

FLT STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: A BURSA ULUDAĞ UNIVERSITY EXAMPLE

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ABSTRACT: *This study aimed to determine the level of intercultural competence of students who are studying in the Department of French Language Teaching in Bursa Uludağ University. The population of this study consists of 95 freshmen and senior FLT students in Bursa Uludağ University. This study is in a descriptive survey model. As the data collection tool, the "Intercultural Competence" scale developed by Fantini (2007)[1] was used. It was found that freshmen FLT students' level of intercultural competence was average ($\bar{X} = 3.33$), and senior FLT students' were high ($\bar{X} = 3.76$). When it comes to sub-dimensions of intercultural competence, it is seen that freshmen students' level of intercultural skills ($\bar{X} = 3.11$), intercultural attitude ($\bar{X} = 3.07$), and intercultural knowledge ($\bar{X} = 3.25$) are average, and intercultural awareness ($\bar{X} = 3.46$) are high while senior students' level of intercultural skills ($\bar{X} = 3.89$), intercultural attitude ($\bar{X} = 3.96$), intercultural knowledge ($\bar{X} = 4.11$) are high and intercultural awareness ($\bar{X} = 4.22$) is very high. The t-test results showed that there is a significant difference between freshman and senior students' level of intercultural competence ($t=3.198$, $p=0.035 < 0.05$). This can be said to show that the courses taken during FLT education affect students' intercultural competence in a positive way.*

Keywords: intercultural competence, French language teaching, FLT students

INTRODUCTION

With the changing conditions all over the world, developing communication and transportation tools, the possibility of different cultures' interaction increases. This interaction can be seen in many different communities, such as families, classrooms, and organizations, such as hospitals to factories. Educational organizations are one of them. Especially in higher education institutions, students' chance of encountering new cultures through courses they are taken, interaction with international students and so on. Especially, students of departments of foreign language teaching, and fine arts are highly possible to interact with different cultures, which makes intercultural competence important for those students. Before defining the concept of interculturalism, the meaning of culture should be understood. One of the commonly accepted definitions has been made by UNESCO [1], which is "all physical, spiritual, mental and logical features that define the character of a society or a social community". As it can be seen understood, learning a new culture requires a deep understanding of that society's physical or spiritual features. As it is known, in both undergraduate programs of foreign language teaching departments and departments of fine arts, there are many courses that students take related to the culture of the language they are learning. This would certainly contribute to students' knowledge and awareness of the culture. Learning a new culture, together with a new language, can be said to require being interculturally competent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As it was explained above, intercultural competence is an important concept for today's world. In order to understand the importance of this concept, the meaning of intercultural competence should be clearly understood. Like many other concepts, intercultural competence has been defined in many different ways, which have some common concepts.

Repečkienė, Kvedaraitė ve Jankauskienė [2] defined this concept as "the individual's ability to interact with the people who are members of another group, culture or a community". Deardorff [3] on the other hand, explained this concept as "behaving effectively and accordingly to intercultural knowledge, attitude, skills, and reflections". Moreover, Berardo [4] defined this concept as "the capacity of behaving effectively and accordingly by using the intercultural sources". All of the definitions included here showed that although there are different definitions, the concept of intercultural competence includes having knowledge about different cultures, having positive attitudes towards learning new cultures, effective communication with people from different cultures. To understand intercultural competence deeply, there are some classifications made ([5], [6], [7]). Byram [5] divided intercultural competence into five dimensions. These dimensions are positive "attitude" for learning a new culture, "knowledge" about cultures and how to adapt to them, "interpreting and relating skills" for an event that belongs to another culture rather than his/hers. And making a connection with his/her own culture, "exploring and interacting skills" for gathering new information about a different culture and "critical cultural awareness" to be able to evaluate cultures in a critical way.

Another classification was put forward by Deardorff [8], and it is called the "pyramid model". The pyramid model has four steps, related to five dimensions. Deardorff [8], suggested that the four steps of this model are obligatory for an individual to have intercultural competence. The first step and the first dimension is called as "requisite attitudes". Deardorff [8], emphasized this model as the beginning of having intercultural competence. The requisite attitudes include respect, openness, curiosity, and exploring. The next dimension and the first dimension of the second step is "knowledge and comprehension". The competencies of this dimension are the individual's awareness of her/his own

culture and others' culture, awareness of the effect of a social factor on the use of language and skills of reading the culture and having the information about the culture and understanding. The third dimension is "skills". Listening to people from other cultures, observing other cultures, interpreting them, evaluating and relating the cultures are included in this dimension. The third and fourth steps and dimensions are "desired internal outcome" and "desired external outcome". The "desired internal outcome" dimension is about adaptation to new cultural environments, flexibility about choosing and using the appropriate communication styles, and empathy. Lastly, the fifth dimension, "desired external outcome", includes having the skills of communication and behaving accordingly and effectively.

Bennett [7] made another classification and divided the intercultural competence into three dimensions, which are cognitive, affective and behavioural skills. The intercultural awareness, general knowledge and specific cultural knowledge are the aspects of the cognitive dimension. The affective dimension of intercultural competence includes an individual's curiosity towards other cultures, cognitive flexibility, motivation to learn new cultures and cultural elements, and being open-minded towards differences. The last dimension of intercultural competence is behavioural skills and it is made up of the ability to communicate with people from different cultures, listening to them, problem-solving, empathy, and gathering information.

In addition to the classification explained above, Fantini [6] made another classification about intercultural competence, which divides it into four dimensions. These dimensions are intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitude, intercultural skill, and intercultural awareness. Intercultural knowledge is defined as an individual's ability to gather knowledge about elements of his/her own culture together with another culture which s/he interacts with. Fantini [6] also added the ability to have the necessary information that will be helpful for the individual to communicate with people from a different culture. The second dimension, intercultural attitude, is about being open and having respect to, interest in and curiosity about different cultures [8]. In addition to these, being risk-oriented, respecting differences, and having empathy are other intercultural attitudes [9, 10.]

The other dimension of Fantini's [6] model is the intercultural skill. This concept is defined as an individual's being able to listen to people from other cultures, examine other cultures, interpret, analyze, evaluate and relate them with his / her own culture [8]. Also, being able to learn a foreign language, face the difficulties experienced during the process of learning a new language, skills to compare and contrast languages with each other, listening skills, information gathering skills, and problem-solving skills are among the intercultural skills ([9], [10]). The last dimension of this model is intercultural awareness. This dimension includes the ability to realize the similarities and differences between her/his own culture and the other culture with a critical point of view [5]. This dimension is also about an individual's positive approach to improving her/his attitudes, knowledge and skills while learning her/his own culture and other cultures.

Within the light of the information above, the main aim of the study is to determine whether there is a significant difference between the level of intercultural competence of freshmen and senior students who are studying French Language Teaching, which is a foreign language for Turkey where the study is conducted. The research problems of this study are:

- What is the level of intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitude, intercultural skill and intercultural awareness which are sub-dimensions of intercultural competence of FLT students at Bursa Uludağ University?
- Is there a significant difference between FLT students' level of intercultural competence depending on their classroom level?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is in the model of a descriptive survey that aims to define the level of intercultural competence of FLT students at Bursa Uludağ University. The population of this study included 95 freshmen and senior students at the Faculty of Education at Bursa Uludağ University. The 26 of the students were male (27.37%), and the 69 were female (72.63%). 53 of the students were freshmen (55.79%), and the 42 were senior students (44.21%). The data collection tool of this study was the "Intercultural Competence Scale" developed by Fantini [6]. This scale consists of 53 items and they are formed as 5-Likert type. There are four sub-dimensions in the scale which are "knowledge", "attitude", "skills" and "awareness".

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to determine the level of intercultural competence of FLT students, the arithmetic mean was taken as criteria. The range was determined as ranges were evaluated as 1.00-1.79 "very low", 1.80-2.59 "low", 2.60-3.39 "average", 3.40-4.19 "high", and 4.20-5.00 "very high". In order to analyze whether the level of intercultural competence of FLT students showed a significant difference depending on their classroom level, independent samples t-test was used.

The results of FLT students' level of intercultural competence are presented in Table 1. The results show that freshmen students' level of intercultural competence is average ($\bar{X} = 3.33$), while the level of intercultural competence of senior students is very high ($\bar{X} = 3.76$). When it comes to sub-dimensions of intercultural competence, it is seen that freshmen students' level of intercultural skills ($\bar{X} = 3.11$), intercultural attitude ($\bar{X} = 3.07$), and intercultural knowledge ($\bar{X} = 3.25$) are average, and intercultural awareness ($\bar{X} = 3.46$) are high while senior students' level of intercultural skills ($\bar{X} = 3.89$), intercultural attitude ($\bar{X} = 3.96$), intercultural knowledge ($\bar{X} = 4.11$) are high and intercultural awareness ($\bar{X} = 4.22$) is very high.

Table 1: Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation Values of Intercultural Competence and Its Sub-Dimensions

Sub-Dimensions		N	\bar{X}	Ss
Intercultural Skills	Freshmen	53	3.11	0.78
	Senior	42	3.89	0.65
Intercultural Attitude	Freshmen	53	3.07	0.89
	Senior	42	3.96	0.74
Intercultural Knowledge	Freshmen	53	3.25	0.96
	Senior	42	4.11	0.81
Intercultural Awareness	Freshmen	53	3.46	0.85
	Senior	42	4.22	0.76
Intercultural Competence	Freshmen	53	3.33	0.72
	Senior	42	3.76	0.69

t-test was used to analyze whether the level of intercultural competence of FLT students showed a significant difference depending on their classroom level. The t-test results showed that the FLT students' level of intercultural competence and its sub-dimensions showed significant differences depending on their classroom level ($t=3.198, p=0.035 < 0.05$) (Table 2).

Table 2: The Results of Independent Samples t Test Related to FLT Students' Classroom Level

		N	\bar{X}	t	p
Intercultural Awareness	Freshmen	53	3.11	3.376	0.021
	Senior	42	3.89		
Intercultural Skills	Freshmen	53	3.07	3.525	0.010
	Senior	42	3.96		
Intercultural Knowledge	Freshmen	53	3.25	3.439	0.017
	Senior	42	4.11		
Intercultural Attitude	Freshmen	53	3.46	3.402	0.029
	Senior	42	4.22		
Intercultural Competence	Freshmen	53	3.33	3.198	0.035
	Senior	42	3.76		

CONCLUSION

Within this study, it was found that freshmen students' level of intercultural competence is average, while the level of intercultural competence of senior students is very high. When looked at the sub-dimensions, the results showed that freshmen students' level of intercultural skills, intercultural attitude, and intercultural knowledge are average, and intercultural awareness are high while senior students' level of intercultural skills, intercultural attitude, intercultural knowledge are high and intercultural awareness is very high. In addition, the t test results showed that there is a significant difference between freshmen and senior students' level of intercultural competence. These results showed the importance of interaction with the other culture in terms of

having a high level of intercultural competence. The senior FLT students take courses such as Reading Skills, French Language and Literature, French Culture and Language, Using Drama in French Language Teaching, French Linguistics. All of the courses mentioned here are likely to increase FLT students' familiarity with the French language and culture. Thus, they have learned how to learn new elements of another culture and language by improving their intercultural competence as Fantini [6] suggested. This study has similar results with Fantini's [6]. Fantini [6] conducted a study of volunteers who went to another country to help people who need help in terms of health and educational issues. The results showed that there was a significant difference between volunteers' intercultural competence when they went to that country at first, and when their mission finished. These results showed that interacting with a new country and culture increases intercultural competence. Similarly, Günçavdı and Polat [11] conducted a study on international students. They found out that international students' level of intercultural competence showed significant differences depending on it has been found out that the level of intercultural competence differs depending on whether they gathered information about Turkey before coming.

The relationship between intercultural competence and learning a language can be said to intertwine. They both affect each other in a positive way. Günçavdı and Polat [11] found that international students' level of Turkish language proficiency affected their intercultural competence with a positive correlation. Vice versa is valid and it can be said that if a person has a high level of intercultural competence, s/he might learn a language more easily.

The results of the study showed the importance of learning a foreign language to have a high level of intercultural competence. Thus, it can be suggested to include cultural elements in the foreign language curriculum as course materials in order to make students familiar with the culture of that language and to be interculturally competent. Also, students can be encouraged to go abroad with ERASMUS+ Exchange Programs or scholarships for bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and PhD. By doing this, they would be more qualified in terms of learning the language they are studying. Moreover, their level of intercultural competence would certainly increase since they would be interacting with a new culture.

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