

## Greek University Students' Intercultural Sensitivity Profile: A Case Study

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**Abstract:** This paper addresses the absence of a comprehensive framework for internationalizing education in Greek universities' intercultural language policy planning (LPP). It highlights educators' pivotal role and proposes expanding intercultural competence programs based on Chen and Starosta's (2000) model. The study, involving 90 University of Patras undergraduates, utilizes the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) to reveal heightened intercultural sensitivity (IS). While indicating a positive foundation for intercultural competence, student feedback identifies areas for improvement, including self-esteem, perceptiveness, attentiveness, and adaptability. The study concludes by emphasizing the necessity of defining and applying intercultural sensitivity across diverse life domains and regions, advocating for further investigation. It also offers preliminary pedagogical insights for developing a language policy emphasizing intercultural sensitivity in Greek universities, contributing to broader education internationalization.

**Keywords:** Intercultural sensitivity, Internationalization, Language policy, Greek students, Higher education

### 1. Introduction

Extensive discourse in academic literature revolves around the concept of intercultural communication competence. Griva and Papadopoulos (2017) contend that fundamental educational programs should incorporate elements of cultural competence and intercultural learning objectives, aiming to facilitate students' comprehension of diverse cultural perspectives and modes of communication. The extent to which the curriculum's orientation serves as the cornerstone for interculturality within foreign language courses is explored by Perry and Southwell (2011). They advocate for a deeper understanding of the various avenues for cultivating intercultural competence. Notably, the researchers propose that alternative learning experiences and environments be investigated, given the limited accessibility of intercultural training programs and overseas experiences. Additionally, they call for more empirical investigations into the efficacy of diverse approaches to fostering intercultural competence and strategies for cultivating it among university students. Furthermore, Matsumoto et al. (2005) underscore the significance of regulating emotions.

They posit that the intercultural experience entails ongoing adaptation to encountered differences, asserting that effective emotion regulation functions as a psychological catalyst for this adaptation. The continual updating of individuals' cognitive frameworks and perceptions with new cultural distinctions renders their capacity to manage emotional responses pivotal in effectively navigating inevitable intercultural conflicts. Failure to exert control over emotions perpetuates existing stereotypical notions and behaviors. Correspondingly, Akyildiz and Ahmed (2020) advocate delving into the role of emotions and advocate for increased research on intercultural sensitivity (IS), given that their survey exposed a predominant focus on the cognitive realm in existing studies on foreign language learning within the context of intercultural communication. The primary inference drawn is the necessity to broaden the scope of objectives within intercultural competence programs to encompass all facets of intercultural communication competence (ICC), including

intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural adroitness (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

Considering that language planning entails a purposeful effort involving the creation and implementation of policies to direct language usage and its intended applications (Wiley, 2015), this paper seeks to address a noted gap in the current literature by emphasizing the importance of emotions. The study conducts a case analysis to investigate the intercultural sensitivity of Greek university students, with the aim of guiding the development of intercultural curricula that align with a language policy (LP) valuing intercultural sensitivity.

## **2. Literature Review**

To set the stage for the core argument presented in this paper, this section offers an analysis of language policy and planning (LLP) within the context of Greek universities, examining its alignment with intercultural communicative competence. The multifaceted nature of intercultural communicative competence is probed by surveying a range of models put forth by prominent experts in the field. The underlying objective is to identify common ground in an earnest endeavor to establish consensus, thereby underscoring the pivotal role assigned to intercultural sensitivity.

### **2.1 Language Policy and Planning (LLP)**

Regarding the interplay of pedagogy and language policy and planning (LPP), Diallo and Liddicoat (2014) contend that although these two realms are extensively researched independently, their interconnectedness often lacks systematic exploration. They advocate for an investigation into how language policy and planning intersect with classroom practices, aiming to illuminate the intricacies involved when decisions are made concerning language education within a specific polity.

In elaborating their stance, Diallo and Liddicoat (2014) draw on the insights of Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), who propose that language planning entails future decision-making aimed at modifying language practices to address perceived linguistic issues, whereas language policy encompasses a range of instruments, including texts and practices. Essentially, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) emphasize the close interrelation between pedagogy and LPP, positing that language planning serves both as a precursor to policy formation and a result of policy establishment. Expanding upon Kaplan and Baldauf's argument (1997), Spolsky (2004, p. 9) contends that due to the inclusion of language practices and management decisions within language policy, the demarcation between policy and planning is not always distinct. For instance, a policy might dictate the language to be taught and the weekly teaching hours allocated. This intricate complexity is further examined by Liddicoat and Taylor-Leech (2021, p. 4), who delve into the concept of agency in language policy and planning (LPP). They highlight the extensive literature on human agency, defining it as an individual's capacity to independently initiate, regulate, and effect changes within their circumstances. Liddicoat and Taylor-Leech (2021) build upon earlier works asserting that understanding LPP necessitates a focus on the decision-makers, their decision-making processes, and the characteristics thereof. In essence, they argue that considering LPP as a matter of choice underscores the value of agency—individuals' ability to autonomously act and make choices (Ball et al., 2012; Bouchard & Glasgow, 2019; Coburn, 2016; Spolsky, 2009, as cited in Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2021, p. 2).

Within the Greek context, Katsara (2020) highlights that while Greek tertiary education programs may incorporate foreign language courses at a macro level, there is no clear mention of the promotion of linguistic diversity in Europe through various levels of planning, each with different goals, with a focus on aspects like multilingualism, intercultural competence, and the preservation and development of regional or minority languages (Liddicoat, 2002, as cited in Katsara, 2020, p. 291).

Nevertheless, the literature offers instances of Greek foreign language educators individually exploring avenues to internationalize foreign language curricula by integrating intercultural education. Drawing from Kumaravadivelu's (2001, as cited in Katsara, 2020, p. 295) post-method pedagogy concept, Katsara proposes the incorporation of Edward De Bono's six thinking hats (1985, as cited in Katsara, 2020, p. 295) as a means to encourage critical cultural awareness among Greek and international students, promoting interaction and preparing them for global professional roles.

Furthermore, Delli (2020) presents an innovative approach to teaching intercultural awareness in a business context, integrating principles of global citizenship into class activities to equip students with cross-cultural negotiation skills and conflict resolution abilities relevant to their future careers. Additionally, Katsara (2023) supports the idea for cultivating world citizens through the integration of cultural diversity into language classes, focusing on values-based rationales for curriculum internationalization. She suggests a class activity based on the SQ3R reading technique, emphasizing its potential to prompt questions and curiosity while aiding students in comprehending and reevaluating their attitudes towards cultural diversity.

These Greek initiatives indicate that policy-making actors can be individuals within institutions, exerting influence over language use within the foreign language learning context. This demonstrates that LPP can manifest as individual agency, aligning with the perspective of Liddicoat and Leech (2021).

## **2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence Materials and Programmes**

Papaefthymiou-Lytra et al. (2019) posit that quality within TESOL materials addressing cultural content is synonymous with nurturing learners' intercultural awareness and competence. They propose strategies that facilitate the cultivation of tolerance and comprehension of otherness, aimed at bridging cultural gaps and mitigating misunderstandings in intercultural contexts. Their recommendations for enhancing quality involve the establishment of guiding criteria for cultural content tailored to learners' age, interests, and expectations. They also advocate for localized curricula that can be employed within specific teaching and learning contexts, promoting a comprehensive understanding of foreign language cultures encompassing facts, issues, processes, concepts, and values. In this context, the authors propose the creation of a bank of critical incidents that juxtapose aspects of the foreign language culture with students' own culture, emphasizing the necessity for foreign language teachers to receive appropriate training.

Griva and Kofou (2019) introduce the concept of the intercultural portfolio, inspired by the European Language Portfolio (E.L.P), composed of three components: the inter/multicultural and multilingual biography, the Dossier, and the intercultural/multilingual passport. The distinctive feature of this portfolio lies in its customization to individual students' needs, with tasks aligned to those specific needs, encouraging reflective engagement and self-evaluation. The initial step in implementing this intercultural portfolio involves a needs analysis, a concept rooted in prior works by Yalden (1987) and Hutchinson and Waters (1987). While these frameworks emphasize the importance of gathering information

regarding students' language learning history and attitudes towards the target language and culture, the role of emotional regulation and empathy (Goleman, 1998) is notably absent. This gap is also highlighted by Guntersdorfer and Golubeva (2018), who emphasize the importance of directing more attention towards empathy in the study of intercultural competence, thus positioning empathy as a valuable asset for intercultural educators.

Ivenz and Blanka (2022) conducted a comprehensive literature review, revealing that foreign language teachers acknowledge the significance of incorporating techniques, methods, and activities to foster intercultural communicative competence in language lessons, yet often lack the requisite knowledge to do so effectively. Through an examination of research articles in databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, they identified various activities (e.g., scavenger hunts, utilization of authentic materials) and methods (e.g., flipped classroom, viewing-listening-speaking approach, telecollaboration, computer-mediated communication, 360-degree video technology, online ICC training model) that enhance students' intercultural communicative competence. The outcomes of these approaches included increased open-mindedness and tolerance among students. Ivenz and Blanka (2022) conclude that students enjoyed these diverse learning experiences, fostering cross-cultural knowledge and proficiency. This highlights the crucial role of pedagogy within the realm of language planning.

### 2.3 The Complexity of Intercultural Competence

Barrett (2013) contends that while educators bear the responsibility of fostering intercultural competencies in learners, the challenge arises from the difficulty in conceptualizing intercultural competence itself. Over the past five decades, a multitude of models of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) have emerged across various disciplines. Griffith et al. (2016) refer to Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) and Leung et al. (2014) to elaborate on their own understanding of ICC. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009, as cited in Griffith et al., 2016, pp 2-4) categorize ICC models into five types: compositional, co-orientational, developmental, adaptational, and causal. Compositional models (e.g., Deardorff, 2006; Hunter, White & Godbey, 2006, as cited in Griffith et al., 2016, p. 2) provide descriptions of ICC attributes (knowledge, skills, attitudes). Co-orientational models (e.g., Byram, 1997; Kurpka, 2008, as cited in Griffith et al., 2016, p. 2) explore how intercultural competence is achieved through interactions. Developmental models (e.g., Bennett, 1993; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005, as cited in Griffith et al., 2016, p. 2) focus on the gradual evolution of intercultural competence. Adaptational models (e.g., Berry et al., 1989, as cited in Griffith et al., 2016, p. 2) merge developmental elements with the context of adapting to foreign cultures. Causal path models (e.g., Arasaratnam, 2008, as cited in Griffith et al., 2016, p. 2), integrate compositional attributes into an interactional framework where variables influence one another to predict ICC. In contrast, Leung et al. (2014, as cited in Griffith et al., 2016, p. 2) propose a system differentiating models based on intercultural traits, attitudes and worldviews, and capabilities. Intercultural traits refer to stable personality traits influencing behavior, while attitudes and worldviews relate to an individual's perception and evaluation of other cultures. Intercultural capabilities encompass a spectrum of abilities facilitating interaction in intercultural contexts, spanning actions, thoughts, and knowledge.

Griffith et al. (2016) argue that the variability in content and dimensions among ICC models, combined with the lack of consensus on its definition, contributes to the complexity of ICC. This lack of consensus is highlighted by a survey conducted by Deardorff (2006, p. 247, as cited in Griffith et al., 2016, p. 6), which found disagreements among ICC experts and higher education administrators. Griffith et al. (2016) reference Deardorff's survey, conducted

using the Delphi method to ascertain the core characteristics of intercultural competence. A significant outcome of the survey is that only one element of ICC—understanding others' worldviews—received unanimous agreement from the respondents.

Considering the above discourse, Griffith et al. (2016) conclude that ICC is indeed intricate due to the diversity in model content and dimensions, leading to reduced conceptual clarity. Notably, evidence from literature (e.g., Deardorff, 2006) underscores that understanding and evaluating worldviews are consistently considered central to ICC. Consequently, any discussion of ICC should commence with an exploration of the concept of understanding.

A pivotal concern revolves around the interpretation and conceptualization of understanding. According to Perkins and Blythe (1994), understanding involves engaging in thought-demanding activities such as explaining, providing evidence with examples, generalizing, applying, analogizing, and offering new perspectives. These activities, referred to as "understanding performances," demonstrate comprehension and the ability to advance a topic. Perkins and Blythe (1994, p. 6) assert that meaningful engagement with these understanding performances is crucial to attain the desired level of understanding. This perspective emphasizes the argument presented by Matsumoto et al. (2005), who emphasize that even the most sophisticated cognitive understanding of a culture remains superficial if emotional regulation is absent in intercultural communicative contexts. Thus, the significance of positive emotions towards understanding cultural differences—namely, intercultural sensitivity—should occupy a central place in any discussion on the subject of ICC.

## 2.4 Intercultural sensitivity

Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) explored the concept of intercultural sensitivity (IS), highlighting its essence in being enthusiastic about learning from other cultures and adjusting one's behavior based on cultural differences. Hammer et al. (2003) define intercultural sensitivity as an individual's psychological ability to navigate cultural differences. In essence, intercultural sensitivity shapes how individuals perceive and possess cultural differences, encapsulating "the capacity to discern and experience relevant cultural disparities."

Contrastingly, Bennett (1993) presents IS as a developmental process, introducing the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). This model traces the transition from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism in intercultural interactions. The initial stages (Denial, Defense, and Minimization) are ethnocentric, portraying a perception of one's culture as centrally significant. In contrast, the latter stages (Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration) are ethnorelative, reflecting an outlook where all cultures are viewed as distinct ways of interpreting reality. Bennett emphasizes a shift from avoiding cultural differences to actively seeking them. This developmental approach focuses on the gradual progression of intercultural competence over time (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Bennett's work paved the way for the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) developed by Bennett and Hammer in 1998, which assesses orientations towards cultural differences. The IDI appears to evaluate more than just an individual's developmental stages of intercultural sensitivity as outlined in the DMIS. It also offers insights into an individual's intercultural awareness and behavior (Bennett & Hammer, 1998).

Chen and Starosta (1997, p. 5) define IS as "the ability to cultivate positive emotions towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences, leading to effective behavior in intercultural communication." They propose that intercultural communicative competence consists of three dimensions: affective (intercultural sensitivity), cognitive (intercultural awareness), and behavioral (intercultural adroitness). The affective dimension entails

acknowledging, appreciating, and accepting diverse cultures. The cognitive aspect involves recognizing similarities and differences between cultures, while the behavioral component relates to achieving communication goals in varied cultural contexts. Chen and Starosta (1997) assert that complete intercultural competence involves proficiency in all three dimensions: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. Intercultural sensitivity, as the affective component, is a prerequisite for intercultural competence, even though it focuses primarily on emotions compared to the other dimensions.

The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), introduced by Chen and Starosta (2000), addresses drawbacks identified in the IDI by Bennett and Hammer (1998). Zhao (2018) explains that unlike the IDI, which may assess a broad spectrum of intercultural competencies including awareness and behavior, the ISS focuses specifically on measuring the affective dimensions of intercultural sensitivity. This refinement ensures a more precise evaluation of individuals' emotional responses and attitudes towards cultural differences. Moreover, the ISS underscores the pivotal role of intercultural awareness as the cornerstone for developing intercultural sensitivity and, consequently, achieving intercultural effectiveness. By emphasizing this foundational aspect, the ISS delineates clear boundaries between intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness, and overall intercultural competence.

The ISS dissects intercultural sensitivity into five domains: engagement, respect for cultural differences, self-confidence, enjoyment, and attentiveness. Interaction engagement denotes active participation and empathy in cross-cultural interactions. Respect for cultural differences implies open-mindedness and willingness to express oneself while accepting diverse expressions. Interaction confidence signifies self-esteem and readiness to navigate complex, ambiguous cross-cultural situations. Interaction enjoyment involves non-judgmental acceptance of diverse cultures and views. Interaction attentiveness characterizes self-awareness, enabling adjustments to challenges in cross-cultural scenarios. The intercultural sensitivity dimension encompasses components like self-esteem, self-monitoring, empathy, open-mindedness, non-judgmentalism, and social interaction, collectively facilitating the development of a positive emotion that drives appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication.

Research indicates that the ISS predicts the quality of intercultural decision-making, capturing attitudinal facets of intercultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Graf & Harland, 2005). It is important to emphasize that the ISS does not directly measure behavior or skills. Nevertheless, it's crucial to highlight that the ISS may need revisions for different populations (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Further studies are warranted to enhance the theoretical understanding of intercultural sensitivity across diverse cultural settings and populations. For example, Wu (2015) suggests that items within the instrument might require modification or new additions, considering that while the ISS is widely used, its validation for measuring sensitivity among Taiwanese citizens remains pending.

### **3. The Study**

#### **3.1 Methodology**

##### **3.1.1 Participants**

The survey was administered to a sample of 90 undergraduate students enrolled in departments at the University of Patras (Agrinio and Mesolongi campus) where the author of

this paper taught.<sup>1</sup> The distribution of participants across departments was as follows: 27.7% were studying Food Science and Technology, 25.55% were enrolled in the Business Administration of Food and Agricultural Enterprises program, 17.7% were pursuing studies in Environmental Engineering, and 28.88% were attending the Department of Accounting and Finance (formerly TEI of Western Greece, Mesolongi). Detailed demographic information, including age, gender, the number of foreign languages spoken, and travel experiences, has been summarized in the subsequent tables.

**Table 1. Gender**

| Gender | %     |
|--------|-------|
| Female | 61.11 |
| Male   | 38.88 |

**Table 2. Level of English**

| Level of English |    | %     |
|------------------|----|-------|
| A1               | 2  | 2.22  |
| A2               | 4  | 4.44  |
| B1               | 8  | 8.88  |
| B2               | 44 | 48.88 |
| C1               | 18 | 20    |
| C2               | 14 | 15.55 |

**Table 3. Number of foreign languages**

| Number of foreign languages | %     |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| 1                           | 51.11 |
| 2                           | 37.77 |
| 3                           | 8.88  |
| 4+                          | 2.2   |

**Table 4. Frequency of travelling abroad**

| Frequency of travelling abroad | %     |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Regularly                      | 5.5   |
| Sometimes                      | 60    |
| Not at all                     | 34.44 |

### 3.1.2 Instrument and Data Collection

During the introductory session at the beginning of the semester, first-year students were requested to complete the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale questionnaire (Chen & Starosta,

<sup>1</sup> According to article 2 of 52/2022 (Gazette 131/7-7-2022, Vol. A) the departments operating in Agrinio either merged with other departments or moved to Patras. According to the provisions outlined in Law 4610/2019, (Gazette 70/7.5.2019, Vol. A) the Accounting & Finance department previously associated with the TEI of Western Greece integrated into the Department of Tourism Management within the School of Economics and Business Administration at the University of Patras.

2000). Ethical considerations regarding confidentiality and anonymity were explained to the students, and they were informed that the survey aimed to assess their comprehension of intercultural sensitivity, contributing to the development of intercultural curricula aligned with a language policy emphasizing the value of intercultural sensitivity.

The questionnaire encompassed three sections. Section A included demographic inquiries, including age, gender, number of foreign languages spoken, and travel experiences. Section B featured a 24-item, 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Section C introduced an open-ended question, inviting students to provide justifications for their responses.

The process of selecting students to complete the self-assessment questionnaire followed a strategy known as random purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) asserts that this approach is employed to identify and select information-rich cases for optimizing resource utilization. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), this technique involves selecting individuals or groups with substantial knowledge or experience relevant to the phenomenon of interest. In this study, the primary objective was to comprehend Greek students' perceptions of intercultural sensitivity for the purpose of designing a curriculum aligned with a language policy emphasizing its significance. Therefore, a broader understanding could be gained by collecting information from a substantial sample encompassing the entire population of students registered for the course, rather than exclusively focusing on the viewpoints of a limited number of selected students.

### **3.1.3 Data Analysis**

This study employed a quantitative research approach to collect and analyze data. Creswell (1994) states that quantitative research involves explaining phenomena through statistical precision. He also distinguishes various types of quantitative research, including survey research, correlational research, experimental research, and causal-comparative research. The present study falls under the category of survey research. The survey encompassed different types of questions, including open-ended questions and close-ended questions with ordered choices. Open-ended questions allow respondents to express their answers in their own words, facilitating the analysis of ideas that may not otherwise surface and proving valuable when seeking additional insights (Sallant & Dillman, 1994, p. 81). In contrast, close-ended questions require respondents to select from a predefined set of responses (McIntyre, 1999, p.75). Close-ended questions can be grouped into categories such as those describing and evaluating individuals, places, and events, those measuring reactions to concepts, analyses, or proposals, and those assessing knowledge (Sallant & Dillman, 1994, p. 81).

The current study utilized close-ended questions to gauge responses to statements regarding intercultural sensitivity. Students were tasked with comparing their own perspectives to the ideas presented in the question statements, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale. Johns (2010, p. 4) emphasizes that Likert items aim to capture the degree of agreement or disagreement with an idea, rather than quantifying "hidden variables." However, if the intention is to uncover "hidden variables," then response options should be structured to unveil these variables. Given that this study aimed to measure the levels of intercultural sensitivity among Greek students, with the objective of designing suitable intercultural curricula, it would be advantageous to incorporate open-ended questions, encouraging participants to provide justifications, reasons, and examples for their responses. This approach would facilitate an examination of their comprehension of intercultural sensitivity and the depth of their emotional connection to the subject.

#### 4. Findings

This section presents students' responses using the Likert scale Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither agree nor disagree [neutral] (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The data, presented in terms of frequency and percentage, was analyzed to achieve two objectives: a) interpreting the significance of each ISS item based on the responses, b) establishing a hierarchy or ranking of the ISS items that reflects the students' level of engagement or perspective concerning IS. The questionnaire was completed by a total of ninety undergraduate students.

The demographic information presented in Section A of the questionnaire indicated that approximately 61.11% (55 students) were female, while 38.88% (35) were male. The majority of students demonstrated an English language proficiency level between B2 (48.88%) and C1 (20%). Regarding foreign language proficiency, the majority of students reported speaking either one language (51%) or two languages (37.77%). In terms of travel experiences, 60% of the students stated that they occasionally travel abroad, while 34.44% indicated that they do not engage in international travel.

Moving on to Section B of the questionnaire, students were requested to assess their levels of intercultural sensitivity across various dimensions, including interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness.

**Table 5. overall ranking of Interaction Engagement responses and interpretation**

| Intercultural sensitivity scale | SA %  | A%    | N%    | D%    | SD%   | Interpretation   | Ranking |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|---------|
| 1                               | 45.55 | 42.22 | 6.66  | 2.22  | 3.33  | Positive feeling | 2       |
| 11                              | 8.88  | 31.11 | 34.44 | 11.11 | 14.44 | Neutral feeling  | 6       |
| 13                              | 27.77 | 44.44 | 7.77  | 8.88  | 11.11 | Positive feeling | 3       |
| 21                              | 4.44  | 43.33 | 41.11 | 10    | 1.11  | Positive feeling | 4       |
| 22                              | 8.88  | 14.44 | 30    | 33.33 | 13.33 | Positive feeling | 7       |
| 23                              | 3.33  | 28.88 | 52.22 | 6.66  | 8.88  | Neutral feeling  | 1       |
| 24                              | 7.77  | 34.44 | 41.11 | 12.22 | 4.44  | Neutral feeling  | 5       |

##### 4.1 Willingness for Intercultural Communication

Table 5 illustrates participants' willingness to engage in intercultural communication, as evidenced by their highest agreement score for item 1 "I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures," and their strongest disagreement with item 22 "I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons."

Nevertheless, Greek students demonstrated a neutral attitude, with the highest scores assigned to item 23 “I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues,” and item 24 “I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally distinct counterpart and me.” An intriguing case is presented with item 21 “I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction,” as the statistical difference between students' responses indicating agreement and those showing a neutral attitude is minimal.

These responses suggest that students might lack the ability to regulate their emotions and exhibit appropriate behavior in various intercultural situations. This observation aligns with the recommendations proposed by Guntersdorfer and Golubeva (2018), who advocate for the incorporation of metacognitive tasks to enhance students' empathy. This involves providing opportunities for students to gain experience in describing emotions and engaging in personal reflections (Morris et al., 2014, pp. 207-215; Kaplan et al., 2013, as cited in Guntersdorfer & Golubeva, 2018, p.59).

**Table 6. overall ranking of respect for Cultural Differences responses and interpretation**

| Intercultural sensitivity scale | SA %  | A%    | N%    | D%    | SD%   | Interpretation | Ranking |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------------|---------|
| 2                               | 0     | 3.33  | 31.11 | 40    | 25.55 | Respect        | 3       |
| 7                               | 3.33  | 13.33 | 12.22 | 26.66 | 44.44 | Respect        | 2       |
| 8                               | 54.44 | 12.22 | 3.33  | 20    | 10    | Respect        | 1       |
| 16                              | 33.33 | 40    | 8.88  | 8.88  | 8.88  | Respect        | 3       |
| 18                              | 6.66  | 11.11 | 11.11 | 36.66 | 34.44 | Respect        | 4       |
| 20                              | 5.55  | 20    | 22.22 | 25.55 | 26.66 | Respect        | 5       |

## 4.2 Respect for Cultural Differences

As presented in Table 6, Greek participants demonstrate a significant respect for cultural differences. The item with the highest score is item 8 “I respect the values of people from different cultures.” This sentiment is further underscored by their second-highest score for strongly disagree on item 7 “I don't like to be with people from different cultures.” Additionally, their lowest strongly disagree score is attributed to item 20 “I think my culture is better than other cultures,” indicating a sense of open-mindedness among Greeks.

These responses align with the outcomes of a survey conducted by U-Report Greece, a global platform managed by UNICEF, which examines the viewpoints of young individuals. This particular survey involved the participation of 282 young Greeks, primarily within the age group of 15 to 19 years old, during the period from June 6th to June 22nd, 2022. Notably, 88% of the participants indicated an understanding of the significance of cultural diversity for society. Furthermore, 26% of the respondents reported that engaging with individuals from different cultures has contributed to their ability to listen attentively and respect varying perspectives.

**Table 7. overall ranking of Interaction Confidence responses**

| Intercultural sensitivity scale | SA %  | A%    | N%    | D%    | SD%   | Interpretation     | Ranking |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------------------|---------|
| 3                               | 26.66 | 45.55 | 23.33 | 6.66  | 6.66  | Confidence         | 2       |
| 4                               | 13.33 | 10    | 18.88 | 38.88 | 18.88 | Confidence         | 4       |
| 5                               | 6.66  | 24.44 | 45.55 | 16.66 | 6.66  | Neutral confidence | 2       |
| 6                               | 7.77  | 23.33 | 42.22 | 22.22 | 4.44  | Neutral confidence | 3       |
| 10                              | 3.33  | 52.22 | 28.88 | 6.66  | 8.88  | Confidence         | 1       |

### 4.3 Confidence in Intercultural Setting

Table 7 illustrates that while Greeks displayed confidence in intercultural interactions, as evidenced by the highest score on item 10 “I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures,” their responses were more neutral for item 5 “I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures” and item 6 “I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.” This suggests that students exhibited uncertainty in less straightforward situations during cross-cultural interactions.

A crucial aspect to consider pertains to the strength of bonds within the community and the significance of beliefs and values. The strength of these bonds can be framed in terms of collectivism versus individualism, a dimension highlighted by Hofstede (1986). Notably, Greeks scored high on collectivism in Hofstede's analysis, implying that their self-concept is interwoven with kinship and social connections, aligning with traditional roles and expectations (Pollis, 1965). The neutral responses observed among students in the current survey underscore the intricate nature of the collectivism dimension.

Triandis (1995) acknowledged the abstract nature of the individualism-collectivism dimension and emphasized the importance of examining its attributes in detail. For instance, self-representation involves shared perceptions of whether the self is best understood as a distinct individual or as part of interpersonal relationships or a larger social entity (Brewer & Chen, 2007, p. 139). Additionally, beliefs and values encompass implicit or explicit understandings regarding causality within the social realm and address the issue of prioritizing interests (individuals, relationships, or groups) in cases of conflicting interests (Brewer & Chen, 2007, p. 139).

**Table 8. overall ranking of Interaction Enjoyment responses**

| Intercultural Sensitivity Scale Item | SA %  | A%    | N%    | D%    | SD%   | Interpretation   | Ranking |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|---------|
| 9                                    | 7.77  | 3.33  | 14.44 | 35.55 | 38.88 | Positive feeling | 1       |
| 12                                   | 10    | 17.77 | 20    | 24.44 | 27.77 | Positive feeling | 3       |
| 15                                   | 11.11 | 7.77  | 21.11 | 31.11 | 28.88 | Positive feeling | 2       |

#### 4.4 Feelings during Intercultural Interaction

According to Table 8, Greek respondents exhibit favorable emotional responses during interactions with individuals from other cultures. The highest scores for strong disagreement were observed for item 9 “I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures” and item 12 “I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.” These responses suggest that Greeks derive enjoyment from engaging in cross-cultural interactions. Notably, students expressed disagreement rather than strong disagreement for item 15 “I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.”

This particular response pattern for item 15 raises interesting insights. As engagement involves meaningful and reciprocal interaction, it implies active participation. Therefore, the students' response to item 15 could indicate their preference for receiving additional training on the affective and behavioral components of intercultural competence. This finding is consistent with a survey conducted by Petosi and Karras (2020), which revealed that Greek EFL teachers in state schools expressed a favorable stance towards incorporating intercultural communicative competence (ICC) into their classroom practices. The survey highlighted the importance of nurturing open, positive, and tolerant attitudes toward foreign cultures and cultural differences, aligning with the current study's findings.

**Table 9. overall ranking of Interaction Attentiveness items**

| Intercultural sensitivity scale | SA %  | A%    | N%    | D%    | SD%   | Interpretation | Ranking |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------------|---------|
| 14                              | 23.33 | 30    | 36.66 | 7.77  | 2.22  | Neutral effort | 3       |
| 17                              | 30    | 40    | 11.11 | 7.77  | 11.11 | Effort         | 2       |
| 19                              | 7.77  | 21.11 | 44.44 | 14.44 | 12.22 | Neutral effort | 1       |

#### 4.5 Effort to Understand the Intercultural Interaction

As indicated in Table 9, Greek respondents demonstrate a neutral inclination towards understanding intercultural interactions, as reflected in their responses for Item 19 “I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction” and item 14 “I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.” Conversely, their responses for item 17 “I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures” suggest a proactive effort.

These findings are consistent with outcomes from a survey conducted by Chranioti and Arvanitis (2018), which revealed similar tendencies among Greek elementary school teachers. The survey indicated that these teachers prioritize gathering extensive information when interacting with individuals from different cultures. However, their sensitivity to subtle cultural nuances during interactions and their level of observation during cross-cultural exchanges appeared to be relatively lower.

These statistics emphasize that Greek respondents might not possess comprehensive intercultural competence, particularly in complex communicative situations. This emphasizes

the necessity for intercultural training for both educators and students, aiming to enhance their intercultural competence.

## 4.6 Open-ended Commentary Question

Students were given the chance to make more remarks in Section C – the open-ended question section, in order to supplement their answers in section B of the questionnaire. An indicative selection of students' comments categorized under themes is offered below.<sup>2</sup>

### 4.6.1 Cultural Ethno-relativism

Students' comments indicated evidence that they were seeking cultural difference by accepting its importance (Bennett, 1993, p. 155). Students appear to embrace ethno-relative behavior. Specifically, comments showed that they adopt the "acceptance stage" since they seem to accept "the equal but different complexity of others" and that "acceptance does not necessarily mean agreement or liking". Some comments were:

"There are cultures that differ from our own culture. However, people in these cultures are not necessarily all narrow-minded."

"We need to be honest and identify both good and bad characteristics of a different culture."

"Whether I disagree or agree with other cultures' values, I respect them unless they violate human rights."

"I respect all cultures but I cannot understand and 'respect' some customs or elements of certain cultures. For example, in Spain where the bullfights take place and the dog meat trade in China. In short, the torture of innocent souls for personal satisfaction."

In addition, students seem to adopt the "adaptation stage" since their comments show "attempts to take the perspective of another culture" and attempts to discover "alternative ways of organizing reality" (Bennett, 1993, p. 156). In Bennett's (1998) terms, this highlights the meaning of cultural empathy, that is, the attempt to organize experience via characteristic constructs of another culture than one's own. Some comments were:

"Interacting with individuals from different cultures brings people closer, contributing to globalization. It's a matter of encouraging respect for diversity and a way to prevent social problems like racism."

"Many times, the body language shows a lot about the culture of a country. For example, the way they greet you, the way they say sorry, even the way they say 'thank you'."

"Even though I don't hate any culture, I do like some more than others because I find them more intriguing."

"Every culture has its own 'open wounds'. That is, things that have been institutionalized violating values, beliefs, etc. For example, men in some nationalities are not supportive of women's rights. In that sense, we must show sensitivity when a person talks to us about them."

"I have learned that there are two sides to every coin, meaning that each country has its own way of interpreting history, which a lot of times can be misleading or purposeful. That's why I always want to hear what the other side has to say about the stuff that happened in the past because most of the times the truth lies right in the middle."

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<sup>2</sup> Even though an English version of the ISS questionnaire was distributed, students were asked to respond to the open-ended question in Greek for convenience. Their comments were translated into English.

#### 4.6.2 Foreign Language Competency

Comments indicated the impact of language competency during intercultural interactions as reflected below:

“There are topics that can be discussed without the need to know the cultures of others, for example hobbies, customs, etc. Therefore, nationality does not affect communication if a common language is used.”

“I think that disagreements are unavoidable but with proper use of language, these can be avoided. I work part time as a waitress. I'm lucky since I speak 3 languages and this makes my job easier.”

#### 4.6.3 Situational Uncertainty

Comments also revealed the link between situational uncertainty and anxiety. As Berger and Calabrese (1975, as cited in Chen 2010, p. 3) proposed, “the lack of information about one another during initial interactions leads to the increase of the situational uncertainty or ambiguity, which in turn provokes feelings of anxiety or apprehension of interactants”. Some comments were:

“Sometimes, I don't know what to say. Sociability depends on how the other person makes you feel.”

“Many times, we meet people from countries that we may admire more for things that our own culture may not have, so there can be a moment of discouragement.”

### 5. Some Implications and Future Research

Regarding the overall profile of students' intercultural sensitivity, the study revealed that the students displayed a high level of IS. However, they exhibited neutral attitudes toward certain components of IS, suggesting that the midpoint on the scale held various meanings such as "neither agree nor disagree," "undecided," "don't know," and "no opinion" (Raaijmakers et al., 2000). Despite the potential drawbacks of using midpoints, these diverse interpretations might help minimize the rate of non-response. Respondents who lack sufficient knowledge to answer a question could opt for the midpoint, indicating uncertainty or lack of knowledge (Raaijmakers et al., 2000). In this context, the students' neutral responses may indicate a need to enhance their understanding of IS components, essentially implying a requirement for increased intercultural knowledge.

The students' comments provided in response to the open-ended question underscored the importance of enhancing their emotional intelligence (EI), encompassing five "social and emotional competencies": self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 1998, p. 318). Specifically, the students expressed a willingness to engage in intercultural encounters, despite their neutral attitude toward verbally or nonverbally expressing positive emotions during these interactions. Some comments suggested that students view social interactions as reciprocal relationships, where both parties should value and pay attention to each other, even if it requires stepping outside their comfort zones. This illuminates the significance of addressing empathy in educational settings by focusing on how individuals perceive and experience emotions (Guntersdorfer & Golubeva, 2018).

The students also demonstrated a respect for cultural differences, as indicated by their comments, which implied an acceptance, although not necessarily agreement or preference,

for the intricate nature of other cultures. This finding corresponds with previous research that highlighted a negative correlation between intercultural sensitivity and ethnocentrism and communication apprehension, as observed in Chen's survey (2010).

Regarding students' confidence during intercultural interactions, the study revealed that students appeared confident, even though social norms and expectations were given neutral weight. This highlights the significance of appraising competency in social skills, given the clear influence of emotional connections in cultivating sociability.

In terms of students' interaction enjoyment, the study found that they reported enjoying cross-cultural interactions and actively seeking to understand individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This suggests an effort to gather information about cultural patterns and norms, reflecting explicit learning processes (Frensch & R nger, 2003, p. 13). However, the students reported neutral perceptiveness and attentiveness toward better receiving and comprehending messages, and a willingness to detect situational cues and adjust their behavior in response to challenges in cross-cultural situations. This may imply that culturally appropriate responses often depend on subtle and intricate conditions (Savani et al., 2022). Some student comments highlighted the complexity arising from situations that clash with values or beliefs, as well as the significance of nonverbal communication in adopting culturally appropriate behavior. This indicates that both explicit aptitude (e.g., reasoning ability) and implicit aptitude (e.g., pattern recognition ability) play essential roles in achieving successful intercultural communication (Savani et al., 2022). Intercultural sensitivity needs to be comprehensively described and applied across various life areas and geographical regions, emphasizing the role of emotions and personal values in achieving goals (Iqbal, 2021).

In summary, the content discussed in this paper accentuates the integration of EI in the context of LPP, placing emphasis on the value of intercultural sensitivity. The integration of EI into LPP presents numerous implications for educational practice and research. Firstly, the incorporation of EI training modules into language and intercultural communication courses serves as an initial step towards cultivating essential skills such as self-awareness, empathy, and social regulation among students. These modules, often featuring interactive activities like reflective writing and experiential exercises, facilitate deeper engagement with personal cultural biases and assumptions. Furthermore, providing opportunities for cultural immersion experiences, whether through study abroad programs or virtual exchanges, offers students firsthand exposure to diverse cultures. This exposure enhances their appreciation for cultural diversity and enriches their intercultural competence. Additionally, organizing workshops focused on cross-cultural communication equips students with practical tools to navigate intercultural interactions confidently. Topics such as cultural etiquette and nonverbal communication are addressed, empowering students to engage effectively in diverse cultural contexts. Moreover, fostering intercultural dialogues within the classroom setting, including role-playing scenarios, promotes mutual respect and understanding among students from different cultural backgrounds. By simulating real-life intercultural encounters, students can practice applying their skills in a supportive environment. One such example highlighting the positive impact of EI on IS can be found in Saberi's (2012) doctoral thesis. Saberi proposed a model to enhance IS by leveraging emotional and cognitive abilities through EI entry points. The model emphasizes three adaptive cognitive states (learn, understand, and know) to shift focus from resistance toward differences and adjust one's worldview and attitude toward individuals who are different.

Future qualitative research, including in-depth interviews, could further explore the identified issues and establish parameters for a comprehensive LPP framework that prioritizes IS. By addressing these aspects, educators and policymakers can effectively

enhance students' intercultural competence, contributing to a more inclusive and culturally aware society.

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