



# Understanding Intercultural Sensitivity among Seventh-Day Adventist Youths in the Windhoek District: A Qualitative Study

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**How to cite this paper:** Chata, L.S. (2026) Understanding Intercultural Sensitivity among Seventh-Day Adventist Youths in the Windhoek District: A Qualitative Study. *Open Access Library Journal*, 13: e15648.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1115648>

**Received:** June 17, 2026

**Accepted:** July 19, 2026

**Published:** July 22, 2026

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## Abstract

Given the intercultural nature of Seventh-day Adventist congregations in the Windhoek District of Namibia, intercultural sensitivity is essential for fostering unity and advancing the mission of the church. This study examined the intercultural sensitivity of SDA youth in the Windhoek District, focusing on how they perceive, experience, and engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds within church settings. The study was guided by Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Theory, which conceptualizes intercultural sensitivity as the ability to develop positive emotions toward understanding, appreciating, and interacting with cultural differences. A qualitative research design was employed, and data were collected through a survey questionnaire comprising ten open-ended questions administered to 19 randomly selected youths from culturally diverse backgrounds. The findings revealed that participants demonstrated high levels of intercultural engagement, openness, and respect for cultural diversity. Most youths rejected notions of cultural superiority and expressed a willingness to build relationships across cultural boundaries. They also exhibited behaviours consistent with intercultural sensitivity, including attentiveness to verbal and non-verbal communication and a positive attitude toward intercultural interactions, even when misunderstandings occurred. However, the study also identified challenges that affected the quality of intercultural experiences, including language barriers, perceived cultural dominance, stereotyping, exclusion, judgmental attitudes, and occasional communication discomfort. These findings suggest that while the SDA Church in Namibia has a strong foundation of intercultural sensitivity among its youth, subtle intercultural tensions remain. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of intercultural sensitivity within the church and provides insights that may assist church leaders in promoting greater inclusivity, mutual respect, and unity within the body of Christ.

## Subject Areas

Literature

## Keywords

Intercultural Sensitivity, Intercultural Engagement, Windhoek District Youth, Seventh-Day Adventist Church

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## 1. Introduction

Christians the world over are increasingly interconnected and the congregations are becoming more culturally diverse. The Adventist church is a global denomination whose members are from different cultures and racial backgrounds. As of 2025, the membership of the Seventh-day Adventist church was more than 24 million [1]. This number includes Adventists in the Windhoek District, which is part of the Namibia South Conference. The concept of intercultural sensitivity within the Adventist church is rooted in the biblical understanding that believers are united as one body in Christ, regardless of racial, cultural, social, or gender distinctions [2] [3]. The Seventh-day Adventist Church further emphasizes this position through its Fundamental Belief on the unity of the body of Christ. This doctrine affirms equality, fellowship, and mutual service among believers from every nation and culture [4]. This doctrine, however, does not erase cultural identities of church members. In other words, though Adventist church members in the Windhoek District are united in faith, they still maintain their cultural identities. Consequently, intercultural sensitivity emerges as an important issue for the church community. Intercultural sensitivity is critical because it fosters healthy relationships and trust among church members as well as helps avoid misunderstandings that have the potential to stifle the mission of the church [5] [6].

Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of the most globally diverse Christian denominations, empirical studies that specifically examine intercultural sensitivity within the Adventist context remain scarce [7]-[9]. Existing literature has largely concentrated on areas such as multicultural ministry and racial transition, with limited direct attention given to intercultural sensitivity among Adventist members, particularly youths [10]-[12]. This extant gap in the literature suggests a need for further research exploring how Adventist youths perceive and experience interculturality. The purpose of this study is to examine intercultural sensitivity among Seventh-day Adventist youths in the Windhoek District, with particular attention to how they perceive, experience, and engage cross-culturally within the diverse church settings. The study provides several benefits to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Windhoek District that include, though, not limited to: identifying strengths and challenges related to intercultural interaction and fellowship among youths from different cultural backgrounds, developing more inclusive youth programs and worship practices that promote unity and mutual

respect within the church, and designing training programs and educational initiatives aimed at strengthening intercultural competence and fostering unity in diversity among Adventist youths.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Theory is the theoretical framework of this study. The theory conceptualizes intercultural sensitivity as an affective dimension of intercultural communication competence. According to this model, intercultural sensitivity reflects an individual's ability to develop positive emotions toward understanding and appreciating cultural differences. The theory identifies five key dimensions, namely: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness [13]. Collectively, these dimensions capture the affective readiness necessary for effective intercultural interaction.

Interaction engagement refers to the willingness to initiate and sustain communication with people from different cultures [14] [15]. It further reflects a person's readiness to participate meaningfully in communication across cultures. Respect for cultural differences highlights the value placed on diversity and the avoidance of ethnocentric attitudes [13] [16]. This dimension emphasizes openness, non-judgment, and appreciation of culturally diverse perspectives. Interaction confidence addresses the self-assurance individuals feel when communicating across cultures, while interaction enjoyment emphasizes the positive emotions and satisfaction derived from intercultural encounters [13]. Similarly, studies by Peng *et al.*, Fritz *et al.* and Tamam [15] [17] [18] found that confidence and enjoyment are important affective dimensions that facilitate effective and meaningful intercultural interaction. Lastly, interaction attentiveness reflects the degree of responsiveness to cultural cues during communication. These dimensions provide a comprehensive lens for examining how church members in diverse congregational settings perceive and navigate intercultural interactions.

By adopting this theoretical model, the present study situates its investigation within a well-established framework of intercultural communication competence. It allows for the operationalization of abstract concepts into measurable variables through survey instruments. It further guides the interpretation of findings in relation to established theory. Furthermore, the framework is particularly relevant in faith-based intercultural interactions. The biblical teachings on unity and equality [2] [3] resonate with the theory's emphasis on respect and engagement across cultural boundaries. Thus, this theoretical framework fully aligns with the spiritual values of the research setting. This study seeks to examine intercultural sensitivity among Seventh-day Adventist youths in the Windhoek District, with particular attention to how they perceive, experience, and engage cross-culturally within the diverse church settings. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) To what extent do the Adventist youths actively engage with individuals from

different cultural backgrounds?

2) How do the Adventist youths perceive or demonstrate respect toward diverse cultural practices and identities?

3) What level of confidence do the Adventist youths show when communicating with people from different cultures?

4) How do the Adventist youths experience satisfaction or discouragement when interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds?

5) How attentive are the Adventist youths during intercultural interactions?

### 3. Literature Review

Cross-cultural interactions are challenging because they elicit both positive and negative responses. Religious congregations provide a good setting for tolerating plural beliefs and behaviors due to common values that members uphold. However, ethnocentrism (the tendency to value one's own culture more than others) is natural human tendency because everybody looks at the world from her or his cultural point of view. This, however, does not necessarily lead to a negative attitude towards otherness [19]. Nonetheless, overemphasis of one's ethnic identity leads to biased views of the behaviors, beliefs, and values of other cultures [16]. In contrast, an ethnorelative worldview perceives all behavior in its own cultural context [16]. Fortunately, intercultural sensitivity is not inborn. It can be learnt. Through teaching, one can improve the skills required in intercultural interactions.

#### 3.1. Intercultural Engagement or Willingness

Research shows that interaction across cultures is beneficial to both local and international members in many ways, ranging from the development of language skills to fostering positive attitudes [20]-[22]. Other studies reveal that intercultural engagement improves sociocultural [23] and psychological adjustment [24]. In a recent study on intercultural interaction willingness, Zheng, Ding, Liu and Xing found several factors that influence interaction engagement [25]. First, language proficiency, culture, and environment have a positive effect on interaction willingness, while racism and discrimination have a negative correlation. Second, interaction willingness is also positively correlated with social connection. Third, interaction willingness plays a mediating role between cultural factors (language, culture, racism and discrimination) and social connection. This means that a supportive environment is crucial for interacting across cultures.

#### 3.2. Respect for Cultural Differences

Cultural differences in a mixed culture group show up in both overt and covert ways. Rozin is of the view that cultural differences or the impressions thereof, stem from the physical or social artifacts created by the culture [26]. Rozin identified five important principles for understanding cultural differences [26]. They are summarized as follows: cultural differences often appear larger than the actual

differences between individuals within those cultures; differences between individuals in different cultures are generally larger in behavior than in thoughts or feelings; cultural differences often show up as default preferences in responses, rather than entirely different alternatives; much of what we perceive as cultural difference stems from the physical and social artifacts (such as environments and institutions) shaped by culture. In the contemporary world, differences between cultures will generally be larger in older generations than in the younger generations.

### 3.3. Interaction Confidence

Interaction confidence refers to the level of comfort, self-assurance, and reduced anxiety individuals experience when communicating across cultures. Several empirical studies indicate that individuals with higher interaction confidence participate more actively in intercultural discussions and demonstrate greater awareness of appropriate communication behaviors in culturally diverse settings [13] [17] [18] [27]. Furthermore, Logan and others found that intercultural anxiety negatively affects willingness to interact. This suggests that confidence plays a critical role in successful intercultural interactions [28].

Interaction confidence emphasizes that individuals who feel assured in intercultural encounters are more likely to participate actively and effectively in dialogue. This construct also highlights the ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty when interacting with culturally diverse groups. Hofhuis, Schilderman, and Verdooren demonstrated that personality traits such as emotional stability and social initiative significantly influence confidence levels, particularly in simulated intercultural training environments [29]. Their findings suggest that proactive communication strategies and stress management are critical in fostering confidence during intercultural exchanges. Similarly, Dai argued that interactional competence in professional intercultural settings depends on balancing inference (assumptions about others) with practice (observable communicative behaviors) [30]. Confidence emerges when individuals can interpret cultural cues accurately and respond with appropriate language.

### 3.4. Interaction Enjoyment

Interaction enjoyment refers to the positive feelings, satisfaction, and emotional comfort individuals experience during intercultural communication. Some empirical studies found that individuals who enjoy intercultural interactions are more likely to communicate [13] [17] [18]. They develop positive intercultural relationships and adapt effectively in culturally diverse environments. Similarly, Mahon and Cushner and Fritz and others observed that positive emotional experiences during intercultural encounters contribute significantly to intercultural openness, empathy, and communication competence [31] [32].

Interaction enjoyment emphasizes that intercultural encounters are not only cognitive or behavioral but also emotional. Enjoyment reflects whether individu-

als feel satisfaction, enthusiasm or discouragement when interacting across cultures. It thus serves as a critical indicator of openness to diversity. Fritz, Möllenberg and Chen, in their confirmatory factor analysis of German students, confirmed interaction enjoyment as part of the intercultural sensitivity construct [32]. They, however, noted an overlap between enjoyment and attentiveness. The overlap suggests that enjoyment is closely tied to attentiveness.

The literature further indicates that enjoyment is influenced by both personality and situational factors. Positive effect, openness to experience, and prior intercultural exposure increase the likelihood of enjoyment in diverse interactions [33]. Conversely, stress, uncertainty, or ethnocentric attitudes can diminish enjoyment, leading to discouragement or withdrawal. In faith-based contexts, enjoyment particularly plays a pivotal role. Church members who find intercultural encounters rewarding are more likely to sustain engagement, build friendships, and contribute to inclusive associations.

### 3.5. Interaction Attentiveness

Interaction attentiveness refers to the degree of mindfulness, careful observation, and sensitivity individuals demonstrate during intercultural communication. It includes efforts to understand other cultures, pay attention to verbal and non-verbal cues, and interpret subtle meanings during interaction. Empirical studies by Chen and Starosta, Coffey and others, Tamam, and Feng indicate that interaction attentiveness contributes significantly to effective intercultural communication, intercultural openness, and the development of intercultural sensitivity [13] [18] [27] [34]. Furthermore, Coffey and others found that interaction attentiveness was the most influential dimension in enhancing intercultural sensitivity outcomes [34].

Interaction attentiveness stresses that interpreting verbal and nonverbal cues, contextual signals, and implicit meanings shapes communication across cultural boundaries. An empirical study by Fritz, Möllenberg, and Chen confirmed that attentiveness is one of the five factors of intercultural sensitivity, although it is closely related to enjoyment [32]. Nevertheless, attentiveness remains a distinct and essential factor as it captures the intentionality behind intercultural learning. Other studies have highlighted the role of attentiveness in effective intercultural communication. Wiseman, Hammer, and Nishida identified attentiveness to cultural cues as a predictor of intercultural competence [35]. They noted that individuals who actively monitor and interpret subtle meanings are better equipped to avoid misunderstandings. Similarly, Spitzberg and Cupach emphasized attentiveness as part of interpersonal communication competence that is linked to empathy [36]. These findings underscore that attentiveness is not merely passive observation but an active, interpretive process that enhances intercultural understanding.

In summary, the literature points to the important role of intercultural sensitivity in building relations across cultures in different contexts. Intercultural sensitivity interventions highlight that confidence is not merely a personality trait but

a skill that can be cultivated through intentional practice. In faith-based social contexts, confidence takes on added significance, as members of congregations are expected to engage respectfully and openly in discussions that bridge cultural and spiritual diversity.

Taken together, these studies underscore that intercultural sensitivity is both a psychological disposition and an experiential phenomenon. It is shaped by personality, reinforced through training, and expressed in the ability to use language appropriately in intercultural encounters. For this study, intercultural sensitivity is examined to provide insight into how Seventh-day Adventist youths navigate social interactions and discussions as well as how they demonstrate awareness of cultural differences among themselves.

## 4. Research Methodology

This study adopts interpretivism as its philosophical stance. Interpretivists hold the view that reality is socially constructed and that individuals develop meaning through their lived experiences. From an interpretivist perspective, human experiences and phenomena are understood subjectively, as people interpret the world based on their personal views, contexts, and realities [37] [38]. The interpretivist paradigm is therefore appropriate for this study because it seeks to understand how Seventh-day Adventist youths perceive and experience intercultural sensitivity within their diverse church environments. Accordingly, this study adopted the qualitative approach. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of how Seventh-day Adventist youths perceive, experience, and engage in intercultural interactions within church settings. It further enabled the researcher to capture participants' feelings, attitudes, behaviors, and interpretations concerning engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness.

### 4.1. Sampling Strategy

The sampling process combined purposive and random selection in a clear sequence. First, a purposive pool was defined by identifying members who met the study's inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria entailed Adventist youth from different cultural backgrounds who are active in intercultural church discussions and who also have demonstrated awareness of language use. From this purposively identified pool, a random draw was then conducted. This ensured fairness and bias reduction, resulting in the final group of 19 participants. In other words, purposive selection determined who was eligible, while random selection determined which individuals from that eligible pool were actually recruited.

### 4.2. Data Collection Procedures and Analysis Techniques

Data were collected over a period of a month using a survey questionnaire with ten open-ended questions. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms. The questions were adapted from Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity



model. A survey questionnaire with open-ended questions allowed participants ample time and space to express their views and opinions regarding intercultural sensitivity. Following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach of thematic data analysis (familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting), the data analysis was primarily theory-guided [39]. But inductive coding was used to generate themes that were subsequently clustered and interpreted within the pre-set theoretical dimensions of the intercultural sensitivity model.

### 4.3. Ethical Considerations and Reliability

Prior to data collection, permission was requested and secured from the Youth Director of the Namibia South Conference of the SDA Church. Participants were informed of the purpose and objectives of the study and they willingly accepted to participate in the study. No participant was coerced and manipulated to participate in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the research process. No data can be traced to a particular participant. The study adhered to the ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice by ensuring that participants' views were represented accurately and sensitively.

To enhance trustworthiness, coding was checked by colleague to confirm accuracy and reduce individual bias. Responses were revisited multiple times to ensure consistency in interpretation and alignment with the emerging themes. Thematic saturation was judged when responses no longer produced new insights, signalling that the key dimensions of intercultural sensitivity had been sufficiently captured. Together, these steps provided credibility and rigor to the qualitative analysis, ensuring that findings were both dependable and transparent.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Intercultural Engagement or Willingness

A dominant theme across the responses is a strong sense of openness and acceptance toward people from different cultures. Many participants described themselves as "open-minded" and willing to engage with individuals from other cultures. Examples: "*Yes. I am open minded*"; "*I am very open minded about interacting with people from other cultures.*"; "*I am very open minded to anyone from any culture.*" (See **Table 1**).

**Table 1.** Intercultural engagement themes.

| Intercultural Engagement or Willingness | Emerging Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-mindedness and acceptance of cultural diversity</li> <li>• Willingness to engage with other cultures</li> <li>• Interest in learning about other cultures</li> <li>• Selective avoidance based on context</li> </ul> |

Another recurring theme is the enjoyment and enthusiasm participants experience when interacting with people from different cultures. Participants expressed



interest, excitement, and appreciation for cultural diversity. Examples: *“I enjoy it very much.”*; *“I love interacting with different cultures.”*; *“I find it interesting to interact with people from different backgrounds.”*

A few participants expressed interest in learning about other cultures and selective avoidance based on situation at hand. Examples: *“Interacting with members from other cultures helped me to be open-minded and gave me perspectives I didn’t have growing up.”* *“Sometimes I do avoid due to communication barriers or lack of confidence when there is language barrier. Or when they are engaged in something I find inappropriate”.*

## 5.2. Respect for Cultural Differences

The most dominant theme is the belief that all cultures are equal and deserving of respect. Many participants rejected the idea that one culture is superior to another and emphasized human equality and mutual respect within the church. Examples: *“No culture is better than others.”*; *“All cultures are equal.”*; *“I do not think any culture is better.”*

Another strong theme that emerged from the responses is that Christianity and faith in Christ transcend cultural differences. Participants emphasized the importance of unity, oneness, and equality before God. Examples: *“When we come at the feet of Jesus, the culture is one.”*; *“In the house of the Lord we are one people.”*; *“The ground is level at the cross”.* (See **Table 2**).

**Table 2.** Respect for cultural differences themes.

| Respect for Cultural Differences | Emerging Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality and respect for all cultures</li> <li>• Unity in Christ beyond cultural differences</li> <li>• Recognition of cultural diversity and uniqueness</li> <li>• Awareness of cultural superiority attitudes and dominance</li> </ul> |

However, several participants acknowledged that every culture is unique and has distinct strengths and weaknesses. Examples: *“All cultures have their pros and cons.”*; *“Cultures should not be compared because they are different.”* Some comments revealed concerns about cultural superiority, dominance, or judgmental attitudes within the church. Examples: *“My culture can be very judgmental about other cultures.”*; *“There are cultures in the church that tend to dominate others, which in my view is not good.”*; *“Some think they are better than everyone else.”*

## 5.3. Interaction Confidence

A dominant theme that emerged is that of comfort and confidence in speaking in intercultural settings within the church. Generally, participants expressed the view that people from other cultures are approachable and that there is no fundamental difference among church members.

Examples: *“Very comfortable. I have no problem speaking in a church full of people from different cultures.”*; *“Very confident.”*; *“I am comfortable. We are all*

*children of God.”*

A few participants expressed discomfort due to feeling judged, excluded, or inferior because of language or cultural differences. Example: *“They make you feel inferior especially if you don’t speak the same language.”* (See **Table 3**).

**Table 3.** Interaction confidence themes.

| Interaction Confidence | Emerging Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comfort in intercultural communication</li> <li>• Experiences of exclusion and inferiority</li> <li>• Respect for cultural differences and etiquette</li> <li>• Avoidance of conflict and disrespect</li> </ul> |

The major theme that emerged with regard to mindfulness during intercultural interaction is respect for cultural norms, values, and etiquette. Examples: *“I am mindful to what others consider as taboo or disrespect.”*; *“I try to be mindful of general etiquette.”*; *“What does respect look like to them.”*

Participants also showed mindfulness by avoiding behaviors that may provoke conflict, disrespect, or cultural offense. Examples: *“I avoid no provoking actions or statements.”*; *“I avoid political sensitive areas particularly that affecting tribes.”*; *“I mind not to disrespect anyone in whichever way.”*

#### 5.4. Interaction Enjoyment

The strongest and most dominant theme is that most participants do not get upset more easily when interacting with people from other cultures. In other words, members enjoy the intercultural interactions regardless of misunderstandings that may exist. Many explicitly stated “No” and emphasized emotional control and neutrality. Examples: *“No I don’t get upset by misunderstandings involving members from other cultures.”*; *“I just see a person not a tribe or culture.”*

Several participants highlighted that frustration may arise when there is perceived imbalance in communication effort or understanding. Participants were of the view that mutual effort in communication is important for positive intercultural engagement among church members. Example: *“It is not nice when there is minimal effort made from them to understand perspective.”*; *“Sometimes I feel their manners could be better.”*; *“I tend to pick up minimal effort made from them to understand mine.”* (See **Table 4**).

**Table 4.** Interaction enjoyment themes

| Interaction Enjoyment | Emerging Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional stability during intercultural interactions</li> <li>• Reciprocity and communication effort</li> <li>• Learning and knowledge exchange</li> <li>• Appreciation of diversity and cultural variety</li> <li>• Disrespect, stereotyping, and exclusion</li> </ul> |

The most dominant theme is learning from other cultures. Participants consist-

ently expressed enjoyment of gaining new knowledge, perspectives, skills, and understanding of how others live, think and experience Adventism. Examples: *“I enjoy the fact that I get to learn how different people actually think and apply what we learn.”*; *“Learning from them.”*; *“It’s like learning a whole other world of life.”*

Several participants emphasized enjoyment of cultural diversity itself, particularly in the aspects of language, food, beliefs, and ways of life in general. Examples: *“I enjoy the diversity. God’s diversity.”*; *“I enjoy the food during potlucks.”*; *“I enjoy the diverse experiences people are willing to share when we come together.”*

Another significant theme that also emerged is about negative interpersonal experiences. Many participants expressed dissatisfaction about some behavioral issues that may or may not be due to cultural differences, for example: rudeness, exclusion, discrimination. Examples: *“Being bullied for having opposing views.”*; *“Stereotyping.”*; *“Being mocked or questioned about dark traditional practices in my community.”*; *“Some members only communicate in their language which excludes others.”*

## 5.5. Interaction Attentiveness

A dominant theme that emerged is that participants pay attention to the beliefs, values, and perspectives of people from other cultures during interactions. Participants expressed attentiveness about how culture shapes people’s thinking and lifestyles. Examples: *“I try to learn what their beliefs are on certain issues such as marriage and how they relate these to Adventist teaching.”*, *“I am always curious about other people’s values.”* (See **Table 5**).

**Table 5.** Interaction attentiveness themes

| Interaction Attentiveness | Emerging Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention to cultural values, beliefs, and worldviews of others</li> <li>• Attention to body language and facial expressions</li> <li>• Monitoring understanding and comfort levels</li> <li>• Awareness of tone, voice, and speech</li> </ul> |

The strongest and most dominant theme that emerged is attention to body language and facial expressions. Participants placed importance on observing non-verbal communication when interacting with members from other cultures. Examples: *“I pay to their facial expressions like smiles or tears, eye movements, frowns, etc.”*; *“I try to pay attention to the body language, facial expressions, and gestures.”*

Another major theme that emerged is monitoring understanding and comfort levels of my interlocutors. Several participants indicated that they pay attention to cues that reveal whether the other person understands them or feels comfortable in the interaction. Examples: *“I see if they seem to not understand me well by making uncomfortable facial expressions.”*; *“If they pull their face and seem to withdraw then I know they may not be comfortable with what I said or gestured.”*; *“I*

*pay attention to how they respond and listen me.”*

Lastly, awareness of tone, voice, and speech were also identified as a significant theme in intercultural interactions. Participants emphasized that these verbal communication cues are important tools that facilitate their interactions with fellow church members from other cultures. Examples: “*The tone of the voice and the volume for me are important cues.*”; “*I pay attention to speech and use basic English.*”

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Intercultural Engagement or Willingness

The findings indicate that Adventist youth in the Windhoek District demonstrate a high level of intercultural engagement and a willingness to interact with fellow believers from different cultural backgrounds. Participants showed positive attitudes toward intercultural encounters, describing them as meaningful, enriching, and enjoyable experiences that broaden their perspectives and deepen their understanding of others. These findings align with the intercultural competence literature, which suggests that openness, curiosity, and a willingness to engage with cultural diversity are foundational dimensions of intercultural sensitivity [21] [40]. Through regular intercultural contact within the church setting, young people are exposed to different perspectives, customs, and communication styles, thereby fostering intercultural friendship formation.

At the same time, the findings reveal that intercultural engagement is not entirely without challenges. Some participants reported selective avoidance in situations characterized by language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, or perceived disrespect. This suggests that willingness alone may not be sufficient to sustain meaningful intercultural relationships. Previous studies have shown that learning about other cultures and acquiring language competencies can reduce anxiety, improve communication effectiveness, and foster more positive attitudes toward culturally diverse groups [21] [22]. Similarly, Allport’s Contact Theory argues that positive and meaningful interaction between groups can reduce prejudice and strengthen mutual understanding when supported by favourable conditions [41].

The findings also underscore the importance of intentional intercultural learning within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Although the church is united by a common faith, cultural differences continue to influence communication patterns, perceptions, and social relationships among members. The presence of selective avoidance suggests that some barriers to intercultural fellowship remain. Consequently, church leaders and youth ministries should create opportunities that encourage meaningful intercultural interaction and collaborative activities among young people from different cultures. Programmes such as multicultural worship services, youth camps, and language-learning initiatives could provide practical platforms for strengthening intercultural engagement and fostering unity in diversity.

## 6.2. Respect for Cultural Differences

The findings suggest that Adventist youth in the Windhoek District demonstrate respect for people from different cultures and reject the idea that any culture can be superior. Participants consistently emphasized that all cultures deserve respect and that shared Christian faith transcends cultural differences. This reflects the biblical understanding of unity in Christ regardless of cultural background. Participants also recognized cultural diversity as a positive aspect of church life. They noted that different cultures contribute unique strengths, traditions, and perspectives to church life. This appreciation aligns with Rozin's principles for understanding cultural differences [26] and with intercultural competence literature that emphasizes respect for cultural diversity as central to effective intercultural interactions [16] [40].

However, the findings also reveal underlying tensions related to perceptions of cultural superiority, dominance, and judgmental attitudes within the church. Some participants reported that certain cultural groups are perceived as dominant or as exercising greater influence, particularly through language use. This has led to feelings of exclusion among minority groups. These findings align with previous research indicating that intercultural contact does not automatically eliminate ethnocentrism or cultural power imbalances [42] [43].

Overall, the findings highlight a tension between the ideal of Christian unity and the lived realities of cultural diversity within the church. This is consistent with Social Identity Theory, which suggests that individuals naturally identify with their own groups while seeking positive distinctiveness [44]. Although Adventist youth largely endorse unity and equality, cultural identities continue to shape group interactions. The presence of concerns about cultural dominance suggests that intercultural sensitivity is still developing.

## 6.3. Interaction Confidence

The findings of this study suggest that Adventist youth in the Windhoek District demonstrate behaviours consistent with intercultural sensitivity. Participants reported being comfortable interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, they reported showing awareness of the need to respect cultural norms, values, customs, and etiquette of others. Their deliberate efforts to avoid behaviours that could be perceived as disrespectful indicate an ability to recognize and appropriately respond to cultural differences. These findings align with Chen and Starosta's intercultural sensitivity model [13], particularly interaction confidence, respect for cultural differences, and interaction attentiveness.

The findings are also consistent with Fritz and others and Tamam, who argue that intercultural sensitivity is associated with openness, empathy, and effective intercultural relationships in multicultural settings [17] [18]. Participants' efforts to avoid conflict and adapt their behaviour to diverse cultural contexts suggest a commitment to harmonious interaction. However, some divergence from ideal

intercultural outcomes is evident, as a few participants reported discomfort, exclusion, or inferiority due to language barriers and cultural differences. These experiences support Chen and Starosta's and Tamam's observations that interaction confidence can be weakened by communication barriers, particularly language dominance within groups [13] [18].

From a practical perspective, these findings indicate that the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Namibia already has a strong foundation of intercultural sensitivity among the youth. Church leaders can strengthen this through intentional intercultural programmes such as youth camps and multicultural Sabbath activities that encourage interaction and mutual understanding. Such initiatives would reinforce the biblical principle of unity in diversity within the church.

#### 6.4. Interaction Enjoyment

The findings indicate that Adventist youth in the Windhoek District enjoy intercultural interactions, even when misunderstandings occur. Participants consistently reported that engaging with people from different cultures exposes them to new knowledge, perspectives, languages, traditions and experiences of the Adventist faith and practice. These interactions are therefore perceived not merely as social exchanges but as meaningful opportunities for broadening worldview and deepening understanding. Such findings align with Allport's contact theory [41] and Deardorff's intercultural competence framework, which emphasize that positive intercultural contact fosters understanding and appreciation of diversity [40].

Participants' enjoyment of learning about different languages, foods, beliefs, and ways of life reflects key dimensions of intercultural sensitivity, particularly openness and interaction enjoyment [13] [45]. According to Chen and Starosta, intercultural sensitivity includes both respect for cultural differences and enjoyment of interaction, both of which were evident in the responses [13]. However, some participants expressed frustration when there was perceived imbalance in communication effort or experiences of rudeness, exclusion, and discrimination. These findings align with Gudykunst's Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Theory, which suggests that misunderstandings and lack of reciprocity can hinder effective intercultural interaction [43]. They also support Tamam's view that positive attitudes toward diversity do not always eliminate communication challenges [18].

Despite these challenges, the findings differ from studies that emphasize intercultural interaction as primarily conflictual or anxiety-driven [46], as participants largely described positive experiences. This suggests that the shared Adventist identity may serve as a unifying factor that reduces social distance and promotes more positive intercultural interaction. From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a space for intercultural learning and friendship formation. Church programmes such as multicultural youth camps, cultural appreciation events, and intercultural discussion

groups should be intentionally strengthened to enhance unity, reduce misunderstandings, and promote inclusive fellowship among diverse cultural groups.

### 6.5. Interaction Attentiveness

The findings reveal that Adventist youth in the Windhoek District are highly attentive to both verbal and non-verbal cues during intercultural interactions. Participants reported carefully observing beliefs, values, and communication styles of individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In particular, body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, speech patterns, eye contact, and indicators of understanding or discomfort were identified as key sources of meaning. This attentiveness reflects an awareness that communication in intercultural contexts is often influenced by cultural interpretation differences. Participants' focus on non-verbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions suggests active efforts to understand the reactions and emotions of their interlocutors.

These findings are consistent with Hall's theory of intercultural communication, which emphasizes that much of human communication is conveyed through non-verbal channels and contextual cues [47]. The participants' reliance on both spoken and unspoken signals demonstrates an understanding that effective communication requires interpreting multiple layers of meaning. Furthermore, participants indicated that they actively monitor whether others understand them. This reflects empathy and interaction attentiveness, which are key components of intercultural sensitivity [40]. The emphasis on tone, voice, and speech also aligns with Fritz and others and Tamam, who found that interculturally sensitive individuals are more attentive to communication style and more effective in multicultural interactions [17] [18].

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that Adventist youth possess valuable intercultural communication skills. These skills strengthen relationships within diverse congregations. Church leaders can build on these strengths by promoting structured opportunities for intercultural engagement, such as multicultural worship services and outreach activities. Additionally, there is a need to further develop skills in interpreting and responding to intercultural communication cues. Such initiatives would help reduce misunderstandings and enhance unity in multicultural church settings.

## 7. Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

This study sets out to examine intercultural sensitivity among Seventh-day Adventist youth in the Windhoek District, focusing on how they perceive, experience, and engage in cross-cultural interactions within the church context. Overall, the findings indicate that the youths demonstrate a high level of intercultural sensitivity. This is reflected in their comfort with intercultural interactions, respect for cultural differences, attentiveness to verbal and non-verbal communication cues, and willingness to learn from people of other cultural backgrounds. Intercultural engagement, respect for cultural diversity, interaction confidence, and in-



teraction enjoyment and attentiveness are largely experienced as positive and enriching. While the findings suggest relatively high levels of intercultural sensitivity among participants, it is important to note that this evidence is based on self-reported written responses from a single district. The results therefore reflect local perspectives rather than broad patterns and should be read as indicative rather than generalizable.

Despite indicating a high level of intercultural sensitivity, the findings also reveal that intercultural sensitivity is accompanied by some challenges that affect the quality of intercultural experiences. Issues such as language barriers, perceived cultural dominance, exclusion, stereotyping, and occasional discomfort in communication highlight the continued presence of subtle intercultural tensions within the church environment. Despite these challenges, participants generally expressed a strong commitment to respect and harmonious coexistence. The study therefore concludes that while Adventist youth in the Windhoek District exhibit high levels of intercultural sensitivity, there remains a need for intentional efforts by the church to strengthen intercultural competence, reduce barriers to inclusion, and promote more equitable and meaningful intercultural engagement within its diverse faith community.

From a policy and practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of intentionally integrating intercultural awareness and cultural competence into Seventh-day Adventist youth ministry programmes in Namibia. Doing so would strengthen the church's mission of reflecting the biblical ideal of unity in diversity [2] [48]. However, challenges such as language barriers and feelings of exclusion indicate that deliberate efforts are still required to ensure that all members experience belonging and equal participation.

In conclusion, this study is limited by its single-district setting, which restricts the generalizability of the findings beyond the local context. The relatively small sample size further narrows the scope of interpretation, as individual variations may not be fully represented. In addition, reliance on self-reported written responses introduces the possibility of social desirability bias and limits the depth of probing into participants' meanings. Finally, the use of Google Forms constrained opportunities for follow-up clarification, reducing the ability to explore nuanced perspectives in greater detail. Despite these limitations, the study recommends that the church prioritize the development of intercultural competence through structured interventions such as multicultural camp meetings and workshops on intercultural communication. These initiatives would enhance the Adventist youth's ability to interpret and respond effectively to both verbal and non-verbal communication cues during intercultural interactions. Strengthening these skills at both individual and institutional levels will enhance greater inclusion and create a more welcoming church environment.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire

Scripture is clear that for believers the walls of culture, race, gender and social status are broken down. However, cultural identity is not done away with. Though church members are united in faith, they still maintain cultural identities. How important then is intercultural sensitivity among church members? The current study seeks to understand how church members experience intercultural sensitivity in their local congregations.

NB: Intercultural sensitivity refers to the emotional desire of a person to acknowledge, appreciate, and accept cultural differences.

Kindly respond to the following questions by expressing your views and opinions based on your experience during intercultural interactions.

### Interaction Engagement

- How much do you enjoy interacting with people from different cultures? Would you say you are open-minded to people from different cultures?
- Do you often avoid those situations where you have to deal with people from other cultures? If so, explain.

### Respect for Cultural Differences

- What do you think of the cultures of other people in church? Do you think your culture is better than other cultures? In what ways?
- What do you say about other people's cultures? Do you respect their values or how they behave?

### Interaction Confidence

- How free or comfortable are you talking in front of people from different cultures?
- Are you always mindful of what to say when interacting with people from different cultures? Please explain.

### Interaction Enjoyment

- Do you ever feel like you get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures as you do with people from your own culture? Explain.
- In a discussion, do you often get discouraged when interacting with people from different cultures? Explain

### Interaction Attentiveness

- When interacting with people from different cultures, do you always try to obtain as much information about their culture as you can? Please explain.
- How observant are you when interacting with people from different cultures, in order to understand subtle meanings during your interaction?