

## **In-service Teachers' Intercultural Sensitivity**

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### **Abstract**

It is urgent to develop intercultural sensitivity (IS hereafter) for the society and especially for in-service teachers as they are the agents that help learners to acquire the intercultural competencies needed to live in a dramatically globalized world. However, few research studies focused on in-service teachers' intercultural sensitivity though there were many studies conducted with pre-service teachers or university students. Therefore, the study's objectives were to identify the intercultural sensitivity of teachers and seek any connections between their sensitivity and demographic variables. The questionnaire with demographic questions and an intercultural sensitivity scale received responses from 214 teachers. The results showed that the teachers' general intercultural sensitivity was not significantly impacted by their age, gender, level of teaching, or the type of institution they worked at. Nevertheless, teachers with international experience had higher scores than those without international experience, and there was a positive relationship between teachers' intercultural sensitivity and the length of their international experience. Teachers of general subjects showed lower intercultural sensitivity than those teaching English. Furthermore, multilingual teachers had much higher intercultural sensitivity than their monolingual counterparts. The implications of the study might guide some stakeholders such as in-service trainers and policy makers in teacher education.

**Keywords:** Intercultural sensitivity, intercultural competence, teacher education, language teachers, teachers of general subjects,

Globalization has brought many novelties in different areas and education is only one part of these changes. Thanks to the fast and safe transportation, countries that previously were not destinations for immigrants have started to accept learners from diverse backgrounds. The number of international students has dramatically increased over the last decade. Prior to 2020, there were many students whose cultures, languages, and religions were distinct from those of their host countries due to the massive influx of displaced peoples into high-income countries worldwide (Tualaulelei & Halse, 2021). Moreover, according to recent UNHCR reports, Türkiye is hosting 3.8 million refugees.

This concise data yet alone recommends that numerous educators in Turkish schools are interacting and are probably going to continue interacting with individuals from various social backgrounds at elementary, secondary, and tertiary education. This also shows how important it is to develop intercultural understanding and sensitivity for the society and especially for

teachers inasmuch as both in-service and pre-service teachers will be handling intercultural communication on a daily basis. Making schools more receptive to and viable with a diverse range of students entails advancement in professionalism that starts with educators' very own comprehension of social contrasts, as such, their intercultural sensitivity (IS hereafter), which is sensitivity to the value of cultural differences and to the perspectives of individuals from diverse cultures (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992, p.411). Therefore, teachers are expected to be well aware of the impacts of globalization and work cooperatively and effectively with the students from culturally and linguistically distinctive backgrounds (Zhao, 2010). It is paramount to consider the varied life experiences of each student when doing classwork. In order to maintain an inclusive environment in the classroom, teachers need to establish a culturally sensitive approach that incorporates many perspectives in didactic activities and assignments. Working toward cohabitation and integration should not depend on teachers' good intentions and instincts, but rather on their particular abilities and competencies (Biasutti et al., 2020).

The significance of interculturality is emphasized in Turkish education, and during the past few years, there have been several program adjustments and initiatives to promote intercultural awareness (Kazazoglu & Ece, 2021). For instance, pre-service teachers have many more opportunities than in-service teachers as the elective courses on intercultural competence, intercultural awareness or intercultural sensitivity have started to be offered though they are still not compulsory in Türkiye. They are also more feasible to study abroad and be exposed to various cultural frameworks. However, veterans might not have had such opportunities one or two decades ago and they might not have acquired the skills and competencies regarding how to respond to such social and cultural contrasts in their classrooms. Previous research also indicated that many educators still struggle to connect with students from diverse cultural and language backgrounds despite the growing awareness of the need for interculturally competent teachers (Gedik Bal & Savas, 2022; Keengwe, 2010; Tualalelei & Halse, 2021). This highlights the need for professional development that equips educators working in the field with the tools they need to interact with these students (Gedik Bal & Savas, 2022; Romijn, Slot, & Leseman, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to identify the intercultural sensitivity of in-service teachers so that necessary precautions can be taken and adjustments in in-service trainings could be made.

Furthermore, prior research on the influence of demographics on the intercultural sensitivity of teachers has yielded inconclusive results. Certain studies have demonstrated a significant impact of age on teachers' IS (Wang, 2016), whereas others have contradicted this finding (Bayles, 2009; Ghamarnia, Soltani, & Rahimi; 2016; Kazazoglu & Ece, 2021). In terms of the effect of gender, some studies (Bayles, 2009; Kazazoglu & Ece, 2021; Segura-Robles & Parra-González, 2019; Wang, 2016) have failed to detect a substantial effect, while others have revealed differences between males and females with respect to their intercultural sensitivities (Ghamarnia, Soltani, & Rahimi; 2016; Nieto & Booth, 2010). There are also variables that have not been previously explored, such as the subject area taught by teachers, the type of institution they work in, their teaching level, and their overseas experience. Given the inconclusive findings from the previous research and the paucity of research on aforementioned factors, investigating intercultural sensitivity among in-service teachers in the Turkish context and relationships between their intercultural sensitivity and some demographic factors would contribute to relevant literature. Thus, the aims of this study are to:

- determine the IS levels of participant in-service teachers in Türkiye.

- determine the relationships between in-service teachers' IS and some demographic factors.

The research questions were formulated based on the aims of the study as follows:

1. What is the level of participant in-service teachers' intercultural sensitivity?
2. Is there any relationship between the in-service teachers' IS and their ages?
3. Is there any significant difference in IS between male and female in-service teachers?
4. Is there any significant difference in IS between state and private school in-service teachers?
5. Is there any relationship between the in-service teachers' IS and the level of teaching?
6. Is there any significant difference in IS between in-service English language teachers and teachers of general subjects?
7. Is there a significant difference between the IS of teachers with and without overseas experience?
8. Is there a relationship between the teachers' IS and the duration of overseas experience?
9. Is there a relationship between the teachers' IS and the number of languages they know?

## **Theoretical framework**

Intercultural sensitivity, according to Bhawuk and Brislin (1992), is sensitivity to the value of cultural differences and to the perspectives of persons from various cultures (p.411). They also contend that certain characteristics, such as an interest in other cultures, sensitivity to cultural differences, respect for individuals who come from societies that are different from their own, and positivity toward differences in culture, are essential.

Bennett and Bennett (2003) elaborated on the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS). According to DMIS, people go through stages as they develop intercultural sensitivity or competency. In the early stages (i.e., denial, defence, and minimization), people emphasize their worldviews while witnessing and interpreting reality. The subsets of stages (i.e., acceptance, adaptation, and integration) are ethno relative; they occur when people naturally assess their viewpoints in perspective of other viewpoints and accept cultural diversity rather than trying to avoid it. In other words, they transition from having a mono-cultural worldview to one that is more sophisticated and nuanced.

Chen and Starosta (1997) also provided a definition of IS as "an individual's capacity to build sensitivity toward knowing and embracing cultural differences that supports acceptable and successful behaviour in international communication" (p.5). In contrast to Bennett and Bennett (2003), Chen and Starosta (2000) have contextualized intercultural sensitivity as an affective component. They also differentiated the terms intercultural awareness (cognitive aspect), intercultural adroitness (behavioural aspect) and intercultural sensitivity (affective aspect) which contribute to the umbrella concept intercultural communication competence (Chen and Starosta, 1996). They established a five-domain model that is used as a barometer to determine one's level of intercultural sensitivity.

Engagement in cross-cultural contacts, the first domain, denotes a person's readiness to actively and constantly participate in the intricacies of cross-cultural interactions as well as their empathy for others. Respect for cultural diversity, the second domain, is characterized by

an individual who is open-minded, eager to express oneself honestly, and accepting of others. A person with a high sense of self and appreciation for the complexity and ambiguity that cross-cultural relationships bring falls under the third category, which is confidence in cross-cultural interactions. The fourth category, enjoying cross-cultural relationships, reveals a person with a non-judgmental attitude who enjoys tolerating other people's viewpoints and cultures without drawing hasty conclusions in response to whatever information s/he learns during cross-cultural encounters. Additionally, the fifth domain, attentiveness in cross-cultural interactions, characterizes a person who uses sound self-monitoring to recognize difficulties that develop in cross-cultural contexts so s/he could make the necessary behavioural modifications. Empathy, continuing and active participation, open-mindedness, strong self-esteem, a non-judgmental attitude, and effective self-monitoring are all characteristics of those who are interculturally sensitive (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Uyun & Warsah, 2022).

## **Review of the literature**

In-service teachers' intercultural sensitivity was investigated in many different contexts. Some of these studies employed Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) (Boudouaia et al, 2022; Ghamarnia, Soltani, & Rahimi 2016; Jantawej, 2011, Mostafaei Alaei & Nosrati, 2018; Nieto & Booth, 2010; Strelakova, 2013; Wang, 2016) whereas others utilized Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Bayles, 2009; Fretheim, 2007; Westrick & Yuen, 2007) to assess the IS of teachers.

In the Iranian context, Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018) investigated EFL teachers' ICC and IS. The results showed that teachers had the highest score from the dimension of respecting other cultures while they had the lowest on interaction confidence. Ghamarnia et al. (2016) also assessed English language teachers ISS in the Iranian context and reported a significant difference between male and female teachers. Male teachers had a higher level of IS. Age and ethnic background (Azeri vs. Farsi) was not a significant factor in the level of teachers' IS. In the Thai context, Jantawej (2011) found a high level of IS among EFL teachers. The analysis showed that the teachers had higher scores for interaction attentiveness than the other subscales. In the United States, Nieto and Booth (2010) carried out a research study on the IS level of students and instructors. Results illustrated that instructors had a higher level of IS than students. Females had higher IS scores than males. There was a significant difference between ESL and non-ESL lecturers in interaction engagement. Similarly, in New York, Strelakova (2013) found that English language teachers had significantly higher levels of IS than teachers of general subject areas. Serving refugee students was not a significant factor in the IS levels of teachers. Qualitative research also implicated a powerful connection between IS and teachers' personal, professional, and educational cross-cultural experiences. Wang (2016) explored English teachers' IS in a higher vocational college in Zhejiang, China. Intercultural experiences and age were found to be significantly impactful on the level of IS. However, some demographic features like gender and educational background did not have an impact on IS. Similarly, Boudouaia et al. (2022) also probed 182 EFL teachers' IS in Algeria and findings revealed no significant differences for gender, educational background, teaching experiences, and teaching levels.

In bilingual schools in Texas, Bayles (2009) also used IDI to assess the elementary teachers' IS. The teachers were detected to be in Minimization stage. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience outperformed those with fewer than 10 years of experience in IS, despite demographic factors like age, gender, and educational attainment having no discernible influence on the test's results. Fretheim (2007) conducted a study on teachers' IS in international schools in Southern Africa. The majority of the teachers were detected to have an ethnocentric worldview according to their IDI scores. It was also found that the years

living and working overseas had a significant effect on the IDI. Similarly, in the Hong Kong context, Westrick and Yuen (2007) conducted a study via IDI, and they found that experience in other cultures was a strong predictor of optimal IDI scores. There was also a positive relationship between the duration that teachers lived in other cultures and IDI scores.

In the Turkish context, Kazazoğlu and Ece (2021) also investigated pre-service, and novice in-service teachers' IS and found that teachers with a multilingual background were more at ease interacting across cultures. Age and gender did not have a significant impact on teachers' IS. Additionally, experience was detected to contribute to fostering intercultural sensitivity.

To summarize, the previous research on the impact of demographics on teachers' IS was not conclusive. Some studies revealed that age has a substantial impact on teachers' IS (Wang, 2016), whereas others reported the contrary (Bayles, 2009; Ghamarnia, Soltani, & Rahimi; 2016; Kazazoglu & Ece, 2021). Regarding the effect of gender, studies (Bayles, 2009; Kazazoglu & Ece, 2021; Segura-Robles & Parra-González, 2019; Wang, 2016) did not find a significant effect while others showed that males and females had differences regarding their intercultural sensitivities (Ghamarnia, Soltani, & Rahimi; 2016; Nieto & Booth, 2010). On the other hand, studying or working abroad had a significant impact on the level of teachers' IS (Fretheim, 2007; Wang, 2016; Westrick & Yuen, 2007) in previous research. In view of the scarcity of the research on in-service teachers' IS in the Turkish context, this study might contribute to the literature, specifically revealing the impact of certain variables that were not studied earlier such as teachers' teaching subject, type of institution, level of teaching and overseas experience.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study sought to investigate intercultural sensitivity among in-service teachers in the Turkish context and relationships between their IS and some demographic factors. Since the aims of the study involved describing the relationships among variables and comparing particular group of teachers, cross-sectional survey research design, which is one of the quantitative methods of research, is preferred in this study. Another justification for choosing survey design is its effectiveness as a tool for gathering data from a large number of participants, standardizing data collection, and providing affordable and efficient ways of data collection (Creswell, 2012, p.403).

### **Participants**

Convenience sampling method was preferred in this study. Participants in the study comprised in-service teachers who were currently teaching diverse range of subjects, including English, Turkish, mathematics, science education, social education, and so on.

Teachers' ages generally ranged between 22 and 57, yet there was also one teacher who was at the age of 73. As demonstrated in Table 1 below, 63 male teachers and 151 female teachers attended the study. The majority of participants were working at state schools. 27 participants were working at primary school, 82 of them were working at high schools and 105 were working at middle schools. 88 of the participants had been abroad whereas 126 had not been abroad. The duration of the overseas experience of the teachers could also be examined in Table 1.

**Table 1. Demographics of Participant Teachers**

		N	%
Age	22-31	69	32.2
	32-41	96	44.9
	42-51	31	14.5
	52+	18	8.4
Gender	Male	63	29.4
	Female	151	70.6
Level of teaching	Primary School	27	12.6
	Middle School	105	49.1
	High School	82	38.3
Level of teaching	Primary School	27	12.6
	Middle School	105	49.1
	High School	82	38.3
Institution	State	181	84.6
	Private	33	15.4
Teaching subject	English Language	94	43.9
	Others (Science, Math, Social etc.)	120	56.1
Overseas experience	Yes	88	41.1
	No	126	58.9
Overseas duration	(1) no overseas	126	58.9
	(2) less than a week	16	7.5
	(3) 1-3 weeks	40	18.7
	(4) 1-3 months	9	4.2
	(5) 4-6 months	8	3.7
	(6) 7-11 months	4	1.9
	(7) 1-3 years	4	1.9
	(8) 4-6 years	6	2.8
	(9) 7-10 years	1	.5
Number of languages	One	46	21.5
	Two	132	61.7
	Three	31	14.5
	Four	5	2.3

### Data Collection Procedures and Instruments

Data collection procedure consisted of three main steps. Firstly, permissions to use the scale were received from both the authors who developed the scale and the scholars who adapted it to Turkish. Ethics committee approval was received from the Social Sciences University of Ankara Human Sciences Research and Scientific Publication Ethics Committee (Decision no 2020/8038). Second, survey was shared with an announcement asking for volunteer participants on social networking websites such as Facebook and WhatsApp. 214 teachers responded to the survey.

Data collection instrument consisted of a socio-demographic questionnaire and Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. With the demographic questionnaire, information regarding age, gender, institution type, level that the teacher was teaching, the subject that the teacher is teaching, overseas experience and languages spoken were gathered. ISS was developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) and adopted Turkish by Küllü-Sülü (2011). Five dimensions were used to

establish the theoretical framework for the ISS scale: interaction engagement, interaction enjoyment, interaction confidence, respect for cultural differences, and interaction attentiveness. The ISS has proven to be highly reliable and to have suitable contemporaneous and predictive validity (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Validity studies of the scale were also carried out by some other studies (Fritz & Möllenberg, 2000; Fritz et al., 2001; West, 2009). The Cronbach Alpha in the original study was 0.88 and .76 in the adapted Turkish version. In this study, explanatory and confirmatory factor analyses were carried out and three items (Q11, Q19, Q23) were removed from the analysis as their factor loads were low. In the present study, the Cronbach Alpha of the whole scale was .89 and inter-reliability scores for each subscale can be seen in Table 2 below in more detail.

**Table 2. Inter-reliability of the Scales**

	Cronbach Alpha	n of items
Interaction Engagement	.69	5
Respect for Cultural Differences	.67	6
Interaction Confidence	.87	5
Interaction Enjoyment	.79	3
Interaction Attentiveness	.72	2
Intercultural Sensitivity Scale	.89	21

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analysed via SPSS IBM v20 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 20.0). Skewness and kurtosis values were utilized to determine whether they corresponded with normal distribution requirements or not, and the scale appeared to have shown a normal distribution as the values of Skewness and Kurtosis in the overall scale were between -1.5 and +1.5 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). Some of the items (i.e., 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20, and 22) were reverse-coded before summing and calculating the mean scores. Factor analyses were carried out and three items (i.e., 11, 19, and 23) were extracted from the analysis as their factor loads were low.

Pearson correlations were utilized to detect any relationship between the IS scores and the continuous variables (i.e., age and overseas duration). In order to detect any substantial differences between males and females, teachers of English and other subjects, teachers with and without overseas experience, teachers at state and private schools, and monolingual and multilingual teachers, the independent samples T test was utilized. One-way ANOVA was also used to detect any possible difference among teachers working in primary, middle and high schools.

### **Findings**

#### **The Overall Intercultural Sensitivity of Participant Teachers**

When the overall mean scores were calculated for overall IS and subscales, it was observed that teachers had high level of IS in all observed categories as listed in Table 3.

**Table 3. The Intercultural Sensitivity Level of Teachers**

	Mean	SD	Level
Interaction Engagement	4.06	0.49	High
Respect for Cultural Differences	4.11	0.51	High
Interaction Confidence	3.78	0.71	High
Interaction Enjoyment	4.24	0.60	High
Interaction Attentiveness	4.07	0.62	High
Total Intercultural Sensitivity	4.05	0.45	High

1-2.5= low, 2.6-3.5= moderate 3.5-5.00=high

### The Impact of Teachers' Age and Gender on Their Intercultural Sensitivity

There was no significant relationship between the age and the intercultural sensitivity of the teachers ( $r = .40, p = .563$ ). When the overall intercultural sensitivity of males and females were compared, no significant difference between males and females was observed. However, there was a significant difference between males and females for two sub-scales. Females had significantly higher scores for interaction engagement than males as indicated in Table 4. Similarly, females had higher scores for respect for cultural differences than males.

**Table 4. Intercultural Sensitivity of Male and Female Teachers**

Gender	Male N=63		Female N=151		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Interaction Engagement	3.95	0.55	4.11	0.45	-2.220	.027*
Respect for Cultural Differences	3.98	0.63	4.16	0.45	-2.370	.019*
Interaction Confidence	3.75	0.61	3.80	0.75	-.409	.683
Interaction Enjoyment	4.20	0.63	4.26	0.59	-.670	.503
Interaction Attentiveness	4.02	0.71	4.10	0.59	-.857	.392
Total Intercultural Sensitivity	3.98	0.45	4.08	0.44	-1.571	.118

\*. Significant at the .05 level \*\* . Significant at the .01 level

### The Impact of Institution Type, Level of Teaching and Teaching Subject on Teachers' Intercultural Sensitivity

There was not any significant difference between teachers working at state and private schools ( $t(212) = .147, p = .883$ ). Moreover, there was no significant relationship between the level of teaching (primary, middle and high school) and the teachers' intercultural sensitivity ( $r = .106, p = .122$ ). However, there was a significant difference between the IS of English language teachers and teachers of general subjects ( $t(212) = 3.580, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, teachers of English had significantly higher scores for each subscale ( $p < .05$ ), which can be examined in Table 5 in more detail below.



**Table 5. Intercultural Sensitivity of Teachers of English and General Subjects**

Teachers of:	English N=94		Other Subjects N=120		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Interaction Engagement	4.16	0.46	3.99	0.50	2.552	<b>.011*</b>
Respect for Cultural Differences	4.24	0.38	4.01	0.58	3.465	<b>.001**</b>
Interaction Confidence	3.94	0.64	3.66	0.74	3.002	<b>.003**</b>
Interaction Enjoyment	4.35	0.52	4.15	0.64	2.387	<b>.018*</b>
Interaction Attentiveness	4.18	0.49	3.99	0.70	2.276	<b>.024*</b>
Total Intercultural Sensitivity	4.17	0.40	3.96	0.46	3.580	<b>.000**</b>

\*. Significant at the .05 level \*\* Significant at the .01 level

### The Impact of Overseas Experience on Teachers' Intercultural Sensitivity

Table 6 shows that those who had been abroad had significantly higher intercultural sensitivity. Moreover, a significant difference was also detected for three of the other component sub-measures.

**Table 6. Intercultural Sensitivity of Teachers with and Without Overseas Experience**

Overseas Experience?	Yes N=88		No N=126		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Interaction Engagement	4.16	0.49	3.99	0.48	2.568	<b>.011*</b>
Respect for Cultural Differences	4.21	0.49	4.04	0.52	2.430	<b>.016*</b>
Interaction Confidence	3.91	0.77	3.70	0.65	2.189	<b>.030*</b>
Interaction Enjoyment	4.32	0.68	4.18	0.53	1.571	.118
Interaction Attentiveness	4.16	0.65	4.01	0.60	1.794	.074
Total Intercultural Sensitivity	4.15	0.49	4.01	0.40	2.676	<b>.008**</b>

\*. Significant at the .05 level \*\*Significant at the .01 level

Pearson correlation results also showed that there was a positive relationship between overall intercultural sensitivity and the duration of overseas experience ( $r = .200$ ,  $p < .01$ ). That is, as the duration of overseas experience increased, the intercultural sensitivity of teachers increased, as well. Furthermore, there was also a significant relation between overseas duration and interaction engagement, ( $r = .199$ ,  $p < .01$ ), interaction confidence ( $r = .186$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and respect for cultural difference ( $r = .141$ ,  $p < .01$ ) which could be examined in Table 7 below.

**Table 7. Relationship between Intercultural Sensitivity and Overseas Duration**

Pearson Correlations	Overseas Duration	Sig. (2-tailed)
Interaction Engagement	<b>.199**</b>	.003
Respect for Cultural Differences	<b>.141*</b>	.040
Interaction Confidence	<b>.186**</b>	.006
Interaction Enjoyment	.114	.096
Interaction Attentiveness	.127	.064
Intercultural Sensitivity	<b>.200**</b>	.003

\*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level . Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

## The Impact of the Number of Languages Spoken on Teachers' Intercultural Sensitivity

Pearson correlation showed that there was a positive relationship between teachers' overall IS and the number of languages they could speak ( $r = .216, p = .001$ ). Independent Samples T Test was run and the results showed that multilingual teachers who knew one or two foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue had significantly higher intercultural sensitivity than the teachers who were monolingual as can be seen in Table 8 below. Multilingual teachers also had significantly higher interaction engagement, interaction confidence, and interaction attentiveness than the monolingual counterparts as can be seen in Table 8.

**Table 8. Intercultural Sensitivity of Monolingual and Multilingual Teachers**

Language proficiency	Monolingual N=46		Multilingual N=168		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Interaction Engagement	3.88	0.57	4.11	0.45	-2.876	<b>.004**</b>
Respect for Cultural Differences	4.00	0.68	4.14	0.45	-1.331	.189
Interaction Confidence	3.46	0.88	3.87	0.63	-2.976	<b>.004**</b>
Interaction Enjoyment	4.13	0.73	4.27	0.56	-.1.188	.240
Interaction Attentiveness	3.88	0.75	4.13	0.57	-2.385	<b>.018*</b>
Total Intercultural Sensitivity	3.87	0.51	4.10	0.42	-2.837	<b>.006**</b>

\*. Significant at the .05 level    \*\*. Significant at the .01 level

## Discussion

Schools in Türkiye serve student populations that are more and more varied, just as those in many cities across the world. For this reason, if schools are to ensure the success of all of their students, they must satisfy teachers' demands for professional development in intercultural sensitivity. This investigation examining the intercultural sensitivity of primary, middle, and high school teachers in Türkiye shed light on how well they comprehend both their own and other people's cultural identities. It also demonstrates significant differences between the IS of teachers with distinctive backgrounds. A multitude of insights revealed from the findings in turn offer various strategies for the teachers' professional growth.

In this study, participant teachers had high level of IS similar to the previous research in other contexts (Jantawej, 2011; Nieto & Booth, 2010; Segura-Robles, A., & Parra-González). This finding suggests that teachers had the potential to enhance their students' intercultural sensitivity as they had high level of IS. However, teachers might not have the necessary knowledge and abilities to implement culturally sensitive or responsive instruction despite having a high level of intercultural sensitivity. Numerous studies in a variety of contexts found that teachers did not adequately incorporate intercultural activities in their classes despite their positive evaluations of intercultural language learning and instruction (Gedik Bal & Savas, 2022; Hoa & Vien, 2019). Previous research also showed that English teachers who felt interculturally incompetent had restricted knowledge of other cultures and the resources to introduce cultures of others in language classes (Gedik Bal & Savas, 2020; Han & Song, 2011). The value of teachers in assisting students develop their intercultural sensitivity cannot be overstated (Gedik Bal, 2020). Therefore, in order to put teachers' potential to increase their students' intercultural sensitivity into practice, there needs to be specific in-service training where teachers learn how to interact with students who are culturally different or how to create resources and activities to foster their students' intercultural sensitivity in

classrooms. As a result, intercultural trainings that are practical and insightful might help teachers of all subjects.

Participant teachers had the lowest score on interaction confidence, which was in line with the results of Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati's (2018) study. The reason of their slightly lower self-esteem in cross cultural interactions might result from their restricted language use or some other affective factors. However, more in-depth qualitative research is needed to identify the exact reasons. Moreover, their slightly low scores for interaction confidence implied that they needed further support to be able to behave appropriately during interactions with socially and culturally different people. As a result, the teachers willing to enhance their intercultural interaction confidence could be offered in-service trainings where they had first-hand experience with international teachers or trainers. Additionally, for the initiatives such as intercultural trainings abroad, teachers could be financially supported.

The findings showed that age was not a significant variable on the intercultural sensitivity of teachers, which endorsed previous studies (Bayles, 2009; Ghamarnia, Soltani, & Rahimi, 2016; Kazazoglu & Ece, 2021). In addition, there was not a significant difference between the overall IS of male and female teachers (Bayles, 2009; Kazazoglu & Ece, 2021; Segura-Robles & Parra-González, 2019; Wang, 2016) though there were significant differences for interaction engagement and respect for cultural differences. The level of teaching did not have a significant relationship with the teachers' intercultural sensitivity, either (Fretheim, 2007; Boudouaia et al., 2022).

On the other hand, teachers of English had significantly higher intercultural sensitivity than general school subject teachers, which was similar to Strelakova' (2013) findings. In addition, there was a significant difference for each subscale including intercultural engagement. Nieto and Booth's (2010) study also revealed that English language teachers had higher interaction engagement than teachers of general subjects. Moreover, teachers speaking one or two languages aside from their mother tongue had higher IS than monolingual teachers, which was in line with Kazazoglu and Ece's (2021) study. These findings validated the necessity of learning a foreign language to enhance intercultural skills of individuals. Therefore, teachers who are monolinguals could be encouraged to learn a foreign language not just during their pre-service education but during their in-service training.

Furthermore, teachers with overseas experience had higher intercultural sensitivity than teachers without overseas experience similar to the results of Westrick and Yuen's (2007) study and there was a positive relationship between the duration of the overseas experience and teachers' intercultural sensitivity (Fretheim, 2007; Westrick & Yuen, 2007). Consequently, teachers might be encouraged to pursue postgraduate programs abroad or at least attend language courses abroad where they could have experience in living in a culturally and socially different environment or learn about distinctive societies. Erasmus+ projects or Comenius programs could also be useful in that teachers would have an intercultural experience. However, supporting such overseas experience with certain intercultural trainings where teachers could reflect on their experiences is also crucial.

## **Conclusion**

### **Brief Summary of the Study**

The purpose of the current study was to determine the intercultural sensitivity level of teachers employed in various professions and to look for any associations between demographic variables and teachers' IS scores. ISS was used to detect the level of teachers' IS. The questionnaire received responses from 214 teachers. SPSS IBM v20 was used to evaluate the data. Age, gender, level of teaching and the type of institution where the teachers

worked were shown to have no discernible impact on the teachers' overall IS. The IS of teachers was positively correlated with the length of their overseas experience, and instructors with overseas experience had much higher IS than teachers without it. Additionally, instructors of English had a much higher IS than teachers of general topics, and teachers of several languages had a significantly higher IS than their monolingual counterparts.

### **Implications**

The current study provided evidence for earlier research regarding the impact of overseas experience on the IS of individuals. Therefore, in-service teachers should be provided with the opportunities to work and study abroad. This could be achieved with Erasmus+ projects or some exchange programs. Teachers may be enticed to pursue their MA or PhD overseas or may be provided with the opportunity to take some summer courses there. However, their overseas experience should be endorsed with pre-departure in-service courses that educated them on the value of gaining intercultural competence and sensitivity. They ought to be given the opportunity to reflect on what they learned from such an international intercultural experience during a post-program session as well. Opportunities to participate in critical and theoretical reflection appear to be necessary for developing as an interculturally responsive teacher. The current study also revealed that the length of overseas experience is critical to the growth of intercultural sensitivity. Consequently, study or work abroad programs should be prolonged enough to promote the development of these abilities.

The results of the current study also indicated that English language teachers had significantly higher intercultural sensitivity than the teachers of general subjects. Furthermore, participant teachers' intercultural sensitivity is boosted by their knowledge of a second or third language. Therefore, it is highly recommended to offer teachers of general subjects some free courses where they can acquire a foreign language. These courses could serve as a component of their professional growth.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

There are certain actions that can be implemented in the future studies to address the limitations of the current study. Firstly, because convenience samples are frequently specific to the particular group of participants who were accessible and willing to participate at the time of the study, they may not be generalizable to other groups or circumstances. Therefore, given the type of sampling method and the modest size of the sampling, studies can be carried out with a larger sample size and by using one of the probability sampling strategies. Secondly, some other variables such as having a friend from overseas countries, teachers' experience in teaching, and teachers' professional qualifications might also be taken into account in future research. Finally, it is essential to do follow-up research to explore instructors' deeper perspectives of intercultural sensitivity and related factors that may affect cultural sensitivity. Therefore, focus group interviews or individual semi-structured interviews might allow for the collection of more in-depth information since teachers would be able to share more insightful information on their high intercultural sensitivity.

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