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## Intercultural Competence: Attitudes and Comprehension of Social Studies Teacher Candidates

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### ARTICLE INFORMATION

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*21st century imposes intercultural communication since citizens live in an increasingly interconnected world. Contemporary and democratic societies necessitate the peaceful coexistence of people of different cultures. In most communities, people encounter individuals of different perspectives and origins daily on the street, at school, or at work. So each individual should get the chance to live peacefully, cooperate and develop a sense of responsibility for the well-being of society. Social Studies course is essential in teaching future citizens knowledge, skills, and values related to cultural differences. This research aims to reveal the attitudes and comprehension of Social Studies teacher candidates (TCs) toward different cultures. The study, carried out with a basic qualitative research design, covers the data collected during the activities designed to improve the attitudes and comprehension of TCs toward intercultural communication. 32 TCs participated in the study. Data collection tools used in the research are individual interviews, focus group interviews and documents. The eight interviews, three focus group interviews, and performance assignments and evaluation papers prepared by the participants were analyzed using the content analysis technique. The results indicate specific patterns in TCs attitudes and comprehension toward different cultures. The paper shows that TCs define culture with its formalistic features, and do not realize that culture may be related to worldview. Also, TCs are insufficient in researching cultural concepts and generalize superficially about culture.*

**Keywords:** Intercultural competence, social studies teaching, prospective teachers



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## Introduction

The perspective that approaches citizenship within the framework of certain rights and responsibilities (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992) has been criticized, especially in the 1990s. Because, with the 1990s, the nation-state, a rational, singular actor, ceased to be the sole actor of the political setting. In the 21st century, there are numerous reasons for people to realize the effects of globalization and embrace the idea of global responsibility. Categories such as culture, ethnicity, religion, and gender are now multiplying, diversifying, and redefining (Alpan, 2019). Globalization (Ritzer, 2018), the advancement of information and communication technologies (Castells, 2000), the idea of global responsibility (Giddens, 2006), anti-democratic practices and understandings, as well as wars erupting in various parts of the world makes the training of multicultural citizens (Kymlicka, 1995) more persuasive and necessary. Then citizens are supposed to act in a society that faces various challenges, such as pollution, migration, poverty, and inequality. Global migrants and refugees may be at the top of the list as a case for Turkey.

To International Organization for Migration IOM (2022a) estimated number of international migrants has exploded over the past 50 years from 84 million to 281 million. As of 2022, over 89.4 million people have been displaced forcibly. While 55 million people were forced to move within their country of residence, over 34 million people migrated to other countries (IOM, 2022b). These numbers alone clarify that it is inevitable for societies to live together with different cultures. Turkey ranks first among the countries most affected by migration and refugee issues.

Erdoğan (2021) examines the harmony that has been achieved between Syrian refugees and local groups. Because the country hosting the most refugees in the world is Turkey, with 3.7 million people. 98.6% of 3.7 million Syrians live together with the community in 81 provinces (UNHRC, 2021). The research results suggest that many people in Turkey are not optimistic about refugees living in a neighborhood as neighbors, students, friends, and co-workers and demand that refugees stay in refugee camps or refugee-only areas. Although more than ten years have passed since the Syrian refugees began to arrive in Turkey in 2011, the opinion that the Syrian refugees have not learned to adapt to rules, norms, and values has not diminished; on the contrary, it has become more robust. However (according to the same research), Syrians find themselves well-adapted to Turkish society by learning the language, culture, and norms. Another finding of the study is about the deficiencies/inaccuracies in the information about Syrian refugees. Erdoğan (2021) found that the perceptions of how refugees live and their conditions are based on prejudice and wrong information. Refugees' language, education, and financial barriers (Orakçı & Aktan, 2021) are not sufficiently recognized. Those who have refugees in their neighborhood/local environment see Syrians as a "problem/threat" more. Tolerating the refugees is dominant rather than embracing them in terms of coexistence status.

It is difficult to say that tolerance suffices to live together in a democratic society. A democratic society requires people to live peacefully, cooperate and develop a sense of social responsibility (Dahl, 2015, p.56). Citizens in 21st societies live in an increasingly interconnected world that imposes intercultural communication. Since refugees take part in community, send their children to school, and develop social relations, some refugees will continue to live in receiving societies.

Schools are essential tools for diagnosing, stimulating, and transforming antisocial behavior toward different cultures and providing citizenship, human rights, and inclusive education (Nenadovic, 2017). Therefore, educational institutions are expected to give more importance to the skills and values necessary for living with cultural differences. Social studies education has an essential role in teaching the meaning and significance of cultures because it is a course that brings together the knowledge, skills, and values of the concepts of culture and citizenship. Social studies education should not only deal with the concepts of culture and different cultures but also develop the skills of future citizens towards cultural differences. Therefore, multicultural education practices such as living with different cultures, cultural harmony, and recognizing differences in Social Studies teaching became more crucial.

### *Attitudes and comprehensions regarding intercultural competence*

Culture is the leading study subject of anthropology (Duranti, 1997). Scholars defined the notion of culture in various ways, including race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability, language, socioeconomic status, group or individual principles, beliefs, and customs (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The present paper defines culture as the norms, values, beliefs, worldviews, behaviors, lifestyles, and products shared by a particular community (Kramsch, 1998). Again, in the present study, culture is considered a concept that is influenced by geography, immigration status, age, gender, ethnicity, time, social class, environment, family history, language, and political and religious beliefs (Gay, 2018). So it has a dynamic structure (Kramsch, 1998). So communicating with people from a different culture requires a specific set of skills, values, and knowledge called intercultural competence. A large amount of literature examines what competencies individuals should have to communicate with people from different cultures.

Intercultural competence has dimensions of knowledge, attitude, understanding, value, and skill. However, intercultural competence has been the subject of various approaches, such as multicultural education in education (J. A. Banks & Banks, 2004), global or international education (Hanvey, 1975; Merryfield, 1996), peace education (Stomfay-Stitz, 1993), cultural or culturally sensitive (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994), intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2004), global competence training, democratic cultural competence. In line with this, the knowledge, skills and values needed presented in the literature are global competence, global citizenship, multicultural competence, cultural harmony, communicative competence, cultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness, cultural intelligence, cultural literacy, intercultural capacity, etc. conceptualized in different ways (Deardorff & Jones, 2022). These approaches seem to have certain common features. The aforementioned approaches are based on the premise that different cultures are increasingly meeting each other in the same environment, neighborhood, and workplace. However, the literature shows that the encounter and interaction of cultures is sensitive. It is possible for individuals to carry out their cultural exchanges in a healthy way only if they gain specific competences.

The present paper used an intercultural competence frame (Deardorff, 2006), which focuses on interactions with people of different cultures, observing and questioning own and the other's cultural points of view. Deardorff (2006), in a Delphi study, examined the dimensions of intercultural competence. As a result, a synthesis has emerged that includes the dimensions of intercultural competence. According to the synthesis, intercultural competence comprises five dimensions (Deardorff & Jones, 2022). These are attitudes, knowledge-comprehension, skills, desired internal outcomes, and desired behavioral outcomes. Attitudes are respect, openness, and curiosity. Comprehension is the individual's understanding of his culture, cultural concepts, and linguistic understanding. The skills are related to the individual's capacity to listen, observe, interpret, analyze, evaluate and relate to the culture. Internal outcomes are adaptability, flexibility, perspective on cultural relativism, and empathy. Behavioral outcomes are related to the individual's ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures in line with a specific goal. Those related dimensions follow a hierarchical order (Deardorff, 2009a). The first stage follows a sequence starting from attitudes toward understanding. The most advanced stage of competence is behavioral outcomes. This research focuses on the dimension of attitude and comprehension.

For TCs to develop intercultural competence, they should be curious about culture and its features, respectful to people from different cultures, and open to new learnings. Examples of intercultural attitudes are being tolerant towards those from different cultural, socioeconomic, and religious communities, not being prejudiced when deciding about people and situations, and having a calm and understanding attitude (Deardorff, 2006). TCs should evaluate a student's behavior from a different culture, not only from their cultural perspective, but also by understanding the student's cultural perspective. The TCs should be curious about different views, beliefs, and perspectives and be able to show that they value (Deardorff, 2009b). Relevant attitudes are expected to be accompanied by a

thorough understanding. To communicate effectively with students from different cultures, TCs should be able to recognize the worldview, beliefs, values, and concepts that guide their cultural perspective in the first step. Relevant understanding requires students to accept these worldviews, beliefs, values, and concepts. Therefore, it is expected that the TCs learn the cultural background that guides the students' perspectives and develop their teaching to appeal to different cultures.

A teacher education rich in cultural diversity has three dimensions (Smolcic & Katunuic, 2017). (1) A school-based practice that emphasizes equality and diversity, (2) reinforcing intercultural communication skills, and (3) acquiring experiences that will improve observation and communication skills are required. Similarly, according to Cushner & Mahon (2009), emphasis should be placed on experience and affective dimensions. TCs need to experience different cultural environments firsthand. It is recommended that TCs should escape from their comfort zone and acquire experience with different cultures. Relevant experience can be accomplished by suspending one's own cultural perspective. Practices based on experience and cultural interaction are essential in intercultural education. Observing a particular culture abroad in its natural environment is seen as the most effective practice (Bardo, 2018) in terms of intercultural competence. However, since the time, money and effort cost of this will be high, methods and techniques such as simulation, discussion and drama may be preferred. Nganga (2016) implemented the activities suggested for the development of intercultural competence of TCs. He found that particular techniques and materials, such as classroom discussions and evaluations, technological tools are effective in teaching of related subjects.

### *Literature review*

Intercultural competence provides an opportunity to understand the complexity of global problems and to develop cooperation with different people in the solution to these problems (Spitzer & Chagnon, 2009). Higher education institutions must provide intercultural competence education to future citizens. In this context, the attitudes and comprehension of teachers and TCs to different cultures is important. Because TCs are supposed to teach in classrooms where students of different cultures are present, they are also responsible for developing correct knowledge and attitudes about them. Besides eliminating the deficiencies of university education in this context, intercultural competence education makes it possible to raise individuals who can quickly adapt to different cultures. Also, respecting the lifestyles of different cultures, coping with the difficulties they encounter in the global world, and developing proper communication in multicultural working environments will be improved (Deardoff, 2009b, 2006). TCs will work with students from different cultures and teach them their own culture. (Gorski, 2016; Sleeter, 2001). Therefore, TCs should gain knowledge and experience about culture in teacher education. Teaching activities should develop attitudes and comprehension toward individuals from different cultures.

Intercultural competence affects TCs teaching performance. Because it is seen that the way teachers communicate with their students from different cultural backgrounds can increase harmony and success (Gorski, 2009; Haenni Hoti et al., 2019; Makarova and Birman, 2015; Vedder and Geel, 2012). Makarova and Birman (2015) showed that caring for cultural diversity in the classroom increases the social cohesion and belonging of the students. Similarly, Vedder and Geel (2012) showed in their study that students with different cultural backgrounds increase their self-confidence and learning motivation when their cultural identities are accepted. Haenni Hoti et al. (2019) also showed that cultural adaptation studies positively affect the approach of children from immigrant families to school. Still, the literature indicates that TCs do not always perceive culture correctly. For example, teachers may think culture is related solely to race, and TCs may think culture comprises visible features (Gorski, 2009). Aydın and Kaya (2017) stated that teachers in Turkey have positive attitudes toward refugee students, but they feel inadequate about the education of these students.

In Turkey, there are several studies examining the concept of intercultural attitudes. In these studies, the attitudes of students, teachers, and TCs were examined. Perceptions of English language

teachers/TCs (Çubukcu, 2013), primary school teachers/TCs (Erdoğan, 2018; Renk, 2014; Sezer & Kahraman, 2017; Yılmaz & Göçen, 2013), and preschool teachers/TCs (Sezer & Kahraman, 2017), Turkish language teachers/TCs (Akin, 2016) are examined. Intercultural sensitivities of students enrolled in undergraduate programs or other TCs (Çoban, Kahraman, & Doğan, 2010) were examined. According to the results of the research, students, teachers, and TCs are open to different cultures.

The cited studies include findings based on self-reflections of teachers or TCs to the imagined community of different cultures. However, studies with social studies TCs differ from other studies in terms of methods and their results. Studies probing into actual cases from daily life (Akpınar & Cantürk, 2021; Ibrahimoglu, 2018; Zayimoğlu, 2021; Karataş, 2018) point out situations that cannot be explained with being open to cultures. For example, TCs taking part in the research conducted by Akpınar and Cantürk (2021) seem confident that they can communicate with someone from a different culture. However, TCs think intercultural education can alienate them from their culture. İbrahimoglu (2018) refers to a similar situation. Although the TCs stated they were respectful to different cultures, 5 of the eight TCs stated they would respond negatively to students of different cultures' requests for permission due to the special celebration day. Refugee students told that their peers did not accept them in Zayimoğlu (2021)'s study, in which she examined the subject through the eyes of the "other." Turkish students believe teachers have a good attitude toward their refugee friends. Participants stated that the Social Studies course did not contribute to integrating refugees into society. For the social acceptance and academic success of refugees, it is recommended to be given more educational support on cultural adaptation (Zayimoğlu, 2021). In addition, TCs teachers taking part in the study of Akpınar and Cantürk (2021) and Karataş (2018) stated that the courses for intercultural communication are limited.

Present paper aimed to contribute the literature by documenting intercultural attitudes and comprehension of Social Studies TCs. This study is unique in inquiring about attitudes and comprehension in an environment where TCs and international students interact. TCs and international student interaction may give an insight into the teaching of intercultural competence education. This research aimed to describe the attitudes and comprehension adopted by TCs in working and communicating with individuals who are culturally different from themselves (international students). In line with the related purpose, answers were sought for two questions.

1. How is the comprehension of social studies TCs towards different cultures?
2. How are the social studies TCs' attitudes of different cultures?

## Methods and Materials

A basic qualitative research design (Merriam, 2013) was used in this study since the researcher aimed to examine the attitudes and comprehension of TCs towards different cultures. This research design was chosen because it allows presenting the participant's attitudes and comprehension in its context and from the participants' perspective. The data collection tools were interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam, 2013). The present paper aimed to reveal the attitudes and comprehension of the participants on the subject based on individual and focus group interviews, assignments, and reflection papers.

### *Setting*

This research includes the data collected during the activities carried out to improve TCs attitudes and comprehension of intercultural competence. Activities were carried in an environment where TCs could apply the knowledge they gained during their undergraduate education. Thirty-two TCs aged between 20 and 25 attended the lesson actively and participated in the activities. 11 students were born and raised in the city where the university is located. Twenty-one students come from different ethnic groups, socioeconomic levels, and regions. All 25 female and seven male participants are registered as Social

Studies TCs. Thirty-two students were divided into seven groups. Each group researched and analyzed the culture of a different country and introduced the country's culture to the class. Therefore, presentations of foreign cultures were presented for seven weeks. 1-2 international students from each culture were invited and asked to give information or comment about that culture. International students comprise ten undergraduate-level students from different countries such as Indonesia, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Syria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Kashmir. International students are also university students. The activities continued with each group meeting with international students to inquire more about the culture. The participants made an interview with international students and reflected on their perspectives.

### ***Participants***

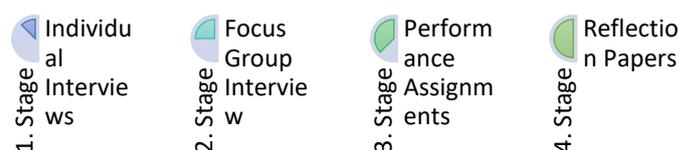
In the selection of participants, the researcher used the teaching situation sampling approach, which is under the single-case sampling technique. The researcher preferred the teaching situation sampling technique (Patton, 2015, p. 404) for situations where a particular group will be studied to provide in-depth information about the research phenomenon that can indicate the teaching activities. Participants are 7 female and 25 male TCs who actively attended Globalization and Society, which is one of the elective field courses in the 2021-2022 Fall Semester in Social Studies Teacher Education Program. The study participants are all undergraduate students who were enrolled in the course. The course included theoretical information on cultural, different cultures, prejudice, refugees/immigrants, and empathy. The researcher aimed for the participants to acquire experience regarding the concepts. Participants voluntarily took part in both the course and the research. The views and perspectives of 32 TCs actively participating in the course were used as data in the study.

### ***Data collection and analysis***

The researcher collected different types of data to understand the phenomenon in depth and increase trustworthiness. To reveal their attitudes and comprehension on the relevant subject, the researcher has employed several data collection tools. Research data were collected using individual interviews, focus group interviews, and documents (documents related to performance assignments and reflective papers). Multiple data collection tools were employed to perform triangulation (Silverman, 2011) and to increase trustworthiness (Patton, 2015, p. 989). Triangulation let the researcher compare and contrast the findings across different data sources.

The researcher analyzed the interviews, focus group interviews, performance assignments, and evaluation writings.

**Figure 1.** Data Gathering Process



In the first stage of the data collection process, individual interviews are conducted to examine the participants' preconceptions on the research topic. As a performance assignment, the participants researched the culture of a particular country and presented it to the rest of the class. In the next stage, participants completed the performance assignment on different cultures.

**Table 1.** Information on Data Gathering Tools

Data Gathering Tool	Individual Interviews	Focus Interview	Group	Performance Assignments	Reflection Papers
Format	Voice Recordings	Voice Recordings	Presentations, PPT		Text
Lenght	Appr. 8-28 min	Appr. 30-41 min.	Appr. 40-65 pages	Appr. 5-7 pages	
Frequency	8	3	7	7	

In the second stage of data collection, the researcher did focus group interviews with the participants. After the performance assignments, the researcher examined their approaches to different cultures, knowledge acquisition, and attitudes and comprehension towards different cultures through focus group interviews.

In the third stage of data collection, the researcher also examined the participants' studies (presentations, knowledge acquisitions) on the relevant countries and cultures. At this point the researcher aimed to observe how the research phenomenon is constructed in participant performances. After the getting performance assignments, the researcher asked the participants to interview an international student from the assigned country and then evaluate the cultural similarities and differences. The fourth stage of the data collection process is the collection of reflection papers.

The data collected within the research were transferred to the Nvivo 10 package program and analyzed. The researcher analyzed research data using the content analysis approach. During the analysis process, The researcher coded the data line by line and reached the themes from the codes. The researcher made constant comparisons (Glaser, 1965) to reveal the common and opposite dimensions across different data types. For example, the continuity and discontinuities between how the concepts are perceived in individual interviews and how they are stated in the reviews are examined, and the researcher has aimed to reveal the patterns in this way.

**Findings**

Four different themes had been reached. These are cultural approach, different culture approach, identity, and limited knowledge. The themes observed in the attitudes and comprehension of the participants were presented, and direct statements were included.

**Figure 2.** Finding Themes



***Approach to culture***

The concept of culture exists its formal appearance in the perspective of participants. All the participants perceive the idea of culture with food-kitchen, weddings, weapons, traditional games, etc., characterized by features. Different forms of weddings or entertainment in other regions and the popular dishes were the most frequently repeated cultural elements. However, the symbolic aspect of culture, which is the distinguishing feature, has rarely been brought to the interviews or documents. Therefore, researcher concluded that the participants defined the culture with its formal features but did not mention the symbolic aspect.

**Figure 3.** Sub-themes Regarding Approach To Culture



Analysis of student presentations also support the finding revealed in the interviews. In the presentations, participants reflected general categories as cultural characteristics. General features are history, politics, geography, faith, military status or power, traditions, cuisine, and gender. Participants presented certain customs and essential days as cultural information in few examples. For example, in the presentation on Syrian culture, the subjects of women, cuisine, belief, and traditions, that is, the customs and habits of the society were placed. Participants presented detailed information about the Nowruz festival or wedding traditions.

*Pakize: "Bride's Table," a tradition among Turks living in the north of Afghanistan, is laid out for girls for seven days from the first day of Eid al-Fitr. According to tradition, during the feast, girls from far*

away visit the couple's house to see the beauty of the newly married brides and the table they set, and they evaluate the table they set among themselves.

Participants mention cultural meanings and symbols rarely. Meanings and symbols are limited to one or two sentences. When the cultural meanings and symbols are noted, they are close to having a superficial quality. The knowledge of culture is generalized to a whole society, its context is removed, and it is superficially placed.

*Yeliz: You can't get an invitation to drink coffee in Lebanon because a meal in Lebanon is not limited to coffee. While many dishes are typically eaten with fingers in Lebanon, some locals adopt European standards and culinary traditions. According to them, this is an insult.*

In the presentations, culture was taken as a monolithic whole, and concepts such as cultural diversity and perspective were neglected. Dimensions, such as cultural meanings and the origin of meanings, are not mentioned. Limited elements of culture (tradition, ritual, behaviors) are presented as static, monolithic, and object-like entities.

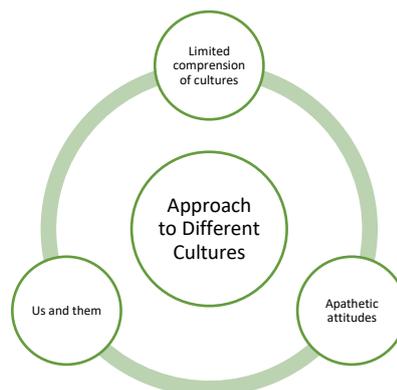
*Nur: The people of Kashmir are hardworking people with great skill and artistic talent. Kashmir shawl loom, hand-woven carpets, hand-woven shawls, fabrics processed one by one with needle lace, shawls, and clothes, paper comes to life, outstanding paper. You can find bachelor, wood carving, copper craftsmanship, and many more.*

In the presentations, not the symbolic content and originality of the culture, but rather its relationship with Turkey stressed by TCs. The similarities between the Turks living in Kashmir, Lebanese cuisine, and Turkish cuisine are explained with emphasis on their relationship with "us," as in the examples of similarities with the Syrian culture. Another dimension of this is whether or not the country has a Muslim population. If the Muslim population is present, it is given by a percentage.

### ***Approach to different culture***

Respect for different cultures has a complex image in the participants' perspective. Participants tend to refer to different cultures by their geographical regions (Aegean, Eastern Anatolia, etc.) and countries (India, USA, Syria). To them, other regions or countries have unique and monolithic cultures. A significant group of respondents hesitated for a long time when asked how they defined the concept of a different culture. After the pause, some participants considered Indians and African tribes as other cultures. It can be said that the participants tend to seek contrast with their characteristics (us/them) when it comes to different cultures.

**Figure 4.** Sub-themes Regarding Approach to Different Culture



There are participants (5) who talked about immigrants as individuals from different cultures. Although these participants stated that they respected immigrants, they included pejorative expressions (dirty, uneducated, vulgar). When it comes to the differences within the country, the same participants discussed them in a non-pejorative way and emphasized the difference in customs. On the other hand, 3 participants did not use a pejorative expression for domestic and immigrant individuals and stated that different cultures should be respected.

Most of the participants found the clothes and food of people from different cultures strange. For example, the participants, who stated that the clothes in Kashmir are not modern and are primitive, claimed that if there are people who prefer this type of clothes in their place of residence, they would react negatively. Only 1 out of 5 participants who expressed their opinion on Kashmir explained that it would not be right to criticize people's preferences and that it is a cultural difference. Only TCs who researched Burkina Faso culture expressed constructive views. Like Kashmir, cultural elements are not found interesting for most participants about Lebanese culture. Participants also did not like the idea of meeting a Lebanese person or visiting Lebanon. Only few participants (2) said they would choose to taste Lebanese cuisine. Neither did they show interest in the idea of the participants interacting with the Lebanese student, asking more questions, or learning their perspective, nor did they try it during the lesson. Very few of the participants communicated with individuals from different cultures during and after the class.

*Metin: "Let's call Palestine Israel!" frankly, her saying made me depressed. I said it for the first time, from the very beginning.*

*Researcher: I wonder whether she meant, we should not call it Israel.*

*Metin: Oh, that's what she said; I got on my nerves.*

*Researcher: Why were you angry?*

*Metin: She should have waited a while, she should have said later. And she gave such a harsh reaction when I raised his hand in a snap; I said I must have said something wrong.*

*Researcher: Do you think you said something wrong?*

*Metin: But she says so, so what can I do?*

*Researcher: What did she want from you?*

*Metin: I understood neither; she changed the name of that country.*

The data revealed in the interviews show that even simple issues are not negotiated with international students. Although the word preferences or behaviors of people from different cultures caught the attention of the participants, they did not turn into interaction. Also, in most cases, TCs ignored possible interactions with international students and did not inquire.

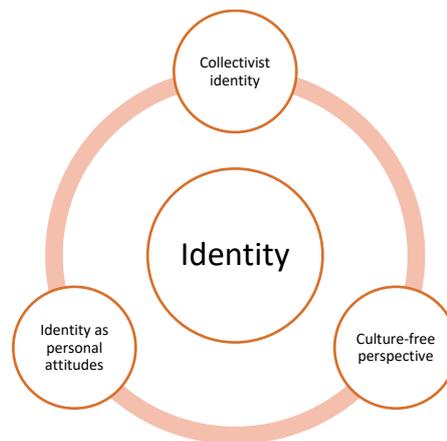
### **Identity**

Participants defined themselves with personal attitudes instead of identity features. It was noted that those who described themselves with individual identity and belonging were few. In individual interviews, only 2 participants stated they were from a particular city, an ideology, or an ethnicity. Most of the participants preferred to define themselves with personal characteristics and attitudes.

*Remzi: I mean, I'm serious, but I don't like people who talk too much. There are subjects I like; there are subjects I dislike. I do not establish intimacy with everyone; my tone must match.*

The participants have used a normative discourse in their views. Being open to innovation, being shy, being self-confident, and being honest are the most preferred features. Except for 2, none of the participants realized their views about attitudes were also a cultural interpretation. The participants, who stated that "people should be nice," "should be sincere," and "should be self-confident," neglected that cultural forms of human qualities could be diversified across cultures. Only one participant stated that the discussion in a culture-related lesson caused him to question his perspective on the other.

**Figure 5:** Sub-themes Regarding Identity



In the reflection papers, the participants defined their culture with the religion of Islam, Turkishness, and other collectivist identities. All the participants commented on the collectivist identity (Islam, Turkishness, Conservatism, etc.) in their reflection papers. A significant majority of them expressed an opinion implying that this is the only truth.

*Kerem: For example, I always favor treating such women well. I said, after all, I am a person with religious belief; I am a Muslim. Our Prophet has a word. In other words, our women are the crown of our heads.*

While most participants tended to present a more contrasting picture of issues related to immigrants and local people (us and them), they managed to refer to familiar aspects of people from different customs in Turkey. These references are usually related to Islam, nationalism, or being from a particular city. Only one of the participants stated that he took his own culture as a reference and said that there are still many valuable cultures.

It was observed that in the reflection paper, the participants did not present a detailed photograph of the different cultures that were the subject. Even two participants who used neutral expressions for different cultures did not use a more complex term than stating that each culture is unique. The other 6 participants, on the other hand, tended to bring up the formal characteristics of people or groups (wedding customs, meals, etc.) that they called different cultures, or to use prejudiced expressions.

### ***Limited knowledge***

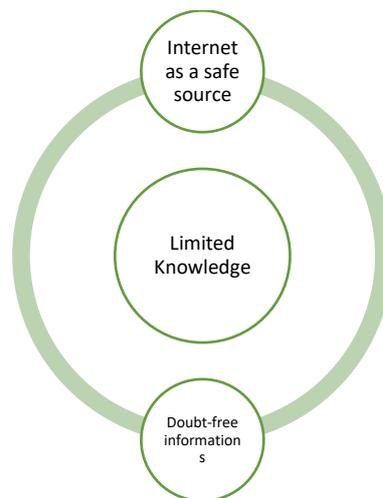
The researcher found that participants researched the country's culture only using internet resources. The participants stated that they did not receive the information they first reached and tried to reach the

correct information. They also told that if the information is same in several websites then it is assumed to be true. It is understood that participants have done detailed internet research.

*Side: We rechecked all the [information] that came out, the information we found, from other pages [websites]. Because it was instantly different; on the one hand, when we look at religion, for example, 61% said Muslim; on the other hand, it was 65%.*

The information given in the presentations and in the reflections has a definite quality or nature. Information obtained from sources is presented as if it is the only truth and as if it is firsthand knowledge. However, presentations and reflection papers are filled with information from a particular media. Participants showed no understanding of the limitedness of presented information/knowledge about the culture studied. In the interviews, no word or meaning was presented to express uncertainty, annotation, or limitation on the issues mentioned. The participants realized that the information might not be correct after they presented it.

**Figure 6:** Sub-Themes Regarding Limited Information



Participants stated that they realized that the information might not be correct when they encountered the comments of a person from that culture. In the participant reflections taken from the last data collection tool, they also used a discourse implying that they had sufficient knowledge about the culture in question. In these reflections, expressions of being unsure, making comments, and expressing subjective opinions were not used, and the limitations of the information presented were not specified.

*Yeliz: In the same way, visiting the graves of deceased elders on holidays is a strong tradition expressing respect for us, but this tradition is sporadic. There are many differences when it comes to citizenship. For example, we have civic duties such as voting and joining the military. But they don't have them.*

## Discussion

Specific patterns regarding the attitudes and comprehension of TCs towards different cultures are presented. These patterns are about definitions of traditional culture, problems related to perspective and culture relationship, problems in information literacy, superficial generalization, and keeping a distance from interaction with different cultures. It is noteworthy that TCs considering culture in general with its physical and formal aspects and TCs talking about it without evaluating its symbolic aspect. Some papers support that finding. In the study by Deveci (2009), TCs tended to define culture as formal elements (food, wedding, etc.). Such an understanding of culture is found necessary but not sufficient.

Because cultural interaction is basically an exchange of meaning or, to put differently, culture is a form of meaning. Discovering the cultural construction of meaning or knowledge refers to intercultural competence. Defining culture only with its standard feature can limit the intercultural competence of TCs. This conception of culture makes it hard to comprehend how the culture is constructed and what implications it may have.

In the study conducted by Günel (2016), it is noteworthy that TCs also emphasize the worldview and thoughts as a dimension of culture. Silva (2022) showed in his study that TCs define culture with individual values and characteristics. Silva (2022) criticized the perspective that it reduces culture to the personal level. Because she argued that personal level type of understanding might prevent understanding the socialization dimension of culture and consequences it will cause for social groups. This research shows that TCs deal with culture with its standard features. Comments and evaluations about countries and cultures do not contain the subtlety or complexity required by the cultural perspective. It can be inferred that formal or individual approaches to culture may limit the intercultural competence.

The TCs in this study consider different cultures only on their visible features and judge them superficially. TCs need a more robust approach to the concept of culture since it is necessary for them to define and understand their future students' cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2018). Doğanay (2008) stated that culture is one of the ten basic standards in teaching Social Studies and argued that students should gain an in-depth understanding and experience of culture and cultural differences in order to compare the interaction styles of people from different cultures with their physical and social environments. Both findings of the study and Zayimoğlu (2021) showed that culture is a concept that hard to comprehend. It is also seen that practice-based activities improve cultural competence education. Because TCs are expected to recognize and evaluate the contribution of culture to social action. Participants rarely realized that they were also cultural creatures. The first step to understanding a different culture is to realize one's own cultural perspective (Bennet, 1986; Ersoy & Günel, 2011). TCs should realize that they were born and raised in a particular culture and that the meaning and attribution are constructed continuously regarding the culture they were born into.

Overconfidence in information gained mostly from websites about the culture is another result of the research. TCs rarely have questioned the validity of the source. Information validity is especially crucial when it comes to the concept of culture. Since culture is complex, symbolic and relativistic (Kramsch, 1998), it is not easy to understand by reading some texts from a website. In another study (Dilek Eren, Muşlu Kaygısız, & Parlak, 2018), TCs gave importance to the content and similarity with the reader's views in deciding the reliability of the information. Still, they did not attach importance to the authorship and type of the text. It is important to realize that although the information is valid and reliable, it may be incomplete or insufficient to cover the whole country. On the other hand, there may be different approaches or differences of opinion on the same subject. The information on culture may be inaccurate and may contain cultural biases. According to Banks (2020), one of the main elements of teaching about culture is to raise TCs awareness of how knowledge is constructed. However, the research results show that TCs tend to take and use information that does not seem contradictory. The study by Ünal and Er (2015) shows that the information literacy levels of social studies TCs are insufficient. This research supports the findings of Ünal and Er (2015).

## Result

The relevant results are not in line with the literature concluding that the cultural attitudes of the TCs are sufficient (Çubukçu, 2013; Erdoğan, 2018; Renk, 2014; Sezer & Kahraman, 2017; Yılmaz & Göçen, 2013; Sezer & Kahraman, 2017; Akın, 2016; Çoban, Kahraman & Doğan, 2010). On the other hand, the results of the research expand the literature (Akpınar & Cantürk, 2021; İbrahimoğlu, 2018; Zayimoğlu, 2021; Karataş, 2018 ) that points to problems in cultural attitudes and comprehension. Therefore, it can be said that there are two opposite situations. On the one hand, TCs think they are

culturally competent; on the other hand, they display attitudes and comprehension that do not match with competence in real-life scenarios or situations. In that case, it would not be wrong to say that TCs have certain cultural biases and that their reflective perspectives are insufficient. Therefore, it is suggested that TCs is supported in terms of necessary attitudes and comprehension regarding intercultural competence (Deardoff, 2006, 2009a, 2009b).

### Limitations and Recommendation

Considering the research results, suggestions for future research and practice is presented. Various studies have been conducted on attitudes and comprehension toward intercultural competence and offer a scientific perspective on the field. However, studies on improving attitudes and comprehension of intercultural competence are limited in number and scope. Therefore, applied research can illuminate the field of study. TCs should encounter issues involving culture, different cultures, and interaction more frequently. One of the results of this research is the limitation of TCs reflective perspectives on their cultural judgments. This limitation can be overcome by practical studies enriched with a theoretical background on intercultural competence. Therefore, practices, where people can gain firsthand experience, can contribute to training TCs who are more competent in terms of intercultural competence.

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