Chapter 8

The Role of International Student Mobility and Language Policies in the Process of Internationalization of Higher Education:
The Case of Turkey

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ABSTRACT

The current study, based on the quantitative research approach, is structured on the basic question of whether participation in exchange programs and foreign language variables affect attitudes towards intercultural communication sensitivity. The research, which was conducted with the participation of university students from seven different geographical regions and from different educational fields, provides findings that support the existence of a relation between the contact with a foreign culture and language. Learning about different cultures and learning a foreign language in interaction with the culture reinforce individuals' language skills and improve their awareness about different cultures. Furthermore, it is remarked that the participants who acquired a foreign language through participating in an international exchange program are more confident and responsible in their interactions compared to the other group.

INTRODUCTION

As the process of globalisation has accelerated all over the earth, understanding of different cultures and interacting with them have gained importance in the context of improving international relations. Intercultural communication studies, developed as a common agenda and process across the world with new concepts such as pluralism, multiculturalism, diversity and alienation have substantially enhanced the importance of interculturality (Bekiroglu & Balci, 2014: 431). As a concept, intercultural communication refers to the communication and interaction between different cultures and subcultures. Furthermore, the term addresses a message in the context of intercultural dialogue. Improved mutual dialogue between different cultures may serve a number of primary purposes including democracy, human rights and rule of law and it also reinforces the global village concept which has become an unavoidable fact in our day.

While any nation, country or culture, which isolates itself from other cultures, cannot continue its existence at the present time, isolated individuals living solely in their own culture have begun giving way to multicultural societies. When individuals' tendencies towards intercultural communication sensitivity are observed, it is seen that people may adopt two different reactions in their relationship with target cultures: ethnocentric reaction and ethnorelative reaction. People with ethnocentric approach may deny cultural differences, defend their cultures against others, and deprecate different cultures. However, individuals with ethnorelative approach tend to accept and respect cultural differences (Bennett, 2004). At this point, one can mention significant indicatives such as learning new languages, speaking foreign languages and being in a different culture, with regard to understanding other cultures. Learning another language to comprehend the target culture is described as an important indicative, especially with a view to eliminate prejudices against a different culture and improve intercultural understanding; and it is argued that people may detach from ethnocentric behaviours through language learning (Er, 2006). In this context, the language becomes prominent within the scope of what to talk with whom, and when, where and under which circumstances to talk along with explaining the behaviours of other people belonging to the counterculture to maintain a positive communication process between individuals from different cultures (Edmonson & House, 1993: 82 as cited in Aktaş, 2004:93).

Intercultural communication, in regard to the relations between Turkey and the EU, is among the agenda topics of high importance, the demand for intercultural communication sensitivity continuously increase in terms of

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