Araştırma Makalesi ● Research Article

Intercultural Competence and Intercultural Sensitivity Levels of EFL Preparatory Students: Insights from a Turkish Context[1]

İngilizce Hazırlık Öğrencilerinin Kültürlerarası Yetkinlik ve Kültürlerarası Duyarlılık Düzeyleri: Türkiye Bağlamından İçgörüler

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MAKALE BİLGİSİ

ÖZ

Farklı duygusal, bilişsel ve davranışsal bakış açılarına sahip insanlar arasında etkili iletişim, güçlü bir iletişim becerisi gerektirir. İngilizce küresel bir dil haline geldikçe yabancı dil yeterliliği ve iletişimsel yetkinlikten daha önemli olan kültürlerarası iletişim becerilerinin öğrenilmesi dil öğretimi için gereklidir. Bu nedenle İngilizce sınıflarında etkili iletişim, çok kültürlü duyarlılık ve yetkinlik gerektirir. Kültürlerarası yetkinlik insanların kültürlerarası ilişkilerde etik ve yetkin bir şekilde davranması gereken küreselleşmiş bir toplumda çok önemlidir. Toplumlar ortak hedefler için çabaladıkça ve farklı kültürel gruplarla kalıcı sosyal, kültürel ve ekonomik bağlantılar kurdukça, kültürlerarası duyarlılığın önemi tüm eğitim seviyelerinde, özellikle de yabancı dil öğrencileri için giderek artmaktadır. Birçok öğrenci kültürlerarası bilgi, beceri ve zihniyetten yoksundur. Bu çalışma, yabancı dille eğitim yapan hazırlık seviyesinde öğrenimlerine devam eden öğrencilerin kendi kültürlerarası duyarlılık ve yetkinliklerini nasıl algıladıklarını, iki değişken arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir ilişki olup olmadığını ve bu değişkenlerin demografik özelliklerine göre anlamlı bir farklılık gösterip göstermediğini incelemektedir. Çalışmada betimsel yöntem benimsenmiş ilişkisel tarama metodu kullanılmıştır. Veriler, Chao (2014) tarafından oluşturulan *Kültürlerarası Duyarlılık Ölçeği* (Chen & Starosta, 2000) ve Kültürlerarası Yetkinlik Ölçeği (ICS) kullanılarak Türkiye'nin batısındaki bir devlet üniversitesindeki Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce hazırlık öğrencilerinden toplanmıştır. Veri toplamak için uygun örnekleme teknikleri kullanılmıştır. SPSS programı, sürüm 22 ile frekans ve yüzdeleri hesaplamak için T-testi, Pearson korelasyonu ve Spearman's Rho testleri kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar, yabancı dil hazırlık öğrencilerinin yüksek düzeyde kültürlerarası duyarlılık ve yetkinlik seviyeleri gösterdiğini; ancak katılımcıların IS ve IC seviyelerinin demografik özelliklerine göre anlamlı bir şekilde değişmediğini göstermiştir. Alan yazın ışığında eğitimsel çıkarımlar önerilmiştir.

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication between people with different emotional, cognitive, and behavioral perspectives requires skill in handling communication. Learning intercultural communication skills (IC), which are more important than language proficiency and communicative competence, is necessary for teaching foreign languages as English becomes a global language. Effective communication in English language classes, thus, requires multicultural sensitivity and competency. Intercultural competence (IC) is crucial in a globalized society where people must behave ethically and competently in cross-cultural relationships. As societies strive toward collective goals and establish lasting social, cultural, and economic connections with diverse cultural groups, intercultural sensitivity is gaining importance at all educational levels, particularly for foreign language learners. Many students lack intercultural knowledge, abilities, and mindsets. This study examines how EFL preparatory students perceive their intercultural sensitivity and competencies, whether there exists a statistically significant relationship between these two variables, and whether these variables show a difference regarding the participants' demographics. The study adopted a descriptive methodology by using a correlational survey method. Data were collected from EFL preparatory students at a state university in western Türkiye by using the *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale and the Intercultural Competence Scale* (ICS). Convenience sampling technique was used to collect data. T-test, Pearson correlation, and Spearman's Rho tests were used to calculate frequency and percentages with SPSS program, version 22. The results showed that EFL preparatory students demonstrated a high level of IS and IC levels; however, the participants' IS and IC levels did not significantly differ by their demographics. Educational implications were suggested in the light of the literature.

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Introduction

Culture is characterized as a group of people's taught and shared values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as their customs and traditions, which are passed down from one generation to the next. Multicultural civilizations frequently have complex, contrasting, and comparable cultural understandings (Aksoy & Akkoç, 2019). Culture also plays a crucial function in the language classroom since it is a relevant word for numerous and ongoing themes. It is recognized as being a crucial component in learning a second language (Mozaffarzadeh & Ajideh, 2019). Chen (2005) emphasized that globalization and technology transference are the main drivers of the rapid expansion of communication since they strengthen connections between individuals from other cultures, societies, faiths, and geographic regions in every aspect of contemporary life. Thus, EFL students, particularly those attending preparatory classes to learn a foreign language along with its culture, need to be informed about the necessity of learning about different cultures and world views in addition to the target language they are learning.

In other words, it is essential to make a shift that reflects an increased cognizance of language and values of cultural consistency, as well as the imperative to equip students with the skills necessary for cross-cultural communication. This derives from the fact that cultural awareness is progressively emerging as a crucial element of education in the realm of contemporary language acquisition. The need for a strong commitment to cultural awareness within the educational system is evident considering recent developments on a national and worldwide level. According to Shemshadsara (2012), incorporating the concepts of language proficiency and cultural awareness in the classroom can have a significant effect on students' overall competency and can play a crucial role in society.

To this end, the concept of intercultural sensitivity pertains to the cultivation of positive affective states that facilitate the comprehension and exploration of cultural differences (Chen, 1997). This definition emphasizes the numerous qualities required to enhance intercultural competence. The aforementioned attributes include self-esteem, self-discipline, open-mindedness, empathetic thinking relationships with other people, and the absence of bias or judgment (Chen, 1997; Mercan, 2016). Because intercultural sensitivity concentrates on personal feelings that occur in specific situations, people, and environments, there is speculation that individuals who possess intercultural sensitivity may be capable of eliciting and experiencing positive emotional responses before, during, and after engaging in intercultural interactions (Triandis, 1977). This pertains particularly to the notion of an appropriate attitude (Adler & Towne, 1993). Inadequate knowledge of how to courteously treat others or cultural disparities typically results in decreased levels of satisfaction with the cross-cultural interaction process (Chen & Starosta, 1997).

On the other hand, intercultural competence (henceforth, IC) is described as the capacity to engage successfully with members of cultures other than one's own (Byram, 2012). The capacity to engage in responsible and proficient communication within cross-cultural environments is commonly attributed to a framework of attitudes, intercultural expertise, competencies, and introspection. (Deardorff, 2006). According to Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), intercultural communication refers to the proficient and efficient handling of communication between individuals who possess varying degrees of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral perspectives towards the world.

IC is the collection of abilities necessary to communicate appropriately and effectively with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself (Fantini, 2009). Intercultural sensitivity is essential for effective communication in a global village, along with intercultural competence and awareness (Barnlund, 1988). However, the majority of research

on intercultural sensitivity lacks a precise conceptualization and juxtaposes intercultural competence and awareness.

Intercultural communication is now essential in language learning contexts, in part, because English has become a global language spoken by a multitude of people regardless of geographic boundaries to communicate globally and nationally in a manner that may differ significantly from those of English-speaking cultures (Alptekin, 2002). It is projected that there will be an increase in the population of individuals who use English as an additional language, significantly outpacing the number of native English speakers, as English continues to gain popularity as a global language. Intercultural communicative competence (henceforth ICC) is required in this new and evolving era, establishing a new benchmark for foreign language instruction. The use of a native speaker as a role model for teaching English has come under scrutiny. Teaching foreign languages aims to help students develop ICC, which is more significant than language proficiency and communicative competence. As a result, teachers are now obliged to encourage their students' acquisition of ICC (Çakır, 2022; Demircioğlu & Cakir, 2015).

Regarding instructional practices, it is important that intercultural awareness instruction be offered to students as a necessary component of their English courses if a teacher wants to maximize their communication efficacy while engaging with people from various cultures (Mai Hoa, 2007). Language teachers have an important job to do when trying to encourage communicative competence in their students (Sarıçoban & Öz, 2014). L2 instructors and prospective teachers need sociocultural information regarding the target language community, frequent and plural contacts with it, and in-depth mastery of the pragmatic rules that govern the use of the foreign language in professional contexts (Sercu et al., 2005). Teachers can promote or oppose cultural diversity within language classes. Culturally sensitive educators are conscious of and actively address intercultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta, 1998; Fantini, 2000).

Teachers must teach today's children how to converse with people from other cultures (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2013). Intercultural communicative awareness is a difficult concept to teach or emphasize in English language schools. Unfortunately, teachers lack sufficient knowledge of IC and how it is evaluated, which makes it challenging to provide instruction or highlight intercultural communicative awareness in different English-language settings. There is a growing understanding that cultural awareness should be incorporated into language teaching as an element of learning a foreign language (Sellami, 2000). The knowledge of the essential and linked relationship between culture, language, and instruction among students in EFL classrooms develops when the emphasis shifts from a traditional to a multicultural mindset. The challenge presented by this transformation is one that EFL instructors and students must resolve to achieve the various language learning goals of our contemporary world.

In today's world, modern international organizations require educational and cultural sensitivity for mutually effective and substantial living. In addition to intercultural awareness and intercultural competence, intercultural sensitivity is a prerequisite for effective interactions within the global community. Therefore, for language teachers and developers to indirectly influence the proficiency level of EFL language learners, the inclusion of learning experiences and possible strategies for instruction based on intercultural sensitivity is required. The purpose of this study was to determine the levels of IS and IC of EFL preparatory-level students at a Turkish university in the west of Türkiye. Taking into consideration the aforementioned circumstances, the present study focused on the following research questions:

1. What are Turkish university preparatory level EFL learners' self-rated degrees of their intercultural sensitivity?

2. What are Turkish university preparatory level EFL learners' self-rated degrees of their intercultural competence?

3. Does their level of intercultural sensitivity differ in relation to their (i) gender, (ii) age, (iii) if they have been abroad, (iv) knowing another foreign language other than English, (v) being in touch with people from different cultures and countries?

4. Does their level of intercultural competence differ in relation to their (i) gender, (ii) age, (iii) if they have been abroad, (iv) knowing another foreign language other than English, (v) being in touch with people from different cultures and countries?

5. Is there a relationship between EFL preparatory students' intercultural sensitivity and their intercultural competence?

Literature Review

Main models of Intercultural Sensitivity and Intercultural Competence were presented in this section. Developmental models focus on the phases of maturation or progression in acquiring intercultural competence.

Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Bennett's (1986) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (henceforth DMIS) Model is predominantly based on the observation of instructors in real-world settings and the experience of students. Dr. Milton Bennett (1986, 1993) developed DMIS to describe how individuals react to cultural differences. Over a period of approximately two decades, Bennett conducted research on individuals' reactions to cultural disparities, their subjective encounters with such disparities, and the gradual development of these encounters into more intricate forms. Bennett formulated the Intercultural Sensitivity Development Model (DMIS) based on the aforementioned observations. This model is widely recognized for its strong theoretical foundation (Greenholtz, 2000).

As individuals learned to become professional intercultural communicators in academic and business settings, he found that they encountered cultural differences in predictable contexts. Using concepts from cognitive psychology and constructivism, he compiled a list of the six phases of cultural sensitivity which he derived from his findings. In other words, a descriptive explanation derived from observations of intercultural sensitivity changes based on experience. The proposed paradigm is a multifaceted approach to intercultural development that encompasses various aspects of the individual, including their emotional, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics, as well as their experiences and responses to cultural diversity (Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova, & DeJaeghe, 2003). Bennett specifies the first three DMIS steps to reflect the level of ethnocentrism while retaining the remaining steps to emphasize ethnorelativism: denial, defense, and minimization as stages of difference avoidance, and acceptance, adaptation, and integration as stages of difference seeking (El Allame, Khotbi, Elghazaly, & Othmane, 2020).

Bennett (1998) concludes that adherence to cultural differences is neither an intrinsic nor a typical characteristic of human behavior. Cultural differences can result in miscommunication, conflict, and culture shock. Consequently, IC is gaining importance, especially in the teaching of foreign languages (Jalali, 2021).

Chen's Intercultural Competence Model

Chen (1989), after examining the works of researchers in the field, established four aspects of intercultural competence. The first component of personal attributes is disclosure of oneself, awareness of oneself, self-concept, and social comfort. Another factor is

communication skills, which consist of message skills, the ability to interact with others, adaptation, and interaction management. Adaptation refers to the capacity to effectively manage challenges, including but not limited to emotions such as anger and anxiety, feelings of isolation, and uncertain or unclear situations. Awareness of social values, customs, societal norms, and cultural understanding comprise cultural awareness. Chen and Starosta (1997) suggested that intercultural competence can be viewed from three different angles: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral.

Byram's Model

In an endeavor to assist foreign language instructors, a framework for teaching and evaluating ICC was developed by Byram (1997). ICC consists of attitudes, understanding, ability of incorporating and connecting, skills of discovering and communication, and most importantly, critical cultural awareness (Byram et al., 2002). The framework aims to cultivate learners as intercultural communicators or mediators who can handle challenging circumstances and diverse identities without resorting to stereotypes. Unlike Bennett's descriptive model, Byram's IC model includes implied guidelines for educators, curriculum designers, and foreign language instructors in particular.

Byram's model promotes clear recommendations and instructions for instructors of foreign languages. For Byram, there is a clear distinction between IC and ICC, that is, interlocutors have the capacity to function as culture mediators because they are able to successfully interact in their native language with individuals from other cultures. Conversely, IC speakers cannot be culture mediators because they communicate in a second or foreign language. In this regard, language learners should be able to effectively communicate, interpret and comprehend the cultural perspectives of the other, and evaluate their culture.

Deardorff's Model

Based on a research inquiry into the identification and measurement of international competence as a learner's end product of assimilation, Deardorff (2004) developed the Pyramid Model of international competence. Respect, receptivity, as well as inquisitiveness, and discovery, are fundamental attitudes that form the base of the pyramid. The subsequent level involves integrating information and understanding into a single category, along with interdependent skills. To achieve intercultural competence, a person must have self-awareness, a comprehensive understanding, and familiarity with diverse cultures, culture-specific knowledge, and sociolinguistic sensitivity.

The acquisition of intercultural competence is facilitated by individuals who possess knowledge of their own culture as well as other cultures. This knowledge enables individuals to develop fundamental skills such as mindful listening, skilled observation, precise interpretation, critical thinking, effective assessment, and meaningful connection. This particular model prioritizes the consideration of internal as well as external outcomes (Taşkın, 2020). Upon attaining the initial two tiers, an individual undergoes an internal transformation characterized by enhanced adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelative perspective, and empathy. This, in turn, translates into discernible external manifestations such as effective and appropriate conduct and communication (Deardorff, 2006).

Methodology

Research Design

Using a quantitative methodology, the study adopted a descriptive methodology utilizing the correlational survey method. In the body of this design, survey research is used to investigate a sample of this group in order to produce a quantitative or numerical description of

trends, attitudes, or opinions within this community. With this method, questionnaires are used to capture data for the purpose of extrapolating sample data to the entire population (Babbie, 1990). Survey research is a research methodology that is non-experimental in nature and is employed to collect data pertaining to the frequency and distribution of variables in a predetermined population, as well as the connections that might exist between them. The application of this methodology involves the collection of data pertaining to individuals' attitudes, actions, and the frequency of occurrences. According to Coughlan, Cronin, and Ryan (2009), sample surveys are generally considered to be a more cost-effective and less complicated method of gathering information for present-day researchers, as compared to population surveys.

Sampling

143 EFL preparatory students participated in the research. Non-probability sampling approach was adopted by using convenience sampling technique to determine the participants within the body of the current research. The population of the research consists of EFL students from various Turkish universities.

Table 1: Demographical Information about the Participants

Variables		f	%
Gender	*Female*	72	50
	Male	71	50
Age	*>20*	67	47
	<20	76	53
Experience of being abroad	*Yes*	52	36
	No	91	64
Knowing another language	*Yes*	43	30
	No	100	70
Being in touch with different people/cultures	*Yes*	107	75
	No	36	25
TOTAL		**143**	**100**

In convenience sampling, the researcher chooses individuals based on their availability, their convenience, and their representation of a characteristic the researcher wishes to investigate. In certain circumstances, it may be necessary to recruit participants who voluntarily consent to be investigated. Calculating descriptive statistics on these samples and comparing them to the larger population to draw inferences from the sample to the population may be appropriate. (Creswell, 2012). Accordingly, the researchers, in this study, chose the participants based on their willingness and availability by using convenience sampling technique.

Data Collection Tools

The purpose of this study was to determine if the IS and IC levels of the participants differed in relation to their demographic characteristics and if there was a significant relationship between these two constructs. Two instruments were exploited within the body of this study. The *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* (ISS)**,** developed by Chen & Starosta (2000) is a 24-item instrument which contains five factors. A five-point Likert scale was used to respond to each item in the scale as follows; 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = uncertain, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree. The original reliability score of the scale is α=.81. On the other hand, *Intercultural Competence Scale* (ICS) developed by Chao (2014) is a 30-item instrument, whose original reliability score is α=.93. It is 6-point Likert scale including the following benchmarks: 5= I *strongly agree with* this statement (Very competent), 4= I *agree with* this statement (Competent), 3= I *slightly agree* with this statement (Partly competent), 2=I *slightly*

disagree with this statement (Less competent), 1= I *disagree with* this statement (Incompetent) and 0= I *strongly disagree with* this statement (Quite incompetent). Below, Table 2 presents the information regarding the normality results for both scales.

Table 2: Tests of normality results for both instruments (ISS & ICS)

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	**df**	**p**	**Statistic**	**df**	**p**
ISS	.071	143	.076	.992	143	.563
ICS	.053	143	.200	.990	143	.420

p> 0.05

   Table 2 demonstrates that both scales had a normal distribution, as a p-value of more than 0.05 is regarded significant. In the analysis of the data, therefore, parametric signed rank tests were conducted.

Data Collection Procedure

   The data were collected from 143 participants (females=72; males=71) during 2022-2023 Spring term. Participants at the school were asked to respond to the two scales through an online survey in their Main Course classes because every student is enrolled in the main course class as a compulsory component of the program. All students took their English classes online during the study because of the earthquake-related mandatory online education system that was implemented in Türkiye. It took about ten to fifteen minutes to finish both scales. By providing a link through a learning management system that was utilized by the university, the researcher guided the participants in completing the questionnaires. Additionally, before answering two scales, students filled out a demographic survey created by the researchers. Students were asked to fill out a demographic form that included questions about their age, language proficiency, department, high school they graduated from, experience living abroad, knowledge of other languages besides English, and contact with people from various cultures and nations. The research only included students who were enrolled in the mandatory preparatory program. Students who did not return their questionnaires or participate in the surveys were excluded from the study.

Data Analysis

   SPSS, version 22, was used to analyze the data using descriptive and inferential statistics to answer the research questions. First, reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability score of both scales is presented in Table 3, suggesting that both scales are highly reliable to use within the body of this study (.85 for ISS and .94 for ICS respectively).

Table 3: Reliability statistics for both scales

Scale	N	M	Sd	Cronbach's Alpha
Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)	24	3.849	.417	.858
Intercultural Competence Scale (ICS)	30	3.599	.569	.943

   The demographic information was subjected to descriptive analysis, including frequency and percentage calculations, in order to present a comprehensive overview of the participants' characteristics, as illustrated in Table 4. The researchers employed descriptive statistics, specifically the means and standard deviations, to address the first and second research questions. Initially, the mean scores of the participants on each item of the IC and IS were assessed. Subsequently, the means of the entire sections were computed. The findings

pertaining to the IC levels of students (Tables 5 and 6) were interpreted using the framework developed by Sariçoban and Öz (2014).

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for all variables

Variables	Range	Min.	Max.	M	Sd	Skewness	Kurtosis
Gender	2.00	1.00	2.00	1.5105	.528	.247	-1.310
Age	18.00	18.00	35.00	19.797	2.057	3.952	24.006
Experience of being abroad	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.636	.482	-.573	-1.696
Knowing another foreign language	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.699	.460	-.878	-1.246
Being in touch with different people/cultures	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.251	.435	1.156	-.673

This paradigm classified disagree and strongly disagree as having a "low level of IS and IC," neither disagree nor agree as having a "moderate level of IS and IC," and agree and strongly agree as having a "high level of IS and IC." Furthermore, a statistically significant relationship was found using the Pearson correlation coefficient to examine the association between the IS and IC levels among students enrolled in EFL preparatory courses.

Findings and Results

This study aimed to investigate the IS and IC levels of pre-service EFL teachers in a Turkish context to determine whether gender, age, and international relocation reveal differences in IS and IC levels. This section presents the findings of the research as descriptive and inferential statistics, preceding a discussion of the findings.

As a response to research questions 1 and 2, the findings as demonstrated in Tables 5 and 6 indicate that the descriptive analyses reveal a moderately high level of IS (M=3.84, Sd=.41) and a high level of IC (M=3.59, Sd=.56) among the participants.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics For ISS

Item	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Sd
I1	143	1.00	5.00	4.335	.75006
I2	143	2.00	5.00	3.916	.98221
I3	143	1.00	5.00	3.734	.82181
I4	143	1.00	5.00	3.223	1.04423
I5	143	1.00	5.00	3.370	.93957
I6	143	1.00	5.00	3.629	1.05268
I7	143	1.00	5.00	4.370	.90132
I8	143	1.00	5.00	4.503	.74940
I9	143	1.00	5.00	4.090	.82998
I10	143	1.00	5.00	3.713	.86091

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Sd
I11	143	1.00	5.00	3.426	.77359
I12	143	1.00	5.00	3.699	.91185
I13	143	1.00	5.00	4.419	.75445
I14	143	1.00	5.00	3.797	.87661
I15	143	1.00	5.00	3.881	.95305
I16	143	1.00	5.00	4.251	.80025
I17	143	1.00	5.00	4.153	.86649
I18	143	1.00	5.00	4.160	.96888
I19	143	2.00	5.00	3.608	.88042
I20	143	1.00	5.00	3.090	1.17431
I21	143	1.00	5.00	3.958	.76797
I22	143	1.00	5.00	3.496	.97774
I23	143	2.00	5.00	3.622	.80320
I24	143	2.00	5.00	3.930	.78409
ISS MEAN	**143**	**2.54**	**4.83**	**3.849**	**.417**

Based on the ISS, the participants' average score extended beyond the mid-point of the scoring continuum in all items and more than 4 in most items, item 1 (M=4.33, Sd=.75), item 7 (M=4.37, Sd=.90), item 8 (M=4.50, Sd=.74), item 9 (M=4.09, Sd=.82), item 13 (M=4.41, Sd=.75), item 16 (M=4.25, Sd=.80), item 17 (M=4.15, Sd=.86) and item 18 (M=4.16, Sd=.96). According to ISS, all these items are related to cultural differences, nuances and interacting with different cultures as displayed in Table 5.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for ICS

ITEM	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Sd
I1	143	1.00	5.00	3.3357	.91885
I2	143	1.00	5.00	3.1259	.89496
I3	143	1.00	5.00	3.5175	.85459
I4	143	1.00	5.00	3.3287	.83730
I5	143	1.00	5.00	3.1608	1.01849
I6	143	1.00	5.00	3.4126	.98816
I7	143	1.00	5.00	3.5175	.98477
I8	143	1.00	5.00	3.2098	.92579
I9	143	1.00	5.00	3.1678	.91917
I10	143	1.00	5.00	4.3007	.88042
I11	143	1.00	5.00	4.1189	.99640
I12	143	1.00	5.00	3.8392	.92425
I13	143	2.00	5.00	3.8671	1.00167
I14	143	1.00	5.00	3.6923	.96583
I15	143	1.00	5.00	4.0839	.93067
I16	143	1.00	5.00	3.7762	.96721

I17	143	1.00	5.00	3.7692	.90920
I18	143	1.00	5.00	3.5664	1.02476
I19	143	2.00	5.00	3.5175	.92579
I20	143	1.00	5.00	3.3846	1.14402
I21	143	1.00	5.00	3.7273	.94334
I22	143	1.00	5.00	3.4755	.87880
I23	143	1.00	5.00	3.5734	1.01044
I24	143	1.00	5.00	3.5315	1.04007
I25	143	1.00	5.00	3.5874	1.08335
I26	143	1.00	5.00	3.7343	.97107
I27	143	1.00	5.00	3.5175	.92579
I28	143	1.00	5.00	3.5664	.78327
I29	143	2.00	5.00	3.8042	.84135
I30	143	2.00	5.00	3.7762	.79097
ICSMEAN	**143**	**2.13**	**4.87**	**3.5995**	**.56976**

Similarly, based on ICS, the participants' mean scores extended beyond the mid-point of the scoring continuum in all items except for item 1 (M=3.33, Sd=.91)., item 2 (M=3.12, Sd=.89), item 4 (M=3.32, Sd=.83), item 5 (M=3.16, Sd=1.01), item 6 (M=3.41, Sd=.98), item 9 (M=3.16, Sd=.91), and item 20 (M=3.38, Sd=1.14). On the other hand, items 10, 11 and 15 extended beyond 4 on the scale as demonstrated in Table 6.

Additionally, a paired samples t-test was performed to identify whether there was a statistically significant difference between the IS for female and male participants as well as whether there was a significant difference regarding the participants' various constructs like (i) gender, (ii) age, (iii) whether they have been abroad, (iv) knowing another foreign language besides English, and (v) being in contact with people from different cultures and countries. The t-test results are presented in Table 7. As a result, there was no statistically significant difference between male and female IS levels (t = -1.24, p =.21). This indicates that male and female participants did not perform differently on the IS scale.

Table 7: T-test Results for IS

	Variables		N	Mean	Sd	t	p
	Gender	*Female*	72	3.813	.353	-1.245	.215
		Male	69	3.900	.472		
	Age	*>20*	67	3.865	.438	.437	.524
IS		*<20*	76	3.835	.400		
	Experience of being abroad	*Yes*	52	3.884	.347	.762	
		No	91	3.829	.453		.447
	Knowing another foreign language	*Yes*	43	3.831	.463	.-.336	.737
		No	100	3.857	.398		
	Being in touch with different	*Yes*	107	3.829	.406	-.964	.323

people/cultures				
	No	36	3.907	.448

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Considering the IC levels of the participants to explore if their level of intercultural competence differ in relation to their (i) gender, (ii) age, (iii) if they have been abroad, (iv) knowing another foreign language other than English, (v) being in touch with people from different cultures and countries, t-test was run, and the results are demonstrated in Table 8 below.

Table 8: T-test Results for **IC**

	Variables		N	Mean	Sd	t	p
	Gender	*Female*	72	3.557	.532	-.900	.369
		Male	69	3.644	.614		
	Age	*>20*	67	3.626	.583	.537	.592
		<20	76	3.575	.559		
	Experience of being abroad	*Yes*	52	3.685	.535	1.364	.175
IC		*No*	91	3.550	.585		
	Knowing another foreign language	*Yes*	43	3.582	.595	-.228	.820
		No	100	3.606	.561		
	Being in touch with different people/cultures	*Yes*	107	3.566	.590	-1.191	.236
		No	36	3.697	.497		

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results revealed that the participants' IC levels did not differ significantly with regard to their gender, age, the experience of being abroad, knowing another foreign language and keeping in touch with people from different cultures and countries.

Finally, to determine the relationship between EFL preparatory students' intercultural sensitivity and their intercultural competence a Pearson correlation analysis and Spearman's Rho test was conducted. The results of the tests are presented in Table 9. As Table 9 shows, there was a significant strong positive correlation between the participants' IS and their IC.

Table 9: Pearson Correlation and Spearman rho's Test Results

		Pearson Correlation				Spearman's rho	
	N	M	Sd	C. Coefficient	p	C. Coefficient	p
ISS	143	3.849	.417	.695	.000	.681	.000
ISC	143	3.599	.569				

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As Table 9 shows, there was a significant strong positive correlation between the participants' IS and their IC.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the intercultural sensitivity (IS) and intercultural competence (ICC) of EFL preparatory students in Türkiye. This section addresses the research questions that prompted this study through an examination of the aforementioned findings. The study produced significant findings regarding the IS and ICC levels of EFL preparatory students. The prevailing consensus among scholars who have conducted research on topics of intercultural sensitivity (IS) and intercultural competence (ICC) is that individuals

with higher levels of intercultural sensitivity tend to exhibit greater intercultural competence (Penbek, Yurdakul Şahin & Cerit, 2012). Following is a discussion of the findings organized according to the previously formulated research questions.

The ability to exhibit intercultural sensitivity has been widely acknowledged as a crucial skill required for fostering peaceful coexistence in the contemporary diverse global society. The phenomenon in question is not a pervasive and innate characteristic of human conduct. Research endeavors that center on learners, while comparatively less prevalent than those that center on pre- and in-service teachers, primarily delve into learners' perspectives on cultural aspects in language education, their present intercultural sensitivity, intercultural competence (IS or ICC), and the impact of intercultural training on their perceptions, IS or ICC (Taşkın, 2020). There have been studies on intercultural sensitivity (Alptekin, 2002; Banos, 2006; Byram, Gribkova, Starkey, 2002; Engle & Engle 2004; Gedik Bal, 2023; Jackson, 2011; Sarıçoban & Öz, 2014). It is noteworthy that there is a lack of research with a similar focus as this current study in the Turkish context, as previous studies have concentrated mainly on preservice English teachers (Çiloğlan & Bardakci, 2019).

However, some studies were similar to the present study in terms of their findings and participants. For instance, some studies (Akın, 2016; Bekiroğlu & Balcı, 2014; Pedersen, 2010; Simkhovych, 2009; Yılmaz & Göçen, 2013) concluded that gender had no influence on intercultural effectiveness and sensitivity similar to the results of the current study. However, Gonzales (2017) conducted a study on university students and found that male participants exhibit greater emotional resilience in intercultural communication when compared to female participants. On the other hand, female participants demonstrated a higher ability to empathize culturally than their male counterparts unlike the results of this study. Also, studies have found that female students have a higher level of intercultural sensitivity than male students (Margarethe et al., 2012; McMurray, 2007). The findings contradict Banos's (2006) conclusion that female pupils are more interculturally sensitive than males.

Penbek et al. (2012) also investigated the intercultural sensitivity of university students and the function of instruction and intercultural experience in the formation of IC. The study's sample was comprised of students from two distinct universities and disciplines, and a survey was conducted to compare the effects of demographics, education, personal traits, and intercultural experience on intercultural sensitivity. Their study revealed that students' respect for other cultures increases in proportion to their participation in international interactions. In the present study, the high level of intercultural sensitivity of the participants might have contributed to their formation of ICC similar to their findings. However, since the samples of both studies do not resemble each other, it would be wrong to make a straightforward comparison. Furthermore, the results of Penbek et al.'s study do not align with the results of the current study in terms of the international experience since no significant difference was found regarding being abroad within the body of this study.

Chen and Hu (2023) also sought to investigate the level of intercultural sensitivity exhibited by university students in Macao, a region in China that is known for its multiculturalism. The findings indicated that university students in Macao exhibited a relatively high level of intercultural sensitivity, which is consistent with the findings of the present study. However, in contrast to the present research, their study revealed notable dissimilarities among various student groups with respect to gender, academic year, intercultural communication-related courses, and foreign language proficiency. Moreover, Yurur et al. (2018) have reported that individuals who have previously participated in student exchange programs, work, and travel programs, and have spent a considerable amount of time abroad, have exhibited an increased level of intercultural sensitivity as a result of their exposure to diverse cultures although the participants' IS did not change with regard to their experience of being abroad.

Regarding overseas experience, several studies (Anderson et al., 2006; Yashima, 2010) have presented empirical support for the notion that individuals who have undergone brief overseas experiences tend to demonstrate a more pronounced enhancement in intercultural sensitivity compared to those who have not. Additionally, Kirillova et al. (2015) have posited that short-term overseas experiences, such as volunteer tourism, may have the capacity to both facilitate and impede intercultural comprehension. However, the current study revealed no significant change with regard to the experience of being abroad as well. This might derive from the fact that not all the participants participating in this study had the chance to go abroad once in their lifetime, which might lead to an insignificant result in relation to the overseas experience.

Intercultural competence is also essential in higher education systems where internationalization is gaining prominence (Avcılar & Gök, 2022). The acquisition of intercultural competence is a gradual and extended educational endeavor that encompasses the acquisition of a foreign language, intercultural training, and practical exposure to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Korhonen, 2004). This study also aimed to investigate intercultural competence levels of EFL preparatory students. Similar to studies regarding IS, the studies conducted in relation to IC were mostly conducted with pre-service teachers (Beek, 2023; Çakır, 2022; Huang, Cheung, & Xuan, 2023; Sapkota, Zhou, Mbewe, Newton, & Phillion, 2023). However, several studies explored IC of tertiary level students. In this respect, this study may contribute to the existing literature on intercultural competence in the sense that it was conducted with EFL preparatory level students. Language instructors' views are undoubtedly important; however, getting feedback from this group of students may play a crucial role in shaping practices in terms of language teaching and may inform language practitioners in doing further research and designing their instructional practices.

For instance, Pham and Pham (2022) conducted research to evaluate the degree of intercultural competence exhibited by students enrolled in higher education within the Vietnamese setting. The aim of this research was to gain insights into the intercultural proficiency of students enrolled in private as well as public colleges. A survey consisting of nineteen questions was conducted with a sample size of 336 participants, comprising of 175 students from private universities and 161 students from public colleges. The results indicated that the level of intercultural competence among students in both public and private schools was not particularly high, which is not congruent with the findings of the current study. However, it was observed that private school students exhibited a greater degree of proficiency in terms of attitudes and skills. The different levels of IC may derive from difference between education systems or procedures of Vietnam and Türkiye, though.

The study conducted by Tran and Duong (2022) aimed to examine the perspectives of EFL postgraduate students in Thailand concerning intercultural acquisition of languages and their proficiency in intercultural competence. The study involved a sample of 91 EFL graduate students from various nationalities, including Cambodia, China, Thailand, and Vietnam. The results of the study indicated that EFL graduate students of English held a positive perception towards intercultural language learning and exhibited a notable degree of intercultural competence (IC), similar to the findings of the present study, which is interesting to note as the language level of the participants within this study was probably lower since they were at preparatory level at the time of the research. However, they demonstrated a high level of IC just like students at tertiary level from different nationalities.

On the other hand, regarding the possible relationship between the two constructs, the current study's finding is congruent with other studies in the sense that there exists a positive and significant relationship between IS and IC. Based on Sarwari and Abdul Wahab's (2017) study, for instance, showed that there exists a strong correlation between IS and IC, with each

construct exerting a reciprocal influence on the other. The study's results indicate that individuals possessing high levels of intercultural sensitivity are capable of initiating intercultural communication, and that their intercultural communication competency facilitates successful interactions. Although the sample of the study is different and included EFL teachers as the sample, Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati's (2018) study also revealed significant correlations among various facets of intercultural competence (IC) and intercultural sensitivity (IS).

The findings of the present investigation corroborated the argument made by Chen and Starosta (2000) that intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communication competence are intimately linked, yet distinct constructs. Ameli and Molaei (2012) assert that intercultural sensitivity is a crucial factor in facilitating effective intercultural communication. Additionally, they argue that intercultural competence is a prerequisite for successful interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

The purpose of the current research was to examine the IC and IS of Turkish students at the preparatory level of English as a foreign language (EFL), with a particular focus on their levels of IC and IS. The research findings indicate that Turkish students at the EFL preparatory level demonstrated competence in both IC and IS. Research has shown that a lack of cultural knowledge among individuals can result in social anxiety and impede their capacity to establish significant relationships with individuals from diverse cultures, thus serving as the primary impediments to successful intercultural communication. Hence, it is imperative to explore strategies that can enhance students' cultural proficiency and subsequently mitigate the primary obstacle, which is their limited self-assurance in engaging in such intercultural associations. One possible approach to achieving this objective is by means of exchange programs, which involve sending students to foreign countries through initiatives such as Erasmus, or by hosting exchange students from other nations to participate in collaborative seminars, workshops, and other activities. Such measures can facilitate student interactions with those coming from diverse cultural contexts, particularly at preparatory level, which is relatively an optimal time period for such cultural exchanges.

Although this study provided valuable insights into the ICC and IS of Turkish EFL preparatory students, it had a number of limitations that could have impacted our interpretation of the results. The research was restricted to 143 EFL preparatory students at a state university. The sample size can influence the applications of the results to a larger population. Future research with a larger sample size may yield more precise and reliable results. Respondents could easily give their preferences instead of reality. Therefore, the results of this study are legitimate to the point that the subjects responded and disclosed the truth. Interviews, observations, or a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to investigate teachers' ICC and IS.

To verify or refute the results of the current study, additional research should be conducted with the same and distinct populations. Students' ICC and IS may be affected by variables such as ethnicity, gender, experience, educational qualifications, their departments; therefore, future research should concentrate on these variables. Lastly, the same research can be repeated by examining language teachers and university professors.

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