The Explanatory Power of Intercultural Communicative Competence among EFL Teacher Candidates

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Abstract

While intercultural communicative competence has gained considerable attention in teachers' professional development, contributions from teacher candidates have usually been underestimated. The traditional bound between language and culture has become less solid thanks to the advancements in transfer of languages and people, which has created a significant need to use language properly in international encounters. Therefore, acknowledging cultural values of different nations has become a primary aim while learning a foreign language. Teacher candidates could benefit from demanded intercultural skills and these skills have the potential to enrich their identity in social, academic, and professional lives. The current study intends to explain whether demographic variables of gender, study year, bi/multilingualism, living in another city, and study abroad experience have a predictive power on intercultural communicative competence. Several multiple regressions were used to analyse 199 teacher candidates' previous intercultural experiences and findings suggest that number of languages explained the variance in intercultural communicative competence, and compared to bilingual individuals, multilinguals had higher intercultural communicative competence. Study abroad experience and living in another city also predicted the variance. However, gender difference did not yield significant results.

İngilizce Öğretmen Adayları Arasındaki Kültürlerarası İletişim Yeterliliğinin Açıklayıcı Gücü

Öz

Öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişimlerinde kültürlerarası iletişim yeterliliği büyük ilgi görürken çalışmalar öğretmen adaylarının katkılarını hafife almıştır. Dillerin ve insanların aktarımındaki gelişmeler sayesinde kültür ve dil arasındaki geleneksel bağ eskisi kadar katı değildir ve bu da uluslararası ortamlarda dili düzgün kullanmak için önemli bir ihtiyaç yaratmıştır. Bu yüzden, yabancı bir dil öğrenirken farklı milletlerin kültürel değerlerini kabul etmek ana hedef hâline gelmiştir. Özellikle, öğretmen adaylarının talep edilen kültürlerarası becerilerden yararlanabilmeleri onların sosyal, akademik ve profesyonel hayatlarını zenginleştirme potansiyeline sahiptir. Mevcut çalışma, cinsiyet, öğrenim yılı, iki/çok dillilik, başka bir şehirde yaşama ve yurtdışında eğitim deneyimi gibi demografik değişkenlerin kültürlerarası iletişim yeterliliği üzerinde yordayıcı bir güce sahip olup olmadığını açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. 199 öğretmen adayının önceki kültürlerarası deneyimlerini analiz etmek için birkaç çoklu regresyon kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, dil sayısının kültürlerarası iletişim yeterliklerindeki varyansı açıkladığını ve iki dilli bireylerle karşılaştırıldığında, çok dillilerin kültürlerarası iletişim yeterliklerinin daha yüksek olduğunu göstermektedir. Yurtdışında eğitim deneyimi ve başka bir şehirde yaşama varyansları da yordanmıştır ancak cinsiyet farkı anlamlı sonuçlar vermemiştir.

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Genişletilmiş Türkçe Özet
Giriş

Dillerin ve insanların aktarımındaki gelişmeler sayesinde kültür ve dil arasındaki geleneksel bağ eskisi kadar katı değildir ve bu da uluslararası ortamlarda dili düzgün kullanmak için önemli bir ihtiyaç yaratmıştır. Bu yüzden, yabancı bir dil öğrenirken farklı milletlerin kültürel değerlerini kabul etmek ana hedef hâline gelmiştir. Özellikle, öğretmen adaylarının talep edilen kültürlerarası becerilerden yararlanabilmeleri onların sosyal, akademik ve profesyonel hayatlarını zenginleştirme potansiyeline sahiptir.

Tüm boyutlar üzerinde ortak bir anlaşma olmadığından dolayı kültürlerarası iletişimsel yeterliliği (ICC) açıklamak zor bir iştir. Buna karşın, araştırmacılar genel olarak kültürlerarası karşılaşmalarda uygun davranma, kendi ve başkalarıyla ilgili farkındalık sahibi olma, kültürel olarak farklı bağlamlarda düzgün iletişim sağlayan açık fikirli bir tutum gibi temel tanımlar üzerinde uzlaşmaktadır. Kültürlerarası iletişimsel yeterliliğini çeşitli bakış açılarından anlamak için uygulayıcıların yanı sıra araştırmacılara yardım eden çeşitli modeller olmasına rağmen, Byram'ın (1997) kültürlerarası iletişimsel yeterliliğin önemi projesi, bu konudaki çalışmalar arasında en çok kullanılanlardan biri olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Byram'ın (1997) ortak yönelimli modeli beş ana bileşenden oluşmaktadır bilme, yorumlama ve ilişki kurma becerileri, keşfetme ve etkileşim becerileri ve kritik kültürel farkındalık.

Davranışlar meraklı olma, diğer kültürler için açık görüşlü olma ve kültürel farklılıklardan doğan yanlış anlaşılmalara engel olmak için hazır bulunma anlamlarına gelir. İnsanlar, başkalarıyla eşitlik temelinde ilişki kurmak için yeni fırsatlar aramaya hazırdır. Alışılmadık durumların farklı yorumlarını keşfetmeye ve çevredeki varsayımları sorgulamak için isteklidirler. *Bilme* kişinin kendi ülkesi de dâhil olmak üzere, uluslararası karşılaşmalardaki kültürel unsurları ve davranışları yeterince kavramayı içerir. Bunlar kültürler arasındaki hem tarihi hem de modern zaman ilişkisi hakkında bilgi sahibi olmayı ve problem ve gerilmeleri çözmek için ilgili kuruluşlarla iletişim kurmayı kapsar.

Bunun yanı sıra, *yorumlama ve ilişki kurma becerileri*, bir olayı başka bir kültürel bakış açısından betimleme becerisi gerektirir. Ayrıca kültürler arasındaki gerilim alanlarının yanı sıra etnomerkezci bakış açılarını tanımlamayı ve ilgili adımları atarak ilişkilere aracılık etmeyi de içermektedir. Benzer şekilde, *keşfetme ve etkileşim becerileri* kültürel davranışları anlama gücünü gerektirir ve gerçek hayat etkileşimleri esnasında tutumlar, bilgi ve beceriler arasında bir bağ oluşturur. İnsanlar, ülkeler ve toplumlar arasındaki geçmişteki ve şimdiki ilişkileri bilirler ve bununla birlikte uygun sözlü ve sözsüz iletişimi kurabilmek için gerekli çabayı ortaya koyarlar. Son öğe olan *eleştirel kültürel farkındalık* ise kültürel ürünlere karşı eleştirel bir bakış açısına sahip olma yeteneğini ve kesin değerlendirme ölçütüne dayalı uygulamaları kapsar. İnsanlar, belgelerin arkasındaki hem açık hem de gizli değerleri ve anlamları tanımlayabilir ve onları bu kriterlere göre iki yönden değerlendirebilir. Aynı zamanda kültürel yanlış anlaşılmaların sebeplerini tartışabilir ve gerektiğinde, kültürlerarası değişimi başlatabilirler.

Birçok araştırma kültürlerarası iletişimsel yeterliliğin önemini vurgulamış olsa da bu gibi araştırmalar genel olarak onların zengin kimliklerini ön plana alan çok kültürlü toplumlardan katılımcıları kapsamamaktadır. Özellikle, çalışmalar genel olarak Avrupa bağlamından elde edilen bulgulara odaklanmıştır ve nadiren toplumcu ve kültürel bağlamda katılımcıları dâhil etmiştir. İkinci olarak, kültürlerarası iletişimsel yeterlilik üzerine olan çalışmalar genel olarak tek dilli ya da iki dilli örneklem içermektedir ve birden çok dil bilenlerin deneyimleri ve tutumlarına dair bir açıklama yapmamaktadır. Daha çok katılımcıyla, nicel bir araştırma yaklaşımı kullanmak kültürlerarası yeterliliği belirlemede daha bilgilendirici ve bütüncül bir yaklaşım sağlayabilir.

Yöntem

Örneklem Türkiye'de Akdeniz bölgesinde bir üniversitede öğrenim gören 199 İngilizce öğretmeni adayını kapsamaktadır. Nicel fazda kültürlerarası yeterliliği ölçmede yaygın olarak kullanılan Fantini ve Tirmizi (2006) tarafından hazırlanan Kültürlerarası İletişimsel Yeterlilik ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Ölçeğin, Byram (1997) tarafından formüle edilen, Kültürlerarası İletişimsel Yeterlilik ortak alt kategorilerini içerdiğinden dolayı araçsal olan dört bileşeni vardır (bilgi, tutumlar, beceriler ve farkındalık.). Yordayıcı değişkenlerin bağımlı değişkenlerle ilişkisi ve açıklayıcı güçleri (eğitim yılı, cinsiyet, çok dillilik, başka bir şehirde yaşama ve yurtdışında öğrenim görme deneyimi) korelasyonlar ve regresyonlar kullanılarak araştırılmıştır. Pearson Korelasyonu, hem Kültürlerarası İletişimsel Yeterlilik alt boyutları arasındaki iç korelasyonlar hem de yordayıcı değişkenlerle iki değişkenli korelasyonlar için kullanılmıştır. Daha sonra, yordayıcı değişkenlerin kültürlerarası yeterlilikte etki büyüklüğünü anlamak için çoklu regresyon analizi yapılmıştır.

Bulgular

Kültürlerarası İletişimsel Yeterlilik alt boyutları arasındaki Pearson korelasyonu boyutlar arasında anlamlı ve pozitif bir iç korelasyon göstermiştir. Bu, Kültürlerarası İletişimsel Yeterlilik ölçütünün kültürlerarası yeterliliğin

farklı yönlerini ölçmede yararlı olduğunu göstermektedir. Dördüncü sınıf öğrencileri daha yüksek bir kültürlerarası yeterlilik göstermişlerdir ve bilgi, beceriler ve farkındalık boyutları açısından dikkate değer bir farklılık bulunmuştur. İkinci sınıf öğrencilerinin davranışları, üçüncü sınıf öğrencilerinin bilgisi, dördüncü sınıf öğrencilerine nazaran pozitif ve anlamlı bir farklılık göstermiştir. Cinsiyet farklılığı kültürlerarası yeterliliği anlamlı şekilde etkilememiştir. Türk iki dilliler ile Kürt çok dilliler arasında anlamlı bir fark bulunmazken, Arap çok dilli olmak Türk iki dillilere göre bilgi, tutum ve beceri boyutlarını anlamlı şekilde yordamıştır. Ülkedeki başka bir şehirde yaşama ve yurtdışında öğrenim görme deneyimi Kültürlerarası İletişimsel Yeterlilik boyutları arasında ortadan yükseğe anlamlı bir korelasyon göstermiştir.

Çoklu regresyon sonuçları yurtdışında öğrenim görme deneyimlerinin kültürlerarası yeterlilikte en çapıcı etkiye sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Modellerin tüm Kültürlerarası İletişimsel Yeterlilik boyutları üzerinde yurtdışında öğrenim görme deneyimi için güçlü bir keşfetme gücü sağladığını gözlemleyebiliriz. Birinci sınıf öğrencilerinin bilgisi ve ikinci sınıf öğrencilerinin davranışları pozitif ve anlamlı bir etkileşim göstermiştir. Ancak üçüncü sınıflar dördüncü sınıflarla kıyaslandığında anlamlı bir farklılık göstermemiştir. Cinsiyet, sınıflar arasındaki kültürlerarası yeterlilikteki anlamlı farkı açıklamamaktadır. Buna ek olarak, iki dilli ya da çok dilli farklılığı ya da başka bir şehirde yaşama Kültürlerarası İletişimsel Yeterlilik üzerindeki farklılığı açıklamamaktadır.

Tartışma ve Sonuç

Birinci araştırma sorusu öğrenim yılı, cinsiyet, kişinin iki dilli ya da çok dilli olması, başka şehirde yaşama ve yurtdışında öğrenim görme gibi demografik değişkenlerin katkılarını araştırmıştır. Birinci ve dördüncü sınıf öğrencileri arasındaki anlamlı farklılık formal eğitimin kültürlerarası yeterliliğin gelişmesinde önemli bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Buna karşın bu ivme zaman içerisinde zayıflıyor gibi görünmektedir. Bu durum lisans eğitimi boyunca kültürlerarasılığa açık bir şekilde odaklanılmamasından kaynaklanıyor olabilir. Cinsiyet farklılığı anlamlı bir farklılık yansıtmamaktadır, bu da hem kadın hem de erkeklerin benzer ve eşit tutumları olduğunu göstermektedir. Çok dilliliğin kısmen üst düzey kültürlerarası yeterliliğe katkı sağladığı bulunmuştur. Arap çok dilliler bilgi, davranış ve beceri boyutlarında Türk iki dillilere göre kısmen daha iyi kültürlerarası yeterlilik sergilemişlerdir.

İkinci araştırma sorusuyla birçok çoklu regresyonla demografik değişkenlerin keşfetme gücü ortaya çıkarılmaya çalışılmıştır ve yurtdışında öğrenim görme deneyiminin tüm Kültürlerarası İletişimsel Yeterlilik boyutları içerisinde en dikkat çekici katkıyı sağladığı bulunmuştur. Farklı bir ülkede yaşamak öğrencilere diğer kültürlerle iletişim kurarken yeni bir bakış açısı ve referans çerçevelerinde önemli bir değişiklik sağlamıştır. Bulgularımız, uluslararası alanda kültürlerarası iletişimsel yeterlilik'te önemli gelişmeler olduğunu ortaya koyan diğer birkaç çalışmayı desteklemektedir (Sobkowiak, 2019; Taguchi et al., 2016).

Çalışmanın bulguları hem öğretmen adayları hem de öğretmenler için çıkarımlar sağlamaktadır. Sınıfta kültürlerarası yeterliğe yeterince vurgu yapılmadığına dair ciddi bulgular vardır (Godwin-Jones, 2013; Trede Bowles ve Bridges, 2013) ve bundan dolayı, kültürlerarası pedagojinin öğretim programının bir parçası olarak yerleştirilmesinin bir gereklilikten daha fazlası olduğu önerilmiştir. Kültürlerarası İletişimsel Yeterlilik dinamik ve çok bileşenli bir doğaya sahiptir ve bundan sınıf içerisinde yararlanmak ikinci dilin öğrenilmesi ve öğretilmesinde çok dilliliğin rolü hakkındaki iddiaları anlamada mutabakata varmayı sağlayacak ve bu da ayrıca kültürel farklılıklardan kaynaklanan klişeleri en aza indirgemeye yardım edebilecektir.

Introduction

The traditional bound between language and culture has become less solid thanks to the advancements in transfer of languages and people, which has created a significant need to use language properly in international encounters. Therefore, acknowledging cultural values of different nations has become a primary aim while learning a foreign language (Byram, 2012). In particular, teacher candidates could benefit from demanded intercultural skills which have the potential to enrich their identity in social, academic and professional lives (Norton, 2013; Wolff & Borzikowsky, 2018), to have heightened discourse competence (Ryshina-Pankova, 2018), to probe into the reason for cultural misunderstanding (Sobkowiak, 2019), to develop a positive attitude (Üzüm, Akayoglu, & Yazan, 2020), to provide a new perspective on identity orientations (Eren, 2022), and to increase awareness for equal citizenship (Trede Bowles, & Bridges, 2013).

Theoretical models of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Explaining intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is a strenuous task as there is mutual agreement on all dimensions. However, researchers usually agree upon some basic definitions such as behaving appropriately in intercultural encounters, having an awareness of the self and others, an open-minded attitude leading to proper communication in culturally different contexts (Allport, 1954; Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Although there are various models that help researchers as well as practitioners to understand ICC from various perspectives, Byram's (1997) projection of ICC stands out as one of the most frequently used models among ICC studies. Byram's (1997) co-orientational model comprises five main components of attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and crucial cultural awareness (See Figure 1).
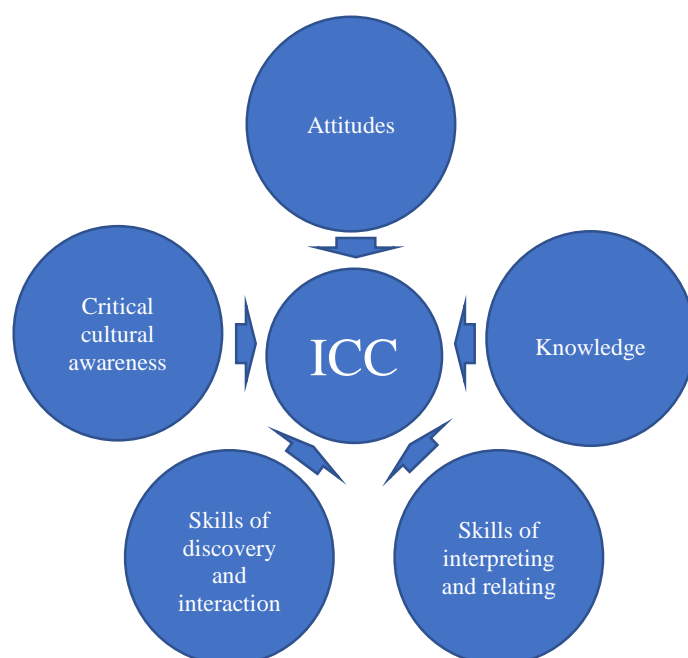

Figure 1. Byram's (1997, 2012) Co-orientational model of ICC

Attitudes means being curious and having an open mind for other cultures, and readiness to stop misunderstandings arising from cultural differences. People are ready to search for new opportunities to engage with others based on equality. They are willing to discover different interpretations of unfamiliar events and to question presuppositions in the environment. *Knowledge* involves having sufficient comprehension of cultural elements and behaviours in international encounters including one's own country. These include knowledge of both historical and modern-day relationships between cultures and having contact with relevant institutions to solve problems and tensions. *Skills of interpreting and relating*, on the other hand, requires an ability to portray an event from another cultural perspective. It also includes identifying ethnocentric perspectives was well as areas of tensions between cultures, and mediate relationships by taking relevant steps. Likewise, *skills of discovery and interaction* entails the power to comprehend cultural behaviours and create a link among attitudes, knowledge, and skills during real-life interactions. People know past and present relationships between countries and societies and puts necessary effort to have appropriate verbal and non-verbal interaction. The last component, *critical cultural awareness*, encompasses an ability to have critical perspective towards cultural products and practices based on an explicit evaluation criterion. People can identify both apparent and hidden values and meanings behind documents and

evaluate them from both sides according to these criteria. They can also negotiate the reasons for cultural misunderstandings and when necessary, they can initiate intercultural exchanges (Byram, 1997, 2012).

Whereas Byram (1997, 2012) depicted intercultural communicative competence through his co-orientational model, Bennett (1993) envisions ICC in terms of developmental stages ranging from an ethnocentric worldview towards a more inclusive ethnorelative one. In this developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, Bennett (1993) proposes six stages in a person's quest through intercultural development. The first three stages are ethnocentric in nature and include denying cultural difference, having a defensive attitude against cultural difference, and minimising cultural difference. People at these stages consider their cultural values as supreme reality and experience dominant culture as an attack on their values. Such people are usually not keen on understanding other cultures and categorising the world in a polarisation of us vs. them. The next three stages are ethnorelative, and comprise accepting differences, adapting to host culture, and integrating cultural difference. People at these stages experience the world within the context of other cultures. Unlike the ethnocentric view of accepting one's own culture as the only reality, people in ethnorelative stages value each culture equally and consider them as different colours of the same reality. Individuals have an expanded worldview to embrace cultural differences and have an empathy, the ability to evaluate events from other cultural perspective.

Teacher candidates in Turkey have a four-year training comprising essential courses on language teacher education. These include theoretical and pedagogical courses as well as practicum in schools. However, there is not an explicit module focusing on intercultural aspects and their necessity in language teacher education. Current studies on the potential of ICC development have reported significant gains in teacher education. Eren (2021) analysed EFL teacher candidates' ICC development through collaborative intercultural exchange with colleagues from European universities, and findings revealed considerable improvements within eight-week treatment. Taguchi Xiao, and Li (2016) inquired the potential contribution of study abroad on students' ICC, and results showed that social contact through study abroad experience gained students higher intercultural and pragmatic competence.

The Rationale for the Study

Although many studies have emphasised the significance of intercultural communicative competence, such studies usually do not include participants from multicultural societies which could foreground their rich identity (Kim, 2007; Noels, Yashima, & Zhang, 2012). In particular, studies generally focus on findings from European context, and they seldom include participants from collectivist cultural contexts (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Secondly, studies on intercultural communicative competence usually include monolingual or bilingual sampling, and do not provide an account for the experiences and attitudes of multilingual speakers (Viáfara González, 2019). Thirdly, measuring ICC is a challenging task (Deardorff, 2006) and studies are mostly based on qualitative methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Üzüm et al., 2020) with limited participants (Gudykunst, 2005; Lenkaitis, Calo, & Venegas Escobar 2019). Taking a quantitative research approach, with more participants, could provide a more informative and holistic approach to determining intercultural competence. Taking these points into account, this study intends to enrich current understanding of ICC by focusing on following research questions:

1) Is there a relationship between ICC and the predictor variables such as study year, gender, bi/multilingualism, living in another city, and studying abroad?
2) To what extent can identified predictor variables help explain the variance in ICC?

Method

Research Design

This study is based on a correlational research design to describe ICC systematically by identifying, observing, and verifying the variables rather than controlling. Such design was instrumental for us because we wanted to explore whether our variables would predict the variance in ICC (Mertler & Reinhart, 2016).

Participants

The sampling included 199 EFL teacher candidates studying at a university in the Mediterranean region, Turkey. There were 141 females and 58 males, aged between 20 and 25 years (93.5%). The majority of students (146) were bilingual in Turkish and English, and 53 students were multilingual in Turkish, English and either Arabic ($N = 32$) or Kurdish ($N = 21$). In terms of intercultural experiences, 116 students (58.3%) lived in another city and 49 (24.6%) studied abroad as part of exchange programs.

Data Collection Instruments

We employed the ICC scale prepared by Fantini and Tirmizi (2006), widely used for measuring intercultural competence. The scale has four components (knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness), which is instrumental as it encapsulates common ICC sub-categories formulated by Byram (1997). Cronbach's alpha showed strong reliability across dimensions, ranging from .80 to .84 (Mertler & Reinhart, 2016).

Data Collection Process

The researchers created an online spreadsheet and transferred all scale items. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and necessary ethical codes were followed. The participation was on voluntary basis and students' anonymity was assured during each phase of the data collection. The scale was administered to undergraduate students in four rounds and data collection was completed in Spring 2022.

Data Analysis

We explored the relationship and explanatory powers of predictor variables (study year, gender, multilingualism, living in another city and study abroad experience) with criterion variables using correlations and regressions. The Pearson Correlation was utilised both for the inter-correlations between ICC sub-dimensions and bivariate correlations with predictor variables. After that, we conducted multiple regression analysis to understand the effect size of each predictor variable on intercultural competence. Before conducting the analyses, we confirmed that the parametric test assumptions were satisfied. We removed outliers to assess univariate normality using the Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p = .334$). We found standard residuals between -3 and 3 (-2.281/2.412), and Levene's test indicated that homoscedasticity was not violated ($p = .443$). For the suitability of regression analyses, Durbin Watson value was found equivalent to 1.786, and we measured Cook's distance lower than 1 (.000/.037). Multicollinearity was checked with VIF and there was no violation as all values were less than 10 (from 1.065 to 1.536) (Mertler & Reinhart, 2016).

Ethical Issues

Researchers declare that the study was carried out in comply with ethical principles. Informed consent was received from all participants of the study.

Results

We start by exploring the inter-correlations between sub-dimensions in intercultural competence as a criterion variable (Table 1). Pearson correlations between ICC sub-dimensions range between $r = .66$ and .74, indicating a significant and positive inter-correlation between the dimensions. This shows that the ICC scale is useful in measuring different aspects of intercultural competence.

Table 1

Correlations Across ICC Components

ICC Components	Knowledge		Attitude		Skills		Awareness	
	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p
Knowledge	1							
Attitude	.66	.00**	1					
Skills	.67	.00**	.69	.00**	1			
Awareness	.72	.00**	.74	.00**	.74	.00**	1	

** *p* value < .01

Following table presents significant bivariate correlations between predictor and different dimensions of criterion variables. We recoded nominal variables as dummy variables (gender= male 0, female 1; city difference and study abroad = yes 0, no 1). It is important to note that in three-level correlations, fourth school year and Turkish L1 speakers are reference variables and all correlations are also equal to bivariate regressions *β* (Table 2).

Table 2

Bivariate Correlation Results between Predictor Variables and ICC Sub-dimensions

Variable	Knowledge		Attitude		Skills		Awareness	
	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p
First Year	-.24	.00**	-.09	.09	-.15	.01*	-.15	.01*
Second Year	-.02	.36	-.14	.02*	.01	.39	.01	.43
Third Year	.13	.03*	.03	.30	.07	.13	.03	.31
Gender	.04	.28	-.00	.45	.03	.33	.04	.26
Arabic	.14	.01*	.12	.03*	.15	.01*	.10	.06
Kurdish	-.03	.32	-.01	.44	-.09	.09	-.03	.29
City Difference	.16	.00**	.12	.03*	.15	.01*	.10	.08*
Study Abroad	.39	.00**	.29	.00**	.28	.00**	.36	.00**

* *p* value < .05; ** *p* value < .01

Fourth-year students displayed higher intercultural competence and there was a considerable difference between first-year students across knowledge, skills, and awareness dimensions. Second year students' attitude, and third year students' knowledge showed a positive and significant difference compared to fourth-year students. Gender difference did not significantly influence intercultural competence. While there is no significance between Turkish bilinguals and Kurdish multilinguals, being an Arabic multilingual significantly predicted knowledge, attitude, and skills dimensions compared to Turkish bilinguals. Living in another city within the country and study abroad experience indicated moderate to strong significant correlations across ICC dimensions.

Next, we conducted multiple regressions to explain the possible effect of predictor variables on dimensions of intercultural competence set as criterion variables (Table 3).

Table 3

Multiple Regression Results between Predictor Variables and ICC Components

Variable	Knowledge		Attitude		Skills		Awareness	
	β	p	β	p	β	p	β	p
First Year	-.18	.02*	-.12	.12	-.06	.45	-.10	.22
Second Year	-.06	.41	-.20	.01*	.01	.82	-.01	.83
Third Year	-.02	.72	-.13	.09	-.01	.82	-.08	.29
Gender	.04	.53	.00	.97	.02	.77	.03	.57
Arabic	.09	.14	.11	.10	.11	.09	.06	.34
Kurdish	.03	.61	.03	.66	-.06	.38	-.01	.89
City Difference	.10	.12	.08	.24	.11	.10	.03	.57
Study Abroad	.32	.00**	.25	.00**	.23	.00**	.34	.00**
R²adjusted	17%		10%		8%		11%	

* *p* value < .05; ** *p* value < .01

Multiple regression models present a moderate exploratory model for knowledge by explaining 17% of the variance. However, the other models yield relatively lower exploratory power by explaining 11% of the variance in awareness, 10% in attitude and 8% in skills. Results indicate that study abroad experiences provided the most striking effect on intercultural competence. We can observe that the models provide strong exploratory power for the study abroad experience across all ICC dimensions. First-year students' knowledge and second-year students' attitude explained a positive and significant interaction, but the third year does not provide a significant difference compared to the reference fourth year. Gender does not explain the significant difference in intercultural competence among student year groups. Additionally, the bilingual and multilingual difference or living within a different city does not explain the variance on ICC.

Discussion and Conclusion

The first research question explored the contribution of demographic variables, such as year of study, gender, bilingual vs. multilingual speakers, living in another city, and study abroad. The significant difference between first year and fourth year students suggests that formal schooling plays an important role in developing intercultural competence. However, this momentum seems to weaken over time, which might result from a lack of explicit focus on interculturality during undergraduate study (Taguchi et al. 2016; Sobkowiak, 2019). Gender difference does not reflect a significant difference, indicating that both females and males have a similar and equal attitude, and in line with Hekman (1997) and Solhaug and Kristensen (2020), we can argue that students have a socially inclusive practice in intercultural relationships.

We found that multilingualism partially contributes to higher intercultural competence. Dewaele and Botes (2020) found that multilingualism has potential to give a shape to a person's character to some extent and there seems to be a positive connection between multilingualism and having an open-minded attitude. Arabic multilinguals performed moderately better intercultural competence in knowledge, attitude, and skills dimensions compared to Turkish bilinguals. In line with Dewaele and Botes (2020), contact with neighbouring Arabic countries might have provided them with flexibility, empathy, and open-mindedness. However, Turkish bilinguals and Kurdish multilinguals did not differ in terms of their perceptions on interculturality. Students who have lived in another city and those have studied abroad performed better intercultural competence. Compared to bilinguals, multilingualism alone may not necessarily yield an increase in intercultural competence, but in agreement with Kim, (2007), Toomey, Dorjee, and Ting-Toomey, (2013), and Tsang, (2020), pluralism in cultural identity enables intercultural adjustment in cross-cultural encounters and promotes higher cultural awareness.

With the second research question, we tried to reveal the exploratory power of the demographic variables through several multiple regressions, and we found that study abroad experience afforded the most striking contribution

across all ICC dimensions. Living in a different country provided students with a new perspective and a significant shift in reference frame when interacting with other cultures. Our findings support several other studies which revealed significant development in ICC in international encounters. Taguchi et al. (2016) found that upon successful integration to the host community, study abroad experience provided higher intercultural competence and fostered pragmatic development. Likewise, Wolff and Borzikowsky (2018) found that even three months long educational study abroad experience increased German students' intercultural competence. Sobkowiak (2019) also reported significant increase in students' critical reflection towards their cultural identity. Exposure to a foreign culture enables students to dismantle their established values and, when necessary, to (re)construct their identity from an ethnorelative perspective (Bennett, 1993). The significant difference in the fourth-year students corresponds to higher intercultural competence in respect, tolerance, and withholding judgments (attitude), together with culture-specific knowledge and cultural self-awareness (knowledge) (Deardorff, 2006).

Our study aimed to provide a quantitative view of intercultural communicative competence by including factors that have not previously been highly studied, including study year, gender, bilinguals vs. multilinguals, study abroad, and living in another city. Findings revealed that, in comparison to bilinguals, multilingual students showed relatively higher intercultural competence. Studying abroad and living in another city granted significant development in ICC, which was also revealed in senior students' performances. However, gender difference did not yield a significant difference in ICC, which was unexpected compared to qualitative studies indicating latent and oppressed stereotypes towards women (Eren, 2022; Stockard, 2006).

When we think about the findings of this study, we could provide several implications for both prospective and in-service teachers. There are severe claims regarding the lack of enough emphasis on intercultural competence in the classroom (Godwin-Jones, 2013; Trede et al., 2013). We propose that it is more than a necessity to embed intercultural pedagogy as a part of the school curriculum. ICC has a dynamic and multi-component nature and benefiting in the classroom will create mutual understanding towards claims about the role of multilingualism in second language learning and teaching, which could also help in minimising stereotypes resulting from cultural differences (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). Additionally, course books usually touch upon cultural elements from a superficial perspective and (Dooly, 2011; Godwin-Jones, 2019) practitioners could use from toolkits available for the classroom use prepared by intercultural researchers (Berardo & Deardorff, 2012). Furthermore, intercultural learning does not operate in isolation and we should also emphasise its importance beyond the classroom walls, which could be more realistic by fostering experiential learning via exchanges (Cushner & Chang, 2015; Lee & Song, 2019).

Whereas our research mainly investigated interculturality among multilingual participants, further research focusing on these elements among monolingual participants could yield a better understanding of ICC across various langue groups. In this study, we based our arguments on a quantitative aspect of intercultural communicative competence, and prospective studies with an explicit focus on qualitative methodology could provide a better complementary understanding of ICC from a holistic view.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that there is no competing financial or non-financial interest that may affect the study.

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