

## Intercultural Sensitivity in Today's Global Classes: Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions\*

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The purpose of this study is to examine pre-service teachers' perceptions of intercultural sensitivity and multicultural practices ideal for the classes. A mixed method was employed to determine the perceptions of pre-service teachers about intercultural sensitivity and curricular practices about multiculturalism in the classes. The sample of the study consists of 220 students attending a pedagogical teacher-training course. As data collection tools, Intercultural Sensitivity Scale was used in order to collect the quantitative data. The qualitative data of the study was collected through a questionnaire in which there were three open-ended questions elaborating on curricular practices about multiculturalism in the classes. The quantitative data of the study was analyzed through *t*-test. *T*-test was used in an attempt to reveal the differences between male and female students about intercultural sensitivity. To analyze the qualitative data, a content analysis was carried out and emerging themes were identified. The quantitative results of this study indicated that there is not a significant difference in the intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers according to gender, the state of going abroad, having foreign friends and nationality. The qualitative results of the study indicated that intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers are not at the desired level, which mainly stems from inadequate multicultural awareness and receiving little or no multicultural education.

### Introduction

Constructing equal education and protecting the rights of every citizen is indispensably necessary for pluralistic societies (Banks, 1998; Banks, 2004; Gay, 1994). One of the most common tendencies in teacher education is that educational failures stem from social characteristics of students, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status or language (Persell, 2010). Teachers, whether or not they are planning to work in a multinational country should start the profession by welcoming any different idea or point of view (Ming & Duke, 2006). In this scope, teachers should be highly tolerant and open to positive or negative criticisms. Tarman and Tarman (2011) state that active intervention of the teacher can change a negative point of view and flourish an anti-bias culture in the classroom. This kind of an intervention both support different ethnic groups in the learning environment and help children gain a broader view to survive in the diverse world throughout their life. In addition, students can develop a multi-faceted global, historical, and cultural perspective and they can learn to respect human rights regardless of ethnic background (Ameny-Dixon, 2004).

In its most fundamental form, teachers, including in-service and pre-service ones, are required to realize the potential risks of treating a classroom as a homogeneous entity. According to Aydin (2012), these risks can be eliminated through becoming creative, responsive, encouraging and flexible teachers, by which they can adopt a strategy that will ensure the uniqueness of each child. When there is a non-threatening learning atmosphere, they can share their experiences about their own culture, religion or language without any hesitation. Pre-service teachers, Banks (2008) and Gay (2010) state, should be educated about having a democratic view, including all voices in a classroom, being tolerant with any inconvenient behavior and supporting the minority groups to create equivalence in the classroom. Sharma (2005) underlines that a multicultural teacher should first be humanistic, fair, and respectful to different views as well as being patient.

Preparing pre-service teachers to teach multicultural classroom is a crucial issue in teacher education. Chisholm (1994) emphasizes that pre-service teachers should first start with being a reflective practitioner and developing an awareness about their own perspectives about monitoring, evaluating and revising a subject. If they are aware of their own perspectives and styles, they can later develop an effective point of view about others, other cultures and cultural diversity (Chou, 2007; Owen, 2010; Scott, 1998). It is a prerequisite for pre-service teachers to gain a multicultural perspective, to interact with students from a broad range of different cultural backgrounds, and to

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function as an intercultural teacher in favor of each group, either minor or major (Banks, 1993; Major, 2012; Schlosser, 1992). Otherwise, a negative attitude toward other cultures might be developed and as a result of this there might be intolerance among the borders of the classroom (Garcia & Soest, 1997).

Another important issue about teacher education is equipping them with necessary teaching skills to be reflective about applying all their skills to their profession. Chou (2007) states that pre-service teachers should first develop an awareness about their own points of view and after that they should gain insights into how the assumption of students from different cultural backgrounds vary. Another important point is that pre-service teachers should have a positive perception about student diversity and should not regard it as a threat to the unity of the classroom (Major, 2012). If they consider multiculturalism as a source of enrichment, they can create a good relationship between school and positive personality development.

As the world is getting more and more globalized, biases about cultural background, ethnic identity, gender, or class hinder the communication seriously in today's educational settings in a worse way. Today's teachers should have a vision that gives a chance to every different identity in the classroom without giving privilege to any group or individual. Only in this way can students have broader perspectives about embracing differences and getting rid of prejudices to function as global citizens. The purpose of this study is to examine pre-service teachers' perceptions of intercultural sensitivity and multicultural practices ideal for the classes.

This study is critical in the sense that it gives insights into developing curricular practices in the classrooms. Moreover, the current study has a high relation with teacher education as it addresses pre-service teachers and it has an attempt to increase awareness about intercultural sensitivity. It gives a chance to the pre-service teachers to make their voices heard about implementing a multicultural perspective in the classrooms. With the help of this study, they expressed their feelings and offered some culturally responsive practices at schools. Overall, this study was carried out in an attempt to increase awareness of pre-service teachers about multicultural education and give insights into implementing functional practices about intercultural sensitivity.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This study was carried out in academic year 2012-2013, with the purpose of examining pre-service teachers' intercultural sensitivity at a state university in Istanbul, Turkey. A mixed method design was employed for data collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative method (Creswell, 2012; Yildirim & Simsek, 2008). Mixed method design enhances the access to the sources of information that cannot be reached by solely recruiting one type of design and it also supports the researchers with more detailed explanations of research questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Briefly, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected with the same scale by employing purposive sampling; the collected data were analyzed separately and gathered results were discussed in a detailed way.

### **Participants and Setting**

The participants of the study include 220 pre-service teachers; 168 of whom are female and 52 of whom are male, attending Yıldız Technical University Faculty of Education at 2012-2013 academic year spring semester.

### **Data Collection Tools**

As data collection tools, the 24 item 5 likert-type Intercultural Sensitivity Scale developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) was used in order to collect the quantitative data. The validity, reliability, and linguistic equivalence study of the scale was carried out by Ustun (2010). The qualitative data of the study was collected through a questionnaire in which there were three open-ended questions elaborating on curricular practices about multiculturalism in the classes.

### **Analysis of Data**

The quantitative data of the study was analyzed through *t*-test with SPSS 16.0 statistics program. The significance level was determined as  $p < .05$ . *T*-test was used in an attempt to reveal the differences between male and female students about intercultural sensitivity. To analyze the qualitative data, a content analysis was carried out and emerging themes were identified. According to Yildirim and Simsek (2008) the fundamental purpose of content analysis is to reach the concepts and relationships to explain the data. In other words, the purpose is to identify the data and to reveal the hidden facts in the data by using content analysis. As Creswell (2009) mentioned, the written documents were reviewed multiple times and key ideas from these documents were noted down and grouped in order to be able to create units of meaning. After grouping the codes, categories and themes were found out by considering the research questions.

## **Results**

The first research question was as follows: “What are the intercultural sensitivity scores of pre-service teachers?” The descriptive statistics were examined to find the answer of the first research question. The descriptive statistics are given in Table 1.

Table 1  
*The descriptive statistics of intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers*

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Intercultural Sensitivity	220	70,00	5,83	57	102

The second research question was as follows: “Is there a significant difference in the intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers according to gender?” Independent groups’ *t*-test was carried to find the answer of this research question. Arithmetic average, standard deviation values, and *t*-test results are given in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Arithmetic average and standard deviation values and t-test results of intercultural sensitivity levels of female and male pre-service teachers*

		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Intercultural Sensitivity	Female	168	76,48	5,45	62	105
	Male	52	77,98	5,72	65	103

As can be seen in Table 2, there is not a significant difference in the intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers according to gender [ $t = .71, p > .05$ ].

The third research question was as follows: “Is there a significant difference in the intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers according to the state of going abroad or not?” Independent groups *t*-test was carried to find the answer of the mentioned question. Arithmetic average, standard deviation values, and *t*-test results are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3  
*Arithmetic average and standard deviation values and t-test results of intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers according to the state of going abroad or not*

		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercultural Sensitivity	Not going abroad	175	70,33	6,11	218	.70	.48
	Going abroad	45	71,02	4,61			

As presented in Table 3, there is not a significant difference in the intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers according to the state of going abroad or not [ $t = .70, p > .05$ ].

The fourth research question was as follows: “Is there a significant difference in the intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers according to having foreign friends or not?” Independent groups *t*-test was carried to find the answer of this research question. Arithmetic average, standard deviation values, and *t*-test results are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Arithmetic average and standard deviation values and t-test results of intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers according to having foreign friends or not*

		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercultural Sensitivity	Not having foreign friends	175	70,36	5,73	218	.97	.33
	Having foreign friends	45	71,32	6,81			

As presented in Table 4, there is not a significant difference in the intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers according to having foreign friends or not [ $t = .97, p > .05$ ].

The fifth research question was as follows: “Is there a significant difference in the intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers according to nationality?” To find the answer of this research question, independent groups *t*-test was carried out. Arithmetic average, standard deviation values, and *t*-test results are given in Table 5.

Table 5

*Arithmetic average and standard deviation values and t-test results of intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers according to nationality*

		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercultural Sensitivity	Turkish	180	70,45	6,062	218	.55	.58
	Foreigner	40	71,02	5,583			

As can be seen in Table 5, there is not a significant difference in the intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers according to nationality [ $t = .55, p > .05$ ].

Apart from the quantitative data of the study, the qualitative data also indicate that intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service teachers are not at the desired level, which mainly stems from inadequate multicultural awareness and receiving little or no multicultural education. When pre-service teachers were asked whether they had adequate information about how to communicate with students from other cultures, a vast majority of the participants answered this question as “No, they don’t.” The emerging themes about the reason of this answer are as follows: Not receiving proper education, the prejudice about other cultures, and being unfamiliar to different cultures. Some of the expressions reflecting this theme can be seen below:

I have never received training about this topic. Teachers mostly pursue this knowledge by their own desire and personal efforts. However, teachers are generally not well-informed (Male, 20).

No, they don’t. People treat others different from them in a biased way. If you do not belong to the same ethnic identity, race or culture, if your languages and religions are not the same, then you are treated as if you do something wrong. Teachers behave in the same way. The reason behind that is the things we learned in the past and our experiences (Female, 21).

I don’t think that we are well-informed. Nobody makes an effort to introduce different cultures and teach their own values (Female, 20).

No, they don’t. because they do not get rid of their thoughts and they don not make objective judgements. In addition, they do not receive related education or implementation on this topic (Male, 22).

Most pre-service teachers emphasize the inadequate level of multicultural education in education faculties. Apart from these themes, some other pre-service teachers mentioned reasons such as not knowing a foreign language, not being flexible enough about improving oneself, and the common nationalistic view.

## Discussion

Results of the study indicate that pre-service teachers are not satisfied with the implementations or with the level of training about multicultural education. They emphasized that multicultural awareness is not at the required level in Turkey. To constitute a system that fosters diversity and creates a culturally responsive atmosphere in the classroom, teachers should first be equipped with necessary teaching tools. According to Banks (2008), possessing the mentioned qualifications is vital for restructuring systems to embrace cultural diversity and to prepare younger generations to be tolerant with people different from them. It is a prerequisite for every pre-service teacher to gain a multicultural perspective, to interact with students from a broad range of different cultural backgrounds, and to function as an intercultural teacher in favor of each group, either minor or major (Chisholm, 1994). In order to keep up with the demands of today’s education systems, the need to prepare pre-service teachers for multicultural education is gradually expanding (Krummel, 2013).

Gay (2010) argues that pre-service teachers need an equalitarian and confiding student-faculty relationship to improve their self-awareness about multiculturalism. There should be a strong bond between faculty and student teachers that is based on mutual respect and esteem. Awareness of pre-service teachers should also be raised about incorporation of diverse cultures into the curriculum. Being a good observer, being sensitive to different needs and styles of students and enriching the curriculum through employment of diverse cultural components will create a peaceful and non-threatening learning atmosphere (Chou, 2007). Therefore, it is of crucial importance to establish a supportive curriculum that raises pre-service teachers’ awareness about differences in race, culture, and gender. This kind of a

curriculum will help pre-service teachers to interrogate their experiences, understand the dynamics of schools, and become better prepared to teach in diverse classrooms (Weinstein, Tomlinson, & Curran, 2004).

Teachers have a crucial role in students' lives. It is a stubborn fact that children's acts or behaviors are shaped by their observations of family members at home and teachers at school. This being the case, teachers should take an active role in regulating perspectives of students about a more moderate and peaceful point of view. This is, as Ming and Duke (2006) states, only possible when teachers and administrators at school develop culturally responsive practices by considering multicultural education.

To summarize, Turkey is a country that is rich about ethnic identities and it has a culturally diverse population. Thus, teacher preparation for this diversity and multiculturalism is essential for the prosperity of the country. Aydin (2012) recommends that Turkish education system should raise awareness of students about working in a diversity of places, about potential exposure to biases, and about some policies that can hinder achievement. This is only possible when pre-service teachers are made aware of the fact they need to think about different ways of teaching and implementing classroom activities by considering individual differences and tailoring the instruction according to the diverse needs in the multicultural classroom (Smith, 2009). On condition that the curriculum is fair, accurate and inclusive for any student, it can embrace a huge diversity of students and teachers having different teaching and learning styles. Although it is still difficult to implement in Turkey owing to certain political and ideological issues, it is inevitable for a multicultural community to receive multicultural education, as it would be a kind of discrimination against different people of colors or ethnic groups apart from the majority of the country.

#### **Limitations**

1. Data collection was limited to 220 students attending a pedagogical teacher-training course.
2. The study site is limited to a state university in Istanbul, Turkey.
3. The findings are limited to the accuracy of the student responses on the scale.

#### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

In societies where more than one nation lives, it is essential to base the education system on democratic roots that will embrace all identities. Though multicultural education is a requisite not only for multinational countries but also for countries with a unique nation, the presence of equality and democratic approach is overwhelmingly crucial for societies having an ethnic diversity. Within this scope, it is crucial for Turkey to adapt a system and take initiatives about multicultural awareness in teacher education programs.

#### **Directions for Future Research**

The following suggestions can be made for further studies:

1. Teacher education is the most important part of an educational reform. As the applicators of educational strategies, teacher awareness should be raised through pre-service and in-service teacher training and the effect of them on teachers can be researched.
2. More qualitative studies should be carried out with stakeholders to examine the requirements for the implementation of multicultural education.

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