

## Enhancing intercultural sensitivity with children's picture books: A perspective from Erasmus+ project

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of experiential learning activities provided by the use of multicultural children's literature products on pre-service teachers' knowledge of interactive reading activities to be carried out with multicultural picture books and their views on intercultural sensitivity skills. The current research was designed as a mixed method in which both quantitative and qualitative research were applied. The study group of the research is the participants of the KA210 program carried out under the coordination of Düzce University in 2023 with the title 'Welcome! Intercultural Sensitivity for Integration' Erasmus+ project in 2023. 15 pre-service teachers from three different countries participated in the project. In the study, a multiple-choice knowledge test was used as a data collection tool. There are 20 questions in total in the knowledge test. With this knowledge test, it is aimed to measure the knowledge levels of pre-service teachers about migration, interculturality, children's picture books and interactive reading practices. On the other hand, qualitative data were obtained through a semi-structured interview form. SPSS was used to analyze quantitative data and descriptive analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. In line with the findings, it was observed that experiential learning workshops with pre-service teachers from different countries improved participants' knowledge about interactive reading and multicultural picture books. Additionally, it can be said that interactive reading workshops enhance participants' intercultural sensitivity levels.

**Keywords:** Multiculturalism, intercultural sensitivity, children's picture books.

## Resimli çocuk kitapları ile kültürlerarası duyarlılığın geliştirilmesi: Erasmus+ projesinden bir perspektif

### ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, çokkültürlü çocuk edebiyatı ürünlerinin kullanımıyla sağlanan deneyimsel öğrenme etkinliklerinin öğretmen adaylarının çokkültürlü resimli çocuk kitaplarıyla gerçekleştirilecek etkileşimli okuma etkinliklerine yönelik bilgilerine ve kültürlerarası duyarlılık becerisine yönelik görüşlerine olan etkisini

incelemektir. Yürütülen araştırma hem nicel hem nitel araştırmanın uygulandığı karma yöntem olarak tasarlanmıştır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubu 2023 yılında Düzce Üniversitesi koordinatörlüğünde yürütülen KA210 kodlu ve 'Welcome! Intercultural Sensitivity for Integration' isimli Erasmus+ projesine katılan üç farklı ülkeden 15 öğretmen adayından oluşmaktadır. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak çoktan seçmeli bilgi testi kullanılmıştır. Bilgi testinde toplamda 20 adet soru yer almaktadır. Uygulanan bu bilgi testiyle öğretmen adaylarının göç, kültürlerarasılık, resimli çocuk kitapları ve etkileşimli okuma uygulamaları ilgili bilgi düzeylerinin ölçmesi hedeflenmektedir. Öte yandan nitel veriler ise yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formuyla elde edilmiştir. Nicel verilerin analizinde SPSS, nitel verilerin analizinde ise betimsel analiz etkili olmuştur. Elde edilen bulgular doğrultusunda, farklı ülkelere gelen öğretmen adaylarıyla gerçekleştirilen deneyimsel öğrenme atölyelerinin, katılımcıların etkileşimli okuma ve çok kültürlü resimli kitaplar hakkındaki bilgi düzeylerini geliştirdiği görülmüştür. Bunun yanında, uygulanan etkileşimli okuma atölyelerinin katılımcıların kültürlerarası duyarlılık düzeylerini geliştirdiği de söylenebilir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Çokkültürlülük, kültürlerarası duyarlılık, resimli çocuk kitapları.

## Introduction

This study focuses on increasing the level of knowledge of pre-service teachers belonging to different cultures about interactive reading and multicultural picture books through experiential learning activities provided with picture books on the theme of migration and intercultural sensitivity. In addition, through the interviews conducted after these experiential learning activities, it is also tried to obtain the thoughts of the participants in terms of intercultural sensitivity skills. In this direction, five interactive reading workshops were held in two different countries with pre-service teachers from three different countries participating in the project.

Migration is the mass movement of people to areas they perceive as better. Two factors are effective when it comes to mass migration. These are divided into push factors such as poverty, political pressures, war and pull factors such as better economic conditions, political freedom, social relations (Castles & Miller, 2009; as cited in Nørredam, 2015). In particular, migration brought by war tends to be larger and more irregular. This brings with it many problems. One of these problems is the burden that migrants bring to the economy of the destination country (Sitompul, 2023). Especially in countries like Turkey, where the young and middle-aged population is high and the unemployment rate is high, unemployment rates become serious with the participation of migrants in the labor force (Sitompul, 2023). Similarly, meeting the health expenses of migrants is one of the problems that strain the economy of the destination country (Nørredam, 2015). In addition, there may be some infectious diseases that may come with migration (Nørredam, 2015; Schilling et al., 2017). This may result in the health system being unable to handle the patient load, as the local population will also need health services. Another problem brought by migration is the integration of migrants and the prerequisite for integration is learning the language of the target country (Gumpel, 2003). Problems experienced in the process of integration of migrants lead to the emergence of many problems related to migration. These problems include the formation of ghettos, parallel societies (Gumpel, 2003), increased crime rates (Delice & Yaşar, 2014; Huysmans, 1995), decreased success in education, and increased anti-immigrant sentiments of the local population (Gumpel, 2003; Hugo, 2005).

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that 108.4 million people were forced to migrate in 2022, an increase of 82.4% compared to the previous year (UNHCR, 2022). The problems faced by the destination country and its citizens are as important as the problems faced by the people who migrate. For example, in a study conducted by Marshall et al. (2005) with the participation of Cambodian migrants, it was reported that on average, migrants experienced 15 different traumas related to migration. Among these traumas, the most common traumas experienced by the participants were hunger, forced labor, murder of a family member, torture and theft (Marshall et al., 2005). Similarly, migrant adolescents exhibit behavioral and emotional problems compared to their native peers due to the traumatic events they experienced both during migration and in the destination country (Derluyn et al., 2008). It is very important for individuals to have a high level of intercultural sensitivity in solving these problems.

Intercultural sensitivity is the ability to understand, perceive and respect the behaviors of individuals from different cultures (Chen & Starosta, 1997), which starts with the acceptance that there are differences between cultures (Moradi & Ghabanchi, 2019). This skill is an indication that a person has developed a broad cultural understanding (Short, 2009). Intercultural sensitivity is a very important skill in today's world where distances disappear. Because intercultural sensitivity lies at the basis of successful and efficient communication (Chen & Starosta, 1997). Therefore, the intercultural sensitivity orientation of individuals is very effective during communication. According to the intercultural sensitivity model developed by Bennett

(1993), there are two orientations, each consisting of three stages. These are the ethnocentric worldview, which consists of denial, defense and minimization stages where the individual focuses on his/her own culture, and the ethnorelative worldview, which consists of acceptance, adaptation and integration stages where the individual approaches different cultures more moderately (Bennett, 1993; Kuusisto et al., 2015). At this point, the education system also needs to be adapted to intercultural sensitivity. According to Irvine, Arment, and Causey (2011), multicultural education is used to develop tolerance, respect, and understanding towards individuals from different cultures (as cited in İşler & Dedeoğlu, 2019). Teachers have a central role in intercultural education (Bennett, 1993). The biggest helpers of teachers in transforming their educational activities into an intercultural structure are multicultural children's literature products. Multicultural children's literature products are children's books that include different cultures and enable the recognition of different cultures. Multicultural children's picture books are the most fundamental way to build intercultural sensitivity and bring multiculturalism into the classroom (Huang, 2011).

When the studies in the literature are examined, there is an inconsistency regarding the intercultural sensitivity levels of the participants in the studies conducted with the participation of teachers and students (Kuusisto et al., 2015). For example, when it comes to cultural differences, female students accept individuals from different cultures more easily than male students (Holm et al., 2009). Similarly, in Finland, teachers expressed negative views on the integration of Muslim students into society (Rissanen et al., 2015). On the other hand, Jantawej (2011) reported that English teachers in Thailand have a high level of cultural sensitivity. On the other hand, Heggernes (2019) reported that interactive reading activities planned with multicultural picture books improved participants' intercultural learning. Because multicultural picture books contain striking visual and mental images and develop empathy skills (Arizpe et al., 2014). The sense of empathy directly develops intercultural sensitivity. Therefore, it is important for teachers to develop intercultural sensitivity perceptions. For this, it is important that education faculty programs include multicultural education courses (Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti, 2005). Because pre-service teachers do not feel ready to teach students from different cultures (Ngai, 2004; as cited in Huang, 2011). Therefore, the current study aims to examine the effect of experiential learning activities provided through the use of multicultural children's literature products on pre-service teachers' knowledge of interactive reading activities to be carried out with multicultural picture books and their views on intercultural sensitivity skills. In line with this purpose, answers to the following questions will be sought:

1. Do the knowledge levels of pre-service teachers from different cultures about multicultural picture books and interactive reading differ significantly from pre-test to post-test?
2. What are the views of pre-service teachers from different cultures towards intercultural sensitivity as a result of experiential learning activities?

## **Method**

### **Research design**

In this study, the effect of experiential learning activities carried out with illustrated children's books with the theme of migration and intercultural sensitivity and interactive reading practices on pre-service teachers' knowledge level about interactive reading activities is examined. The current research was designed as a mixed method in which both quantitative and qualitative research were applied. Mixed method is defined as collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data together in a research (Creswell, 2017). After the pre-service teachers' knowledge levels about children's picture books and interactive reading were collected through quantitative methods, qualitative data were obtained by interviewing the participants about their experiences. Since the research data were collected in the specified order, explanatory sequential design, one of the mixed method designs, was preferred in the study. According to the explanatory sequential design, quantitative data are first collected and analyzed, and then qualitative data are collected to explain the quantitative findings in more detail (Creswell, 2017; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

### **Participants**

The study group of the research consists of 15 pre-service teachers from three different countries who participated in the KA210 coded Erasmus+ project 'Welcome! Intercultural Sensitivity for Integration' Erasmus+ project coordinated by Düzce University in 2023. 15 pre-service teachers from three different countries participated in the project. The research group was determined using purposive random sampling

method. This sampling method is defined as the purposeful classification of a systematic and randomly selected set of samples in line with the purpose of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). In the process of identifying partner countries for the project, the purpose of the project was taken into consideration. Greece and Spain, two countries with long years of experience in migration and intercultural sensitivity, were chosen for this reason. On the other hand, Turkey, which has been working on interactive reading, coordinates the work done in this project. Table 1 below provides demographic information about the participants.

**Table 1.** Demographic information of the participants

| Participants | Gender | Age | Education level | Country |
|--------------|--------|-----|-----------------|---------|
| P1           | Male   | 33  | PhD             | Türkiye |
| P2           | Male   | 26  | PhD             | Türkiye |
| P3           | Male   | 26  | PhD             | Türkiye |
| P4           | Male   | 40  | Master's Degree | Türkiye |
| P5           | Female | 21  | Undergraduate   | Türkiye |
| P6           | Female | 29  | Undergraduate   | Greece  |
| P7           | Female | 24  | Undergraduate   | Greece  |
| P8           | Female | 29  | Master's Degree | Greece  |
| P9           | Male   | 21  | Undergraduate   | Greece  |
| P10          | Female | 27  | Undergraduate   | Greece  |
| P11          | Female | 19  | Undergraduate   | Spain   |
| P12          | Female | 26  | Master's Degree | Spain   |
| P13          | Female | 26  | Master's Degree | Spain   |
| P14          | Female | 23  | Master's Degree | Spain   |
| P15          | Female | 24  | Master's Degree | Spain   |

In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, codes were used instead of using the names of the participants in the table. Five of the pre-service teachers who participated in the study were male and the other 10 were female. It is seen that the ages of the pre-service teachers participating in the research are distributed between 21-40. 3 of the pre-service teachers are continuing their doctoral education in the field of classroom education. While 6 of the other participants have a master's degree, the other 6 participants have a bachelor's degree. One participant from Spain and one participant from Greece are studying at a private university, while all other participants are studying at public universities. Five of the pre-service teachers were citizens of Turkey, five were citizens of Greece and the other five were citizens of Spain. All participants were included in the study voluntarily.

### Procedure

During the design phase of the project, the researchers first tried to identify children's picture books on the themes of migration and intercultural sensitivity for the workshops. Since the common language used by the participants was English, a large list of books on migration and intercultural sensitivity was created from the official websites and social media accounts of foreign publishers. The books on this list were decided by taking into consideration the opinions of experts in the field and the time it took to obtain the books online. The books were then ordered for each participant and reviewed for content by the researchers before the workshops began.

After the book procurement process, the coordinating country organized an online meeting with the leaders of the other countries and shared detailed information about all the activities to be carried out in the process. As a result of the meeting, it was decided to organize mobility to two countries (Greece, Larissa-Turkey, Düzce) and to organize interactive reading workshops in these two countries. Workshop plans showing all the workshop activities in a planned manner were distributed to the participants so that everyone could easily follow the workshop processes. In the first meeting in Greece, a multiple-choice knowledge test was administered to the participants as a pre-test about children's picture books on the theme of migration and intercultural sensitivity and interactive reading practices. The multiple-choice knowledge test was prepared by the researchers in consultation with experts in the field.

Before starting the study, icebreaker activities and warm-up games were played among the participants to ensure group dynamism and increase their motivation. Then, before, during and after reading activities were carried out with picture books with the theme of migration and intercultural sensitivity. All participants were encouraged to read aloud and take part in other workshop activities. After the workshops in Greece, the participants were divided into three equal mixed groups and asked to write a children's picture book on migration. Intercultural interaction was maximized by making sure that there were participants from three different countries in the mixed book writing groups. The mixed groups wrote picture books on migration to be used in the workshop to be held in Turkey. The picture books were printed and distributed to all participants in the study. The mixed groups also prepared interactive reading workshop plans for the books they wrote. After the preparation of the interactive reading plans, these plans were turned into large posters and hung on the walls of the workshop environment. The workshop environment was prepared in a U seating arrangement where all participants could easily sit, listen and participate. The workshop plans to be implemented were made by the group members to last throughout the day. A sample plan of the workshops is given in Appendix 1. After the interactive reading workshop activities were completed, the same multiple-choice knowledge test was applied to the pre-service teachers in the study for the post-test measurement of migration, intercultural sensitivity-themed illustrated children's books and interactive reading practices. Finally, individual interviews were conducted with the participants about the workshops implemented within the framework of intercultural sensitivity during the project process.

### **Data Collection Tool**

In the study, a multiple-choice knowledge test was used as a data collection tool. The knowledge test was prepared by the researchers by reviewing the international literature on migration, intercultural sensitivity, children's picture books and interactive reading. There are 20 questions in total in the knowledge test. Each question has five options. With this knowledge test, it is aimed to measure the knowledge levels of pre-service teachers about migration, interculturality, children's picture books and interactive reading practices. The list of children's books with the themes of migration and intercultural sensitivity used as research materials is given in Appendix 2. After the workshops with children's picture books were completed, it was decided to interview the participants within the scope of intercultural sensitivity. Interviews are activities conducted to learn the feelings and thoughts of individuals involved in the research about a subject or situation (Karataş, 2017). In the study, participant opinions were collected through a semi-structured form. There are 5 open-ended questions in the interview form. Interviews were conducted individually with all of the participants and lasted an average of 20 minutes. Participant responses were kept for analysis.

### **Reliability**

In order to calculate the consistency rates of the codes created in the research, the data related to the interview with the participants were coded separately and the consistency rates were revealed by comparing the coding made by the researchers unaware of each other. If the percentage of the consistency rate between codes is above 80%, it can be said that the coding has a high reliability. In the research, the formula  $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Number of Consensus}}{\text{Total Number of Consensus} + \text{Number of Disagreement}}$  was used to calculate the rate of consistency between codes (code agreement rate). In the reliability analysis conducted with the above formula, it was found that the code agreement rate of the codes determined in the research was 87%. Therefore, it can be said that the coding in the research has a high reliability (Miles & Huberman, 2015, p. 64).

### **Data Analysis**

In the study, the data obtained from pre-service teachers using multiple-choice knowledge test were entered into the SPSS package program to compare them. SPSS 20 package program was used to apply the necessary statistical tests on the collected data. Paired Samples T-Test was used to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of the participants and to test whether the difference between the scores was statistically significant. Descriptive analysis was preferred to analyze the qualitative data. The data obtained from the participant responses were interpreted by evaluating each question within itself with the descriptive analysis technique and the most repeated ones were included in the analysis. In order to ensure the validity of the study, the findings section includes the individual opinions of the participants.

## Findings

### Findings related to the first sub-problem

In this study, which was carried out to determine the effect of experiential learning activities provided by the use of multicultural children's literature products on pre-service teachers' knowledge of interactive reading activities to be carried out with multicultural picture books and their views on intercultural sensitivity skills, the analysis of the knowledge test consisting of 20 items in order to reveal the participants' competencies regarding interactive reading and multicultural picture books is given below.

First of all, the necessary tests for the normality of the data were applied. Accordingly, it was determined that the participants' knowledge test pre-test scores (Zskew= -.854, Zkurt=.109) and post-test scores (Zskew=.957, Zkurt=.398) showed normal distribution. Based on the normality data, Paired Samples T-Test was used to analyze the data for the pretest-posttest knowledge test scores of the same group.

**Table 2.** Analysis of participants' pre-test and post-test knowledge test scores

| Measurement | n  | $\bar{x}$ | S    | Sd | t     | p    |
|-------------|----|-----------|------|----|-------|------|
| Pre-test    | 15 | 10.81     | 2.53 | 14 | -4.10 | .001 |
| Post-test   | 15 | 15.50     | 4.00 |    |       |      |

When Table 2 is examined, there is a significant difference between the pretest-posttest scores of the pre-service teachers participating in the study from different countries on the knowledge test on interactive reading and multicultural picture books ( $t(15)=-4.10$ ,  $p<.01$ ). In this direction, it is interpreted that experiential learning workshops with pre-service teachers from different countries improved the participants' knowledge levels about interactive reading and multicultural picture books.

### Findings related to the second sub-problem

For the second sub-problem of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. Through these interviews, the participants' views on intercultural sensitivity after their participation in experiential learning activities were revealed. When the participants' answers to the questions were analyzed, it was seen that their intercultural sensitivity and their level of knowledge about interactive reading and children's picture books increased.

In order to reveal the contribution of the research to the participants' intercultural sensitivity, the participants were asked the question "*What changes have occurred in your thoughts about intercultural sensitivity as a result of participation in this research?*". To this question, all participants gave answers indicating that their intercultural sensitivity levels increased. Some of them are as follows:

*"... Thanks to this study, I realized that we are all equal, that we should not take racial differences into account, and how important it is to live in harmony with migrants. I also think that my intercultural sensitivity and my belief that all people are equal and should be treated the same, regardless of religion, language, race, etc. have increased."* (P1, Greek).

*"Thanks to .... research, I learned about the perspectives of migrant children, how they feel and how/why I can help them. I also understood what it feels like to be a refugee and how I should approach migrant children. Now I will help them to have a better future."* (P3, Spanish).

*"... The project gave me the opportunity to interact with people from different cultures, understand them and develop empathy towards migrant children/people. As a classroom teacher with migrant students in my class, this project helped me a lot in developing intercultural sensitivity, acting democratically and looking at life from the perspective of migrants."* (P2, Turkish).

Looking at the participants' views on the process, it is concluded that they emphasized universal and humanitarian ideas such as equality, unity, solidarity, empathy and cooperation. This can be interpreted as a sign that the research also affected them emotionally and that the knowledge and experiences in the process left a mark on them.

The participants were asked the question *“What did you learn about interactive reading within the scope of the research?”* in order to address their thoughts about interactive reading.

*“... As a classroom teacher, it was a wonderful experience where I learned great information about migration, migrant children, children's picture books and interactive reading that I can apply in my classroom throughout my life. I never knew that interactive reading is so important and functional. I will definitely implement it in my classroom and I am sure that I will attract the interest of the children.”* (P3, Turkish).

*“... The researchers put a lot of effort into preparing the interactive reading topics and created a great workshop environment. In this way, I have seen what interactive reading is, how to conduct it and how it can be handled in classrooms. I think interactive reading is an important reading method that can attract children's interest.”* (P5, Spanish).

*“... The materials, content and other conditions in the interactive reading workshops prepared for the research were perfectly organized. Thanks to the study, I can say that my awareness of intercultural sensitivity, children's picture books and interactive reading increased.”* (P2, Greek).

When we look at the answers given by the participants about the interactive reading method, it is seen that most of them stated that they had not heard of such a method before, that the method was/would be interesting for children and that they could use it in their classrooms. They also stated that they gained not only theoretical but also practical and functional information about interactive reading. From this point of view, it can be said that the theoretical and practical information given to the participants about interactive reading has achieved its purpose.

The question *“What did you learn about the children's picture books used in the interactive reading workshops in the study?”* also aims to address the participants' views and opinions about children's picture books.

*“... Thanks to the research, I learned how to use children's picture books in the classroom and how to approach these books from a different perspective. I realized that the selection of these books is as important as the use of these books. Because I also saw that reading without selecting quality books cannot reach the goal. I also realized that I can use children's picture books for intercultural sensitivity.”* (P2, Spanish).

*“... In this study, I learned what children's picture books are, their functions and how to use them to increase intercultural sensitivity in my classes. I realized that I can use these books to communicate with migrant students in my class. Many fun and instructive activities related to children's picture books were carried out in the research.”* (P5, Turkish).

*“...In this research I participated in, I learned about children's picture books about migration, how to use these books, and how to read them interactively. I think that the trainings I received about how children's picture books should be in terms of content and form will help me in the process of choosing books. Moreover, thanks to the researchers, I also experienced interesting games related to children's picture books and these books.”* (P4, Greek).

When we look at the opinions of the participants about children's picture books, it is understood that they understand how books should be, where and when they should be used. The answers revealed that the training they received improved them both in terms of content and form. In addition to learning about children's picture books, the participants also experienced how to use these books for intercultural sensitivity. It can also be interpreted that they realized that books are not only for entertainment purposes, but also an important educational material that they can use in multicultural classrooms in the context of integrating students, providing classroom management and increasing the integration of foreign students into the lesson/school.

The participants were also asked the question *“What do you think about supporting the use of multiculturalism-themed picture books read with interactive reading method to increase intercultural sensitivity in your classroom?”*. The aim of this question was to reveal the contribution of interactive reading and picture books in increasing intercultural sensitivity. The answers given by some of the participants to this question are as follows:

*"... I realized that children's picture books are very helpful in explaining migration and intercultural sensitivity to children. Thanks to these books and the interaction reading method, I will be able to attract the attention of especially migrant children and touch on the important points of what I want to explain. When I was using other books or reading straight, I could not create the climate of integration I wanted in the classroom. But now I think it is possible."* (P3, Greek).

*"...I can also say that illustrated children's books are more functional, effective and remarkable than textbooks. Because the formal and contextual features in them are exactly for children's interest. But according to what I have learned, it is necessary not only to find the right book and read it, but also to blend it with interactive reading. Thanks to interactive reading, I think I will have no difficulty in helping students participate in the process."* (P1, Turkish).

*"... Before participating in these activities, I was not making much effort to integrate the immigrant children in my class into the classroom and school. Even if I did, I was doing the classical methods and if they did not work, I did not act on them. Because I did not know what I could do. In the study, I saw many picture books with multiculturalism themes and how to read them with the interactive reading method. After this research, I aim to increase the intercultural sensitivity of the children in my class by using picture books and the interactive method."* (P4, Spanish).

The participants' answers to this question show that they think that the use of interactive reading and multiculturalism-themed picture books will be effective and functional in order to increase intercultural sensitivity in the classroom. In general, the participants expressed that they thought that children's picture books would attract the attention of students, that they could be used as an educational resource in the classroom, and that the encounter with these books was an opportunity for them. They also stated that reading these books by combining them with the interactive reading method would create more permanent learning for children. The fact that there are teachers who want to apply the method and books in their classrooms can be interpreted as a sign that they think that the process was productive for them and that the workshops and activities they participated in were useful, understandable and useful.

Finally, the participants were asked the question, *"How would you describe the information and process you gained from this research in a community, in your circle of friends or in a conversation with teachers?"*. The purpose of this question was to get feedback from the participants about the process and the results. The answers given by some of the participants to this question are as follows:

*"... I gained information about migration or migrants that I had not thought about before participating in the research. I realized how important intercultural sensitivity is in integrating them into society and school. I also got to know the methods and materials I should use in this integration process. I will definitely look at them from a different perspective thanks to this research. I will share the knowledge I gained here with all my friends and encourage them to work for a better world."* (P5, Greek).

*"... Thanks to this study, I had the opportunity to interact with people from various countries and exchange information about their cultures and lives. I had the opportunity to expand my global vision by learning about the realities of other countries. I also promised myself that I will be more sensitive to migrant children when I come together with them. I am glad that I participated in such a study. I want to share the knowledge I gained with my family, relatives, colleagues and close friends. It is now my duty to increase their intercultural sensitivity."* (P4, Turkish).

*"...This study met all my expectations about migration and the integration of migrant children into society, which was the reason for my participation. I would tell my friends about this study as an experience where I learned a lot, met new people who "won my heart" and I would do it again without changing anything if I had the chance. I also understood what it feels like to be a refugee and how I should approach migrant children. Now I will help them to have a better future. I think the world needs projects like this right now. I wish my other friends could participate in this project!"* (P1, Spanish).

Looking at the participants' answers to the last question, it can be said that all of them had positive feelings towards the research process. The fact that the participants wanted to tell their friends, family or colleagues about this study confirms this. In addition, the answers show that the participants think that the knowledge they have learned about intercultural sensitivity, interactive reading and children's picture books will help them in the future. From this point of view, it can be said that the participants have made a progress both in



increasing the intercultural sensitivity of the students in their classrooms and in integrating them into the classroom and school, and in raising awareness of their stakeholders and the people around them.

Some of the most important concepts addressed by the participants in terms of increasing their intercultural sensitivity are empathy, sensitivity and gaining different perspectives. These concepts addressed by the participants are critical expressions within the concept of intercultural sensitivity. Acquiring these concepts, being aware of them and using them when expressing opinions and thoughts can be considered as another expression of the participants' increased intercultural sensitivity. In addition to these, it is noteworthy that the participants generally included expressions such as "... I did not know/do/not realize, but now ... I will do/ behave/ think." when talking about immigrant students. Based on these statements, it can be said that the participants were affected emotionally and cognitively by the activities in the process.

When the participants' opinions about the interactive reading method and illustrated children's books are examined, it is seen that most of the participants were not aware of this method and material before the project. As a result of the training and support given to these participants during the project process, it is clear from their responses that they have knowledge about this method and material and have gained experience in using them. When discussing the interactive reading method and the illustrated children's book, the participants stated that they found this product and method educational, functional, effective, awareness-raising and of high quality. In addition, the participants stated that they did not know how widely these methods and books were used in their classrooms and that they were happy to learn about them now. From this point of view, it can be said that the effect of children's picture books and interactive reading method on the participants' intercultural sensitivity has emerged.

The fact that the picture books used in the study had a multicultural theme increased the participants' attention to the process and enabled them to encounter original and high quality books that they could use in their classrooms to increase intercultural sensitivity. Multicultural picture books include themes that address the problems and solutions faced by migrant and immigrant children. Reading these books with the participants, giving them the opportunity to read them and raising awareness by organising various activities/games related to the books may have contributed to increasing intercultural sensitivity. In fact, when expressing their opinions, the participants stated that they realised that multicultural picture books are one of the most important educational materials that can be used to integrate immigrant pupils into the classroom and school.

Analysing the answers to the questions posed to the participants in the second sub-problem of the research, it can be seen that all the participants increased their intercultural sensitivity and gained various knowledge and experiences related to children's picture books and the interactive reading method. In addition, the participants also expressed their opinions about transferring and using their experiences and knowledge in other settings, recommending it to other stakeholders and expressing their satisfaction with the process. These views and opinions obtained from the participants can be interpreted as a sign that the project has achieved its purpose and that the activities carried out are consistent, meaningful and functional in themselves.

## **Results, Discussions and Suggestions**

According to the findings of Heggernes (2019), interactive reading activities with multicultural picture books aim to increase participants' level of intercultural learning and awareness. This study shares similar qualities, focusing on cultural diversity and aiming to improve participants' understanding of different cultures. It highlights the issue that teacher candidates do not feel adequately prepared to teach students from different cultures (Ngai, 2004; as cited in Huang, 2011). This research is seen as important because it encourages teacher candidates and exposes them to different exemplary practices. Similarly, in a qualitative study, Sigen (2023) explored whether teacher candidates should have intercultural teaching experiences and found significant intercultural outcomes and relationships resulting from such experiences. The views of the participants in the current research are consistent with the need for these outcomes, given their gains in intercultural skills and awareness through the activities conducted.

The aim of the current study is to examine the effect of experiential learning activities provided through the use of multicultural children's literature products on pre-service teachers' knowledge of interactive reading activities to be carried out with multicultural picture books and to obtain pre-service teachers' views on intercultural sensitivity as a result of experiential learning activities provided through the use of multicultural children's literature products. According to the findings obtained within the scope of the research; it was

concluded that as a result of the interactive reading activities carried out with pre-service teachers from different cultures, pre-service teachers' knowledge levels about interactive reading and multicultural picture books improved. In addition, it is seen that the views and opinions of pre-service teachers from different cultures towards different cultures and experiences have changed as a result of interactive reading activities with multicultural picture books. Nath and Grote-Garcia (2017) stated that individuals can gain the ability to respect different cultures as a result of encountering books with multicultural structure and gain the ability to empathize by considering the experiences of people exposed to migration.

Barret (2018) states that the most fundamental way to develop individuals' views and opinions on intercultural sensitivity is through a qualified education. Many methods and activities such as lectures, presentations, classroom discussions, activities to examine the behaviors of groups with different cultures, communication and interactions with individuals living in different cultures, enabling individuals living in different cultures to come together, and establishing intercultural friendships play important roles in the development of views and thoughts towards intercultural sensitivity (Barrett et. al, 2013). Spinthourakis et. al. (2009) stated that pre-service teachers who were involved in experiential learning activities had significant improvements in their intercultural sensitivity skills. In this study, interactive reading activities of multicultural children's picture books were carried out with pre-service teachers from different cultures. Thanks to the interactive reading method, activities were carried out in which pre-service teachers will gain awareness about issues such as multiculturalism, the lives of different cultures and migration. Thus, it is aimed to obtain qualified and accurate results based on the studies conducted.

Based on the answers given for another purpose question of the research, it is possible to interpret that interactive reading activities with multicultural picture books are effective in developing the views and thoughts of pre-service teachers from different cultures towards intercultural sensitivity. It is thought that the transfer of topics such as war, migration, exclusion, acceptance, and marginalization in picture books through experiential learning and interactive reading activities contributed to the awareness and knowledge levels of pre-service teachers about these issues.

Children's picture books have the power to develop individuals' knowledge, skills and thoughts. The characters and topics covered in children's picture books help individuals who read/listen to these books to restructure their views, gain different perspectives, recognize different cultures and develop sensitivity to these differences (Lickteig & Danielson, 1995; Kemple et al., 2016). In addition, children's books with a multicultural structure allow children to gain in-depth knowledge about other cultures, learn universal values, and examine the cultural values of both their own and other societies (Dolan, 2014; Hope, 2008). In this direction, it can be thought that the use of children's picture books that include different cultures as a tool for experiential learning can lead to positive developments in intercultural sensitivity skills in the reader or listener.

It may not always be enough to use multicultural picture books to develop individuals' intercultural sensitivity levels. After a while, this leads to a lack of interest in different cultures (Louie, 2006). It is necessary for the reader to make an attempt to start a dialogue about the book. In order to start a dialogue, it is very important for the audience to be able to relate to what they read and make connections between the stories. Interactive reading is used as an important method that enables communication between the reader and the listener. Interactive reading is used in studies as an important factor that increases communication and interaction in the use of multicultural children's picture books.

Considering the migration movements in today's world, it is seen that the multicultural picture books and activities used in this research process should be implemented with different study groups. These and similar studies will facilitate respect for cultural differences that arise with migration and the acceptance of individuals in new environments. In addition, individuals will have more knowledge about topics such as interactive reading and illustrated children's books and will be able to review their intercultural sensitivity skills through these mediators.

In this study, teacher education programs should be developed to provide experiential learning opportunities in areas such as intercultural sensitivity and awareness. Experiential learning opportunities should be integrated into the program to enable teacher candidates to teach effectively in different cultural contexts. In addition, mandatory and elective courses aimed at further developing the level of intercultural sensitivity of teacher candidates can be included in undergraduate programs. Efforts can be made to increase the number of international students in education faculties to contribute to multicultural educational environments. Finally,

the results of this study highlight the value and importance of multicultural children's literature as a valuable tool for teachers. Multicultural children's literature has the potential to increase young readers' cultural awareness and sensitivity by introducing them to different cultures, lifestyles and perspectives. Such literary works can help children to understand their own cultural identity and to approach the experiences of others with empathy. In this regard, publishers and authors of children's literature can be encouraged to produce multicultural children's literature products, while teachers can be encouraged to integrate these products into the classroom environment.

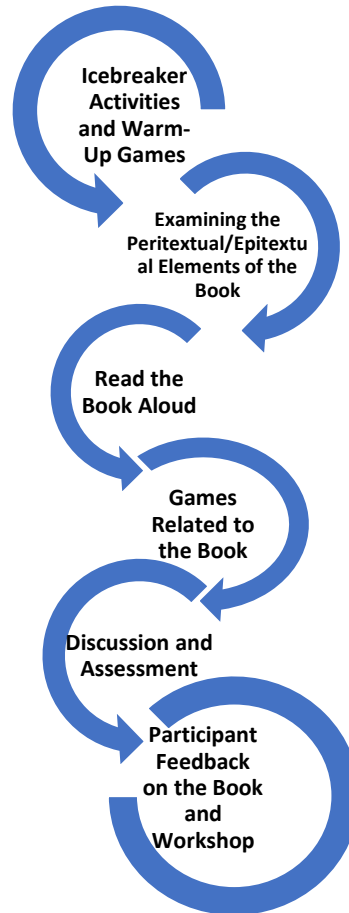
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**Appendix**

Appendix 1. A sample workshop plan



**Appendix 2. Illustrated Children's Books Used in the Research**

| <b>Order</b> | <b>Picture Books</b>    | <b>Author-Illustrator</b>  | <b>Publisher</b>              |
|--------------|-------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 1            | Stepping Stones         | Margriet Ruurs- Nizar Ali Badr   | Orca Book Publishers          |
| 2            | What is a refugee?      | Elise Gravel   | Puffin                        |
| 3            | The Suitcase            | Chris Naylor-Ballesteros   | Clarion Books                 |
| 4            | The Day War Came        | Nicola Davies- Rebecca Cobb  | Candlewick                    |
| 5            | Göç                     | Mike Unwin- Jenni Desmond  | Tübitak                       |
| 6            | Geraldine               | Elizabeth Lilly  | Roaring Brook Press           |
| 7            | Welcome                 | Barroux  | Little bee books              |
| 8            | If A Jacket Migrates... | Serena Squizzato- Özge Selin Birgül-Behlül<br>Bilal Sezer-Nadia Baldouni-Amara Sanz<br>Gomez | Düzce University              |
| 9            | I Am Enough             | Grace Byers- Keturah A. Bobo   | Balzer + Bray                 |
| 10           | The Blue Path           | Teresa Casado Gonzalez- Clara Lopez<br>Fernandez- Athina Mangipa- Ferhat<br>Demirkıran       | Düzce University              |
| 11           | All Are Welcome         | Alexandra Penfold-Suzanne Kaufman  | Knopf Books for Young Readers |
| 12           | The Cat Path in Forest  | Mücahit Durmaz- Abdurrahman Baki<br>Topçam- Juan Montest- Evelyn Kakatsiou                   | Düzce University              |