

## Cultural Sensitivity and Mindfulness among Nursing Students: A Descriptive and Correlational Study

Funda ASLAN<sup>1\*</sup>, Nilay ERCAN ŞAHİN<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

**Aim:** This study was conducted to determine nursing students' levels of mindfulness and cultural sensitivity and to reveal the correlation between mindfulness and cultural sensitivity.

**Material and Methods:** Descriptive and correlational research method was used. Data were collected online from nursing students at a state university in Ankara between December 5, 2022, and January 5, 2023. The online survey comprised three sections: student information form, Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire—Short Form, and Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. The questionnaire was sent to the students through email. The final sample consisted of 318 students who agreed to participate in the study and filled out the questionnaire. Data were analyzed using the IBM SPSS v.23 for Windows.

**Results:** The mean total scores for the Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire—Short Form and the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale were  $66.41 \pm 6.58$  and  $93.08 \pm 7.01$ , respectively. Additionally, statistical analyses revealed a moderately significant positive correlation between mindfulness and intercultural sensitivity among nursing students.

**Conclusion:** The study findings and the reviewed literature indicate that if nursing faculties and educators wish to develop strategies to promote cultural sensitivity, it would be beneficial to integrate mindfulness training into the nursing curriculum both before and after graduation.

**Keywords:** Culture; cultural sensitivity; education; mindfulness; nursing students.

### Hemşirelik Öğrencilerinde Kültürel Duyarlılık ve Bilinçli Farkındalık: Tanımlayıcı Ve İlişkisel Bir Çalışma

#### ÖZ

**Amaç:** Bu çalışma, hemşirelik öğrencilerinin bilinçli farkındalık ve kültürel duyarlılık düzeylerini belirlemek ve bilinçli farkındalık ile kültürel duyarlılık arasındaki ilişkiyi ortaya koymak amacıyla yapılmıştır.

**Gereç ve Yöntemler:** Betimsel ve ilişkisel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Veriler, Ankara'da bir devlet üniversitesindeki hemşirelik öğrencilerinden 5 Aralık 2022 - 5 Ocak 2023 tarihleri arasında online olarak toplanmıştır. Çevrimiçi anket Öğrenci Bilgi Formu, Beş Yönlü Farkındalık Anketi - Kısa Form ve Kültürlerarası Duyarlılık Ölçeği üç bölümden oluşmuştur. Anket öğrencilere e-posta yoluyla gönderildi. Örneklem, katılmayı kabul eden ve anketi tamamlayan 318 öğrenciden oluşmuştur. Veriler IBM SPSS v.23 for Windows kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir.

**Bulgular:** Beş Yönlü Farkındalık Anketi - Kısa Form ve Kültürlerarası Duyarlılık Ölçeği için ortalama toplam puanlar sırasıyla  $66,41 \pm 6,58$  ve  $93,08 \pm 7,01$  idi. İstatistiksel analizler, hemşirelik öğrencileri arasında farkındalık ve kültürlerarası duyarlılık arasında orta derecede anlamlı pozitif bir ilişki olduğunu ortaya koymuştur.

**Sonuç:** Çalışma bulguları ve incelenen literatür, hemşirelik fakülteleri ve eğitimcilerinin kültürel duyarlılığı teşvik etmek için stratejiler geliştirmek istemeleri durumunda, mezuniyet öncesi ve sonrası hemşirelik müfredatına farkındalık eğitimini entegre etmelerinin yararlı olacağını göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kültür; kültürel duyarlılık; eğitim; farkındalık; hemşirelik öğrencileri.

1 Cankırı Karatekin University, Health Science Faculty, Çankırı, Türkiye  
2 Hacettepe University, Faculty of Nursing, Sıhhiye Campus, Ankara, Türkiye

Sorumlu Yazar / Corresponding Author: Funda ASLAN, e-mail: fundaaaslan@gmail.com  
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## INTRODUCTION

Cultural sensitivity is defined as conscious awareness regarding cultural differences and similarities between people without assigning a positive or negative value thereto. Cultural sensitivity serves as a fundamental skill for the development of cultural competence; furthermore, it is an essential component of cross-cultural communication skills (1).

Nurses are expected to be aware of differences in cultures and values (2). Because they are the most likely among healthcare professionals to interact with people from various social and ethnic groups. Moreover, they are expected to adapt to the ever-evolving changes in the society structure by aiming to touch the lives of those people and make a difference for them (3).

Although several factors are related to care improvement, cultural sensitivity is generally emphasized as the basic factor (4). Culturally sensitive care is a vast topic, which will seemingly continue to hold its position in the years ahead. The ongoing demographic changes (5,6), aging society (7), migration and an increase in the population of sexual minority groups (8,9) force nurses, like all other healthcare professionals, to develop cultural sensitivity; on the other hand, these challenges push the health education systems and educators in the quest to promote cultural sensitivity during care among healthcare professionals.

### Background

Studies in various health disciplines have shown that factors related to cultural sensitivity, such as empathy and self-efficacy, moral sensitivity, and response flexibility, are present (10-12). One other factor is handled jointly with cultural sensitivity in the field of psychotherapy, which is mindfulness. Mindfulness is defined as a specific way of orienting within one's external and internal experiences, which is characterized by an attitude of self-compassionate curiosity. It was identified five rules of thumb in mindfulness: observe, describe, act with awareness, do not judge, and do not react (13). Mindfulness is considered helpful for individuals to be less reactive while having negative thoughts and emotions. Furthermore, mindfulness, with its emphasis on acceptance and attentive observation of one's experience, may be crucial for exhibiting cultural sensitivity (13,14).

No study on the relationship between mindfulness and cultural sensitivity is present in nursing literature. However, few studies in the field of psychotherapy have shown that a relationship exists between cultural sensitivity and mindfulness. One study reported that the components of mindfulness are correlated with cultural awareness, whereas another study reported that a positive correlation exists between mindfulness and cultural sensitivity among mental health practitioners (15). In the nursing literature, only studies that aimed to demonstrate the level of mindfulness among nurses and nursing students are present (16,17).

Improvement of cultural sensitivity among nurses is vital in countries undergoing demographic and social changes to improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities in healthcare provision. Thus, the exploration of alternative methods to improve cultural sensitivity that will facilitate this process is crucial. In this context, establishing a relationship between mindfulness and cultural sensitivity

may offer a new approach to enhancing cultural sensitivity among nursing students and nurses.

### Aim

This study aims to reveal the correlation between mindfulness and cultural sensitivity levels among nursing students and determine whether mindfulness affects cultural sensitivity.

The questions of the research are as follows:

- What is the level of cultural sensitivity among students?
- What is the level of mindfulness among students?
- Do the levels of mindfulness and cultural sensitivity change depending on the grade of nursing students?
- Is there a correlation between students' mindfulness and cultural sensitivity levels?

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Study Design

This study was conducted to determine nursing students' levels of mindfulness and cultural sensitivity and the correlation between mindfulness and cultural sensitivity as a descriptive, cross-sectional, and correlational research.

### Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the Çankırı Karatekin University Ethics Review Board (no: 2109092021), and all participants were obtained written permission. Permission to collect data was obtained from the Dean of the Faculty of Nursing at the university where the study was conducted. Additionally, the participants voluntarily chose to take part in the study, and written informed consent was obtained from everyone who agreed to participate at the beginning of the e-Google form.

### Participants and Settings

The study involved the faculty of nursing at a state university in Ankara, Turkey. The faculty had 819 undergraduate nursing students (first grade to fourth grade) in total during the 2021–2022 fall semester. The sample to be used in the study was calculated using a sampling method with a known population at a 95% confidence interval and 0.05 tolerance, resulting in a minimum required sample of 261 nursing students. All the students were invited to participate in the study. The questionnaire was sent to the students through email. The final sample consisted of 318 students who agreed to participate in the study and filled out the questionnaire.

### Measurement

The online survey comprised three sections: student information form, Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire—Short Form (FFMQ-SF), and Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS).

#### Student Information Form

The student information form was developed based on the literature review conducted by the researchers (14). The form consisted of eight questions regarding the sociodemographic and educational characteristics of nursing students, such as age, gender, marital status, class of enrollment, parents' education level, place of residence, and financial status.

#### Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire—Short Form

Baer et al. originally developed the FFMQ, and the FFMQ-SF is a shortened version of it (13). Şahin and Ayalp carried out The Turkish adaptation of the FFMQ-SF. The Cronbach  $\alpha$  reliability coefficient of this adaptation was concluded to be 0.71. This 5-point Likert scale contains five subscales, namely observe, describe, act aware, non-judge, and non-react. Higher scores indicate a higher level of mindfulness. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient for the scale was found to be 0.78 in this study (18). Permission to use the scale was obtained from the researcher through email correspondence.

#### Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

ISS was developed to measure the intercultural sensitivity of nursing students (19). The validity and reliability of the Turkish version were established by Bulduk, Tosun, and Ardiç in 2011 (20). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value was 0.86 in the Turkish validity-reliability study of ISS (21). This 5-point Likert scale contains 24 items and 5 subscales, namely interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. Higher scores indicate a higher level of cultural sensitivity. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient for the scale was 0.81 in this study. Permission to use the scale was obtained from the researcher through email correspondence.

#### Data Collection

A questionnaire was created using Google Drive and sent to nursing students through an email link. Since each class representative had the email addresses of all students, the authors distributed the main form to the representatives, who then forwarded it to their classmates. The faculty was notified about the data collection process. The data collection period lasted from December 5, 2021, to January 5, 2022, and the average time to complete the questionnaire was 20-25 minutes. Electronic coding was used to ensure participants could not fill out the questionnaire more than once.

#### Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using the IBM SPSS v.23 for Windows (IBM Corp, Armonk, NY, USA). Before proceeding to data analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine whether or not the variables were normally distributed, and it was observed that the data exhibited a normal distribution ( $p > 0.05$ ) and parametric statistical methods were used. Descriptive statistics for the data are given as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation, number and percentage (%). One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is used to determine whether there is a difference in mean scores between more than two independent groups. Internal consistency was determined using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for FFMQ-SF and ISS. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to analyze the relationship between the levels of mindfulness and cultural sensitivity in nursing students. The results were interpreted with a confidence interval of 95% and a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

Table 1 provides the sociodemographic characteristics of the nursing students

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of nursing students

Characteristics	n	%
<b>Age</b>		
18-20	125	39.32
21-23	176	55.34
24 and upper	17	5.34
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	274	86.18
Male	44	13.82
<b>Grade</b>		
First Grade	105	33.01
Second Grade	82	25.78
Third Grade	57	17.92
Fourth Grade	74	23.29
<b>Mother's Level of Education</b>		
Illiterate	13	4.08
Literate	14	4.41
Primary School	139	43.71
Secondary School	53	16.66
High School	71	22.32
University	28	8.82
<b>Father's Level of Education</b>		
Illiterate	3	0.95
Literate	3	0.95
Primary School	100	31.45
Secondary School	73	22.95
High School	79	24.84
University	60	18.86
<b>Residential Location</b>		
Rural urban	54	16.98
Town	112	35.22
City	152	47.80
<b>Financial Status</b>		
Good	61	19.18
Moderate	238	74.84
Bad	19	5.98
<b>Total</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 presents the distribution of FFMQ-SF and ISS subdomains and total scores. When the mean scores of the subdomains and total scores of FFMQ-SF were evaluated, the "act aware" subdomain was found to have the highest mean score ( $16.63 \pm 2.38$ ), whereas the "non-judge" subdomain had the lowest mean score ( $11.50 \pm 3.50$ ), and the total score was  $66.41 \pm 6.58$ . Regarding ISS subdomains and total scores, the "interaction engagement" subdomain had the highest mean score ( $23.26 \pm 2.30$ ), whereas "interaction attentiveness" had the lowest mean score ( $10.52 \pm 1.18$ ), and the total score was  $93.08 \pm 7.01$ .

**Table 2.** The distributions of FFMQ-SF and ISS scores of nursing students

	Mean	SD
<b>FFMQ-SF</b>		
Observe	11.62	2.28
Describe	13.10	2.17
Act aware	16.63	2.38
Non judge	11.50	3.50
Non react	13.54	2.91
Total score	66.41	6.58
<b>ISS</b>		
Interaction engagement	23.26	2.30
Respect for cultural differences	22.75	2.30
Interaction confidence	17.85	3.59
Interaction enjoyment	11.82	2.32
Interaction attentiveness	10.52	1.18
<b>Total score</b>	<b>93.08</b>	<b>7.01</b>

SD: Standard deviation

Table 3 illustrates the FFMQ-SF and ISS scores based on the grade of nursing students. First-grade students had the highest mean score of  $67.03 \pm 6.27$  within the total score of FFMQ-SF. Similarly, first-grade students had the highest mean score of  $93.52 \pm 7.13$  for ISS. Nevertheless, no statistical significance was observed among the groups ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 3).

**Table 3.** FFMQ-SF and ISS scores by grade of nursing students

	1. Grade (n=105)	2. Grade (n=82)	3. Grade (n=57)	4. Grade (n=74)	p value
<b>FFMQ-SF</b>					
Observe (M±SD)	11.83±2.20	11.08±2.40	11.54±2.19	12.00±2.26	0.056
Describe(M±SD)	13.37±1.96	12.97±2.08	12.84±2.45	13.06±2.32	0.438
Act aware(M±SD)	16.40±2.43	17.06±2.24	16.71±2.28	16.43±2.51	0.234
Non-judge (M±SD)	11.77±3.56	10.86±3.44	11.68±3.67	11.71±3.35	0.291
Total score (M±SD)	67.03±6.27	65.90± 6.25	66.54±6.95	66.01±7.10	0.630
<b>ISS</b>					
Interaction Engagement (M±SD)	23.09±2.37	23.36±2.34	23.63±2.48	23.12±2.013	0.481
Respect for cultural differences (M±SD)	22.86±2.18	22.69±2.56	22.47±2.47	22.86±2.06	0.726
Interaction confidence (M±SD)	17.80±3.85	17.29±3.90	18.24±3.16	18.24±3.12	0.318
Interaction enjoyment (M±SD)	12.05±2.32	11.35±2.58	11.71±2.22	12.08±2.05	0.141
Interaction attentiveness (M±SD)	10.64±1.12	10.59±1.23	10.35±1.34	10.40±1.07	0.333
Total Score (M±SD)	93.52 ±7.13	92.32±7.46	92.94±7.22	93.41±6.18	0.671

Table 4 presents the correlation analysis between FFMQ-SF and ISS. A moderately significant positive correlation was identified between mindfulness and intercultural sensitivity ( $r=0.446$ ,  $p=0.001$ ).

**Table 4.** Correlation analysis between FFMQ-SF and ISS

		Observe	Describe	Act aware	Non-judge	Non-react	Total score
Interaction Engagement	r	-0.034	0.007	0.159	-0.061	0.141	0.078
	p	0.550	0.900	<b>0.005</b>	0.282	<b>0.012</b>	0.165
Respect for cultural differences	r	0.199	0.064	0.113*	0.167	-0.076	0.186
	p	<b>0.001</b>	0.258	<b>0.044</b>	<b>0.003</b>	0.178	<b>0.001</b>
Interaction confidence	r	0.136	0.300	0.352	0.229	-0.113	0.346
	p	<b>0.015</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.044</b>	<b>0.001</b>
Interaction enjoyment	r	0.303	0.401	0.301	0.278	-0.147	0.430
	p	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.009</b>	<b>0.001</b>
Interaction attentiveness	r	-0.031	0.158	0.277	0.038	0.132	0.220
	p	0.576	<b>0.005</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.501</b>	<b>0.018</b>	<b>0.001</b>
Total Score	r	0.206	0.343	0.424	0.231	-0.035	0.446**
	p	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.001</b>	0.535	<b>0.001</b>

## DISCUSSION

Cultural sensitivity is considered to be at the heart of healthcare in a globalized world (22). When shifting cultural structures are taken into account, it is self-evident that health systems will direct nurses to provide nursing care based on cultural values. Consequently, nurse educators need to incorporate alternative techniques within the nursing curriculum to improve the level of cultural sensitivity of nursing students. To our knowledge, there is no study in the nursing literature assessing the relationship between mindfulness and cultural sensitivity. The correlations between cultural sensitivity and mindfulness found in the current study seemed to be consistent with the findings of the limited number of studies conducted in different fields (14,15,23).

The ISS comprised five subdimensions: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. The average total score of nursing students was  $93.08 \pm 7.01$ . As the range of the scores of nursing students in different grades ranged from 20 to 120, it was concluded that a meaningful difference did not exist between grades in this respect, and the level of cultural sensitivity among the nursing students was high (Table 3). The results of some studies conducted with Turkish nursing students were consistent with those of this study (21,24,25). Nevertheless, some other studies on nurses working in clinical settings reported that the level of cultural sensitivity of nurses was generally medium (26,27). Thus, the transition from the theoretical aspect to clinical practice could affect the cultural-sensitivity approach, and further alternative methods are required to establish a sustainable understanding of cultural sensitivity in nursing students.

The other question of this study aimed to identify the level of mindfulness among nursing students. The average total score of mindfulness of the nursing students who participated in our survey was  $66.41 \pm 6.58$ . This result can be considered medium-level mindfulness because the scores ranged from 20 to 100 on the FFMQ-SF scale, which has five subscales (observe, describe, act aware,

non-judge, and non-react). Research performed in Turkey reported that the mindfulness level among nursing students was average (28), which is consistent with our data. The main question in this study was whether a relationship exists between mindfulness and cultural sensitivity, and the findings confirmed that a statistically significant relationship exists ( $r = 0.446$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between the levels of cultural sensitivity and mindfulness of nursing students. Their level of mindfulness was found to rise with an increase in their cultural sensitivity. This positive relationship indicated that mindfulness could be used as a tool to improve the cultural sensitivity of nursing students. Although no study demonstrated the presence of a relationship between mindfulness and cultural sensitivity in nursing literature or other fields, some studies in the field of psychotherapy and counseling have indicated a positive relationship between cultural competence and mindfulness. Previous studies reported that cultural awareness is positively associated with two facets (observe and non-judge) of mindfulness. Particularly, “observing and describing” was found to be positively associated with the cultural sensitivity approach (14,15). This study likewise indicated a positive relationship between, almost among all subscales of both, mindfulness and cultural sensitivity. A negative and low relationship was merely found between a few subscales (observe-interaction engagement  $r = -0.034$ ; non-judge-interaction engagement  $r = -0.061$ ; and non-react-interaction enjoyment  $r = -0.113$ ). The other one demonstrated that all the facets of mindfulness were positively and significantly correlated with cultural competence in counseling students. Furthermore, the same study revealed that individuals who believed themselves to be mindful in their daily lives tended to think of themselves as multiculturally competent (23). Cultural sensitivity is using one’s knowledge, consideration, understanding, and respect, as well as self-adaptation based on the awareness of self and others (3). This process requires one to be open-minded, nonjudgmental, and socially relaxed (3,29). Similarly, these skill sets also constitute the main structure

of the mindfulness concept (13,14). Some studies in the literature advocate this argument by indicating that mindfulness promotes the nurse-patient relationship, reduces the stress levels of nurses, encourages ethical decision-making, facilitates communication with patients and colleagues, and supports the personal development of nurses (16,30,31). Furthermore, Binnie and Robson (32) reported along these lines, demonstrating how mindfulness training enhanced empathy and communicative skills; inner awareness of thoughts, feelings, and judgments; and the development of attentive observation among medical students. Considering these aspects, it would be appropriate to claim that cultural sensitivity and mindfulness have substantial similarities, and nurse educators could well benefit from a nursing curriculum supporting the education of cultural sensitivity among them. In this context, the integration of mindfulness into undergraduate and graduate nursing curricula imminently has been emphasized (33,34).

The results may not be generalized to all nursing students because this study was conducted on nursing students from just one institute. Furthermore, the results are restricted by the study period, which can be extended to a longer duration to obtain a better view over time.

## CONCLUSION

In Turkey, similar to other countries that face immigration, the nursing education system and educators are pursuing strategies to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion because of the increasing number of refugees. In this direction, this study provides insight into the correlation between the levels of cultural sensitivity and mindfulness among nursing students. The obtained results showed that mindfulness could be used as an alternative tool to improve the level of cultural sensitivity among nursing students. Vis-a-vis the constantly evolving cultural transformations in the world and the ever-changing social structures, it is apparent that today's healthcare world is undoubtedly in need of culturally sensitive nurses in particular. The study findings and the reviewed literature indicate that if nursing faculties and educators wish to develop strategies to promote cultural sensitivity, it would be beneficial to integrate mindfulness training into the nursing curriculum both before and after graduation.

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