

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON COLLABORATION AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

### ULUSLARASI ÖĞRENCİLERİN İŞBİRLİĞİ VE KÜLTÜRLERARASI İLETİŞİMSEL EDİNCİNE İLİŞKİN ALGILARI

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#### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore students' experiences and perceptions of their intercultural communicative competence development during group-work activities in a multicultural educational setting. The scale for this study was adapted from a measurement tool, which was originally developed to find out the correlation between intercultural communication competence and team effectiveness of multicultural work teams. The participants of the present study were international students who pursue their studies in Turkey and also Turkish exchange students who enrolled in a university abroad. The survey data were obtained from 157 participants. Seven international students were also interviewed in order to get a deeper understanding of the participants' perceptions on the development of their intercultural communicative skills during the multicultural group work activities they engaged in. The results revealed that flexibility and adaptability are the most important skills required in a multicultural educational context. Language barrier also emerged as a common challenge for international students.

#### ÖZ

Bu çalışma, çok kültürlü bir eğitim ortamında grup çalışması etkinlikleri sırasında öğrencilerin kültürlerarası iletişim edincine ilişkin deneyimlerini ve algılarını keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada kullanılan ölçek, orijinal olarak uluslararası takım çalışmalarında kültürlerarası iletişim yetkinliği ile takım performansı arasındaki ilişkiyi bulmak için hazırlanmış bir ölçeğin uyarlamasıdır. Örneklem grubu yurtdışında bir üniversitede eğitimine devam eden Türk değişim öğrencileri ile Türkiye'deki uluslararası öğrencilerdir. Anket verileri 157 katılımcıdan elde edilmiştir. Katıldıkları çok kültürlü grup çalışması etkinlikleri sırasında öğrencilerin kültürlerarası iletişim becerilerinin gelişimine ilişkin algılarını daha iyi ortaya koyabilmek için yedi katılımcıdan da görüşme yoluyla veri toplanmıştır. Sonuçlar, esneklik ve uyulanabilirliğin çok kültürlü bir ortamda öğrenim gören öğrenciler için gerekli olan en önemli beceriler olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca dil engeli de uluslararası öğrenciler için ortak bir sorun olarak ortaya çıkmıştır.

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## Introduction

Establishing international cooperation and collaboration among higher education institutions helps to foster the quality of teaching as well as to improve the mutual benefits and understanding. Collaboration in higher education involves various activities such as mobility of students and staff and internationalization of curricula. International student exchange programs enable students to experience different cultures and expand their horizons through it. These programs not only encourage positive relations among young people from different countries but also help them gain skills for their future jobs and there has been growing emphasis that students' professional skills should be developed as part of their tertiary education. As Carvalho et al., (2016) points out, student exchange programs provide students with a broader vision of the future. International teams function across multiple boundaries, and exhibit cultural and linguistic heterogeneity, one of the key challenges is the creation of a positive climate of diversity within teams (Zander et al., 2015). Such diversity can potentially lead to positive outcomes but also some negative outcomes such as, interpersonal conflict which might reduce interaction and communication among team members (Schweiger et al., 2003). The future specialists, such as teachers, with developed skills of interaction in a multicultural environment has a higher chance of employment compared to students who do not have such skills. Therefore, it is important to understand how future teachers will be prepared for intercultural encounters in order to work as agents of integration within culturally discordant contexts (Anttila et al., 2018).

According to Serpa et al., (2020), "globalisation has brought along the internationalisation of teaching, achieved, for example, through partnerships, the hiring of teachers of different nationalities, the development of projects, teaching programmes, research and publications that result from articulation between different countries and academic mobility, covering the exchange of students, teachers, researchers and the remaining staff members" (p. 46). "Through student exchange programs students seek linguistic improvement, autonomy and demonstrate expectations regarding professional training" (cited in Carvalho et al., 2016, p. 60). Garcia and Canado (2005) conclude that the linguistic proficiency within the multicultural team is viewed as the single most influential element in attaining an advantageous position within it.

Because of the growing number of foreign students in different countries, there is a need to develop multicultural competencies in different fields of science such as the field of education (Ben-Peretz & Flores, 2018). The current study, therefore, aims to explore international students' development of intercultural communication competence through team-work in a multicultural setting. Multicultural team-work studies in the field of education are quite limited since research studies in team-work literature is mainly job-related. Therefore, it is important to collect data from students enrolled in a student exchange program and to reflect on their experiences of collaboration with the domestic students in a variety of tasks they get involved in together.

Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) define "cross-cultural communication as a process of symbolic exchange in which people from different cultures seek negotiable meaning in the communicative environment embedded in the social system" (cited in Yan, 2021, p.394). In this regard, language education emphasizes on both language-using competence and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and language teachers not only can facilitate the interaction between target culture and student *own*, but also can promote their intercultural awareness (Yan, 2021). If teachers accept their role as agents of change and acknowledge that their main responsibility is to ensure that teaching brings about changes "language teachers become responsible for enabling their students to understand the world around them, to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries, and to play an active role at many levels in the world" (Kelly et al., 2002, cited in Garrido & Alvarez, 2006, p.169). Therefore, according to Garrido and Alvarez (2006), responsibility and positive function of teachers are of great importance (Yan, 2021). The study conducted by Karacabey et al. (2019) proves the importance of positive attitude of teachers to the multicultural environment and taking students' cultural values into account will promote the development of students' cognitive and emotional abilities and their integration into society (cited in Kovalchuk et al., 2021).

As a result of internationalization (Blumenthal & Laughlin, 2009), the popularity of study abroad programs has increased in tandem with the need for graduates to function in global working environments. Previous team-work studies in the literature, as stated earlier, mainly focused on the perception of colleagues of

multicultural team performances and its impact on their intercultural development. For example, Madeev (2002) investigates how different cultures identify intercultural communication competence and its impact on multicultural team performance in international organizations and he concludes that “a moderate relationship exists between the level of intercultural communication competence of individual team members and the overall performance of a multicultural team” (p.142). The findings of some studies in the field (Chang & Tharenou, 2004; Kayes et al., 2005) reveal that multicultural teamwork helps individuals learn on the job and this greatly adds to their life-long learning (Garcio & Canado, 2011).

As Mateev (2002) emphasizes, work teams have received only minimal attention from social scientists (e.g., Black, 1979; Simpson & Wood, 1992; Steiner, 1974, 1986; Sundstrom et al., 1990). Research that addresses issues of intercultural communication in international work-teams has also been limited (Dumitraşcu & Dumitraşcu, 2019; Granrose & Oskamp, 1997; LePine et al., 1997; Schweiger et al., 2003; Mockaitis et al., 2018) and most of the studies on diversity and multiculturalism are focused on one country, in most cases - the United States.

Perception of intercultural communication competence might be different from one culture to another and communication competence of an individual can be related to willingness to communicate (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986). Team members with a lack of interpersonal skills and inability to work with diverse people or poor communication skills can quickly ruin a team (Kieffer, 1997, cited in Matveev, 2002 p. 19). People working on a multicultural team have to be sensitive to the opinions of others, understand the cultural and skills differences among team members, and be united by a common goal. A multicultural educational environment promotes the formation of skills of the future professionals, which enables them to interact with society effectively through the development of multicultural competence (Mena & Rogers, 2017; Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2019). A higher level of multicultural competencies of teachers not only provides an increase in the level of professional qualification of teachers but also has a positive impact on student performance (Anttila et al., 2018; Cherng & Davis, 2019) (cited in Kovalchuk et al., 2021). Several scholars (e.g. Kern, 2000; O'Dowd, 2003) emphasize that contact between cultures does not automatically lead to intercultural learning; in other words, the exposure to differences might encourage stereotypical and ethnocentric attitudes (Avgousti, 2018). Diversity can potentially lead to innovations but also interpersonal conflict, and reduced interaction and communication among team members (Schweiger et al., 2003). However, as O'Dowd (2011) suggests contradictions can be seen as sources of learning and discussion of cultural ‘rich points’ in which the differences between cultures are appreciated as well as the similarities between them (Avgousti, 2018).

## **Methodology**

The current study aims to explore students’ experiences and perceptions of their intercultural communicative competence development during group-work activities in which they are required to work collaboratively in a multicultural educational setting. The survey method was employed in this research study. As Denscombe (2010) points out, “surveys are used to best effect when the researcher wants factual information relating to groups of people: what they do, what they think, who they are” (p.12).

The team-work scale, which was originally developed to find out the correlation between intercultural communication competence and team effectiveness of multicultural work teams, is adapted and used in a different context in the present study.

## **Participants**

The research data are drawn from two different groups. The first group of the participants was international students who pursue their studies in Turkey whereas the second group consisted of Turkish exchange students who enrolled in a university abroad. The survey data were obtained from 157 participants. The group of the students for this research study was drawn through convenience sampling method, which “allows access to participants who are conveniently located” (cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.43).

## Data Collection

A questionnaire was adapted from Matveev (2002), which was initially designed to “understand how different groups of respondents perceive different dimensions of intercultural communication competence and to provide preliminary guidelines for describing the relationship between intercultural communication competence and team effectiveness of multicultural work teams” (p.75). The theoretical framework of the questionnaire is based on Integrated Intercultural Communication Competence Model (rooted in Abe and Wiseman's abilities model, 1983) and Cui and Awa's (1992) concept of intercultural effectiveness. “The model is based on four underlying dimensions that describe a level of intercultural communication competence of a team member: interpersonal skills, team effectiveness, cultural uncertainty, and cultural empathy” (Matveev 2002, p.75). Each item in the questionnaire was rated on a five-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= undecided, 4= agree and 5= strongly agree). Participants are asked to answer the scale items by thinking about the situations in which they work in pairs, small groups or in a team to complete a task/activity or a project.

Matveev (2002) performed a pilot study of 380 participants to test the consistency and the internal reliability of the International Communication Competence Questionnaire (ICCQ). 23 items of the ICCQ were constructed around these dimensions of intercultural communication competence. The researcher employed the ICCQ with reliability  $\alpha = 0.88$ . to survey 124 managers and multinational organization managers in Russia and in the United States (Matveev, 2002). One of the main issues that intercultural communication studies need to address is to study different cultures in different parts of the world and consequently it is important to modify the current scales and measurement devices to adapt to these less-studied cultures (Croucher, 2013 cited in Croucher, 2015). In order to modify the current scale developed by Matveev, some modifications were made on the scale and the number of the items dropped to 18. Five items of the scale were omitted since they were considered to be relevant to company or organization settings, but irrelevant to the educational context. The original questionnaire consisted of 23 items however, only 18 of them were adapted and the replicability and accuracy of the scale were tested in the pilot study conducted by Gündüz and Doğan, 2022. The final version of the team-work scale, were grouped under two-factor structure (Flexibility: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18; Inflexibility: 1, 2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 17) and were administered to 168 participants. The participants were international students who pursue their studies in Turkey and also Turkish students who study abroad as part of the Erasmus exchange program. According to the internal consistency coefficient values, it was found out that the values for the subscales were high (flexibility  $\alpha = 0.842$  and inflexibility  $\alpha = 0.802$ ). “The scale is expected to produce valuable results in order to obtain data about how intercultural sensitivity, based on individuals' flexibility and inflexibility levels, affects teamwork in a multicultural setting” (cited in Gündüz and Doğan, 2022, p.478). The data collected for the pilot study are not included in the present study.

The main data collection techniques in this piece of research are both survey and interview. The data for the present study were drawn from 157 questionnaires and a total of seven interviews involved three Turkish students who study abroad and four international students who pursue their studies in a public university (an English-medium institution) in Turkey. Semi-structured interviews were carried out in order to get a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives on the development of their intercultural communicative competences during the multicultural group work activities they engaged in. As Balcescu and Ilie (2019) suggest, developing intercultural communication competences and skills can help facilitate the multicultural encounter and lead to more tolerance towards the other.

Interviews were recorded with participant consent and each session took about 15 minutes.

## Data Analysis

In the present study, SPSS 28.00 package program was used to analyze the quantitative data and content analysis was utilized to analyze the qualitative data collected via semi-structured interviews. After the data transcription process, the researcher analyzed the data and the sample extracts are presented under the related categories identified by the researcher in order to help explain the results from the quantitative study.

## Findings

The findings of this research study are expected to provide a better understanding of how international students perceive their intercultural communicative competence and its impact on collaborative learning in multicultural settings. According to Sweeney (2008), “multicultural influences on language and communication exchange in group learning activities may further impact upon team performance and learning outcomes” (p.120). Therefore, it is important to understand international students’ perception of cross-cultural collaboration and help them develop their communicative competence skills through it.

In this section, the results of the analysis of the quantitative and the qualitative data will be illustrated. The main findings are reported using two subheadings derived from the main sections of the survey: (1) the flexibility and (2) the inflexibility levels of the participants, which are believed to be the components of intercultural sensitivity and affect teamwork in multicultural contexts.

The survey items with the mean scores are presented in Table 1 below. The highest scores under the two categories are highlighted in bold:

**Table 1.** The Mean Scores of the Scale Items

Subscale	Items	Mean	SD
Flexibility	My team involves every member in the decision-making process without any relation to the national origin (Item 3)	4.15	1.061
	I work with nationals from other countries differently from the way I work with people from my home country (Item 4)	3.02	1.425
	I engage in a meaningful dialogue with people from the other countries in the same way as with people from my own country (Item 5)	3.90	1.145
	I acknowledge differences in communication and interaction styles when working with people from different countries (Item 6)	4.38	.788
	Working with people from different cultures is exciting (Item 7)	4.42	.833
	Working effectively with other people involves understanding other peoples' beliefs (Item 9)	4.23	.912
	When in another country, I try to learn as much about the culture of this country as possible (Item 13)	<b>4.48</b>	1.035
	I am flexible when working with people from different cultures as I acknowledge differences in values and beliefs (Item 14)	4.46	1.095
	I am comfortable when communicating with foreign nationals (Item 15)	<b>4.55</b>	1.135
	Viewing people from their cultural perspectives is helpful when working on a multicultural pair/group/team (Item 16)	4.36	1.215
Inflexibility	Creativity of the pair/group/team increases if people from different cultures are present (Item 18)	4.20	1.440
	Establishing a good working relationship with people from other countries is difficult (Item 1)	2.39	1.073
	I feel uncomfortable working with people from different countries (Item 2)	1.71	1.044
	Dealing with cultural differences is a frustrating process (Item 8)	<b>2.46</b>	1.201
	Hearing people speaking with an accent makes me believe that they are less	1.55	1.077
			1497

capable (Item 10)	1.93	1.220
I am inattentive to cultural and behavioral norms of others (Item 11)	2.18	1.404
Effectiveness of communication on the pair/group/team falls when people from different countries are working on the team (Item 12)		
I tend to develop closer relationships with pair/group/team members from my own country than with team members from other countries (Item 17)	<b>2.79</b>	1.765

As presented in Table 1, most of the participants in this study agree with item 15 and they stated that they do not experience any problems in communicating with people from other countries (M = 4.55) and they enjoy working with *other* while they are trying to get the task done together during the group-work activities (M = 4.42). Moreover, the participants are willing to learn about the host culture as much as possible when they are in another country (M = 4.46), which would help them develop their knowledge of different culture and sociolinguistic awareness which are considered to be important dimensions of ICC. In a similar study, Aksoy et al. (2017) conclude that study abroad experience, Erasmus program in particular, “stimulates students’ curiosity about new cultures and motivates them to explore further” (p.23).

The results also reveal that another highest item is *I am flexible when working with people from different cultures as I acknowledge differences in values and beliefs (Item 14)*, which suggests that the participants value and respect fellow group members’ perceptions and interpretations and develop an open-minded attitude towards others. The findings are in line with other studies carried out by Lagerström and Andersson in 2003, which indicate that social competence and flexibility are among the most important skills for the members of the transnational team have to create an atmosphere that supports social interaction among the team members. “By means of social interaction, mutual understanding and trust are established, and the actors become motivated, committed, and secure in engaging in knowledge creation and sharing” (p.94). According to Lagerström and Andersson, information technology has just supportive function and the importance and value of information technology increases once the team members know each other and also each other’s interests and competencies. Bachmann (2006) also suggests that acceptance is important and they need to develop respect for the contributions of their group members as well as respect for their own perceptions and interpretations in order to contribute to accomplishing the group’s tasks.

In the qualitative data *flexibility* and *adaptability* also emerge as very important features of working collectively. Some of the participants explain that:

I think it is better if we work with people from different nationality in this team it is better because you see different points of view. So, I would prefer working with people from different cultural background.

I need to work a little bit more to prove myself among them, I was the only person who do not share the same language with them. In my case, there was this notion that you have to work together. I experience some difficulties but I can understand the problem, I was the only person comes from a different country and it was new for them too. I tried not to make a big deal out of it.

I am more flexible now and I do not have any problem speaking their L1 with them.

I am more practical now to solve a problem but one at a time, not trying to solve all the problems at once.

The highest score emerged in the quantitative data as *Inflexibility category* is *Item 7 I tend to develop closer relationships with pair/group/ team members from my own country than with team members from other countries* (M = 2. 79). However, the interview data suggest that this can be as a result of *language barrier* rather than participants’ cultural differences since all the interviewees agree that they are quite happy and comfortable when working with people from other countries. They state during the interviews that they experience language related issues which lead them to stress. During the group-work activities participants report that there have been codeswitching to a greater extend. *Language barrier* emerged as an important theme as some participants emphasized in the following extracts:

The domestic students need to speak in English because I cannot speak their L1. In group-works they normally use their L1 but, because of me they had to speak in English but at some point, they switched their language from L2 to L1 and I had some difficulties in understanding some terms they used. I was a bit shy to ask them switch to English so, I used translations. Other than that, the group presentation was totally fine.

Kemaloğlu-Er and Özata (2020) indicate that there are a number of reasons for practicing codeswitching in group work such as lack of proficiency, sharing the same native language, preventing communication breakdowns, saving time, and building solidarity. One of the respondents points out that

In that group the domestic students were not really confident enough about their L2 abilities and that is why they forced us to speak their L1. Actually, that is why I learnt their L1. Language barrier was the only problem I believe, they did not have another intention. They accepted me, we were working together. The problem is that when you move to another country you need to work a little harder or you have the sense of working harder to be accepted. It was OK with me, I worked a little bit harder.

The issue of language barrier is often raised during the interviews and it was clear that most of the participants experienced code-switching during group-works but most of the students reported that host students were sensible and mature enough to understand and switch their language to English after they explained that they cannot follow the discussion:

Sometimes when there is a pressure the other team members prefer to speak in their L1 after a while they involved me into process. This happened several times. Two or three times I need to tell them guys you need to speak me in English. After that they apologized and explained why they switched to L1. Because they were so stressed and they we need to clarify some issues between us.

Interpretative ambiguity also aroused over technical terms which explained by one of the participants as follows:

Some misunderstandings happened especially over some professional terms. Sometimes they misunderstood what I meant and then we did quick google search or try to convince each other.

However, the participants also pointed out that the tutors were very helpful and understanding and they continued to communicate in L2 by restricting use of codeswitching in the classroom and the students received regular reminders from teachers to encourage them to speak English, which appreciated by the international students.

The majority of the students were the ones who share the same L1 so they tend to speak in L1 during online collaborative task. However, the tutor warned them to speak in English. I was shy to say that I cannot understand everything when they speak in L1 or switch to in English.

As presented in Table 1, negative responses can be observed from the results of *Item 10 Hearing people speaking with an accent makes me believe that they are less capable*. The survey responses ( $M = 1.55$ ) indicate students' disagreement with the item, which can be inferred that accent is not a significant factor the impact on students' educational success, in opposition to the findings reported by Park (2017). As Choomthong and Manowong (2020) put it, "the traditional concept of being native speakers with English norms has shifted to English used globally by non-native English speakers" as a result of the globalization (p. 165). The participants of the present study seem to acknowledge that international students come from different backgrounds and thus, have different accents.

Finally, during the interviews the international students explained that huge impact not only their future professional life but also their personal life as illustrated below:

I think I got tougher at the end but I am very happy with this experience because people do not have this experience they will have this experience in their work-life or when they migrate, change their countries. I got this experience a little bit earlier and my life is way easier than them.

This experience made me more open with people and interact better with them. I became more friendly with people. I found more interesting if I stay with people from other nations, like I try to learn about their cultures, how they react in different situations.

I experienced some difficulties which made me feel frustrated from time to time but I would definitely persuade someone have this experience. I have just applied for an internship abroad.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study aims to explore international students' perceptions of multicultural teams and their impact on intercultural communicative competence. Results confirm that multicultural group-work facilitates the international students' development of interpersonal skills, understanding other people's needs, cooperation and negotiation. Most of the participants believe they are more tolerant towards the differences that may arise as a result of the fellow team members' cultural background and they develop their abilities such as acknowledging the different values and perceptions, recognizing other people's needs, and negotiating to solve a problem in order to find a common ground during the process of getting the task done. Some research studies (Brett et al., 2006; DiStefano & Maznevski, 2000) highlight that "in teams composed of individuals from different countries, differences in values, norms of behavior, and communication styles are a frequent source of irritation, misunderstandings, and conflict" (cited in Stahl, 2010, p.5). By contrast, the results of the present study reveal that international students are quite confident and feel content in collaboration with students from other countries and their experience motivated them to work in multinational organizations in the future. Small number of students report some minor misunderstandings caused as a result of having different cultural backgrounds. However, language barrier emerges as a more crucial issue than cultural barriers. Most of the participants emphasized that at the initial stage of the group-work activities the code-switching was an important problem but, eventually, the students found a common ground by negotiating and also by the support of their tutors.

The results also confirmed that other than business and technical knowledge, proficiency in English is important and the team members must be able to cooperate and communicate with each other across borders, as Lagerstöm (2003) concludes in her research study. As Porto et al. (2017) points out, the phrase *intercultural citizenship* is less widespread but is being used increasingly, especially in the field of foreign language education. He claims that language teaching as foreign language education cannot and should not avoid educational and political duties and responsibilities. Byram (2008; 2014) frames these educational and political duties in the concept of 'education for intercultural citizenship in the foreign language classroom' (cited in Porto et al., 2017, p.485). Therefore, language teachers are considered to be the most important agent of developing cultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity of students. "As the teacher remains the main source of information and an example to follow in traditional education, his or her classroom language should meet the criteria of intercultural citizenship, creating the environment, which ensures mutual understanding, tolerance and desire to collaborate in team work" (cited in Mukhametzhanova & Sivirana, 2016, p. 261). Language teachers can contribute to the development of intercultural communicative competence of *intercultural citizens* particularly, their multinational flexibility and intercultural workforce, which has changed dramatically in the era of globalization. In recent years, significant changes in the composition of the workforce have taken place with organizations becoming increasingly more diverse on a large number of personal characteristics, one of the most significant of which is cultural diversity" (Lloyd & Hartel, 2010, p.845).

Finally, as Çağiltay et al. (2015) point out,

It seems apparent that the lack of research that targets cultural issues in collaborative working/learning environments is likely to have negative consequences for both team members and organizations/institutions in such collaboration. We posit that the sociocultural aspects of a virtual world constitutes a more important and essential part of cyberspace than the technological aspects represented by computers, modems and wires - and yet the socio-cultural aspects receive far less attention (p.13-14).

Some training programs can be introduced to increase intercultural competences of workforce through professional development as Lloyd and Hartel (2010) indicate that "developing intercultural competencies is likely to require a range of training modes including classroom lectures, cultural exchanges and cultural mentoring (p. 870).

Since the present study mainly focuses on the international students' perceptions of multicultural team-works it is believed that it provides some food for thought on some pedagogical issues. It is hoped that educators, researchers, and language teachers can find implications from the findings of this study. However, further studies are needed to clarify international students' perception of multicultural work teams and to understand

their needs in collaborations. Since the data for this study were drawn from a relatively small sample of international students, the indications of the findings of this study should be treated tentatively. Despite these limitations, the present study adapts the scale into multicultural education setting and into language education context to identify international students' understanding of collaboration with other students and to help them improve their communicative competence skills. This study adapts the scale for potential uses in future empirical studies. It is expected that this study would provide possible future directions for further research.

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## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Yükseköğretim kurumları arasında uluslararası iş birliği ve iş birliğinin kurulması, öğretim kalitesinin artırılmasına ve karşılıklı yarar ve anlayışın geliştirilmesine katkıda bulunur. Yükseköğretimde işbirliği, öğrencilerin ve personelin hareketliliği gibi çeşitli etkinlikleri içerir. Uluslararası öğrenci değişim programları, öğrencilerin farklı kültürleri deneyimlemelerini ve bu kültürler aracılığıyla ufkunu genişletmelerini sağlar. Bu programlar sadece farklı ülkelerden gençler arasında olumlu ilişkileri teşvik etmekle kalmaz, aynı zamanda gelecekteki meslekleri için beceriler kazanmalarına yardımcı olur ve öğrencilerin mesleki becerilerinin yüksek öğrenimlerinin bir parçası olarak geliştirilmesi gerektiğine giderek daha fazla vurgu yapılmaktadır. Takım çalışması literatüründeki araştırmaların ağırlıklı olarak iş ile ilgili olması nedeniyle eğitim alanında çok kültürlü takım çalışması araştırmaları oldukça sınırlıdır.

Garcia ve Canado (2005) çalışmalarında, çok kültürlü ekip içindeki dil yeterliliğinin, ekip içinde avantajlı bir konum elde etmede etkili unsur olarak görüldüğü sonucuna varmışlardır.

Farklı ülkelerde artan yabancı öğrenci sayısı nedeniyle, eğitim alanı gibi farklı bilim alanlarında çok kültürlü yetkinliklerin geliştirilmesine ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır (Ben-Peretz ve Flores, 2018). Takım çalışması literatüründeki araştırmaların ağırlıklı olarak iş ile ilgili olması nedeniyle eğitim alanında çok kültürlü takım çalışması çalışmaları oldukça sınırlıdır. Bu nedenle, bir öğrenci değişim programına kayıtlı öğrencilerden veri toplamak ve bir grup içerisinde birlikte çalıştıkları farklı kültürden öğrencilerle iş birliği deneyimlerini yansıtmak önemlidir.

Mateev'in (2002) vurguladığı gibi, çalışma ekipleri sosyal bilimcilerden çok az ilgi görmüştür. Uluslararası çalışma ekiplerinde kültürlerarası iletişim konularını ele alan araştırmalar da sınırlıdır.

Kültürlerarası iletişim yetkinliği algısı bir kültürden diğerine farklılık gösterebilir ve bir bireyin iletişim yetkinliği iletişim kurma istekliliği ile ilişkili olabilir (McCroskey ve McCroskey, 1986). Farklı kültürden insanlarla çalışmayan veya zayıf iletişim becerilerine sahip takım üyeleri, o takımın başarısız olmasına yol açabilir (Kieffer, 1997, aktaran Matveev s. 19). Çok kültürlü bir takımda çalışan insanlar, diğerlerinin görüşlerine karşı duyarlı olmalı, takım üyeleri arasındaki kültürel ve beceri farklılıklarını anlamalı ve ortak bir hedefte birleşmelidir. Çok kültürlü bir eğitim ortamı, geleceğin profesyonellerinin çok kültürlü yetkinliğin geliştirilmesi yoluyla topluma etkili bir şekilde etkileşime girmelerini sağlayan becerilerinin oluşumunu teşvik eder (Mena ve Rogers, 2017; Pope, Reynolds ve Mueller, 2019).

Bu çalışma, öğrencilerin çok kültürlü bir eğitim ortamında iş birliği içinde çalışmalarını gereken grup çalışması etkinlikleri sırasında kültürlerarası iletişimsel yeterlilik gelişimine ilişkin deneyimlerini ve algılarını keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu araştırma çalışmasında anket yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Orijinal olarak çok kültürlü çalışma gruplarının kültürlerarası iletişim edinci ile grup etkinliği arasındaki ilişkiyi bulmak için geliştirilen takım çalışması ölçeği, bu çalışmada uyarlanmış ve farklı bir bağlamda kullanılmıştır.

Araştırma verileri iki farklı gruptan alınmıştır. Katılımcıların birinci grubunu Türkiye'de öğrenimine devam eden uluslararası öğrenciler, ikinci grubu ise yurtdışında bir üniversiteye kayıtlı Türk değişim öğrencileri oluşturmaktadır. Anket verileri 157 katılımcıdan elde edilmiştir.

Bu araştırmadaki temel veri toplama teknikleri hem anket hem de görüşmedir. Bu çalışmanın verileri 157 anketten elde edilmiştir ve yurtdışında eğitim gören üç Türk öğrenci ve Türkiye'de bir devlet üniversitesinde (İngilizce eğitim veren bir kurum) eğitimine devam eden dört uluslararası öğrenci ile toplam yedi görüşme yapılmıştır. Katılımcıların çok kültürlü grup çalışması etkinlikleri sırasında kültürlerarası iletişim yetkinliklerinin gelişimine ilişkin bakış açılarını daha iyi anlamak için yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılır. Balcescu ve diğerleri (2019), kültürlerarası iletişim edinç ve becerilerini geliştirmenin diğerine karşı daha fazla hoşgörüyü yol açabileceğini öne sürüyor.

Görüşmeler, katılımcıların onayı ile kayıt altına alınmış olup her oturum yaklaşık 15 dakika sürmüştür.

Bu çalışmada nicel verilerin analizinde SPSS 28.00 paket programı, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanan nitel verilerin analizinde içerik analizinden yararlanılmıştır. Veri nicel çalışmadan elde edilen sonuçların açıklanmasına yardımcı olmak için araştırmacı tarafından belirlenen ilgili kategoriler altında örnek alıntılar sunulmuştur.

Sonuçlar, çok kültürlü grup çalışmasının uluslararası öğrencilerin kişilerarası becerilerini geliştirmelerini, diğer insanların ihtiyaçlarını anlamalarını, iş birliğini ve müzakereyi kolaylaştırdığını doğrulamaktadır. Katılımcıların çoğu, takım arkadaşlarının kültürel geçmişlerinin bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkabilecek farklılıklara karşı daha hoşgörülü olduklarını ve farklı değerleri ve algıları kabul etme, diğer insanların ihtiyaçlarını tanıma, bir sorunu çözmek için müzakere etme gibi yeteneklerini geliştirdiklerine inanmaktadır. Sonuçlar ayrıca iş ve teknik bilgi dışında İngilizce yeterliliğinin de önemli olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Dil öğretmenleri, özellikle küreselleşme çağında kültürlerarası iletişimsel edinçlerinin gelişimine katkıda bulunabilirler.

Bu çalışma temel olarak uluslararası öğrencilerin çok kültürlü takım çalışmasına ilişkin algılarına odaklandığından, eğitimcilerin, araştırmacıların ve dil öğretmenlerinin bu çalışmanın bulgularından çıkarımlar yapabileceğine inanılmaktadır. Ancak, uluslararası öğrencilerin çok kültürlü çalışma grupları algısını netleştirmek ve bu iş birliklerinde ihtiyaçlarını anlamak için daha fazla çalışmaya ihtiyaç vardı. Bu sınırlamalara rağmen, bu çalışma, uluslararası öğrencilerin diğer öğrencilerle iş birliği anlayışlarını belirlemek ve onların iletişimsel edinç becerilerini geliştirmelerine yardımcı olmak için ölçeği çok kültürlü eğitim ortamına ve dil eğitimi bağlamına uyarlamaktadır ve uyarlanan bu ölçeğin gelecekteki ampirik çalışmalarda kullanılması ümit edilmektedir.