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Research Article

A look at intercultural sensitivity from the perspective of mindfulness and acceptance of diversity[1]

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Article Info	Abstract
	Although the concept of mindfulness is gradually increasing its use in the intercultural literature, it is seen that there has not been enough empirical research on the role of mindfulness in intercultural relations and the variables related to intercultural relations. One of the intercultural variables is intercultural sensitivity. In today's world, which is getting richer with increasing diversity, it can be said that approaching intercultural sensitivity from the framework of mindfulness will provide a more comprehensive understanding. Acceptance of diversity is one of the variables that are emphasized in the culturally sensitive approach processes. Therefore, it is thought that mindfulness and acceptance-based approaches will positively affect intercultural sensitivity. In this study, it was aimed to reveal the roles of mindfulness and acceptance of diversity variables in predicting the intercultural sensitivity levels of university students. The study is a descriptive research in which the correlational survey model was used and the data were collected with the convenience sampling method. 336 university students participated voluntarily in the study. Acceptance of Diversity Scale (ADS), Adolescent and Adult Mindfulness Scale (AAMS), Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), participant information form were used as data collection tools. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis and Pearson Product Moment Correlation techniques were used in the analyses. The findings revealed that the sub-dimensions of Adolescent and Adult Mindfulness Scale -focus on the present moment, being non-reactive, non-judgmental, self-accepting- and acceptance of diversity explained 33% of intercultural sensitivity level. As a result, it is a necessity to provide an inclusive and supportive environment free from discrimination for every individual of society and to protect their well-being. In order to foster intercultural sensitivity; it is of great importance to promote mindfulness and acceptance of diversity.

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Introduction

In the early years, multiculturalism was defined as understanding the cultural diversity in the areas such as nationality, ethnicity, and language as a concept that emphasizes diversity in societies (Kymlicka, 1995). In subsequent years, the content of concept was expanded to include orientations such as different sexual orientations, weight, and disability, and it began to be viewed as a very broad structure that touches everyone's life (Glazer, 1997). According to Sue and Sue (2012), any form of interpersonal communication is considered an intercultural interaction. Multiculturalism opposes the idea of melting in the same pot, which expresses the understanding of assimilating smaller groups under

the dominant culture and refers to adding each individual's identity and characteristics to the pot as color and richness (Song, 2010). However, it is seen that non-dominant groups face many obstacles in societies where strict, judgmental, and harsh rules and views prevail (Irvine, 2003). One of these obstacles is microaggressions, defined as harmful, humiliating behaviors, verbal injustices, thoughts and attitudes that are automatically directed against a particular person or group without their awareness (Pierce et al., 1977). It is observed that individuals who are exposed to microaggressions have psychological problems such as low self-esteem, depression, suicide attempts, anxiety (Kaufman et al., 2017; Nadal et al., 2014), intense negative emotions such as anger, hopelessness, disappointment, stress (Stewart et al., 2006), and harmful consequences such as academic failure, job burnout, and poor social relationships (Ong et al., 2013). Therefore, in today's world, where the world is becoming more global, and especially in societies that receive many immigrants, multiculturalism becomes an issue that needs to be emphasized and a phenomenon that aims to provide equal rights to each individual.

The 21st century is an era in which international cooperation has increased; travel, transportation, and communication are widespread; technology has developed, and globalization has come to the fore; people with different cultural characteristics and orientations live together, collaborate, and interact more than ever (Davis et al., Cho, 2005; Scheuerman, 2010). Along with globalization, migratory movements are among the most important factors in societies with a multicultural structure (Deardorff, 2006). It is stated that migration movements in the recent years have transformed Turkey (Ulukaya Öteleş, 2021), which already includes various ethnic groups and has a multicultural structure, into one of the migration countries with the status of a safe country (Ünal & Gedik, 2022). Therefore, in today's Turkey, the concept of intercultural sensitivity, which expresses the effective approach to differences and the development of flexible perspectives in environments such as work environments, family circles, schools, and universities, where cultural diversity is increasing, plays an important role (Marx & Moss, 2011).

Intercultural sensitivity was developed based on intercultural communication studies (Bennett, 1986) and sought to explain individuals' responses to cultural differences and similarities (Altan, 2018). Furthermore, intercultural sensitivity appears as the ability to understand and value cultural similarities and differences (Hammer et al., 2003) and to distinguish culturally diverse individuals' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors (Altan, 2018). In this regard, the intercultural sensitivity is one of the most effective skills to bend false assumptions and stereotypes about individuals belonging to different ethnic groups/cultures (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022).

According to Bennett and Bennett (2004), intercultural sensitivity is addressed within the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. Individuals undergo several stages depending on how they perceive and respond to cultural diversity. Each of the six identified developmental stages focuses on how individuals experience differences. The denial, defensiveness, and minimization stages are referred to as ethnocentrism and include recognizing cultural differences, reducing polarized views and judgments, and understanding the importance of differences within the similarities. The next three stages are referred to as ethnorelativism and include acceptance, adaptation, and integration processes. It is seen that individuals who have passed to the ethnorelativism stage can recognize differences, accept them with respect, adapt their own values and ways of interaction to other cultures, and feel they belong to more than one cultural group.

Intercultural sensitivity is considered a prerequisite for intercultural communication (Aksoy, 2016) and one of the most important means of avoiding or resolving communication problems and misunderstandings that may occur between individuals (Straub et al., 2007). Also the intercultural sensitivity enables individuals to think in different ways, view situations and phenomena from different perspectives, and facilitate interactions between culturally diverse individuals (Liu & Zhang, 2022). Additionally individuals with high levels of intercultural sensitivity respect the differences between individuals, accept differences, approach cultural differences and others' perspectives more sensitively and empathetically (Cheung et al., 2022) and their social intelligence (Yenphech & Intanoo, 2022), and happiness levels are higher. (Öğüt, 2017). Therefore, considering the changing structure of society, it is essential to develop intercultural sensitivity in individuals and to teach these skills and attitudes to the next generations in a globalized world (Struppert et al., 2010).

Universities are one of the environments where students of many different genders, religions, languages, and ethnic backgrounds come together, and therefore, multiculturalism is experienced most intensely (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022). University exchange programs such as Erasmus, Farabi, and Mevlana (Kartarı, 2014) and international student quotas initiated by the Council of Higher Education in Turkey (2019) as part of internationalization policy also enrich diversity in the universities and open a window into new perspectives for the students. In the universities where cultures come together, students learn new things from each other, become aware of many things, and get to know themselves and others. From time to time, they may argue because of their different views and characteristics. Thus, the university environment helps each individual understand that they are unique and special. In addition, university students with high levels of intercultural sensitivity are more open to intercultural knowledge, interaction, and teamwork (Bennett, 2017). At this point, it is of great importance to develop intercultural sensitivity for university students who share the same desks, residence hall, homework, and memory with the individuals from other cultures and to examine the variables that play a key role in the development of intercultural sensitivity. Bennett (1993) argues that the development of intercultural sensitivity occurs through increased awareness of cultural differences, structures, experiences and acceptance of cultural diversity. Therefore, the present study assumed that awareness and acceptance of other university students' beliefs and styles would facilitate sensitive interactions and the variables of mindfulness and acceptance of diversity were examined as predictors of university students' levels of intercultural sensitivity.

The Relationship Between Mindful Awareness, Acceptance of Differences, and Intercultural Sensitivity

The concept of mindfulness, which underlies third-wave cognitive behavioral therapy systems (Kahl et al., 2012), is defined as the ability of individuals to direct their attention to the moment they are in, to their behaviors, emotions, thoughts and sensations that occur at the moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2005), a metacognitive state of awareness (Brown et al., 2007), a non-judgmental attitude mixed with curiosity and compassion, and an understanding that is open to newness accompanied by sincerity and acceptance (Teper et al., 2013). According to Kabat Zinn (2005), the mind tends to form judgments in terms of black and white by categorizing the facts and situations to reduce cognitive load. However, it has been shown that people with high levels of mindfulness can easily recognize the judgments they make automatically, make more objective assessments, see reality as it is, and use compassionate language in place of their inner critics (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness studies with different variables in different domains such as social life, business, professional life, and academic life has been shown to improve social skills (Manusov et al., 2020), facilitate adaptation and coping (Ghahremanlou et al., 2021), protect psychological satisfaction and physiological health (Hero, 2020), bring success in business and school life (Lampe & Müller-Hilke, 2021; Li, 2022), and increase life satisfaction (Dirzyte et al., 2022). Despite the increasing number of studies addressing the concept of mindfulness within intercultural literature (Zegarac et al., 2014), it should be noted that very few studies have been conducted on this topic. Therefore, uncovering the potential role of mindfulness in developing intercultural sensitivity is expected to be an important contribution to the field.

It is of great importance for individuals to be aware of cultural background of others, to maintain an acceptance and compassion-oriented approach by reducing situations and emotions such as insecurity and helplessness experienced during the interaction process, and to adapt to cultural diversity for effective communication (Moosmüller & Schönhut, 2009). It can be said that mindfulness plays a role in developing and increasing intercultural sensitivity (Menardo, 2017). First of all, it can be said that avoiding and resolving communication problems will facilitate interactions between culturally diverse individuals thanks to the increased level of metacognitive awareness (Straub et al., 2007), the sense of curiosity will allow a better understanding of cultures by promoting a deeper knowledge of different cultures (Thomas, 2006), and the non-judgmental attitude will reduce prejudice towards different cultures (Djikic et al., 2008). In addition, mindfulness can contribute to intercultural sensitivity through its attitudes that emphasize flexibility, adaptability, and openness to new experiences (Davis & Cho, 2005).

A high level of mindfulness means that the individuals are aware of different cultures and their values, beliefs, and norms in the interaction process and are open to acknowledging and understanding these cultures and approaches (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Furthermore, mindfulness involves the individual's ability to see his or her own culture in

relations with other cultures (Fantini, 2000). Therefore, it can be said that mindfulness acts as a bridge for individuals to achieve the equipment they need to have intercultural sensitivity.

Acceptance means maintaining an understanding of equality among differences, accepting and respecting differences and similarities. Acceptance does not mean loving and agreeing with the perspectives or values of others (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Acceptance represents that individuals clarify their perspectives on different cultures and values, can accept the cultural explanations of others, and are willing and interested in explaining their own culture and values (Bennett, 2001). Acceptance of diversity stands for respecting the differences between culture, behavior, and values (Medina et al., 2004). The differences mentioned encompasses all aspects of diversity, including language, age, gender, race, ethnicity/culture, ability, and socioeconomic status (Sanders & Downer, 2012).

It is important to understand and accept individuals within the frame of their own cultural context (Doğan, 2005). In this context, accepting diversity is considered as a goal to be achieved in multicultural structures and approaching ideas and practices without prejudice (Banks and Banks, 2001). In that case promoting acceptance reduces discriminatory, racist behaviors and prejudice (Bernstein et al., 2000). In addition, it is emphasized that accepting diversity without judgment (Gervais & Hoffman, 2013) allows individuals to develop positive relationships with individuals from other cultures (Simmons et al., 2010) and increases empathy skills (Napoli & Bonifas, 2011). According to Fritz et al. (2001), individuals with high intercultural sensitivity are aware of and accept cultural similarities and differences. Therefore, accepting self and others as they are is another factor that should be considered in intercultural sensitivity (Bakioğlu, 2017).

It is noted that mindfulness and acceptance-based approaches are culturally sensitive therapies and these approaches show promise for individuals from marginalized and non-dominant cultures (Fuchs et al., 2013). For example, acceptance and commitment therapy, which is within the spectrum of mindfulness, has decreased people's judgment (Lillis & Hayes, 2007). As a result, intercultural sensitivity (Rathje, 2007), which is recognized as an important tool for reducing misunderstandings that may occur between people from different cultures and creates opportunities for people to collaborate productively, solve problems effectively, and live together, should be considered within the framework of mindfulness and acceptance of diversity. It is expected that this will greatly benefit to the research and the field of application.

Problem of Research

Problem statements of the study:

- Is there a significant relationship between the level of mindfulness, acceptance of diversity, and intercultural sensitivity of university students?
- Do the level of mindfulness and acceptance of diversity significantly predict the level of intercultural sensitivity of university students?

Method

Research Design

This study is a descriptive research in which the correlational survey model, one of the quantitative research types. Survey models describe situations that existed or still exist in the past, while correlational survey models attempt to uncover the relationships between variables and the degree of those relationships (Crano et al., 2014; Karasar, 2009). In this study, intercultural sensitivity constituted the dependent variable, while mindfulness and acceptance of diversity were taken as the independent variables.

Participants

The study group consisted of 336 university students studying in different departments of four different state universities in Turkiye. In the studies that use regression analysis, when determining the sample size, it is stated that 40 participants should be included for each number of predictor variables (Pallant, 2015). From this point of view, it can be said that the number of participants of 336 individuals is appropriate for this study.

In the study that used the convenience sampling method, the data were collected through online platforms from the students who voluntarily participated in the autumn term of 2022-2023 academic year. 58.03% (195 students) of study group were female, and 41.97% (141 students) were male. The average age of students was 20.42 years. Demographic variables such as gender, class, department, number of siblings, mother's education level, father's education level, mother's employment status, father's employment status, /family financial situation, the place where most of life was spent, and immigration status are included in Table 1 is shown below:

Table 1. Demographic Information of Study Group

Variables		N	%
Gender	*Female*	195	58.03
	Male	141	41.97
Grade	*1st Grade*	101	30.06
	2nd Grade	88	26.19
	3rd Grade	81	24.11
	4th Grade	66	19.64
Department	*Child Development*	107	31.84
	Sociology	67	19.94
	Theology	19	5.65
	Psychological Counseling and Guidance	61	18.15
	Social Sciences Teaching	35	10.42
	School Teaching	47	13.98
Number of Siblings	*Only Child*	20	6
	Two siblings	124	36.9
	Three Siblings	85	25,3
	Four and Above Siblings	107	31.9
Mother's Education Level	*Is illiterate*	30	8.9
	Can only read and write.	13	3,9
	Elementary School Graduate	158	47,0
	Secondary School Graduate	79	23,5
	High School Graduate	49	14,6
	University Graduate	6	1,8
	Postgraduate Education	0	0
	Death	1	0,3
Father's Education Level	*Is illiterate*	1	0,3
	Can only read and write.	8	2,4
	Elementary School Graduate	156	46,4
	Secondary School Graduate	66	19,6
	High School Graduate	65	19,3
	University Graduate	26	7,7
	Postgraduate Education	2	0,6
	Death	12	3,6
Mother's Employment status	*Housewife*	266	79,2
	Self-Employment	25	7,4
	Private Sector	27	8
	Retired	8	2,4
	Officer	3	0,9
	Other	7	2,1

Father's Employment Status	*Unemployed*	20	6,0
	Self-Employment	89	26,5
	Private Sector	55	16,4
	Retired	76	22,6
	Officer	24	7,1
	Other	72	21,5
Financial Status of Family	*Very Low*	13	3,9
	Low	72	21,4
	Moderate	239	71,1
	High	11	3,3
	Very high	1	0,3
Where Majority of Life was Spent	*Village-Town*	87	25,9
	City	249	74,2
Migration Status	*Yes*	103	30,7
	No	233	69,3
Total		336	100

Examination of Table 1 shows that the majority of study group consists of first-year students (30.06%), they have two siblings (36.9%), and their parents have a primary school degree (47-46.4%). In addition, if we look at the occupational distribution, we notice that mothers are mostly housewives (79.2%), and fathers are self-employed (26.5%). They consider their financial situation as moderate (71.1%), and they spent most of their life in the city (n=179; 46.9%). When asked if they had a migration experience in their life (urban/rural), 30.7% of respondents indicated that they had migrated, while 69.3% indicated that they had no migration experience. When the 103 participants who reported being migrated were asked to rate their happiness level on a scale of 10, it was found that their happiness level was slightly above average (see Table 2).

Table 2. Happiness Levels of Students in the Place of Migration

	$\bar{X}$	**SS**	**Min-Max**
Level of Happiness in the Immigrated Place	5.8	2.74	1-10

Data Collection

Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)

ISS was first developed by Chen and Starosta in 2000 to measure the intercultural sensitivity level of 414 university students. The scale consists of 24 items, is a 5-point Likert-type scale that can yield a total score, and has five dimensions. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale's total score was calculated to be .86. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Üstün (2011) as a part of dissertation study on university students. After adaptation, it was found that the scale consisted of 23 items and had a unidimensional structure. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of scale was .90. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to be .87.

Adolescent and Adult Mindfulness Scale (AAMS)

AAMS was developed in 2018 by Droutmana et al. It is a 19-item, 5-point Likert-type scale. The scale underwent five stages in its development, which was applied to different sample groups in each stage. The first stage of study was conducted on 589 university students, and it was found that the scale can give a total score and has four sub-dimensions. These dimensions are focused on the present moment, being non-reactive, non-judgmental, self-accepting. While Cronbach's alpha coefficients of sub-dimensions were .54, .77, .68, .74. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of scale was .81 for total score. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Sarıçam and Çelik in 2018. In the adaptation study with 317 university students and 200 high school students, the 19-item and four-dimensional structure of scale was confirmed. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total score was calculated as .84. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of subdimensions were .79, .93, .67, and .70. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .87 was obtained for the total score and .86, .76, .88, .75 for the sub-dimensions.

Acceptance of Diversity Scale (ADS)

ADS was developed by Deniz and Tutgun-Ünal (2019) and aims to assess the level of acceptance of individuals with different religion, ethnic origin, appearance, thought and life values in environments such as family and work life. The scale, developed on 516 participants, is a three-dimensional, 9-item, 5-point Likert-type scale that can yield a total score. These sub-dimensions are labelled as *acceptance of diverse ethnicit/religions, appearances and values/ideas*. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total score was .77. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the sub-dimensions were calculated to be .67, .63, and .56. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .83 was obtained for the total score and .56, .76, .79 for the sub-dimensions. According to some researchers, the reliability coefficient of scale of .60 and above means that the scale is acceptable (Baştürk, 2014; Clark & Watson, 1995; Sipahi et al., 2008). However, because of the reliability coefficient of scale's acceptance of diverse ethnicit/religions sub-dimension was less than .60, only the total score of scale was used in this study.

Participant Information Form (PIF)

PIF was created by the researcher and contains demographic information about the school, department, gender, age, grade level, number of siblings, parent's education level, parent's employment status, perceived family financial situation, and participants' migration experiences.

Data Analysis

The analyses of study were performed with SPSS 24.00. Before starting the analysis, the data set was examined in terms of outliers, and the data of six participants were excluded from the data set. It was found that the skewness and kurtosis values of dataset were between -1.5-+1.5, meaning that the dataset follows normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Correlation levels and VIF values between variables were assessed for the multicollinearity. The correlation between independent variables was found not to exceed .90, and VIF values were less than 2.5 (Allison, 1999; Çokluk et al., 2012). From this point of view, it can be said that there is no multicollinearity problem in the data set. As a result, it was determined that the data set met the necessary conditions for analysis, and Pearson product-moment correlation and multiple linear regression analysis were applied.

Procedure

After obtaining the necessary approvals from the Ethics Committee for the research through an application to the Ethics Committee of Dokuz Eylül University (document dated 6.08.2022 with the number E-87347630-659-327151), the data were collected online with the participation of university students voluntarily. The descriptive statistics of students' scores in ISS, AAMS, and ADS are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics Regarding the Scores Obtained from ISS, AAMS, and ADS

	N	x̄	SS	Min.	Max.
Intercultural Sensitivity	336	91.06	0.63	63	114
Mindfulness	336	76.71	0.57	50	95
- Focus on the Present Moment	336	38.33	0.31	24	45
- Being Non-Reactive	336	11.20	0.14	5	15
- Being Non-Judgmental	336	16.6	0.18	6	20
- Being Self-Accepting	336	10.5	0.16	3	15
Acknowledge the Diversity	336	35.61	0.40	13	45

Examining Table 3, it can be seen that the students participating in the study scored above average in all the scales and sub-dimensions. The results of Pearson product-moment correlation analysis, which includes the relationships among the variables in the study, are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis Results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Intercultural Sensitivity	1	.42**	.39**	.30**	.40**	.06*	.40**
Mindfulness		1	.87**	.62**	.74**	.52**	.20**
- Focus on the Present Moment			1	.35**	.55**	.24**	.13**
- Being Non-Reactive				1	.36**	.28**	.11**
- Being Non-Judgmental					1	.12*	.17**

- Being Self-Accepting	1	.09*
Acknowledge the Diversity		1

**<.001; *<.05

As can be seen in Table 4, there were positive and significant relationships between intercultural sensitivity and acceptance of diversity (r=.40; p < 0.01), total mindfulness score (r=.42; p < 0.01) and the sub-dimensions of mindfulness, focus on the present moment (r=.39; p < 0.01), being non-reactive (r=.30; p < 0.01), being non-judgmental (r=.40; p < 0.01), and being self-accepting (r=.06; p < 0.05). It was found that there were positive and significant relationships between acceptance of diversity (r=.20; p < 0.01) and total mindfulness score and the sub-dimensions of mindfulness, focus on the present moment (r=.13; p < 0.01), being non-reactive (r=.11; p < 0.01), being non-judgmental (r=.17; p < 0.01), being self-accepting (r=.09; p < 0.05).

The results of multiple linear regression analysis conducted to examine the predictive role of mindfulness and acceptance of diversity in intercultural sensitivity are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results Regarding the Predictive Role of Mindfulness and Acceptance of Diversity

	B	S.E.	β	t	p
Constant	39.17	4.41		8.86	.000**
Mindfulness					
- Focus on the Present Moment	.38	.11	.19	3.42	.001*
- Being Non-Reactive	.79	.23	.17	3.43	.001*
- Being Non-Judgmental	.62	.19	.18	3.13	.002*
- Being Self-Accepting	.15	.18	.04	.79	.428
Acknowledge the Diversity	.55	.07	.35	7.56	.000**
R= .58; R^2 = .33	Adjusted R^2 = .33				
$F_{(5-330)}$ = 32.81	p= .000				

**p<.001; *p<.05

As seen in Table 5, the results of multiple linear regression analysis, mindfulness, and acceptance of diversity statistically significantly predicted the level of intercultural sensitivity of university students (R=.58, R^2=.33, adjusted R^2=.33, p<.001). The sub-dimensions of mindfulness, focus on the present moment, being non-reactive, being non-judgmental, being self-accepting and acceptance of diversity together explained 33% of change in the level of intercultural sensitivity. The results of t-test showed that the sub-dimensions of mindfulness, such as focus on the present moment (t=3.42, p<.05), being non-reactive (t=3.43, p<.05), being non-judgmental (t=3.13, p<.05), and acceptance of diversity (t=7.56, p<.001) contributed statistically, significantly to predicting the level of intercultural sensitivity. In contrast, the contribution of being self-accepting (t=.79, p>.05), one of the sub-dimensions of mindfulness, to the model was not statistically significant. A one unit increase in the focus on the present moment sub-dimension led to an increase of 0.38 unit in the intercultural sensitivity. A one unit increase in the being non-reactive sub-dimension led to an increase of 0.79 unit in the level of intercultural sensitivity. In addition, a one unit increase in the being non-judgmental and the acceptance of diversity led to an increase of 0 .62 and 0.55 unit in the intercultural sensitivity.

Discussion and Conclusion

Due to the reasons such as war, migration, globalization, and economic conditions, it can be observed that cultures are converging, and the societies are rapidly adopting a multicultural structure (Yılmaz et al., 2019). Turkish culture already has a very rich cultural diversity (Bektaş, 2006). For individuals living in such a rich cultural structure, it is of great importance that they are interested in communicating with individuals from other cultural groups and are sensitive to differences in their own culture and other cultures (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2013; Fowers & Davidov, 2006; Hammer et al., 2003). However, it is not possible to maintain healthy intercultural interaction in an environment where prejudice and discriminatory attitudes are prevalent (Lupano Perugini & Castro Solano, 2011). For a successful and peaceful social life, interacting with different cultures, living together with individuals with cultural differences,

working, and being open to different cultures seem to be one of the competencies that the individuals need to have in the 21st century (Eğinli & Yalçın, 2016; Renk & Polat, 2014).

Universities are among the environments where intercultural sensitivity is gaining the most importance (Menardo, 2017). It is noted that the international students mobility programs increase cultural diversity in the universities (Abaslı & Polat, 2018). In such an environment, due to the low level of intercultural sensitivity of students, contact between different groups is insufficient or can sometimes reach dangerous levels (Menardo, 2017). Therefore, it is of great importance to emphasize cultural and ethnic diversity in the higher education, promote multicultural interaction and understanding between the students and the faculty members, and help the students understand the experiences of individuals of different ethnicities and cultures in the academic environment (Enyeart Smith et al., 2017). From this perspective, the intercultural sensitivity levels of university students were examined in the context of mindfulness and acceptance of diversity. Results of study showed that 30.7% of students had a migration experience in their life and their happiness level in the migration place was slightly higher than the average level. It was found that there were positive and significant relationships between intercultural sensitivity and acceptance of diversity, the total mindfulness score, and the sub-dimensions of mindfulness, focus on the present moment, being non-reactive, being non-judgmental, being self-accepting. In addition, it was found that the mindfulness and acceptance of diversity were statistically significant predictors of university students' level of intercultural sensitivity. The sub-dimensions of mindfulness, focus on the present moment, being non-reactive, being non-judgmental, being self-accepting, and acceptance of diversity explained 33% of change in the level of intercultural sensitivity (R=.58, R^2=.33, adjusted R^2=.33, p<.001). Considering the results, it can be said, as Bennett (1993) suggested, that the key role of mindfulness and acceptance of diversity in developing the intercultural sensitivity has been confirmed.

According to Chen and Starosta (2000), the individuals in the intercultural interaction should be aware of similarities and differences between cultures. It is stated that the individuals with a high level of intercultural sensitivity should have some certain characteristics, and these characteristics include attitudes related to the mindfulness such as being empathetic, not judgmental, and being open-minded. (Chen, 1997). In Deardorff's model of intercultural competence, mindfulness-based constructs such as curiosity/exploration, empathy, respect and openness have an important place (Deardorff, 2006). In addition, the literature defines the intercultural sensitivity as an increase in the individual's awareness of other cultures, a decrease in their prejudices (Trang et al., 2003), and approaching situations from different perspectives (Hammer et al., 2003). Based on the relevant explanations and definitions, it can be said that mindfulness and intercultural sensitivity are interrelated and that the skills in relation to the mindfulness can be used to develop intercultural sensitivity levels.

It is importantis for the individuals to be aware of their biases and values, to understand people from other cultures, and to respect their values (Sue et al., 1992). Recognizing that one is a product of cultural experiences and appreciating differences also promotes cultural growth and development for the individual. Mindfulness helps individuals communicate better and feel more genuine and comfortable in their interactions (Haas & Langer, 2014). In addition, mindfulness has been shown to have positive and significant relationships with variables such as intercultural sensitivity (Menardo, 2017), culturally sensitive counseling competencies (Bakioğlu, 2017; Ivers et al., 2016; Tourek, 2014), cultural intelligence (Thomas, 2006), and intercultural communication effectiveness (Khukhlaev et al., 2022).

Tadlock-Marlo (2011) states that mindfulness plays a key role in acquiring values related to the intercultural sensitivity and transmitting those values to the future generations. Similarly, according to Gay (2000), being aware of cultural differences and how differences affect our culture forms the basis of ethno-relative phase of Bennett (1993)'s intercultural sensitivity model. This is supported by the fact that the individuals with high levels of mindfulness can view the situations and the events from different perspectives with an open mind (Zakaria, 2000) and tend to have curiosity and interest in other people's experiences and cultures (Fritz et al., 2001), and can see the situations and the events in their context. It is shown that they can see how they are, and they can create new mental maps of individuals' cultural backgrounds (Gardner, 1995; Menardo, 2017). It can be said that mindfulness has an important place in the intercultural literature with its features.

It is stated that the individuals with high levels of intercultural sensitivity exhibit high levels of empathy (Fujimura, 2022). Empathy is considered a concept related to mindfulness, and it is found that the empathy can be developed through mindfulness practices (Goenka, 1993). Studies have also shown that the mindfulness-based training improves empathy skills (Bohecker & Doughty Horn, 2016; Davis & Hayes, 2011; Rybak, 2013; Shapiro et al., 2011). In addition, a study with psychological counselors showed positive and significant relationships between mindfulness and empathy (Greason & Cashwell, 2009).

By monitoring mental processes, mindfulness reduces prejudice (Djikic et al., 2008) and racial dilemmas (Kucsera, 2009), reduces and controls stereotypical thoughts and automatic behaviors (e.g., microaggression responses given automatically without being aware of it because they are adopted over time) through metacognition (Bird & Osland, 2006), thus it is stated that it develops sensitivity towards different cultures (Ivers et al., 2016). This is because when individuals begin to become aware of evaluation and judgment processes, they understand their conflicting emotions and where these emotions come from, and they exhibit more open and flexible behavior toward others (Brown et al., 2007; Thomas, 2006). On the other hand, Niemiec et al. (2010) found that university students with low levels of mindfulness were more likely to be defensive and judgmental of other cultural perspectives. A prejudice that is not true and leads to individuals being excluded and humiliated is one factor that prevents intercultural interaction (Ügeöz, 2003). Therefore, it is of great importance for the individuals to move from the ethnocentric stage, where they judge others, to the ethnic relativistic stage, where they are open to experiencing other cultures and cultural contexts (Üstün, 2011). It can be stated that mindfulness plays an important role in this process.

Mindfulness acts as a bridge between the knowledge and the attitudes that affect the cultural intelligence. For the sensitive intercultural interaction, individuals should know different cultures, values, and perspectives (Sue et al., 1992). Mindfulness arouses an individual's curiosity and desire to learn and drives him or her to acquire knowledge. In addition, mindfulness processes direct attention to the most accurate and appropriate information and ensure that information is consciously transmitted (as opposed to autopilot mode) (Baer et al., 2006; Thomas, 2006).

According to Bennett and Benett (2004), one of the most important indicators of high levels of intercultural sensitivity is the degree of acceptance and tolerance of diversity. The individuals with the low levels of intercultural sensitivity are more prone to not accepting intercultural differences and refusing to interact with the individuals from other cultures (Zhu, 2011). In Bennett's (2001) Intercultural Sensitivity Model, it can be seen that ethnocentrism stages focus on avoiding cultural differences. In these stages, the existence of differences is denied, defense mechanisms against differences are developed, or differences are trivialized. On the other hand, in the stages based on ethnorelativism, it is stated that the differences are accepted, those different perspectives are accommodated, or the individual accepts that differences as part of his or her identity, and the integration occurs. In particular, it can be said that *the acceptance step* is closely related to the acceptance of diversity.

The development of intercultural sensitivity begins with the development of one's inner processes, and characteristics such as accepting, respecting, and appreciation of differences are considered indicators of intercultural sensitivity (Matveev & Yamazaki Merz, 2014). According to Bulduk et al. (2011), the intercultural sensitivity is the understanding and acceptance of cultural differences. Based on this definition, it can be said that the variable of acceptance of diversity is one of the most important building blocks to ensure the intercultural sensitivity. Similarly, Chen and Starosta (2000) state that one of the characteristics of individuals with a high level of intercultural sensitivity is the tendency and desire to accept differences.

Individuals with a high level of acceptance of diversity view the differences and values of other cultures as equivalent to their own culture and can accept them as *different structures representing reality* rather than *insignificant illusions* (Hammer et al., 2003). Acceptance increases understanding and tolerance for the experiences that cause distress or discomfort to the individuals (Brown et al., 2007). Studies show that the acceptance is positively and significantly associated with the intercultural sensitivity (Menardo, 2017; Ryu, 2022) and negatively, significantly associated with the avoidant coping strategies (Öksüz & Öztürk, 2016). In addition, the results of a study conducted in

Argentina, which aimed to determine the acceptance level of students, revealed that the students with a high acceptance level tend to give positive attributes to the students of other nationalities (Castro Solano, 2013).

As a result, it is necessary to create an inclusive and supportive environment without discrimination for every member of society and to protect the health and well-being of individuals (Emami & Safipour, 2013). It is very important to develop the necessary skills for effective interpersonal, interethnic, and intercultural group interactions among university students and to promote values, attitudes, and behaviors that support cultural diversity to ensure the intercultural sensitivity (Bonder et al., 2004). In this context, in order to foster intercultural sensitivity; it can be said that mindfulness and acceptance of diversity will play important roles.

Recommendations

Some suggestions for researchers and practitioners are listed below;

- Kneller (1965) states that the content of all education programs should be culturally sensitive to solve the problems that may arise concerning cultural differences and avoid misunderstandings. Therefore, it can be said that the inclusion of courses and/or units on cultural sensitivity in the education programs and the discussion of contents related to cultural sensitivity with the university students in the classes will have an important place in developing cultural sensitivity.

- It can be stated that the mental health professionals working in the universities can conduct psycho-educational programs to improve the intercultural sensitivity in the university students through the seminars, the group work, or the individual studies.

- In the process of developing intercultural sensitivity skills, it can be aimed to increase the level of students' mindfulness, acceptance of diversity, and informative activities can be conducted. Mindfulness and acceptance-based techniques and approaches can be used in this context.

- It can be said that the intervention programs based on mindfulness, acceptance, and sensitivity to the differences also positively impact students' professional lives (Chiner et al., 2015).

- Faubl et al. (2021) have shown in their studies with the university students that as the period of education progresses, the difficulties arising from the differences decrease, students gradually move to the ethnorelativism based stages and begin to focus on the positive aspects of multicultural environment in which they live. From this point of view, it can be said that the orientation studies should be given more emphasis so that the students can easily and quickly adapt to the university life, and topics such as mindfulness, acceptance of diversity, and intercultural sensitivity can be included in orientation studies.

- The research can be conducted with larger sample groups to cover the universities in all geographic regions of Turkiye, or it can be conducted with the students in different age groups, such as elementary and secondary schools.

- In future studies, the variables such as self-compassion, psychological flexibility, and cognitive flexibility can be included in the examination of intercultural sensitivity.

Limitations of Study

The results of this study are limited to the data obtained from 336 university students studying at four different state universities in Turkiye in September 2022. In addition, the results obtained are limited to the data collected from the Acceptance of Diversity Scale (ADS), Adolescent and Adult Mindfulness Scale (AAMS), Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), and the findings produced by the SPSS 24 statistical program.

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