

# Intercultural Sensitivity Assessment of the Postgraduates Majoring in English: A Case Study of Guangxi Normal University

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## Abstract

This study is using Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS hereafter) to assess the intercultural sensitivity (ICS hereafter) level of postgraduates of Grade 2016 majoring in English from the College of Foreign Studies in Guangxi Normal University (GXNU hereafter) and try to discover what individual factors, such as Work Experience, Work Types and so on, influence their ICS level. The research questions are: 1) what is the postgraduates' ICS level like? 2) What individual factors influence the postgraduates' ICS?

By analyzing the 102 copies of valid questionnaires, this study gets the following findings. 1) The subjects' general ICS level is moderate for their mean ICS total score is 88.63, within the range of 80-100. 2) Among the five factors of ICS, the value of Respect for Cultural Difference is the highest while Interaction Confidence is the lowest. 3) Among the subjects' individual factors, Work Experience, Having Friends from Different Cultures and Having Passed TEM8 exert significant influence on the subjects' ICS level, while factors such as Work Types, IC Courses Offered during the Undergraduate Study, Working as Volunteers, and Work Length, have no significantly statistical effect on the subjects' ICS level.

The above findings successfully answer the two research questions. Then, based on the subjects' real situations, this study analyzes the underlying causes for the findings from two perspectives. Firstly, Chinese students are greatly affected by the collectivism-oriented cultural value. Secondly, the subjects lack chances of intercultural practice and experience. In the end, four tentative suggestions are put forward to improve the subjects' ICS level and intercultural communication competence.

**Keywords:** intercultural sensitivity, intercultural communication competence, postgraduates majoring in English

## 1. Introduction

The development of communication and transportation technology that links every part of the world serves to interconnect almost every aspect of life at the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Frederick, 1993; Porter & Samovar, 1994). The whole world is becoming a so-called Global Village. The trend towards globalization and internationalization has increased the importance and necessity of being competent in communicating with people from different cultures. In other words, to adapt to the trend of globalization and internationalization, individuals of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are required to become intercultural people who are able to communicate with people from different cultures effectively and appropriately.

As postgraduates majoring in English, they should be also, even more, required to become intercultural people. On one hand, after graduation, quite a few of them will work for the foreign trading companies and it is more likely for them to cope with people from various cultural backgrounds. If they lack intercultural competence, cultural conflicts will often occur when they communicate with people from different cultures. The process of communication will be full of obstacles and difficulties, and communicative goals will not be attained successfully or efficiently. On the other hand, most of the postgraduates majoring in English graduating from normal universities will probably choose to work as teachers after graduation. They take the responsibility of cultivating their students to become intercultural people so as to adapt to the trend towards globalization and internationalization. In order to be qualified for their future job, they need to be equipped with the competence of intercultural communication at first.

ICC is comprised of three conceptual dimensions, including intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness, and

intercultural adroitness. Intercultural sensitivity is the affective aspect of ICC, and refers to the development of readiness to understand and appreciate cultural differences in intercultural communication. Intercultural awareness is the cognitive aspect of ICC that refers to the understanding of cultural conventions that affect how we think and behave. Intercultural adroitness is the behavioral aspect of ICC that stresses skills needed for acting effectively in intercultural interactions.

This study only focuses on one aspect of ICC, namely to assess the ICS of the postgraduates majoring in English. ICS is “an individual’s ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication” (Chen & Starosta, 1997), and it is a very important indicator of an individual’s ICC. By reviewing literature about previous ICS researches, it is not difficult to find that subjects studied are mainly high school students, pediatric resident trainees, English or non-English majors, college English teachers, and people working in foreign trading companies. However, to date, there is still little study on the research of ICS level of postgraduates majoring in English, or on the exploration of the impact of the subjects’ individual factors on their ICS level.

## 2. Literature Review

The main body of this part focuses on previous studies on ICS and Chen and Starosta’s ISS, including the significance of ICS, Chen and Starosta’s understanding of ICS, the assessment tools for ICS, and researches home and abroad.

### 2.1 *Intercultural Sensitivity*

#### 2.1.1 The Significance of ICS

ICS belongs to the emotional and attitudinal level of ICC, into which quite a few scholars have made in-depth research. To be effective in another culture, people must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behavior as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures. Intercultural sensitivity is viewed as an attitudinal forerunner to successful intercultural encounters and a predictor of cultural competence (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992). It is true that “being sensitive to your surroundings and to other people is one of the hallmarks of a competent intercultural communicator” (Samovar & Porter, 2000: 286). With the reform and opening to the outside world, communication and cooperation between China and the world is growing at a rapid speed so to cope with people from different cultures has become a daily activity. To become a successful intercultural communicator, only a good command of a foreign language is not enough. To use a language is just to use an instrument to exchange information with others, but how to establish and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds requires an individual with several attributes, such as self-esteem, open-mindedness, empathy, tolerance, confidence and so on. All these attributes belong to the affective and attitudinal aspect of ICC, i.e. ICS.

#### 2.1.2 Chen and Starosta’s Understanding of ICS

According to Chen and Starosta (1996; 1997; 2000), intercultural sensitivity can be conceptualized as “an individual’s ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication.” Intercultural sensitivity is an independent concept which contains six factors, i.e. self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement, and non-judgment. They made a detailed illustration about the six elements as follows:

##### 1) Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a sense of self-value or self-worth. It is based on one's perception of how well one can develop his or her potential in a social environment. A culturally sensitive person usually shows higher degrees of self-esteem. It is self-esteem that enhances the positive emotion towards accurately recognizing and respecting the situational differences in intercultural interactions.

##### 2) Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring refers to a person's ability to regulate behavior in response to situational constraints and to implement a conversationally competent behavior. Persons with high self-monitoring are particularly sensitive to the appropriateness of their social behaviors and self-presentation in social interaction

##### 3) Open-Mindedness

Open-mindedness refers to the willingness of individuals to openly and appropriately explain themselves and to accept other's explanations. Being open-minded means the willingness to recognize, accept, and appreciate different views and ideas.

#### 4) Empathy

Empathy has been long recognized as a central element for intercultural sensitivity. Empathy refers to a process of projecting oneself “into another person's point of view so as momentarily to think the same thoughts and feel the same emotions as the other person”. Empathy allows us to sense what is inside another's mind or to step into another person's shoes.

#### 5) Interaction Involvement

Interaction involvement is the ability of individuals to perceive the topic and situation that involves their conception of self and self-reward. People with high interaction involvement are more responsive, perceptive, and attentive, which enable them to better receive and understand messages, to take appropriate turns, and to initiate and terminate an intercultural interaction fluently and appropriately.

#### 6) Suspending Judgment

Suspending judgment refers to an attitude that allows one to sincerely listen to others during intercultural communication. Suspending judgment allows the other party to be psychologically satisfied and happy that s/he has been listened to actively. Suspending judgment means the attitude of reaching a conclusion of others in no hurry.

The six elements above are directly related with ICS, the affective part of a person's ICC; however, they are also closely interrelated with intercultural cognitive ability and intercultural behavioral ability. They are interrelated and meanwhile they have subtle distinction between each other. Chen and Starosta have given a clear definition conceptually and operatively about the terms of ICC and its three components.

#### 2.1.3 Assessment Tools for ICS

In 1992, Bhawuk and Brislin attempted to develop an instrument for measuring ICS from the perspective of individualism and collectivism. They used the concept of intercultural communication competence to develop intercultural sensitivity measurement based on affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions (Chen & Starosta, 1997). They designed scales to measure ICS by examining: 1) people's understanding of the different ways they can behave depending upon whether they are interacting in an individualistic or collectivist culture; 2) their open-mindedness concerning the differences they encounter in other cultures; 3) their flexibility concerning behaving in unfamiliar ways that are called upon by the norms of other cultures. In other words, Bhawuk and Brislin proposed a measure by arguing that intercultural sensitivity consists of three elements, including the understanding of cultural behaviors, open-mindedness towards cultural differences, and behavioral flexibility in host culture (Chen & Starosta, 2000). The inventory they proposed is the Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ICSI), which has its own advantages. For example, among these three aspects measured, to assess an individual's open-mindedness is to directly assess an individual's ICS. However, Kapoor and Comadena (1996) found that Bhawuk and Brislin's measure was relatively unreliable due to the ambiguity of tone and directions of items used in the scales (quoted in Chen & Starosta, 2000).

In 1984, John Bennett put forward the concept of intercultural sensitivity. He conceives intercultural sensitivity as a developmental process in which one is able to transform oneself affectively, cognitively, and behaviorally from ethnocentric stages to ethnorelative stages. According to Bennett (1986; 1993), ICS can be expressed as a continuum consisting of three ethnocentric stages (denial, defense, and minimization), and three ethnorelative stages (acceptance, adaptation, and integration). This is Bennett's DMIS (referring to Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity), which consists of six stages ranging from denial of difference to integration of difference.

However, because of lack of valid means for measurement, there is no substantial movement in this field. Then in 1998, based on the theoretical base of DMIS, Bennett and Hammer developed IDI (referring to Intercultural Development Inventory), which proves to be a valid assessing instrument. It is widely used in America, Asia, and Europe (Zhou X.Y., 2007). IDI was constructed to measure the orientations toward cultural differences described in the DMIS. The result of this work is a 50-item (with 10 additional demographic items), paper-and-pencil measure of intercultural competence (Hammer et al, 2003). But, IDI seems to assess not only an individual's developmental stages of ICS conceptualized in DMIS; it can also provide information about an individual's intercultural awareness and intercultural behavior. So conceptually, Bennett's perception of intercultural sensitivity seems identical with the concept of intercultural communication competence which has been under investigation by other scholars (Chen & Starosta, 1997). In the opinion of Chen and other scholars, Bennett has confused the concept of ICS with ICC. Bhawuk and Brislin also confuse the three aspects of ICC. To Bhawuk and Brislin, an individual's ICS should contain cultural understanding and behavioral flexibility, which are

concerned with intercultural awareness and intercultural behavior. Chen and Starosta (1996, 1997) put forward their understanding of ICS, which clarified the confusion of the concept of ICS with that of ICC and intercultural awareness.

Chen and Starosta (1997) admit that the above review (DMIS, IDI, ICSI etc.) provides a foundation for the conceptualization of intercultural sensitivity. However, two confusions need to be clarified. First, although intercultural sensitivity is related to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of interaction situation, it mainly deals with the affective aspect of ICC. It is concerned with the emotion. Second, intercultural awareness is the foundation of intercultural sensitivity which, in turn, leads to intercultural adroitness/effectiveness. In other words, the three are closely related but separated concepts.

Chen and Starosta develop the intercultural sensitivity scales (ISS) based on the theories on intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity of other scholars. It is a 24-item, 5-likert scale with 5 sub-scales used to measure a person's degrees of intercultural sensitivity in terms of five factors, i.e. interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. An overall score of the scale can be computed, with higher scores on the ICS suggesting higher level of sensitivity in intercultural interaction.

Several scholars have proved the validity and reliability of ISS. Gregory utilized ISS in his study in 2001 and a reliability alpha of .93 was found for ISS, which means the scale has a better inner consistency. Duplication study by Fritz, Mollenberg and Chen in 2002 in a different cultural background –Germany has proved ISS's general validity, reliability and cultural general characteristic and found it to be “ the best psychological measurement of ICS.” Another test by Fritz et al in 2005 based on German and US-American sample cast some doubts on its validity. While Graf and Harland (2005) find in their comparative study that ISS exhibits significant predictive validity (quoted in Wu Y., 2006: 16).

The ISS has demonstrated strong reliability and appropriate concurrent and predictive validity (Chen & Starosta, 2000), and the scale is proved to be reliable and valid by other scholars. It is suitable to assess participants' ICS than IDI and other scales because it distinguishes ICS from other components of ICC and ICC itself. This scale is developed mainly to assess participants' ICS, the affective or emotional dimension of ICC, while IDI and other scales are mostly to assess participants' levels of ICC. Therefore, Chen and Starosta's ISS is given a preference to be adopted as the main tool of assessing the subjects' ICS.

#### 2.1.4 Researches Home and Abroad

By surfing literature, in China, during the past ten years, many scholars have used Chen and Starosta's ISS to conduct research on the ICS of different groups of subjects. They are mainly English or non-English majors (Wu, 2006; Zhou, 2007; Peng, 2006, Peng, 2007; Hu, 2008; Zhao, 2012; Zhou, 2015); English and non-English postgraduates (Li, 2012; Liu, 2013; Huang, 2016); college English teachers (Jiang, 2008; Zhang, 2017); teachers (Wang, 2013); students majoring on Teaching Chinese as a Second Language (Xia & Xia, 2013); senior and junior high school students (Xia, 2013; Wang, 2014; Zhou, 2014; Zou, 2015;) and people working in foreign trading companies (Yun, 2008; Zhou, 2011).

In foreign studies, the number of essays is much fewer than that of China. D. A. Straffon (2003) uses the IDI, a 60-item inventory, to measure the level of intercultural sensitivity (ICS) of high school students attending an international school. The results show that 97% of the students were operating in Bennett's Acceptance or Cognitive Adaptation stages from the DMIS. Levels of ICS were positively correlated with the length of time that the student had attended international schools. Inkeri Ruokonena and Seija Kairavuoria (2012) use IDI to determine the developmental level of intercultural sensitivity of the 9th graders and find it was mainly at the ethnorelativistic level. There were no significant differences between girls and boys. Saied Reza Ameli and Hamideh Molaei's (2012) study aims to investigate intercultural sensitivity among the followers of two Muslim sects, the Shia and Sunni in Iran. Amy Jo Coffey et al. (2013) uses a modified version of Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), the study sought to identify which of the five ISS dimensions played the most influential role in intercultural sensitivity outcomes. Ali Soltani ((2014) uses Chen and Starosta's (2000) ISS for data collection. The results of the Chi-square indicated a strong relationship between intercultural sensitivity and ethnic background. In Paola Ruiz-Bernardo et al.'s (2014) paper, the data was gathered using a scale adapted from Chen and Starosta's (2000) ISS. Yaser Arslan et al. (2015) uses pre-experimental. Intercultural Sensitivity Scale developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) as data collection tool to determine the impact of Peace Education Programme (PEP) that is applied to university students on their intercultural sensitivity.

From the above long list of research papers, it is very clear that most of the studies are conducted empirically and

quantitatively using Chen and Starosta's ISS. In China, ISS is easily attained while IDI is hard to get access to. Their difference mainly lies in the different subjects of the research, i.e. to test the ICS level of different groups of subjects or to explore the relationship between ICS and other factors. The tool is mainly used to assess or test the participants' ICS levels, the correlation between five factors and ICS, or ICS with other variables. This result is congruent with Xia L.P. and Han Z.J.'s study (2016) that the studies on ICS in China (from 2003-2013) are mainly empirical, and the research subjects are the survey of the status quo of ICS (53.2%), the cultivation of ICS (22.6%), the comparison analysis (16.1%), the connotation and literature review of ICS (4.8% and 3.3% respectively). The above foreign studies indicate that most of them prefer to use Chen and Starosta's ISS (2000) or IDI developed by Bennett and Hammer (1993). Most of the studies are still empirical and quantitative research.

This part has illustrated the definition and components of ICS, assessment tools of ICS, especially the ISS developed by Chen and Starosta, and foreign and home researches on ICS. Literature on ICS and Chen's ISS is given a more detailed illustration because this study aims to assess the ICS level of postgraduates majoring in English, and discover what individual factors influence the subjects' ICS level. Chen and Starosta's understanding of ICS and their ISS are respectively adopted as the theoretical base and assessment tool for this study.

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1 Research Questions

The present study intends to discover the ICS level of the postgraduates majoring in English. Two research questions are put forward as follows:

- 1) What is the postgraduates' ICS level like?
- 2) What individual factors influence the postgraduates' ICS?

#### 3.2 Subjects

Subjects in this study are 102 postgraduates of Grade 2016 majoring in English from the College of Foreign Studies in Guangxi Normal University. Their research orientations are English Teaching Methodology, English Language & Literature, and Foreign Linguistics & Applied Linguistics. The following table presents the detailed information about the subjects.

Table 1. Subjects' Information

Items	Details	N	Total
Gender	Male	10	102
	Female	92	
Work Experience	Yes	49	102
	No	53	
Work Types	0 Type	53	102
	Teaching	33	
	Foreign Trade	4	
	Other Work	8	
Work Length	All the Three Types	4	102
	0 Year	53	
	1-3 Years	38	
IC Courses Offered	More than 3 Years	11	102
	Yes	53	
Having Friends from Different Cultures	No	49	102
	Yes	71	
Working as Volunteers	No	31	102
	Yes	48	
Having Passed TEM8	No	54	102
	Yes	64	
	No	38	102

#### 3.3 Instrument: ISS

ISS is a 24-item, 5-likert scale (see the Appendix) and it includes five sub-scales (or factors). The five factors are

Interaction Engagement, Respect for Cultural Differences, Interaction Confidence, Interaction Enjoyment and Interaction Attentiveness. Items 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20, and 22 need to be reverse-coded before summing the 24 items (Chen & Starosta, 2000). For each item there are five choices ranging from 5- strongly agree to 1- strongly disagree. The 24 items are all with an Eigen value >1, and have satisfactory concurrent validity found between the instrument and seven valid and related instruments. It is proved to be a valid and reliable scale to assess the participants' level of ICS.

The following table gives a detailed presentation of the five factors and the distribution of 24 items.

Table 2. Five Factors and Relevant Item Distribution

Five Factors	Item Distribution
Interaction Engagement	7 (1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23, 24)
Respect for Cultural Difference	6 (2, 7, 8, 16, 20)
Interaction Confidence	5 (3, 4, 5, 6, 10)
Interaction Enjoyment	3 (9, 12, 15)
Interaction Attentiveness	3 (14, 17, 19)

### 3.4 Data Collection

On December 18, 2017, as soon as the intercultural communication lecture was over, 105 copies of questionnaires were distributed to them. The subjects were very careful and cooperative while dealing with the questionnaires. After 30 minutes, 102 copies of questionnaires are handed in altogether. Among the 102 copies of questionnaires collected, there are three in which one item is not ticked. These items are given the median value of 3. Therefore, the number of valid questionnaires for this study is 102.

### 3.5 Method of Analysis

After all the valid questionnaires were collected, the original data were typed into the computer database. Some items in the scale (items 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20 and 22) need to be reverse-coded, other items in the scale ranging from 5- strongly agree to 1- strongly disagree were scored 5 to 1 correspondingly according to the subjects' choices. The statistical software SPSS is used to analyze the original data; meanwhile Microsoft Office Excel 2003 is also used to help cope with the original data.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This part shows the results in this study, mainly including two parts. The first is the general ICS level of the subjects and the second part is the study of influence of the subjects' individual factors on their ICS level.

### 4.1 The General ICS Level of the Subjects

This part is designed to answer the first research question of this study, namely, what the postgraduates' ICS level is like. The subjects' mean ICS total score, the frequency of the subjects' total scores, and the mean scores of ICS and its five factors are given a detailed illustration as follows.

Table 3. General ICS Level

Valid N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Min.	Max.
102	88.63	87.50	87.00	8.56	0.523	0.052	72.00	113.00

Notes: SD: referring to Std. Deviation.

Table 3 is the descriptive statistics for the subjects' mean ICS total score. The table demonstrates that the mean total score of the subjects' ICS is 88.63 (ISS total score is 120). The Median value and Mode value are close to each other (i.e. 87.50 and 87.00), so it is clear that about 50 percent of the subjects' mean ICS total scores are lower than 87.50 and the most frequently appeared ICS score is 87.00. The three values of Mean, Median and Mode are close, which suggests that the subjects' total ICS scores are positively distributed. The following values of Skewness and Kurtosis (.523 and .052, both above 0 and below 1) also indicate that the subjects' total ICS scores are positively distributed. In addition, the value of Std. Deviation is relatively small, which means that the subjects' total ICS scores have a central tendency. According to Zhou X.Y. (2007), ICS scores ranging from 80-100 are defined as Moderate Level and 100-120 as Advanced Level. The results of Table 3 indicate that most of the subjects' ICS level is moderate because the Mean value is 88.63, which shows there is still room to improve their ICS level.

The following table and figure give a more detailed description about the distribution of the subjects' ICS total

scores. Table 4 is the frequency of ICS total scores and Figure 4.1 is the histogram of the frequency.

Table 4. Frequency of ICS Total Scores

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	72.00	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
	73.00	2	2.0	2.0	2.9
	76.00	3	2.9	2.9	5.9
	77.00	2	2.0	2.0	7.8
	78.00	3	2.9	2.9	10.8
	79.00	5	4.9	4.9	15.7
	80.00	2	2.0	2.0	17.6
	81.00	2	2.0	2.0	19.6
	82.00	4	3.9	3.9	23.5
	83.00	5	4.9	4.9	28.4
	84.00	4	3.9	3.9	32.4
	85.00	5	4.9	4.9	37.3
	86.00	4	3.9	3.9	41.2
	87.00	9	8.8	8.8	50.0
	88.00	4	3.9	3.9	53.9
	89.00	6	5.9	5.9	59.8
	90.00	7	6.9	6.9	66.7
	91.00	2	2.0	2.0	68.6
	92.00	4	3.9	3.9	72.5
	93.00	1	1.0	1.0	73.5
	94.00	4	3.9	3.9	77.5
	95.00	2	2.0	2.0	79.4
	96.00	4	3.9	3.9	83.3
	97.00	1	1.0	1.0	84.3
	98.00	2	2.0	2.0	86.3
	99.00	2	2.0	2.0	88.2
	100.00	2	2.0	2.0	90.2
	102.00	2	2.0	2.0	92.2
	104.00	2	2.0	2.0	94.1
	105.00	2	2.0	2.0	96.1
	106.00	1	1.0	1.0	97.1
	107.00	1	1.0	1.0	98.0
	110.00	1	1.0	1.0	99.0
	113.00	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

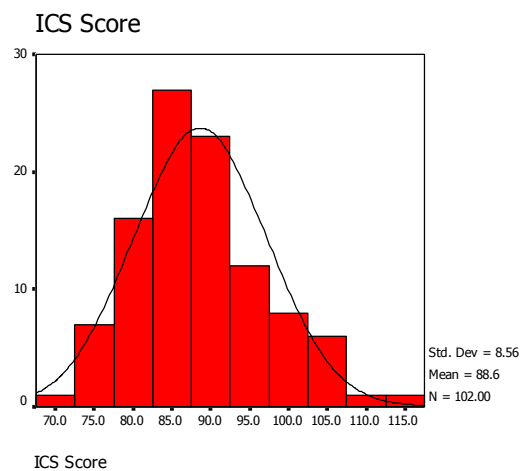


Figure 4. Histogram of ICS Scores

According to Table 4, 59.8% (61) subjects' ICS scores are under 89 (the mean score of ICS is 88.63, approximating to 89) and 40.2% (41) subjects' ICS scores are above 89. About 11.8% (12) of the subjects get a score above 100, which shows that these subjects have a relatively high intercultural sensitivity towards different cultures. Figure 1, the histogram of the subjects' frequency of ICS scores, demonstrates a bell-shaped normal distribution, from which it is easy to find the dense area and the tendency of rising and falling, and that the subjects' ICS scores are positively distributed. Table 4 and Figure 3 further testify the results of Table 4.

To get to know the subjects' general ICS level, it is also necessary and important to have a clear knowledge of the levels of the five factors of ICS, i.e. Interaction Engagement, Respect for Cultural Difference, Interaction Confidence, Interaction Enjoyment, and Interaction Attentiveness. Table 5 gives a thorough description about the average score of ICS and its five factors.

Table 5. Average Score of ICS and Five Factors

Item	Valid N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Variance	Range	Min.	Max.
ICS	102	3.69	3.63	3.5	0.374	0.14	1.79	3.01	4.8
1	102	3.61	3.57	3.57	0.363	0.132	2	2.57	4.57
2	102	4.10	4	4	0.434	0.188	2.17	2.83	5
3	102	3.25	3.2	3.4	0.589	0.346	3.8	1.2	5
4	102	3.80	4	4	0.714	0.509	3	2	5
5	102	3.71	3.67	3.67	0.517	0.267	2.67	2.33	5

Notes: 1: referring to Interaction Engagement; 2: Respect for Cultural Differences; 3: Interaction Confidence; 4: Interaction Enjoyment; 5: Interaction Attentiveness.

Table 5 indicates that the mean ICS score is 3.69 (ISS mean score is 5) and among the five factors of ICS, the value of Respect for Cultural Difference is the highest (4.10) while the value of Interaction Confidence is the lowest (3.25). Moreover, the values of Mean, Median, and Mode of ICS and each factor are close, and the values of the Std. Deviation and Variance of ICS and each factor are small, all of which show that the scores of ICS and each factor are positively distributed and have a central tendency.

In order to find out why the value of Respect for Cultural Difference is the highest (4.10) while the value of Interaction Confidence is the lowest (3.25), the author of this thesis makes a statistical analysis about the specifics of the item choices of these two factors.

Table 6. Number, Percentage and Mean of Each Item of Respect for Cultural Difference

Item	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
2	39(38.2%)	50(49%)	11(10.8%)	2(2%)	0	4.24
7	23(22.5%)	62(60.8%)	12(11.8%)	3(2.9%)	2(2%)	3.99
8	48(47.1%)	52(51%)	2(2%)	0	0	4.45
16	35(34.3%)	56(54.9%)	7(6.9%)	4(3.9%)	0	4.20
18	33(32.4%)	54(52.9%)	10(9.8%)	4(3.9%)	1(1%)	4.12
20	17(16.7%)	45(44.1%)	26(25.5%)	12(11.8%)	2(2%)	3.62

Table 7. Number, Percentage and Mean of Each Item of Interaction Confidence

Item	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
3	9(8.8%)	34(33.3%)	51(50%)	7(6.9%)	1(1%)	3.42
4	14(13.7%)	46(45.1%)	21(20.6%)	20(19.6%)	1(1%)	3.51
5	4(3.9%)	12(11.8%)	56(54.9%)	28(27.5%)	2(2%)	2.88
6	5(4.9%)	25(24.5%)	50(49%)	21(20.6%)	1(1%)	3.12
10	6(5.9%)	33(32.4%)	50(49%)	13(12.7%)	0	3.31

Table 6 shows that the mean values of four items (items 2, 8, 16, and 18) are above 4 and the other two items (items 7 and 20) also have a mean value which is approaching 4. However, the mean values in Table 7 are all below 4 and worth mentioning, the mean value of Item 5 is under 3 (2.88). The mean values in these two tables indicate that most of the subjects are equipped to orient to or tolerate their counterparts' culture and opinion while they still lack confidence.

Based on the results of the choices of each item in the above two tables, more specific information can be



attained. In Table 6, there are 100 (48 plus 52, about 98.1%) subjects who respect the values of people from different cultures (Item 8); there are 89 (39 plus 50, about 87.2%) subjects who do not agree with the statement that people from other cultures are narrow-minded (Item 2); there are 91 (35 plus 56, about 89.2%) subjects who respect the ways people from different cultures (Item 16); there are 87 (33 plus 54, about 85.3%) subjects who will accept the opinions of people from different cultures (Item 18). By contrast, in Table 7, nearly half the subjects (respectively 50%, 54.9%, 49%, 49%) are uncertain whether they are pretty confident, sociable or pretty sure of themselves when interacting with people from different cultures, and that they are also uncertain what to say in the interaction setting (items 3, 5, 6, and 10). Table 7 also indicates that in terms of interaction confidence, the subjects are polarized because there are 60 (14 plus 46, about 58.8%) subjects who find it not hard to talk in front of people from different cultures while 21 (20 plus 1, about 20.6%) subjects find it hard (Item 4), and there are 39 (6 plus 33, about 38.3%) subjects who feel confident while 13 (12.7%) subjects who lack confidence when interacting with people from different cultures (Item 10).

The above results in this part can answer the first research question, i.e. what is the postgraduates' ICS level like? The subjects' mean total score of ICS is 88.63, and the mean ICS score is 3.69. Among the five factors of ICS, Respect for Intercultural Difference has the highest value and Interaction Confidence has the lowest value. Most of the subjects are equipped to orient to or tolerate their counterparts' culture and opinion; however, more than half of them still lack confidence when interacting with people from different cultures. They do not know what to say, feel uneasy or nervous in the interaction setting. According to Zhou X.Y. (2007) and Bennett (1984), the current ICS level of the subjects is only moderate, though most subjects are open-minded and have a comparatively positive attitude towards intercultural interaction, yet they still need to be improved to become more sensitive and confident.

#### 4.2 Influence of Individual Factors on ICS

This part studies the influence of individual factors on ICS. Individual factors include Work Experience (yes or no), Work Types (0 type, teaching, foreign trade, other work), Work Length (0 year, 1-3years and more than 3years), IC Courses Offered during the Undergraduate Study (yes or no), Having Friends from Different Cultures (yes or no), Working as Volunteers (yes or no), and Having Passed TEM8 (yes or no).

##### 4.2.1 Work Experience and ICS

Table 8. Work Experience and ICS

Item	Valid N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Range	Min.	Max.
Yes	49	90.37	89.007	87	8.27	40	72	113
No	53	87.02	87.00	79	8.59	35	72	107

From Table 8, it is apparent that the values of Mean, Median, Mode, Minimum, and Maximum of the subjects with work experience are all higher than those of the subjects without work experience. The Std. Deviation values of the two are close which means that the distribution of the numbers is quite even.

Table 9. Relations between Work Experience and ICS

Independent Samples Test						
Item	F	t	df.	Sig.(2-tailed)	MD	SED
ICS Score	.177	2.003	100	.048*	3.35	1.67

Notes: \*Significant level is set at .05 (2-tailed) hereafter; MD: Mean Difference; SED: Std. Error Difference.

The 2-tailed Sig. value is .048, under .05, which indicates that correlation between the factor Work Experience and ICS is significant. In other words, whether an individual has work experience or not affects his/her ICS level. Individuals with work experience have a higher ICS level than those without.

##### 4.2.2 Work Types and ICS

The results of Table 8 and Table 9 indicate there is significant difference between subjects with work experience and those without in their ICS level. However, through further study on the ICS of subjects with different work types, it is found that there is no significantly statistical difference between subjects with different work types. In other words, the factor Work Type has no significant effect on the subjects' ICS.

Table 10. Work Types and ICS

Item	Valid N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Range	Min.	Max.
Teaching	33	88.79	87	87	6.02	27	73	100
Foreign Trade	4	96.25	94.5	86	10.66	24	86	110
Other Work	8	93.88	94	78	10.37	28	78	106
All the Three	4	90.5	85	79	15.35	34	79	113

This table presents the ICS of subjects with different work types. By comparison, the values of Mean, Median and Mode of the subjects who have ever worked in the field of foreign trade are higher than those of the other subjects with other work types. The Mean value of those subjects working as teachers is lower than that of subjects with other work types. The reasons for this result may be that the subjects with other types, especially the subjects working in the field of foreign trade perhaps have more chance of communicating with people from different cultures than those working as teachers. The value of Std. Deviation of the subjects with other types is higher than that of the subjects who have worked as teachers indicating that the ICS scores of subjects working as teachers are more equally distributed than the ICS scores of those subjects with other work types.

Table 11. Relations between Work Types and ICS

One- Way ANOVA and Levene Statistic					
Item	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	604.722	4	151.18	2.158	.079
Within Groups	6795.121	79	70.053		
Total	7399.843	101			
Levene Statistic					.038*

Multiple Comparisons				
(I)Work Types	(J)Work Types	MD(I-J)	SE	Sig.
Teaching	Foreign Trade	-7.4621	5.43082	0.832
	Other Work	-5.0871	3.81343	0.772
	All the Three	-1.7121	7.74692	1
Foreign Trade	Teaching	7.4621	5.43082	0.832
	Other work	2.375	6.46839	1
	All the three	5.75	9.34412	0.993
Other work	Teaching	5.0871	3.81343	0.772
	Foreign Trade	-2.375	6.46839	1
	All the three	3.375	8.50652	0.999
All the three	Teaching	1.7121	7.74692	1
	Foreign Trade	-5.75	9.34412	0.993
	Other Work	-3.375	8.50652	0.999

However when comparing the different work types with ICS level, it is found that the factor Work Types has no significant influence on the subjects' ICS for the Sig. value is .079. The Sig. value of Levene statistic, used to test the homogeneity of variance, is .038, under .05, which means that the variance is not homogeneous. According to Du Z.Y. (2006: 53), when the variance is not homogeneous, we can choose Tamhane's T2 to make multiple comparisons to discover the interrelationship between groups. The results of multiple comparisons indicate that there is no significant difference between work types for all the Sig. values are over .05. However, from Table 10, it is obvious that different groups of subjects have different ICS levels. One possible interpretation may be that the difference of sample sizes of different groups also affects the distribution of their ICS scores, but the results can give us some hint on how to improve the subjects' ICS.

4.2.3 Work Length and ICS

Table 12. Work Length and ICS

Item	Valid N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Range	Min.	Max.
0 Year	53	87.02	87	79	8.59	35	72	107
1-3 Years	38	90.13	88	87	8.22	40	73	113
More than 3 Years	11	91.18	90	79	8.77	27	79	106

According to the above table, it can be found that the Mean value of the subjects who have worked more than 3 years (91.18) is higher than that of the subjects with a work length of 1-3 years (90.13) and those without work experience (87.02). The Range value of the subjects who have worked 1-3 years is 40, the highest among the three, which means that its deviation degree is the highest.

Table 13. Relations between Work Length and ICS

One- Way ANOVA and Levene Statistic					
Item	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	294.88	2	147.44	2.05	.134
Within Groups	7104.96	99	71.77		
Total	7399.84	101			
Levene Statistic					.782

Multiple Comparisons				
(I)Work Length	(J)Work Length			
0 Year	1-3 Years	-3.1127	1.80075	0.087
	More than 3 Years	-4.163	2.80685	0.141
1-3 Years	0 Year	3.1127	1.80075	0.087
	More than 3 Years	-1.0502	2.9005	0.718
More than 3 Years	0 Year	4.163	2.80685	0.141
	1-3 Years	1.0502	2.9005	0.718

The 2-tailed Sig. value is .134, above .05, indicating that there is no significant correlation between Work Length and ICS. The value of Levene Statistic is .782, which means that the variance is homogeneous. According to Du Zhiyuan (2006: 53), when the variance is homogeneous, we can choose LSD (referring to Least-Significant Difference) to make multiple comparisons to discover the interrelationship between groups. The results of multiple comparisons indicate that there is no significant difference between subjects with different work lengths for all the Sig. values are over .05. However, from Table 12, it is obvious that the longer an individual works the higher ICS level he/she has.

#### 4.2.4 IC Courses Offered and ICS

Table 14. IC Courses Offered and ICS

Item	Valid N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Range	Min.	Max.
Yes	53	89.17	87	85	8.18	37	76	113
No	49	88.04	88	87	8.99	35	72	107

Table 16 indicates that the Mean, Median, and Mode values of the subjects who were offered IC courses and those not offered during their undergraduate study are close. The differences between the values of Mean, Median, and Mode of the two groups of subjects are subtle. However, it is still clear that subjects offered IC courses have a higher Mean value (89.17) than those not offered (88.04).

Table 15 Relations between IC Courses Offered and ICS

Independent Samples Test						
Item	F	t	df.	Sig.(2-tailed)	MD	SED
ICS Score	1.197	0.664	100	.508	1.129	1.701

The above table indicates that whether or not IC courses were offered during the undergraduate study has no clear significant influence on the subjects' ICS level for the Sig. value is .508 > .05. However, from Table 14, it is clear that the subjects offered IC courses have a higher mean value than those not offered.

The interpretation for the results may be that the subjects who were offered IC courses during the undergraduate study might have a good command of IC knowledge and understanding, so their intercultural awareness and ICS ought to be higher than those who were not offered with IC courses. The interpretations for the factor of IC Courses Offered during the Undergraduate Study having no clear significant influence on the subjects' ICS may be as follows. First, the subjects offered IC courses perhaps simply have a general knowledge of IC theory while they lack practical experience of interacting with people from different cultures. Second, those subjects without

being offered IC courses might have more chances of communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. Third, the teachers offering IC courses perhaps lack teaching methods, so their teaching quality and efficiency are not high. In other words, the interpretation for the results may be that there is no use only having cultural knowledge and understanding, and the most important is to practice communicating with people from different cultures. Those subjects not offered IC courses may have more chances to be exposed to the environments of intercultural interaction, such as working in the field of foreign trade, making friends with people from different cultures, working as volunteers and so on. So their ICS level is approximating those offered IC courses during the undergraduate study.

#### 4.2.5 Having Friends from Different Cultures and ICS

Table 16. Having Friends from Different Cultures and ICS

Item	Valid N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Range	Min.	Max.
Yes	71	89.76	89	87	8.73	40	73	113
No	31	86.03	85	83	7.67	32	72	104

Table 16 describes the differences in the values of Mean, Median, Mode and some other index between subjects who have friends from different cultures and those who do not. It is apparent that the values of the former are higher than those of the latter.

Table 17. Relations between Having Friends from Different Cultures and ICS

Item	Independent Samples Test					
	F	t	df.	Sig.(2-tailed)	MD	SED
ICS Score	.246	2.06	100	.042*	3.728	1.814

Table 17 shows that the factor Having Friends from Different Cultures has a significant influence on the subjects' ICS level, for the value of 2-tailed Sig. is  $.042 < .05$ . It can be explained as follows. The subjects with foreign friends might have more chance of communicating with people from different cultures. During the process of intercultural interaction, they may encounter cultural conflicts sometimes. Naturally, they will make a comparison between his/her own culture and the other one, and find out the similarities and diversities between cultures. Gradually, because of the accumulation of intercultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity, he/she changes the so-called ethnocentric cultural identity into the ethno-relative cultural identity so that his/her stereotyped and prejudicial attitude towards different cultures is also changed. They know how to respect and adapt to cultural differences, and think in the other's position, so their intercultural interaction become more and more effective and appropriate, and thus their ICS level is a little higher than those without foreign friends.

#### 4.2.6 Working as Volunteers and ICS

Table 18. Working as Volunteers and ICS

Item	Valid N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Range	Min.	Max.
Yes	48	89.83	88	87	8.82	40	73	113
No	54	87.56	87	79	8.26	35	72	107

Table 18 indicates that the values of Mean, Median, and Mode of the subjects with experience of working as volunteers are higher than those without. The mode value of the subjects with experience of working as volunteers (87) are much higher than those without (79) which indicates that through the practice of working as volunteers, it may be apparently effective to improve the subjects' ICS level.

Table 19. Relations between Working as Volunteers and ICS

Item	Independent Samples Test					
	F	t	df.	Sig.(2-tailed)	MD	SED
ICS Score	.035	1.347	100	.181	2.278	1.691

Table 19 demonstrates that the factor Experience of Working as Volunteers exerts little influence on the subjects' ICS level because the Sig. value is  $.181$  which is above  $.05$ . However, the influence surely exists because the results of Table 18 show that the subjects with experience of working as volunteers have a higher Mean value than those without.

The reasons for the fact that the factor of Working as Volunteers has little influence on the subjects' ICS level can be given as follows. Working as volunteers is only periodic which generally lasts for a short time. The volunteers' main task is to provide service. Of course, during the period of working as volunteers, intercultural communication will take place. However, once the so-called service of being volunteers is over, the intercultural communication is not so convenient. In other words, working as volunteers is a short-term practice, so its impact on ICS is not obvious. It is different from having friends from different cultures, which is a long-term practice in intercultural communication.

#### 4.2.7 Having Passed TEM8 and ICS

Table 20. Having Passed TEM8 and ICS

Item	Valid N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Min.	Max.
Yes	64	90.59	89	87	8.95	72	113
No	38	85.32	85	83	6.75	73	105

Table 20 describes the values of Mean, Median, Mode and other index. Except the value of Minimum (72) of the subjects who have passed TEM8 being lower than that of the subjects who have not (73), all the other values of the former are higher than those of the latter, which means that the ICS level of the subjects who have passed TEM8 is higher than those who have not. Meanwhile, from the values of Std. Deviation, it can demonstrate that the distribution of the ICS scores of the two groups of subjects is not the same.

Table 21. Relations between Having Passed TEM8 and ICS

Item	Independent Samples Test					
	F	t	df.	Sig.(2-tailed)	MD	SED
ICS Score	3.728	3.140	100	.002*	5.278	1.681

The value of the 2-tailed Sig. is .002, below .05, which indicates that the correlation between Having Passed TEM8 and ICS is significant. By comparison, it can be found that the factor Having Passed TEM8 and ICS is more significantly correlated than the other factors. In other words, this factor has a more significant influence on the subjects' ICS than the other factors mentioned in this study.

TEM8 is to test the participants' degree of command of language and culture because referential courses for TEM8 contain both linguistic and cultural knowledge. If the subjects have passed TEM8, it suggests that they have got a good command of English language and culture. Language is the product of culture and the carrier of culture, which constitutes an important part of culture. The subjects having passed TEM 8 must have a higher level of intercultural awareness. Intercultural awareness is the foundation of ICS and ICC. So it is natural that the subjects who have passed TEM8 have a higher ICS level than those who have not.

#### 4.2.8 Comparison between Mean Values of Five Components

According to the above results, factors 1, 5, and 7, (respectively referring to Work Experience, Having Friends from Different Cultures, and Having Passed TEM8), make significant impact on the subjects' ICS level. Of course the other four factors also influence an individual's ICS level, yet the influence has not had statistic significance. So in this section, comparisons between factors 2, 3, 4, and 6 (respectively referring to Work Types, Work Length, IC Courses Offered during the Undergraduate Study, and Working as Volunteers) are not made. In the following table, the scores of subjects' Interaction Confidence, Respect for Cultural Difference, Interaction Engagement, Interaction Enjoyment and Interaction Attentiveness will be given a detailed comparison in order to discover how the three factors (1, 5, and 7) influence the subjects' ICS level.

Table 22. Mean-value Comparison among Five Components of ICS

Item	Work Experience		MD	Having Friends		MD	Having Passed TEM8		MD
	Yes	No		Yes	No		Yes	No	
1	3.68	3.54	0.14	3.62	3.57	0.05	3.68	3.48	0.2
2	4.11	4.09	0.02	4.13	4.03	0.1	4.19	3.96	0.23
3	3.39	3.12	0.27	3.35	3.01	0.34	3.31	3.15	0.16
4	3.92	3.69	0.23	3.86	3.66	0.2	3.92	3.6	0.32
5	3.75	3.67	0.08	3.75	3.61	0.14	3.8	3.54	0.26

Notes: 1: referring to Interaction Engagement; 2: Respect for Cultural Differences; 3: Interaction Confidence; 4:

Interaction Enjoyment; 5: Interaction Attentiveness; MD: Mean Discrepancy.

This table indicates that all the mean scores of Respect for Cultural Difference are the highest (mostly above 4) and all the mean scores of Interaction Confidence ranks the lowest (all below 3.5), which are consistent with the results of Table 5. From the MD (referring to Mean Discrepancy) values of Interaction Confidence influenced by factors 1, 5, and 7, it is clear that their MD values of Interaction Confidence are 0.27, 0.34, and 0.16, which suggests that factors 1 and 5, i.e. Work Experience and Having Friends from Different Cultures influence an individual's interaction confidence more than Factor 7. In other words, this result implies that in order to improve an individual's interaction confidence, it is very important to expose him/her to the intercultural setting and have more intercultural practice. From the MD values of Respect for Cultural Difference, it is apparent that the MD values are respectively 0.02, 0.1, and 0.23, which means that Factor 7, i.e. Having Passed TEM8 exerts more influence on an individual's attitude toward cultural difference. By passing TEM8, an individual acquires a different language and culture, so his intercultural awareness is improved. He/ she will show more respect to cultural difference than those without passing TEM8. From the MD values of Interaction Enjoyment, it can be found that the MD values are all above 0.2, surpassing the MD values of Interaction Engagement and Interaction Attentiveness, which show that if an individual with work experience, friends from different cultures or having passed TEM8, he/she will have a more positive reaction towards communicating with people from different cultures.

#### *4.3 Discussion*

The previous 4.2 and 4.3 have displayed the results of this study. The results can successfully answer the two research questions, namely what the postgraduates' ICS level is like and what individual factors influence the postgraduates' ICS. The following discussions focus on the interpretation of the above results.

The results of this study indicate that the ICS level of postgraduates of Grade 2016 majoring in English from the College of Foreign Studies in GXNU is moderate, and among the five factors of ICS, their interaction confidence is a little weaker than the other four factors. Two reasons can be used to explain the results.

Firstly, from the perspective of cultural value, the subjects are all Chinese, who are mainly collectivism-oriented. Besides general features of collectivism, Chinese people, affected by deep-seated Confucianism, have their own specific characteristics. On most occasions, they depreciate themselves while praise others; they are overly concerned about and confined by their own and others' social positions and power distance; they will think twice before opening their mouths, considering harmony and face saving as the highest maxim, so they try not to cause conflicts with others in speech or in behavior. To them, keeping silence has become a habit and virtue, especially before a group of strangers from different cultures. Two situations, i.e. whether they are too respectful to others or too proud of their own cultural identities, can both lead to their lack of confidence. In other words, being too respectful to others will make them too confined to their own words and behaviors, so that they will fail to feel easy while communicating with people from different cultures. The same is true that being too proud of their own cultural identities will make them take a firm stand so that they are not flexible enough to adapt to the new intercultural setting. It needs a quite long period of time for them to establish their own appropriate cultural identities while interacting with people from different cultures. It is also a long time before they have changed their stereotyped view toward those people whose culture is different from theirs. Both stereotyped attitude and ethnocentrism, to some extent, affect the individuals' emotions and behaviors, which is harmful for successful intercultural communication, especially for their interaction confidence.

Secondly, from the perspective of the subjects' living and learning environment, they are learning a second language and culture in their native country from teachers who are Chinese. Though quite a few teachers have experience of studying abroad, it is impossible for them to act like native foreigners in or after class for it is difficult for them to completely cast away their native culture. Most of the time, the way they behave and speak is similar to foreigners while actually it can be said they are typically Chinese affected by western culture. Their real identity is Chinese growing up in the culture of China. Being taught by such Chinese teachers, the students using the interaction awareness and interaction skills acquired in or after class will have difficulty in meeting the real need while interacting with people from different cultures, so most subjects feel uneasy or lack of confidence in such cases. Furthermore, the subjects lack chances of being immersed in the real environment of intercultural communication, which may be one of the main reasons for the explanation of their moderate ICS level. Practice makes perfect, which is a truth forever. The students require practicing more in real interaction environments, at least being provided with more simulation ones. They should be offered more chances for intercultural communication practice and experience.

The results of this study also indicate that the subjects' ICS level is affected by their individual factors, especially

Work Experience, Having Friends from Different Cultures and Having Passed TEM8. These factors contribute to the subjects' developing into a high intercultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity, which lead to appropriate and effective intercultural behavior. By passing TEM8, they consolidate their linguistic and cultural foundation so that language obstacles of communicating with people from different cultures are overcome and their interaction confidence is built up. During the process of acquiring linguistic and cultural knowledge, an individual improves his/her intercultural awareness, which is the foundation of ICS and ICC, so he/she will become more respectful and adaptable to cultural difference.

Factors such as Work Experience and Having Friends from Different Cultures, can lead an individual to becoming more empathetic, tolerant, respectful and open-minded towards different cultures. From the results of Table 20, it can be found that people with work experience or having friends from different cultures are more confident than those without as these two factors provide more chances for intercultural communication. In the process of intercultural communication, an individual's cultural identity is established because he/she will definitely experience intercultural differences and conflicts which may make him/her become aware and sensitive to cultural difference, and acquire flexible intercultural strategies.

In the above results, Factors such as Work Types, Work Length, IC Courses Offered during the Undergraduate Study, and Working as Volunteers, do not have significant effect on the subjects' ICS. Of course, it does not mean these factors do not influence ICS at all, but only means that they alone exert little effect on ICS. In other words, when they are combined with other factors, for example, when the knowledge acquired from the IC courses is used in real intercultural practice and experience, it must have a significant influence on ICS. Working as volunteers is a periodic and short-term practice, so once the practice is over, chances of intercultural communication will become fewer. Once or twice of such activities are not enough to contribute to the great improvement of an individual's ICS level. Therefore, its influence on ICS is not so significant. Though factors Work Types and Work Length have no significant influence on an individual's ICS level in this study, the subjects with work experience have higher ICS level than those without, and the longer an individual works, the higher his/her ICS level is.

## **5. Conclusions, Suggestions and Limitations**

### *5.1 Major Findings of This Study*

Firstly, the postgraduates' ICS level is moderate and among the five factors of ICS, Respect for Cultural Difference scores the highest while Interaction Confidence is the weakest. The mean total score of the subjects' ICS is 88.63, and there is still a long distance to 120, the full mark of ICS. So there is still room to improve.

Secondly, subjects' individual factors, such as Work Experience, Having Friends from Different Cultures and Having Passed TEM8, have significant influence on the subjects' ICS. The results indicate that these factors influence the subjects' ICS level more than the other four factors in this study. Factors such as Work Types, IC Courses Offered during the Undergraduate Study, Working as Volunteers, and Work Length, do not have significant effect on the subjects' ICS; however, they are definitely related with an individual's ICS level because the subjects who were offered IC courses, who have done a certain type of work, who have worked for years, and those who have worked as volunteers, have a higher ICS level than those without such experiences.

### *5.2 Tentative Suggestions*

According to the results and discussions of this study, the following tentative suggestions are put forward.

Firstly, more systemic IC courses should be offered for the postgraduates majoring in English. If the students have a systemic command of intercultural knowledge, they will form comprehensive intercultural awareness, which is the foundation of an individual's ICC and ICS. IC courses generally contain both general culture and specific culture. The former aims to develop the students' understanding of culture's global influence on human beings, while the latter aims to impart information about specific culture and cultural guidelines for interacting with people in a specified culture. In other words, after learning the IC courses, the students can have a general and specific knowledge about different cultures. Then they can be equipped with cultural awareness in interacting with people from different cultures, which is one of the best ways to achieve their ICS and ICC. General culture is compulsory, and all English majors must learn. Specific culture is selective according to the students' focuses and interests. In addition, more time should be offered for the teaching and learning of IC courses. Generally, the IC teachers of postgraduates majoring in English have about two hours per week for their IC teaching, which is not enough for the students to improve their ICC and ICS. Therefore, in order to improve the students' ICC and ICS, more time should be spent, and more systemic IC courses should be offered for the teaching and learning of intercultural knowledge.

Secondly, English classroom teaching should be reformed. Most of the English lessons are still grammar-translation oriented. It is the teachers who dominate the class activities while the students are listening passively most of the time. The teachers should encourage the students to air their view freely and let them get used to communicating with others. They can work in groups and learn to cooperate with each other in or after class. If the students get used to the so-called mono-cultural communication, they will adapt to intercultural communication more easily and quickly. In other words, in the university they have learned how to communicate and cooperate with others, how to understand others and think from others' points, and how to solve cultural conflicts and establish harmonious interpersonal relationship, all of which will develop and improve their empathy, open-mindedness, non-judgment, and confidence while communicating with others from different cultures.

Thirdly, more colorful English activities should be held. Postgraduates majoring in English, whose focus is thought to be on academic research, still need to take part in colorful English activities to improve their linguistic competence, and intercultural competence, such as contests of English songs, English dramas, and English speeches and so on. If the conditions are permitted, the students can be organized to visit the multinational companies or go to restaurants with specific cultural features so that they can immerse themselves in the real intercultural environment. During the period of education for Master's degree, development and improvement of students' language competence and intercultural competence is neglected. So after graduation, they do not have more apparent advantages over undergraduates. It is imminent that the students should further enhance their language competence and skills though their focus is on academic research and exploration. More colorful English activities can make the students' language competence and skills developed and improved. Language is also culture, so to improve an individual's linguistic competence also means to improve his/her cultural competence.

Last but not least, more chances of communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds should be provided for the students. As students, they have no chances of going abroad to experience cultural differences; however the college can organize some intercultural activities for them to communicate with some international students, such as making friends with them, touring and dining together, living in the same dormitory with them, having parties together and so on. The college can hire teachers from another culture, or teachers with experience of going abroad, so that the cultural teaching seems to have a real environment of intercultural communications, though sometimes this environment is simulated. The college can invite overseas scholars, overseas Chinese, and workers in foreign trade companies to interact with the students. The college can recommend the students to practice in the foreign trade companies or participate in all kinds of expos. The college can organize students with experience of working as volunteers or in the field of foreign trade companies to share their experience with the other students without such kinds of experience. All the above measures of encouraging the postgraduates to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds are conducive to the development and improvement of the students' ICS and ICC. Through intercultural practice and experience, the students may be able to become more open-minded, empathetic, confident and thus sensitive enough to cultural differences, knowing what to do and to say at the right time in the right way.

### 5.3 Limitations

The present study has explored the two research questions on the intercultural sensitivity of the postgraduates of Grade 2016 majoring in English from the College of Foreign Studies in Guangxi Normal University, and the research questions have been answered successfully, but there still exist limitations.

Firstly, the sample size in this study is small. The subjects are only 102 second-year postgraduates from the College of Foreign Studies in GXNU, and the ICS levels of the first-year and the third-year postgraduates are not taken into consideration. On the other hand, the number of subjects with the work type of Foreign Trade is only 4 and the number of subjects with a work length of More than 3 Years is 11. The sample size is so small that it will directly affect the universality and persuasiveness of the results. So the study is only a case study about the ICS level of the postgraduates majoring in English from the College of Foreign Studies in Guangxi Normal University of Grade 2016. In the future study, the sample size can be a little larger, and they can be selected from several different colleges of foreign studies from different universities

Secondly, the number of male subjects is much smaller than that of the female ones. There are only 10 male subjects in this study while the female subjects are 92. Gender, together with subjects' ages, personality, power distance, and their previous education status, is also important factors of the subjects, which will definitely affect the results of this study. In the further study of the subjects' intercultural sensitivity, these factors should be taken into consideration.



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