaining deep cultural knowledge.

As the literature indicated that individuals with willingness to interact regard uncertainty as interesting and curious to initiate interaction with members from other cultures (Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Lu & Hsu, 2008; Samochowiec & Florack, 2010), such attitude helps participants in the study to explore uncertainties to gain understanding of cultural differences. Nonetheless, participants noted some challenges that they had to face in exerting the willingness to interact. Participants noted that even when they were keen to seek interaction, people may not necessarily project similar interests which may lead participants to feel frustrated. The literature noted this problem by acknowledging that living in an intercultural world will inevitably introduce uncertainties about interactions (Barna, 1994; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Hecht et al, 1993; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Samochowiec & Florack, 2010). People may feel threatened when challenged by an alternative cultural framework which explains why it is hard for groups of culturally different individuals to work, play and live together (Lustig & Koester, 2010; Smith, Bowman, & Hsu, 2007; Tan & Goh, 2006). It is also possible for people to encounter unpleasant incidents with the Other which has led them to avoid future interactions (Martin & Nakayama, 2013). The implication of this finding is that it adds to real picture of intercultural experience into the attitudinal component of intercultural

competence. Given this finding, while it is crucial to develop positive attitudes to seek for intercultural interaction, it is equally important to understand people's predispositions. By acknowledging the fact that not everyone may be comfortable with those coming from outside their own cultural group, individuals were able to be open to the real challenges in intercultural interaction.

The finding of cultural understanding indicates that what fundamentally moves participants to interact is their ability to have the attitude of openness to cultural differences. This finding supports Deardorff's (2004) process model since it illuminates that the fundamental starting point for intercultural competence is attitude. The attitude, knowledge, and skills that participants developed have shifted their previous held assumptions about other cultures leading them to attain desired internal and external outcomes. As the finding suggests, for example, gaining a deeper cultural knowledge led participants to have an ethnorelative view about other religious beliefs which enabled them to dispel inaccurate perceptions and engaged in competent behaviors.

5.2.2.2 Textural Theme 2: Respect

Respect emerged as the second component of intercultural competence. Participants expressed that since their intercultural experience has heightened their awareness about cultural differences, they felt that respect is critical for achieving intercultural competence. Respect enables participants to be aware that although the cultural ways of the Other may be something that goes beyond what they can comprehend, the existence of different realities in viewing the world needs to be valued. As the finding indicates, the sub-themes that describe respect include accepting cultural

differences and recognizing cultural boundaries.

The finding of respect reinforces the literature that indicates its critical importance for developing intercultural competence (Chen, 2010, Deardorff, 2009b, Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992, Byram, 1997; Holmes & O'Neill, 2010, LaRocco, 2011, Spooner-Lane, 2013). In relation to Deardorff's (2004) process model, this finding reflects the attitudinal component. As Deardorff (2004) pointed that attitude is fundamental for developing intercultural competence, the finding supports in that the attitude of respect is the critical starting point for participants to interact with the Other. Demonstrating the attitude of respect by accepting cultural differences enables participants to be open and to acknowledge the rights of the Other to practice their cultural ways in their own terms, although, the way of behaving of the Other may go beyond what participants can comprehend,. This finding confirms the literature that indicates accepting cultural differences does not necessarily mean agreement with other cultures since people by nature carry their own cultural baggage in perceiving their external world. Rather, accepting other cultures necessitates an individual to avoid judging other cultures based on his or her cultural standpoint (Hammerf et al., 2003; Koester & Lustig, 1991; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Samovar et al., 2010).

It is also interesting that participants associated respect as it manifests through acceptance of cultural differences with their concerns on creating positive feelings in interaction. This aspect was less noted in Deardorff's (2004) process model in regard to the attitudinal component. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) contended that conceptions of intercultural competence most often envision participants as too rational in intercultural encounters, hence missing out the emotional aspects that may

elicit potentially relevant concepts. This study extends the literature by incorporating the idea that respect, as a component of intercultural competence, requires participants to be attuned communicators. In this sense, respect takes into account the ability to sense the emotion or to "take care of feelings" in intercultural interaction. For example, as the finding suggests, although the cultural norms of the Other may be perceived as "impolite" or inappropriate from participants' own cultural standpoint (such as using direct eye contact), participants chose to adapt to make the Other feel comfortable. In situations where the Other may be unaware of participants' cultural values and unconsciously engaged in behaviors that may be viewed as "inappropriate," participants found a way to be tactful in confronting such differences to avoid offending the Other. Such sensitivity to feelings is sharable with Miike's (2012) proposition on the preponderance of many Asian cultures to view communication as sensing and feeling. In Miike's review of the existing Asian literature, many of Asian experiences of communication imply emotional sensitivity as an essential feature that characterizes the nature of being humans. Miike attested that the tendency toward affection does not suggest that Asians are not rational, but feelings and emotions are valued as critical qualities in Asian communication.

Deardorff's (2004) process model suggested that competent individuals attain desired internal outcomes by adapting and becoming flexible to select appropriate communication styles in intercultural communication. In regard to adaptation, the literature raised the key question that if adaptation is the core of competence, it is unclear as to what extent intercultural participants should adapt to one another (Deardorff, 2009b, Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) attested that "if both are adapting, it seems possible that both parties become

chameleons without a clear target pattern to which to adapt" (p.35). The finding on respect through recognition of cultural boundaries responds to this question. The finding suggests that while it is important for participants to adapt their behaviors as an indication of respect toward the Other, it is equally important to recognize that there are certain "territory" that provide a strong sense of ethnic identity to which participants felt as resistant to change. This necessitates participants to come into intercultural dialogue of each other's cultural boundaries that helps them to negotiate the extent they are able to adapt to one another.

As the finding indicates, one aspect of cultural boundary that was given most attention by participants pertains to religious beliefs. Suraya et al. (2013) explained that religion is closely tied to the principle of absolute truth. It is considered a sacred territory that is resistant to accepting change and necessitates attentiveness from intercultural participants. This finding substantiates the literature that religion plays a significant role in a majority of Malaysian people especially for the Malays where they were born into the Islamic faith and viewed Islam as a core part of their being (Minah Harun, 2007; Mohd Nor, 2011; Shamsul, 1996, 2001, 2005). In relation to the present study, participants demonstrated a heightened sensitivity to religious positions that was viewed as "non-negotiable" and thus, must be recognized in their own terms. In this sense, religious positions seemed to be a pivotal territory to which participants choose to maintain in intercultural interaction. It is within the consciousness of cultural boundaries that prompts participants to think of respect as a mutual process. Without mutual respect, it is very unlikely for two different ethnic individuals to co-exist and develop intercultural competence. It is at this juncture that participants' perspective on respect marks its distinction from the Western

perspective. While Deardorff (2004) remarked that the attitude of respect is located primarily at the individual level in her model, this study suggests that the attitude of respect is a function of both interlocutors in interaction that are viewed as interdependent beings. This finding is in congruence with the existing non-Western perspectives in the literature that indicated the emphasis on mutuality and interdependent process of communication in many non-Western cultures (e.g., Chen, 2009, 2011; Chen & Starosta, 2003; Yeh, 2010; Yum, 2012; Zaharna, 2009).

The interdependent process of communication also corresponds closely to Miike's (2002, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2012b) work on Asiacentricity. Miike (2012b) attested that communication as it is viewed from an Asiacentric perspective is a process of non-separateness that rests within interdependent and interrelated nature of the universe. As Asians believe "the universe is a great whole in which everyone and everything are interrelated across space and time" (Miike, 2012b, p.71), many Asian practices accentuate the fact of human existence that is dependent on all other beings (Chen, 2009a, 2009c; Chen & An, 2009; Chen & Miike, 2006; Dissanayake, 2003; Ishii et al., 2012). Based on this worldview of mutual dependence, Miike (2012b) further proposed the theme of reciprocity is Asian communication that entails one's obligation to repay what he or she had received in the course of his or her life. The view on mutual dependence corresponds with this study as it indicates that participants viewed respect as an obligatory reciprocity in which it is an exchanged process. When one initiates respect for the Other, then such respect is expected to be returned. Without this obligatory reciprocity, intercultural competence is unlikely to take place.

The finding on respect with regard to religious positions also responds to the call made by Holmes and O'Neill (2012) for understanding how positions of religious identities give impact on intercultural competence. This study provides phenomenological evidence on how participants work with differences in religious positions. As Deardorff's (2004) process model indicated that adaptation is an important aspect of intercultural competence, this study suggests that it is not always the means for achieving competent communication. Rather, intercultural competence is viewed as a process that takes into account the extent intercultural participants negotiate whether or not it is possible for them to adapt to cultural differences. In view of this, participants choose to maintain their religious positions in the face of cultural differences.

Interestingly, the maintenance of religious positions does not create conflict for participants to relate well with the Other. Participants were able to engage in satisfying intercultural interaction resulting in their thoughts on the importance of recognizing each other's cultural boundaries. This standpoint suggests that having competent communication does not necessarily require a compromise of one's cultural and religious identity. Rather, it takes into account a mutual process of respect between two ethnic individuals to acknowledge each other's differences. As Deardorff (2009b) attested that the search for intercultural competence requires the need for genuine respect to which we truly value each other, this study concurs with her view by showing that genuine respect is about mutual recognition of differences that enable intercultural participants to co-exist in this multicultural world.

5.2.2.3 Textural theme 3: Language Ability

The literature indicated that language remains an issue as Western intercultural scholars were not able to conclude whether or not it is an essential component of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2004, 2006; LaRocco, 2011). Participants in the study felt strongly on the importance of language which resulted in the emergence of language ability as a crucial component of intercultural competence. As the finding indicates, the emergence of language ability emanated from participants' consciousness of language as an important medium of interaction, language strategies that they devised in interaction and their interest to learn other languages.

Participants felt that the primary goal of interaction is to convey messages through language. This finding indicates the valued interactional goal for participants which reflect the notion of effectiveness. It seems that from the participants' standpoint, effective communication is achieved when they were able to understand the Other and to get themselves understood through language. In view of this, language serves as the key enabler for participants to function effectively in intercultural interaction. Without language, it is virtually impossible for participants to interact. Interestingly, participants' focus was principally with spoken language since it is the most visible aspect of interaction. Participants might feel frustrated to try to describe their ideas but not being able to think of words that accurately convey the intended meaning when interacting. This consciousness led participants to associate intercultural competence with the ability to learn vocabulary and to construct sentences within a particular language that enables them to send information.

The interconnection between language and communication has long been noted in the literature since language is the "basic stuff" in social interaction and language requires the process of communication to connect people (Fantini, 1995; Fong, 2012; Mowlana, 1996). Fantini (1995) maintained that language plays an important role because it gives physical expression to thoughts that enable the process of communication to take place. Accordingly, Fantini claimed that language is vital for one's communicative ability since it allows him or her to learn symbols, to devise thoughts and to convey thoughts. Given this view, it can be said that competent communication in any language requires knowledge of the words needed to express ideas (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006; Fong, 2012; Lustig & Koester, 2010). Paradoxically, notwithstanding a wide acknowledgement on the important role of language in the literature, Western researchers continue to ignore the role of language during intercultural encounters (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 1995, 2009; Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006). This raises the question: if language is acknowledged as an important aspect for communication, what makes language seems to be 'invisible' in the eyes of Western scholars?

Mowlana (1996) contended that the invisibility of language can be attributed to the fact that most communication research is carried out by scholars from the dominant linguistic group internationally in which language is not a problem for these societies. The attention on psychological factors, behaviors, and communication rules most often supersede language component in many Western models of intercultural competence (Fantini, 2009; Byram, 1997). Extant research of intercultural competence within Western cultural contexts substantiates this view. For example, Holmes and O'Neill (2012) interrogated intercultural engagement from

the vantage point of New Zealand students (who are mostly native speakers of English). Participants in their study perceived language was not much an issue in interaction since they viewed themselves as "inevitably" competent. Instead, respecting cultural differences was perceived as more important than language. Accordingly, Holmes and O'Neill concluded that linguistic competence is not an indicator for intercultural competence. Additionally, Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) attested that notwithstanding many years of international travelling experiences, many Western scholars remain monolingual and thus, it is not surprising to find them without proficiency in a second language. Fantini further argued that those who have never labored to communicate through a second language are often unaware of the qualitative difference between communicating in one's own language and in other languages. Without a second language experience, they have not grappled with language and see the world through an alternative cultural frame. Lacking an alternative form of communication led many Western scholars to adopt a single vantage point to continue their perception, conceptualization, and expression of thoughts; and inadvertently become unaware of language's role in intercultural communication (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006; Miike, 2010a, 2010b, 2012a).

Lustig and Koester (2010) remarked that language is notably a taken-for-granted aspect of people's lives. It is the realization that the use of language can give rise to a serious gap in interaction that heightens people's awareness on language's central role in their ability to interact. In congruence with this view, the present study indicates that participants noted lacking language ability caused some serious constrains in their interaction. As such, language appears to be an area of concern for participants leading them to think on the importance of language in their ability to

interact with the Other. The need for language ability was keenly felt by participants in intercultural situations that necessitate both ethnic individuals to interact through a lingua franca (mainly English). The finding also indicates that participants faced difficulties to comprehend variations of accents or pronunciations of English words that makes their communication more effortful. In response to such difficulties, participants addressed their concern on their language ability and suggested the importance of having a good command of English.

The concern on language ability is worthy of note since English was not native to all participants in the study. The literature indicated that non-native speakers of English perceived language skills to be more difficult than native speakers (Albl-Mikasa, 2009; Berman & Cheng, 2010; Doan, 2012; Yang et al., 2006). Byram (1997) claimed that people who are struggling with a foreign language is more aware of the source of their difficulties than those speaking their first languages. Byram went on to say:

> The subjective experience of interaction in a foreign language distinguishes significantly between intercultural and intracultural communication. The foreign language speaker may experience a degree of powerlessness vis-à-vis a native speaker. They may sense the constraints of insufficient knowledge and skill in linguistic competence to meet the specific requirements of the interaction. They should be aware of the need to compare, contrast, and establish relationships between concepts in their own and the foreign language, including the problems of dysfunction and conflict. (p.41)

Difficulties with language have been well-documented in the literature. However, researchers most often studied international students' experiences within Western cultural contexts in which English is spoken natively by a majority of its host members (e.g., Flaherty & Stojakovic, 2008; Gu et al., 2010; Jung et al., 2007; LaRocco, 2011; Lin, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Yang et al., 2011). Given such research focus, their findings highlight unidirectionality on the need for competency that centers on non-native English speakers of international students who crossed their national borders to study in Western countries. These studies raise an interesting question for discussion, that is, "What it means to be competent in a non-Western multilingual setting where English is not spoken natively by majority of its members?" Scholars noted that when two individuals in interaction are from different cultures speaking a language which is foreign to both of them, there are significant influences on communication that arise from their initial language (Baker, 2011; Byram et al., 2002; Lustig & Koester, 2010). As differences in words and concepts of a language affect the ease with which a person can change from one language to another, competent intercultural participants need to have the awareness of the inherent cultural conventions that gave impact on their speech practices (Baker, 2011; Bowe & Martin, 2007; Maude, 2011; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

It was evident in this study that participants were aware about cultural influences on their spoken language leading them to devise a number of strategies to facilitate interaction. One of the strategies includes working through confusion of the uttered words by the Other through written verbal code. Participants also used nonverbal cues to complement their verbal point and this strategy helps participants to make

their speech in a more comprehensible context. The strategies that participants used are congruent with what Maude (2011) called as 'repair' activities. Maude attested that 'repairs' are needed because individuals from different cultural backgrounds are often unaware of each other's communicative conventions which may cause miscommunication of the other person's meaning. Acknowledging that miscommunication often occurs in intercultural situations, it should be quickly 'repaired' such as asking the speaker to clarify his or her verbal point. The finding of this study also corresponds to Liu's (2009) investigation of intercultural competence in the context of English as foreign language in China. Liu found that non-native English speakers usually adopt their own ways of using the language to interact. Liu contended that intercultural competence takes into account the ability to see what goes in interaction that requires participants to use language flexibly to negotiate meanings in the process of intercultural interaction.

It is important to note that paying attention on language alone is not an absolute guarantee for achieving intercultural competence. As the findings of this study suggest, what underscores the need for language strategies that participants used in interaction with the Other takes into account attitude, knowledge, and skills of participants. As Deardorff (2004) attested that attitude is the critical starting point for achieving competence, attitude moves participants to be aware of challenges especially when it includes situations that necessitate both ethnic individuals to rely on a lingua franca. Trying to interact in a foreign language can be fatiguing and thus, requires patience and perseverance toward difficulties that participants faced in interaction. This necessitates participants to develop an attitude of openness to accept various versions of a language to move beyond language-cultural differences. Such

openness led participants to develop skills in working out strategies to improve interaction.

In addition to acknowledging the importance of improving ability in a lingua franca (mainly English) to remove language barriers, participants expressed the interests to learn the language of the Other because it serves as windows into gaining insights about their cultures. This finding supports the literature that indicated learning language teaches much about the culture of those who use it and permits individuals to not only experience the ways in which language embodies another culture but also to establish connection (Byram, 1997; Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006; Fong, 2012; Lau, Ang, Soon, Law, & Wong, 2012; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Mohamad Azlan, 2010; Samovar et al., 2010). This finding correlates with the literature that competence can be assisted by the behaviors that indicate interest in other languages (Fantini, 2009; Gudykunst, 1998; Lustig & Koester, 2010). Fantini (2009) contended that intercultural competence necessitates the ability to transcend one's native communication competence and to develop a second communication competence as one encounters his or her interlocutor. One's acquisition of a second communication competence as it is manifested through new language learning reflects one's development of intercultural competence. Fantini further contended that competency in a second language (or third and fourth language) enhances all other aspects of intercultural competence. Coming to grips with a new language led people to adopt communicative strategies in someone else's terms and simultaneously develop cultural self awareness of how their own culture influences their perceptions and behaviors. In congruence with Fantini's contention, this study provides the evidence that learning the language of the Other enhances participants' ability to have an

ethnorelative view that would help them to see from the perspectives of other cultures.

Importantly, participants noted that language learning may occur on day-to-day basis as they build close relationships with the Other. This finding adds an interesting perspective on the salience of interpersonal relationships that promotes language learning. This standpoint reiterates the relational aspect as a criterion for intercultural competence in non-Western cultural contexts (e.g., Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Liu, 2012; Yeh, 2010; Yum, 2012). Furthermore, as most research on intercultural competence has been conducted in English and about North Americans who themselves are monolingual (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006); this study suggests a new perspective on intercultural competence that includes ethnically diverse individuals who speak multiple languages. It appears that the presence of multilingual ethnic individuals within the study setting provides rich opportunities for participants to enter into another tongue and to transcend their native worldviews. As Fantini (2009) asserted that there is a need for developing new abilities to be able to communicate across language-cultural differences, this study adds to the literature by offering an understanding that intercultural competence is parts and parcel of developing bilingual-bicultural perspectives through interpersonal relationships. This means that competent communicators do not only strive to make themselves understood in their own tongue or the interlocutor's tongue, or a language that is foreign to both parties; but also strive to build relationships that become the key for learning other languages and cultural perspectives.

5.3 Contributions to the Field of Intercultural Competence

Studies on intercultural competence have been conducted in Western cultural contexts and utilized positivistic methodologies. As a result, most existing definitions of intercultural competence do not adequately capture what it is like to experience intercultural interaction and how such experience informs understanding of intercultural competence from other cultural contexts. Accordingly, the literature calls for more non-Western perspectives of intercultural competence. This study is one of the ongoing efforts to illuminate an alternative perspective to the Western conceptions of intercultural competence. In so doing, this study employs Moustakas (1994) phenomenological method and such methodology contributes to a re-conceptualization of intercultural competence that takes into account the lived experience of individuals who engaged in intercultural interaction in a non-Western multicultural setting. The findings of this study offer several contributions to the extant knowledge on intercultural competence.

The first contribution of this study is it responds to the calls made by researchers to re-think the Western derived conceptions of intercultural competence. This study brings forth the lived experience of multiethnic students in a Malaysian university setting. Accordingly, this study includes diverse ethnic voices and offers the common meeting point of what constitutes intercultural competence from these diverse voices. Deardorff (2009b) maintained that although there are distinctions between the Western and non-Western perspectives in viewing intercultural competence, there are also certain elements that may be similar between Western and non-Western cultures. This study contributes to the body of knowledge of

intercultural competence by identifying the elements of intercultural competence that can be compared to that of the Western perspective. This study reveals that the criteria for judging competence intersect with the Western perspective as it includes both appropriateness and effectiveness; and the interdependent requirements for producing effective and appropriate behaviors which include attitude, knowledge, and skills. The emergent core themes that constitute intercultural competence - cultural understanding, respect and language ability correspond to the attitudinal, knowledge and skills components that are important for achieving appropriate and effective behaviors as envisioned in Deardorff's (2004) work. The finding also confirms the full cycle depicted in Deardorff's (2004) model to which intercultural competence begins with an internal manifestation of attitude, knowledge, and skills; and exhibited externally in intercultural interaction.

Despite similarities on the core components that constitute intercultural competence, this study contributes a different perspective on thinking through the locus of intercultural competence. While Deardorff (2004) model focuses on the knowledge, attitude and skills of a single individual, intercultural competence in the context of the present study indicates a focus on the relationships. The conditional components (knowledge, attitude, and skills) of intercultural competence are viewed as relational since it takes into account mutual dependence between two ethnic individuals that must occur through interpersonal relationships. Such relational aspect is an essential quality since without it, intercultural competence does not take place. The relational aspect of knowledge, attitude, and skills in turn affect the nature of appropriateness and effectiveness that forms the core conception of intercultural competence. While the Western literature bears more on a single individual to acquire knowledge about

appropriate behaviors in a given culture, this study extends appropriateness into a relational perspective that necessitates both ethnic individuals to be mutually aware of culturally acceptable behaviors that each other brings into interaction. Equally, while effectiveness from the Western perspective tends to focus on achieving one's personal goal (s), this study shows that the valued goal of communication is to develop interpersonal relationships between two ethnic individuals. This goal led participants to value emotional sensitivity as an essential communication goal. This aspect contributes to an understanding that intercultural competence includes maintenance of human relationships through the ability to be attuned to emotional aspects in interaction.

It is worthy to note that the emphasis on relationships in intercultural competence does not suggest it is exclusive to non-Western cultures. Such a conception also seems to exist within Western cultures. However, there is a major distinction that characterizes the nature of relationships in Western and non-Western cultures. The Western perspective indicates that even though individuals develop relationships, individuals are independent on the needs or the goals they bring into the relationships (Chen & An, 2009; Spitzberg, 2012; Xiao & Chen, 2012; Yum, 2012). Accordingly, in the West, individuals are expected to take responsibility to actively participate in their communication exchange and to satisfy each other's needs (Hecht & Spitzberg, 1984; Imahori & Lanigan, 1989; Spitzberg, 2000). In her examination of Korean perspective of communication competence, Yum (2012) attested that unlike Western perspective that stresses on achieving personal goals in mutually accepted ways that makes a person competent, effectiveness for Koreans is not so much centred on getting what one needs out of a relationship. Rather, a relationship

is viewed as harmonious in which it is not about "what one does to gain one's goal but what all parties do to maintain appropriate relationship" (p.13). This view is in tune with this study. In line with Yum's proposition, this study indicates that competency is not confined within the Western perspective of achieving personal goals in a relationship. Rather, what becomes more of a concern for participants is to establish mutual dependence that necessitates two ethnic individuals to think of what both parties can do to co-create intercultural competence in a relationship.

The second contribution of this study is that in addition to the relational aspect on intercultural competence, it highlights the significant role of language in intercultural competence. As language abilities received scant attention by Western scholars, this study illuminates the visibility and vitality of language as an important component of intercultural competence. The finding on language ability contributes to an enriching dimension of effectiveness as it takes into account participants' concern to understand the Other and to make themselves understood through a language. As participants acknowledged the need for language ability was keenly felt within situations that necessitate them to use a lingua franca (mainly English) in interaction, the finding contributes into thinking about intercultural competence to meet the realities of lingua franca users. Since English has become international language in Malaysian campuses, one important skill for developing competency includes flexibility in using this language as one interacts with the Other. Interestingly, the significant role of language in intercultural competence does not only include viewing it as an enabler. It also includes using language as a tool for transcending participants' own cultural worldviews and relating well with the Other. This standpoint led participants to express the interest to learn the languages of the Other.

More interestingly, language learning may naturally occur as participants develop a close relationship with the Other. Accordingly, this study contributes to an understanding of intercultural competence as a process that includes developing bilingual-bicultural skills which can be attained through relationship building.

The third contribution of this study is it offers an understanding that intercultural experience as it is lived by the participants can be viewed as not only an important source for drawing their conception on intercultural competence, but also as part of the process of how they can become competent. In view of this, it seems that intercultural experience and intercultural competence interweave with one another. Although the data analysis in this study was divided according to the research questions which necessitate a compartmentalization of the findings into the nature of intercultural experience and the conception of intercultural competence, over the course of interpreting the data, I found that this compartmentalization seems unnatural. This made me realized that when participants shared their intercultural experience, there is really no natural separation between what it is that they experienced and what it is that they understand about competent communication. The nature of intercultural experience and the notion about competence seems to interweave and inform one another. For example, as I reflect how participants' thoughts about language ability as an important factor for intercultural competence came to emerge, this thoughts derive from participants' experience talking about difficulties they faced in interaction when their ability to function through a language was not available. As participants found that lacking language ability (mainly in English as their lingua franca) is a constraining element in interaction, participants felt that improving their language ability and minimizing language

difficulties help them to achieve competency. In this case, the absence of language ability suggests the critical need for its presence in order for participants to relate with the Other. It is also possible that participants have already engaged in intercultural competent behaviors in their everyday interaction with the Other. For example, during the in-depth interviews, I remember one participant (who is a Chinese Malaysian) talked about his experience having a Malay Malaysian roommate (from which he viewed this roommate as a friend) and how mutual understanding of each other's cultural differences led both to be able to co-exist peacefully. Taking from such experience, this participant suggested that intercultural competence must take into account mutual understanding. The lived experience of participants does not only deepen and extend our understanding on what transpires in intercultural interaction but also how participants acquired competency over the course of experiencing interaction with the Other.

In addition to the interweaving connection between intercultural experience and intercultural competence, this study offers a deeper-level understanding on intercultural competence in the light of how participants construe selves as complex ethnic beings. This standpoint draws attention on the critical importance of identity consciousness as an important factor for intercultural competence. As participants understand who they are as ethnic individuals, they become aware of how their own worldviews give impact on their behaviors. As participants try to see things through the eyes of the Other who hold an alternative worldview, their perspective is added into participants' own personal repertoire. Additionally, the meaning of being an ethnic individual is not only based in a 'given' manner which is constructed through the ethnic sociological markers. It is also viewed in a 'multifaceted, multilayered,

and fluid' sense suggesting the idea that identity is being redefined and reconstructed in the course of participants' interaction with the Other. Given that participants felt their ethnic identity interweaves with religious and national identities, the conception of intercultural competence must take into account how participants self-position their identities in relation to the Other. Such self-positioning of identities speaks volume on how participants experienced degree of cultural differences, how they identify intercultural exchanges and how they work out ways to deal with cultural differences.

The fourth contribution of this study is that in a practical and social sense, it provides the means for higher institutions in Malaysia to improve intercultural competence among students through their curriculum. Educational institutions must play the key role in preparing younger generations for a world that demands them to interact with diverse ethnic groups (Tamam, 2009; Fazilah, Zaharah, Azizah, Gill, & Noor Aziah, 2012). In response to the role of higher education, Zhao and Wildemeersch (2008) asserted:

> Higher education is not only about transmitting knowledge, skills, and social values to students; it should provide opportunities for individuals to come into the world, to know who they are and where they stand, to have a better sense of who others are and how to respond to them. (p.55)

Maintaining a harmonious multiethnic society is indeed a 'never ending story' as it requires continuous effort to guarantee Malaysia's stability and future survival (Evans et al., 2010; Shamsul, 1995, 2005, 2014). Educating university students about ethnic relations remains as a crucial agenda for Malaysia (Tamam, 2009). One of the

ways this agenda has been manifested in Malaysian universities was through the inception of a compulsory course for students called "Ethnic Relations" in 2007 (Shamsul, 2008). As the General Editor of the "Ethnic Relations Module," Shamsul (2008) remarked the significance of improving ethnic relations amongst university students:

> The main objective of the "Ethnic Relations" course was to raise awareness of the state of ethnic relations in Malaysia amongst the university students…and facilitate mutual understanding among the ethnic groups by imparting detailed information about the culture and the values of each to a level not normally understood. Indeed, as social actors themselves, students are at the verge of entering not only the job market but more importantly as the expanding intelligentsia of Malaysian society. It was envisaged that the sharing of their lived experiences of their individual ethnic identities in a classroom situation would enable to exchange among themselves their personal experiences and views to members of different ethnic groups, thus facilitating mutual understanding. This process of face-to-face interaction mediated by lecturers trained as facilitators was planned as an optimum context for raising the awareness of the need for cross cultural understanding in Malaysian society. (p.16)

Ironically, despite such an effort to enhance awareness and mutual understanding, current studies indicated that the level of interaction among multiethnic students beyond the classroom is at a satisfactory stage (e.g., Hamidah et al., 2011; Khalim & Norshidah, 2010; Khalim et al., 2010; Mohd Rizal & Thay, 2012). Hamidah et al.

310

(2011) attested that students tend to confine their socialization within their own ethnic group and thus, there is a need to enhance interaction among multiethnic students by adding interactional elements within the university curriculum. Given that this study captures lived intercultural experience of students, the findings of the study offer the specificities of intercultural competence that would guide policy makers into producing a curriculum design that encourages students to experience intercultural interaction and to develop intercultural competence. Much can be taught to students about interaction with the Other and what students can do to achieve competent communication. As Shamsul (2005) attested that it is critical for anyone who wants to make sense and find solutions to pluralism problems by learning from history that assist him or her to deconstruct problematic aspects and find ways to solve problems, it is in the similar way that students may develop intercultural competence by learning from their own intercultural experience.

Malaysia as a plural society will continue to face challenges of ethnic diversities and failure to tolerate differences may rupture social cohesion (Evans et al., 2010; Shamsul, 2005, 2008, 2014). Needless to say that globalization has been one important facet of today's society, and arguably, challenges for Malaysia's development may not only come from within but also from the outside. As this study offers a conception of intercultural competence that includes diverse ethnic voices from both domestic and non-domestic ethnic groups, this study helps higher learning institutions to develop a more holistic perspective of intercultural competence. Teaching intercultural competence to students must not only include communication skills to interact successfully with other domestic ethnic individuals, but also with those from other places. Having such soft skills give advantageous for students to

make them employable given that today's organizations seek graduates who are able to meet the demands of diverse clientele from both locals and internationals.

5.3.1 Delienating a Conceptual Model of Intercultural Competence

The literature called for a further refinement of the existing theoretical models that are primarily derived from Western cultures (e.g., Deardorff, 2009b; Liu, 2012; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Responding to these calls, intercultural competence is re-conceptualized as a mutual dependence process between two ethnic individuals to achieve appropriate and effective communication. This mutual dependence process must take into account the abilities of both ethnic individuals to develop knowledge, motivation and skills that occur through interpersonal relationships.

Drawing from the aforementioned re-conception of intercultural competence, the essential contribution of this study is that it brings forth a relational perspective in conceptualizing intercultural competence and such a perspective is visualized in Figure 5.1. This conceptual model extends Deardorff's (2004) work from the emphasis on a single individual into a framework that highlights a mutual dependent process between two ethnic individuals (self and the Other) to co-create intercultural competence. The model also adds several elements of identity as suggested by the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht et al., 1993) in providing a more complex picture of intercultural competence.
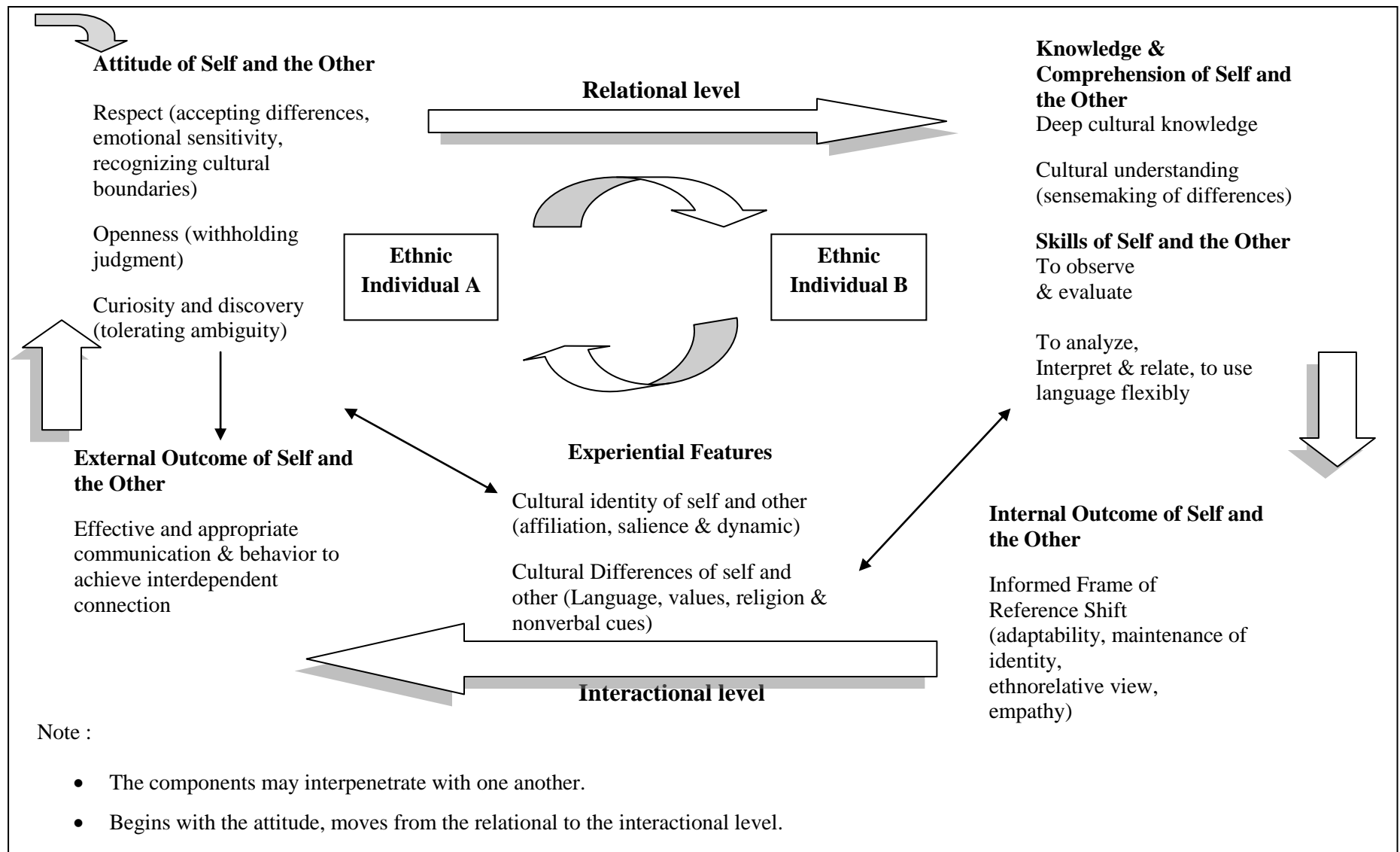
Attitude of Self and the Other

Respect (accepting differences, emotional sensitivity, recognizing cultural boundaries)

Openness (withholding judgment)

Curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity)

Relational level

Knowledge & Comprehension of Self and the Other
Deep cultural knowledge

Cultural understanding (sensemaking of differences)

Skills of Self and the Other
To observe
& evaluate

To analyze,
Interpret & relate, to use language flexibly

Ethnic Individual A

Ethnic Individual B

External Outcome of Self and the Other

Effective and appropriate communication & behavior to achieve interdependent connection

Experiential Features

Cultural identity of self and other (affiliation, salience & dynamic)

Cultural Differences of self and other (Language, values, religion & nonverbal cues)

Internal Outcome of Self and the Other

Informed Frame of Reference Shift (adaptability, maintenance of identity, ethnorelative view, empathy)

Interactional level

Note :

- The components may interpenetrate with one another.

- Begins with the attitude, moves from the relational to the interactional level.

Figure 5.1. Conceptual Model of Intercultural Competence

313

The model as it is visualized in Figure 5.1 envisions intercultural competence as a complex process to which it occurs through the movement and process orientation of various elements from the relational level into the interactional level. The relational level portrays that intercultural competence is a function of attitude, knowledge, and skills of both self and the Other that occurs through interpersonal relationships. Although it is possible to enter this framework at any given point such as getting into the interactional level or knowledge/comprehension directly to the external outcome, the degree of achieving appropriateness and effectiveness is likely to be high when the entire cycle is completed. Additionally, attitude is viewed as the fundamental starting point that moves both self and the Other to acquire knowledge and skills, and to achieve internal and external outcomes.

Given that language plays a significant role in the ability to interact as the findings of this study suggests, language is added as an important component of skills for achieving intercultural competence. The needed skills for achieving competent communication are that both self and the Other know how to use language flexibly to achieve effective communication and to use language to establish interpersonal relationships. In addition to valuing differences as an indication of respect, this model includes emotional sensitivity and recognition of cultural boundaries as additional elements of respect. In view of this, respect does not only include the ability to value other cultures. It also includes the ability to be attuned to the feelings of the Other and to recognize cultural boundaries of both self and the Other. Being an attuned communicator is important to create comfortable feelings in the face of cultural differences. Showing respect through recognition of cultural boundaries is

important for the ethnic individuals to negotiate the extent both parties can adapt to one another.

In addition to the relational perspective, this proposed model also extends Deardorff's (2004) work by incorporating experiential features of intercultural interaction that indicate the complex process of intercultural communication. This experiential features offer a deeper-level understanding of intercultural competence in addition to knowledge, attitude, and skills; and the internal and external outcomes. Intercultural experience is an important source for people to draw on their conception of intercultural competence and it is also part of the crucial process for how people develop their competency. What underscores the importance of intercultural experience is to begin with an active consciousness of self as much as the Other as complex ethnic beings. This view gives rise to acknowledging the important role of cultural identity in interaction that considers three important aspects: affiliation, salience, and dynamics of identity.

The affiliation aspect considers the ethnic framework or the sense of belonging to an ethnic group which influences the ethnic individuals' standpoint of the world. The affiliation aspect is important to understand how the individuals viewed selves as ethnic beings and how their ethnic identity is internalized and externalized in their interaction with the Other.

As Deardorff (2009b) attested that intercultural communication considers the extent cultural identity influences one's interaction with the Other, the salience of identity refers to the extent that ethnicity matters in intercultural interaction. This salient aspect also recognizes intercultural participants as complex ethnic beings since they

may belong to various social groups and thus, considers the multifaceted and multilayered nature of identity. What is important in comprehending identity salience is to look at how ethnicity intersects with other identities (such as religious or national identities) and how these identities emerge in intercultural situations. The salience of identity can be understood by looking at how an ethnic individual self positions his or her identities in relation to the Other that determines which identities seem to be activated in intercultural situations.

The dynamic aspect of identity closely relate to the salience aspect of identity in that it illuminates the fluid nature of identity of both self and the Other. Given that intercultural interaction can be viewed as encounters between culturally complex beings, this dynamic aspect recognizes individuals as changing entities that define and re-define their sense of selves within the realm of interpersonal connection with the Other. As ethnic individuals interpret the behaviors of the Other through their identity framework, it is likely that individuals encounter cultural differences. Such experience may not only include the presence of cultural differences but also the degree of cultural differences (such as values, religion, norm, language, and nonverbal cues) that both ethnic individuals felt in their interaction.

As Deardorff (2004) suggested that her model can be entered at any given point, similarly, in this proposed conceptual model, it is possible for ethnic individuals to directly experience interaction and make sense of what is needed to become competent out of such experience. However, attitude is the fundamental starting point for ethnic individuals to continuously experience intercultural interaction and to progress through the cyclical process of intercultural competence. The process of

becoming competent through experience does not only require time but it can also be haphazard and unstructured. It is haphazard and unstructured because in real life, both ethnic individuals do not always know about each other. Such uncertainties may lead both parties to engage in a trial and error process, and concurrently learn competent behaviors. Additionally, learning whether or not one violates or follows cultural expectations is not an instantaneous process. It progresses through relationship building and mutual engagement from both ethnic individuals to understand each other's culturally different views. As both ethnic individuals experience different ways of doing things, they enter into intercultural dialogue to gain cultural knowledge and begin to refine each other's communicative repertoires. As both sides begin to make sense on what attitude, knowledge, and skills that are needed for achieving appropriate and effective behaviors from their experience; what they have learned can be fed back into interaction to improve future experience. In view of this, the experiential features and other components, including the relational and interactional level in the framework may interpenetrate with each other.

Given that there is no pinnacle for intercultural competence because it is a process that improves over time (Deardorff, 2009b), what is crucial in the process of becoming competent requires a great amount of ongoing learning from intercultural experience and expanding communication skills. In view of this, it can be conjectured that the more both ethnic individuals acquire knowledge about each other and improve their skills through interpersonal relationships, the higher is their levels of intercultural competence.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Since this study included both local and non-local participants in the focus groups and in-depth interviews, the samples were diverse not only in ethnicity but also in nationality. This diverse sample has certainly enhanced our understanding in bringing forth the complexity of intercultural competence as it is situated within participants' lived intercultural experience. While having such diverse sample in the study offers a more complex notion of intercultural competence, admittedly, it is also intricate to articulate in what ways ethnicity informs or misinforms participants' experience.

Given that the realm of ethnicity is often contextualized within a particular society (Kim, 1986), it is commonplace to find that the corpus of interethnic studies most often include major ethnic groups in Malaysia (e.g., Aida, 2008; Faisal, Abdul Muati & Jusang, 2009; Tamam, 2009, 2013; Tamam, Fazilah & Yee, 2011; Tamam, Fazilah & Azimi, 2006). Within this context, the salience of ethnicity is warranted in researchers' inquiries. Taking this perspective, it is undeniable that the salience of ethnicity for local participants has prominently emerged in the study. However, given that this study also included non-local participants, the salience of ethnicity seems to be elusive in their experience. This is due to the fact that it is more likely for the non-local participants to be identified by the other person in terms of their nationalities rather than their specific ethnicities. Accordingly, such identification from the standpoint of another person may misinform the salience of ethnicity in participants' experience. Nonetheless, this finding suggests the fluid nature of ethnicity rather than its absence in participants' experience. As Minah Harun (2007) attested the acquaintance of ethnicity requires one to meet the person at an

interpersonal level, this study admittedly needs a further probing. In view of this, it is interesting for future studies to look into how long ethnically diverse participants had been in the campus and how long they had developed close friendships with one another. Within such longitudinal studies, researchers may interrogate in what ways the ethnic identification of non-local participants from the perspective of another person plays out in their interaction and how it gives implications on developing intercultural competence. Additionally, the interest for interrogating close friendships among ethnically diverse individuals offers an opportunity for future researchers to extend the proposed relational model in the previous section into examination of specific interpersonal relationships. What motivates these individuals to develop relationships with those coming from different cultural backgrounds? How do these individuals experience intercultural relationships? How do they negotiate different ethnic identities? What it takes to have successful intercultural relationships? Such foci will assist in the emergence of findings that would add to a richer understanding of intercultural competence that can be compared to the finding of this study.

In rethinking the relevance of Western concepts of competence, there is an opportunity for future researchers to consider the significant role of religion in intercultural competence. As this study indicated that religious beliefs work as an important bonding factor for participants to relate effectively with the Other, especially for participants who are Muslims, this particular area needs a further interrogation. Mowlana's (2007) claim is useful to point into such direction:

Islam is not only a religion but also a total way of life for millions of people around the world. Unlike other major cultural systems, Islam transcends geographical as well as racial and ethnic boundaries and strives for universality of human kind. (p.24)

Given that this study indicated religion emerged as one important factor for establishing a common ground for Muslims participants to develop intercultural relationships, it is admirable to explore in what ways Islamic values surpass cultural differences and how it gives implications on the conception of intercultural competence. Such exploration from the Islamic perspective is vital to garner an alternative to the existing Western orientation that dominates the field of intercultural competence.

This study is oriented toward interrogating the conception of intercultural competence through participants' reflections of their interaction with the Other. While participants' reflection can be insightful in comprehending intercultural competence, little is known as to what was actually being perceived by participants when they interact with the Other in real situations. It is recommended for future researchers to incorporate other methodologies such as ethnography to observe how individuals of different cultures interact in actual intercultural situations. What actually takes place when two individuals of different cultural identities interact? How are competent behaviors enacted in actual intercultural situations? Findings from such research would be beneficial to delineate competent behaviors that work in actual intercultural situations.

Apart from exploring face-to-face intercultural communication, the understanding of intercultural competence could also be enhanced by considering online communication in future studies. With the unprecedented process of globalization, the spread of new social media worldwide has resulted in the increasing number of intercultural contacts (Chen, 2012; Lebedko, 2014). Given that many scholars have underscored the significant impact of new social media on intercultural communication (Lebedko, 2014); it is recommended for future researchers to study students' communication with the Other through social media. The study may probe into eliciting students' understanding of intercultural competence as they reflected on their interactional experience across cultures via social media such as the Facebook. Perhaps, such an inquiry may transform the "traditional" way of conceptualizing intercultural competence.

As this study considers students' reflection of their lived intercultural experience, this study highlights the students' social reality in the multicultural campus that they live in. Given that the development of intercultural competence is indispensable at all levels within higher learning institutions; further research can be conducted by including other important stakeholders such as academics and administrators. As higher education in Malaysia is fast becoming an industry to which promotions are actively carried out to attract foreign students especially from Asia and Africa (Nazri & Rozita, 2012); it is interesting for future researchers to study intercultural interaction that involve international students and administrators or instructors. Such studies are useful to interrogate what kind of challenges in intercultural interaction that both parties experienced and how they overcome intercultural challenges. The understanding of intercultural competence within the context of international

students and administrators/academics would be beneficial for Malaysian universities to improve the quality of interaction within the campus and enhance their reputation.

5.5 Conclusion

The result of this phenomenological study indicates that while there are dimensions of intercultural competence that intersect with the Western perspective, there are dimensions that need to be situated within a particular cultural context. As this study contextualizes its inquiry within a non-Western setting, this study contributes to a re-conceptualization of intercultural competence that brings forth the importance of mutuality, relationship building and interconnectedness between intercultural participants. It is hoped that this study will promote more efforts in developing intercultural competence among students in Malaysian higher learning institutions. Mere contact with the Other is not sufficient for competent communication. Rather, adequate preparation is necessary for students to learn how they can acquire intercultural competence through relationship building. This hopefully will help them to function appropriately and effectively in an increasingly multicultural society.

REFERENCES

Abdul Rahim, H., Mohd Najib, G., & Anis Ayuni, C. G. (2010). *Fostering inter-group contacts among multiracial students in higher Education*. Retrieved from West Texas A&M University website: http://wtfaculy.wtamu.edu/ wbres//File/Journals/MCJ/Volume5-1/hamdan_ghafar_ghani.pdf

Adler, R. B., Rosenfeld, L. B., & Proctor, R. F. (2007). *Interplay: The process of interpersonal communication* (10th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Ahmed, I. (1996). *State, nation and ethnicity*. New York: Pinter.

Aida Hafitah, M. T., & Maimunah, I. (2007). Cross-cultural challenges and adjustments of expatriates: A case study in Malaysia. *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations, 6*(3), 72-99.

Aida, I. (2008). An analysis of Malay-Sino relations in Malaysia. *Asian Social Science, 4*(2), 3-12.

Albl-Mikasa, M. (2009). Who's afraid of ELF:'Failed' natives or non-native speakers struggling to express themselves?. *Dimensionen der Zweitsprachenforschung/Dimensions of Second Language Research.Festschrift für Kurt Kohn. Tübingen: Narr*, 109-129.

Alhazmi, A., & Nyland, B. (2010). Saudi international students in Australia and intercultural engagement: A study of transitioning from a gender segregated culture to a mixed gender environment. In D. Fallon (Ed.), *The 21st ISANA International Education Conference* (pp. 1-11). Melbourne, Australia: ISANA International Education Association Inc.

Ali, A., Van der Zee, K., & Sanders, G. (2003). Determinants of intercultural adjustment among expatriate spouses. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27*(5), 563-580.

Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Applebaum, M. (2013, May 14). Interview by D. Syarizan [E-mail]. Retrieved from https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/marc%40marcapplebaum.com/13ea 74482b8e826a.

Aquino-Russell, C., & Russell, R. (2009). Immersion in another culture: Paradoxical experiences considered for teachers and students in university classrooms. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research, 2*(4), 77-84.

Arasaratnam, L. A. (2004). *Intercultural communication competence: Development and empirical validation of a new model*. Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New Orleans, LA.

Arasaratnam, L. A. (2007). Research in intercultural communication competence. *Journal of International Communication, 13*(2), 66-73.

Arasaratnam, L. A. (2009). The development of a new instrument of intercultural communication competence. *Journal of Intercultural Communication, 20*, 2-22.

Arasaratnam, L. A., & Doerfel, M. L. (2005). Intercultural communication competence: Identifying key components from multicultural perspectives. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29*, 137-163.

Asante, M. K., Miike, Y., & Yin, J. (2014). Introduction: New directions for intercultural communication research. In M. K. Asante, Y. Miike & J. Yin (Eds.), *The global intercultural communication reader* (pp. 1-14). New York: Routledge.

Asma, A. (1996). *Going glocal: Cultural dimensions in Malaysian management.* Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Malaysian Institute of Management.

Asma, A., & Pederson, P. B. (2004). *Understanding multicultural Malaysia: Delights, puzzles and irritations.* Selangor, Malaysia: Prentice Hall.

Awang Rozaimie, A. S., Anees, J. A., & Oii, B. C. S. (2011). *Multicultural awareness for better ways of life: A scale validation among Malaysian undergraduate students.* Paper presented at the International conference on Business and Economic Research, Kuching Sarawak, Malaysia. Retrieved from http://www/ internationalconference.com.my/proceeding/icber2011_ proceeding/234-2nd-2011ICBER2011PG1174-1186MulticulturalAwareness. pdf

Baker, W. (2011). Intercultural awareness: modelling an understanding of cultures in intercultural communication through English as a lingua franca. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 11*(3), 197-214.

Baker, W. (2012). English as a lingua franca in Thailand: Characterisations and implications. In R. Baird, M. Kitazawa, H.Y. Lee & Y. Wang (Eds.), *English in Practice: Working papers of the centre for global Englishes, University of Southampton.* (Vol. 1). Southhampton, UK: University of Southhampton.

Baldwin, J. R., & Hecht, M. (2003). Unpacking group-based intolerance: A holographic look at identity. In L. A. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (pp. 354-363). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Banks, J. A. (2009). *Teaching strategies for ethnic studies*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Barna, L. M. (1994). Stumbling blocks in intercultural communication. In L. A. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (pp. 337-346). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Bennett, J. M. (2009). Cultivating intercultural competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Berman, R., & Cheng, L. (2010). English academic language skills: Perceived difficulties by undergraduate and graduate students, and their academic achievement. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 4*(1), 25-40.

Bhopal, M., & Rowley, C. (2005). Ethnicity as a management issue and resource: Examples from Malaysia. *Asia Pacific Business Review, 11*(4), 533-574.

Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological Methods and Research, 10*(2), 141-163.

Bippus, A. M., & Dorjee, T. (2002). The validity of PRECA as an index interethnic communication apprehension. *Communication Research Reports, 19*(2), 130-137.

Bird, A., & Osland, J. S. (2005). Making sense of intercultural collaboration. *International Studies of Management and Organization, 35*(4), 115-132.

Bok, D. (2009). Foreword. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bowe, H., & Martin, K. (2007). *Communication across cultures: Mutual understanding in a global world*. Sydney, NSW: Cambridge University Press.

Bradbury-Jones, C., Sambrook, S., & Irvine, F. (2008). The phenomenological focus group: An oxymoron? *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 65*(3), 663-671.

Bradford, L., Allen, M., & Beisser, K. R. (2000). Meta-analysis of intercultural communication competence research. *World Communication, 29*(1), 28-48.

Brein, M., & David, K. H. (1971). Intercultural communication and the adjustment of the sojourner. *Psychological Bulletin, 76*(3), 215-230.

Brislin, R. W. (1981). *Cross cultural encounters: Face-to-face interaction*. Needham Heights, MA: Ally and Bacon.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. New York: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., & Fleming, M. (1998). Introduction. In M. Byram & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Language learning in intercultural perspective: Approaches through drama and ethnography* (pp. 1-10). West 20th Street, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Byram, M., Gribkova, B., & Starkey, H. (2002). *Developing the intercultural dimension in language Teaching. A practical introduction for teachers.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Caelli, K. (2001). Engaging with phenomenology: Is it more of a challenge than it needs to be? *Qualitative Health Research, 11*(2), 273-281.

Caraway, C. (2010). *A phenomenological inquiry of pre-service teachers and their cultural immersions* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd/

Casrnir, F. L. (1999). Foundations for the study of intercultural communication based on a third-culture building model. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 23*(1), 91-116.

Cerbone, D. R. (2006). *Understanding phenomenology.* Saddler Street, Durham: Acumen.

Chai, S., & Zhong, M. (2006). Chinese American ethnic and cultural identity. In L. A. Samovar, R. E. Porter & E. R. McDaniel (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (pp. 93-104). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Chan, J. K. L. (2011). Enhancing the employability of and level of soft skills within tourism and hospitality graduates in Malaysia: The issues and challenges. *Journal of Tourism, 12*(1), 1-16.

Chang, W.W. (2007). The negative can be positive for cultural competence. *Human Resource Development International, 10*(2), 225-231.

Charon, J. M. (2004). *Symbolic interactionism: An introduction, an interpretation, an integration*. Upper Saddle Rivers, NJ: Pearson-Prentice Hall.

Chen, C. Y. (1987). Chinese philosophy and contemporary human communication theory. In D.L.Kincaid (Ed.), *Communication theory: Eastern and Western perspectives* (pp. 23-40). Albany, NY: State University of New York.

Chen, G. M. (2014). The two faces of Chinese communication. In Y. Miike, M. K. Asante & J. Yin (Eds.), *The global intercultural communication reader* (2nd ed., pp. 273-282). New York: Routledge.

Chen, G.M. (1990). Intercultural communication competence: Some perspectives of research. *The Howard Journal of Communication, 2*(3), 243-261.

Chen, G.M. (1993). *A Chinese perspective of communication competence.* Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Miami Beach, Florida.

Chen, G. M. (2004). The two faces of Chinese communication. *Human Communication: A Journal of the Pacific and Asian Communication Association, 7*(1), 25-36.

Chen, G.M. (2009a). Beyond the dichotomy of communication studies. *Asian Journal of Communication, 19*(4), 398-411.

Chen, G.M. (2009b). *On identity: An alternative view* (Research Report No.7752). Retrieved from http://www.thefreelibrary.com/On identity: an alternative view.-a0215306984

Chen, G.M. (2009c). *Toward an I Ching model of communication* (Research Report No. 5916)*.* Retrieved from http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Toward an I Ching model of communication.-a0215307082

Chen, G.M. (2011). *An introduction to key concepts in understanding the Chinese: harmony as the foundation of Chinese communication.* (Research Report No. 7842*).* Retrieved from http://www.thefreelibrary.com/An introduction to key concepts in understanding the Chinese: harmony...-a0275038595

Chen, G.M. (2013). A Zhong Dao model of management in global context. *Intercultural Communication Studies, XXII*(1), 1-8.

Chen, G. M., & An, R. (2009). A Chinese model of intercultural leadership competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp. 196-208). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chen, G.M., & Miike, Y. (2006). The ferment and future of communication studies in Asia: Chinese and Japanese perspectives. *China Media Research, 2*(1), 1-12.

Chen, G. M., & Starosta, W. J. (2003). Asian approaches to human communication: A dialogue. *Intercultural Communication Studies, XII*(4), 1-16.

Chen, G.M., & Starosta, W. J. (2008). Intercultural communication competence: A synthesis. In M. K. Asante, Y. Miike & J. Yin (Eds.), *The global intercultural communication reader* (pp. 215-237). New York: Routledge.

Chen, G.M. (2012). Impact of new media on intercultural communication. *China Media Research, 8*(2), 1-10.

Chideya, F. (2006). A nation of minorities: America in 2050. In E. Higginbotham & M. L. Andersen (Eds.), *Race and ethnicity in society: The changing landscape* (pp. 11-16). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Chua, C. M. (2004). The Malaysian communication competence construct. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 33*(3), 130-144.

Cohen, M. Z., & Omery, A. (1994). Schools of phenomenology: Implications for research. In J. M. Morse (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Collier, M. J. (1988). A comparison of conversations among and between domestic culture groups: How intra- and intercultural competencies vary. *Communication Quarterly, 36*(2), 122-144.

Collier, M. J. (1989). Cultural and intercultural communication competence: Current approaches and directions for future research. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 13*, 287-302.

Collier, M. J. (1996). Communication competence problematics in ethnic friendships. *Communication Monographs, 63*(4), 314.

Collier, M. J. (2006). Cultural identity and intercultural communication. In L. A. Samovar, R. E. Porter & E. R. McDaniel (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Collier, M. J., Ribeau, S. A., & Hecht, M. L. (1986). Intracultural communication rules and outcomes within three domestic cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 10*, 439-457.

Collier, M. J., & Thomas, M. (1988). Cultural identity: An interpretive perspective. In Y. Y. Kim & W. B. Gudykunst (Eds.), *Theories in Intercultural Communication* (pp. 99-120). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Cooley, R. E., & Roach, D. A. (1984). A conceptual framework. In R. N. Bostrom (Ed.), *Competence in communication: A multidisciplinary approach* (pp. 11-31). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory: Procedures, canons and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative sociology, 13*(1), 3-21.

Corporate Planning Unit, Chancellery, Universiti Utara Malaysia.(2014).[Statistics of students in Universiti Utara Malaysia]. Unpublished data.

Cox, C. B., & Ephross, P. H. (1998). *Ethnicity and social work practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Craig, R. T. E. (2007). Issue forum introduction: Cultural bias in communication theory. *Communication Monographs, 74*(2), 256-258.

Cresswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative. quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cresswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative Research* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Cresswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cushman, D. P., & Kincaid, D. L. (1987). Introduction and initial insights. In D. L. Kincaid (Ed.), *Communication theory: Eastern and Western perspectives* (pp. 1-10). Albany, NY: State University of New York.

Dahlia, Z. (2008). Cultural dimensions among Malaysian employees. *International Journal of Economics and Management, 2*(2), 409-426.

Deardorff, D. K. (2004). *The identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of international education at institutions of higher education in the United States* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/ir/bitstream/1840.16/5733/1/etd.pdf?origin=publication_detail.

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 10*(3), 241-266.

Deardorff, D. K. (2009a). Exploring interculturally competent teaching in social sciences classrooms. *ELiSS, 2*(1), 1-18.

Deardorff, D. K. (2009b). Synthesizing conceptualizations of intercultural competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 264-269). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Deardorff, D. K. (2011). Assessing intercultural competence. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 2011*(149), 65-79.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 1-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2012). *Yearbook of Statistics Malaysia*. Retrieved from http://www.statistics.gov.my.

Dissanayake, W. (2003). Asian approaches to human communication: Retrospect and prospect. *Intercultural Communication Studies, XII*(4), 17-38.

Doan, M. N. (2012). *Cambodian and Laotian Students' Experience of Language Barriers, Cultural Differences, and Teacher-Student Rapport in a University in Vietnam: A Grounded Theory Approach* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from http://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10063/2283/thesis.pdf?sequence=2.

Dowling, M. (2007). From Husserl to Van Manen: A review of different phenomenological approaches. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 44*(2007), 131-142.

Dreyfus, H. (1987). Heidegger, Husserl and modern existentialism. In B. Magee (Ed.), *The great philosophers: An introduction to Western philosophy.* (pp. 254–277). Walton Street, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eland-Goossensen, M. A., Van De Goor, L. A. M., Vollemans, V. C., Hendriks, V. M., & Garretsen, H. F. L. (1997). Snowball sampling applied to opiate addicts outside the treatment system. *Addiction Research, 5*(4), 317-330.

Eriksen, T. H. (1996). Ethnicity, race, class and nation. In J. Hutchinson & A. D. Smith (Eds.), *Ethnicity* (pp. 28-31). New York: Oxford University Press.

Evans, H.D., Anis, Y. Y., & Shamsul, A. B. *Ethnic Diversity in Malaysia: Lessons Learned from Bio-diversity Research.* Paper presented at the Rethinking Realities, Reimagining Pluralism: Future Landscapes of Pluralism for Democratic Societies, UKM, Bangi. Retrieved from http://impra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/30383/1/MPRA_paper_30383.pdf

Faisal, I., Abdul Muati, A., Tamam, E., & Jusang, B. (2009). Measuring inter-ethnic accommodation: Are communicator style constructs adequate. *SEGI Online Review, 2*(2), 52-64.

Fantini, A. E. (1995). Language, culture and worldview. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 19*(2), 143-153.

Fantini, A. E. (2009). Assessing intercultural competence: Issues and tools. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 456-476). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fantini, A. E., & Tirmizi, A. (2006). *Exploring and Assessing Intercultural Competence* (FEIL Report). Retrieved from http://digitalcollection.sit.edu.

Fazilah, I., Zaharah, H., Azizah, Y., Gill, S. K., & Noor Aziah, M. A. (2012). The role of education in shaping youth's national identity. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Science, 59*, 443-450.

Fenton, S. (2010). *Ethnicity* (2nd ed.). Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Filpisan, M., Tomuletiu, A.E., Moraru, A., Stoica, M., Gorea, B., & Solovastru, A. (2011). The dynamic of stereotypes and prejudices in the multicultural environment. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Science, 15*, 3263-3267.

Fisher, K., & Hutchings, K. (2013). Making sense of cultural distance for military expatriates operating in an extreme context. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 34*, 791-812.

Flaherty, B., & Stojakovic, J. (2008). *Intercultural competence as a key element toward cultural integration of international students in the United States.* Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the NCA 94th Annual Convention, San Diego, California. Retrieved from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/ p258719_index.htm

Fong, M. (2012). The nexus of language, communication and culture. In L. A. Samovar, R. E. Porter & E. R. McDaniel (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (pp. 271-279). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Freeman, S., & Lindsay, S. (2012). The effect of ethnic diversity on expatriate managers. *International Business Review, 21*, 253-268.

Ganeson, K. (2006). *Students' Lived Experience of Transition into High School: A Phenomenological Study* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://eprints.qut.edu.au/16249/1/Krishnaveni_Ganeson_Thesis.pdf?origin=p ublication_detail.

Gao, C. (2011). *The role of face-to-face interpersonal communication with different social networks in the development of intercultural communication competence* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from http://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/ bitstream/handle /10339/33472/Gao_wfu_0248M_10122.pdf

Garner, D. L. (2012). *The acquisition of cultural competence: A phenomenological inquiry highlighting the processes, challenges and triumphs of counselor education Students* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://digital scholarship.unlv.edu

Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 28*(2), 235-260.

Giorgi, A. (2000). Concerning the application of phenomenology to caring research. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences, 14*(1), 11.

Giorgi, A. (2006). Difficulties encountered in the application of the phenomenological method in the social sciences. *Análise Psicológica, 24*(3), 353-361.

Giorgi, A. (2012). The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. *Journal Of Phenomenological Psychology, 43*, 3-12.

Giorgi, A. (2013, May 21). Interview by D. Syarizan [E-mail]. Retrieved from http://academia.edu/t/g8tKN/keypass/05bb0b1e6686014f8a3b3c1d444703537f7fd70a/read_message/596594.

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 8*(4), 597-607.

Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3*(1), 1-26.

Gu, Q., Schweisfurth, M., & Day, C. (2010). Learning and growing in a 'foreign'context: Intercultural experiences of international students. *Compare, 40*(1), 7-23.

Gudykunst, W. B. (1998). *Bridging differences: Effective intergroup communication* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gudykunst, W. B. (2003). Intercultural communication: Introduction. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Cross-cultural and intercultural communication.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (2003). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Lee, C. M. (2003). Cross-cultural communication theories. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Cross-cultural and intercultural communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gunaratne, S.A. (2009). Emerging global divides in media and communication theory: European universalism versus non-Western reactions. *Asian Journal of Communication, 19*(4), 366-383.

Hall, E. T. (1959). *The silent language*. Westport, CT: Greenword Press.

Halualani, R. T. (2008). How do multicultural university students define and make sense of intercultural contact: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 32*(1), 1-16.

Halualani, R. T. (2010). Interactant based definitions of intercultural interaction at a multicultural university. *Howard Journal of Communication, 21*(3), 247-272.

Halualani, R. T., Chitgopekar, A. S., Morrison, J. H. T. A., & Dodge, P. S. W. (2004). Diverse in name only? Intercultural interaction at a multicultural university. *Journal of Communication, 54*(2), 270-286.

Hamidah, A. R., Norlin, A., Nor Akmar, N., Norashikin, M., Rozianan, S., & Shah Rollah, A. W. (2011). Kajian tinjauan hubungan etnik dalam kalangan pelajar tahun satu di kampus Johor Bahru, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. *Jurnal Teknologi, 54*(Sains Sosial), 65-76.

Hamill, C., & Sinclair, H. A. H. (2010). Bracketing - practical considerations in Husserlian phenomenological research. *Nurse Researcher, 17*(2), 16-24.

Hammer, M. R. (1987). Behavioral dimensions of intercultural effectiveness. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 11*(11), 65-88.

Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M. J., & Wiseman, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27*(4), 421-443.

Hecht, M. L., & Choi, H. (2012). The communication theory of identity as a framework for health message design. In H.Choi (Ed).*Health Communication Message Design: Theory and Practice* (pp. 137-152). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Hecht, M. L., Collier, M. J., & Ribeau, S. A. (1993). *African American Communication: Ethnic identity and cultural interpretation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hecht, M. L., Jackson, R. L., & Pitts, M. J. (2005). Culture: Intersections of intergroup and identity theories. In J. Harwood & H. Giles (Eds.), *Intergroup communication: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 21-42.). New York: Peter Lang.

Hecht, M. L., Jackson, R. L., & Ribeau, S. A. (2003). *African American communication: Exploring identity and culture*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hecht, M. L., Larkey, L. K., & Johnson, J. N. (1992). African American and European American perceptions of problematic issues in interethnic communication effectiveness. *Human Communication Research, 19*(2), 209-236.

Hecht, M. L., & Ribeau, S. A. (1984). Ethnic communication: A comparative analysis of satisfying communication. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 8*, 135-151.

Hecht, M. L., Ribeau, S. A., & Alberts, J. K. (1989). An Afro-American perspective on interethnic communication. *Communication Monographs, 56*(4), 385-410.

Higginbotham, E., & Andersen, M. L. (2006). Race: Why it matters? In E. Higginbotham & M. L. Andersen (Eds.), *Race and ethnicity in society: The changing landscape*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's consequences: International differences*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hofstede, G. (1997). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the minds.* New York: McGraw Hill.

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations software of the minds: Intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

Hollander, T. (2010). The social contexts of focus groups. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 33*, 602-637.

Holmes, P. (2005). Ethnic Chinese students communication with cultural others in a New Zealand university. *Communication Education, 54*(4), 289-311.

Holmes, P. (2006). Problematising intercultural communication competence in the pluralistic classroom: Chinese students in a New Zealand university. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 6*(1), 18-34.

Holmes, P., & O'Neill, G. (2010). (Auto) Ethnography and self-reflection: Tools for (self) assessing intercultural competence. In Y. Tsai & S. Houghton (Eds.), *Becoming intercultural: Inside and outside the classroom* (pp. 167-193). Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars.

Holmes, P., & O'Neill, G. (2012). Developing and evaluating intercultural competence: Ethnographies of intercultural encounter. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 36*(5), 707-718.

Hraba, J. (1979). *American ethnicity.* Itasca, IL: Peacock.

Hutchinson, J., & Smith, A. D. (1996). Introduction. In J. Hutchinson & A. D. Smith (Eds.), *Ethnicity* (pp. 3-14). New York: Oxford.

Hycner, R. H. (1999). Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. In A. Bryman & R. G. Burgess (Eds.), *Qualitative research* (pp. 143-164). London: Sage.

Idris, A. (2008). An analysis of Malay-Sino relations in Malaysia. *Asian Social Science, 4*(2), 3-12.

Imamura, M., Zhang, Y. B., & Harwood, J. (2011). Japanese sojourners attitudes toward Americans: Exploring the influences of communication accommodation, linguistic competence, and relational solidarity in intergroup contact. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication, 21*(1), 115-132.

Ishida, K. (2005). *Cross-cultural adaptation reconceptualised: A phenomenological study of intercultural identity* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://ohiolink.edu/etd/

Ishii, S. (2006). Complementing contemporary intercultural communication research with East Asian sociocultural perspectives and practices. *China Media Research, 2*(1), 13-20.

Ishii, S., Klopf, D., & Cooke, P. (2012). Worldview in intercultural communication: A religio-cosmological approach. In L. A. Samovar, R. E. Porter & E. R. McDaniel (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (pp. 56-64). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Isma Rosila, I., & Lawrence, J. (2012). *Investigating intercultural communication across ethnic diversity:A preliminary study at University Malaysia Terengganu.* Paper presented at the 2nd Malaysian Postgraduate Conference, Queensland, Australia. Retrieved from http://eprints.usq.edu.au/ 22003/2/Ismail_Lawrence_MPC2012_PV.pdf.

Jandt, F. E. (2010). *An introduction to intercultural communication: Identities in a global community.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Jasper, M. (1996). The first year as a staff nurse: the experiences of a first cohort of Project 2000 nurses in a demonstration street. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 24*, 779-790.

Jensen, I. (2003). The practice of intercultural communication: Reflections for professionals in cultural meetings. *Journal of Intercultural Communication, 6*, 1-17.

Jung, E., Hecht, M. L., & Wadsworth, B. C. (2007). The role of identity in international students' psychological well-being in the United States: A model of depression level, identity gaps, discrimination, and acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 31*(5), 605-624.

Kader, F. R. (2012). The Malaysian experience in developing national identity, multicultural tolerance and understanding through teaching curricula: Lessons learned and possible applications in the Jordanian context. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2*(1), 270-288.

Keles, Y. (2013). What intercultural communication barriers do exchange students of erasmus program have during their Stay in Turkey? *Procedia Social and Behavioral Science, 70*(25), 1513-1524.

Kennedy, J. C. (2002). Leadership in Malaysia: Traditional values, international outlook. *The Academy of Management Executive*, *16*(3), 15-26.

Khalim, Z., & Norshidah, M. S. (2010). Ethnic relation among the youth in Malaysia: toward fulfilling concept of one Malaysia. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Science, 9*, 855-858.

Khalim, Z., Taip, A., & Zulkifli, M. (2010). The effect of ethnic relations course on the students perceptions towards ethnic relations among first year students of one public university in Malaysia. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Science, 2*, 3569-3599.

Kilbourn, B. (2006). The qualitative doctoral dissertation proposal. *Teachers College Record, 108*, 592-576.

Kim, Y. Y. (1986). Introduction: A communication approach to interethnic relations. In Y. Y. Kim (Ed.), *International and intercultural communication annual (Vol. x, pp. 9-17).* Beverly Hills,CA: Sage.

Kim, Y. Y. (1988). On theorizing intercultural communication. In Y. Y. Kim & W. B. Gudykunst (Eds.), *Theories in intercultural communication*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross cultural adaptation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kim, Y. Y. (2006). On becoming intercultural. In M. W. Lustig & J. Koester (Eds.), *Among US: Essays on identity, belonging and intercultural competence* (pp. 249-257). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Kim, Y. Y. (2008). Intercultural personhood: Globalization and a way of being. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 32*, 359-368.

Kim, Y. Y. (2009). The identity factor in intercultural competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 53-65). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

King, P. M., Perez, R. J., & Shim, W. J. (2013). How college students experience intercultural learning: Key features and approaches. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 6*(2), 69-83.

Koester, J., & Lustig, M. W. (1991). Communication curricula in the multicultural university. *Communication Education, 40*(3), 250-254.

Koester, J., Wiseman, R. L., & Sanders, J. A. (1993). Multiple perspectives of intercultural communication competence. In R. L. Wiseman & J. Koester (Eds.), *Intercultural communication competence*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Krippendorff, K. (1987). Paradigms for communication and development with emphasis on autopoiesis. In D. L. Kincaid (Ed.), *Communication theory:*

Eastern and Western perspectives (pp. 189-206). San Diego, CA: Academic Press Inc.

Krueger, R. (2001). Focus groups. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The American tradition in qualitative research* (Vol. 328-338). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kuo, E. C. Y., & Chew, H. E. (2009). Beyond ethnocentrism in communication theory: towards a culture-centric approach. *Asian Journal of Communication, 19*(4), 422-437.

Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing interviews*. London: Sage.

Ladegaard, H. J. (2011). Stereotypes and the discursive accomplishment of intergroup differentiation: Talking about "the other" in a global business organization. *International Pragmatics Association, 21*(1), 85-109.

Ladegaard, H. J. (2012). Discourses of identity: Outgroup stereotypes and strategies of discursive boundary-making in Chinese students' online discussions about "the other". *Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 7*(1), 59-79.

Lailawati, M.S (2005). High/Low context communication: The Malaysian Malay style. *Proceedings of the 2005 Association for Business Communication Annual Convention* (pp. 1-11). Harvard Business School Press.

Lanigan, R. L. (1977). *The phenomenology of human communication as a rhetorical ethic.* Paper presented at the Central States Speech Association Conference, Detroit, Michigan. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ ED136314.pdf

LaRocco, M. (2011). *International teaching assistants and the essence of the development of intercultural competence* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.ric/etd/edu/40

Lau, S. K., Ang, L. H., Soon, C. T., Law, S. B., & Wong, N. L. (2012). Pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Cina dalam menggalakkan interaksi pelajar berbilang kaum. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies, 12*(3), 979-997.

Lebedko, M. (2014). Globalization, networking and intercultural communication. *Intercultural Communication Studies, XXXIII*(1), 28-41.

Levine, T. R., Park, H. S., & Kim, R. K. (2007). Some conceptual and theoretical challenges for cross-cultural communication research in the 21st century. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 36*(3), 205-221.

Lin, C. (2007). Culture shock, social support, and intercultural competence: An investigation of a Chinese student organization on a U.S. Campus. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, *35*(2), 117-137.

Lindolf, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Liu, J. (2009). Students' construal of intercultural communication competence and intercultural communication teaching. *Intercultural Communication Studies, XVIII*(2), 88-102.

Liu, S. (2012). Rethinking intercultural competence: Global and local nexus. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, *7*(3), 269-275.

Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. H. (1995). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis (3rd ed.).* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Lough, B. J. (2011). International volunteers perceptions of intercultural competence. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 35*(4), 452-464.

Lu, Y., & Hsu, C.F. (2008). Willingness to communicate in intercultural interactions between Chinese and Americans. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 37*(2), 75-88.

Luft, S. (2004). Husserl's theory of the phenomenological reduction: Between life-world and Cartesianism. *Research in Phenomenology, 34*, 198-234.

Lustig, M. W., & Koester, J. (2006). *Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Lustig, M. W., & Koester, J. (2006). The nature of cultural identity. In M. W. Lustig & J. Koester (Eds.), *Among US: Essays on identity, belonging and intercultural competence* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Lustig, M. W., & Koester, J. (2010). *Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Lustig, M. W., & Spitzberg, B. H. (1993). Methodological issues in the study of intercultural communication competence. In R. L. Wiseman & J. Koester (Eds.), *Intercultural communication competence* (pp. 153-167). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Mackerras, C. (2003). Introduction. In C. Mackerrass (Ed.), *Ethnicity in Asia* (pp. 1-14). New York: Routledge.

Mai, R. C. (2012). Developing soft skills in Malaysian polytechnic students: Perspectives of employers and students. *Asian Journal of Management Sciences and Education, 1*(2), 44-51.

Manian, R., & Naidu, S. (2009). India: A cross-cultural overview of intercultural competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 233-248). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Martin, J. N. (1993). Intercultural communication competence: A review. In R. L. Wiseman & J. Koester (Eds.), *Intercultural communication competence* (pp. 16-29). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Martin, J. N., & Hammer, M. R. (1989). Behavioral categories of intercultural communication competence: Everyday communicators' perceptions. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 13*, 303-332.

Martin, J. N., & Nakayama, T. K. (2013). *Intercultural communication in contexts* (6th ed.). Avenue of the Americas, NY: McGraw Hill.

Maude, B. (2011). *Managing cross-cultural communication: Principles and practice*. New York: Macmillan.

McConnell-Henry, T., Chapman, Y., & Francis, K. (2009). Husserl and Heidegger: Exploring the disparity. *International Journal of Nursing Practice, 15*(1), 7-15.

McCroskey, J. C. (1982). Communication competence and performance: A research and pedagogical perspective. *Communication Education, 31*(1), 1-7.

McCroskey, J. C. (1984). Communication competence: The elusive construct. In R. N. Bostrom (Ed.), *Competence in communication* (pp. 259-268). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

McCroskey, J. C. (1985). *A trait perspective on communication competence.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association, Honolulu, Hawaii. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/ fulltext/ED260488.pdf

McDaniel, E. R., Samovar, L. A., & Porter, R. E. (2009). Understanding intercultural communication: The working principles. In L. A. Samovar, R. E. Porter & E. R. McDaniel (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (12th ed., pp. 6-17). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

McDaniel, E. R., Samovar, L. A., & Porter, R. E. (2012). Using intercultural communication: The building blocks. In E. R. McDaniel, L. A. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (pp. 4-33). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

McLean, C. A., & Campbell, C. M. (2003). Locating research informants in a multi-ethnic community: Ethnic identities, social networks and recruitment methods. *Ethnicity & Health, 8*(1), 41-61.

Miike, Y. (2002). Theorizing culture and communication in the Asian context: An Assumptive foundation. *Intercultural Communication Studies, XI*(I), 1-21.

Miike, Y. (2003). Beyond Eurocentrism in the intercultural field. In W. J. Starosta & G. M. Chen (Eds.), *Ferment in the Intercultural Field : Axiology/Value/Praxis* (pp. 243-275). London: Sage.

Miike, Y. (2006). Non-Western theory in Western research? An Asiacentric agenda for Asian communication studies. *The Review of Communication, 6*(1-2), 4-31.

Miike, Y. (2007). Asian contributions to communication theory: An introduction. *China Media Research, 3*(4), 1-6.

Miike, Y. (2010a). An anatomy of Eurocentrism in communication scholarship: The role of Asiacentricity in de-westernizing theory and research. *China Media Research, 6*(1), 1-11.

Miike, Y. (2010b). Culture as text and culture as theory: Asiacentricity and its raison d'etre in intercultural communication research. In T. K. Nakayama & R. T. Halualani (Eds.), *The handbook of critical intercultural communication* (pp. 190-215). West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Miike, Y. (2012a). Cultural traditions and communication theory: Clarifying the Asiacentric paradigm. *China Media Research, 8*(3), 1-2.

Miike, Y. (2012b). Harmony without uniformity: An Asiacentric worldview and its communicative implications. In L. A. Samovar, R. E. Porter & E. R. McDaniel (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (pp. 65-80). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Miike, Y. (2014). The Asiacentric turn in Asian communication studies. In M. K. Asante, Y. Miike & J. Yin (Eds.), *The global intercultural communication reader* (2nd ed., pp. 111-133). New York: Routledge.

Minah Harun (2007). *Malay-Chinese interethnic communication in Malaysia: An analysis of sensemaking in everyday experiences* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://etd.uum.edu.my/2094/1/Harun_Minah.pdf

Miner, S. (2008). *The experience of becoming mindful of culture via study abroad* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http;//gradworks.umi.com.

Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. (2011a). *Buku Perangkaan Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia.* Retrieved from http://www.mohe.gov.my/web_statistik/statistik2010/BAB2_IPTA.pdf

Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. (2011b). *Malaysia Centre of Educational Excellence*, from http://www.mohe.gov.my/educationmsia/education.php?article=malaysia

Miyahara, A. (2004). Toward theorizing Japanese interpersonal communication competence from a non-Western perspective. In F. E. Jandt (Ed.), *Intercultural communication: A global reader* (pp. 279-291). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mohamad Azlan, M. (2010). Lingua franca di Sarawak : Aplikasi teori pilihan bahasa. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies, 10*(2), 97- 116.

Mohd Anuar, R., & Mohamad Aizat, J. (2012). Interaction of plural society in Malaysia: Diatribe or dialogue. *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization, 2*(1), 53-57.

Mohd Nor, M. R. (2011). Religious tolerance in Malaysia: An overview. *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research, 9*(1), 23-27.

Mohd Rizal, M. S., & Thay, C. Y. (2012). Tahap hubungan etnik: Kajian di kalangan pelajar yang mengikuti kursus Sarjana Muda Teknologi serta Pendidikan (Kemahiran Hidup), sesi pengajaran 2007-2008, semester 2 di Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai. *Journal of Technical, Vocational & Engineering Education, 6*(June), 59-72.

Moon, D. G. (1996). Concepts of "Culture": Implications for intercultural communication research. In M. K. Asante, Y. Miike & J. Yin (Eds.), *The global intercultural communication reader* (pp. 11-26). New York: Routledge.

Moon, D. G. (2010). Critical reflection on culture and critical intercultural communication. In T. K. Nakayama & R. T. Halualani (Eds.), *The handbook of critical intercultural communication* (pp. 34-52). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Moore, A. M., & Baker, G. G. (2012). Confused or multicultural: Third culture individuals' cultural identity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 36*, 553-562.

Moran, D. (1999). *Introduction to phenomenology*. Florence, KY: Routledge.

Morgan, D. L. (1996). Focus groups. *Annual Review of Sociology, 22*, 129-152.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mowlana, H. (1996). *Global communication in transition: The end of diversity*? Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mowlana, H. (2007). Theoretical perspectives on Islam and communication. *China Media Research, 3*(4), 23-33.

Munz, E. (2007). *Phases of sojourner adaptation and the implications for intercultural communication competence.* Paper presented at the International Communication Association Conference, San Francisco, California.

Mustaffa, C. S., & Illias, M. (2013). Relationship between students' adjustment factors and cross-cultural adjustment: A survey at the Northern University of Malaysia. *Intercultural Communication Studies, XXII*(I), 279-300.

Nazri, M., & Rozita, I. (2012). The development of higher education in Malaysia: An ethnic relation perspective. *The Social Sciences, 7*(4), 568-574.

Neuman, W. L. (2000). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (4th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Ally & Bacon.

Ning, J. (2012). Representation of the Other in Desert de Ret as reflections of French englightenment thought. *Intercultural Communication Studies, XXI*(3), 108-123.

Nwosue, P. O. (2009). Understanding Africans' conceptualizations of intercultural competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Oetzel, J. G. (2009). *Intercultural communication: A layered approach*. New York: Pearson.

Orbe, M. P. (1996). Laying the foundation for co-cultural communication theory: An inductiv approach to studying "non-dominant" communication strategies and the factors that influence them. *Communication Studies, 47*(3), 157-176.

Orbe, M. P. (2000). Centralizing diverse racial/ethnic voices in scholarly research: the value of phenomenological inquiry. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 24*, 603-621.

Ortlipp, M. (2008). Keeping and using reflective journals in the qualitative research process. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(4), 695-705.

Osland, J. (2010). Expert cognition and sensemaking in the global organization leadership context. In U.Fisher & K.Moser (Eds.), *Informed by knowledge: Expert performance in complex situations* (pp. 23-40). New York: Taylor & Francis.

Osland, J., Bird, A., & Gundersen, A. (2007). *Trigger events in intercultural sensemaking.* Paper presented at the Academy of Management Meeting, Philadelphia, USA. Retrieved from business.umsl.edu/seminar_series/2009/springseminarseriesinbusinessandeconomics/ppt/files/Trigger/Events.doc

Osland, J. S., & Bird, A. (2000). Beyond sophisticated stereotyping: Cultural sensemaking in context. *Academy of Management Executive, 14*(1)*,* 65-77.

Osman, W. A. M., Girardi, A., & Paull, M. (2012). Educator perceptions of soft skill development: An examination within the Malaysian public higher education sector. *International Journal of Learning, 18*(10), 49-62.

Palmer, D. (2010). *Looking at philosophy: The unbearable heaviness of philosophy made lighter* (5th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Pandian, A. (2008). Multiculturalism in higher education: A case study of Middle Eastern students' perceptions and experiences in a Malaysian university. *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies, 4*(1), 33-59.

Parks, M. R. (1994). Communication competence and interpersonal control. In M. L. Knapp & G. R. Miller (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (2nd ed., pp. 589-618). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. Q.(1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research, 34*(5 Pt 2), 1189-1208.

Phinney, J. S. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research. *Psychological Bulletin, 108*(3), 499-514.

Pierson, L. L. (2007). *Communicating ethnicity: A phenomenological analysis of constructed identity* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.unl.edu

Pringle, J., Hendry, C., & McLafferty, E. (2011). Phenomenological approaches: challenges and choices. *Nurse Researcher, 18*(2), 7-18.

Ramalu, S. S., Rose, R. C., Kumar, N., & Uli, J. (2010). Doing business in global arena: An examination of the relationship between cultural intelligence and cross cultural adjustment. *Asian Academy of Management Journal, 15*(1), 79-97.

Ramalu, S. S., Rose, R. C., Uli, J., & Kumar, N. (2010). Personality and cross-cultural adjustment among expatriate assignees in Malaysia. *International Business Research, 3*(4), 96-104.

Rasmussen, L. J., Seick, W. R., & Osland, J. (2010). Using cultural models of decision making to develop and assess cultural sensemaking competence. In D. Nicholson (Ed.), *Advances in cross-cultural decision making* (pp. 2-10). Boca Raton, FL: Taylor & Francis.

Ray, M. A. (1994). The richness of phenomenology: Philosophic, theoric and methodologic concerns. In J. M. Morse (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research methods* (pp. 117-134). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Razaleigh, M. K., Abdul Ghafar, D., Salasiah Hanin, H., Fariza, M. S., Badlihisham, M. N., Muhammad Faisal, A. (2012). The history of ethnic relationship in Malaysia. *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences, 6*(4), 504-510.

Redmond, M. V., & Bunyi, J. M. (1993). The relationship of intercultural communication competence with stress and the handling of stress as reported by international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 17*(2), 235-245.

Rogers, E. M., & Steinfatt, T. M. (1999). *Intercultural communication*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Romlah, R. (2013). Culturally appropriate communication in Malaysia: budi bahasa as warranty component in Malaysian discourse. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 8*(1), 65-78.

Rose, R. C., Ramalu, S. S., Uli, J., & Kumar, N. (2010). Expatriate performance in international assignments: The role of cultural intelligence as dynamic intercultural competency. *International Journal of Business and Management, 5*(8), 76-85.

Roselina, S. (2009). Soft skills at the Malaysian institutes of higher education. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 10*(3), 309-315.

Rosemarie, S., Mary, C., & Jackie, C. (2004). Researching the researchers: Using a snowballing technique. *Nurse Researcher, 12*(1), 35-46.

Rossman, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ruben, B. D. (1989). The study of cross cultural competence: Traditions and contemporary issues. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 13*, 229-240.

Ruble, R. A., & Zhang, Y. B. (2013). Stereotypes of Chinese international students held by Americans. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 37*(2), 202-211.

Russell, R. C., & Dickie, L. (2007). Paradoxical experiences of expatriate managers in Indonesia. *Journal of Diversity Management, 2*(1), 17-28.

Sadler, G. R., Lee, H.C., Lim, R. S.H., & Fullerton, J. (2010). Recruitment of hard-to-reach population subgroups via adaptations of the snowball sampling strategy. *Nursing & Health Sciences, 12*(3), 369-374.

Samochowiec, J., & Florack, A. (2010). Intercultural contact under uncertainty: The impact of predictability and anxiety on the willingness to interact with a member from an unknown cultural group. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34*(5), 507-515.

Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., & McDaniel, E. R. (2010). *Communication between cultures* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Sarbaugh, L. E. (1988). A taxonomic approach to intercultural communication. In Y. Y. Kim & W. B. Gudykunst (Eds.), *Theories in intercultural communication* (pp. 22-38). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Sardar, Z.(1999). Development and locations of Eurocentrism. In R. Munck & D.O'Hearn (Eds.), *Critical development theory: Contributions to a new paradigm* (pp.44-62). London, UK: Zed books.

Schemerhorn, R. (1996). Ethnicity and minority groups. In J. Hutchinson & A. D. Smith (Eds.), *Ethnicity* (pp. 17-18). New York: Oxford University Press.

Schreiber, S. T. (2011). *Internationalization at Home? Exploring Domestic Students' Perceptions of and Interactions with International students at a Large Midwestern Research Institution* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.unl.edu.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

343

Selvarajah, C., & Meyer, D. (2008). One nation, three cultures: Exploring dimensions that relate to leadership in Malaysia. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 29*(8), 693-712.

Shamsul, A. B. (1995). In search of 'bangsa Malaysia': Politics of identity in multiethnic Malaysia. *Hitosubashi Journal of Social Studies, 27*(Special Issue), 57-68.

Shamsul, A. B. (1996). Debating about identity in Malaysia: A discourse analysis. *Southeast Asian Studies, 34*(3), 476-499.

Shamsul, A. B. (1999). Identity contestation in Malaysia: A comparative commentary on 'Malayness' and 'Chineseness'. *Akademika, Julai*, 17-37.

Shamsul, A. B. (2001). A History of an identity, an identity of a history: The Idea and practice of 'Malayness' in Malaysia reconsidered. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 32*(3), 355-366.

Shamsul, A. B. (2005). The construction and management of pluralism: Sharing the Malaysian experience. *ICIP Journal, 2*(1-14).

Shamsul, A. B. (2006). Asia as a form of knowledge: of analysis, (re)production, and consumption. In J. Stremmelaar & P. Velde (Eds.), *What about Asia: Revisiting Asian sttudies* (pp. 43-56). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Shamsul, A. B. (2008). Many ethnicities, many cultures, one nation: The Malaysian experience. *UKM Ethnic Studies, Ethnic Studies Paper Series*(2), 9-30.

Shamsul, A. B. (2014). *Perpaduan, Kesepaduan dan Penyatupaduan: Satu Negara, Satu Kata Akar, Tiga Konsep Keramat.* Paper presented at the Persidangan Pemantapan Citra Kenegaraan: Perkongsian Pengalaman, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu.

Shuter, R. (2008). The centrality of culture. In M. K. Asante, Y. Miike & J. Yin (Eds.), *The global intercultural communication reader* (pp. 37-43). New York: Routledge.

Shuter, R. (2014). The centrality of culture in the 20th and 21st centuries. In M. K. Asante, Y. Miike & J. Yin (Eds.), *The global intercultural communication reader* (2nd ed., pp. 48-57). New York: Routledge.

Singer, M. R. (1998). *Perception and identity in intercultural communication.* Yarmouth, MN: Intercultural Press.

Singh, M. K. M. (2012). Friendship patterns between international and local undergraduates in a Malaysian public institution of higher learning. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education, 2*(1), 267-280.

Singh, P. K. H., & Thuraisingam, T. (2007). *A hermeneutic phenomenological approach to socio-cultural and academic adjustment experiences of*

international students. Retrieved from
http://proceedings.com.au/isana2007/papers/isana07final00007.pdf.

Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 35*, 699-713.

Smith, T. B., Bowman, R., & Hsu, S. (2007). Racial attitudes among Asian and European American college students: A cross cultural examination. *College Student Journal, 41*(2), 436-443.

Sorrell, J. M., & Redmond, G. M. (1995). Interviews in qualitative nursing research: Differing approaches for ethnographic and phenomenological studies. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 21*, 1117-1122.

Spencer-Oatey, H., & Franklin, P. (2009). *Intercultural interaction: A multidisciplinary approach to intercultural communication*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Spiegelberg, H. (1960). Husserl's phenomenology and existentialism. *The Journal of Philosophy, 57*, 62–74.

Spitzberg, B. H. (1991). Intercultural communication competence. In L. A. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (pp. 353-365). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Spitzberg, B. H. (2000). A model of intercultural communication competence. In L. A. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication : A reader* (pp. 375-387). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Spitzberg, B. H. (2012). Axioms for a theory of intercultural communication competence. In E. R. McDaniel, R. E. Porter & L. A. Samovar (Eds.), *Intercultural communication : A reader* (13 ed., pp. 424-435). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Spitzberg, B. H., & Changnon, G. (2009). Conceptualizing intercultural competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 2-52). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (1984). *Interpersonal communication competence*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (1989). *Handbook of interpersonal competence research*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Stallman, E. (2009). *Intercultural competence and racial awareness in study abroad.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota). United States - - Minnesota.

Stiftung, B., & Cariplo, F. (2006). *Intercultural competence - the key competence in the 21st century?*. Retrieved from http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/bst/de/media/xcms_bst_dms_30238_30239_2.pdf

Suraya, S., Khadijah, M. K., Nurhanisah, S., Suhaid, S.D., Nur Farhana, A. R., & Siti Hamimah, M. Z. (2013). The culture of tolerance in families of new Muslims convert. *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research, 14*(12), 1665-1675.

Syarizan, D. (2011). What it takes to interact with "The other"? : A Phenomenology of Interethnic Communication Competence among students in an American University. *Human Communication, 14*(3), 221-239.

Syarizan, D. (2012). *What it takes to interact with "the Other": Conceptualising Intercultural Communication Competence.* Paper presented at the Regional Conference on Cross Cultural Communication and National Integration, Kuala Lumpur.

Syarizan, D., Minah Harun., & Norhafezah, Y. (2013). *What does it mean to interact with the Other : Exploring Students' Perception of Intercultural Competence.* Paper presented at the Asian Media Information and Communication Conference, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Takahara, S. (2013). Balancing ethnic identity: The life history of a Filipino-Japanese woman. *Intercultural Communication Studies, XXII*(1), 243-255.

Tamam, E. (2009). Influence of interethnic contact on interethnic attitudes of Malay and Chinese-Malaysian university students in Malaysia. *Human Communication, 12*(1), 53-66.

Tamam, E. (2013). Interracial bridging social capital among students of a multicultural university in Malaysia. *Journal of College Student Development, 54*(1), 85-97.

Tamam, E., Fazilah, I., & Yee, W. M. T. (2011). Interracial communication and perceptions of the compatibility of different races among Malay and non-Malay students in a public university in Malaysia. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Science, 15*, 703-707.

Tamam, E., Yee, W. M. T., Fazilah, I., & Azimi, H. (2006). Relationship of exposure to public affairs news with cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of ethnic tolerance among Malaysian youths. *Kajian Malaysia, XXIV*(1&2), 171-184.

Tamam,E., Yee, W. M. T., Fazilah, I., & Azimi, H. (2008). News media socialisation and ethnic tolerance among Malaysian youth. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, 16*(1), 65-74.

Tan, J. K. L., & Goh, J. W. P. (2006). Why do they not talk? Towards an understanding of students' cross-cultural encounters from an individualism/collectivism perspective. *International Education Journal, 7*(5), 651-667.

Thangiah, C. K. (2010). *International students in Asian universities: Exploring barriers to sociocultural adjustment*. Retrieved from http://www.cetl.hku.hk/conference2010/pdf/Thangiah.pdf.

Tomoko, Y. (2010). The effects of international volunteer work experiences on intercultural competence of Japanese youth. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34*(3), 268-282.

Tonki, E., McDonald, M., & Chapman, M. (1996). History and ethnicity. In J. Hutchinson & A. D. Smith (Eds.), *Ethnicity* (pp. 18-24). New York: Oxford University Press.

Tylor, E. B. (1871). *Primitive culture: researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art, and custom*. New York: Gordon Press.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London: State University of New York.

Vijver, F. J. R. V., & Leung, K. (2009). Methodological issues in researching intercultural competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 404-418). Thousand Oaks,CA: Sage.

Walden, G. (2012). Editor's introduction: Focus group research. In G. Walden (Ed.), *Focus Group Research* (Vol. I, pp. xxvii-ixx). London: Sage.

Webb, C., & Kevern, J. (2000). Focus groups as a research method: a critique aspects of their use in nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 33*(6), 798- 805.

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science, 16*(4), 409-421.

Wiseman, R. L. (2002). Intercultural communication competence. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Handbook of international and intercultural communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wiseman, R. L. (2003). Intercultural communication competence. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Cross cultural and intercultural communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Woelfel, J. (1987). Development of the western model: Toward a reconciliation of Eastern and Western perspectives. In D. L. Kincaid (Ed.), *Communication theory: Eastern and Western perspectives*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.

Wojnar, D. M., & Swanson, K. M. (2007). Phenomenology: An exploration. *Journal of Holistic Nursing, 25*(3), 172-180.

Wong, A. K., & Meng, N. S. (1985). *Ethnicity and fertility in Southeast Asia: A comparative analysis*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Xiao, X., & Chen, G. M. (2012). A Confucian perspective of communication competence. In L. A. Samovar, R. E. Porter & E. R. McDaniel (Eds.), *Intercultural communication : A reader* (13 ed., pp. 435-445). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Xiao, X., & Chen, G.M. (2009). Communication competence and moral perspective. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 4*(1), 61-74.

Yang, M., Webster, B., & Prosser, M. (2011). Travelling a thousand miles: Hong Kong Chinese students study abroad experience. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 35*(1), 69-78.

Yang, R. P. J., Noels, K. A., & Saumure, K. D. (2006). Multiple routes to cross-cultural adaptation for international students: Mapping the paths between self-construals, English language confidence, and adjustment. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 20*, 487-506.

Yeh, J. B. (2010). Relations matter: redefining communication competence from a Chinese perspective. *Chinese Journal of Communication, 3*(1), 64-75.

Yep, G. A. (2014). Encounters with the "Other" : Personal notes for a reconceptualization of intercultural communication competence. In M. K. Asante, Y. Miike & J. Yin (Eds.), *The global intercultural communication reader* (2nd ed., pp. 339-356). New York: Routledge.

Yum, J. O. (2012). *Communication competence: a Korean perspective*. Retrieved 4 January, 2013, from http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Communication competence: a Korean perspective.-a0289120577

Yusliza, M. Y. (2010). Demographic differences among international undergraduate students at a Malaysian public university. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research, 10*(2), 36-41.

Yusliza, M. Y. (2011). International students' adjustment in higher education: Relation between social support, self-efficacy, and socio-cultural adjustment. *Australian Journal of Business and Management Research, 1*, 1-15.

Yusliza, M. Y., & Chelliah, S. (2010). Adjustment in international students in Malaysian public university. *International Journal of Innovation, Management and Technology, 1*(3), 275-278.

Yusliza, M. Y., Jauhar, J., & Chelliah, S. (2010). *Examining the role of perceived social support on psychological adjustment of international students in a Malaysian public university*. Paper presented at the Third International

Conference on International Studies (ICIS 2010), Hotel Istana Kuala Lumpur.

Zaharna, R. S. (2009). An associative approach to intercultural communication competence in the Arab world. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 179-198). Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage.

Zhao, M., & Wildemeersch, D. (2008). Hosting foreign students in European universities: international and intercultural perspectives. *European Education, 40*(1), 51-62.

Zuria, M., Salleh, A., Saemah, R., & Noriah, M. I. (2010). Challenges for international Students in Malaysia: Culture, Climate and Care. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 7*(C), 289–293.