



A Case Study in Turkey: Attitudes of EFL Teachers towards Intercultural Sensitivity

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Abstract

Along with its history of cultural diversity, Turkish classrooms are becoming more multicultural as the number of refugees and international exchange students keeps increasing. As such, Turkish teachers are required to possess intercultural sensitivity and have the ability to simultaneously teach students with multiple cultural backgrounds. Accordingly, this study aimed to determine the level of intercultural sensitivity in a group of EFL teachers (n=10) from 7 Turkish universities. The participants completed a 3-section questionnaire sent via e-mail; a study-specific tool for collecting data on their professional intercultural experience; the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, which is an objective measure of the general level of intercultural sensitivity; an 8-item open-ended study-specific set of questions to measure the level of intercultural sensitivity in the classroom. The results suggest that the participants, who mostly display a satisfactory level of intercultural sensitivity, are still in need of development in certain aspects. Though the participants' comments demonstrated their good knowledge of what ISS was, their comments on what behaviours were representative of ISS indicated that they needed guidance on classroom tasks that could enhance ISS.

Keywords: English language teachers, intercultural communication, intercultural sensitivity

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Türkiye'de bir vaka analizi: İngilizce öğretmenlerinin kültürlerarası duyarlılık kavramına yaklaşımları

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Özet

Öteden beri var olan kültürel çeşitlilikle birlikte, günümüzde sayıları sürekli artmakta olan mültecilerin ve uluslararası öğrencilerin varlığı sayesinde, Türkiye'deki eğitim öğretim ortamının çok kültürlü yapısı sürekli zenginleşmektedir. Bu durum Türkiye'deki öğretmenlerin farklı kültürel geçmişlerden gelen öğrencileri içeren sınıflarda ders verirken kültürlerarası duyarlılığa sahip olmalarını ve buna göre hareket etmelerini gerekli kılmaktadır. Bu çalışma Türkiye'deki 7 farklı üniversiteden çalışmaya katılan bir grup İngilizce öğretmenin kültürlerarası duyarlılık seviyesini belirlemek amacıyla yürütülmüş olup katılımcılar kendilerine gönderilen veri toplama araçlarına e-mail aracılığıyla cevap vermişlerdir. Katılımcılara mail yoluyla gönderilen anket üç kısımdan oluşmaktadır: profesyonel yaşamlarındaki kültürlerarası tecrübelerini sorgulayan çoktan seçmeli bölüm, Kültürlerarası Duyarlılık Anketi, çalışmanın amacına uygun tasarlanmış 8 adet açık uçlu soru. Çalışmanın öne çıkan bulgusu, genel olarak yüksek kültürlerarası duyarlılık seviyesine sahip olan katılımcıların bazı alanlarda yine de ilerlemeye ihtiyaç duydukları olmuştur. Katılımcıların cevapları kültürlerarası duyarlılık kavramının ne olduğuna dair oldukça bilgili olduklarını gösterse de, bu kavramın davranışsal boyutta nasıl temsil edileceğine dair yorumları katılımcıların kültürlerarası duyarlılığı artıracak sınıf içi etkinliklere dair rehberliğe ihtiyaç duyduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İngilizce öğretmenleri; kültürlerarası iletişim yeterliliği, kültürlerarası duyarlılık

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Introduction

As globalization is transforming the world into a virtual global village (Chen, 1997; Pillay & James, 2013), second language educators have come to recognise the importance of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). ICC in teachers is generally defined as avoidance of cultural stereotyping of students, which is dependent on cultural awareness and tolerance (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002). The literature on foreign language education has primarily focused on ICC in broad terms; however, it has also been reported that intercultural sensitivity is an important component of ICC (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

Intercultural Communicative Competence

The concept of ICC was investigated in relation to both pre-service and in-service EFL teachers (Baalerud, 2013; Hismanoglu, 2011; Saricoban & Oz, 2014; Zhou, 2011). Saricoban & Oz (2014) investigated the level of ICC in pre-service EFL teachers (n = 89) in Turkey. They aimed to determine if study abroad, gender and academic achievement had an effect on ICC, which was measured using the ICC Questionnaire. They reported an overall high level of ICC and that only study abroad had a positive effect on ICC. The researchers concluded that all FL teachers and teacher trainees should have the opportunity for studying abroad, due to its positive correlation to ICC. Hismanoglu (2011) studied the level of ICC in pre-service EFL teachers (n = 35) to determine if ICC is affected by FL proficiency, overseas experience and formal ICC training. The level of ICC was measured via a written questionnaire comprised of 8 open ended questions. The overall level of ICC was reported to be high, and overseas experience and formal ICC training were positively correlated to ICC, whereas FL proficiency was not.

Zhou (2011) investigated the level of ICC in EFL teachers (n = 201) at 5 universities in China, using the Assessment of Intercultural Competence Scale (AICS). The researcher reported that the overall level of ICC was similar in the EFL teachers, regardless of university. Yet, the mean AICS score was significantly higher among those teaching students majoring in English (n = 74) than in those teaching students not majoring in English (n = 127). Furthermore, EFL teachers with an MA or PhD had a significantly higher level of ICC than those that did not, and those with overseas experience had a significantly higher level of ICC than those that did not. Despite the methodological differences between the studies described above, it was commonly observed that overseas experience had a positive effect on ICC.

Intercultural Sensitivity

In general, the ICC literature examines ICC as a unified concept; however, some studies have examined its subdomains, including intercultural sensitivity (Arévalo-Guerreo, 2009; Küllü-Sülü, 2014; Mostafaei & Nosrati, 2018; Peng, 2006). Chen and Starosta (2000) reported that ICC consists of 3 components: 1. Intercultural sensitivity; the ability to behave appropriately in an intercultural context; 2. Intercultural awareness; the cognitive domain of intercultural communication; 3. Intercultural adroitness; the ability to communicate effectively in intercultural situations. Moreover, according to Chen and Starosta (2000), intercultural sensitivity consists of self-esteem, self-monitorisation, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement, and a non-judgemental attitude. As an individual's level of intercultural sensitivity can fluctuate over time, Bennett (2004) proposed a development model of intercultural sensitivity to describe how individuals move through stages: from denial to defence to minimisation (ethnocentrism), and then from acceptance to adaptation to integration (ethnorelativism). The 3 ethnocentrism stages are associated with the notion that one's own culture is superior to all others, whereas the 3 ethnorelativism stages are indicative of the notion of the validity of all cultures.

Jantawej (2011) investigated IS in 20 foreign EFL teachers at public secondary schools in Thailand by using the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS). The mean ISS Interaction Attentiveness subscale score was highest, followed by the Interaction Engagement subscale score and Interaction

Confidence subscale score. In contrast, the mean ISS Respect for Cultural Differences and Interaction Enjoyment subscale scores were the lowest, which was mainly attributed to the short time that the participants spent in Thailand (range: 1-3 years). A study by Mostafaei & Nosrati (2018) was carried out in Iran on IS. The participants were 167 EFL teachers working at private language schools. The data was collected using the ISS and it was reported that the level of IS was high (mean ISS score: 3.86). A similar finding was also reported by Cubukcu (2013) who found that the level of IS in Turkish pre-service EFL teachers ($n = 65$) was high, based on a mean Cultural Sensitivity Scale score of 4.3.

Globalisation is manifesting in multiple ways in Turkey, including a large influx of refugees—especially from Syria—and a growing population of international exchange students. As such, Turkish classrooms are becoming more multicultural over the course of time and teachers must have a high level of IS to function effectively in a multicultural classroom setting. Accordingly, the present study aimed to determine the level of IS in 10 Turkish EFL teachers from 10 Turkish cities.

Method

This is a mixed method study in which both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were employed.

Participants

The study included 10 EFL teachers—from 7 different universities in Turkey, in an attempt to achieve geographic representativeness. These participants were reached via purposeful sampling method in that the researcher reached colleagues via her personal network. These participants were invited to the study by relying on the researcher's observation that they were all experienced in teaching learners from different cultural backgrounds. The study included 8 female and 2 male EFL teachers, all Turkish nationals. Mean cumulative teaching experience was 10 years (range: 5-15 years). All of the participants reported having had multicultural classroom experience during the previous 2 years, as follows: 0-6 months ago: $n = 3$; 6 months-1 year ago: $n = 3$; 1-2 years ago: $n = 4$.

Instrument

The participants were administered a 3-section questionnaire. In the first part, a study-specific section was included in the questionnaire to collect data related to demographics and professional EFL experience of the participants. The quantitative data was collected in the second section where ISS was administered to measure the level of general intercultural sensitivity. ISS is a 24-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure the level of intercultural sensitivity. It includes 5 subscales: Interaction Engagement (items 1, 11, 13, and 21-24); Respect for Cultural Differences (items 2, 7, 8, 16, 18 and 20); Interaction Confidence (items 3-6 and 10); Interaction Enjoyment (items 9, 12 and 15); Interaction Attentiveness (items 14, 17 and 19). Each item is answered using a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). ISS was reported to be a reliable and valid method for measuring intercultural sensitivity (Fritz, Mollenberg, & Chen, 2002; McMurray, 2007; Peng, 2006).

In order to get qualitative data, the participants were also administered an 8-item study-specific section in the questionnaire to collect data on classroom-specific intercultural sensitivity. These items were all open-ended questions. J. M. Bennett and Bennett (2003) report that intercultural sensitivity is the product of both a mind-set and a skillset encompassing 3 dimensions: knowledge, attitude and behaviour. By operationalizing this approach and in consideration the present study's aim, the 8 open-ended questions were constructed with reference to these 3 dimensions. Items 1, 2 and 3 were used to measure the level of knowledge of intercultural sensitivity, items 4 and 5 measured attitudes about working in a multicultural classroom and items 6, 7 and 8 measured behaviours related to working in a multicultural classroom. The qualitative data obtained underwent content analysis and were categorized according to the categories that emerged.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Social Sciences University of Ankara, Institutional Ethics Committee of Social Sciences and Humanities Research and Publication (the document can be retrieved from: <https://turkiye.gov.tr/ebd?eK=5451&eD=BS43MYCK7Z&eS=36873>).

Results

ISS Findings

The statistical analysis was carried by using SPSS. The mean ISS total score was 20.61. An ISS total score of 20-25 was considered to indicate a high level of IS and 15-20 was considered moderate IS. Accordingly, 70% (n = 7) of the participants had a high level of IS and 30% (n = 3) had a moderate level. Table 1 shows the ISS subscale and total scores for each participant.

Table 1. ISS Subscale and total scores

Participant	Interaction Confidence	Interaction Engagement	Interaction Attentiveness	Interaction Enjoyment	Respect for Cultural Differences	Total Score
Participant 1	2.6	3.8	3.6	3.8	3.6	17.40
Participant 2	3	3.8	3	4	4.1	17.90
Participant 3	4	3.4	4.3	4	4	19.70
Participant 4	3.8	4	4	4	4.5	20.30
Participant 5	3.6	4	3.3	5	4.6	20.50
Participant 6	3.5	3.5	4.2	5	5	21.20
Participant 7	4	4	4	5	4.5	21.50
Participant 8	4.3	4	4.3	4.6	5	22.27
Participant 9	4	4.4	4	5	5	22.40
Participant 10	4.5	4.4	4.3	5	4.8	23

ISS subscale scores of 4.00-5.00 were considered high, 3.00-3.99 were considered moderate, and ≤ 2.99 were considered low. Accordingly, 50% (n = 5), 40% (n = 4), and 10% (n = 1) of the participants had a high level, moderate level, and low level of interaction confidence, respectively. Among the participants, 60% (n = 6) had a high level of interaction engagement and interaction attentiveness, versus 40% (n = 4) with a moderate level. In all, 90% (n = 9) of the participants had a high level of interaction enjoyment and respect for cultural differences, versus 10% (n = 1) with a moderate level.

Study-Specific Questionnaire Findings

The qualitative data has been analysed in terms of three dimensions, which are knowledge, attitude and behaviour.

The Knowledge Dimension

Open-ended questions were used for the participants to define IS and describe what they thought could be done to increase the IS level in EFL instructors. Analysis of the definitions of IS yielded the following list of IS constituents:

- Acceptance of cultural differences (values, lifestyles, and traditions)
- Understanding cultural differences
- Valuing cultural differences
- Respect for differences in values, lifestyles, and traditions
- A non-judgemental attitude towards cultural differences

The above-listed IS constituents show that to the participants IS was considered a comprehensive concept, as expressed by participant 1.

'IS is having a positive attitude towards people of different cultures. It is also valuing cultural differences without labelling them as good or bad, and acceptance of such differences.'

Participant 2 highlighted the dynamic nature of IS and suggested that a negative attitude towards cultural differences might be just a phase in the development of IS.

'A person's attitude towards other cultures can be positive or negative. Individuals have their own cultural heritage. This heritage can cause them to judge people from other cultures positively or negatively. Development of IS requires learning how to avoid negative judgements. Though a person may not enjoy being with other people from cultures, they can learn to avoid judging them.'

The constituents of IS were not only related to cultural norms, but also to individual differences, as expressed by participant 3:

'In addition to awareness of the dynamics of people's culture(s), it is important to have respect and empathy them for their individual cultural preferences.'

and participant 4:

'Being open to cultural differences includes an awareness of the existence of a world view that differs with each individual, and acceptance of those differences...'

In terms of what the participants thought was needed to increase the level of IS in EFL teachers, 2 general themes emerged: pre-service language teacher training programs and overseas experience. Participant 10 stated:

'Theoretical background should be given during pre-service teacher training. Later, when they start working, teachers should be encouraged to take part in exchange programs to experience teaching culturally distinct students. They can also learn a lot from collaboration with foreign colleagues.'

The Attitude Dimension

Responses to open-ended questions regarding attitudes towards IS yielded 3 characteristics:

1. Respect for cultural differences

'I respect differences related to the cultural backgrounds of my students. An FL teacher should be tolerant of such differences and even highlight them in order to enhance the teaching process' (participant 5).

2. Enjoyment of the multicultural classroom

'I enjoy the multicultural classroom a lot. Every year many students from other countries come to my classroom and I have learned so much from them, including their traditions, language, and lifestyles' (participant 4).

3. Curiosity about other cultures

'When I have students from different cultures, I try to learn about their backgrounds, families, and motives for studying abroad. Later, I do some research on their countries in order to become familiar with their cultures. Also, I invite students from other countries to make presentations to the class about their cultures' (participant 7).

'I enjoy having students from other countries in my classroom because they improve my knowledge of cultures. I like learning and discovering new things and I have always been amazed by different cultures' (participant 6).

Participant 8 reported that students from different cultures contribute to her appreciation of other cultures and a positive classroom atmosphere:

'I believe that a multicultural classroom creates a more harmonious atmosphere. As student from different cultures have their own perspective on the issues studied, they help the other student and me develop empathy towards diversity. They are a good source of cultural diversity.'

Lastly, 2 participants expressed concern about students' cultural differences in classroom behaviour that bordered on stereotyping.

'I usually enjoy culturally different students, as diversity in the classroom is generally a good thing, but some persistent behaviours, such as coming to class late, can bother me' (participant 4).

'Actually, I feel a bit nervous, especially at the beginning of the term. This is partly due to not being familiar with how disciplined students from different cultures can be and how I should react when students do not behave according to norms in Turkey' (participant 6).

The Behaviour Dimension

Open-ended questions related to the behaviour dimension asked the participants to describe what they do to remain interculturally sensitive in the classroom and the following themes emerged:

1. Respect cultural differences
2. Remain open to interaction with culturally different students
3. Have empathy for culturally different students
4. Tolerance of ambiguities related to cultural differences

'When I'm in a multicultural classroom setting I try to be careful to avoid using any words or picking discussion topics that might be considered offensive to non-Turkish students. I also try to be a mediator between Turkish students and foreign students, as sometimes it could be hard for foreigners to make friends' (participant 3).

'Remaining interculturally sensitive simply requires being aware of the values of different cultures when teaching, and avoiding comparison or ranking cultures. To maintain IS in the classroom, teachers should have some knowledge of the history of the relevant cultures and avoid misunderstandings that might offend people from other cultures' (participant 9).

Discussion

The participants in the present study had a high level of IS, based on ISS total scores and the cut-off point used in the study. According to Chen (2010), a high ISS score is indicative of a high level of ethnorelativism, which is associated with highly competent intercultural communication. As the level of ethnorelativism increases, an individual's willingness to engage in intercultural communication increases (Lin & Rancer, 2003), as does the likelihood an individual will have a complex, sophisticated approach to cultural differences and a high level of ICC (Bennett, 2004).

Although the present study's participants had a high level of IS according to ISS scores, analysis of the ISS subscale scores shows that they ranged from low to high, and that some need to improve their competency in the skills associated with the subscales. One of the present study's participants scored

2.6 on the interaction confidence subscale, which was considered a low score and was the only low score for any of the 5 subscales. As teaching experience in the present study was 5-15 years, it is possible that given more time some of the participants' competency related to the ISS subscales will improve, as it is known that the ability to perform in a multicultural setting is dynamic in nature (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005) and IS has been conceptualized according to a developmental model (Bennett and Bennett, 2003).

The present study's qualitative data have some important implications. The present findings show the participants generally defined IS in comprehensive terms. Among the themes that emerged from analysis of the participants' definitions of IS was the expectation that FL teachers should have a culturally inclusive worldview, which according to Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman (2003) is characterized by moving beyond the boundaries of a mono-cultural world view and accepting the existence of cultural differences. Another theme that was identified based on the definitions of IS was respecting and valuing cultural differences, which according to Byram et al. (2002) is indicative of a lack of cultural stereotyping and the acceptance that individuals have complex multiple identities different than our own. Of note, although Bennett & Bennett (2003) report that conscious knowledge of one's own culture is necessary for developing IS, such knowledge did not emerge as a theme in the present study; as such, research on the level of conscious knowledge of one's own culture in FL teachers might yield valuable data that can be used to help improve the level of IS.

Analysis of the present study's participants' answers concerning their attitude towards teaching in a multicultural setting yielded multiple themes, including being open-minded and non-judgemental, which according to Chen (1997) is an essential component of IS. Bennett and Bennett (2003) report that curiosity is among the requirements for a positive attitude towards different cultures and was another theme to emerge from the present study's participants' responses; in general, the participants reported that they are curious about individuals from cultures different than their own. The emergence of these two themes suggest that the participants had a positive attitude towards cultural diversity in the classroom, which should be among the aims of foreign language teaching (Byram et al., 2002). Despite the emergence of these themes, 2 of the participants reported being anxious about teaching in a multicultural classroom, citing concerns about foreign students' lack of punctuality and discipline that bordered on stereotyping, which is characterized by the notion that all individuals of a particular culture behave in an identical fashion (Wainryb, 2006). Teachers' beliefs about culture and cultural diversity have a significant effect on their teaching practises (Sercu, 2006) and the anxiety reported by these 2 participants highlight the need FL teacher training programs to include systematic exploration of stereotypes and cultural diversity.

Although the present study's participants had a high level of IS, FL teacher training programs in Turkey generally do not include a component dedicated to cultural diversity. The curriculum of EFL teaching programs in Turkey should be transformed to include the multicultural education approach, which aims to train teachers to provide equal educational opportunities to all students, regardless of gender, social status, and culture (Banks, 2004). To effectively design such a curriculum IS and ICC must be clearly defined first and foremost, as there is a lack of consensus concerning their definitions (Deardorff, 2011).

Pre-service teacher education should be the initial step in developing teachers' conceptualizations of diversity and cultural awareness (Clarke & Drudy, 2006; Saricoban & Oz, 2014), which is in agreement with what was reported by the present study's participants. Ambe (2006) posits that multicultural education is essential for pre-service to conceptualize themselves as agents of change in pluralistic societies. The primary limitation of the present is its small population; however, the present findings still indicate that in-service EFL teachers require ongoing IS training despite having an overall high ISS score. In-service training for EFL teachers can include reflective writing, critical analysis of films from different cultures, cross cultural activities, analysing cultural norms (Keengwe, 2010; Pillay & James, 2013). EFL teachers that have achieved IS can use the classroom environment for transmitting their cultural understanding and appreciation of diversity to learners (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). Another limitation of the present study was the use of open-ended questions that in some instances might

have negatively affected the coding of responses and analysis of their correspondence to the dimensions of IS.

Based on the literature and the present study's findings, it is clear that development of Turkish EFL teachers with IS will not only improve classroom outcomes, but will also increase the level of appreciation and acceptance for the cultures of foreigners in the general Turkish population. In conclusion, the Turkish EFL teachers included in the present study overall had a high level of IS, even though some ISS subscale scores were low, indicating the need for improvement. Additional research is required to determine the causes of an overall high ISS score despite low subscale scores, and how best to address such low subscale-scores of EFL teachers.

Limitations and Further Research

This study has some limitations that can be addressed by further research. First of all, the representative power of this study is quite limited due to small-number of the participants. The second limitation is that this study is descriptive-oriented and falls short of making precise suggestions in terms of activities that can improve EFL teachers' ISS. Moreover, ISS is a term that needs to be addressed from the perspectives of different share-holders in education. Further research can provide more generalizable results upon consideration of these points.

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Etik Beyannamesi

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