Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Social Intelligence and Intercultural Sensitivity

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Abstract

In the 21st century, teachers are expected to help learners to get the ability of communicating with people from all over the world. In order to help students to gain the capability of communicating with people from different cultures and coping with the difficulties of various social and cultural environments, teachers themselves need to have those qualifications. Social intelligence or interpersonal intelligence is characterized by skills such as reading nonverbal cues and making inferences from the behavior of others. A socially intelligent individual is expected to have behavioral flexibility and to change his/her behavior depending on the circumstances of the situation. Intercultural sensitivity is the desire to motivate individuals to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures, and to produce a positive outcome from intercultural interactions. For this purpose, this study aimed to investigate the intercultural sensitivity levels of prospective English teachers and possible effects of social intelligence and some demographic factors on it. The results indicated some meaningful relationships between social intelligence and intercultural sensitivity of prospective EFL teachers. However, age, communication with foreign people through internet and gender did not show any significant relationship with intercultural sensitivity. Some recommendations were yielded based on the findings of the study.

Keywords: Social intelligence, intercultural sensitivity, language learning, teacher education

1. Introduction

With the advances in technology and globalization, social interaction opportunities have increased to a great extent. As globalization makes the world smaller in many ways, wide ranges of societies and cultures have had to get closer and closer day by day. Even the most traditional and close societies had to manage the issues of cultural diversities and intercultural communication. Societies realized that developing the skills of intercultural competency and training interculturally competent citizens is as important and urgent as training skilled labor in today's modern world. So, education process in all the societies has been ascribed a new role: to train citizens having tolerance, understanding and respect towards the differences in ideologies, cultures, traditions, religions, beliefs, and behaviors. As suggested by Tye and Tye (1992, p. 17) education should aim global citizenship where students take part in "the study of themselves as members of the human species, as inhabitants of planet earth, and as participants in the global social order". Intercultural sensitivity has been perceived as a significant forerunner to intercultural sufficiency is. It is supposed to abolish barriers among cultures and let people utilize from this potential. It has been described and conceptualized in many ways by different scholars. Some of them have been presented in the following paragraphs.

Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) described intercultural sensitivity as the ability to understand different cultures and points of view, and regulate behaviors based on cultural context. This definition involves a four-factor model as Open-Mindedness, Flexibility, Individualism, and Collectivism. Open-mindedness refers to an orientation where individuals are not averse to differences in views, customs, and beliefs. Flexibility refers to the ability to adapt behaviors in unfamiliar contexts. Individualism is a context with focus on the self or independence. Collectivism is a context with focus on others or interdependence.

According to Bennett (1993), intercultural sensitivity is mainly about effective abilities, as controlling and coordinating emotions. He created a model called Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). His model provides a structure for understanding how people experience cultural differences. Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) asserts that people with intercultural sensitivity have an inclination to move from the ethno-centric stage to the ethno-relative stage. He explained intercultural sensitivity in six stages: The first stage of the process is denial in which the individual denies the existence of cultural differences among people. In the next stage which is called as defense, individuals attempt to protect their world view by countering the perceived threat. The third step is minimization in which individuals attempt to protect the core of one's world view by concealing differences in the shadow of cultural similarities. The next step of the process is acceptance in which individuals begin to accept the existence of behavioral differences and underlying cultural differences. The fifth stage is adaptation in which individuals become empathic to cultural differences and become bicultural or multicultural. The sixth and last step of the process is integration in which individuals are able to apply ethno-relativism to their own identity and can experience differences as essential and joyful parts of all life (Bennett, 1993).In DMIS, The first three stages have been considered "ethnocentric" in that one's own culture is seen as the only culture or to varying extents the "better" culture whereas the last three stages are considered "ethno relative" in that one's own culture is seen as equal among many other cultures.

Gudykunst and Kim (1992) claimed that intercultural sensitive people are expected to have some special qualities such as self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement, and non-judgment. It has been suggested that individuals having high self-esteem would have the positive emotion towards cultural differences and recognizeand respect the situational differences in intercultural interactions.

Chen and Starosta (2000) criticized the previous studies on intercultural sensitivity due to some conceptual confusion. In other words, those studies were charged with handling intercultural sensitiveness and intercultural competence as identical concepts. They developed a model for intercultural communication competence and acknowledged that intercultural sensitivity is related to three aspects of intercultural interaction. As can be understood from the model intercultural sensitivity has been handled as the affective dimension of intercultural communication competence which refers to the emotional desire of a person to appreciate and accept cultural differences. It has been explained with six components as self-esteem, self-monitoring, empathy, open-mindedness, nonjudgmental, and social relaxation. The second dimension is intercultural awareness. It is called as the cognitive dimension of intercultural communication competence referring to a person's ability to understand the similarities and differences of others' cultures. It consists of two components as self-awareness and cultural awareness. The last dimension, intercultural adroitness, is the behavioral dimension of intercultural communication competence referring to an individual's ability to reach communication goals while interacting with people from other cultures. It contains four components as message skills, appropriate self-disclosure, behavioral flexibility, and interaction management (Chen &Starosta, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000). This study has adopted the intercultural sensitivity definition and model of Chen and Starosta as"an individual's ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences in order to promote appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication" (Chen & Starosta, 2000, p. 408). Consequently, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) which was developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) was used to evaluate the participants' intercultural sensitivity. The core point of intercultural sensitivity is the personal aspiration of a person to comprehend and appreciate different cultures and cultural norms which are not the same as his or her own cultural norms (Chen & Starosta, 1997). In the literature, it is not rare to find studies investigating the possible predictors affecting intercultural sensitivity levels of individuals such as demographic factors, team work, and emotional intelligence (Oh, 2011; Liu, 2016, Atay et al., 2009; Çubukçu, 2013; Sarıçoban & Öz, 2014; Yetiş & Kurt, 2016). Social intelligence has been suggested to be one of the factors shaping intercultural sensitivity (Bosuwon, 2017; Dong, Koper & Collaco, 2008; Lovvorn&Chen, 2011). This is because the results of some studies indicating social intelligence as a predictor of enhanced social problem-solving abilities (Jones & Day, 1997), experienced leadership (Kobe et al., 2001), and positive interpersonal experience (Cheng, Chiu, Hong & Cheung, 2001).

2. Social Intelligence

Social scientists have studied social intelligence for over 30 years and it has gained more attention in recent years. Thorndike (1920), who conducted the earliest research about the issue, defined social intelligence as "the ability to act wisely in human relations" (p. 228).

Ford and Tisak (1983) defined social intelligence in terms of behavioral consequences. In the same year, Gardner (1983) emphasized that his conceptualization of personal intelligences is based on intrapersonal (emotional) intelligence and interpersonal (social) intelligence. To Marlowe (1986) social intelligence and social competence were equal. In "Social Intelligence", which was published in 2006, Daniel Goleman has written widely on emotional intelligence. Contemporary theorists like Peter Salovey and John Mayer originally viewed emotional intelligence as part of social intelligence (Salovey& Mayer, 1990; p. 189), which suggests that both concepts are related and may, in all likelihood, represent interrelated components of the same construct. During those years, through some different studies, Reuven Bar-On (1988, 1997, 2000) revealed that emotional-social intelligence is composed of a number of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies, skills and facilitators that combine to determine effective human behavior. As briefly summarized in the paragraph above, since the time of Thorndike (1920), a number of different conceptualizations have appeared and they have created an interesting mixture of opportunity regarding the best approach to defining this construct. So, there are currently three major conceptual models:

1. The Salovey-Mayer model: It defines this construct as the ability to perceive, understand, manage and use emotions to facilitate thinking;
2. The Goleman model: It views this construct as a wide array of competencies and skills that drive managerial performance;
3. The Bar-On model: It describes a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that impact intelligent behavior, within a potentially expandable multimodal approach.

Ford and Tisak's explanation of social intelligence (1983) underlines its importance in terms of cultural sensitivity. According to their description, social intelligence can be characterized by skills such as reading nonverbal cues and making inferences from the behavior of others. Social perception, insight, scripts, and interpersonal awareness of individuals are supposed to be other indicative components. In other words, adaptiveness level of individuals in social performance is an indicator of social intelligence. Socially intelligent individuals are expected to be flexible in their behaviors and to change their behavior depending on the requirements of the situation. Social intelligence may also be defined in terms of behavioral outcomes, such as the ability to make others voluntarily behave and enjoy behaving in desired ways.On the other hand, intercultural sensitivity is the desire to motivate individuals to understand, appreciate, and accept differences in cultural settings and have positive outcome. As a result, this study intended to investigate the possible relation between these two using the Bar-On model for social intelligence.

3. Research Questions

Although there is much research on several aspects of social intelligence as a part of emotional intelligence as mentioned above, a limited amount of research exists about the relationship between social intelligence and intercultural sensitivity of pre-service or in-service language teachers. As a lifelong process, language teaching requires awareness of differences of other cultures and with the below given data the study tried to put forth that social intelligence has a strong bond with intercultural sensitivity for pre-service EFL teachers. Thus, this study seeks to shed light on the relationship between social intelligence and intercultural sensitivity. In fact, the study aims to answer the following questions:

The present study aims to find out the answers of the following questions:

1. What is the current intercultural sensitivity level of pre-service EFL teachers?
2. Does the intercultural sensitivity level vary according to age, gender and communication with foreigners via internet?
3. Are there any effects of social intelligence skills on EFL learners' intercultural sensitivity?

4. Method

The overall design of the present study is based on the quantitative research method and it is designed to investigate the relationship between social intelligence skills and intercultural sensitivity of pre-service English teachers at a state university in Turkey in addition to investigating social intelligence in relation to gender, age, and communicating with foreigners through internet. Participation in the research was completely voluntary. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaires after being informed about the aim and scope of the research.

4.1 Participants

The participants in the study, at first, involved 120 students studying in the different years English Language Department of an Educational Faculty at a state university in Turkey. However, only 99 of the questionnaires filled out by the participants were included in the analysis due to the considerable amount of missing data in 21 of them. Of the participants, 69 (70.1%) are females and 30 (29.9%) are males.They are all freshmen aged from 19-26 with a mean score of 21.6. Of the participants, 38 (41.8%) reported that they used internet for communicating with foreigners while 53 (57.1%) of them reported that they do not.

4.2 Research Instruments

To find out the answers for the research questions, the quantitative data which were collected through a demographic inventory and the Turkish Adaptation of Emotional Intelligence Quotient Inventory (Acar, 2001) were used. The Turkish adaptation of the Bar-On EQ-I (Acar, 2001) only involved the questions of the sub-dimension as interpersonal EQ. The Emotional Quotient Inventory was originally designed in 1980 by Bar-On with the aim of providing an approximate judgment for the individual's emotional intelligence for individuals who are sixteen and above, and it is a self-report scale comprising 133 items. The interpersonal EQ comprises 29 items. It is divided into empathy comprising 8 items, interpersonal relationship comprising 11 items, and social responsibility comprising 10 items. In order to determine students' levels of intercultural sensitivity, an intercultural sensitivity questionnaire that was developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) was used. The questionnaire includes 24 items that investigate the participants' level of intercultural sensitivity based on their responses to statements on a 5-point scale (5= strongly agree, 1= strongly disagree). The Intercultural Sensitivity scale involves five factors as Interaction Engagement (six items), Respect for Cultural Differences (six items), Interaction Confidence (five items), Interaction Enjoyment (four items) and Interaction Attentiveness (three items).

4.3 Validity and Reliability

Before analyzing the questionnaire, SPSS reliability analysis was conducted in order to check the reliability of the items in the questionnaires. Cronbach Alpha Analysis was calculated to find the reliability coefficients of the questionnaires. It was discovered that the coefficient of interpersonal scale is 0.842 and intercultural sensitivity is 0.721.

4.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered through these questionnaires were analyzed through descriptive statistics by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19.0, the results of which were illustrated through frequency distribution tables. The statistical significance level was used as $\alpha < .05$ for all the independent sample findings. The data were grouped and analyzed under topics relating to the research questions. Quantitative data analysis techniques were used to analyze the two questionnaires. Then, for each participant, their total social intelligence and intercultural sensitivity scores were calculated. First, descriptive statistics were used for the demographic information and to get a picture of students' social intelligence and intercultural sensitivity levels. Then, an independent samples t-test was used.

5. Findings

The findings of the research will be organized in accordance with the research questions.

The current intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service EFL teachers

The overall mean scores and the sub-categorical mean scores were calculated and presented in Table 1. Theoretical scores have been calculated from the number of items of each dimension, as a reference of the minimum, maximum and medium scores (theoretical), scoring 1, 5 or 3 in all items, respectively.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistical Values for Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

Subscales	Mean	SD	Minimum	Medium	Maximum
Respect for cultural differences	16.19	4.14	9	18	30
Interaction engagement	13.08	3.25	6	18	30
Interaction confidence	12.97	3.07	5	15	25
Interaction enjoyment	10.53	3.26	4	12	20
Interaction attentiveness	7.56	2.64	3	9	15
Total IS score	63.4	11.5	24	72	120

According to the descriptive statistics, the overall mean score of all the participants in the IS questionnaire was 63.49 which indicated that the participants' IS levels were below the average. The highest mean score of the participants among the sub-categories is Respect for Cultural Differences, respectively followed by Interaction Engagement, Interaction Confidence, Interaction Enjoyment, and Interaction Attentiveness. However, the categorical mean scores pointed out that, participants had below average scores in all the subcategories as in the overall score (Table 1).

Respect for cultural differences had the highest score and it seems that participants orient to or tolerate their counterparts' culture and opinion as expected from foreign language learners who are supposed to have a deeper understanding of the importance of culture, and thus a greater level of respect for cultural differences. The second subcategory having the highest score is interaction engagement", which is concerned with participants' feeling of participation in intercultural communication. It indicates that participants are positive and open-minded towards foreigners and eager to communicate with them to some extent. This is an encouraging result since eagerness and enthusiasm in communicated that ting is supposed to help them develop their general intercultural communication competence. In the third rank, students seem to get the highest score in interaction confidence which shows that participants are not so confident while interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Participants got the lowest scores in interaction enjoyment and interaction attentiveness. Both of them reveal that participants do not put much effort to understand what is going on in intercultural environment and to interact with foreigners. This result is not in line with the result of some other studies conducted in Turkish EFL context. Those studies conducted with pre-service English teachers reported that the participants had positive attitudes towards teaching culture with language and they have a high opinion of intercultural sensitivity (Çubukçu, 2013; Sarıçoban&Öz, 2014; Yetiş & Kurt, 2016, Köroğlu, 2016). Another study which interestingly indicated that although pre-service English teachers were aware of the role of the culture in foreign language teaching they did not put much effort to use cultural components to enhance intercultural competence levels of learners (Atay et al., 2009).

The relation between the intercultural sensitivity and age, gender and communication with foreigners via internet

The second research question investigated the effect of some variables such as age, gender and communication through internet. In addition to other usages such as searching for information, the internet is used as a way of communication as well. It was aimed to find out whether communication with people from different nationalities affected students' IS scores or not. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the effect of age and independent samples t-test was conducted to see the effects of gender and communication through the internet.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistical Values for Social Intelligence

Subcategories	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Interpersonal relationship	95	1.57	4.00	2.61	0.51
Empathy	94	1.00	4.60	2.60	0.59
Social responsibility	95	1.67	3.83	2.53	0.47

However, the results indicated that neither age, nor gender, nor communication through internet has a statistically meaningful effect on pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural sensitivity levels. Ghamarnia et al., (2016) also reported that age was not a statistically significant factor in intercultural sensitivity of prospective EFL teachers. Considering the previous studies, gender is a controversial issue in this respect. Many studies (Yetiş & Kurt, 2016; Ghamarnia et al., 2016) conducted on intercultural sensitivity, indicated that men and women may differ in their intercultural sensitivity whereas some of them did not reveal any significant difference between men and women as in the present study (Yılmaz & Göçen, 2013; Üstün, 2011). The reason this study did not yield a relation between men and women may also stem from the inequality of the numbers of the participants. As in most education faculties, women outnumber men in the faculty where the research was conducted and the number of men is just 30 whereas the number of women is 70.

Table 3: Pearson Correlations on identifying students' EQ skills in reference to age

	N	Mean	SD	P	R
Intercultural Sensitivity	99	2.64	0.48	0.27	8.05

Communication through internet is used as a way of exposure to other cultures in this study since the students did not have much opportunity to go abroad and stay enough to interact with foreigners. Studies in the literature provided ample data suggesting that communication through internet like social network sites may help individuals to share a connection and establish social interaction with people from different cultures (boyd, & Ellison, 2007). However, the present study could not determine any significant effect of the variable. It should be noted that the research ignored asking the frequency of contact with foreigners which is one of the constraints of the study. It is thought that the frequency of contact could have had an effect if it had been evaluated.

The relation between social intelligence and intercultural sensitivity

Firstly, the social intelligence profile of the participants was evaluated based on the subcategories of questionnaire. More specifically, the mean scores and descriptive data about the subcategories of social intelligence are presented in Table 2. According to the results, it is clear that students have the highest scores in interpersonal relationship, which is followed by empathy and they got the lowest scores in social responsibility subcategory.

Table 4: The results of t-tests on intercultural sensitivity in reference to gender and communication through internet

Variables		N	Mean	SD	T	P*
	Male	24	2.68	0.51	0.39	0.70
GENDER	Female	63	2.63	0.47		
COMMUNICATION THROUGH INTERNET	No	53	2.65	0.45	0.66	-0.42
	Yes	38	2.61	0.48		

As for the correlation between social intelligence and intercultural sensitivity, Pearson Correlation Analysis was conducted and seen that a significant correlation exists between the social intelligence and some subcategories of intercultural sensitivity. According to the results, Interaction Engagement, Interaction Confidence, and Interaction attentiveness have a positive correlation with social intelligence, as can be seen in Table 4. A positive correlation suggests that two of the variables increase or decrease together. A Pearson R correlation is a bivariate measure of association that also determines the strength of the relationship between two variables. Thus, the strength of the relationship between social intelligence and the four intercultural sensitivity subscales is assessed as well. The correlation between interaction engagement and intercultural sensitivity is the strongest one with a strong effect size. The correlation between interaction confidence and interaction attentiveness indicates a moderate score. In other words, the results indicate that as pre-service EFL teachers' social intelligence increase, their interaction engagement, interaction confidence and interaction attentiveness levels increase.

Table 5: Pearson Correlations on intercultural sensitivity and social intelligence

	N	Mean	SD	P*	R
Interaction Engagement	94	2.61	0.65	**0.00***	0.46
Respect for Cultural Differences	92	2.69	0.69	0.46	0.07
Interaction Enjoyment	98	2.63	0.81	0.07	0.18
Interaction Confidence	97	2.59	0.61	**0.00***	0.30
Interaction Attentiveness	98	2.52	0.88	**0.00***	0.29

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the most striking result of the study is prospective EFL teachers' low intercultural sensitivity and social intelligence levels. This result do not seem to be promising with regard to intercultural education of foreign language teachers since they are expected to have high or at least moderate level of intercultural sensitivity. As role models for students to live and work in a multicultural community, foreign language teachers themselves firstly must be intercultural competent. However, in this research, prospective EFL students had low intercultural sensitivity scores in general and in all the subcategories of intercultural sensitivity which is quite disappointing. In addition, students' intercultural sensitivity does not seem to be affected by demographic variables such as age, gender and communicating with foreigners through internet. Students' social intelligence and intercultural sensitivity are interrelated and both are found to be low in this study.

As for suggestions, firstly, this study suggests that high levels of social intelligence can contribute a lot to develop intercultural sensitivity. Being good at interpersonal relationship and having empathy is thought to help individuals tolerating differences in culture as well as accepting them. Considering the close relationship between social intelligence and intercultural sensitivity, it can be strongly suggested that training to improve pre-service teachers' skills, either implicitly or explicitly, in interpersonal relationship, empathy and social responsibility as components of social intelligence can raise intercultural sensitivity of pre-service EFL teachers. In addition, some programs such as drama as suggested by Thang Ho (2016) or supporting students to participate in the exchange programs offered by the European Union ought to be implemented in teacher training programs to enhance intercultural sensitivity of pre-service EFL teachers. Finally, based on the findings of the study, a noteworthy suggestion of this is a need for the integration of intercultural approach into the curricula of EFL teacher training programs.

Moreover, various factors affecting intercultural sensitivity of learners ought to be investigated through different research methods, in different cultural contexts and with different subjects. It should be noted that the study has some limitations. One limitation was that the measures were based on self-reports. Incorporating observed behavior criterion, or peer and other reports, would help validate these findings. A second limitation was the nature of the sample which involves undergraduate EFL students located in the eastern part of Turkey. As such, generalization is limited. Future researchers may want to explore intercultural sensitivity and social intelligence studies in other countries and cultures and expand their studies to examine the relationships between them. Finally, these results are expected to contribute to existing literature in communications, education, and diversity.

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