

INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY, COMMUNICATIVE ADAPTATION, AND PEDAGOGICAL AGENCY: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LECTURERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN SUPER-DIVERSE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Globalization and demographic shifts have transformed higher education classrooms into spaces of super-diversity, characterized by complex intersections of ethnicity, language, religion, and educational background. This qualitative inquiry explores the lived experiences of English language lecturers navigating this complexity, focusing on the interplay between intercultural sensitivity, communicative adaptation, and pedagogical agency. Drawing on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals from eight university lecturers in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The findings reveal that intercultural sensitivity develops through distinct stages from ethnocentric minimization to ethno-relative integration, where cultural differences are ultimately viewed as valuable resources. Lecturers employ sophisticated communicative strategies, including linguistic convergence, interactional adjustment, and identity validation, to bridge gaps and foster mutual understanding. Furthermore, pedagogical agency emerges as the central driving force, enabling educators to interpret curricula, establish inclusive norms, and innovate practice despite institutional constraints. The study concludes that these three dimensions form a dynamic, mutually reinforcing cycle: sensitivity provides awareness, adaptation facilitates connection, and agency enables transformative action. This research advances existing literature by proposing an integrated framework for intercultural teaching, highlighting that effective instruction in super-diverse contexts requires not only knowledge and skills but also the capacity to act autonomously and reflectively. Practical implications emphasize the need for professional development that fosters the holistic integration of these competencies to create equitable and inclusive learning environments.

Keywords: intercultural sensitivity; communicative adaptation; pedagogical agency; super-diversity; English language teaching; qualitative inquiry.

1. Introduction

Globalization and demographic shifts have made university classrooms highly diverse, with students bringing varied languages, values, and traditions. This condition, described by Vertovec (2019) as super-diversity, goes beyond nationality or ethnicity to include

intersections of language, religion, socioeconomic status, migration, and identity. In Indonesia, where education is multilingual and multi-ethnic and English is taught as a foreign language, this complexity is especially evident. English lecturers must navigate these diverse influences while managing subtle cultural dynamics that shape learning and interaction.

Although diversity is widely recognized in education, there remains a gap between inclusive pedagogy policies and classroom realities. Research highlights the importance of intercultural competence in language teaching (Jackson, 2022; Deardorff, 2020), but often treats cultural awareness, communication skills, and professional autonomy as separate rather than interconnected. Most studies emphasize measurable outcomes, overlooking educators' subjective experiences—how they interpret cultural differences, adapt communication, and exercise pedagogical agency. As a result, lecturers lack context-specific understanding of how these elements interact, and professional development programs often fail to address the nuanced, adaptive skills needed in super-diverse classrooms.

This study examines the lived experiences of English language lecturers in diverse classrooms, moving beyond identifying cultural differences to explore the cognitive, emotional, and professional processes shaping teaching. It contributes theoretically by linking intercultural sensitivity, communicative adaptation, and pedagogical agency into an integrated framework, highlighting the overlooked role of agency in intercultural competence (Jackson, 2022; Deardorff, 2020). Practically, it offers contextual insights for teacher education and policy, showing how lecturers navigate complexity, adapt communication, and exercise autonomy to foster inclusive learning. Effective teaching in super-diverse settings is presented not as static knowledge of cultures, but as dynamic, reflective practice that treats diversity as a resource for learning.

2. Literature Review

This part provides a comprehensive review of relevant literature and theoretical foundations that underpin this study. It critically examines the core concepts of intercultural sensitivity, communicative adaptation, pedagogical agency, and the emerging construct of super-diversity in educational contexts. By synthesizing seminal theories and recent empirical studies, this review establishes the conceptual boundaries of the research, identifies existing gaps in scholarship, and builds the integrated framework that guides the inquiry.

2.1 Intercultural Sensitivity: Cognitive and Emotional Dimensions of Cultural Understanding

Intercultural sensitivity is a core dimension of intercultural competence, defined as the ability to perceive and respond respectfully to cultural differences (Bennett, 2017; Deardorff, 2020). Bennett's DMIS model frames sensitivity as a developmental continuum from ethnocentric stages (Denial, Defense, Minimization) to ethno-relative stages (Acceptance, Adaptation, Integration). In language education, many teachers remain at Minimization, with deeper empathy requiring sustained engagement and reflection. In Indonesia, lecturers often know foreign cultures factually but struggle to move toward perspective-taking, affecting classroom interaction.

Deardorff (2020) expands this view, stressing that sensitivity is emotional as well as cognitive, involving openness and tolerance of ambiguity—traits essential in super-diverse classrooms. Jackson (2022) adds that behaviors like silence or eye contact are culturally coded, not indicators of ability. Tran & Le (2023) emphasize that sensitivity must be contextual, as norms vary across Southeast Asia.

Despite these insights, most studies treat sensitivity as a static competency rather than a lived, evolving process. Limited research explores how lecturers develop sensitivity in real-time classroom interactions, which is the focus of this study.

2.2 Communicative Adaptation: Strategic Interaction in Linguistically Diverse Contexts

Communicative adaptation is the behavioral dimension of intercultural competence, explained by Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) (Giles et al., 1991; Giles & Ogay, 2021). CAT shows how speakers adjust speech and non-verbal styles to converge for rapport or diverge to maintain identity. In EFL classrooms, adaptation is crucial: lecturers' adjustments affect comprehension, participation, and motivation (Liddicoat, 2018; Davies & Harré, 2020). Strategies like paraphrasing, code-switching, and translanguaging, once discouraged, are now valued for inclusion (Canagarajah, 2021; Pillai et al., 2022).

Adaptation also involves modifying interactional norms, since communication styles differ across cultures (Kim, 2019; Hofstede et al., 2020; Ting-Toomey, 2021). Failure to adapt feedback or turn-taking can silence students. Recent scholarship stresses adaptation as reciprocal, creating shared communicative space (Giles & Ogay, 2021). Yet most studies focus on observable outcomes, with little attention to how lecturers balance adaptation with academic standards or manage multiple cultural styles simultaneously—key challenges in super-diverse classrooms.

2.3 Pedagogical Agency: Professional Autonomy in Contextualized Practice

Pedagogical agency explains how and why teachers act, beyond sensitivity and adaptation. Rooted in sociocultural theory, it is defined as educators' capacity to make intentional choices and transform practice within institutional constraints (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Priestley et al., 2021). Priestley's Ecological Model frames agency as iterative (drawing on past experience), projective (envisioning futures), and evaluative (judging present actions).

In diverse contexts, agency is vital: when curricula fail to address cultural complexity, teachers rely on agency to design inclusive practices (Biesta et al., 2017; Arber & Pilbeam, 2023; Suryani & Mukminatien, 2021). Reflection sustains agency, enabling lecturers to identify bias and innovate (Farrell, 2022). Yet most research treats agency as a general attribute, with little focus on how it interacts with intercultural sensitivity and communicative adaptation. This study positions agency as the central mechanism translating awareness and communication skills into effective pedagogy.

2.4 Super-Diverse Multicultural Classrooms: Redefining Diversity in Education

Super-diversity, introduced by Vertovec (2019), describes demographic complexity beyond multiculturalism, where differences intersect across migration status, language, religion, education, socioeconomic background, and age. In higher education, this has become the norm (Arber & Pilbeam, 2023), and in Indonesia it is intensified by ethnic diversity and international mobility. Classrooms host students with varied linguistic repertoires and cultural scripts.

Research shows language in such contexts is fluid and hybrid (Blommaert & Rampton, 2018), challenging traditional ELT approaches that emphasize standard English (Block, 2018). Teaching must shift from "teaching culture" to "teaching for intercultural being," requiring sensitivity, flexibility, and autonomy (Higgins, 2020). Yet most studies remain theoretical or student-focused, leaving a gap in understanding how educators navigate this complexity. This

study addresses that gap by examining super-diversity as a lived teaching context shaping practice.

2.5 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

2.5.1 Theoretical Framework

This study integrates three perspectives to analyze teaching in super-diverse classrooms. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 2017) explains lecturers' cognitive and emotional growth in engaging cultural difference. The Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Ogay, 2021) accounts for behavioral strategies and communicative choices during interaction. The Ecological Model of Teacher Agency (Priestley et al., 2021) highlights professional decision-making, autonomy, and transformative action within institutional constraints.

Together, these frameworks position teaching as a holistic practice where mindset (sensitivity), behavior (adaptation), and action (agency) continuously interact to shape inclusive pedagogy.

2.5.2 Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review, the conceptual framework below illustrates the structure of the study. It presents Super-Diverse Multicultural Classrooms as the contextual setting, and identifies Intercultural Sensitivity, Communicative Adaptation, and Pedagogical Agency as three interrelated dimensions of the lecturer's lived experience. The framework proposes that these dimensions are mutually reinforcing and collectively lead to Inclusive and Effective Teaching.

Figure 1:

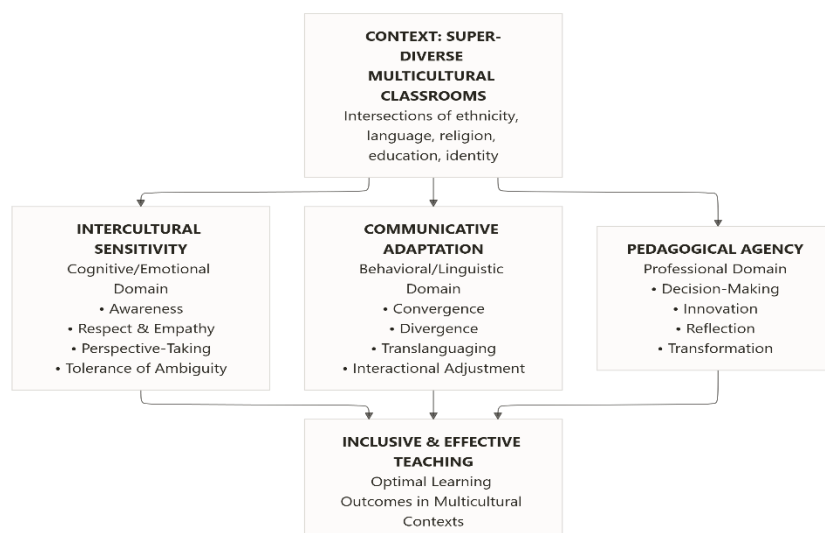


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework – Integrated Dimensions of Intercultural Teaching Practice

This framework serves as the analytical lens for data collection and interpretation, guiding the exploration of how each dimension manifests and how they relate to one another in the lived experiences of English language lecturers.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological design within the interpretivist paradigm, aiming to explore the lived experiences of English language lecturers in super-

diverse classrooms. Phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of experience from participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994), and this research specifically applies Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which emphasizes both phenomenological and interpretivist assumptions through a "double hermeneutic" where the researcher interprets participants making sense of their world (Smith et al., 2022; Tesch, 2013). This design allows for deep exploration of intercultural sensitivity, communicative adaptation, and pedagogical agency as lived processes.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on information-rich cases (Palinkas et al., 2015), with maximum variation to capture diverse perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Inclusion criteria required lecturers to be tenured, have at least five years of experience, regularly teach super-diverse classes, hold a Master's degree or higher, and be willing to engage in interviews, observation, and reflective journaling. Eight lecturers (5 female, 3 male) from three universities in North Sumatra were chosen, representing 6–22 years of teaching experience and exposure to both local ethnic groups (Batak, Malay, Javanese, Sundanese, Chinese-Indonesian, Indian-Indonesian) and international students.

Data collection employed triangulation through semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observation, and reflective journals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Interviews provided participants' perspectives, observations captured real-time enactments of sensitivity, adaptation, and agency, and journals documented reflective insights. Ethical standards were strictly followed: informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and beneficence were ensured.

Data analysis followed the systematic steps of IPA (Smith et al., 2022), complemented by thematic analysis, moving iteratively between individual accounts and broader themes. NVivo 12 software supported data organization and coding, ensuring rigor, transparency, and trustworthiness throughout the process.

4. Findings and Discussion

This part presents findings organized into three themes: intercultural sensitivity, communicative adaptation, and pedagogical agency. Evidence from interviews, observations, and journals illustrates lecturers' lived experiences. The discussion connects these results with Bennett's DMIS (2017), Giles & Ogay's CAT (2021), and Priestley et al.'s Ecological Model of Teacher Agency (2021), showing how mindset, behavior, and professional action interact to shape inclusive teaching in super-diverse classrooms.

4.1 Theme 1: Developmental Trajectories of Intercultural Sensitivity: From Awareness to Integration

The analysis revealed that intercultural sensitivity is not a static trait but a dynamic, evolving capacity that develops over time through experience, reflection, and interaction. Consistent with Bennett (2017), participants' experiences showed a clear progression from ethnocentric orientations to ethno-relative understanding. However, in the context of super-diversity, this development was not linear but characterized by deepening complexity and nuance. Three distinct stages of sensitivity were identified: Early Perception, Critical Awareness, and Transformative Integration.

4.1.1 Findings and Empirical Evidence

Stage 1: Early Perception "*English is English, culture is separate*". In the early years of teaching, participants tended to view culture as external or irrelevant to language learning.

They operated under the assumption that English is a universal system and that differences among students were minimal or irrelevant. Cultural differences were often minimized or misunderstood as learning difficulties.

Evidence 1 (Interview, Participant D, 8 years of experience): *"When I first started teaching, I thought culture didn't matter much. I thought, 'I teach English, they learn English.' If students were quiet or didn't answer, I thought they didn't understand or weren't prepared. I didn't realize that for some students, speaking up in front of a lecturer is actually considered rude or too bold in their tradition. I just thought they were passive."*

Evidence 2 (Reflective Journal, Participant B, 12 years of experience): *"Year 1–3: I used the same jokes, the same examples, the same way of speaking for everyone. I believed that if I taught clearly, everyone would understand the same way. I saw differences only as levels of ability, not as differences in worldview or communication style."*

Evidence 3 (Observation Note, Participant F): *"In the early lessons observed, the lecturer frequently asked, 'Why are you silent? Please speak up!' showing frustration. There was no attempt to interpret silence as a cultural sign; it was treated purely as a lack of participation."*

Stage 2: Critical Awareness *"Differences exist, and they matter."* Through encountering misunderstandings, conflicts, or unexpected reactions, lecturers developed a critical awareness that culture is deeply embedded in language and interaction. They began to recognize that values, norms, and communication codes vary significantly across ethnic groups (Batak, Malay, Javanese, Chinese, etc.) and that these differences directly shape how students engage with learning.

Evidence 1 (Interview, Participant A, 15 years of experience): *"There was a turning point. I had a class with mixed students. I gave direct feedback, saying, 'This paragraph is wrong, rewrite it.' The Batak students argued back and asked questions, which was fine. But the Malay students looked down, didn't ask, and seemed very discouraged. I realized: same words, same intention, but completely different impact because of culture. That's when I knew I had to change how I see them."*

Evidence 2 (Interview, Participant G, 22 years of experience): *"I learned that silence is not silence. For Javanese students, silence is respect, it is thinking, it is politeness. For Batak students, silence means they have nothing to say, or they disagree. For international students, silence means confusion. I had to learn to read the silence differently for every group. That was a big shift in my sensitivity."*

Evidence 3 (Reflective Journal, Participant C): *"Today, I discussed the concept of 'individualism' in Western culture. One student said, 'But in my family, we never decide alone.' I realized that my teaching materials often assume Western values. I started seeing that what I teach carries cultural meaning, and my job is not just to teach language, but to mediate between different cultural views."*

Stage 3: Transformative Integration *"Difference is a resource, not a problem"*. At the most advanced stage, participants demonstrated ethno-relative thinking. They no longer viewed cultural diversity as a challenge or a barrier, but as a rich resource for learning. They actively sought to understand differences, facilitated intercultural dialogue, and positioned themselves as cultural mediators. They recognized that in super-diverse classrooms, there is no single "correct" way to communicate or learn.

Evidence 1 (Interview, Participant E, 18 years of experience): *"Now, I don't try to make everyone the same. Instead, I use their differences as material. When we discuss a topic, I ask: 'How is this seen in your culture?' We compare, we share. The class becomes a place where they learn not just English, but also how to understand each other. My sensitivity now is about creating a space where all cultures are valid."*

Evidence 2 (Observation Note, Participant H): *"Lecturer explains an idiom 'to save face'. She immediately asks: 'Is this concept familiar in your culture? How do you protect dignity in your family or community?' Students from different backgrounds explain their traditions. The lecturer listens respectfully and validates every contribution, saying 'That is a beautiful way to show respect.'"*

Evidence 3 (Interview, Participant F, 10 years of experience): *"I have stopped judging. If a student disagrees strongly, I don't see it as disrespect. If a student speaks very softly, I don't see it as a weakness. I understand these are different ways of being human. My sensitivity is now about empathy and curiosity, not just knowledge."*

4.1.2 Discussion

The findings validate Bennett's (2017) DMIS, showing lecturers move from ethnocentric stages (e.g., Minimization) toward ethnorelative stages (Acceptance, Adaptation, Integration). In super-diverse contexts, however, sensitivity requires navigating multiple intersecting cultural codes, not just understanding one culture. This aligns with Deardorff's (2020) view of intercultural competence as internal transformation and supports Jackson (2022), who emphasizes that communicative behaviors are culturally coded.

Development was often triggered by critical incidents where standard teaching failed, echoing Susanto & Hamied (2022) who found Indonesian EFL lecturers deepen sensitivity through practice and reflection. A novel contribution here is evidence of lecturers reaching the Integration stage, treating diversity as a pedagogical resource. This extends prior studies that stop at Adaptation and resonates with Bhabha's (1994) idea of a "third space," where diversity fosters new understandings and transforms teaching philosophy.

The findings confirm Bennett's (2017) DMIS, showing lecturers progress from ethnocentric stages toward ethno-relative ones, but extend the model by revealing that in super-diverse contexts sensitivity means navigating multiple cultural codes at once. This aligns with Deardorff's (2020) view of intercultural competence as internal transformation and supports Jackson (2022), who stresses that communicative behaviors are culturally coded. Development was often triggered by critical incidents, echoing Susanto & Hamied (2022) who found Indonesian lecturers deepen sensitivity through practice and reflection.

A novel contribution is evidence of lecturers reaching the Integration stage, treating diversity as a pedagogical resource. This resonates with Bhabha's (1994) concept of a "third space," showing that intercultural sensitivity evolves into a transformative educational philosophy rather than stopping at adaptation.

4.2 Theme 2: Patterns and Mechanisms of Communicative Adaptation – Balancing Clarity, Rapport, and Identity

Communicative adaptation was identified as the behavioral manifestation of intercultural sensitivity. Drawing on Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Ogay, 2021), the findings reveal that lecturers employ a sophisticated, dynamic set of strategies to adjust their language, interaction, and discourse. These strategies were not random; they

were intentional, calibrated, and context-dependent. Three main patterns emerged: Linguistic Convergence, Interactional Adjustment, and Strategic Divergence/Identity Validation.

4.2.1 Findings and Empirical Evidence

Pattern 1: Linguistic Convergence Making language accessible. Participants systematically adjusted their linguistic output to reduce complexity and align with students' proficiency levels and cultural understanding. This included modifying speech rate, simplifying syntax, explaining cultural references, and avoiding idiomatic language without clarification.

Evidence 1 (Interview, Participant C, 14 years of experience): *"I control my speed. I speak slower, articulate clearly, and pause more often. I also changed my vocabulary. If I want to say 'facilitate', I might say 'help you learn'. If I use an idiom like 'break a leg', I immediately stop and explain: 'This does not mean hurt your leg, this means good luck.' I have learned that what is easy for me is often full of hidden meaning for them."*

Evidence 2 (Observation Note, Participant D): *"The lecturer was explaining a complex concept. She noticed confused faces. She stopped, said, 'Let me try again. Imagine...' and used a local metaphor related to farming and harvest, which is familiar to many students from rural areas. She switched from academic language to a concrete, culturally rooted example."*

Evidence 3 (Reflective Journal, Participant G): *"Today I realized I used too many British references. I changed my examples. Instead of talking about 'tea time', I used 'break time' or 'family gathering'. I adapt the content of my speech to their world, so the language connects to their reality."*

Pattern 2: Interactional Adjustment, changing how communication happens. Adaptation went beyond words to the rules of engagement. Lecturers modified turn-taking, feedback styles, questioning techniques, and participation norms to align with students' cultural expectations of respect, hierarchy, and harmony.

Evidence 1 (Interview, Participant B, 12 years of experience): *"I used to use direct correction: 'No, that is wrong.' But I learned that for many students, especially those from Chinese and Javanese backgrounds, this causes them to lose face, and they stop trying. Now I adapt my feedback: 'That is an interesting idea, and we can also look at it this way...' or 'You are on the right track, let's add this...' I change the form, keep the meaning, but protect their dignity."*

Evidence 2 (Interview, Participant H, 16 years of experience): *"In some cultures, asking questions publicly is challenging the teacher. So, I changed my method. I don't ask 'Who has a question?' because nobody raises their hand. Instead, I ask them to write questions on paper, or discuss in pairs first, then speak. I adapt the way I ask, not just what I ask. I meet them where they are comfortable."*

Evidence 3 (Observation Note, Participant A): *"When a student spoke very softly and briefly, the lecturer did not say 'Speak louder'. Instead, she leaned forward, listened attentively, and said: 'Thank you, that is a very important point.' She adjusted her own listening behavior to encourage the student, rather than forcing the student to adjust volume."*

Pattern 3: Strategic Divergence and Identity Validation – Valuing diverse repertoires. Contrary to the idea that adaptation means "becoming like the students," participants also engaged in divergence, maintaining standard English or academic norms, but simultaneously validating students' linguistic and cultural identities. This included allowing translanguaging and valuing local knowledge.

Evidence 1 (Interview, Participant E, 18 years of experience): *"I expect them to use English, yes. But if they struggle to explain a deep cultural concept, I say: 'You can use your local language to explain, then we translate it together into English.' I don't ban their language. Their mother tongue is their asset. I adapt my policy to allow them to bring their whole self into the classroom."*

Evidence 2 (Observation Note, Participant F): *"A student said: 'In Batak culture, we say...' The lecturer stopped the lesson and said, 'Please explain that tradition. We need to know. Language is not just grammar; it is the culture behind it.' She diverged from the textbook plan to validate the student's cultural identity."*

Evidence 3 (Interview, Participant D): *"I correct errors, yes, but I also praise their expressions that are creative or locally meaningful. I adapt my evaluation criteria: fluency and meaning are more important than a perfect accent. I show them that their way of speaking English is valid, as long as it communicates."*

4.2.2 Discussion

These findings provide strong empirical support for Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Ogay, 2021), showing that convergence, divergence, and maintenance are actively used strategies. However, the study advances CAT by demonstrating that in super-diverse educational contexts, adaptation is multi-directional and relational. Unlike standard CAT, which focuses on dyadic interaction, here lecturers must accommodate multiple groups simultaneously, requiring high cognitive flexibility.

The data aligns with Liddicoat (2018) and Canagarajah (2021), who argue that translanguaging and strategic code-switching are not deficits but powerful adaptive tools. The findings confirm that effective adaptation is not "simplification" but mediation—bridging the gap between academic English and students' lived experiences (Davies & Harré, 2020).

Crucially, the study reveals that adaptation is guided by intercultural sensitivity. As seen in Theme 1, those with higher sensitivity engaged in more sophisticated interactional adjustments, such as modifying feedback styles or participation rules. This directly answers the research question regarding how sensitivity and adaptation are linked: Sensitivity provides the awareness and motivation; adaptation provides the behavioral tools. These findings challenge previous literature that often treats these as separate competencies, showing instead that they are deeply integrated.

4.3 Theme 3: Manifestations of Pedagogical Agency – Acting with Intentionality in Constrained Contexts

The third and most distinct finding of this study is the central role of pedagogical agency—the capacity of lecturers to make choices, innovate, and transform their practice despite institutional constraints. Rooted in Priestley et al.'s (2021) Ecological Model, agency was found to be the mechanism that translates sensitivity and adaptation into action. It was observed in three forms: Curriculum Negotiation, Norm Setting, and Reflective Innovation.

4.3.1 Findings and Empirical Evidence

Form 1: Curriculum Negotiation, *"I choose what is relevant"*. Although syllabi and materials were often fixed by the institution, participants exercised agency by selecting, modifying, or supplementing content to ensure cultural relevance and inclusivity. They did not simply deliver the curriculum; they interpreted it.

Evidence 1 (Interview, Participant G, 22 years of experience): *"Yes, I have a syllabus. But I decide how to teach it. If the book uses examples that are all Western or unfamiliar, I change them. I bring in texts about Indonesian culture, about local heroes, about things they know. The learning objective is still English, but I give them content that respects their identity. Nobody tells me to do this; I decide it because I know it works better for them."*

Evidence 2 (Observation Note, Participant C): *"The official topic was 'Global Business'. The lecturer modified it to 'Local Business in Global Context'. She asked students to present about their own family businesses or regional industries. She took the global topic and rooted it in their local diversity. She said: 'We can learn English while talking about us.'"*

Evidence 3 (Reflective Journal, Participant A): *"Sometimes the curriculum is very rigid. But I have agency in the details. I choose the groupings; I choose the assignments. I make sure that in every group, there is a mix of backgrounds, so they must interact. I design the learning experience, not just follow the lesson plan."*

Form 2: Norm Setting: Creating an inclusive classroom culture. Lecturers exercised agency by establishing their own classroom rules, norms, and expectations that differed from standard or traditional practices, specifically designed to manage diversity and create safety.

Evidence 1 (Interview, Participant E, 18 years of experience): *"In this university, the rule is 'teacher speaks, student listens'. But I created a different rule. On the first day, I tell them: 'In this class, we have many cultures. Some speak loudly, some speak softly. All are welcome. We listen to understand, not to judge.' I set the norms. I decide what respect means in my classroom."*

Evidence 2 (Interview, Participant F, 10 years of experience): *"I had a problem where students from certain backgrounds dominated the discussion while others stayed quiet. I didn't wait for the system to change. I created a 'talking token' system. You can only speak when you hold it. It forced everyone to take turns. I invented this myself because I saw the diversity needed a different structure."*

Evidence 3 (Observation Note, Participant B): *"A student made a culturally insensitive comment. The lecturer did not punish or scold. Instead, she paused and said, 'Let's talk about this. Why do we see it differently?' She turned the incident into a lesson. She used her authority to shape the culture of the class, making it safe to discuss differences."*

Form 3: Reflective Innovation: Agency as continuous improvement. Agency was also manifested in the ongoing reflection and willingness to change practice. Participants viewed themselves as lifelong learners who constantly evaluated their effectiveness in diverse settings.

Evidence 1 (Interview, Participant H, 16 years of experience): *"I am never satisfied with 'good enough'. If a lesson fails, I ask: 'Was it the material? Was it my communication? Did I miss something cultural?' I will change my method next time. I don't wait for training or orders. I am responsible for my own development and for my students' success."*

Evidence 2 (Reflective Journal, Participant D): *"Today I realized my explanation was too direct and hurt feelings. Tomorrow I will adjust. My agency means I have the power to correct my mistakes and improve. That is my professional duty."*

Evidence 3 (Interview, Participant C): *"I don't believe there is one best way to teach. Every class is different because every mix of students is different. My agency has the ability to read the situation and create the right approach for this group, today."*

4.3.2 Discussion

These findings strongly support Priestley et al.'s (2021) Ecological Model, demonstrating that agency is not a personality trait but a dynamic interaction between the teacher, their beliefs, and their environment. Even within institutional constraints, participants found "spaces of action" to innovate. This aligns with Biesta et al. (2017), who argue that agency is about acting differently rather than just acting.

Crucially, the study reveals that agency is the driving force connecting sensitivity and adaptation. One can have high sensitivity and know many adaptation strategies, but without agency—the confidence and autonomy to deviate from the standard plan—these remain just ideas. The data shows that the agency allows lecturers to enact their sensitivity and adaptation, turning them into an inclusive pedagogy.

In the context of super-diversity, agency becomes indispensable. As Arber and Pilbeam (2023) note, standard curricula cannot account for the unique complexity of every classroom. Therefore, the teacher's ability to interpret, modify, and create is the most important competency. This finding significantly advances existing literature, which has often treated agency separately from intercultural competence. Here, we see that they are inseparable: Intercultural teaching is inherently agentic teaching.

4.4 Integrated Discussion: The Dynamic Cycle of Sensitivity, Adaptation, and Agency

The most profound finding of this study is not just the existence of these three dimensions, but the reciprocal relationship between them. The data reveals a continuous cycle:

1. Intercultural Sensitivity provides the awareness and motivation to notice differences and the empathy to care about them. Without sensitivity, adaptation is mechanical and ineffective.
2. Communicative Adaptation is the behavioral response that builds trust, ensures understanding, and validates identity. Successful adaptation leads to better interaction, which in turn provides more experiences that deepen sensitivity.
3. Pedagogical Agency is the power and freedom to make choices, to modify practice, and to create inclusive environments. It enables the lecturer to go beyond mere communication to transform the learning context. Furthermore, the exercise of agency requires reflection, which refines both sensitivity and adaptation strategies.

These cycles explain why some educators are highly effective in super-diverse classrooms while others struggle. It is not enough to be "good at English" or "know about culture." Effective teaching requires an integrated system of mindset, behavior, and action.

These findings extend the work of previous scholars (Deardorff, 2020; Jackson, 2022) by proposing a holistic model of intercultural teaching. It suggests that professional development should not treat these skills in isolation, but foster their integration.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that effective English language teaching in super-diverse classrooms rests on the dynamic interplay of intercultural sensitivity, communicative adaptation, and pedagogical agency. Sensitivity emerges as a developmental process rooted in empathy and

perspective-taking, enabling lecturers to interpret complex identities and behaviors. Adaptation is revealed as a strategic, relational practice that balances clarity with validation of student identities. Agency is the driving force that transforms awareness and skills into inclusive pedagogy through curriculum negotiation, norm-setting, and reflective innovation.

Together, these three dimensions form a mutually reinforcing cycle that defines professional excellence in diverse contexts. Theoretically, the study integrates Bennett's DMIS, Giles & Ogay's CAT, and Priestley's ecological model of agency into a holistic framework, extending super-diversity research into language teaching. Practically, it offers guidance for educators, training programs, and institutions: fostering reflection, flexible communication, and empowering teachers to act with autonomy.

While limited by its qualitative scope, focus on lecturers, and cross-sectional design, the research highlights critical directions for future inquiry, including student perspectives, longitudinal studies, cross-cultural comparisons, and the role of technology. Ultimately, the study affirms that in super-diverse higher education, lecturers are not just language instructors but cultural mediators, flexible communicators, and agents of change—ensuring diversity is embraced as a powerful resource for transformative learning.

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