

Investigating the Impact of Intercultural Communicative Competence Training at High School Setting

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Abstract: This study uses a mixed research method to examine the effects of a five-week intercultural competence (ICC) training program on 9th-grade high school students. Analysis of paired-sample t-tests revealed a significant increase in overall ICC levels, particularly in the knowledge and consciousness dimensions, indicating the training's effectiveness. However, despite the statistical significance of these results, the small effect sizes suggest that its impact is limited. Additionally, no significant changes were observed in the affective, behavioral, and self-efficacy dimensions, indicating that the training did not immediately alter attitudes or behaviors. On the other hand, interviews revealed that while students initially had limited cultural perspectives, mainly focusing on surface aspects and national stereotypes, the training broadened their views. Participants reported becoming more mindful of cultural differences and gaining new insights, such as understanding culture shock. There is a noticeable gap in ICC research related to high school students. The study highlights the importance of integrating ICC into English language learning to better prepare students for effective interaction in an increasingly globalized world.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

Kültürlerarası

Lise

Eğitim

Lise Bağlamında Kültürlerarası İletişim Yetkinliği Eğitimin Etkisinin Araştırması

Özet: Bu çalışma, 9. sınıf lise öğrencilerine yönelik beş haftalık bir kültürlerarası iletişim yetkinliği (KIY) eğitim programının etkisini incelemek için karma bir araştırma yöntemi kullanmıştır. Bağımlı örneklem t-testleri analizi, genel KIY seviyelerinde ve de özellikle bilgi ve bilinç boyutlarında bir artış olduğunu ortaya koymuş ve eğitimin etkinliğini göstermiştir. Ancak, bu sonuçlar istatistiksel olarak anlamlı olmasına rağmen, küçük etki büyüklükleri eğitimin etkisinin sınırlı olduğunu önermektedir. Ayrıca, duygusal, davranışsal ve öz-yeterlik boyutlarında anlamlı değişiklikler gözlemlenmemiş olup, bu durum eğitimin tutum veya davranışları hemen değiştirmedikçe göstermektedir. Öte yandan, görüşmeler öğrencilerin başlangıçta yüzeysel unsurlar ve ulusal stereotiplere odaklanan sınırlı kültürel bakış açlarına sahip olduklarını ortaya koymuştur; ancak eğitim, perspektiflerini genişletmiştir. Katılımcılar, kültürel farklılıklara daha fazla dikkat etmeye başladıklarını ve kültür şoku gibi yeni kavramları öğrendiklerini bildirmiştir. Lise öğrencilerine yönelik ICC araştırmalarında belirgin bir boşluk bulunmaktadır. Çalışma, ICC'nin İngilizce dil öğrenimine entegrasyonunun, öğrencileri giderek daha küreselleşen dünyada etkili etkileşimler için daha iyi hazırlamak adına önemini vurgulamaktadır.

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1. Introduction

English as a lingua franca facilitates interactions with people across the globe, transcending national boundaries (Baker, 2011; Crystal, 2003). Furthermore, the rising migration rate promotes significant intercultural exchanges among diverse cultural backgrounds (Kim et al., 2023). Consequently, many countries are home to various cultures, traditions, and social norms. Intercultural communicative competence (hereafter ICC) is already a key concern in multiple areas, including administration, marketing, healthcare, and education (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). In addition to interculturally diverse workplaces, schools also host various cultures from all around the world. The capacity to communicate in these intercultural environments is essential for building successful relationships (Fantini, 2000). English is the most commonly spoken language worldwide, and native English speakers are now outnumbered by non-native English (Graddol, 2006). As an international language, English is the primary language for ICC (Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Crystal, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2005).

Some high school students have extrinsic motivation to learn English. They study English to get good grades, get job opportunities, and get overseas education. However, some are intrinsically motivated to learn English. They study English for pleasure and satisfaction, such as by playing online international games (Jensen, 2017; Sundqvist & Wikström, 2015). They also participate in extramural activities such as digital English learning (Lee, 2019). Additionally, they engage in international projects and interact on social media platforms (Mahaputri et al., 2024). Through these activities, they interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and communicate in English as an international language. High school students should acquire English, understand different cultures, and develop skills for effective intercultural interaction. Since language and culture are intertwined and indispensable elements, it is essential for second language teaching to include cultural components (Baker, 2011).

The school education system in Türkiye often focuses on cross-cultural competence, comparing national cultures. The transition from a modernist to a postmodernist view of teaching culture has promoted ICC education in second language education (Kramsch, 2013, 2014). ICC instruction differs from cross-cultural education, which presents culture as static and focuses primarily on inner countries like the United Kingdom or the United States (Kachru, 1990). It reflects a more dynamic and liquid culture (Baker, 2022; Byram, 2021; Dervin, 2011) and underlines liquid interculturality (Dervin & Dirba, 2006). Culture cannot confine national boundaries and extends far beyond with its dynamic nature and fluidity. (Dervin & Dirba, 2006). Although ICC has been discussed in the literature for decades, it is not taught in English classrooms or presented in English language coursebooks.

Avoiding narrow viewpoints, stereotypes, and discriminatory behavior is critical in the globalized world. Educators and policymakers need to be aware of global changes, as our students must be prepared for the requirements of the new century. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering ICC through their teaching, and policymakers should incorporate intercultural education objectives into English language curricula (Byram, 2001; Byram et al., 2023). As future leaders, high school students must develop ICC to interact with an increasingly interconnected world.

Like many countries, Türkiye hosts people from various cultural backgrounds and nations. The Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE hereafter) presents programs as a precaution for these developments. The national institution prepares documents such as the Support Program for Integrating Refugee Children into Education (MoNE, 2023), the Psychoeducation Program for Migration (MoNE, 2020), and The Path to Integration (MoNE, 2019). However, these strategies primarily focus on migrating adolescents by helping them make sense of their

migration experiences. There is also a need for intercultural curriculum or training programs that cater to all students in the country.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

ICC facilitates interaction and negotiation between people from different cultures within specific contexts and involves the appropriate use of language in diverse cultural settings (Byram, 1997), and is a crucial competence of the 21st century. ICC developed from communicative competence, encompassing linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competencies. Various researchers have presented different ICC models (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Sercu, 2005). In English Language Teaching (ELT hereafter), Byram's (1997) model is considered one of the most effective, and this study is based on his framework. According to this model, the key components of ICC are attitudes, knowledge, relational skills, and critical cultural awareness. Critical cultural awareness involves engaging and negotiating in intercultural settings and the ability to make inferences and evaluations from both explicit and implicit materials or situations within our own culture and others. (Byram, 2008).

Effective communication requires more than linguistic, grammatical, and phonological knowledge. Interculturally competent individuals should possess a variety of abilities to interact effectively in intercultural environments, including tolerance, empathy, curiosity, openness, self-awareness, the capability to perceive the world from others' perspectives, and the competence to understand others' viewpoints (Gupta, 2002; Sercu, 2005).

However, the Turkish National Education high school curriculum mostly focuses on cross-cultural competence, usually comparing national cultures in visible aspects like cuisine, costumes, and holidays (Uygur, 2019). These surface aspects of culture resemble the waterline in Hall's (1976) iceberg model, with behaviors and customs above the waterline and values and beliefs below, which are more related to ICC, which differs from cross-cultural competence, includes group cultures, and is not limited to national cultures. It focuses on the communicative aspect and emphasizes cultural similarities (Gudykunst, 2003). Underlining differences can lead to stereotyping and bias, which causes discrimination. It is critical to avoid ethnocentrism, narrow points of view, and stereotypes, which cannot represent entire societies and cause communication problems among different cultures (Berry et al., 2012).

Students should develop ICC to interact effectively with people from various cultural backgrounds, and they need explicit knowledge and training on ICC (Chen & Starosta, 2012) and a positive attitude toward cultural diversity. Successful ICC in English involves several key features and abilities, including a positive attitude, behavioral flexibility, open-mindedness, self-awareness, and a non-judgmental approach toward people from different cultures. (Chen, 1997; Stewart, 2022). Students need cultural knowledge and activities to internalize and be interculturally competent individuals.

While there are problematic issues with English language teaching textbooks (Arıkan, 2009; Chao, 2011; Khan & Taş, 2020; Zorba & Cakir, 2019), many researchers argue that an increasing number of non-native English speakers are claiming ownership of the language (Baker, 2011; Guilherme, 2007; Holliday, 2009).

MoNE High School English curriculum (2018) states that with technology and social media usage, digital native students can access authentic and intercultural environments that provide communication opportunities and insights into other cultures. English, as the *lingua franca* (Baker, 2016; Crystal, 2003), offers opportunities to contact other cultures. However, the

curriculum is problematic (Zorba & Arıkan, 2016) and does not fully address the cultural diversity presented in high schools. It underlines the importance of cultural values and culturally sensitive, unbiased attitudes toward others and other cultures and primarily presents cultures as national cultures. In contrast, many cultures exist, even within small classroom environments. Students should be taught to interact in intercultural environments.

When the relevant literature is checked, there are many studies on ICC. A mixed-method research study on EFL (English as a Foreign Language) prospective teachers showed that negotiation and active learning task-based role-playing activities yielded successful results in both language proficiency and ICC. (Akiyama, 2017; Chao, 2013; Hismanoglu, 2011; Juan-Garau & Jacob, 2015; Sobacı, 2024; Tsareva et al., 2020; Zorba, 2023). Chao (2013) investigated the perspectives of EFL students in an intercultural course using foreign films as a teaching method based on learner diaries. The results demonstrated that many participants valued the intercultural course and significantly improved their acquisition of intercultural motivations, attitudes, knowledge, and awareness. A quasi-experimental study by Tural (2021) post-test results showed that using short stories would enhance intercultural awareness among EFL students. Sarıkayis (2022) studied secondary school students' attitudes toward English courses and the relationship between intercultural awareness and emotional competence, finding a positive relationship between emotional competence and intercultural awareness perceptions. Zorba and Çakır's (2019) study on English coursebooks revealed problematic aspects, including an imbalanced representation of cultural elements related to home, target, and other cultures. However, implementing intercultural awareness activities was effective, resulting in increased intercultural interaction and interest. Another study by Uygur (2019), which involved a document analysis of a coursebook designed by the Turkish Ministry of National Education, found that the coursebook included minimal intercultural elements.

As presented above, there are many studies on ICC, but most focus on higher education, preparatory students, and pre-service and in-service ELT teachers. However, there is a noticeable gap in ICC research related to high school students (Heggernes, 2021). To address this gap, the researcher developed a curriculum with various activities to enhance ICC among high school students and conducted a study to investigate the impact of this training. This study is significant for two reasons: To the best of our knowledge, it is the first mixed-methods research on ICC conducted in a high school setting in Türkiye, and it provides valuable insights into the perceptions of Turkish high school students regarding ICC and its training. The researcher developed a curriculum with various activities to enhance high school students (ICC), and the study investigated the following research questions.

1. Do the learners' ICC levels differ significantly in the experimental after the training?
2. What do learners report about their experiences and insights from the ICC training program?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study implemented a mixed-method research design, blending quantitative and qualitative methods. Integrating these methods helps the researcher see the whole picture of the subject and find answers to the questions in all aspects Creswell (2012). Quantitative data were collected via the Intercultural Competence Scale (ICS), while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews designed by the researcher. The researcher

collected quantitative data before and after ICC training to handle a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the training on 9th-grade high school students.

The implementation process lasted for six weeks. In the research, extra weeks were allocated at the beginning and end of the study, specifically to gather quantitative data related to the pre-test and post-test. Before the intervention, the pre-test was given to comprehend participants' knowledge and understanding of ICC. This first assessment provided a starting point and a reference for evaluating any changes or developments throughout the study. In the same way, soon after the training, the last week was reserved for administering the post-test. The post-test was given to assess whether training helped to improve participants' ICC levels by comparing the pre-test and post-test findings.

2.2. Participants

The study was conducted in 2023 at a public school in Adana, Türkiye, where the researcher had worked as an assistant principal and English teacher for seven years. Convenience sampling was used to assess the implementation process's practicality and the participants' accessibility (Muijs, 2022).

The institution implements a special program, enrolling students based on examination results. Over the past five years, the school's success rate has been approximately 0.36-1.58 percent. As an advanced placement (AP) school, it annually offers AP courses such as English and Celsus. Additionally, some students participate in the American Field Service (AFS) Exchange Program each year. Many graduates go on to study at medical or engineering faculties and are interested in Erasmus+ exchange programs or pursuing MA degrees abroad. Each year, students from all grade levels at our school organize a Model United Nations (MUN) conference. This event is an educational simulation where students negotiate on pressing global issues and collaborate to find solutions. Additionally, students also participate in MUN conferences held across the country.

The participants' age range was between 14 and 15 years old. In the 9th grade, there were six classes, each with approximately 30 students. These classes were divided into three experimental groups and three control groups. Out of 180 students, 148 voluntarily participated in the study. Of these, 74 students were in the experimental group and 74 in the control group. The experimental groups received training in their classes, with group sizes of 24, 26, and 24 students, respectively. The experimental group had 42 females and 32 males, while the control group comprised 36 females and 38 males.

Table 1.
Participant Demographics and Preferences

Characteristic	Category	Count (N)
Gender	Female	78
	Male	70
Wish to live abroad	Yes	95
	No	53
Having friends from different cultures	Yes	63
	No	85

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics and cultural preferences of the participants. It categorizes the data into three main areas: self-identification, desire to live abroad, and having friends from different cultures. The gender distribution among the students was notably balanced, comprising 78 female and 70 male participants. According to the

participants' self-reported responses, most students expressed themselves as Turkish citizens, while only 17 identified as global citizens. Regarding the desire to live abroad, 95 participants expressed a willingness to do so, while 53 students responded with a preference against living abroad. The responses related to friendships from different cultures showed that a total of 63 students reported having friends from different cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, a larger group of 85 students indicated that they did not have friends from different cultures.

2.3. Data Collection

The scale developed by Chao (2014) and adapted to Turkish by Sari and Özdil (2022) was used for this study. It includes five factors: affective orientation to intercultural interaction, display of intercultural consciousness, self-efficacy in intercultural situations, knowledge of intercultural interaction, and behavioral performance. The ICS has high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient value of .93. The researcher adhered to all ethical guidelines before starting the research. First, permission to use the adapted scale version was requested and approved via email. The researcher then submitted all required documents to the Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Ethics Committee, and the application was approved. Following this, the researcher submitted the Ethics Committee approval document, along with other necessary documents, to the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) to obtain official permission to conduct the research at a public high school, and this application was also approved. Following these, participants were informed about the ethical guidelines concerning confidentiality and anonymity of the research. The researcher gave detailed information to parents about the research procedure and the ICC training at the first-semester parent meeting. Since the participants were under 18, the researcher obtained consent forms from the students and their parents. These permissions were required for the Ethics Committee and the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) to approve the permission for the research.

The data collection procedure began with a pre-test to comprehend participants' initial perspectives regarding ICC. The researcher sent the Google form link to the students via WhatsApp message. Soon after the pre-test, the researcher conducted the ICC training procedure for six weeks, with two lessons (40 minutes for one lesson) each week. The training procedure is presented in the data collection section in detail. The post-test Google link was sent again after the training sessions to evaluate participants' understanding and learning outcomes. In addition to the qualitative data from the IC survey, the quantitative data was collected via semi-structured interview questions. The sessions were conducted with twelve randomly selected students (seven female and six male). The researcher checked the literature related to the ICC to ensure that the questions were comprehensive and aligned with the research questions. The questions also aimed to get detailed responses to the participants' perspectives, experiences, and insights on ICC and training procedures. The interviews were conducted online using the Microsoft Teams program and lasted approximately 30 minutes. They were conducted in Turkish to allow participants to express themselves more efficiently and comfortably. The program transcribed the process in real time, and the interview transcripts were subsequently translated into English.

2.3.1 ICC Training Procedure

The ICC training procedure is presented in the table below. In week one, the focus was on aspects of culture. Students explored key elements of culture, such as language, time, space, and communication patterns. This week also covered the iceberg concept of culture, which

illustrates surface-level aspects, such as costumes and cuisine, and deeper aspects, such as beliefs and values.

Week two shifts to cross-cultural competence, emphasizing the impact of cultural differences on interactions. During the session, Hofstede’s five dimensions of national cultural diversity (2001) survey was presented in detail, initially sparking significant interest among the students. These dimensions provided a framework for understanding cultural differences across countries. However, the presentation also highlighted the potential issues with such generalizations. It emphasized that reducing dynamic cultures to just five static dimensions can oversimplify complex realities and reinforce stereotypes. For instance, examples like women working as bus drivers and fathers taking care of their babies challenge the notion of cultures being strictly masculine or feminine. The discussion underlined that while Hofstede’s framework is practical, it does not fully capture the diversity and complexity of cultural experiences.

Table 2
ICC Training Program Syllabus

Week	Topics
-	Pre-test
1	Culture and aspects of culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language/time/space/ communication Patterns • The iceberg concept of culture
2	Cross-cultural competence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A critical review of Hofstede’s five dimensions of national cultural diversity (2001)
3	From communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linguistic competence • Sociolinguistic competence • Pragmatic competence • Using English in an inclusive way • Curiosity and open-mindedness • Reducing negative prejudice
4	From communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and avoiding bias and stereotypes • Identifying and avoiding ethnocentric perspective • Develop an intercultural speaker’s perspective
5	Living in a multicultural world <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture shock and its stages • Acculturation process
-	Post-test

The next session focused on the evolution from basic communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence. Linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competence were presented. The focus then shifts to intercultural skills, highlighting the importance of inclusive language, curiosity, open-mindedness, and reducing prejudice. The session also focused on identifying and avoiding biases, stereotypes, and ethnocentrism and developing an intercultural perspective to enhance understanding and communication of cultures. The goal was to foster an environment where prejudice was reduced and intercultural interactions were handled with sensitivity and respect.

Week five addresses the experience of living in a multicultural world. Topics include culture shock and its stages, which describe the challenges individuals may face when adapting to new cultural environments. The acculturation process was also discussed, focusing on how

individuals adjust and integrate into different cultural contexts over time. During the sessions, the researcher presented each topic in detail and then enhanced the learning experience through interactive speaking tasks, which included discussions and sharing personal experiences. This method allowed participants to deepen their understanding and apply the concepts practically. Students reflected on the topics and shared their experiences, further enriching the sessions. Additionally, the researcher incorporated authentic materials, such as YouTube videos and photographs, throughout the training to support the learning process.

2.4. Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from the scale were analyzed using SPSS 25 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. The normality of the data distribution was checked using skewness and kurtosis values. As presented in Table 1, the pre-test skewness score was -.224, the kurtosis was .576, the post-test skewness score was -.067, and the kurtosis was -.249. According to George and Mallery (2012), a kurtosis score between ± 1.0 is ideal, while a score between ± 2.0 is acceptable. After the normality distribution of the data was tested, descriptive statistics were calculated for the pre-test and post-test results, including mean scores and standard deviations. Paired-sample t-tests were conducted to determine the significance of changes in ICC levels and for each scale factor.

The qualitative data was conducted for thematic analysis. Initially, the interview data were organized to align with the study's research questions and broader conceptual framework. In the next step, irrelevant and repetitive sections were removed. The transcripts were then analyzed to explore participants' cultural perceptions and views on ICC training, including the metaphors they used. This thematic analysis provided rich, contextual insights that complemented the quantitative findings, offering a comprehensive understanding of the training's impact on students' beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and perspectives (Lichtman, 2023).

Table 3.

Skewness and Kurtosis Scores

IC Scale	Skewness	Kurtosis
Pre-test IC Scale	-.224	.576
Post-test IC Scale	-.067	-.249

3. Findings

3.1. Research Question 1: Do the learners' ICC levels differ significantly in the experimental after the training?

In this study, a five-week ICC training program intervened to enhance and assess ICC levels of high school students. Table four presents paired-sample t-test results for comparing pre and post-test and five dimensions of ICC scales. The overall pre-and-post-test results revealed a statistically significant difference between the tests. Among the five dimensions, the knowledge and consciousness dimension substantially improved, indicating statistical significance and the intervention's effectiveness. On the other hand, Cohen's values were calculated for the overall ICC test and knowledge and consciousness dimensions. The results showed that little effect size with values 0.021, 0.042, and 0,021, respectively. However, affective, behavioral, and self-efficacy dimensions did not differ significantly.

Table 4.
Paired Samples T-test and Effect Size for Paired Samples Results

	Paired Differences			<i>t</i>	df	Sig (2- tailed)	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	Mean	SD	St. Error Mean				
PRE-TEST IC			.058				
POST-TEST IC	0.16	.680	.062	-2.766	147	.006*	0.021
Pre-Knowledge	0.34	7.161	.056	-5.200	147	.000*	0.042
Post-Knowledge			.061				
Pre-Affective	-0.11	5.872	.409	1.456	147	.148	
Post-Affective			.425				
Pre-Self efficacy	013	2.765	.235	-1.813	147	.072	
Pos-Self efficacy			.222				
Pre-Behavioral	0.13	4.846	.416	-1.967	147	.051	
Post-Behavioral			.446				
Pre-Consciousness	0.18	4.739	.416	-2.792	147	.006*	0.021
Post-Consciousness			.420				

* p<.05

3.2. Research Question 2: What do learners report about their experiences and insights related to the ICC training program?

The participants first answered the interview questions in Turkish, and their responses were then translated into English. When the participants were asked about the definition of culture and its features, they provided various insights indicating that culture is related to clothing, food, lifestyle choices, social life, language usage, traditional practices, social norms, and behavioral patterns. Among them, the second student offered a different perspective. The participant underlined the changing nature of the culture and illustrated the statement below:

S2: Although culture changes over time, I believe its fundamental essence remains unchanged. On the other hand, change is inherent in everything in our lives; our lifestyle shapes our culture and changes over time.

When the participant's ideas were asked about generalizations about nations, all the participants, except one, stated that generalizations about the nations are nonsense and do not represent individuals living in a culture or a country. However, one participant offered a dissenting opinion, noting that these generalizations might be valid in some aspects. These reflections highlight the students' understanding of culture, emphasizing the complexity and fluidity of the culture. The following excerpt from the following student elucidates this perspective.

S13: General statements about cultures may not reflect the entire truth because these generalizations will always have contradictions. I think it is absurd and wrong to fit an entire country into a stereotype. However, since such stereotypical expressions are formed through many people's experiences, I believe there is some truth to these generalizations.

When the participants were asked about people from different cultures, participants described them as good and respectful. They stated that their communication experiences were diverse, providing relief from monotonous routines and entertainment. The statements are presented below:

S3: I was already positive about them before. I am still looking forward to it. I believe cultures should interact with each other.

S4: There are stereotypes, which are generally very cliché statements, and I believe it is wrong to approach a society in this way. In other words, an individual does not represent the entirety of society,

S6: With the internet, many things in the world have become similar. The only difference is our various languages. It is absurd to view one person's behavior as representative of an entire culture; everyone is responsible for their behavior.

During the interviews, it was realized that all the students think of national cultures when they are asked about other cultures. The sixth participant explained the reason for this case.

S6: When I think of different cultures, many things come to my mind, but basically, these are the things that come to mind because we were taught about international cultures in primary school.

Another participant also stated why different cultures are often related to national cultures.

S12: If I were to answer directly about various cultures without thinking deeply, I would resemble national cultures only, but if I think about it a little more, I realize that there are different cultures within our country as well.

These explanations demonstrate how students' perceptions of different cultures are shaped by early education and highlight the importance of broadening these perspectives. The sixth participant shared his opinions after the training session.

S6: I had never thought about the elements that make up culture, such as the idea that the actions of a group of people should not be taken personally. However, during the lesson, I agreed with this perspective and found it to be true.

When asked about their opinions on ICC training, some participants noted that it significantly reduced cultural stereotypes among students.

S2: We learned that we should not judge every person the same way. Just as there is a perception about Turks, not all of us conform to that perception. People in foreign countries also attracted my attention in that respect. There are aspects of a country's culture that we do not see as well as the aspects we see. In other words, it is very wrong to make a general judgment or stereotype immediately.

Nearly all the interviewees noted that they had never heard about culture shock before; some made inferences about the case as follows:

S3: I've never heard of culture shock before, but I think, for example, some of the cultures, customs, and lifestyles of the Chinese seem strange to us. You know, we are surprised when we hear this. If so, culture shock. But if it's not that, I have no idea.

Some participants explained culture shock as follows:

S8: I can imagine the culture shock. Is it the feeling of not belonging that we experience when we go abroad due to cultural differences? When what we do is different from what they do, one has to adapt. He needs to learn about that culture and at least know what he has seen of that culture, and I think this can be called culture shock.

Some of them indicated that they realized different aspects of culture and illustrated as follows:

S4: With the information you provided, we focused on different branches of culture. For example, we had mountain images and realized that the underlying cultural values were more important than superficiality.

4. Discussion

This study evaluated the impact of ICC training on 9th-grade high school students. These findings can be interpreted based on Byram's (2021) process model of intercultural competence. According to this model, ICC is a developmental process involving enhancing knowledge and awareness, interpretation skills, openness, curiosity, and discovery, with critical cultural awareness at its core. The overall post-test scale scores and the scores for the knowledge and awareness dimensions indicate positive outcomes. However, while these results are statistically significant, the small effect sizes suggest that the practical impact of these findings is limited. This contrast highlights that although the results are statistically significant, their real-world significance may be minimal. Additionally, the interview results support the quantitative findings, with participants expressing their improved ICC after the treatment. The study findings are consistent with the conclusions from Chao (2013), Keshmirshakan (2019), Lin and Wang (2018), Sarikays (2022), Stewart (2022), Tsareva et al. (2020), Vu and Tran (2023), Zorba and Çakır (2019). The findings of these studies revealed that participants showed cognitive and behavioral changes following their involvement in ICC training. This highlights the process for explicit knowledge and training on ICC and the need for a positive attitude toward cultural diversity. However, no statistically significant difference was found in terms of affective, behavioral, and self-efficacy dimensions, and the findings resemble Tural's (2021) study. This result suggests that while explicit knowledge can enhance students' understanding of intercultural concepts, it may not immediately transform attitudes or behaviors.

On the other hand, a five-month study increased ELF students' awareness of their own culture and a deeper understanding of how cultural backgrounds influence values, beliefs, and behavior (Lázár, 2015). Likewise, the two-month transnational telecollaborative project on global education tasks also improved the ICC levels of EFL learners according to Byram's framework (Öztürk & Ekşi, 2022). It can be concluded that the longitudinal studies with limited participants are more effective in fostering ICC among the learners.

In addition to some drawbacks, the study also yielded some positive results, supporting the claim that the ICC training implementation process was beneficial. The participants stated that after the ICC training, they gained knowledge of various cultures and how to cope with difficulties in specific intercultural situations. After participating in ICC activities, they reported becoming more mindful of cultural issues and experiencing new concepts, such as culture shock. These activities effectively deepened participants' understanding of different cultural backgrounds and helped them to reduce cultural stereotypes.

Based on the findings, several implications can be drawn for authorities, curriculum, and material developers for English learners and the overall English language teaching and learning environment. The ability to communicate in a foreign language is no longer the only goal of language learning. High school students should be taught critical cultural awareness skills and how to negotiate in intercultural environments from an early age. This will enable them to navigate intercultural settings effectively and meet the requirements of being global citizens.

Teachers play a crucial role in fostering ICC through their teaching. They can integrate ICC into their English classes by developing a network of competencies in ICC activities (Kök & Koç, 2024). Students might be encouraged to participate in extramural activities (Uztosun & Kök, 2024). To create intercultural learning environments, ELT teachers can present virtual facilities such as telecollaboration projects among individuals from diverse cultures. In-

service and pre-service ELT teachers might need additional information and abilities to support the intercultural learning process. Their requirements should be supported through training and workshops. They can be equipped with tools.

This study has several limitations. First, the small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, as it may not fully represent the diverse population of EFL high school learners in Türkiye. Additionally, the dependence on self-report instruments may lead to potential bias, as participants might offer socially desirable answers instead of providing their real experiences and thoughts. Furthermore, the study was conducted in a single institution and may not fully reflect the variability across different schools. Additionally, employing diverse research designs and data collection methods would provide a more comprehensive understanding of high school students' experiences. Further research should include more diverse institutions and samples to generalize findings and enhance the participants' comprehensive range of experiences. Additionally, longitudinal studies might be conducted to investigate the long-term impact of ICC training on students, such as implementing real-life interaction via telecollaboration projects.

Authors' Note

This research paper is derived from the first author's PhD thesis, conducted under the supervision of the second author.

Note on Ethical Issues

Ethical permission for this study was attained from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University's Ethical Committee on 30/03/2023 with the decision number E-84026528-050.01.04-2300076926.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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