



**EXPLORING THE INTERCULTURAL IDENTITY OF
PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS
DURING THEIR STUDY-ABROAD EXPERIENCES:
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY**

Doktora Tezi

Merve DOMBAYCI

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Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Ana Bilim Dalı

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ÖZET

İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENİ ADAYLARININ YURTDIŞINDA-EĞİTİM DENEYİMLERİNDEKİ KÜLTÜRLERARASI KİMLİĞİN KEŞFEDİLMESİ: BİR ÇOKLU DURUM ÇALIŞMASI

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Bu çalışma, hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmenlerinin yurtdışı deneyimleri aracılığıyla nasıl kültürlerarası kimlik geliştirdiğini araştırmaktadır. Vygotsky'nin Sosyal İnşacılık kuramına dayanan araştırma, kimliğin oluşumunda kültürel etkileşim, iletişim ve yansıtmanın rolünü incelemektedir. Yang (2017) ve Byram'ın (1997) kültürlerarası yeterlik modellerinden yararlanılarak yürütülen bu çalışma, Erasmus+ programına katılan dört Türk hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmeniyle gerçekleştirilen nitel bir çoklu durum çalışmasıdır. Veriler, görüşmeler, yansıtıcı günlükler ve kritik olay raporları yoluyla toplanmış ve tematik olarak analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, kimlik gelişiminde kişilerarası etkileşimlerin, dil kullanımının ve kültürel uyumun önemli olduğunu göstermektedir. Katılımcılar dil engelleri ve kültürel uyumsuzluk gibi zorluklarla karşılaşmış olsalar da, bu deneyimler onların dayanıklılık ve kültürlerarası farkındalık kazanmalarını sağlamıştır. Çalışma, kişisel gelişimin program yapısı, yeni deneyimlere açıklık ve önceki kültürlerarası deneyimler gibi faktörlere bağlı olarak değiştiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Genel olarak, bulgular yurtdışı deneyimlerinin kültürlerarası yeterliği artırdığını ve kültürel açıdan duyarlı öğretmen kimliklerinin gelişimine katkı sağladığını göstermektedir. Çalışma, öğretmen eğitim programlarında yapılandırılmış kültürlerarası eğitim, yansıtıcı uygulamalar ve kurumsal destek gerekliliğine dikkat çekmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kültürlerarası kimlik, hizmet öncesi EFL öğretmenleri, yurtdışında eğitim, kültürlerarası iletişim, öğretmen kimliği gelişimi.

ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE INTERCULTURAL IDENTITY OF PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS DURING THEIR STUDY-ABROAD EXPERIENCES: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

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Department of Foreign Language Education

Ph.D. in English Language Teaching

Anadolu University, Graduate School, May 2025

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Hülya İPEK

This study investigates how pre-service EFL teachers develop intercultural identity through study-abroad experiences. Grounded in Vygotsky's Social Constructionism, it examines the role of cultural immersion, communication, and reflection in shaping identity. Using Yang's (2017) and Byram's (1997) intercultural competence models, the study adopts a qualitative multiple case study approach with four Turkish pre-service EFL teachers who participated in Erasmus+ programs. Data were collected through interviews, reflective journals, and critical incident reports, and analyzed thematically. Findings show that interpersonal interactions, language use, and cultural adaptation are key in identity development. While participants faced challenges such as language barriers and cultural dissonance, these difficulties fostered resilience and intercultural awareness. The study highlights how personal growth varies depending on factors like program structure, openness to new experiences, and prior intercultural exposure. Overall, the findings suggest that study-abroad not only enhances intercultural competence but also supports the development of culturally responsive teacher identities. The study calls for structured intercultural training, reflective practices, and institutional support in teacher education programs.

Keywords: Intercultural identity, pre-service EFL teachers, study-abroad, intercultural communication, teacher identity development

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ETİK İLKE VE KURALLARA UYGUNLUK BEYANNAMESİ

Bu tezin bana ait, özgün bir çalışma olduğunu; çalışmamın hazırlık, veri toplama, analiz ve bilgilerin sunumu olmak üzere tüm aşamalarında bilimsel etik ilke ve kurallara uygun davrandığımı; bu çalışma kapsamında elde edilen tüm veri ve bilgiler için kaynak gösterdiğimi ve bu kaynaklara kaynakçada yer verdiğimi; bu çalışmanın Anadolu Üniversitesi tarafından kullanılan “Bilimsel İntihal Tespit Programı”yla tarandığını ve hiçbir şekilde “intihal içermediğini” beyan ederim. Herhangi bir zamanda, çalışmamla ilgili yaptığım bu beyana aykırı bir durumun saptanması durumunda, ortaya çıkacak tüm ahlaki ve hukuki sonuçları kabul ettiğimi bildiririm.

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STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND RULES

I hereby truthfully declare that this thesis/dissertation is an original work prepared by me; that I have behaved in accordance with the scientific ethical principles and rules throughout the stages of preparation, data collection, analysis and presentation of my work; that I have cited the sources of all the data and information that could be obtained within the scope of this study, and included these sources in the references section; and that this study has been scanned for plagiarism with “Scientific Plagiarism Detection Program” used by Anadolu University, and that “it does not have any plagiarism” whatsoever. I also declare that, if a case contrary to my declaration is detected in my work at any time, I hereby express my consent to all the ethical and legal consequences that are involved.

.....

Merve DOMBAYCI



This thesis is dedicated to my beloved grandmother,
who convinced my mom to let me do my first Erasmus+ study in Budapest in 2011,
I took my first steps in my lifelong international journey thanks to her...

More importantly, she did not give me life,
She showed me how to live it graciously...
Canım Annem, Canım Anneannem...

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I wanna thank me for having no days off
I wanna thank me for, for never quitting.”

Merve DOMBAYCI, May 2025

ÜRETKEN YAPAY ZEKÂ KULLANIM BEYANI

Bu tez çalışmasının hazırlanması, yürütülmesi, verilerin analizi vb. aşamalarının herhangi birinde üretken yapay zekâ programlarından yararlanmadığımı beyan ederim”

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DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USAGE

I declare that I have not used generative artificial intelligence programs at any stage of the preparation, execution, data analysis, etc. of this study.

.....

Merve DOMBAYCI

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ECTS	: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EFL	: English as a Foreign Language
ELF	: English as a Lingua Franca
ELT	: English Language Teaching
ESN	: Erasmus Student Network
FLTA	: Fulbright Foreign Language Teacher Assistant
GPA	: Grade Point Average
ICC	: Intercultural Communication Competence
L2	: Second Language
LTI	: Language Teacher Identity
LTIs	: Language Teacher Identities
MA	: Master of Arts
PhD	: Philosophy of Doctorate
US	: The United States of America
USA	: The United States of America
TESOL	: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

CHAPTER ONE

1 INTRODUCTION

*“It does not matter if the
experience is positive or
negative.*

All experiences are important.”

-Council of Europe-

1.1 Identity and Constructing an Identity

When a child is born, it immediately starts to be identified with various different kinds of features. At first, it is identified by gender, followed by weight and height. Then, if the name is decided, it can be announced, and the identity document can be issued. Later on, the identity's construction continues daily throughout the individual's life. As long as the individuals live, their urge to look for who they are continues with the appearance of additional identities. Sometimes a person calls themselves a tennis player, and sometimes a non-stop traveler. Some aspects of identity come from birth, while some develop over time (Pennington, 2015). As Erikson (1994), an influential psychologist in history, explains, identity is a continuous concept throughout the life cycle beginning from birth. On the other hand, from a sociocultural perspective, identity is considered to be formed from childhood through interactions and relationships with other individuals (Fraser, 2016). The significance is very profound as identity engages each individual with the world through the perception of the self and what surrounds that specific being. Therefore, there is much more to reveal about the concept of identity.

In looking back at the history of the identity concept, it can be seen that it was regarded as a somewhat fixed and unique feature for an individual (Erikson, 1968). However, following poststructuralism, it started to be seen as something complex with dynamicity (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Following this kind of perspective, the idea of an individual being identified with something fixed, such as 'social or antisocial', began to be replaced with multiple strands of the dynamic self of individuals. Therefore, identity

at a glance is generally conceptualized as constantly emerging and developing throughout the years (Miller, 2009). According to Pennington (2015), identity is multifaceted and dynamic. In this regard, the identity frame has a long history, and many researchers from various fields have worked on describing identity. This focus on exploring identity has gained acceleration since the 1950s. McCall and Simmons (1978) were among the ones who laid the foundations of the modern identity concept back in the 1960s-70s. They relate identity to the roles of the individuals tied in a society, and these identities can be multiple for an individual categorized according to the prominence level. In this sense, the meanings of situations are fundamental. Burke and Stets (2023) give a related example that a professor in a classroom carries an educator identity but may also integrate a friend identity depending on the meaning of the role that the professor finds in herself. These identities develop through interaction with others and being in different positions in culturally different situations. This dynamic nature of identity was also mentioned by Erikson (1994) in that he regards a person's identity as more than solely being existent in the world, instead, he asserts that it is the 'selfsameness' and continuation of this feeling of conformity in the eyes of individuals themselves as well as of others.

Looking back at the background of the identity concept, it becomes clear that it has been a significant area of discussion among various scholars. Some other examples of descriptions related to the identity concept are as follows:

Table 1.

Definitions for the identity concept

Identity is:	In-Text Citation:
"How a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how that person understands possibilities for the future"	(Norton, 2000, p.4)
"A constant ongoing negotiation of how we relate to the world."	(Cook, 2001, p. 149)
"The view that individuals have of themselves and of their place(s) in the world in the past, now, and in the future."	(Varghese et al., 2005, p.5)
"Socially and culturally constructed based on the immediate sociocultural environment in which a person has lived for a period of time."	(Yang, 2017, p. 526)
"Internalized sets of meanings that can be found in a culture that define who individuals are, and these meanings guide their behavior within and across situations."	(Burke & Stets, 2023, p.3)

These definitions of the identity concept reveal some common patterns. One remarkable aspect that is somehow included in the definitions is the relation of the individual with the world. One's identity has been considered to be connected to one's social surroundings. In looking at the history of identity work, it can be seen that, specifically, since the 1950s, identity has gained more attention with the globalization and internationalization of the world, which has followed this new social dimension of identity. In this sense, by looking at the 21st century, it can be seen that the sociocultural perspectives toward the concept of identity have become more significant due to globalization and internationalization in the world. From this perspective, identity is not regarded as only being; it is thought to be socially constructed from early childhood, with interactions with the world around the children (Fraser, 2016). Accordingly, this identity realization appears with the combination of the ways in which human beings have a global understanding of themselves with the features they see as significant in themselves. These could be abilities, ethnic background, or physical features.

In addition to exploring the identity concept related to the relationship of the individual with the world, the construction and development of this identity have also been mentioned as a key concept by the definitions in Table 1. In her description, Norton (2000), for example, explains that the development of identity contains a process that connects the individual to the future. Going back in time, when identity work started to become more popular after the 1950s, Erikson (1964) was among the first scholars who brought the identity concept to the social sciences (Burke & Stets, 2023). He also brought out the theory of identity development, which significantly contributed to the ongoing discussions about what identity is and how it works. Accordingly, this psychosocial framework brings attention to eight developmental stages in one's life related to that individual's identity. Erikson indicates that the individual faces different challenges in each stage. For example, in adolescence, an individual tries to deal with identity and the confusion of roles in the world. This directs the individual to look for who they are and a clear description of their expectations and perceptions. As other prominent scholars (Pennycook, 2001; Varghese et al., 2005) also point out, a strong connection exists between one's identity and that person's relationship with the world. Erikson (1964) claims that this need to seek the individual's place in the world continues throughout a lifetime. If the contradictions in the stages of life are solved well, the process results in a well-defined identity.

In connection with the significance of identity and the relationship of the individual's identity with the world, the social surroundings of the individual hold importance in identity development. This is because human beings live in specific communities and build relationships with the world through the integration of these communities. Along with this approach, Reeves (2018) indicates that it mainly takes place in social and linguistic interaction, and what is significant is that identity is represented by an individual's behavior and engagement in certain cultures. Moreover, according to Fraser (2016, p.76), "It is through active participation (in society, education, communities) that a sense of identity and belonging develops." Despite this participation, not every individual has a chance to acknowledge and discuss the conformity of their identity, which is in the process of being developed. This could be due to the different sociocultural backgrounds and language barriers. In this case, Fraser (2016, p.76) adds that "their self-efficacy, sense of belonging and participation in learning is impacted

negatively.” Therefore, it can be understood that not only being in a developmental process of identity but also being aware of this development, as well as being able to be an active participant, are some of the key factors for a successful realization of self in a community and construction of identity in the world. It is clear that the formation of identity plays a significant role in individuals’ growth and maturing processes, as well as forming the roles in their society (Pennington & Richards, 2016).

Following the finding of self and identity formation, socially related focused identities, such as social and sociocultural, have also gained importance. By bringing out the ‘self-categorization theory,’ Turner et al. (1994) shifted the focus of identity to a necessary distinction between an individual's personal and social identity. Accordingly, this distinction should be made on the ‘self-categorization’ of an individual, including two different levels: personal identity and social identity. In this sense, personal identity shows how unique an individual is in a social group, while social identity (Hogg et al., 1995) is considered a collective identity that requires continuous realization of the shared attributes with other members of a group. That is, while in identity theory, individuals self-categorize and self-view themselves in a group, in social identity theory, individuals are acknowledged for their belonging to a group or a category in society compared to other groups (Stets & Burke, 2000). This suggests that attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors may vary depending on the context and social group that the individual is in, as identity is formed by finding the self in other social categorizations. As a result, “through the process of self-categorization and identification, an identity is formed” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 224). That is, identity theory is more related to the ways in which individuals behave within the given roles in their surroundings, while social identity is more concerned with the relations in a group (Hogg et al., 1995). As a result, the theory of identity and social identity becomes interrelated as individuals activate their identities in a particular community through cognitive and motivational processes. Moreover, individuals connect with the community and carry out a depersonalization process by adapting to the norms of the community they live in.

As can be seen until now, the identity concept does not have only one dimension. It is considered possible to have multiple social identities as each person can self-categorize in more than one different kind of society (Spears, 2011). As a result, it has more than one focus, including common patterns and key terms among the dimensions,

such as individual self, society, social groups, and culture. Considering an individual having multiple social roles in a community, which requires the construction of multiple identities, it can be said that this individual eventually obtains more than one identity. According to Burke and Stets (2023), the identity theory focuses on this notion. That is, the theory tries to identify the meanings of these claimed identities for the individuals and the ways in which these identities affect their life and their connection with society with aspects such as behaviors, beliefs, emotions, and attitudes. In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that identity is a dynamic concept that changes context-wise (Yang, 2017). Similarly, Bucholtz and Halt (2005) claim that identity is a product, meaning it is not only a psychological concept; it might appear intentional or habitual depending on interactions and negotiations.

All in all, it is clear that in the history of identity work, the individuals' personal sides are mainly thought to be connected to the social influence in constructing identity (Giddens & Sutton, 2021). Moreover, even some researchers claim that identity is ultimately a social phenomenon (Lawler, 2014). Following all these ideas related to identity being connected to social surroundings, the significance of it in educational contexts is incontrovertible. Just as the identity theory itself continues throughout life, as Erikson (1994) once pointed out, education in its nature is also a dynamic process that covers most of an average individual's life in their social surroundings. The identity concept and its relationship with educational contexts will be discussed in detail in the following section below.

1.2 Teacher Identity & Language Teacher Identity

Teacher identity refers to “teachers’ dynamic self-conception and imagination of themselves as teachers, which shifts as they participate in varying communities, interact with other individuals, and position themselves (and are positioned by others) in social contexts” (Yazan, 2018, p. 21). Kavrayıcı (2020) indicates that pre-service teachers' personal traits significantly impact their sense of self as teachers. Personal qualities, including a passion for teaching, effective communication, patience, and tolerance, would have an impact on the formation and molding of the teacher's identity. Language teacher identity, on the other hand, according to Duff (2017, p. 12), is “teachers’ subjectivities and sense of who they are in relation to their educational practices, their histories, and the

social dimensions of their lives that are most important to them”. As a result, unlike the general concept of teacher identity, language teacher identity exists as more than a simple self-conception or imagination. Instead, it is the way the language teachers see themselves and understand who they are with the language they teach (Barkhuizen, 2016). As Yazan (2018, p.35) points out, “language is integral to their identities”. As a result, they make sense of themselves both as teachers and language users.

In line with sociocultural views, there has been interest in language teachers’ identities for some time now. This includes their views, feelings, and prior experiences, as well as the way in which they operate their identities. This is what it means to be an EFL teacher in this era (Yazan, 2018). In consideration of language teacher identity, it can be realized that EFL teacher education and TESOL are growing rapidly due to the global trend of English language learning. This identifies language teachers’ identities as a growing area of study (Selvi & Uzum, 2013).

In looking at the history of teacher identity and language teacher identity, it can be realized that the focus on identity work over the years, which accelerated in the mid-20th century, gave rise to the criticality of the concept in other areas. Toward the end of the 20th century, the identity concept appeared in social sciences, which was followed by linguistics. Education became one of the areas during the 1990s, which led the identity concept in education to be considered as an emerging area of inquiry (Miller, 2009).

In educational settings, teachers and students can be seen as the building blocks of what makes a classroom environment worth visiting. In that environment, there is no doubt that both teachers and students bring their own identities into the classroom. Until the last decade, the identity of teachers was not the main focus of educational research; however, the focus has gradually changed. The main reason that led to this change in the curiosity seeing the significance of teacher identity was mainly because of the shift from cognitive learning theories used in education to social perspective, which called attention to the role of identity in people’s perceptions of the nature of teachers and teacher learning (Spears, 2011). As a result, the identity of teachers that is uniquely brought into the classrooms began to be described and theorized. In connection to this, for example, Varghese et al. (2005) regard identity as the views that individuals hold for themselves,

including their past, present, and future. In this sense, the identity concept in the area of education is significant as “teachers as well as learners hold views of themselves” (p.5).

The idea and the realization of teachers holding views of themselves connects the identity to their social and sociocultural state of life. In the Bakhtinian perspective dating back to the 1990s, for example, teacher identity is considered to be a ‘dialogic’ approach. That is, teacher identity contains the relationship of ‘self’ and ‘others’ because “humans are always intimately connected to the spatial and temporal contexts in which we live, and these connections are how we articulate who we are, as well as our relationship to others” (Hallman, 2015, p.4). As a result, the significance of this relationship between the teacher's self and the others in the social context that the teacher lives in provides us an understanding of the urge of the teacher to find their identity with others. In addition to this perspective, Miller (2009, p. 172) indicates that there are several kinds of social theories related to the teacher identity concept, such as language socialization theory and neo-Vygotskian theory. She continues that these theories have a mutual focus on identity as well as “agency, discourse, diversity, social interaction, local context, and lived experience.” On the contrary, in relation to cognitive and psychological perspectives toward identity, Park (2015) points out that the sociocultural perspectives, following the Vygotskian sociocultural framework, place the individual in a social environment and do not separate the mind and consciousness from social interactions. Similarly, language socialization theory, which Ochs and Schieffelin initially proposed in the 1980s, also focuses on the strong bond between language practice, culture, and socialization in Western and non-Western societies (Riley, 2008). As a result, the theories developed through social perspectives bring out the significance of the identity that the teacher brings into the classroom as well as the social environment and the significance of that social environment in which the identity is shaped.

Following this social direction in teacher identity, Yazan and Percy (2018, p. 11) indicate that the identity development process does not include only individual action, but rather it covers “teacher learning, cognition, and emotions,” all connected during the formation. Thus, their professional learning experiences contribute to this formation process. In connection to teachers, Peker et al. (2020) propose ‘teacher learning’ as a type of learning that comes along with the inclusion of teachers and teacher candidates in specific communities with a socially built environment. The authors suggest that the

dynamicity of the teacher's identity is boosted and developed with the continuum of teacher learning. According to Morton and Gray (2018), this emerging interest in the relationship between identity and language, as well as education, is not a surprise, as language is considered one of the building blocks of the construction of identity.

With the focus on teacher identity connected to the sociocultural perspectives, with the popularity and growing necessity of the English Language around the world, the identity concept of language teachers, particularly English Language Teachers, should be mentioned. In this direction, Barkhuizen (2016) is one of the pioneers who focused his research on the significance of the language teacher identity (LTI) and indicated that it is not possible to describe exactly what LTI means. Instead, he (p. 4) explains what the LTI contains as follows:

“Language teacher identities (LTIs) are:

- cognitive, social, emotional, ideological, and historical—
- both inside the teacher and outside in the social, material, and technological world.
- being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying.
- struggle and harmony: They are contested and resisted by self and others, and they are also accepted, acknowledged, and valued by self and others.
- core and peripheral, personal and professional, they are dynamic, multiple, and hybrid, and they are foregrounded and backgrounded.
- LTIs change, short-term and over time—discursively in social interaction with teacher educators, learners, teachers, administrators, and the wider community,
- and in material interaction with spaces, places, and objects in classrooms, institutions, and online.”

In consideration of the explanation by Barkhuizen (2016) above, it can be seen that he presents the multi-faceted nature of teacher identity, which proposes the significance of both individual and social impacts that shape this LTI. In doing this, it is clear that language teachers are constantly in a state of seeking who they are as individuals, and language teachers in and out of the classroom where they can make sense of themselves in their social environment. Another common aspect of LTI is its dynamic nature, which changes LTI through interactions and various contextual environments. Similarly, Leibowitz (2016, p.76) defines LTI as “many-layered: one has an identity as an individual, onto which is layered an identity as a teacher, and onto that an identity as

a language teacher.” As a result, the facets of LTI and individual identity are closely intertwined in society.

In connecting Barkhuizen’s (2016) socially built and multi-faceted explanation of LTI to English language teachers, it must be mentioned that with globalization and internationalization of the English language around the world along with the social shift in education, the focus on English language teacher identity has also started to gain attention during the past years. According to Yazan et al. (2013), globalization and the popularization of English throughout the world are some of the contributing factors to this high attention, as this demand affects educational policies and the developing state of the ELT field. Moreover, considering the historical perspectives on teacher identity and language teachers in particular, it can be said that the general vision of a language teacher who was considered the agent of the transmission of information in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) has started to change in this day and age. As a result, the image of teacher identity has been shifted with the importance given to recent research on the social context, which is seen as inseparable from teacher identity (Miller, 2009; Varghese et al., 2005). Indeed, teacher identity has received increased focus for the past 15 years or so. Until around 2005, as Varghese et al. (2005) indicate, language teachers, in general, were regarded as passive technicians (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) who were only expected to transfer the context knowledge without any kind of application of the correct methodologies in the class. However, with the inclusion of sociopolitical and sociocultural sides of teaching, the teacher became a vital component in the class who not only passively transfers technical knowledge. As it is welcomed by other fields, such as sociology, the identity-related work regarding language teachers and teaching identity has reached its current significant state.

In connecting the shift of focus in education to the TESOL teachers’ identity, it should also be mentioned here that this shifting focus from the professional side of the teacher to the social side is due to the “shift of focus in learning theory from cognitive to social perspectives that have highlighted the role of identity in our understanding of the nature of teaching and teacher learning” in the last decade (Pennington & Richards, 2016, p. 6). By agreeing with the positive effect of this theoretical shift on identity in TESOL, Miller (2009, p. 172) argues that the globalization and internationalization of English, on the other hand, leads to further elements regarding the identity concept, and, therefore,

identity research must cover the “role of discourse in self-representation, the salience of sociocultural contexts, diversity and ethnicity, the native/nonnative binary and beliefs about standard language”. In this sense, it is also claimed that the identity of language teachers in the process of being a language teacher needs to be explored deeply, as they do not only represent a professional identity but also their own existing identities (Morton & Gray, 2018). The importance of exploring and understanding this identity construction, considering language teacher identity, Varghese et al. (2005, p. 22) highlight the following suggestion:

“In order to understand language teaching and learning, we need to understand teachers; and in order to understand teachers, we need to have a clearer sense of who they are: the professional, cultural, political, and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them”.

Following the importance of identity in education, Varghese et al. (2005) claim that although there is a focus on the identity of language teachers, there is still little attention paid to theorizing language teacher identity. Concerning this, Pennington (2015, p.19) categorizes teacher identity frames in TESOL. In his "Frames model of ELT," Pennington (2015) presents "Frames of ELT work," which includes frames such as instruction, which encompasses teaching content, methods, and other related aspects, and profession, which encompasses teacher education and development, collegial relations, and other related aspects. In addition, as the second main frame, he provides ‘ELT context frames’ that contain global, local, and sociocultural frames. The contexts of these frames are shown in the figure below:

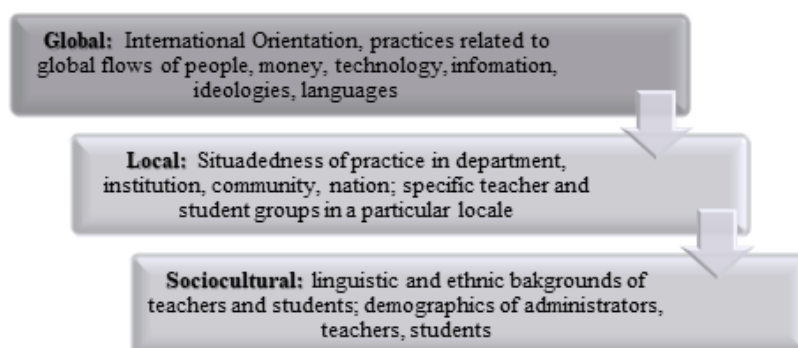


Figure 1.

ELT Context Frames. (Pennington, 2015, p.19)

Following the figure above, Pennington (2015) connects ELT context frames to teacher identity in TESOL. Accordingly, while the frames such as instructional and professional are considered to be practice-framed for teacher identity, the global, local, and sociocultural frames are seen as contextual frames in teacher identity, as shown in the figure below:

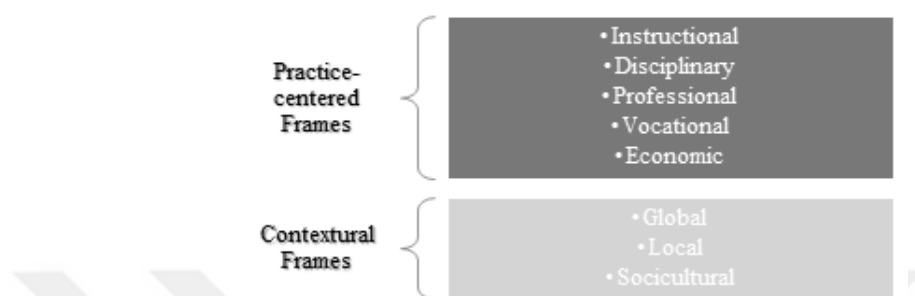


Figure 2.

Frames of Teacher Identity in TESOL. (Pennington, 2015, p.19)

As can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, the global environment of a TESOL teacher, including international orientation, global flows, etc.; the local environment, including community, nation, etc.; and the sociocultural environment, including backgrounds and demographics, are considered to be the building blocks of TESOL teacher identity. This indicates the significance of the contextual and socio-cultural factors in teacher identity. In terms of the existing globalized and internationalized world, contextual factors affecting teachers' practices and identities are important in their development. This is because, as Pennington (2015) points out, the global frame is related to the teachers' international orientation and current global trends. In contrast, the local frame is about national contexts and teachers' awareness of these contexts. The sociocultural frame is related to sociocultural identity, which leads teachers to acknowledge the sociocultural dimension of the communities and sociocultural factors affecting their practices.

In addition to the language teacher identity and the significance of EFL teacher identity in particular, the concept of identity is also considered important in teacher education (Pennington & Richards, 2016). In TESOL, the main focus has usually been on the professional development of the language teachers. As language teacher candidates begin their educational journey, they begin their professional development as prospective

TESOL teachers through teacher education programs. Concerning these programs, Friesen and Besley (2013) argue that the early years of language teacher education programs have a high possibility of shaping pre-service teachers' initial beliefs related to teacher role and identity. As a result, their experiences in and outside their educational settings are important in constructing their identities. Moreover, this identity work stands out as a resource for pedagogy, and the work on social identity, in particular, has a high chance of affecting their professional identities, which are in the process of formation, as well (Fogle & Moser, 2017). In this sense, Pennington (2015, p.17) states that “the students, content, and methods that one teaches define specific facets of a teacher identity as created in interaction with the teacher’s autobiographical identity and specific educational and teaching experiences, including those in teacher education programs.”

Integrating cultural aspects is significant in teaching the English language as a world language. Ortaçtepe (2015, p. 96) calls this feature ‘teachers of intercultural competence,’ which he describes as ‘language teachers who teach the target language with its cultural dimension.’ This aspect of the construction of their teacher identities, together with the social side of the globalized and internationalized world during the years of their teacher training education, pre-service EFL teachers, and their intercultural identity, holds importance to be discussed in the next section.

1.3 Intercultural Identity & Pre-service EFL Teachers

“Culture is internalized by individuals” – Burke & Stets, 2023

Considering the social shift in identity work and the significant role of the relationship between the individual and the social and sociocultural surroundings mentioned in identity concept descriptions, it can be said that culture and social environment hold importance in shaping identity. Cultural identity stands as an initial step towards intercultural identity. Two distinct perspectives have been used to define cultural identity by Kramsch (2013) as ‘small c’ and Capital ‘C’. This perspective holds that Capital C represents the static elements of a country, including its history and literature, while culture with a lowercase c pertains to its customs and lifestyles. Since language is a dynamic system, it is claimed that culture is shaped by methods of communication (Esteban-Núñez, 2021). Following the dynamicity of culture, Kim (2008) proposes and

describes ‘intercultural personhood’ as a mixture of cultural and intercultural identity in today’s globalized world. Accordingly, Kim links the current focus on cultural identity to the framework developed by psychologist Erikson in the 1950s, which regards identity development as a blend of a person's group and individual identity. In contrast, cultural identity only presents the identification of a person with a particular group (Kim, 2007). The fluidity of culture and the increasing significance of communication in social contexts regarding teacher identity brings this topic into the realm of interculturality, necessitating a detailed explanation. This connection is mainly based on the pluralistic turn in identity research in the 1970s that occurred through “prolonged and cumulative intercultural communication experiences, individuals around the world can, and do, undergo a gradual process of intercultural evolution” (Kim, 2007, p. 359). As a dynamic concept, the importance of interculturality then leads to the focus on the intercultural identity of language teachers, which is considered to be developed during the teacher education years by pre-service teachers and continues along with the teaching (Peker et al., 2020).

According to Dervin and Jackson (2018), identity construction depends on the context, which could include the home country or another country, as well as a classroom or a cinema, and what triggers identity in those specific contexts. They (p. 10) add that as a result, the “very root of the word interculturality, inter-, reflects this central aspect of identity.” That is, when individuals meet in a foreign country, they share different identities with each other. At first, ‘ethnocentrism’ may lead this meeting to bring out the thought of the superiority of one’s own culture. However, following the initial interaction, individuals begin taking their own culture as a base for experiencing the new culture (Paige & Bennett, 2015).

In another perspective, Kim (2008) describes intercultural identity as the process of identity adaptation and alteration outside of the boundaries of the traditional, categorical understanding of cultural identity. In this sense, it is used as an opposition to and an extension of cultural identity. The pluralistic turn in social sciences as opposed to early years research (E.g., Erikson, 1950), which focused on cultural identity described as developing identity with the merge of personal and group identity, made individuals realize the intercultural nature of individuals. In this sense, rather than staying bound to a culture by disregarding minorities, the intercultural person goes through ‘acculturation’

(learning new cultural practices and new ways of having emotional perspectives) and ‘deculturation’ (unlearning some previous habits) processes. Moreover, the construction of intercultural identity includes the ‘stress-adaptation-growth’ cycle (Kim, 2001). As a result, the ‘acculturation, deculturation, stress, adaptation, and growth’ processes altogether create an intercultural individual. Furthermore, according to Kim (2008), the transformation of the intercultural identity brings out two components: *individuation* and *universalization*. The components are explained in Figure 3 below:

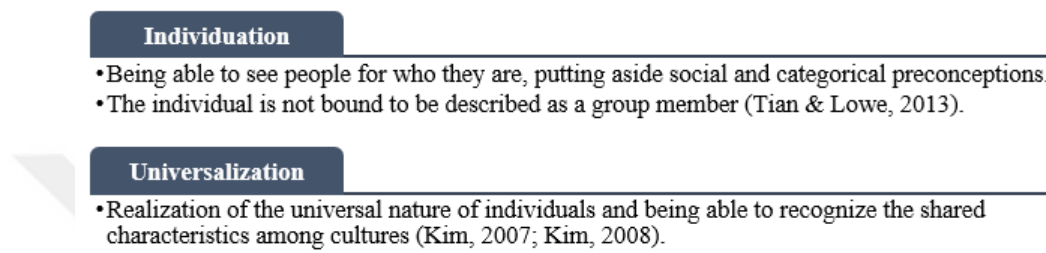


Figure 3.

Transformation of Intercultural Identity (Kim, 2008)

In addition to the outstanding key terms “intercultural identity development” and “intercultural personhood”, proposed and explained by Kim (2015), interculturality is generally defined as having an understanding of different cultures without obtaining any judgments in mind and accepting these multicultural environments and related features as well as a realization of different language behaviors that other individuals might have (Ishihara & Menard-Warwick, 2018; Kramsch, 2005; Menard-Warwick, 2014). By integrating the identity concept into interculturality, Menard-Warwick (2008, p.622) defines intercultural identity as ‘a negotiated investment in seeing the world through multiple cultural lenses and claims that this kind of identity forms its basis in international contexts with experiences. Ortaçtepe (2015) indicates that Menard-Warwick created something different by looking at interculturality with a broader perspective because, usually, in this research area, the focus is mainly on teachers’ professional identities in English-speaking countries. In addition, Yang (2017, p. 527) describes intercultural identity as “an individual’s display of belonging to and sharing with speakers of diverse language and cultural backgrounds in an adaptive form of intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication”. Similarly, Chen (2017) asserts that intercultural identity can

be identified with the individuals' bond with two or more cultural communities. In order to be identified with specific cultures and communities, it is important to acknowledge that effective interaction and being an 'intercultural speaker' who ensures the practical state of intercultural communication are necessary (Byram, 1997). In this process, Byram (1997) introduces 'Intercultural Communicative Competence,' which is a framework that describes the ability to understand and use the cultural knowledge of one's own and others. More specifically, Byram (1997) provides the factors in international communication that lead to successful communication and possible successful intercultural identity development as a result:

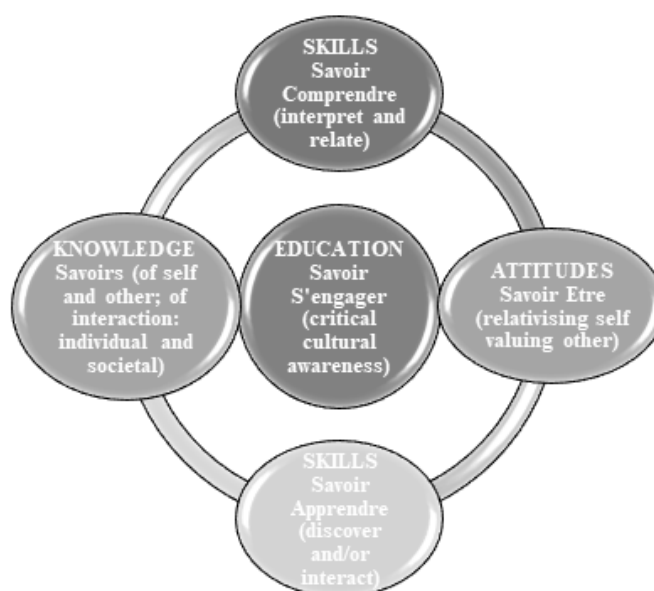


Figure 4.

Factors in Intercultural Communication (Byram, 1997, p. 230)

As seen in Figure 4, these five savoirs are necessary components of the intercultural speaker who has intercultural communicative competence, which leads to the construction of intercultural identity as an intercultural speaker. In connection with this teacher identity development, intercultural identity is also seen as a sub-identity of professional identity, and it becomes pretty dominant in nonnative contexts (Chen et al., 2016). In intercultural development, Fernández-Agüero and Garrote (2019) argue that individuals develop and use certain strategies to ease the adaptation process, and what is more, these strategies shape how individuals develop their intercultural identity. In order

to promote the intercultural identity development of foreign language teachers, Yang (2017, p. 534) offers the following three strategies:

- *learning an additional language,*
- *undertaking cultural immersion, and*
- *promoting multicultural education in and outside of classroom settings.*

Following this need for developing intercultural identity, as Varghese et al. (2005) indicate, teacher identity is constructed in a social context, including both the teacher's individual and socially blended selves. Being socially blended as an individual contributes to the intercultural identity of foreign language teachers, which is a case that is becoming very popular in this day and age, where we all live in a globalized and internationalized world both in social and educational contexts. Yang (2017, p. 527) depicts the world we live in as a “globalized village” and claims that in this globalized world, it becomes a must that a foreign language teacher builds and develops an intercultural identity. As it is a dynamic process, TESOL teacher identity can be developed in an intercultural environment. As Fernández-Agüero and Garrote (2019) indicate, intercultural identity development is connected to the individuals’ experiences and socialization in these experiences. This brings the topic to the importance of interculturally competent teachers and students through international exchange experiences as globalization continues to emphasize reinforcing educational exchange studies (Spinelli & Dolci, 2008).

According to Chen (2017), languages and related cultures are not simply things to be taught; instead, they consist of individuals' identities in connection to those languages and cultures. Therefore, it becomes necessary for EFL teachers to be aware of their own intercultural identity in order to promote unbiased understanding between cultures and intercultural competence consciously. Similarly, Byram (2008) also asserts that developing self-awareness of an individual’s interculturality is paramount to carrying out the rest of the process. In this direction, Menard-Warwick (2008), for example, argues that English Language teachers with intercultural features have much to contribute to the field. Thus, these intercultural teachers and what they bring from their experiences to the ELT field should be valued and taken into consideration more in the profession.

In relation to the interculturality of teachers, Yang (2017) relates teacher identity to the expectations of specific cultural contexts and indicates that these expected behaviors shape the image. It is evident in the studies exploring non-native foreign language teacher identity that the formation of the teacher identity is affected chiefly by sociocultural factors, including intercultural experiences (Chen et al., 2016). According to Byram et al. (2002, p. 9), this intercultural dimension is critical in language learning and teaching as it “aims to develop learners as intercultural speakers or mediators who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity.”

In order to become interculturally competent teachers, the educational process of pre-service EFL teachers is important as these teacher candidates start forming particular identities during their teacher education program. In this sense, it should also be mentioned that after graduation from the teacher education program, they start teaching with a certain background. However, in a real classroom teaching environment, they probably face a different cultural group of students with different backgrounds. In order to deal with the challenges ahead, foreign language teacher candidates need to be aware of the necessity of intercultural identity and develop such an identity. This type of identity needs to be recognized by EFL teachers to keep an objective mentality in their personal and professional lives toward different cultures (Chen, 2017). According to Yang (2017), language teachers are already ready to develop this kind of identity as they can speak more than one language. However, what is more important at this point is that they can develop or co-construct this type of identity in intercultural settings through intercultural communication as well as intercultural understanding.

Language teachers and teacher candidates developing an intercultural identity may affect their future students' well-being and success. In this sense, it is worthwhile to consider that “Teachers' awareness of minority groups' different cultures and their openness and tolerance can also be listed in today's language teachers' professional development requirements” (Gazioğlu & Tanyeri, 2021, p. 28). Consequently, it is clear that the primary responsibility in the classroom starts with how pre-service teachers construct their identities. This process is the earliest opportunity for candidates to shape their professional identities. Moreover, as their early experiences, together with their awareness and expectations, have a high impact on their choices and future practices,

Fernández-Agüero and Garrote (2019, p. 165) suggest that “intercultural self-awareness should be a substantial component in the teachers’ identity development process”. According to Dervin and Jackson (2018), with the poststructuralist thought of the identity concept, it can be understood that the way individuals feel about their multifaced selves may change with experience and maturity. This experience could include living or studying in a multicultural environment where various languages are spoken. They claim that this is mainly because ‘being different from the majority may stimulate deeper contemplation about multiple dimensions of their identities (e.g., cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, national) and lead to a higher level of self-awareness’ (p.3). In this day and age, where pre-service teachers have various opportunities to study-abroad, exchange programs are a good fit to develop this kind of identity.

As a result of this fast-growing side of learning outside the borders of the classroom, socialization, and internationalization have become inevitable, especially with poststructuralist approaches toward language learning, which is regarded as a process of socialization, rule learning, which is central to cognitive approaches to language education, started to become insufficient (Çelik, 2018). In return, socialization in education came into prominence. In connection to socialization in language education, studying abroad is one of the first actions that appears in mind. According to Hammer (2012), as students go abroad to study or work, they inevitably have to construct and develop their intercultural competence. In terms of the teacher’s perspective, getting in contact with the target culture and understanding their own culture as well as international students’ cultures provide an advantage for foreign language teachers considering their development (Gazioğlu & Tanyeri, 2021).

Until this point, it has been clear that language, with its every aspect, is a social construct, and interculturality is an important element that connects identity with language teaching. Considering the necessity of pre-service teachers’ awareness of the importance of intercultural identity in EFL contexts, it can make sense that this self-awareness can be provided by integrating teacher candidates into social contexts such as study-abroad experiences. Such experiences provide Turkish learners and teachers opportunities to take part in intercultural interaction in the classroom environment of different cultures. (Gazioğlu & Tanyeri, 2021).

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Intercultural communication competence (ICC), sometimes referred to as *intercultural communicative competence*, has been under exploration underpinning intercultural identity. Several researchers took a number of perspectives by taking intercultural communication competence from a different angle. For example, Byram (1997) claims that this competence refers to the ability to have an understanding and acceptance toward different cultures and values, as well as being aware of the socially built actions of different backgrounds while negotiating them. Moreover, he posits *savoirs* that describe EFL teachers with intercultural communication competence. These *savoirs* involve intercultural attitudes (such as openness to other cultures and relativizing individuals' beliefs and behaviors), knowledge (of social processes or people with different backgrounds), skills (of interpreting and relating as well as discovery and interaction), and critical cultural awareness. In this frame, interaction and communication are the main components because *Intercultural communication competence* requires the "ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (Byram, 1997, p. 51). While Byram's model is concerned with the general social processes in actions, Fantini (2000) takes this model's basics and adds a linguistic element as 'being proficient in the host tongue' in his model in describing the EFL teachers having ICC.

Another example of modeling intercultural communication competence would be the Rainbow Model of Kupka and Everett (2007), which includes several more components compared to the others, such as cultural distance, self-awareness, knowledge, skills, motivation, appropriateness, effectiveness, contextual interactions, and intercultural affinity. This Rainbow Model is based on several theories, including the social construction of reality theory, social learning theory, and cultural identity theory. Each model's main commonality can be seen in categorizations that somehow involve 'knowledge, skills, and attitudes' components. ICC mainly represents the individuals who are able to communicate in different intercultural settings with other people from different cultures not only effectively but also appropriately. In communicating appropriately in various intercultural contexts with intercultural communication competence, the key components would include the individuals' attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Wiseman, 2002).

Beginning from a more umbrella concept, it can be said that intercultural identity presents how flexible individuals are in culturally different environments and how they are able to adapt to those changes. These are the cases in which individuals tend to develop “*new understanding, knowledge, and awareness*” (Guerriche, 2020, p. 84). This kind of exchange through perspectives and experiences in newly met contexts is the core idea laying in **Social Constructionism**. The central perspective lies behind intercultural communication, in which the identity is built through social constructs in everyday life. It is closely related to intercultural identity in that in social constructionism, knowledge, and actions go together in interacting with intercultural contexts while taking the language as a core tenet (Burr, 2015; Burr & Dick, 2017). The main emphasis of this perspective is on everyday interactions and the ways in which individuals use language to create their reality and understand knowledge (Andrews, 2012). Language and interaction are significant components of construction and the subsections of identity development (Allen, 2005; Leeds & Hurwitz, 1995). Interactions lead to various actions, which will result in the construction of social practices and interactions through intercultural communications. Following the developmental process of intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers in this study, social constructionism is the primary umbrella perspective in this study as the constructed knowledge and the intercultural environment stand as a fit to explore natural study-abroad settings. Identity is a socially constructed phenomenon in which intercultural communication is necessary, and this intercultural communication consists of constructing the intercultural identity of individuals via culture and communication (Nyugen, 2019).

Following the Social Constructionism perspective, the core component under this umbrella perspective, the ICC model, is used as a frame in this study to dive into the everyday socially constructed interactions in building the intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers in intercultural settings. Following this, in the present study, Yang (2017) takes a theoretical toolkit for the development of TESOL teacher intercultural identity as the basis. In this framework, the construction of identity is considered to be built through communication, following Byram’s (1997) ICC model that involves interactions through communication. As Nyugen (2019, p. 7) points out, “*Verbal and nonverbal competence plays a key in successful intercultural communication.*” As a result, Yang (2017) redefines the concept of intercultural communication competence and

considers verbal and nonverbal interactions to be the core elements in developing an intercultural identity. Moreover, he presents a framework for developing TESOL teachers' intercultural identity using an intercultural communication competence theory. He claims that this kind of identity is “developed and transformed in action and across languages and cultures.” This perspective describes the components in the development of an EFL teacher's intercultural identity because “Intercultural communication competence is closely related to intercultural identity, and it is their ability to employ both verbal and nonverbal communication competence that makes them successful and adaptable to different cultures” (Yang, 2017, p. 529). The cycle of the construction of EFL teachers' intercultural identity through ICC is shown below in Figure 5.

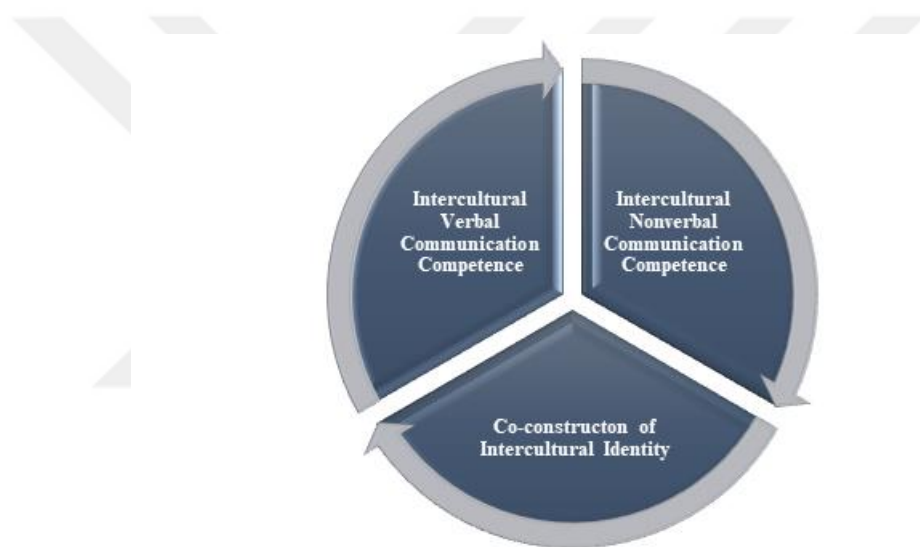


Figure 5.

EFL Teacher Intercultural Identity Development Cycle

In this theoretical toolkit, TESOL teachers are observed to develop their intercultural identity by fulfilling the following three features of Intercultural Communication Competence, summarized below:

Table 2.

Dimensions of TESOL Teacher Intercultural Identity Development (Yang, 2017).

1. TESOL teacher intercultural verbal communication competence
Intercultural verbal communicative skills and styles: <i>capacity to demonstrate working knowledge about the differences between their home language and culture and that of others, their oral/written communication skills, and their attitude toward intercultural interaction with others. (Knowledge)</i>
2. TESOL teacher intercultural nonverbal communication competence
Using various body languages for intercultural nonverbal communicative style and sensitivity: <i>working knowledge of the nonverbal communication differences between one culture and another; nonverbal communication skills, and attitude toward intercultural nonverbal communication with others.</i>
3. TESOL teacher intercultural identity co-construction
Being engaged in the social co-construction of intercultural identity: <i>working with different groups of stakeholders (e.g., colleagues, communities, students) of diverse cultural backgrounds to facilitate and maximize their authentic intercultural communication experience.</i>

The three dimensions in the cycle of this *TESOL teacher intercultural identity development model*, explained in Table 2, are found to involve commonality with the other frames of ICC (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Wiseman, 2002). This notable commonality includes ‘knowledge, skills, and attitudes’ components that are used in terms of verbal and nonverbal communication competence of EFL teachers.

Considering the significance of developing an intercultural identity for EFL teachers, building appropriate communication and becoming competent in communication is necessary. In doing that, their awareness becomes one of the core components: “It is necessary for EFL teachers to be aware of their own intercultural identities in order to promote unbiased understanding between cultures and intercultural competence consciously” (Chen, 2017, p. 12). As a result, the approach in the theoretical framework of this study forms a way to discover the intercultural identity of foreign language teachers. In this study, the framework and its dimensions will help bring out the

ways in which the pre-service EFL teachers construct their intercultural identities and shed light on their developmental process of being an intercultural speaker while developing their intercultural identity. The dimensions of Yang's frame and what they involve regarding the communication side of intercultural identity will be taken explicitly as a basis for data collection instruments. This will make the results more specific in what forms the intercultural identity in intercultural contexts.

Along with Yang's (2007) frame that directs us to intercultural identity, it is clear that the intercultural dimension is essential today, making it worthwhile to investigate deeper. Byram (1997, p. 5) claims that the 'intercultural dimension' in foreign language education requires "intercultural speakers or mediators who can engage with complexity and multiple identities and avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity." These qualities are not ready-made, and they are yet to be discovered. In this study, these dimensions mentioned in Yang's model are integrated into the discovery of pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural identity development process to look at the early stages of their teacher training education by being in an intercultural environment. Also, as intercultural identity is socially constructed with intercultural communication, according to Alptekin (2002), providing individuals with a context to construct their intercultural identity and getting them to know different cultures while learning how to cope with those differences are significant for intercultural and international communication.

Following these aforementioned models, the intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers in their study-abroad processes will be investigated in terms of 'intercultural interactions' integrated into Social Constructionism, discussed, and underpinned through intercultural communication competence. In connecting it to the study-abroad intercultural contexts, the construction of intercultural identity in socially different contexts will be researched in terms of the communicative and interactive environment in intercultural settings. Intercultural identity is considered to be built with conversations, relationships, and group interactions. It requires social contexts and participants (Burr, 1995). The path in this study considers *intercultural identity* as connected to *social constructionism* and constructed through *intercultural communication competence* (ICC). It aims to investigate this frame on pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural identity construction in intercultural contexts.

To be identified with particular cultures and communities, it is important to acknowledge that effective interaction and being an ‘intercultural speaker’ who ensures the practical state of intercultural communication are necessary (Byram, 1997). Consequently, fostering relationships across cultures requires an understanding and acceptance of diverse cultural differences, which in turn cultivates intercultural competent individuals through effective communication (Alptekin, 2002; Byram, 1997; Kim, 2001). In this sense, the framework that the current study is based on focuses on the communicative aspect of intercultural identity constructed in intercultural settings and will provide a comprehensive and exclusive outlook on intercultural identity. Using Yang’s framework as a basis, this study will use it in pre-service TESOL teachers’ early intercultural identity development rather than Yang’s original context, which involves in-service TESOL teachers. As a result, this study will contribute to the intercultural identity development research from another perspective.

1.5 Significance of Study

Until this point, the perspectives related to teacher identity and intercultural identity and the importance of early years of identity construction by pre-service EFL teachers have been explained. It is also clear that the shifting perspectives moving toward the social side of foreign language teaching and learning hold importance (Varghese et al., 2005; Wenger, 2009). According to Gray and Morton (2018), the growing interest in this language teacher identity has its base in the shift of perspectives from past educational theories, such as individualistic and cognitive theories, toward situated and practice-oriented theories. As the socially situated perspectives gained more significance, the curiosity about how language teachers see themselves and narrate their perspectives and experiences began to arise. As a result, it becomes significant and necessary to acknowledge the intercultural identity of foreign language teacher candidates, considering the massive impact of socio-cultural conception on education.

In connection with the significance of the intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers, discovering and investigating the distinct characteristics of this side of the identity concept in a globalized and internationalized world is of utmost importance. To explore these unique characteristics further, examining study-abroad experiences and analyzing the concept of intercultural identity from the viewpoint of a pre-service EFL

teacher can be beneficial in the field. As indicated in their overview of worldwide research related to teacher intercultural identity by Chen et al. (2016), the awareness of foreign language teachers related to their intercultural identity is a crucial topic to be researched. Moreover, Peker et al. (2020, p. 230) highlight the importance of investigating teacher identity in study-abroad contexts with the following words:

“The concept of teacher identity is worth studying in multicultural contexts, and some exchange programs such as Fulbright Foreign Language Teacher Assistant (FLTA) Program or Erasmus and Comenius teacher exchange programs are important sources providing language teachers with reflecting on their teacher identity in multicultural contexts.”

However, research is very scarce, and there is still a lack of research on foreign language teacher identity, specifically concerning intercultural identity while studying abroad. However, these intercultural experiences help teacher candidates gain self-awareness and acknowledge intercultural differences more (Gieser, 2015).

Moreover, in general, the research in the field focuses on teacher and learner identity. Thus, intercultural identity as a sub-concept of identity is still open to be investigated in detail as an important feature in the developmental process of teacher candidates (Chen et al., 2016; Menard-Warwick, 2008).

This study is significant in that it provides knowledge of the status and development of intercultural identity concerning pre-service English teachers' perspectives in the EFL context. In investigating this developmental side of pre-service teachers' intercultural identity, it is also important to discover the underlying factors and specific cases directly related to their intercultural experiences. Involving the study-abroad context in discovering the ways in which pre-service EFL teachers construct their intercultural identities in intercultural contexts will reveal valuable insights in understanding this concept. The research into intercultural identity work in both Türkiye and global contexts primarily focuses on opinions related to the intercultural identity of either pre-service or in-service EFL teachers (Safa & Tofighi, 2022; Yang, 2018) or the evaluation of the effects of studying abroad on their identity (Atay, 2022). However, this study provides an exciting opportunity to advance our knowledge of intercultural identity by revealing their dispositions on intercultural identity and finding the factors in its development through first-hand experiences of pre-service English teachers from the first

day of their study-abroad journey till their return. This supports Byram's indication (1997) that the intercultural qualities that intercultural speakers hold must be discovered individually. Moreover, finding out the specific processes they go through in developing this kind of identity contributes to the field by obtaining pre-service teachers' reflections on the construction of intercultural identity in study-abroad contexts.

Lastly, although Erasmus+ is a very popular international study-abroad program, there has been no work in the field exploring the experiences of EFL pre-service teachers during this study-abroad program in connection to their intercultural identity. The focus has been more on the work experiences of in-service teachers in their abroad experiences. As a result, it becomes very valuable to discover the experiences of pre-service EFL teachers in the Erasmus+ program. As Dervin and Jackson (2018, p.12) point out, "the Erasmus program has explicit goals, with a clear emphasis on intercultural interactions". Moreover, these experiences in a study-abroad process may unravel the identity reconstruction in intercultural contexts.

Considering the reasons mentioned above, it has been clear that this study is expected to contribute to the foreign language education field by exploring the intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers in a natural intercultural setting: the international exchange context. As these teacher candidates have the experience of studying abroad, they will naturally see the differences between their own culture and the host country's culture. In addition to culture, they will have a chance to get to know themselves and observe their intercultural identity development as pre-service teachers.

1.6 Aims of the Study and Research Questions

Both language teachers' and teacher candidates' interaction with other languages and cultures in their lifetime shapes their identity construction, influencing how their intercultural identities are positioned in their lives. In addition, studying abroad clearly contributes significantly to having this interaction with other cultures and developing this kind of identity. Furthermore, the critical period for language teachers to develop intercultural identity is considered to be the training programs by many researchers (Fogle & Moser, 2017; Friesen & Besley, 2013; Peker et al., 2020; Pennington, 2015). This study thus seeks to investigate the intercultural identities of pre-service EFL teachers as they

engage in study-abroad programs and to understand their expectations and perceptions regarding these experiences in relation to their intercultural identity.

In addition to their dispositions toward the intercultural identity concept in the study-abroad process, it is also important to see how they develop this kind of identity. Thus, it is also targeted to follow their whole study-abroad process and discover how they eventually construct their intercultural identity in an international context while studying abroad.

Lastly, it is also important to reveal not only the developmental process of their intercultural identity but also the factors in this development. Thus, another important focus and purpose of this study is to identify common traits and factors affecting this process of developing pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural identity. Following these aims, this study is believed to shed light on a deeper understanding of the intercultural identity development of Turkish pre-service EFL teachers in international settings.

In order to meet these objectives, the research questions that are set for this study are as follows:

1. What are pre-service EFL teachers' dispositions toward their study-abroad experiences related to their intercultural identity?
2. How do EFL teachers' intercultural identity development trajectories unfold in the course of study-abroad?
3. What are the factors that affect the intercultural identity development of pre-service EFL teachers?

CHAPTER TWO

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Language teacher identity research has gained acceleration in the last decade. Especially considering the global and internationally increased focus on language learning and teaching, as well as the social focus in and out of the classroom environment, the curiosity about how the teachers form their identities in social contexts and the impacts of these forms on their lives brings out the significance of this kind of research. On the other hand, a large portion of the early research on identity in second language (L2) acquisition and teaching concentrated on the individual or collective identities of the learners. Following the wave of applied linguistics during the 1990s, including curiosity about language teachers' identity, some researchers, including Duff and Uchida (1997), began to investigate the L2 teacher identity from a sociocultural perspective. Accordingly, Duff (2017) indicated that the findings throughout their work showed that the L2 teacher identity regarding social and intercultural sides was not fixed but rather situationally co-constructed. As a result, the investigation of L2 teacher identity with a focus on social and intercultural sides becomes significant in the field as "teacher identity construction is a circular and forward-moving process rather than a journey with discrete and linear parts" (Zhao & Mantero, 2018, p. 57). In this sense, Yazan et al. (2013) point out that "the investigation of teacher identity construction can shine a light on the way L2 teachers develop as professionals while transitioning from a graduate or undergraduate student self to a teacher self" (p. 2). Therefore, exploring how EFL teachers construct and shape their social and intercultural identities, particularly during their formative pre-service years, offers valuable insights into developing more effective teacher training programs and fostering culturally responsive teaching practices.

2.1 Interculturality and Intercultural Identity Research

Looking back at the history of the research on the sub-categories of EFL teacher identity with a focus on the social side of identity, it can be seen that the research remarks on facets of identity that are shaped by the social interactions, cultural settings and roles that educators play in their communities and classrooms. These sub-categories in a glimpse and their pioneers in research would be as follows:

- **Cultural Identity:** This covers how EFL teachers view both their own culture and the culture of the language they are learning. In this sense, Kramsch (1993) highlighted the importance of culture in language instruction, claiming that their cultural knowledge greatly influences educators' pedagogical approaches and capacity to promote intercultural understanding.
- **Sociocultural Identity:** Sociocultural identity refers to the interaction of cultural expectations, societal standards, and a teacher's unique identity. This subcategory is based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the influence of social interaction and cultural resources on forming an individual's identity.
- **Intercultural Identity:** The primary focus of intercultural identity is the development of EFL teachers' capacity to mediate between various cultural contexts. Byram (1997) developed the idea of intercultural communicative competence, emphasizing how crucial it is for educators to function well in cross-cultural environments since this is directly related to how their intercultural identities evolve.
- **Social Role Identity:** Teachers' self-perception of their duties in the educational system and society at large is known as social role identity. By engaging with communities of practice, Wenger (1998) explored identity as a process of becoming. Through participation in professional networks and educational settings, EFL teachers frequently cultivate their sense of social role identity.
- **Professional Identity in a Sociocultural Context:** Although professional identity is a more general concept, its sociocultural component focuses on how teachers' social and cultural environments impact their professional duties. Beijaard et al. (2004) examined professional teacher identity and highlighted how social and cultural settings influence how educators view and carry out their jobs.

The sub-categories of EFL teacher identity focusing on the social side reflect the dynamic interplay between teachers' personal, professional, and cultural dimensions. Understanding how teachers create their identities and adjust to the intricate demands of

teaching English as a foreign language requires an awareness of these characteristics. Following the social side, the research on this type of identity of EFL teachers goes back to the 1990s. For example, Duff and Uchida (1997) explored the cultural identities of EFL teachers in Japan. Based on the four EFL teachers' trajectories, they found that EFL teachers were in constant cultural transmission. In addition, their cross-cultural experiences, as well as professional and personal experiences, were the main factors that shaped their cultural identities. Similarly, in looking at the results of the case studies with Vietnamese EFL teachers studying in Australian universities, Phan (2007) discovered that unlike the EFL teachers in Japan in Duff and Uchida's study, they tended to constantly construct their Vietnamese national and cultural identities despite being abroad.

Following the individualistic outcomes of the culture-wise and nation-wise results of the sociocultural identity research, the area has been broadened with the intercultural side of the identity. The emergence of the popularity of this area of identity research mainly stems from the international and intercultural nature of the world and, in addition, "the development of intercultural understanding and the ability to interact appropriately and effectively—according to established norms and values, and achieving particular objectives—with people from other cultures have become extremely important in today's globalized, multilingual world" (Pasterick, 2019, p. 127). Kramsch (2005, p. 553) describes this concept of interculturality as "an awareness and a respect of difference, as well as the socio-affective capacity to see oneself through the eyes of others."

Following the interculturality concept, which is continuously gaining popularity throughout the world, Menard-Warwick (2008) is observed to integrate the concept into identity and adopt it as 'intercultural identity' through the intercultural and transnational experiences of teachers, unlike the general teacher identity works that mostly tend to focus on professional identities of teachers. Intercultural identity has generally been described as the individuals' attachment to more than one culture with acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity (Alptekin & Alptekin, 1984; Chen, 2017). In this attachment, national norms are not abandoned but incorporated into the individuals' identities through their lives and practices (Chen, 2017). Moreover, the significance of the prefix "inter" in conveying the role of the intercultural speaker as a language and culture mediator was emphasized by Byram and Wagner (2018). Given the importance

of intercultural identity, studies investigating it with different contexts and groups started to gain attention.

2.2 Intercultural Identity in Language Learning and Teaching in TESOL

The globalization and internationalization of the English Language have been under discussion for many years. Indeed, it is not a new concept for the global world; instead, it has been used with the popularization of the English Language. In fact, since the 1970s, "internationalization" has been a term used to describe various activities, including language learning, institutional agreements, studying abroad, and local students (Knight, 2008). Following this, ever since the 70s and 80s, when the use of the English Language began to rise by bringing out the emergence of the need for more and more EFL teachers all around the world, the identity search has been under development in studies. Beyond that, Matsumoto (2018) implied that the English Language, known to be English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), is not only used for communication but, in this day and age, it is essential to identity building in a world that is becoming more international and multilingual. Following this, as the main component of the emergence of learning the English Language has been the learner, the first phase of identity research was to focus on the learner's identity in an interculturalized world. Intercultural identity has long been studied with students' intercultural experiences. For example, Tian and Lowe (2014) explored American students' emerging intercultural identity in China. They revealed that the students went from cultural naivety to emergent intercultural awareness with a stress, adaptation, and growth cycle. They were observed to gain capabilities in getting rid of stereotypes and accepting everyone as individuals, which was referred to as 'individualization,' and in being able to recognize the commonalities between themselves and different cultural groups, which was referred to as 'universalization.' Similarly, in a recent study, Fang et al. (2023) investigated Chinese EFL learners' intercultural and multilingual identities after their study-abroad experiences. As a result, they discovered significant distinctions between the beginning and end of their experiences. They found that their feelings, experiences, and assessments influenced the construction of this kind of identity. In addition, communication was found to be the main factor that assisted the identity construction process, thanks to the authentic setting they live in.

Following the EFL student identity research that appeared in the 1970s and 80s, the EFL teacher identity also gained attention. In terms of EFL teacher identity regarding interculturality and intercultural competence, studies in the related literature focus on how EFL teachers integrate these concepts into their classrooms. Following the birth of EFL teaching and learning in the 1970s, there has been a strong emphasis on EFL teacher preparation due to the growing presence of language and cultural diversity in schools throughout the United States (Putman & Byker, 2021). Moreover, the international experiences of EFL teachers have also been under investigation. For example, Zhang and Wang (2022) looked into Chinese college English teachers' international experiences and their impacts on identity development. Accordingly, their overseas experiences significantly affected the development of the teachers' professional identities by allowing them to construct several identities. In terms of developing their professional identities as in-service EFL teachers, they were found to develop knowledge of and proficiency in the language, intercultural competency, and cultural awareness, while they also gained pedagogical benefits. In another Chinese context, Zhao and Mantero (2018) investigated how, in terms of their views and methods of instruction, in-service Chinese EFL teachers establish and maintain their identities during their study-abroad experiences. The results indicated that Chinese EFL teachers created and recreated their identities during the study-abroad program as they acquired new information and experiences. Moreover, one of the salient findings of this research was that when the participants were studying abroad and found it challenging to handle everyday chores, they changed their self-perception from advanced language users to essential language learners. Later, however, they became more confident teachers as a result of their increased immersion in American culture. Upon their return, they became more imaginative and analytical educators.

In the EFL teaching literature, following the increase in social approaches leading to widespread curiosity in looking at the teacher identity development of EFL teachers, teaching abroad has attracted many researchers. One popular context has been the US, in which EFL teachers teach their native language in the US through the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) Program. These studies generally aimed to investigate the EFL teachers' professional identity reconstructions involving some factors such as social challenges (Mutlu & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Peker et al., 2020). In this sense, Peker et al. (2020) suggest that these international programs, including Erasmus and

Comenius programs, are very significant in providing unique resources for investigating EFL teacher identity as they lead these teachers to reflect on their identities in multicultural contexts.

Study-abroad experiences also hold importance in investigating EFL teachers' intercultural identity. As noted, "Study-abroad experiences have been referred to as one of the most effective ways to prepare global teachers," in addition to many other benefits (Putman & Byker, 2022, p. 24). In the experiences of EFL teachers abroad, one of the concepts that attract attention is related to intercultural interaction, which in most studies is among the top findings. For example, a study by Fotovatian (2010) found that Iranian EFL teachers teaching in Australian Universities tended to prioritize their intercultural interactions to develop their social and cultural identities. Moreover, the deficiency of this interaction led to cultural gaps and problematized their development in the new culture. In a similar perspective, Ortaçtepe (2015) investigated two Turkish EFL teachers in the USA and revealed that the intercultural dimension in their identities strongly requires a socialization process. Concerning this perspective, Reeves (2018) indicates that identity development occurs mainly in social interaction as well as participation in specific communities. In this sense, Mutlu and Ortaçtepe (2016) also investigated Turkish EFL teachers teaching Turkish in the US with a year program. They explored the narratives collected through journals to examine their identity reconstruction in intercultural settings. Accordingly, they found that their multiple identities constantly interacted with each other.

Following the interactions in a social environment, shared language is also considered in intercultural identity construction. Using a language socialization approach, Ortaçtepe (2015), for example, investigated two experienced EFL teachers' reconstruction of their intercultural identities in their graduate study experiences in the US. The narrative inquiry, which was used to explore their language socialization process, showed that their experiences in the US contexts provided them with multiple identity investments in that intercultural environment. Moreover, regarding their intercultural identity reconstruction, the participant teachers were observed to have hardship when miscommunication happened. In addition to these findings, what Ortaçtepe suggests is also very significant to the core of this study. Accordingly, he indicates that studying and working abroad contribute to building intercultural competence and identity. Therefore,

including ‘language socialization’ is a must, especially when investigating EFL speakers. In non-native contexts, Atay (2022) conducted a study with Turkish in-service EFL teachers who experienced the Erasmus+ program during their BA years. In looking at their perceptions of culture and teacher identity, Atay found that the intercultural experience raised their cultural awareness and affected their intercultural identity in many ways, such as a change in worldview and cultural stereotypes. Furthermore, she strongly points out that it would be challenging for teachers to develop this kind of identity without living this experience.

Lastly, in her research project, Israelsson (2016) studied EFL teachers’ perceptions of interculturality and intercultural competence by using Byram’s *savoirs* in his Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model. Accordingly, the intercultural dimension in EFL teaching has not been fully developed and promoted by the teachers in the study. In addition, the interview results showed that none of the teachers showed more than one *savoir* in their practices. Although they all accepted that intercultural dimension was important as part of their development, ‘*savoir s’engager*’ in Byram’s model that corresponds to the ‘critical cultural awareness’ was almost absent, while ‘*savoir-être*’ that corresponds to their ‘attitudes’ including curiosity and openness to other cultures was not available in teachers’ perceptions and practices. As a result, the author suggests that all five components are necessary for interculturally developed EFL teachers, and they need opportunities to develop this kind of identity involving competence and related *savoirs*.

As can be seen in this part of the literature review, the focus of the research is related to student identity and in-service EFL teacher identity. Moreover, the identity of an EFL teacher has mainly been on the professional side of EFL teachers who are actively teaching and have experience teaching in different cultural contexts. However, teacher identity is a dynamic phenomenon, and the construction of their identity begins in teacher education programs, which makes it worth investigating their identity development during their training years (Peker et al., 2020). Moreover, this professional experience in abroad contexts led to integrating the social and intercultural side of EFL teacher identity in research due to the nature of being in a different social environment. However, these international contexts usually consist of countries where English is the native language. Therefore, looking deeper into the intercultural identity-focused research of EFL teachers

by specifically reviewing pre-service EFL teachers' experiences related to intercultural identity becomes a must to discover in the next section.

2.3 Research on Intercultural Identity of Pre-Service EFL Teachers

The past 30 years have seen the development of multicultural approaches to language learning and teaching (Fielding, 2021). Considering the shift of focus from teacher and teacher learning to social perspectives, it can be realized that the significance of individuals in their identity creation through interacting with different cultures, languages, and social groups creates the facets of intercultural identity (Pennington & Richards, 2016). The concepts of interculturality and intercultural identity continue to gain attention, especially with the internationalization of education and the higher needs of learning English. In consideration of the intercultural identity research, it can be seen that they primarily focus on EFL teachers who currently teach in a different country where English is the native language. In exploring the research worldwide, Chen et al. (2016) assert that the main factors affecting the construction of intercultural identities, which are common in most studies in which the EFL teachers are being examined in ES countries (English-speaking countries), are the differences in language, values, as well as socialization in this different environment.

The shift in related literature from general teacher identity to a more specific focus on EFL teacher identity has highlighted the importance of addressing the development of 'pre-service' EFL teacher identity. In relation to the investigation of the pre-service EFL teacher identity, Selvi and Uzum (2013, p. 2) indicate that digging deeper into their identity "can shine a light on the way L2 teachers develop as professionals while transitioning from a graduate or undergraduate student self to a teacher self". Moreover, considering the growing trend of pre-service EFL teachers' experiences with intercultural encounters, it is necessary to delve deeper into their intercultural identity construction and development in the related literature.

Examining how pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers build their cultural sensitivity, knowledge, and competence to be prepared to teach in various language learning situations is the focus of research on the intercultural identity of these future educators. An overview of the main ideas and conclusions from research in this

field was carried out by using commonalities found in the literature, and the researchers were found to touch upon the following sides of the intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers:

1. Intercultural Awareness & Sensitivity
2. Intercultural (Communication) Competence
3. Intercultural/Cross-cultural Experiences

2.3.1 Intercultural awareness & sensitivity

Research usually looks at how pre-service EFL teachers create their intercultural identities based on their educational experiences, language skills, and cultural origins. Scholars investigate the elements that influence the creation of an identity, such as social influences, past language acquisition, and cross-cultural encounters. Beginning from a more general approach in related studies, in exploring the research throughout the world related to intercultural identities of non-native English Teachers, Chen et al. (2016) found three groups of common factors in constructing intercultural identities: Personality characteristics, Teaching experience, and Sociocultural background.’ As these non-native English teachers experience teaching in foreign contexts and studies in general, their relations with coworkers and students are also the focus of the studies. However, the rest of the factors reveal insights contributing to this study. That is, their perspectives toward the culture as well as language and their learning backgrounds concerning their personal characteristics, their own sociocultural context, and its impact on their ideas seem to shape these teachers’ intercultural identity constructions.

Regarding the pre-service EFL teacher approach, Gu and Benson (2015) point out that pre-service teacher education involves the most important years available for identity shaping. In addition, they revealed in their cross-cultural study that shaping identity is something individual depending on the immediate contextual factors. As a result of this experiment in which the participants were required to narrate their vision of identity, it was found that “Engagement, alignment, and imagination operate simultaneously in pre-service teachers’ identity construction, mutually influencing and shaping meanings and practices across different dimensions” (p.199).

Researchers investigate how pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural identity is developed and mainly impacted by cultural sensitivity and awareness. Studies underscore the significance of comprehending cultural variances in language instruction and acquisition, confronting preconceptions and prejudices, and advocating for inclusive teaching methodologies. Following this, Menard-Warwick (2008) claims that intercultural teachers are very important for EFL teacher pedagogy and suggests that courses regarding the experiences of intercultural teachers should even be integrated into teacher training programs.

In addition to this significance, as Byram (1997) suggests, not only the occurrence of the development of intercultural identity but also the awareness of it is significant in the EFL teachers' multicultural experiences. In this sense, Chen and Starosta (1996) propose that intercultural awareness is an important dimension of ICC. Accordingly, the cognitive component of ICC, known as intercultural awareness, is a person's capacity to recognize the cultural similarities and differences of others. In addition to the cultural component of intercultural awareness, intercultural self-awareness is also considered to be a must in the process of teachers' identity development journey (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Fernández-Agüero & Garrote, 2019).

In looking deeper into the focus on the awareness of intercultural identity, Fernández-Agüero and Garrote (2019) also found that they focus more on the awareness of the intercultural identity of EFL teachers. They conducted a study with 63 pre-service EFL teachers in Spanish settings at the University in Madrid. The results of the focus group interviews revealed that although the pre-service teachers had seemed very confident about their professional lives and responsibilities as prospective teachers, they were naïve and unaware of their intercultural identity. Moreover, they had little intercultural knowledge. The researchers also mention that these pre-service teachers tend to avoid any intercultural interactions in their settings, and this could be because the participants lack intercultural expertise in other natural settings. They had no opportunity to connect with another kind of identity except for professional identity. Therefore, the researchers argue that successful communication in a socially situated environment where identities are mutually accepted is a requirement for intercultural identity development.

2.3.2 Intercultural (communication) competence (ICC)

Fantini (2006, p.12) defines ICC as “a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself”, whereas, for Bouchard (2017, p. 10), it is “the ability to deal with difference, an ability which in large part entails managing one’s value judgment when facing difference”. Given that cross-cultural encounters are becoming more frequent and individuals often gain from them, the development of ICC is crucial in the current era of globalization. Studies look into the intercultural competency of pre-service EFL teachers, emphasizing how well they can interact and communicate with people from various cultural backgrounds.

In looking at this competence, Cui (2013) investigates the levels of global mindedness of pre-service EFL teachers in her thesis and finds that competence in non-native language or culture, frequency of interaction with people of diverse backgrounds, and teaching experience were significant predictors. Following the significance of the interaction in discovering the developing process of TESOL teacher intercultural identity, Yang (2017) conducted a study in the Australian multicultural context and revealed that TESOL teacher intercultural identity, including pre-service teachers, construction is strongly connected to intercultural interaction and intercultural communication competence. In this sense, he strongly points out that intercultural identity is “an individual’s display of belonging to and sharing with speakers of diverse language and cultural backgrounds in an adaptive form of intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication” (p.527).

In consideration of the importance of ICC in intercultural identity development, some studies aim to teach the concept to pre-service EFL teachers. For example, in Vietnamese contexts, Vu (2020) conducted a case study with pre-service EFL teachers using Byram’s (1997) ICC framework to observe their development in a 16-week teacher education program integrated with constructivist learning. In this learning, the idea was that the teachers were not just consumers of knowledge but rather active users of it. The findings of the study revealed that the preservice teachers enjoyed their improved intercultural knowledge as well as exponentially enhanced skills in the areas of discovery and interpretation. Moreover, constructivist learning seemed to have facilitated the EFL

pre-service teachers' professional responsibilities and intercultural sensitivity via mediating cultural understanding.

Research following the ICC evaluates a range of intercultural competency qualities, including cultural sensitivity, empathy, communication proficiency, and adaptability. In a recent study, Barrow (2023) conducted a multiple case study with four pre-service teachers who had experienced a month-long internship abroad. The study aimed to figure out whether and how those pre-service EFL teachers with no training would conceptualize and comprehend ICC. The results showed that the experience was an excellent chance for the teachers to encourage and facilitate critical reflection, which led them to make sense of their experience and ICC development.

ICC is a significant part of foreign language teaching, as explained in this study until now. When looking deeper into the literature background of ICC and pre-service EFL teachers, it can be seen that various other researchers proposed different components of ICC, which is an important dimension of the intercultural identity development of EFL teachers. One of the oldest proposals comprises affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions (Kim, 1991). Accordingly, while the affective dimension is related to the motivational and interpersonal orientations of the individuals, the cognitive dimension is about making sense of and interpreting different verbal and nonverbal cues in the case of intercultural communications. In contrast, the behavioral dimension relates to adaptability and flexibility in intercultural encounters. On the other hand, in recent times, Genç (2018) took 'ambiguity tolerance,' 'empathy,' and 'open-mindedness' as the key components of ICC in looking at the ICC readiness of EFL teachers.

2.3.3 Intercultural/cross-cultural experiences

Research into how pre-service EFL teachers develop their intercultural identities also reveals that this type of identity is affected by cross-cultural experiences, including study-abroad programs, internships, and volunteer work, and their impact on identity negotiations and growth.

In connection to the experiences of EFL teachers abroad, Kaçar (2021) conducted a study with Turkish pre-service EFL teachers in an international exchange program in

terms of the effects of the Comenius language assistantship program on their sociolinguistic perspectives. The interviews and journals reveal that exchange experiences contributed to their transformative processes, especially in being able to receive different perspectives and awareness of intercultural contexts. Moreover, the study suggested that interculturality-related issues, such as intercultural awareness and diversity in languages and cultures, should be integrated into teacher training programs.

Interestingly, the only study found in the literature that conflicts with the studies indicating the advantages of studying abroad on intercultural identity was conducted in Turkish settings, where Çelik (2018) claims that EFL teachers do not need to go abroad or be in contact with an English language user to build their intercultural identity and become aware of that. Moreover, he calls this identity a unique identity.

As outlined above, overall research on the intercultural identities of pre-service EFL teachers reveals the complex relationships that exist among language acquisition, cultural awareness, and professional growth in the language education sector. By analyzing pre-service teachers' experiences, viewpoints, and educational goals, these studies contribute to developing successful teacher preparation programs and fostering cross-cultural comprehension in language learning and teaching environments.

Lastly, studies on the intercultural identities of pre-service EFL teachers have looked at a range of topics, including how teachers understand, navigate, and construct their intercultural identities, as well as the related factors in this construction. In bringing out these factors, reflective practices were found to be a focal point of intercultural identity-related literature. Accordingly, most of the studies aimed to reveal the construction of intercultural identity by leading pre-service EFL teachers to make sense of their experiences by journaling or blogging. Studies highlight the value of reflective practice in helping pre-service EFL teachers develop their intercultural identity. For example, in her study with pre-service teachers, Higdon (2023) investigated the field experience that the participants had during their study-abroad process in Northern Ireland and revealed that through reflective discussions and journaling, participants were able to express their changing perspectives on culturally relevant instruction. Moreover, thanks to reflective journaling, the participants were able to record their observations and the reasons impacting their instructional decisions by keeping a reflective notebook, which

promoted greater self-awareness and critical thinking about their approaches to instruction. As a result, it was discovered that following their involvement in the program, pre-service teachers' attitudes and beliefs on culturally relevant pedagogy underwent significant changes.

Researchers recommend reflective practices like journaling, peer talks, and critical event analysis to assist teachers in understanding their own cultural experiences and viewpoints. This is because reflection is more than just repeating unconsidered events; it is a genuine investigation of circumstances, people, and oneself (Pasterick, 2019). This is essential for intercultural development since it teaches candidates how to think critically and methodically about what they are going through as well as how to see beyond themselves. As a result, reflective study-abroad activities can improve critical thinking, alter attitudes, and foster multicultural understanding (Cheng & Huang, 2023).

Overall, the study of pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural identities has yielded valuable insights into the complex connection between cultural elements and language teaching. It has also highlighted the need for teachers to develop intercultural competence and identity in order to facilitate successful communication and intercultural understanding.

2.4 Research on Studying Abroad and the Intercultural Identity of Pre-Service EFL Teachers

Considering the rise in the use of the English language, studying abroad began to be the focus or a part of the investigation of studies. It is now believed that not only language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge but also the awareness of the intercultural use of English by EFL teachers are considered to be important (Byram, 2021; Chen & McConachy, 2022; Fang et al., 2024; Zhang & Wang, 2022). In doing this, studying abroad is considered a successful way to prepare global EFL teachers (Putman & Byker, 2021). In studies, the study-abroad concept is generally seen as a transformational experience. When it comes to the international experiences of language teachers, the significance of these international experiences becomes a core component that helps build their identities. According to Nyugen and Hao (2022), it is important to start understanding the identity of foreign language teachers within larger communities

and the experiences that teachers have had within them. Even though not as many explicitly address the intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers in study-abroad settings, a few relevant research studies aim to connect studying abroad and EFL teachers' intercultural identity. At this point, reviewing the related research in detail in the following subsection becomes important.

Using commonalities identified in the literature, an overview of this field's key concepts and findings was put together. The researchers found that pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural identities:

- 1) Role of Studying Abroad on Intercultural Identity
- 2) Language Development and Intercultural Competence
- 3) Advantages and Challenges

2.4.1 Role of studying abroad on intercultural identity

It would be wrong to consider 'intercultural identity' fixed, as individuals develop it as context-dependent (Duff, 2017). In this sense, it can be said that study-abroad contexts are a significant fit for investigating the development of this kind of identity, especially concerning pre-service EFL teachers. In particular, studying abroad can have a number of advantages, including enhancing one's ability to communicate in another language, expanding one's cultural awareness, maturing as a person, and fostering a greater sense of global interest and care, according to Brown (2009). In addition, Cheng and Huang (2023, p. 173) assert that "*Study-abroad experiences challenge participants' tacit assumptions and support critical reflection in which they consciously make meaning of their lives*". Besides, they claim that the study-abroad process can lead pre-service EFL teachers to experience transformative learning. That is, as they frequently encounter perplexing challenges that contradict their previously held beliefs, studying abroad encourages critical reflection and personal development by gaining a greater comprehension of cultural variety and global viewpoints. Several research projects have examined how study-abroad opportunities affect the formation of pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural identities. Participant awareness, sensitivity, and flexibility are raised as a result of these experiences, which frequently involve immersion in the target language and culture (Brown, 2009). Besides, the overall findings of the research usually

reveal individual and cultural growth, development of pedagogical skills and intercultural awareness, and the positive roles of studying abroad on pre-service EFL teachers.

In Turkish contexts, in a qualitative study, Aydın (2012) gathered information from 23 pre-service EFL teachers regarding their Erasmus study-abroad process, and the findings showed that the process offers some significant advantages for the pre-service English teachers' professional and personal growth as well as their language proficiency, but it also has some potential drawbacks. Accordingly, the Erasmus program enhanced participants' views toward culture and leisure activities, as well as their language skills and knowledge, professional and personal development, and more. Pre-service teachers benefitted from the active participation approach by improving their vocabulary, pronunciation, speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities in English as a foreign language. Additionally, it boosted self-esteem, lessened communication anxiety, and raised understanding of the contextual usage of English as a second language in the target nation. However, it also raised some possible issues with formality, the process of adaption, and language and cultural disparities. Moreover, in her study with pre-service EFL teachers in a Turkish university, Önen (2017) found that the study-abroad program helped them develop academically, socially, personally, and professionally, as well as with language acquisition and cultural accumulation. By investigating Erasmus mobility, Önen (2017, p.356) also revealed that the following were the biggest challenges students faced: *communication and socializing, the differences in the education systems, language problems, economic problems, and culture shock*.

Following the studies in Turkish contexts, in their study, Sal-İlhan and Külekçi (2022) examined how Turkish pre-service EFL teachers perceived the benefits of the Erasmus exchange program for their professional, academic, linguistic, social, cultural, and personal growth as well as the challenges they faced prior to, during, and following the mobility. According to the results, the participants thought their personal and cultural growth was the primary way the Erasmus program helped them. Specifically, several important findings emerged from the study on how the Erasmus program affected Turkish pre-service EFL teachers:

- Personal and Cultural Development: "Learning how to cope with challenges" emerged as the most common topic among participants, who reported notable

personal and cultural development gains, including improved confidence and adaptability.

- **Language Development:** Fluency and speaking abilities were the primary facets of their language development. Participants became more conscious of different accents and felt more comfortable speaking English.
- **Academic Gains:** The majority of participants said they had improved academically, especially in speaking eloquently and interacting with others in meaningful situations.

These results demonstrate the advantages and difficulties Turkish pre-service EFL teachers face in the Erasmus program.

It is believed that English language teaching (ELT) ought to seek to enhance students' capacity to negotiate meanings with people from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds rather than just focusing on language skills in the limited sense (Byram, 2021). Therefore, study-abroad programs can help pre-service teachers better understand their own intercultural identity in connection to the cultures they experience there. Moreover, considering the appropriateness of the nature of studying abroad contexts, it should be mentioned that “one natural site in which teacher candidates can experience difference, develop interculturality, and learn to question what they have previously understood to be ‘normal’ is during a study-abroad (SA) immersion experience” (Pasterick, 2019, p. 127).

In a recent study, Fang et al. (2024) investigated the study-abroad experiences of pre-service Chinese EFL teachers who returned to China after studying abroad for a semester. The study explored the accomplishments and difficulties of those pre-service teachers while studying abroad, paying particular attention to how their interpretations and reflections on their intercultural encounters changed their views on language and communication and how they made sense of intercultural encounters. One outstanding result was that the teachers considered English a tool for studying abroad. However, they learned to accommodate the different accents and uses of English, and their perspectives changed with intercultural communication and language diversity. That is, they

developed sensitivity to diversity as well as language awareness. Moreover, their narratives revealed that the following contextual factors were dominant in developing their intercultural identity in study-abroad experiences:

- Being exposed to intercultural conflicts and differences in lifestyle: The teachers lacked communication strategies in a different culture and had difficulties and a lack of communication while having misunderstandings in finding solutions. However, they became more comfortable over time, and their communication strategies were developed.
- Getting used to different customs: They realized that everyone dealt with things differently, and as a result, they developed intercultural awareness through self-reflection.
- Developing understanding by participating in different social activities: They expanded their mindset and sense of criticality by investing in their intercultural identity through active participation in local and international communities.
- Learning from negatives: ‘Power relations’ was a distinguishing variable as a result of their lack of investment in a new environment (Norton, 2013). Even with minor difficulties, they tended to lack the willingness to communicate and used avoidance strategies. Moreover, their willingness to engage with the unfamiliar, including the struggles with the local accents and jokes deviating from expectations) lead them to learn to understand and respect.
- Developing critical perspectives outside the books, leading them to become global citizens.

Similarly, in another Chinese context, Zhang and Wang (2022) explored pre-service Chinese EFL teachers and the effects of studying abroad on their identities and professional growth. They found that the intercultural experiences that teachers were experiencing appeared to have a significant influence on how they developed their identities and how they perceived language. As a result, studying abroad provided

immersive cultural experiences, the development of intercultural communication skills, and personal and professional growth.

While research on the intercultural identities of pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in study-abroad settings is still limited, it is becoming increasingly important to comprehend how these experiences impact the identity development of future teachers.

Lastly, it should also be mentioned that the literature on teachers' intercultural development has been criticized for failing to adequately address language and the unique impact that immersion in a foreign culture has on teachers' awareness of linguistic conventions and the cultural connotations of various linguistic forms. According to Baker (2020), this could be because language teachers have not been the focus of many empirical investigations; instead, they have been teachers of other disciplines. Therefore, it is important to reveal this awareness in the intercultural identity development of foreign language teachers by following their experiences abroad.

2.4.2 Language development and intercultural competence

It is an excellent chance for pre-service EFL teachers to build their intercultural identities in study-abroad contexts where the medium of communication is English. Pre-service EFL instructors can improve their language skills and intercultural communication abilities through study-abroad programs. In this vein, Pasterick (2019, p. 127) asserts that “The development of intercultural understanding and the ability to interact appropriately and effectively—according to established norms and values, and achieving particular objectives—with people from other cultures has become extremely important in today’s globalized, multilingual world.” In relation to this topic, in the Turkish EFL context, Genç (2018) investigated the ICC of pre-service EFL teachers and found ‘studying abroad’ to be an important indicator of a higher level of ICC. Genç (2018) explored the readiness of Turkish EFL pre-service teachers to manage intercultural challenges and looked at the relationship between certain individual factors and factors that predict intercultural communication competence: *ambiguity tolerance, empathy, and open-mindedness*. The results of the questionnaire showed that the pre-service EFL teachers’ intercultural communication competence skills were lacking. However, the

finding salient for the present study was that compared to their peers, those who had studied abroad before, in particular, showed higher levels of tolerance for ambiguity. Besides, this, according to Genç (2018), gives them comfort because the ones with tolerance for ambiguity will be better able to see and understand ambiguous situations realistically without omitting or misrepresenting any of their complexity. Moreover, tolerant people ought to function well in novel, challenging circumstances, and they are better equipped to comprehend cultural differences as a result.

However, it must also be mentioned that intercultural communication is complex by nature since it contradicts our previously held beliefs (Kim, 2015). Studies show that when individuals immerse themselves in real-world language exchanges and negotiate cultural disparities in day-to-day communication, they enhance their intercultural competence. Roswita et al. (2023) indicate that study-abroad programs appeal to pre-service teachers who want to teach a second language because they help them improve their language skills and get experience living abroad. In their study, by working with five pre-service EFL teachers who volunteered to teach abroad over nine weeks, they found that interaction and discourses played an important role in their personal and professional development. The results were revealed through the participants' reflections via blogs. As a result, writing a blog enabled them to make sense of their language and cultural learning experiences and the challenges they have in adjusting to a new school environment and system.

In Turkish contexts, study-abroad studies that integrate intercultural (communication) competence are found to be present as few. The ICC is generally analyzed in EFL teachers' classroom teaching based on the experiences collected during teacher training years. For instance, in her thesis, Tütüncü (2014) investigated the study-abroad experiences of EFL teachers related to ICC that they had developed during their study-abroad experiences in training years. As a result, she found that motivation and knowledge were significant components of ICC. The experience affected their personal development with an increase in being 'self-confident, more flexible, more understandable, more tolerable, and better communicator.' (p.87), as well as social development and language development. They were curious and motivated about the place prior to the experience. The results of the study led the researcher to suggest that the ICC knowledge of EFL teachers should be integrated into the curriculum. That is,

they should be allowed to transfer what they have collected from their experiences in studying abroad while constructing their intercultural identity through communication.

Moreover, Sarıcoban and Oz (2014) looked into the ICC side of intercultural identity in studying abroad in Turkish contexts with a quantitative approach. The goal was to determine whether variables like gender, study-abroad experience, and academic success indicate any variations in their ICC levels. The results of the large-scale questionnaire investigation with pre-service EFL teachers revealed significant positive correlations between the participants' ICC levels and their study-abroad experiences. Specifically, 'intercultural communication' was underlined as an important factor that affected their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, especially in the ability to interpret and create links between different aspects of the two cultures and the willingness to explore and communicate. Therefore, studying overseas had a significant correlation with the ICC's knowledge, skills, and attitude aspects. Following the study's findings, the researchers suggested that providing pre-service EFL teachers with the chance to enroll in optional intercultural education courses and encouraging them to study-abroad would help them advance their ICC.

As can be seen, the relationship between the ICC and study-abroad has gained some acceleration over the past 10 years. However, comparing the results of as many contexts as possible is significant for gaining more insights. In the Indonesian context, on the other hand, Arfiandhani and Suraya (2021) investigated this kind of intercultural development of three pre-service EFL teachers. They found the following three developmental components that they had gained while studying abroad: 'Cultural awareness,' 'personal growth,' and 'foreign language improvement.' In particular, the pre-service EFL teachers in their study indicated that they had developed an understanding of different countries and cultures. In addition, regarding the personal growth component, they mentioned gaining self-independence and developing their ability to find solutions to difficulties, whereas, in terms of language development, they pointed out not only the improvement in their English proficiency but also in the local language that they had lived with. In a German context, on the other hand, to investigate pre-service EFL teachers' expectations and gains from the placement-abroad semester, Vogt (2016) focused on interculturality and used reflective reports and group discussions. She found that during their 3 months, participants reflected on their experiences and

incorporated cultural insights into their professional identities, demonstrating critical cultural awareness.

In sum, the pre-service EFL teachers in study-abroad contexts revealed somewhat similar, yet specific, developmental processes and added influential components to their intercultural identity while studying abroad.

2.4.3 Advantages and challenges

Although study-abroad programs have many advantages, pre-service teachers of EFL may face difficulties like isolation, culture shock, and language obstacles. Concerning the advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad for pre-service EFL teachers, Lee (2009) investigated a group of Hong Kong EFL teachers who joined a six-week immersion program in Auckland in terms of impacts, benefits, and obstacles. The results of the study showed that the teachers experienced communication improvements. For example, one of the participants mentioned that her host lady had corrected her English from time to time, which led her to develop her speaking and listening skills. Moreover, studying abroad helped them understand cultural differences. They gained a more profound sense of self-awareness, independence, and the maturity to handle situations that differed from their regular lives in Hong Kong. In the meantime, they grew more assured in their capacity to interact and impart knowledge to others from various ethnic backgrounds.

In Japanese contexts, a case study was carried out by Hiratsuka (2022), who aimed to look deeper into the transformational experiences of a Japanese pre-service EFL teacher studying abroad in Sweden. The narrative interviews showed that the participant went through sequential stages of transformation processes, such as going from feeling more confident to encountering a perplexing situation and from critically reflecting to taking on new roles. Moreover, she modified her frames of reference. As a result, she was found to develop her intercultural identity through two incidents: one was her self-reflection, as she realized studying abroad was not only about studying non-stop. The second turn of events was when other people started communicating with her, asking whether she was okay. The significance of communication in developing an intercultural identity was present throughout the study. Research emphasizes how crucial it is to offer

mentorship opportunities, cultural orientation programs, and support systems to assist participants in navigating the challenges of living and studying abroad. Study-abroad initiatives can also help pre-service teachers from various cultural backgrounds collaborate and engage in meaningful cross-cultural interactions.

In another Japanese context, Suzuki (2021) investigated 15 pre-service EFL teachers' change of views during their long-term study-abroad process. It was found that their foreign experiences significantly impacted how they saw the English Language, especially in relation to its significance in cross-cultural communication. Accordingly, pre-service EFL teachers appeared to have prioritized communicative effectiveness over linguistic accuracy due to their rich connections with international peers. As a result, studying abroad could change young pre-service teachers' perceptions of English for intercultural communication in a way that would make them flexible by fostering a nuanced understanding of language use in diverse contexts. The study's findings suggest that studying abroad is an important part of training to become an English teacher, especially for pre-service Japanese instructors. Moreover, their enhanced intercultural communication skills were associated with this shift of viewpoint, indicating that SA is a helpful strategy for improving English language skills and cultural awareness.

Following meaningful cross-cultural interactions, previous studies on EFL teacher identity focused on reflection, negotiation, and identity awareness to bring out the advantages and challenges of studying abroad. To begin with, it must be mentioned that the English language has spread throughout the world, and English speakers differ significantly in terms of language aspects (pronunciation, lexis, etc.), as well as in how they perceive social interactions and prefer to express their identities (Baker, 2020). Pre-service EFL teachers frequently participate in reflection techniques to make sense of their experiences studying abroad and navigate their cultural identities. Research has indicated that critical thinking, self-awareness, language awareness, and an open mind are crucial for overcoming prejudices and stereotypes and navigating cross-cultural interactions (McConacy, 2022). Reflecting on these experiences and making sense of them are significant parts of developing an intercultural identity abroad, as it is necessary to *“become fully engaged with their environment rather than living almost encapsulated in the links with home”* (Byram, 2021, p. 103). As participants work to reconcile opposing cultural values and perspectives, they may undergo identity shifts or transformations.

Negotiation of identity is considered significant in study-abroad contexts as developing an intercultural identity in intercultural contexts requires active involvement instead of just taking on a tourist mindset (Byram, 2021). Larzén-Östermark (2011) indicates that study-abroad programs have the power of eventually fostering their awareness of other cultures, namely ‘intercultural awareness’ and adds that “intercultural sojourn begins as a trip abroad – to learn the language and discover another culture – but ends in learning most about one’s self” (p. 455). Moreover, in her study, Larzén-Östermark found that for pre-service EFL teachers in their study-abroad processes, casual conversations with foreigners and locals were regarded as highly beneficial opportunities for learning in terms of linguistic and cultural aspects. Moreover, it is suggested that the intercultural outcomes of studying abroad for pre-service EFL teachers are highly dependent upon their actions, the conversations they initiate, and the activities they participate in.

In a recent study, on the other hand, Back (2023) looked into the intercultural identities of 10 teacher candidates who critically reflected upon their own identities in relation to the cultural environments of their study-abroad experience in Peru. The results showed that their intercultural awareness gradually increased with increased intercultural sensitivity and contextual awareness regarding their and others’ identities. On top of that, ‘cultural excavation’ was found to be a central concept that led to the related identity and awareness of it.

2.5 Summary of the Review

This section revealed the literature on the intercultural identity construction of pre-service EFL teachers and the preliminary factors of this development. However, in every case, the significance of communication in the construction and development of intercultural identity was self-evident. As Kim (2008) argues in his work on intercultural identity, individuals can and do gradually go through a process of intercultural evolution through extended and cumulative encounters with intercultural communication.

In addition, the literature was followed by the additional study-abroad context, which is considered a contributing factor in developing the intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers. According to recent literature, study-abroad experiences majorly

affect this development in the way teachers make sense of these experiences (Byram, 2021).

It should also be mentioned that the overall analysis of the study-abroad-related section of this literature review reveals that the popularity of the investigation of intercultural identity in studying abroad has risen over the past couple of years. There were no more than a couple of studies that connected intercultural identity and studying abroad of pre-service EFL teachers before the year 2020. However, Putman and Byker (2021, p. 24) note that “study-abroad experiences have been referred to as one of the most effective ways to prepare global teachers, together with various other benefits.”

In sum, the importance of investigating the intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers with the components of intercultural communication competence and study-abroad experiences is evident. Moreover, the literature also explicitly explains the gap in the studies on pre-service EFL teachers’ intercultural identity. Therefore, this study stands as an important building block of the EFL education field with the integration of intercultural identity and its components: study-abroad and ICC.

CHAPTER THREE

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins by presenting the research design. It then explains the research context, participants, data collection instruments, processes, and analysis. Finally, it addresses trustworthiness

3.1 Research Design

This section covers the case study research design, which will analyze the participants' cases in detail, considering the study's qualitative nature. In addition, the 'narrative-oriented approach', which is the backbone of the design, will be explained. The reasons for choosing this type of design will also be revealed.

3.1.1 Multiple case study design

In case studies, an individual, an event, or an activity is explored with a detailed analysis through several data collection processes (Creswell, 2012). According to Dornyei (2007, p. 155), "the case study is an excellent method for obtaining a thick description of a complex social issue embedded within a cultural context," and it provides "rich and in-depth insights that no other method can yield." Considering these case study features, this study is designed as a qualitative multiple-case study to better understand the central phenomenon of 'intercultural identity.'

In this type of qualitative case study, as Creswell (2012, p.466) describes in the following figure, several cases are investigated by being depicted and compared to each other to bring insights into the issues being studied.

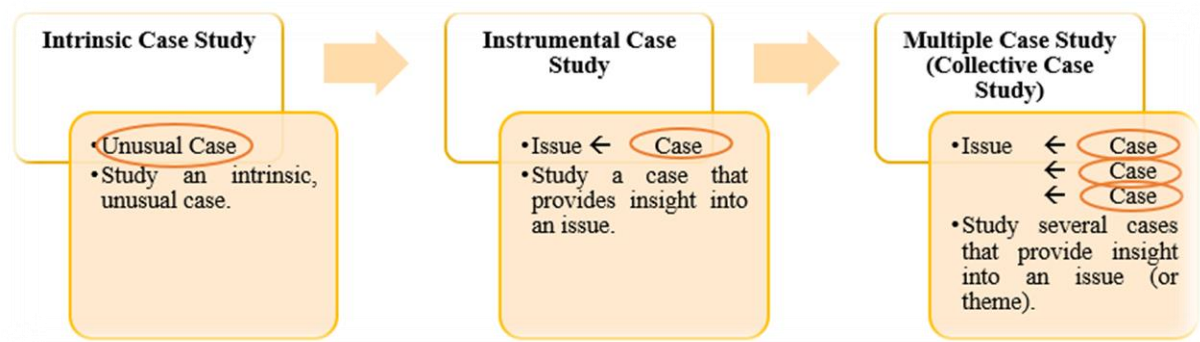


Figure 6.

Types of Qualitative Case Studies (Creswell, 2012)

In the nature of this study, individual intercultural identity developments of the participants in their study-abroad processes will be revealed. As each one will have his/her own study-abroad experience while their intercultural identity is being investigated, multiple case studies fit well with the nature of this study.

Moreover, another advantage of using the case study for this research design is related to the length of the investigation. That is, the multiple cases will be analyzed for around 5 months. As collecting the data for case studies takes a long time to gain an in-depth understanding of their natural environment, the period will provide detailed analysis for each case in this study (Dornyei, 2007).

3.1.2 Narrative-oriented approach

In case studies, multiple forms of data are used, and following this feature of case studies, this research design is mainly based on data that contain a narrative approach, which is common in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2012). This kind of narrative-oriented approach provides awareness and leads the way for teachers with their identity construction process and in forming their work (Fogle & Moser, 2017). Therefore, making use of this aspect of case studies will also contribute to the rich data analysis of this study. In explaining the power of narratives in language teacher identity research, Barkhuizen, a researcher well-known for focusing on narrative inquiry and qualitative research, comes into prominence. Specifically, he is interested in language teacher identity (LTI). Considering his narrative-oriented approach, Barkhuizen (2011, p. 399) points out the significance of the narrative inquiry on teacher identity and indicates that

“in telling stories, participants are performing themselves; they are doing their identities.” As a result, it can be said that the narrative inquiry provides a way of unraveling the identities of teachers.

As this study aims to reach a deeper understanding of the development of the intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers mainly through their experiences and stories to be told about their study-abroad semester, the approach toward the narrative inquiry will contain the process of ‘narrative knowledging’ (or sense-making) (Barkhuizen, 2011, 2013). Barkhuizen (2011, p. 395) claims that narrative knowledging is a cognitive activity that involves making sense of participants’ experiences and stories in research (e.g., in interviews and journals) and defines narrative knowledging as follows:

“Narrative knowledging; then, is the meaning-making, learning, or knowledge construction that takes place during the narrative research activities of (co) constructing narratives, analyzing narratives, reporting the findings, and reading/ watching/listening to research reports”.

Accordingly, in narrative knowledging, the researcher is actively involved in the conversations and helps construct the narratives while the participants talk about their stories, rather than passively listening. The researcher eventually creates coherence by telling and retelling these narratives by combining what has been told. In this way, the researcher aims to make sense of the data produced with interpretations.

According to Barkhuizen, this narrative knowledging includes knowledge construction with the social and cognitive side of the individuals telling their experiences. This process leads to the knowledge construction in the study, which involves interpreting and reinterpreting the stories of the individuals. Following this, in this study, the narrative knowledging will involve bringing the participants' stories and analyzing them, which will be followed by the findings report. Finally, the interpretations will be revisited throughout the narrative research (Barkhuizen, 2011, 2013). The data focus will be on their intercultural development, and for the analysis, the summary of the narratives will be created and revisited during the study.

As Barkhuizen (2011, p. 396) points out the significance of narrative knowledging in TESOL, the stages in narrative knowledging and the place where the participants stand are visualized in the following figure 7:

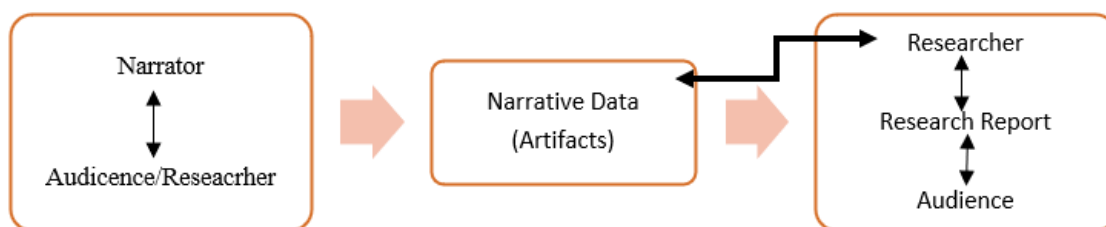


Figure 7.

Stages And Participants in Narrative Knowledging.

Similar to what Barkhuizen signifies related to the narrative inquiry, Golombek and Johnson (2014) also give importance to the narrative research and claim that narrative inquiry provides sense-making. The language teachers make sense of what they do and how they identify themselves with the stories and experiences unraveled by the researcher. In addition, what is more important is that this narrative data could actually lead to changes in language teachers' selves and practices both in the classroom and in life.

According to Golombek and Johnson (2014, p. 307), narrative inquiry is not simply an object to reveal the stories as they are told. However, instead, the stories are to be connected with interpretation. As a result, the events from their past are retold and reconstructed through narratives, which provide "new understandings of themselves as teachers". Golombek and Johnson (2004, p. 308) claim that "narratives are social, relational, and culturally bound, they gain meaning from our collective social histories and cannot be separated from the sociocultural and sociohistorical contexts from which they emerged".

Following the advantages of using narratives in research, it becomes clear that narratives, as a methodological approach began to gain momentum as Cheung et al. (2015, p.15), explain as follows: "As language and discourse are important elements in the examination of teacher identities, narratives have become an established

methodological approach in the understanding of how identities are constructed, and particularly in recent ELT/TESOL literature”. Similarly, Golombek and Johnson (2014, p. 309), indicate that this kind of inquiry becomes a voice for prospective teachers while going deeper into their identity in the contexts where they shape theirs, and add that using narratives as a data collection method, can be expected to see “how teachers participate in and constitute their social reality”. As narrative research has become a growing trend, particularly in the language teacher identity research area, making use of this approach will contribute to the nature of this study (Barkhuizen, 2011). Following the participants' experiences in their study-abroad term, the construction and development of their intercultural identity will be investigated within the narrative inquiries through the journals and critical incidents they will indicate. The details of these instruments and the analysis of the narrative approach will be explained in the following sections.

3.2 Research Context

This study is constructed under the framework of the Erasmus+ study-abroad program. The research context mainly includes the experiences of pre-service EFL teachers who study in a public University and are about to go abroad to benefit from the Erasmus+ mobility program soon.

The Erasmus+ KA131 Student Mobility for Studies Program is a study-abroad program from which full-time University students have an opportunity to benefit and have a chance to be granted by the European Commission. The students who match the criteria set by the institutions in 28 European countries and three program countries have a chance to study at a specific university for a semester with a monthly grant. After the students apply to the program, they get placed in partner institutions according to their GPA and language scores. Following the nomination procedure at their home university, they apply to the university they are nominated to and get their acceptance letter from them. Eventually, this long journey takes the students to Europe for a semester.

During their Erasmus+ semester abroad, the students are supposed to take a minimum of 28 to a maximum of 32 ECTS, and these courses that they take are automatically transferred to their transcripts at their home university. In order to complete this procedure, the students are required to bring a certificate of attendance as well as a

transcript from the host university and complete their process with the International Relations Office at their home university. As a result, the research context of this study covers the whole process of newly placed Turkish Erasmus+ students starting from their acceptance procedure, which is followed by the study process with their arrival to the host universities for about five months, till their return home and completion of their procedure. According to Holmes et al. (2015), global skills are highly possible to develop in students through the European Erasmus+ mobility exchange program, which enables them to complete their undergraduate studies at a university in a different country.

3.3 Participants

The participants of this study are students who are studying at the ELT department of a public University in Türkiye. The pre-service EFL teachers who are the participants of this study are studying at the ‘English Language Teaching Program’ at a public University in Türkiye. It is a four-year, full-time undergraduate program in which the students are trained to be qualified English Language Teachers in the future. During these four years, they take various kinds of courses varying from methodology to pedagogy, while they also have a chance to experience teaching in their final years with an internship in authentic classroom contexts. Other than that, during the program, the students have opportunities to improve themselves academically and socially with study-abroad programs offered by their university.

In order to intentionally select the specific participants “to learn or understand the central phenomenon”, they are chosen with a ‘homogeneous sampling’ strategy of purposeful sampling, as there are specific criteria and certain defining characteristics set for the selection process (Creswell, 2012, p.206). This sampling strategy fits well with the specific nature of the research context, including being a student of the study-abroad program, based on the following criteria:

- Selected for the Erasmus+ KA131 Student Mobility for Studies Program by their University's International Office.
- Being nominated to ELT departments of the partner universities.
- Accepted by the host university and received acceptance letter.

- Having traveled to the host country and started the study-abroad semester at the host University.

10 students in total were found to fit the criteria mentioned above. They were all successfully placed in ELT departments of different Universities in Europe to spend the spring semester of the 2023-24 Academic Year as Erasmus+ students. Two of the 10 students started their semester earlier than the rest in mid-January in Spain. The other two would start their semesters in April in Germany, which would be farther from the rest. The academic calendar of the rest of the students was almost the same, which would be better for the data collection procedure. Therefore, the other six students were contacted, but one refused to participate, while the other did not respond to further e-mails. As a result, students (one male and three female) were chosen after the Zoom meetings with each student and were accepted to participate in this study through a consent form. The participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

Lastly, as this study is a multiple case study including four participants, each participant is described in detail in the table below:

Table 3.*Description of the Participants*

Burak	• This participant is Male. His nickname in this study is Burak. • He is in his 3rd year in the ELT department in Türkiye. • He has been accepted for his Erasmus+ studies at a public university in Poznan/Poland. • His study period begins at the end of February 2024 and ends at the end of June 2024. • Accommodation type: He stays in a dormitory that the host University provides. • The courses he takes at the host University: ○ <i>Refresher Course in teaching English to Children,</i> ○ <i>Society, Culture & Education in Contemporary England,</i> ○ <i>Small Group Work as a Teaching Strategy,</i> ○ <i>Games and Play in Education,</i> ○ <i>Globalization, International Agencies, Economy and Education,</i> ○ <i>Linguistic Theory: Syntax,</i> ○ <i>Poland for Beginners.</i>
Elif	• This participant is Female. Her nickname in this study is Elif. • She is in his 2nd year in the ELT department in Türkiye. • She has been accepted for his Erasmus+ studies at a public university in Slupsk/Poland. • Her study period begins at the end of February 2024 and ends at the end of June 2024. • Accommodation type: She stays in a dormitory that the host University provides. • The courses she takes at the host University: ○ <i>Creative Speaking,</i> ○ <i>Speaking,</i> ○ <i>Practical English,</i> ○ <i>Language Acquisition,</i> ○ <i>Phonetics,</i> ○ <i>Introduction to Linguistics,</i> ○ <i>Elements of Culture,</i> ○ <i>Culture of Anglo-Saxon Countries.</i>
Güneş	• This participant is Female. Her nickname in this study is Güneş. • She is in his 2nd year in the ELT department in Türkiye. • She has been accepted for his Erasmus+ studies at a public university in Craiova/Romania. • Her study period begins at the end of February 2024 and ends at the end of June 2024. • Accommodation type: She stays in a dormitory that the host University provides. • The courses she takes at the host University: ○ <i>Literary Theory,</i> ○ <i>English Language (Lexicology and the Verb Phrase),</i> ○ <i>English Literature (Neoclassicism and Romanticism),</i> ○ <i>Optional Course A1 Literature: Shakespeare,</i> ○ <i>History Of Linguistic Theories (20th Century),</i> ○ <i>English (The Compound and Complex Sentence Syntax),</i> ○ <i>English Literature (20th Century),</i> ○ <i>African-American Literature,</i> ○ <i>English (Introduction to Pragmatics).</i>
Mila	• This participant is Female. Her nickname in this study is Mila. • She is in his 2nd year in the ELT department in Türkiye. • She is accepted for his Erasmus+ studies at a public university in Novipazar/Serbia. • Her study period begins at the end of February 2024 and ends at the end of June 2024. • Accommodation type: She stays in an apartment. • The courses she takes at the host University: ○ <i>Contemporary English Language-2,</i> ○ <i>Contemporary English Language-6,</i> ○ <i>Syntax of the English Language,</i> ○ <i>English Literature,</i> ○ <i>Academic Writing.</i>

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

As the study covers multiple case studies, several different kinds of qualitative data collection instruments were used to gather as much detailed data as possible during the intercultural identity development of selected participants. As Dornyei (2007) points out, in case studies, the researchers use a combination of various data collection instruments. In this way, data triangulation is provided in this study, which will contribute to the analysis of the rich data and the credibility and validity of the results. The use of multiple methods provides an advantage in this study as only one could not be able to shed light on a broad qualitative phenomenon: intercultural identity. The instruments that are explained in detail below help facilitate a deeper understanding of the analysis of rich and comprehensible data. Creswell (2008) argues that using data from different times, spaces, and people and providing a triangulation increases the accuracy of a study.

First of all, to gain a deeper understanding of each participant's actual feelings and expectations as well as the details of their experiences, semi-structured interviews were used as the primary instrument of this study during their study-abroad semester. In addition to one-to-one interviews, focus-group interviews were conducted. The interviews were in Turkish simply due to the qualitative nature of this study in which the participants were thought to be more comfortable and explain their encounters as well as emotions better in their native language

The second instrument in this study was monthly reflective journals, which were used as the supportive instrument. The participants kept these journals to track their experiences and reflect on them. In her book, Miller (2009) strongly suggests one direction to understand teacher identity: the need for critical reflection. She claims that critical sociocultural reflection helps investigate the identity of individuals in specific contexts as well as their experiences shaped by a specific discourse in which they are situated. In addition, in the Bakhtinian perspective, teacher identity is regarded as *text*, which is viewed "as an ongoing formation" of teacher identity (Hallman, 2015, p.13). As the texts hold importance in shaping teacher identity, Hallman (2015) further suggests that in teacher education programs, while they are at the beginning of their careers, making them produce and re-think texts helps bring out a great source of data concerning their teacher identity formation. Letting them write eventually urges them to evaluate and

realize themselves. Thus, these reflective journals hold importance for the details in the data collection process of this study to have detailed critical data in developing their intercultural identity from the participants' experiences. These controlled questions and keywords with interviews and journals are defined as 'personal narratives' by Pavlenko (2008). An example of this that is closely related to this study is the study of Spinelli and Dolci (2008, p. 9), who implemented journal writing to investigate the intercultural identity of students. They indicate that the journals involved three main areas with a focus on feelings, knowledge, and actions "which reflect the affective, cognitive and operational dimension of the intercultural identity".

Moreover, critical incidents were used as another supportive instrument, as the aim was to get the participants to reflect upon their intercultural experiences. Hammer (2012, p.132) states, "Cultural reflection is often best gained through in-depth analysis of critical incidents, in which cultural differences emerge through reflection on the students' experiences that 'make a difference'". Accordingly, Hammer indicates that the instrument is implemented in his studies by asking the participants to provide particular situations they experience abroad and ask for an explanation of the cultural differences that make that incident critical.

3.5 Data Collection Process

The data for this study were collected during the spring semester of the 2023-2024 Academic Year. The participants were asked to follow the instructions of each data collection process, which will start before they arrive at their host institutions. The study-abroad semester, which usually starts around the end of January or the beginning of February in European Universities, contains specific data collection in its specific parts. This detailed data collection process is shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4.*Data Collection Process of the Study-abroad Semester*

MONTH	PART OF THE MONTH	PART OF THE SEMESTER	DATA COLLECTION
February, 2024	Late-February	Before the semester starts	Focus Group Interview - 1
March, 2024	Beginning	2 weeks after their arrival	Individual Interviews - 1
	Mid-March		Critical Incident - 1
	Late-March		Reflection Report - 1
April, 2024	Beginning		Critical Incident - 2
	Mid-April		Reflection Report - 2
	Late-April	Mid-Semester	Individual Interviews - 2
May, 2024	Beginning		Critical Incident - 3
	Mid-May		Reflection Report - 3
	Late-May		Critical Incident - 4
June, 2024	Beginning		Reflection Report - 4
	Mid-June	End of the semester	Individual Interviews - 3
	Late-June	After return	Focus Group Interview - 2

As can be seen in the table above, the collection process began before they traveled to their host institutions and began their Erasmus+ semester. Consent forms were taken from the participants right before the first data collection. The process began with the first focus-group interview, which was planned for the beginning of February through a Zoom meeting. This first focus-group interview was related to their cultural and intercultural expectations, images of the host culture that is foreign to them, their purposes for the exchange semester, and their educational expectations. This focus-group interview also stood as a meeting that created a warm environment for the participants before this long journey ahead. This meeting somewhat stood as an orientation and expectation sharing toward their upcoming Erasmus+ journey, which was beneficial for them in reflecting on their expectations. In addition, the meeting also served as an orientation for them to ease into the topic of *intercultural identity* as well as *the intercultural communication competence* concepts. During the interview, the concepts were introduced, and the participants were asked to comment on them and brainstorm about the integration of the concepts related to this study in their study-abroad semester.

After the first focus group interview, the first individual interviews were conducted around two weeks after they arrived at their host universities. These 60–90-minute interviews revealed their first impressions of the host environment and their intercultural life in that specific culture.

In the meantime, the participants were asked to keep reflective journals and critical incident reports to learn about their daily experiences and specific situations in the host environment. These reports were asked every two weeks starting from late February, following the first individual interviews. Each time, they received a document with the related tip questions for them to reflect on the past two weeks. They received the instructions via e-mail throughout the process. The participants emailed their journals and critical incident reports every two weeks from February 2024 to the end of June 2024, for approximately five months. After they had sent each of their journals, the participants were asked some follow-up questions based on their journal entries for further clarification and elaboration during the second individual interview session.

In the mid-semester, which corresponds to the beginning of April, the second individual interviews were conducted with them one by one through around 60 to 90-

minute-long Zoom meetings. They were asked to reflect on their current experiences and the critical incident reports they send every two weeks. As the descriptions of a real-life situation were asked to be reflected on by the participants, these narratives helped us observe their real-life experiences and their feelings related to them. This kind of data collection is referred to as ‘developmental interviewing’ by Hammer (2012, p. 127), in which the participants are asked to

“provide accounts of specific situations or critical incidents that they encountered overseas and to explain what the cultural differences were that ‘made a difference’ in each situation; what strategies they used to navigate these identified differences; and, finally, what they perceive the outcomes to have been”.

Finally, the last individual interviews were conducted at the end of the semester to gain a deeper understanding of their overall experiences. In addition, the last focus group interview was held after they returned home at the beginning of July via a Zoom meeting. This last interview was expected to bring out more details related to their overall experiences and closing remarks on their perspectives on their intercultural identity compared to the beginning of their semester.

3.6 Data Analysis

As this study was planned as a qualitative multiple-case study, the analysis of the collected data was very detailed, and the data were meticulously analyzed after each collection process.

In order to analyze the data, Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Qualitative Thematic Analysis was taken as a base, and this scheme was used throughout the whole process. Accordingly, thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns and/or themes within qualitative data. The main reason for carrying out this type of analysis was that this study aimed to obtain a deep understanding of people’s experiences and realities. The overall process of the thematic analyses can be seen in the following figure:

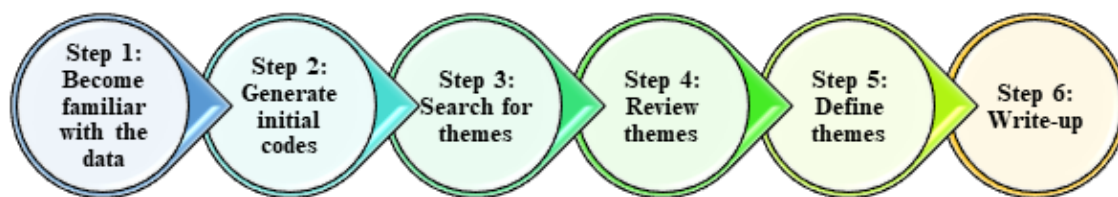


Figure 8.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six-Phase Framework for Thematic Analysis

Considering the interview analyses, each set was analyzed with a close reading of the transcriptions after they were transcribed and translated into English for the analysis. As shown in Figure 8, codes were drawn from the transcriptions during the analyses through an iterative coding process (Creswell, 2012). While identifying the common patterns, the coding process was conducted manually. Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 84) distinguish between two levels of themes: semantic themes being "...within the explicit or surface meanings of the data and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written", while the latent themes "...starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations – and ideologies - that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data". Following the coding process in which latent-vise investigation was considered, the recurring themes and sub-themes were distinguished after the comparison and contrast of the codes in the end. In addition to the interview sessions, the reflective journals and critical incident reports were analyzed using the same procedure, with each collection every two weeks. Commonalities and discrepancies were examined through thematic analysis for them as well. Specific and overall results, considering the research questions, were described in the end.

In reflective journals and critical incident reports, data analysis was conducted through coding and thematic analysis of collected narratives (i.e., analysis of narratives; Barkhuizen et al., 2014). In the narrative analysis suggested by Polkinghorne (Polkinghorne, 1995, mentioned in Bakhuizen, 2011), the process involves coding, categorizing, and finding common patterns. However, in particular, in narrative knowledging, Barkhuizen (2011) suggests collecting the data by sense-making, and this

can be accomplished by analyzing the similarities in stories being told and grouping those similarities in categories. In this way, the analysis includes revealing the stories and discovering a common whole.

In order to visualize the analysis of the data collection with a thick description, a table was formed for a detailed description of the interview data as shown in the table below:

Table 5.

Information Regarding the Length and Proportion of The Interview Data

	1 st Interview			2 nd Interview			3 rd Interview		
	Duration	Page	Word Count	Duration	Page	Word Count	Duration	Page	Word Count
Burak	75 minutes	25 pages	7283 words	106 minutes	38 pages	12407 words	65 minutes	27 pages	7702 words
Mila	55 minutes	23 pages	6089 words	70 minutes	28 pages	7950 words	32 minutes	10 pages	3606 words
Elif	69 minutes	27 pages	7371 words	70 minutes	26 pages	7515 words	64 minutes	20 pages	6912 words
Güneş	82 minutes	21 pages	5860 words	87 minutes	30 pages	8389 words	64 minutes	17 pages	7404 words
Focus Group Interview – I	55 minutes, 18 pages, 5741 words								
Focus Group Interview - II	58 minutes, 22 pages, 6163 words								

As shown in Table 5, the overall length of the interview journeys was 952 minutes, approximately 16 hours. The transcriptions totaled 332 pages and 100,392 words. As there were two other data collection instruments, the data contributed to the richness of the interviews, as shown in the table below:

Table 6.

Information Regarding the Length and Proportion of the Interview Data

	Burak		Mila		Elif		Güneş	
	Page	Word Count	Page	Word Count	Page	Word Count	Page	Word Count
Critical Incident - I	3 pages	1056 words	2 pages	527 words	2 pages	388 words	2 pages	467 words
Critical Incident - II	3 pages	768 words	2 pages	495 words	2 pages	429 words	2 pages	456 words
Critical Incident - III	3 pages	773 words	2 pages	504 words	2 pages	383 words	2 pages	547 words
Critical Incident - IV	3 pages	671 words	2 pages	419 words	2 pages	386 words	2 pages	568 words
Reflective Journal - I	5 pages	1453 words	2 pages	847 words	2 pages	581 words	2 pages	976 words
Reflective Journal - II	4 pages	1769 words	2 pages	650 words	2 pages	517 words	2 pages	1035 words
Reflective Journal - III	4 pages	1699 words	2 pages	703 words	2 pages	509 words	2 pages	617 words
Reflective Journal - IV	2 pages	1047 words	2 pages	632 words	2 pages	555 words	2 pages	672 words

Table 6 above shows that the critical incidents and reflective journals provided 75 pages of data, which, together with the interview transcriptions, made up 407 pages and 23,099 words in total. The data analysis was sequential. That is, it was carried out right after the data was collected. After analyzing the whole data, the results were demonstrated in the next chapter.

The process of coding, categorizing, and delineating themes was conducted to form sub-themes. Similar sub-themes were grouped and later compared and contrasted. The final stage of the data analysis involved going through all the sub-themes to group them under the main themes. As a result, sub-themes and main themes were finalized in line with the purpose of the study. The examples from the final version of themes-subthemes are given in the appendices (See Appendix 8: Sample Coding Tables (Preliminary)).

The interview data—transcripts—were shared with the participants during the data analysis. Moreover, following the findings, they received a copy of the parts where their data were used and asked whether the parts revealed the truth or not. These two actions were considered an additional means of validating the data.

The researcher carried out the analysis, and 10% of the data was analyzed by another researcher in the field who was familiar with qualitative data analysis. Discussions on the inter-rater analysis were carried out with the rater several times through online meetings. The inter-rater was involved in the process from the first draft of the analysis until the final version. The inter-rater reliability was measured by using the $[\text{agreement} / (\text{agreement} + \text{disagreement})] \times 100$ formula (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Inter-rater reliability was found to be .87, which indicated a good degree of reliability, at least 80% agreement of the coders for reliability, which is expected to be obtained according to Miles and Huberman. In addition to inter-rater reliability, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness taxonomy was applied to ensure the quality of validity.

3.7 Trustworthiness

‘Trustworthiness’ is a concept introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which refers to the quality of validity of qualitative studies. Trustworthiness is a critical part of

a study in ascertaining the value of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Described by Geertz (1973) as ‘thick description’, this study aimed for readers to experience texts that were so detailed that they could actually feel the event or thing being described. Therefore, each segment of trustworthiness was taken into consideration. In order to reveal how validity and reliability will be established in this study, Lincoln and Guba’s taxonomy, including the criteria of credibility, conformability, transferability, and dependability, were explicitly acknowledged.

Following this concept, first of all, the triangulation of data, which is considered an important feature of a study, contributes to the trustworthiness of this study in many ways (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility, which refers to the accuracy and authenticity of the findings, was ensured primarily through triangulation and member checking. Multiple data sources—interviews, reflective journals, and critical incident reports—were used to provide deeper insight into participants’ intercultural identity development. This triangulation contributed to the robustness of the data and strengthened the study’s overall credibility. As Creswell (2011, p. 259) notes, “This ensures that the study will be accurate because the information draws on multiple sources of information.” Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing interview transcripts and analyzed themes with participants, allowing them to verify the accuracy and completeness of their contributions.

On the other hand, an audit trail or an outside evaluation of the research process is frequently used to provide conformability, which guarantees that the results are influenced by the data rather than the researcher's bias. Given the interpretive nature of qualitative research, conformability was essential to demonstrate that findings were grounded in the data and not influenced by researcher bias. This was supported by maintaining a detailed audit trail, including methodological decisions, coding procedures, and researcher reflections. The triangulation of data and feedback from participants further contributed to confirmability, as the inclusion of diverse perspectives helped minimize personal bias (Dörnyei, 2007). As this study is built upon a totally qualitative nature, and as the analysis procedure only depends on the researcher’s interpretation, making sure of these segments of trustworthiness was significant in building the trustworthiness of this study.

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the findings over time. Techniques like inquiry audits, in which the research procedure is recorded and examined for coherence, guarantee dependability. In this study, dependability was ensured through an inquiry audit, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), where three external researchers periodically reviewed the research process, including data collection and analysis steps. These experts were consulted for clarity and appropriateness of the themes obtained from the analysis. These external audits verified the consistency and traceability of the findings. Quotations from participants were also presented under thematic headings in the findings section, further demonstrating transparency and analytical consistency. Additionally, the use of multiple instruments helped distinguish overlapping themes and provided a comprehensive analysis of the data.

Transferability is the degree to which the results can be used in comparable situations or environments. Thorough, in-depth explanations of the study's background make this possible. Although this study focused on Turkish pre-service EFL teachers, its findings may be relevant to other pre-service teacher populations in comparable educational and cultural settings. This potential is supported by rich, thick descriptions of the participants, the context, and the methodology, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the results to their own situations (Dörnyei, 2007). Following this, it can be said that the study has an important role in contributing to the field, as there are limited studies focusing on the intercultural identity of Turkish pre-service EFL teachers. Due to the unique context of this group, the findings of this study can be transferred to similar contexts or populations, such as pre-service EFL teachers in other countries with comparable cultural and educational settings. This is accomplished through transferability, allowing the study's findings to provide insights for future research or practice in different contexts, as long as conditions (e.g., cultural dynamics, teacher education systems) are comparable. Comprehensive descriptions of the study's context, participants, and methodology enable readers to evaluate the relevance of the findings to their own circumstances.

Furthermore, there were additional measures to enhance trustworthiness. As a result, several practical steps were also taken to further enhance trustworthiness. Before data collection, two ELT experts reviewed the semi-structured interview and journal questions to ensure their clarity and relevance. A second-year ELT student was also

consulted to assess the instruments' comprehensibility. During the translation process, a qualified colleague compared the translated and original data to ensure linguistic accuracy. In order to provide further reliability, which corresponds to the degree of consistency in findings, the availability of data was ensured for the experts in the field in the coding procedures of the whole dataset. In addition, during the analysis process, a colleague with expertise in English translation was asked to compare the translated version with the original data to verify the translation process's accuracy. These steps added to the credibility and dependability of the study. Moreover, in presenting the results of these interviews, reflective journals, and critical incident reports, the 'contextualization and thick description' strategy, which is an important component of the researcher's image according to Dornyei (2007), was used. In order to do so, the findings were presented in detail with rich contextualization.

Finally, in line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework, this study employed peer debriefing as a strategy to enhance credibility. Throughout the research process, my thesis jury, thesis monitoring committee, supervisor, and colleagues with expertise in the field were actively involved in providing feedback on the research design, data interpretation, and thematic analysis. These interactions served as critical debriefing sessions, allowing me to reflect on my own assumptions and ensure that the findings were grounded in the data rather than personal bias.

Additionally, to strengthen the dependability and confirmability of the analysis, an independent rater, who is experienced in qualitative content analysis, was consulted. The rater was briefed about the research aims, data sources, and coding framework before starting the evaluation. The selection of this rater was intentional, as they had previous experience in conducting and evaluating similar qualitative research. Their expertise provided an external check on the consistency and reliability of the coding process, further enhancing the study's methodological rigor.

Lastly, acknowledging the possibility of researcher bias—especially when the same individual is responsible for both data collection and analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994)—member checking became a vital component. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest member checking to reduce this bias. They believe that returning data to participants aids in ensuring its accuracy and thoroughness. After all, it is essential that researchers are

transparent about what they hope to achieve with the method and how their claims about credibility and validity fit with their epistemological stance (Birt et al., 2016). Following Birt et al. (2016), member checks included both transcript validation and sharing synthesized themes with participants, allowing them to reflect on and confirm their experiences as accurately represented. As a first step, the transcriptions of the interviews were sent to the participants by e-mail to check the accuracy of the interview transcriptions. Secondly, in order for the researcher to make assertions on the reliability of the results, themes were shared with the participants after the researcher finalized the analyses. This was also considered a ‘narrative accuracy check,’ which is a good way to confirm that a participant's description of an experience or event is accurate (Stanley, 2011). As a result, the participants in this study were able to reflect on the synthesized version of their experiences in the study-abroad process.

3.7.1 The reflexivity of the researcher

Reflexivity is significant in qualitative research as it allows analysts to critically examine their own positions, biases, and the impact of their identities on the research process. It serves as a deconstructive exercise to uncover the complexities of representation and the relationships between the researcher, the subjects, and the text. In the end, reflexivity seeks to promote a deeper comprehension of the social constructions under study in order to increase the accuracy and legitimacy of qualitative approaches (Macbeth, 2001). All phases of the research process may be influenced by the personal opinions and interests of qualitative researchers, which could result in the researcher's voice overpowering that of the participants (Mason, 2002). However, “ensuring that the participants’ own meanings and perspectives are represented and not curtailed by the researchers’ own agenda and knowledge” is important (Tong et al., 2007, p. 356). This potential was considerably reduced in some ways, including member-checking in this study. Nevertheless, as much as trust in the researcher was provided, the researcher's perspective and role in this study must be mentioned.

Identified as “a major strategy for quality control in qualitative research, understanding how it may be impacted by the characteristics and experiences of the researcher is of paramount importance” (Berger, 2013, p.1), the reflexivity position of the researcher is a central concern in qualitative research. Following this concern, Watson

(2005, p. 2) continues as follows: “The professional observer is enjoined to switch into reflexive mode, involving perhaps a confessional self-examination of the observer’s relation to the observed, of his/her descriptive devices (including, for instance, linguistic transactions and fieldnote writing) ...”. As the role of the researcher is one of the main concerns in qualitative studies, the researchers are encouraged to set aside a section specifically for such dispositions in order to examine the underlying presumptions regarding the topic being studied. By doing this, the readers would better understand the researchers' starting points, their attitudes and opinions regarding the investigation, their philosophical inclinations that could explain their decisions when interpreting the findings, and so forth. These could increase the study's transparency, which raises the general validity of the research.

My own intercultural journey began with the Erasmus exchange program in Hungary as a pre-service EFL teacher over ten years ago. The Erasmus internship program followed that intercultural experience in Spain. After that, I became an MA student at a public University in Hungary and finished my Master’s Degree around eight years ago. The two-year experience in intercultural contexts as a pre-service EFL teacher was the peak period where I became more intrigued by interculturality and became more experienced in the topic. However, as I was not aware of the fact that I developed a special kind of identity – intercultural identity- I did not have a chance to analyze the developmental processes that I went through or the factors that affected those processes, which led to the idea of conducting a Ph.D. study on it. As a result of study-abroad experiences, I realize that my specific perspective and interpretation can both influence and limit what can be perceived because it may influence how I read the experiences of the participants. However, as someone whose intercultural experiences are relatively new, my point of view and my mid-ground role would contribute to delving into the specific sides of the participants’ accounts and finding salient factors that create their intercultural identities in their study-abroad process. In this sense, I consider this topic very fascinating since there may be inspirational stories that encourage individuals to consider their paths to studying abroad as pre-service EFL teachers and how their intercultural identities develop and change during that period.

Regarding my familiarity with the topic of intercultural identity, I can be regarded as an experienced novice teacher and a researcher passionate about revealing the

interculturality of the developing world and promoting internationalization and intercultural identity. My experiences contributed a lot during the data collection process because I used to be like my participants as a sojourner. I was aware that I might be experiencing flashbacks of my study-abroad semesters, which took place roughly eight years ago, and that I may also be able to comprehend how, as a pre-service teacher, I created my own identity during this specific educational phase. However, the participants were emotionally supported, as they expressed, and seeing an experienced researcher with a similar background made them feel comfortable in being open about sharing their stories.



CHAPTER FOUR

4 FINDINGS

The findings of this study represent each individual's intercultural identity development, which was constructed throughout the study-abroad semester. As each participant built their identity in their specific environment, the data findings will be presented case by case. The findings of each case will be shown under the title of 'journey'. This is simply because the participants went through a long, almost 5-month study-abroad process, which included their journey of intercultural identity development and awareness. After the presentation of each journey analyzed with its own data, the common patterns will be pointed out, and a framework will be drawn at the end.

4.1 Findings from the First Focus Group Interview

The study-abroad journeys of the four pre-service EFL teachers began with their first focus group interview. The interview was planned as a meeting to familiarize participants with the study and to reveal their initial dispositions related to their intercultural identity construction. Thus, this task stood as the first task of the first Research Question (*What are pre-service EFL teachers' dispositions toward their study-abroad experiences related to their intercultural identity?*) of this study. During the interview, the participants got to know each other while reflecting on the topic and concepts of this study, mainly Intercultural Identity and Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC).

First of all, the participants were asked to express their opinions on the possible *advantages of living/studying in an intercultural environment*. Although they all expressed that they had the chance to meet cultures other than their own through online platforms, none of them had experienced studying in intercultural settings before. They reflected on some key perspectives that highlighted the benefits of such experiences under the following concepts:

- **Personal Growth**

Burak emphasizes the importance of developing independence and adaptability. He expressed that his main aim in participating in the study-abroad program was to learn

to stand on his own feet and take himself out of his comfort zone. He was expecting personal growth from this journey. Thus, building a new lifestyle in a different culture would foster resilience and self-reliance as he learns to integrate into an unfamiliar environment. Güneş agrees with Burak on this topic.

- **Language Development**

Mila focuses on the practical advantages of language use. Accordingly, this experience would allow her to gain skills in engaging with people with proper language use while enhancing communication skills and learning contextually appropriate phrases. It was her second day in Serbia when the interview took place, and therefore, she had a very recent experience to share with the group related to active language use:

“Well, I think using the language effectively is... we know English, but we do not use it very often in our daily lives, so we have to use it in areas that we would never think of. For example, yesterday, I went to get a phone line and froze. I did not know anything, like phone tariffs, phone lines, or what to say, and I realized I did not know these things. It was good for me to learn these things.” (Mila - 1st Focus Group Interview – 21.02.2024)

Moreover, gaining the ability to empathize with international students in Türkiye was also an outcome that Mila foresaw.

- **Cultural Immersion**

Elif highlights the enriching experience of exploring the host country’s culture. She mentioned that she liked cooking. Thus, trying traditional foods and learning to cook local cuisine would deepen her understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. She expected such experiences to foster her creativity and new perspectives by blending culinary practices from different traditions. Mila agrees with Elif on this topic.

- **Cultural Empathy and Understanding**

Güneş underscores the importance of empathy in multicultural environments. Experiencing the host culture encourages individuals to see the world through others' perspectives, promoting tolerance and understanding. As a result, experiencing the cultures in a multicultural environment, which leads to being able to see the world from

others' perspectives, would be the gain from the process. In this sense, participant Güneş expressed her thoughts as follows:

“After all, every language and every culture has a different perspective. I mean, I think of them all as characters, to some extent. And maybe looking at things through their eyes, seeing them from their perspective, thinking about their way of thinking would be an advantage.”
(Güneş - 1st Focus Group Interview – 21.02.2024).

As can be seen from their reflections, the participants had their own expectations regarding the advantages of living and studying in a multicultural environment. From personal growth and language skills to cultural immersion and empathy, the experience was expected to provide a deeper understanding of diversity. It equips individuals with the tools to thrive in an interconnected world while fostering respect and appreciation for different cultural backgrounds.

Another topic that the participants were asked to reflect on was the concept of *Intercultural Identity* and what the notion evoked in them. The thematic analysis highlighted how they perceived and internalized Intercultural Identity as follows:

- **Transformation into a Different Person**

All participants unanimously associated intercultural identity with becoming a "*different person*." In their opinion, engaging with other cultures would lead to personal growth and reevaluating their identity.

- **Changes in Personality Traits**

Two of the participants, Burak and Güneş, specifically linked intercultural identity to personality shifts, such as becoming "more talkative" or "more extroverted." As a result, interacting with diverse cultural norms and practices was expected to push them out of their comfort zones and adopt new communication styles. For example, Burak indicated that he became a different person with a change of personality while talking in English, and he often felt more talkative in English, which he explained below:

“... when I speak English, I assume a completely different person. I think differently. The registers of the words I use are different and more polite. For example, while I do not use

"please..." very much in Turkish, I start every sentence with "please" when speaking to foreigners. I do not say "excuse me" in Turkish, but when I speak here in English, I start with "excuse me". Such a difference occurs." (1st Focus Group Interview – 21.02.2024)

In addition, Güneş related intercultural identity to becoming open-minded toward people from different backgrounds and added, "*I think I need to be less judgmental*" (1st Focus Group Interview – 21.02.2024).

- **A Blend of Cultural Influences**

Elif highlights the notion of hybridity, describing intercultural identity as a "mixture of two cultures." Thus, the notion of intercultural identity also refers to living in multicultural contexts that integrate elements from different cultural backgrounds, creating a unique identity.

In addition to intercultural identity, the participants were asked to express their opinions on another important concept in this study: Intercultural Communication Competence. However, Burak thought it could possibly mean using a foreign language effectively. In contrast, Güneş thought that becoming a world citizen could be related to it. No further comments could be received from the participants.

Lastly, the participants were asked to express their thoughts on whether they would be *confident to initiate a conversation* in their journeys. As the study aims to observe how they would use verbal and non-verbal communication in constructing their intercultural identities, it was crucial to know their first thoughts on that topic. The discussion revealed that the three of them were confident. Mila and Elif, for example, shared that they would initiate conversations by finding common topics or asking for help even from the first day. Güneş would need to get used to her new environment, but she would be able to initiate communication confidently. On the other hand, Burak indicated that he was stressed about his ability to start a conversation with foreigners confidently. He tended to overthink this issue as his study-abroad journey almost began.

Following the first focus group interview, each participant began their journey by arriving in their host country. Therefore, the following section should draw on the

individual findings to better understand how each one formed their intercultural identity throughout the study-abroad semester.

4.2 The Journey of Burak

4.2.1 Intercultural background of Burak

To look deeper into the process of intercultural identity construction of the participant, whose pseudonym is Burak, his intercultural background is summarized in this part. Burak is a 21-year-old third-year ELT student at a public University in Türkiye. He is from the same city where his university is located. He is an only child and lives with his parents. He loves the English Language and is studying in the English Language Teaching program. In addition, he has visited a few cities in Türkiye but has not been abroad before.

Before the data collection process, during the first meeting for personal introductions, Burak expressed that he had begun his bachelor's degree with a big dream of seeing Europe, and he had heard of the Erasmus+ program as an opportunity. As he had good grades, he earned a grant from the program to study-abroad in Europe. Among his university's inter-institutional agreements with European Universities, he picked one from Poland, a top-ranked government Institution. He explained the reasons why he chose the University during the first interview. Accordingly, he was recommended to pick this one due to its education quality and the livability of the city, as well as the conditions that the University provides to its international students. Moreover, the other reason was financial, which gave him the thought of not worrying about the economic conditions if the city provided a more economical life during his study-abroad process.

Burak had never been abroad before his Erasmus+ study-abroad journey in Poland. As a result, his lifetime intercultural experiences were limited to some international students in his faculty and some gamer-friends in online gaming, as he expressed during the focus group interview.

4.2.2 Burak's emerging intercultural identity during the first round of data

Was it love at first sight or a total disappointment for Burak?

The beginning of Burak's journey includes this study's first rounds of data collection, namely the first individual interview, critical incident, and reflective journal. These initial tasks aimed to figure out his initial disposition in constructing his intercultural identity. This was carried out with time lapses such as the first individual interview, which was conducted two weeks after the arrival; the first critical incident; and the first reflective journal, which had a two-week lapse in between. The total process covers the first impressions, perceptions, and actions taken to construct such an identity. Therefore, the first round of tasks revealed significant findings concerning the first research question of this study: *"What are pre-service EFL teachers' dispositions toward their study-abroad experiences related to their intercultural identity?"*. In addition, as a part of the third research question of this study, there will be the initial factors that affect the intercultural identity development of pre-service EFL teachers during the first 1,5 months of their study-abroad semester.

As can be seen in Figure 9, the thematic analysis yielded four main categories: *leaving the comfort zone, starting a cultural exchange, overcoming the language barrier, and being curious about the local culture*. These four main categories are the turning points of Burak's emerging intercultural identity construction at the beginning of his study-abroad semester.

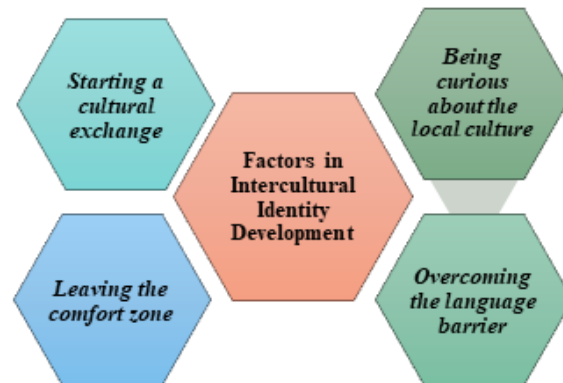


Figure 9.

The Main Categories Revealed from the First Round of Data

In the category of ***being curious about the local culture***, the participant shared his views on this novel experience of the first couple of weeks upon his arrival in Poznan city. Firstly, his initial impressions regarding the intercultural environment of Poznan city were very positive. During the first interview, Burak expressed that it was a big touristic city with excellent city planning. In addition, local people seemed to be used to seeing foreign nationalities in the city. Regarding the local people, Burak talked about a moment he found funny that he had with the Polish grannies. He indicated that he was surprised when a couple of old people wanted to take photos with him in the central area. He said that moment was probably because he looked different from the Polish people who are blonder. This memory made Burak smile but terrified him at the same time because he was afraid that this would possibly prevent him from blending into the culture. He also stated that everywhere was full of kebab shops, which felt familiar. Seeing the English translations of the local language at the restaurants and coffee shops was also a big motivation for him to blend in. Lastly, Burak also showed his affection for the natural beauty of Poznan and had a big smile on his face while talking about the trip he took with the school to the Alpaca farm. It was a pleasant bonding experience for him during his

first days in a different cultural environment. Moreover, as he wanted to know more about the cultures and adapt himself to the culture, he asked his Polish friend for help:

“I asked my Polish friend Macek for instructions on how to behave and what to do so that I would be perceived as a local rather than a tourist. I thought that doing something they often do would make it easier for me to see the world through their eyes. In addition, I watched cultural videos on YouTube about things you should never do in Poland, etc.” (1st Reflective Journal – 05.04.2024)

In the category of ***overcoming the language barrier***, which involves the importance of *non-verbal communication*, it can be said that Burak seemed to have quite a few moments of irritation in terms of communication. He expressed that he did not feel comfortable during his first two weeks, especially in the supermarkets. The moment he was most stressed was in a self-cash-out, where the machine gave an error, and Burak could not communicate with the cashier. After a while, a random person helped him, but he indicated that he felt so small and sad when the cashier told him to leave the market. In addition, he also felt uncomfortable until he learned how the ticket systems worked in transportation. He shared a desperate moment he experienced after having difficulty in communication as follows:

“Why did I leave my life?” “I remember feeling very confused and even wanting to go back in my second week. Even though I was not alone, I felt very lonely” (1st Reflective Journal – 05.04.2024)

It was the first time that Burak had so many different occasions that he could use his English with modifications. During the first interview, he indicated that in the first two weeks he spent in Poznan, he realized that he needed to simplify his English, especially for the elderly. For example, while asking for a price, he did not use the whole phrase of ‘*How much is this?*’ but instead, he just simplified it with ‘*price?*’ to get them to understand what he meant. Moreover, Burak added that he also tended to talk slowly and use simpler words to communicate with his roommate. In addition to the modification of verbal communication, Burak also benefitted from non-verbal communication, as he explains in the first data collection tasks. Accordingly, he usually used pictures, mimes, and gestures at the shops and markets. Translation apps were also included. As an instance related to this issue, he remembered he could not differentiate between a package that was complete with sugar and salt. He used many non-verbal ways to figure it out.

If one takes a closer look, the category of *starting a cultural exchange*, which involved collective activities and local students as tremendous support, provides a more elaborated image of the study-abroad experiences from Burak's point of view. Firstly, it was apparent that Burak regarded himself as lucky since the dormitory was full of international students. The first international student that Burak met was a Korean student. They met in the shared kitchen on their floor, and the friendship started with the question, '*Do you need help?*'. Then, it turned into fun dinners, where they gathered together in the kitchen and did Korean barbeque. In addition, he met a Turkish girl in the kitchen and planned a Turkish night with some other friends staying on the same floor. Burak said this was a big step because he described himself as having cold feet when interacting with his Turkish peers. That is, he was not able to communicate with them that easily in Türkiye.

Following the first intercultural exchanges, Burak could not hide his excitement about the first local people he met at his dormitory's lobby. He expressed that nervous moment when the Polish students started speaking in Polish, and Burak responded to them in English. However, after that anxious moment, they exchanged feelings about the dormitory and discussed mutual topics. Burak was so happy in the end as the students invited him out on the same evening.

In addition to the students he met at the dormitory, Burak made himself two local best friends. The importance of local students was mentioned frequently in the tasks. The first one was Alina, his buddy student appointed by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), a volunteer student organization at the university. During the critical incident, in his reflective journal as well as interview, Burak continuously mentioned Alina for her support and help whenever he was in trouble, especially in terms of communication. Besides Alina, Macek was Burak's other Polish best friend, whom he met in the common kitchen of the dormitory floor. At this point, Burak said he initiated the conversation by asking Macek, 'Are you Polish?' (1st Interview – 06.03.2024) while cooking. As they had a common interest at that moment, they continued talking, and during the first week of Burak, he spent much time with Macek. Burak even asked Macek to take him to his favorite church to attend Sunday prayers and blend in. He even pointed out the importance of his first steps with the following words during the interview: "The things we did

together! If I had not started that conversation, none of this would have happened” (1st Interview – 06.03.2024).

Lastly, in the category of *leaving the comfort zone*, the first step for Burak at the beginning of his journey was to travel from his home to Poland by himself. He said that part was already getting out of his comfort zone, which was a massive step for him. During the first interview, he smiled as he explained how he judged the Polish couple who did not share their snack next to him on the plane to Poznan. He said he feared at that moment that he probably would miss the hospitality of his environment back home.

It was also the first time Burak shared a room. As an only child in the family, he has never shared his room with someone else, and on top of that, he was supposed to live with someone from a different country with a different culture. During the first interview, Burak seemed perplexed as he was supposed to live with a person with a different background for the semester. Specifically, regarding communication approaches, his roommate, Deyu, was very different from Burak. He mentioned the times that Deyu left the room in the middle of a conversation. It felt absurd to him. However, he was on the way to finding solutions to create a decent relationship with Deyu despite the challenge he had, as can be seen in the following extract:

“He does it when I tell him to do something, but I find it very difficult. I cannot say it because I am never a do this, do that person. I cannot just say that. That is why it is difficult for me.”
(1st Interview – 06.03.2024).

Following the improvement of the interaction with the roommate, Burak’s first critical incident was proof of how he put forward himself in his intercultural journey. The title of his first critical incident, which he wrote after a month of being there, was ‘*Unplanned visit to the airport with my Polish friend*’. Accordingly, during his first visit to another city in Poland with his new friend Macek, they could not sleep at night, so they spontaneously got onto a bus and went to the airport. Burak was amazed by the experience, which he would not have gone for normally. It was somewhat strange for him, and his extract read, “This was very strange because everything that happened in the last 30-45 minutes was an action that I would never do”. (1st Critical Incident - 19.03.2024)

He also indicated that leaving his comfort zone was so impressive that they enjoyed just watching the planes take off and the hustle at the airport. He added that this experience provided an awareness of new and different cultural experiences. The reason for his choosing this experience and the impact of it on his intercultural identity were explained in the following extracts:

“I chose this experience because it was the first time in my life that I realized that I could go way outside my comfort zone and be more spontaneous than I ever have”. (1st Critical Incident - 19.03.2024)

“I realized that when I am in an intercultural environment, there are many situations that can surprise me and that are not even remotely compatible with my own culture. It was an important experience in terms of developing the ability to cope when I encounter such situations”. (1st Critical Incident - 19.03.2024)

As a result, it can be said that during the first 1,5 months, Burak developed a need for blending in while his curiosity rose in getting to know the local culture as well as the people around him. Although the beginning of the journey was more of a feeling of loneliness for him, he began to leave his comfort zone, try to find solutions for the language barrier, and participate in the cultural exchange with activities in his new intercultural environment to blend in. During this time, the impact of the local students, non-verbal communication, and collective activities seemed very significant.

4.2.3 Burak’s emerging intercultural identity during the second and third rounds of data

How is Burak doing in his intercultural journey?

Halfway through Burak’s journey corresponded to 2 - 2,5 months after he began studying abroad in Poznan. At that point, thanks to the second interview, as well as the second and third critical incidents and reflective journals, the changes in his intercultural life and updates from his intercultural identity-building process were revealed. The realization of his intercultural identity development was verbalized with the following words: “I guess I was searching for some kind of identity for the last two weeks, and I tried to create it myself, or rather I found it” (2nd Interview - 14.05.2024). Four main categories were unearthed from the thematic analysis that is shown in Figure 10:

Belonging in the multicultural environment, blending into the local culture, developing communication skills, and improving the local language. In addition to the first question, the data in this part also serves the second research question. As the experiences and the path for constructing intercultural identity from the first month till the end of the semester were shaped more properly and apparently, the answer to the second research question was thoroughly revealed: *“How do EFL teachers’ intercultural identity development trajectories unfold in the course of study-abroad?”*. In addition, following the third research question, *“What are the factors that affect the intercultural identity development of pre-service EFL teachers?”* the factors began to be more apparent.

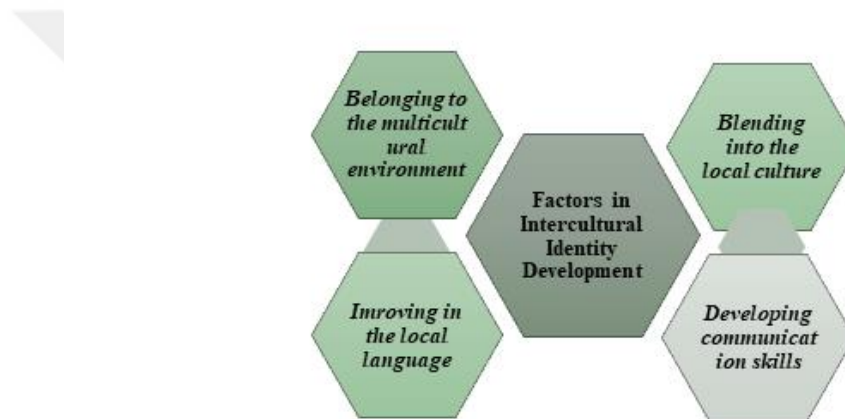


Figure 10.

The Main Categories Revealed from the Second and Third Rounds of Data

In the category of ***belonging in the multicultural environment***, the efforts that Burak put forward and the steps he took were very salient. In his second Reflective Journal, Burak wrote about his first steps toward blending in his multicultural environment, and he mentioned that he started by pushing himself to attend every activity that the ESN student organization of his university planned. During the orientation week, he felt both happy and stumbled, and he explains the reason with the following extract:

“For me, who had a small social circle in my own country, such social expansion must have suddenly seemed too much, and I can say that I was a little taken aback. (2nd Reflective Journal – 02.05.2024)”

However, things changed after Burak's first week. For example, the second round of tasks revealed that the familiar places, especially the shared kitchen, were sacred for him. Even from the first week, the place somehow gave him the courage to interact with others while he learned how to cook. It became his comfort zone, and the place provided a critical incident that Burak could not forget. The second critical incident of Burak was titled “*Our dinner in the common kitchen at our dormitory*” (2nd Critical Incident - 20.04.2024). In this incident, he expressed a notable experience in which food brought different nations together. Through a common interest, which was cooking in that case, students from nine different countries, such as South Korea, Poland, Spain, Kazakhstan, and Türkiye, met in the kitchen and ate together. That communication through cooking and eating together inspired, contented, and surprised Burak with many different cultures coming together and spending hours talking. Moreover, this experience provided Burak with a new feeling of ‘*belongingness in a multicultural environment.*’ He expressed that he felt safe and developed a sense of belonging specifically with the following words: “That moment when everyone was preparing their own meal was a moment when I truly felt like I belonged” (2nd Critical Incident - 20.04.2024). He consistently tended to use the two words of belongingness and safety during the second interview. He was touched by the feeling of belongingness with something in common, kilometers away from his family. Lastly, when he was asked how this experience affected his intercultural identity development, Burak indicated that he was affected positively. His awareness of the intercultural environment can be seen in the following excerpts:

“This experience made me think that even though we speak different languages, were born in different countries, use different currencies, and eat different foods, we are all fundamentally very similar.”

“I think my intercultural identity has been positively affected because now when I meet someone of a different nationality, the first thing I will care about is who they are rather than where they are from. During the meal with these people, I realized how many topics we could talk about and how much we had in common, even though I had not thought so before. Before, I thought, 'This person has a very different background, they cannot understand me,'

but I realized that in reality, everyone has been through very similar things and is capable of understanding each other.” (2nd Critical Incident - 20.04.2024)

The experiences of cooking and eating together with other students from different nationalities were an important part of Burak’s intercultural identity construction in understanding different cultures. He indicated that he was constructing his intercultural identity by breaking down prejudgments. He pointed out that he now realizes the important thing is ‘*thinking about who that person is rather than where she is from*’ (2nd Critical Incident - 20.04.2024).

Considering all factors, Burak expressed that his intercultural environment greatly impacted how he viewed other cultures. When he was asked to reflect on the changes that he had felt at the end of 2,5 months in his 3rd Reflective Journal, he explained his intercultural awareness in the following extract:

“Finally, I can definitely say that I have developed intercultural awareness. I have become more empathetic. I have learned more about different lifestyles, beliefs, and values, and I have a better understanding of the importance of these differences in human relations. This process has made me more open-minded and understanding of other cultures. (3rd Reflective Journal – 02.06.2024)”

In the category of ***blending into the local culture***, it can be said that in addition to the collective activities with other students, Burak's efforts and his urge to blend in were more visible during the second set of data. The most distinctive action he had taken was expressed by himself at the beginning of the second interview. Before the questions were asked, he casually pointed out that he started growing a mustache and beard as the local Polish men did. He was happy to look like one of the people in the local culture.

Another important factor that led Burak to blend in and build his identity was the lifestyle that he built in Poznan. He indicated that as he had some habits, daily routines, and regular places that he went, he became more comfortable and open to developing himself and finding himself in his intercultural environment. During the second interview, he expressed the following feeling with a huge smile on his face: “*I take a walk in the morning now, and it smells beautiful over here*” (2nd Interview – 14.05.2024). Similarly, in his second journal, he wrote, “*Poland was a place where I could find peace and tranquility*” (2nd Reflective Journal – 02.05.2024)

In the category of *developing communication skills*, Burak was aware that his communication skills were being developed amid his journey. His communications with people in his intercultural environment were coincidental, unlike the first couple of weeks of Burak. As he became more curious and sociable, he began to find more common topics and spent time with many different nations, such as Turkish, Spanish, and Korean, at common places.

Burak was also more open to blending in the classroom environment. For example, when he was asked who the first person he had met at school was in his second reflective journal, he depicted that moment. Accordingly, in one of his courses at school, the teacher asked the class to write their names on paper so that the teacher would not forget their names. When the class does that, Burak realizes the Kazakh student beside him has a familiar name. That moment of him initiating a conversation and connection is described by him as follows:

“I noticed that the girl next to me had written Jasmine, and I pointed to the paper she was writing on and started the conversation by telling her that the name Jasmine also existed in our country and was written and pronounced as Yasemin. She knew about this and had been to Türkiye before. Then I asked her to say something in Kazakh to test how much of it I could understand. Very little of what she said sounded familiar. (2nd Reflective Journal – 02.05.2024)”

In his third reflective journal, he explained his adaptation to the communication process and wrote that he was having difficulties with verbal communication at first, with a low level of confidence in initiating conversations, as well as anxiety in using English due to fear of being misunderstood. He found himself asking the following questions: ‘*Will they misunderstand me?*’ and ‘*Will they think badly of me?*’ (3rd reflective journal - 02.06.2024). However, after a couple of months, he became confident and gained an understanding of the development of the two languages.

Lastly, communication development with his roommate was another update Burak provided during the second and third data sets. In his second Reflective Journal (02.05.2024), he mentioned, "Because of the language barrier between us, I could not be very close with him, and I could not have the relationship that I dreamed of as a

roommate.”. However, he always tried to be understanding toward his roommate and modified his language while talking to him:

“In addition, when I speak, I always think about how and to what extent he/she will perceive what I want to convey, as well as what I want to convey. I put myself in his/her shoes and formulate my sentence accordingly.” (2nd Reflective Journal – 02.05.2024)

All things considered, Burak wrote in his third reflective journal that he became an effective communicator as he handled conflicts better. He also became aware of his development in active listening skills as he started listening more carefully.

In the category of *improving the local language*, the data revealed that Burak was getting more confident as he learned more Polish every day. He broke the language barrier by contacting the local environment. Burak indicated that the local language was one of the top things that could get him to blend in and build his intercultural identity. He realized that he needed to break the language barrier for healthy communication. His trip to a Polish village was one of the examples of that great effort of Burak, who eagerly wanted to learn Polish to communicate with the locals. Concerning this, his third critical incident was titled “*Meeting the family of my buddy student’s Polish family.*” In this excerpt, he talks about a day spent in a village at the invitation of his Polish best friend, Alina. He indicated that it was a day he did not feel like a foreigner at all. He had a chance to spend quality time with local people and eat local food while enjoying their hospitality. At that time, he was happier than usual because his Polish was better during his visit to that village. He even expressed that he used his mimes and gestures and said a few phrases, such as Chleپ (bread in Polish) and Turicha (Turkish in Polish). Getting used to the local language and phrases made him more confident in his actions. He also noted that he felt at home through that cultural integration while collecting unforgettable intercultural moments. When he was asked the reason why he had chosen that particular experience to write about, Burak wrote the following:

“The reason is that I experienced Turkish hospitality from a Polish family thousands of kilometers away from Türkiye. I never thought that during my Erasmus period, I would visit a Polish home, spend time with Polish people, eat their food, and see with my own eyes what kind of life they live. Thanks to my buddy, these things became possible, so it meant a lot to me. (3rd Critical Incident – 26.05.2024)”

Following the village experience, he mentioned that the experience affected his intercultural identity positively. He was first amazed that there were different languages and food, yet a similar attitude and hospitality of his own culture were present in that home. By evaluating the quality and importance of relationships with other cultures, Burak realized that they were getting culturally rich reciprocally, and the value of intercultural friendship and understanding was a fantastic outcome. He wrote the following words: “As part of my intercultural identity, I have a better understanding of how both I and others can be enriched by cultural exchanges and sharing now” (3rd Critical Incident – 26.05.2024). Moreover, through language, food, and friendship, he gained an understanding of the value of becoming one with different cultures.

Moreover, Burak could not help but state his happiness in blending in with the locals through their language, as he stated, “One of the things I wanted most was for them not to see me as a tourist” (2nd Interview – 14.05.2024). He indicated that when he used Polish phrases, the locals always smiled and were delighted. Moreover, he proudly stated that he could have small talks with the ticket controllers with whom he could not get along well during his first days in Poznan. As a result, he was more comfortable putting effort into building his intercultural identity while getting used to carrying out successful communications in his intercultural environment.

In sum, Burak’s intercultural life had many things going on amid his journey. As he expressed, making the most of the intercultural experience was the main thing that Burak was doing after 2.5 months. He no longer felt pressured to blend in, face language barriers, or participate in collective organizations.

4.2.4 Burak’s emerging intercultural identity during the fourth round of data

Is it sadness, relief, or mixed emotions for Burak?

The data from the fourth round of tasks, including the last interview, critical incident, and reflective journal, is summarized in the figure below. As can be seen in Figure 11, there are three main categories yielded from the thematic analysis. According to the thematic analysis, these are listed as *observing personal growth*, *advancing in the local language*, and *becoming a world citizen*. These categories stand as the evaluation

and a general reflection on the whole semester, as well as additional experiences during the last month of Burak's study-abroad journey.

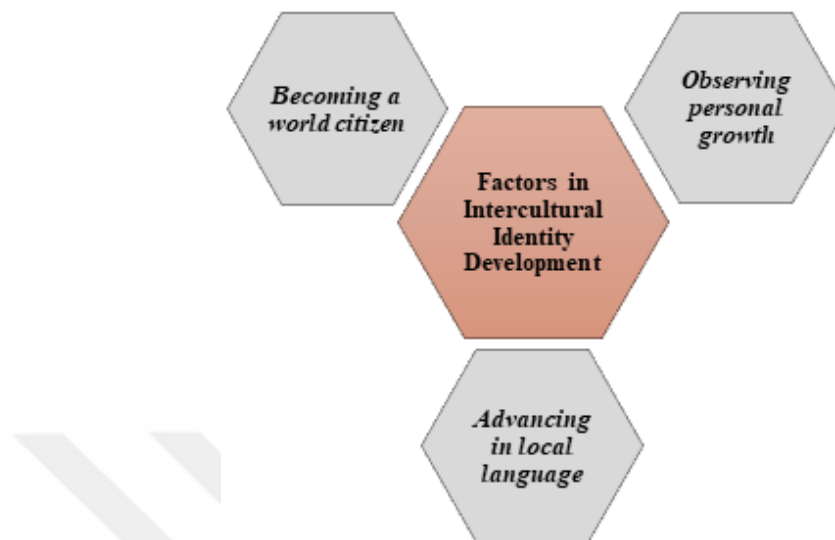


Figure 11.

The Main Categories Revealed from the Fourth Round of Data

In observing personal growth, Burak stated that his adaptation process was initially strange and complicated. However, with university orientations, ESN student clubs, buddy students, and learning the local language, he felt change and development in himself. It was '*a long journey in building a new lifestyle*' (4th Reflective Journal – 22.06.2024). These intercultural interactions impacted Burak because he believed he gained a new personality and a new perspective on life. He was now enough on his own with a greater confidence. He could not believe how far he had come. In his last interview, he presented his emotions regarding how far he had come and developed as an intercultural person with the following words:

"There is a huge difference in competence between Burak 4.5-5 months ago and Burak now. Burak was not very self-sufficient. For example, I cried yesterday about this. Because Burak, in his early months, came to my mind. Even when I first got on the bus, I was like this... Yes, I was very upset, very upset." (3rd Interview – 03.07.2024)

Burak was asked to evaluate and reflect on his intercultural identity development in his last reflective journal. In response, he indicated that he was amazed to see different

cultures living in harmony, which made him open to different perspectives. He believes he is now '*better at intercultural dialogues*' (4th Reflective Journal – 22.06.2024). When he was asked to reflect on his intercultural identity development throughout the whole journey, he indicated that his intercultural communication skills and sense of empathy were the significant developments for him:

“My intercultural dialogue skills improved, and I became more open to different perspectives. Hearing different cultural perspectives, especially in class discussions, contributed to the transformation of my own identity into a multicultural one. Now, I can communicate more comfortably and empathetically with people from different cultures.” (4th Reflective Journal – 22.06.2024)

In his last critical incident, which was entitled '*The bus that did not come on my trip to Vienna,*' Burak shares his unforgettable experience at a bus station. Accordingly, while on a solo trip to Vienna, he faces a complex situation where the bus does not show up. Then, he finds himself taking a leading role by bringing all the people together and looking for a solution. This experience affected his intercultural identity development positively, as in the following excerpt:

“I realized that it is possible to work together to solve a common problem and overcome language and cultural differences. This experience showed that even in times of crisis, my intercultural communication skills improved, and I was able to communicate more comfortably with people from different cultures”. (4th Critical Incident – 09.06.2024)

Burak felt safe in his intercultural environment, and thanks to the confidence he gained in intercultural dialogues throughout the journey, he was able to develop cooperation and unity through communication in a crisis.

In the category of ***advancing in the local language***, it can be said that gaining ICC was also challenging, according to Burak. He had many difficulties due to language problems. He did his best to learn the local language. He adapted himself to the intercultural environment by realizing that '*It was not a touristic experience*' (3rd Interview – 03.07.2024). He was delighted with his language development. He said, “But right now, for example, if we go to the same tailor, I can explain my own problem because I have a Polish level of that level” (3rd Interview – 03.07.2024).

In the category of *becoming a world citizen*, Burak's most salient statement was that he had gained the capability of seeing everyone as an individual. That provided him with an intercultural awareness. He was amazed by the fact that he could find something mutual with every culture regardless of their nationalities. He was happy to realize that he could see the richness in every culture. He summarized his intercultural awareness as follows:

“Treating everyone as an individual, regardless of their nationality. Seeing that everyone embodies very different worlds.”, “I can now evaluate them completely independent of the cultural background they live in.”, “I also realized that each culture has its own unique richness and contributions. This awareness helped me look at the world from a broader perspective and see cultural diversity as a wealth” (3rd Interview – 03.07.2024).

In addition, during the last interview, he stated that he never thought that he would be able to get along with different nationalities that much. He presented the following thoughts on the importance of those friends he made in his reflective journal: “These friendships help me understand different cultural perspectives and improve my social skills. I also get the opportunity to experience different lifestyles and traditions, which helps me see life from a broader perspective” (4th Reflective Journal – 22.06.2024). Moreover, he also had significant changes in his perspectives. In his last reflective journal, he noted that he gained intercultural awareness through intercultural identity and became a ‘*world citizen*’ (4th Reflective Journal – 22.06.2024).

He was proud of himself for his study-abroad path. During the last interview, he was even happy that some of his international friends had already made plans to visit Burak in Türkiye in the summer. Lastly, Burak also pointed out the benefits of this study's tasks in his development of intercultural awareness. He stated that he was able to collect memories thanks to the given tasks, and rereading them made him reflect on himself regarding his intercultural experiences.

4.2.5 The whole experience in a glimpse

Did time fly, or was it more than enough to return home for Burak?

During the last focus group interview, Burak was very excited to step in and share his experiences with the other participants. He stated that his study-abroad semester

significantly improved his life. His intercultural environment led him to develop his adaptation skills. Moreover, he had a chance to get to know many cultures at the same time. Gaining multiple skills in his intercultural environment was an important outcome for Burak.

In terms of intercultural university life, he expressed that he encountered various teaching methodologies and classroom activities. As a result, his experience broadened his perspectives on his future life. Burak shared that gaining different perspectives in the ELT field was another important outcome of his journey.

While reflecting on his regrets, Burak again brought up the topic of the local language. He indicated that if he had learned the Polish language before his intercultural experience, he would have made a smoother blend-in and hastened the process of identity development. Furthermore, Burak also regretted not interacting more with his roommate.

In terms of the development of his intercultural identity, Burak shared with the others that he was more confident in life and could reflect on the past and present in his new identity. He added that he started traveling more and became more confident about doing it. His example about him being a new person was ready, and thus, he shared the following news with the group:

“I realized this. Even in Türkiye, there are so many cities I have not been to and so many places I have not seen... I arrived here on Saturday. On Monday, we bought a Black Sea tour as a family. We will go there, for example. I would never have done something like this before”. (2nd FC Interview – 17.07.2024).

Regarding the topic of ICC Awareness, he confidently stated that he was more experienced now. He was able to modify the language he used and use more keywords. As a result, he has gained the ability to develop his language skills continuously. This awareness and identity development would also contribute to his future teaching practices.

4.2.6 Summary of the transformation journey of Burak's emerging intercultural identity

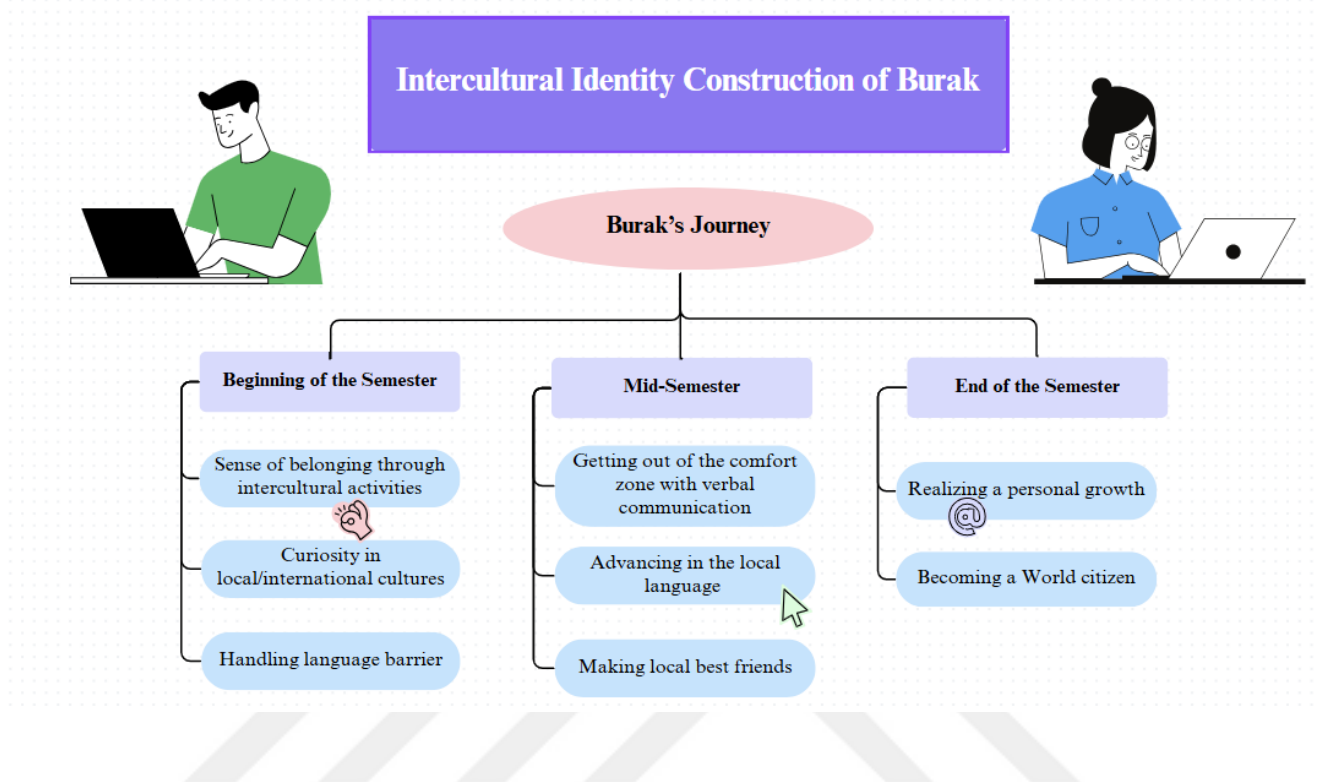


Figure 12.

Burak's Intercultural Identity Transformation Journey

In summary, as seen in Figure 12, Burak began to develop her intercultural identity by creating a sense of belonging through participating in activities and making friends. He was lucky enough to live in a dormitory with both local and international students. He took the opportunity to meet new friends and have a quality and fun time in the common areas of the dormitory. Moreover, he also took the opportunity to have a well-structured ESN Erasmus student organization at the university and took part in their collective activities. Moreover, his curiosity about the culture and having local friends with whom he could ask for information about the Polish culture helped him blend into his environment.

At the beginning of the semester, Burak tried to handle the language barrier through non-verbal communication, which was not enough for him to blend in

thoroughly. Therefore, during the mid-semester, advancing in the local language was the main thing that accelerated Burak's sense of belonging and improvement interculturally. By attending language courses and practicing Polish, he gained confidence in interacting with locals in his daily life. In fact, his best local friends invited him to their family houses a couple of times with great hospitality, which made Burak feel more and more like he belonged to his intercultural environment, where he could also use what he learned in Polish.

On the other hand, he embraced the fact that he got out of his comfort zone with so many international friends and a roommate with whom he initially had challenges. Then, during the first couple of months of his journey, he developed empathy and understanding and began handling his challenges with verbal communication with an open mind. He also gained confidence in taking the first steps in communication with other individuals and seeing a person as unique without considering their nationality.

At the end of the semester, Burak observed personal growth in himself. He initially felt a feeling of change, development, and the power to handle things alone. In addition, thanks to the intercultural friends and activities, as well as the courses at the University, he gained a new perspective on cultures and new practices. He improved at intercultural dialogues, which he called becoming a world citizen.

4.3 The Journey of Mila

4.3.1 Intercultural background of Mila

Mila is a 20-year-old second-year ELT student at a public University in Türkiye. She is from a city different from where her university is located. She is an only child. She lives in a dormitory close to her university.

Mila likes traveling. She visited the U.S.A. as a child with her parents, but had not been abroad by herself before. During her visit to the U.S.A., she says that she visited her relatives and did not get a chance to discover the intercultural environment. Thus, this study-abroad semester would be a significant opportunity for her.

Mila received an acceptance letter from a university in Novi Pazar City, Serbia, concerning her Erasmus period. During the first interview, when she was asked about the

reason why he picked that university and country during the applications, she said that it was among her options in the list, and it came as a surprise because she thought that she would be placed in one of her first choices. Thus, she did not research the university and city much; instead, she learned everything there.

Mila had never been abroad by herself before his Erasmus+ study-abroad journey in Serbia. As a result, her lifetime intercultural experiences were limited to friends from online platforms and international students from Turkic countries in some of her classrooms, as she expressed during the first focus group interview. In addition to these meetings, Mila also took part in some speaking club events in her city. As she was getting together with many different nationalities every month, she says that she was getting the gist of how it would feel to be intercultural.

In sum, Mila's intercultural background was limited to her own activities in her city. As a result, the journey to study-abroad would be the first time she would spend a longer time in a different intercultural environment.

4.3.2 Mila's emerging intercultural identity during the first round of data

Was it love at first sight or a total disappointment for Mila?

The mind map figure below summarizes the participant's first round of data, including the first interview, critical incident, and reflective journal, under the assumed name of Mila. The theme analysis revealed four primary categories. These include *attending the local language course, taking actions to blend in, giving a start to intercultural communication, and feeling familiarity and sincerity*, as per the thematic analysis. As shown in Figure 13, these four primary categories represent the turning points in Mila's developing intercultural teacher identity during the initial phases of the Erasmus study-abroad semester.

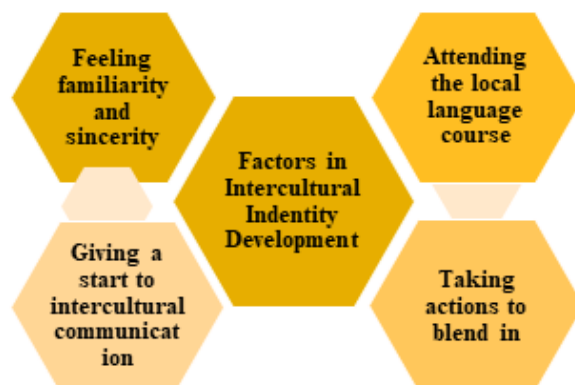


Figure 13.

The Main Categories Revealed from the First Round of Data

In the category of ***feeling familiarity and sincerity***, Mila first shared her view on her first impressions of the intercultural environment in Novi Pazar city. Accordingly, her first impression was ‘*familiarity*’. That is, she felt familiar vibes of her own culture by seeing the mosques in the city. Another thing that caught her attention during the first days was the new language. As she stated, it was *a different feeling to be exposed to a language she was not interested in before* (1st Interview - 04.03.2024). Despite a new language focus, Mila indicated she did not feel like a foreigner in her new intercultural environment. She was amazed to see that she was in Europe, but the place reflected Ottoman culture. Therefore, she felt surprised but happy at the same time. People from that Balkan culture seemed to like the Turkish people, while some of them even knew some Turkish. As a result of that familiar culture, during the first interview, she also indicated, “I do not have much difficulty because I do not feel too foreign” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024).

When she was asked to talk about the first person she met in the first reflective journal, she wrote that it was the Erasmus coordinator/professor. According to her first impressions, she was welcomed warmly. Moreover, the coordinator showed them around and provided sincere conversations, which made her passage through the first days easier

than expected. She also added that a moment that made her feel at home was when the coordinator invited her parents from outside to his office during the first meeting. As Mila pointed out, the act was what a Turkish person would do.

When it came to the university environment, Mila's impressions were somewhat disappointing as there were not so many people from different nations and not many Erasmus students. She was also surprised to see one small building and no campus because her University in Türkiye had a vast, crowded campus with many facilities. On the other hand, she was thankful that the study-abroad coordinators and professors seemed very helpful, although she was sad to hear that there were no student groups such as ESN to help international students.

In the category of *attending the local language course*, Mila's data revealed that it was a vital step for her to live interculturally in her new environment. As much as Mila wanted to interact daily, she faced a language barrier during her first weeks in Novi Pazar. Having to use non-verbal communication was a real challenge, according to her. That difficulty in her daily life stemmed from not many English speakers being available in the city. During the first interview, Mila indicated that buying a SIM card was very difficult as she could not communicate with the staff. As a result, she found writing down as a solution. In Mila's perspective, that was the realization of the need to learn the local language for her and she said "I said, I need to learn this language, the language of here. You know, even if it is good or bad, I need to get to an A2 level" (1st Interview – 04.03.2024).

According to Mila, looking for a language course to learn the local language and socialize was her fastest action. She was searching for activities in a small town while wishing to be able to communicate in her daily life. Thus, she found a tutor to learn Serbian and invited another Turkish student to join her. During the first interview, Mila indicated that she had heard of the tutor through a friend she met in class who was learning the Turkish Language as a hobby. Thanks to the course she began to attend, she met a family who had lived in Türkiye for some time.

Following the Serbian language course Mila began to take, her first critical incident, which corresponded one month after arrival, included her first Serbian

interaction. The title of the incident was “*My Dialogue with the Serbian Cashier*”. Accordingly, Mila goes to a supermarket to buy some eggs after learning some topics such as pronouns and numbers in Serbian in that day’s course. At the cashier, she finishes buying without difficulty in terms of language. She provides small talk, uses numbers, and leaves with the content of the outcomes of the language course. When asked why she chose to write about that incident, she said she was surprised by how a simple interaction led to a feeling of belongingness. She also added that learning a language in a native environment and the immediate use of the language left her happy. She added the following words:

“Seeing that my efforts were rewarded and that they were useful motivated me to learn this language even more, and since it was a small start for me, it was an important experience for me”. (1st Critical Incident - 24.03.2024)

“The best way to learn a foreign language is to be in the country where that language is spoken, and thanks to the Erasmus+ project, I had this chance, and I wanted to take advantage of it and do my best.” (1st Critical Incident - 24.03.2024)

In terms of the effects of the incident on her intercultural identity, Mila explains the positive effects and outcome of belongingness in the following extract:

“After having this experience, I think it will positively affect my intercultural identity as it will make me feel more socially and culturally included in the place I am in, and I will find myself in a more confident position in communicating with people from different cultures in the future.” (1st Critical Incident - 24.03.2024)

In the category of ***taking actions to blend in***, one can witness Mila's eagerness to observe her surroundings and take actions to feel at home. In order to blend in, Mila took action during her first weeks in Novi Pazar to visit other classes in which the students were learning Turkish. Promoting her home university and encouraging the students to participate in the Erasmus study-abroad project made her feel at home. Moreover, during the first interview, she said she was excited about a trip to Belgrade with one of her classrooms as she traveled around. The plan was to visit a big library there.

Following these actions, Mila also initiated some activities herself to blend in with the school. A start of speaking club idea appeared in her mind; she offered starting a

speaking club to a professor, and the professor seemed open to her idea. One reason for offering that activity was because Mila observed that Serbian students could not approach her because of their low level of English. Therefore, it would be beneficial for both sides. Moreover, during the first interview, she also pointed out that she had heard of a Turkish-speaking club and wanted to attend that one.

In the category of *starting intercultural communication*, it can be seen that the focus was mainly on social interactions because there were only a few international students besides Mila. Therefore, she felt the urge to take some actions to make the most of her time there and not feel like a foreigner in her new environment.

As Mila was living in a small city in a flat by herself, the classes she took were all she had. Therefore, the first action that she had taken was to try to meet her classmates and socialize. She had two classes with first-year ELT students; the rest were with third-year ELT students. As she was planning to get to know them in time, she started observing around to become friendly at once. Her first interaction was mixing and mingling by getting help from classmates. Accordingly, in her first English Literature class, the professor spoke Serbian full-time, ignoring the fact that an international student was in the class. After the professor ignored Mila's warning, she asked her classmates for help. Classmates banded together against the teacher in order to make Mila comfortable and warned the professor multiple times. Moreover, they calmed her down by offering to translate and give their notes to Mila later:

“A girl started talking to me. You know, you do not know anything, etc. I said yes, I did not understand anything. Then she said, we will help you. We will teach you, we will do it, etc. Then we started talking there.” (1st Interview - 04.03.2024)

This felt very close to her. She concluded the experience with the following remarks: “So, I can say that even though it was a bad situation, it helped me make friends” (1st Interview - 04.03.2024).

Mila was also welcomed in her classes, but during the first interview, she indicated that her daily conversations at school were superficial, including simple phrases such as *Hello, how are you?* With classmates. As much as she was not happy with that situation, she also expressed her belief that it might change in a positive way. In connection to the

interactions with her classmates, when she was asked about the things she missed about home, her answer was: '*friends*'. That is, she missed the campus back at home and spent time with friends at the campus because that was what she was doing most of the time at home. Nevertheless, she said that she also believed her comfort zone would be created there.

By having courage from the small interactions, Mila began to interact with more students in her classes. She found the only international student who was half Pakistani – half Serbian and knew Turkish and German. She mentioned talking to him was interesting because he had so much to discuss. Mila indicated in her first reflective journal that she talked to him after the Erasmus Coordinator mentioned international students. Then, their friendship began with Mila's question: "*Are you the student coming from Germany?*" (1st Reflective Journal - 06.04.2024). Taking the first step to interact with an international student was a big moment for her.

Lastly, at the end of the first interview, Mila was asked to express her expectations and beliefs about what would change till the second interview. Mila said that she was expecting stronger bonds and had a belief in getting closer to the current friends that she met. She also mentioned that the first exam period could be a chance to blend in the groups in classrooms because that was how she had connected with her friends back home at university at first: "It was a bit like that in home university too. I made new friends thanks to the exams. Maybe something similar could happen here. I think so." (1st Interview - 04.03.2024)

4.3.3 Mila's emerging intercultural identity during the second and third rounds of data

How is Mila doing in his intercultural journey?

Around 2 - 2,5 months of Mila's journey corresponded to halfway through her study-abroad semester in Novi Pazar. Thanks to the second interview, the second and third critical incidents, and the second and third reflective journals, the findings related to the changes in her intercultural life and the updates from her intercultural identity were revealed. The mind map figure hereunder provides a summary of the themes. It includes

gaining confidence in communication, developing curiosity for the intercultural environment, and feeling of belongingness. These categories are the milestones of Mila's intercultural identity construction process, as her actions and experiences reach a peak point with development.

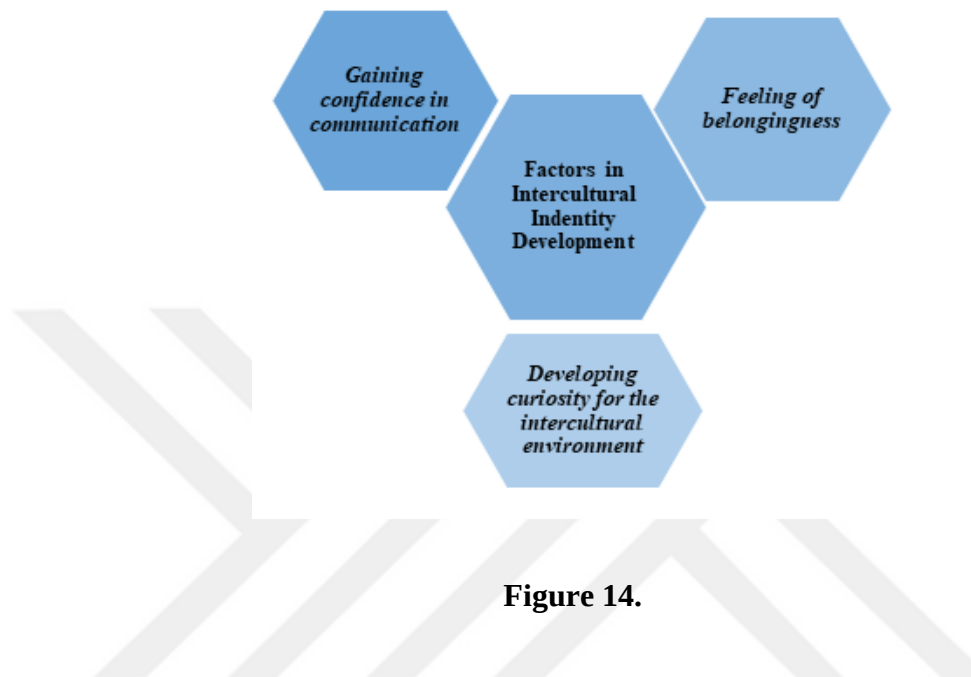


Figure 14.

The Main Categories Revealed from the Second and Third Rounds of Data

In the category of ***gaining confidence in communication***, Mila visualizes the whole process and confirms how much change she has had with confidence since she first met her intercultural environment. In her first interview, she mentioned that she gained warm friendships through communication. Although both sides were shy at first, they were going for sleepovers at each other's houses at the time of the interview. She gave an example during the second interview as follows: "For example, the other day I stayed with my friends at one of their houses, we watched movies, did some things. Yes, it was as if we had known each other for a longer time" (2nd Interview – 13.05.2024). She also added that she was getting used to talking about many topics with them. She was actually more comfortable talking with her classmates than her roommates. The reason was that the roommates were usually talking among themselves in Serbian. Mila was trying to catch the words. However, she still tried to communicate as much as possible with them. During the second interview, Mila also mentioned that her friendship with the half-Pakistani, half-Serbian international student was also getting better in class. She indicated

that she was interviewing him about his intercultural life and learning many things from someone experienced that much,

“He has lived in many places and speaks many languages. Sometimes, it is enjoyable to talk to him. Because he has a lot to tell, he has lived a lot. He has known different cultures. I always ask him questions. How is it here? Which place did you like the most? Where would you like to live? When I talk to him, I feel like I am doing an interview like this, just like you.” (2nd Interview – 13.05.2024)

Moreover, she described having the best interaction with one of the professors who taught the Contemporary English Language course. Mila described him as kind and sincere, adding that “*He was also eager to talk about topics other than school*” (3rd Reflective Journal—03.06.2024).

In addition, her communication with locals was also getting better. Even though she was interacting with signs at first, she was then better at learning the local language. She was able to guess the meanings from the context now. Mila indicated in her second reflective journal that she was also more comfortable in conversations as she was getting used to her new life. The moments she needed to communicate the most were usually during food shopping, markets, and school days. She wrote that although she was initially shy and nervous, she was comfortable asking for help. There was no big Erasmus intercultural community, but she was trying and taking steps to blend in the classrooms. She interacted with peers by initiating and asking questions. In her second reflective journal, Mila explained the way she had herself included in the environment in the following extract:

“Unfortunately, there is not much of an intercultural Erasmus environment at my university, but in my new classes, I usually try to initiate communication by asking questions about something. I felt happy as I found common ground and felt that I could make closer friends.” (2nd Reflective Journal – 08.05.2024)

As a result, the more mutual topics they found, the more comfortable Mila felt with friends from different cultural backgrounds. There was easy and enjoyable communication with friends, and the reasons, according to Mila, were similar cultures, similar mindsets, and a sense of humor. Furthermore, in terms of the awareness these communications provided to Mila, her comments were as follows:

“It is a beautiful thing that people can make friends even with people from different cultures than themselves. All of this made me realize how powerful communication is” (2nd Reflective Journal – 08.05.2024)

At the end of the second interview, Mila was asked how her intercultural environment and intercultural communications affected her life. In response, she indicated that seeing her friends’ lives, having many first-hand experiences, and even getting to know their dreams broadened her vision through communication while living there. She was feeling safe and comfortable. Her exact feelings can be found in the following extract:

“I mean, communicating with a lot of people in a different place like this definitely improves one's vision. You see their lives, what kind of life they live, what their dreams are, what they want, for example. What are their expectations? Even these can be different things sometimes. It is nice to learn these things.” (2nd Interview - 13.05.2024)

She also added that her attitude had changed towards communication. For example, while she was more introverted at first, trying to walk around less with a fear of being judged, she got used to her new life by spending time: “I feel more confident about communicating and new people; I think I will feel more comfortable speaking to people both in a foreign language and when I return to my own country”. (3rd Reflective Journal – 03.06.2024)

Lastly, Mila also realized that she was able to start a conversation and carry it further. She gained the ability to talk about cultural topics, especially sensitive ones: “I have gained the ability to converse with people without offending or making them uncomfortable while asking cultural questions, and I think this is a very important thing” (3rd Reflective Journal – 03.06.2024).

In the category of *developing curiosity for the intercultural environment*, Mila elaborated on her curiosity towards her environment and the things she did to blend into that environment. Following the friendships and warm welcoming environment that she felt, Mila’s third critical incident was also about one of her unique experiences in which she felt welcome and happy, as she stated. The title of her critical incident was “*An Elementary School in Novi Pazar*”. In this incident, Mila talked about her visit to a school where her friends from class were teaching as a part of their teaching practicum. She

wanted to visit them and observe their classes even though she was not taking that course. The class teachers welcomed her very warmly. She wrote that she had a heartfelt moment with a little student who offered her a snack. When Mila was asked whether that incident affected her intercultural identity, she wrote that it was positively affected. She gained the competence to observe, compare, and be curious about local practices: “I saw the similarities and differences between our own country and here...” (3rd Critical Incident - 25.05.2024). As a result, she was able to critically analyze and evaluate the intercultural environment she was living in. Moreover, academically, she was inspired to use fun techniques and planning to adapt the similarities and differences in future practices. She finalized her thoughts by expressing how lucky she felt with the following comment: “I do not think most Erasmus students experience something like this” (3rd Critical Incident - 25.05.2024).

Furthermore, in terms of blending in the intercultural environment, Mila indicated that she was trying the cultural habits as much as possible. For example, during the second interview, she mentioned the breakfast meeting that was held in one of her classmates’ houses. She observed that the family was eating biscuits and drinking mint tea before breakfast. Although it initially felt very unparticular for Mila, she wanted to accompany them. When she was asked whether she continued that habit later, Mila said that she did not like it but that the one-time thing was only for a new experience while becoming one of them during the breakfast.

In the category of ***feeling of belongingness***, Mila uncovers her feeling of belongingness in her intercultural environment. For example, the title of her incident was “*A visit to the town where my friends live*”. According to the incident, the Ramadan Feast was also a cultural act in Türkiye. She was invited to the family home of one of her classmates at school. In the village, she got a chance to see and experience the real lives of a local family. They watched Turkish TV series together and ate local food while getting warm with a blanket brought to the balcony by a mother of the house. By feeling at home, she wrote, “They made me feel like they were relatives I had never met before” (2nd Critical Incident - 26.04.2024). Also, when she was asked to talk about her reactions to the incident, she indicated, “When this experience happened, I felt very happy, and I said to myself that I am glad I am doing Erasmus because these experiences were very

valuable to me” (2nd Critical Incident - 26.04.2024). Furthermore, concerning the impact of this incident on her intercultural identity development, she added the following words:

“It was a great thing to meet my friends' families and see and experience their living spaces. I also think that meeting people from different countries and cities during the trip developed my intercultural identity in a good way.” (2nd Critical Incident - 26.04.2024)

Moreover, Mila indicated that this was not all. On the train ride back home from the place of the incident, she met new people. She was amazed that she was interculturally blending and taking every chance to interact with people around her. In that incident, the outcome for Mila was being able to use the Serbian she had learned so far while trying to communicate with them throughout the day.

Considering Mila's further activities in her intercultural environment, she gave the example of a trip to Belgrade with the school during the second interview. She said she was over the moon as she collected memories with Serbian friends, although they were getting lost while walking around the streets. She added that she was planning more trips as they all decided that they wanted to explore more of Belgrade at another time. According to Mila, she had so much fun during the trip because she did not have to explain herself anymore. That is, they were understanding each other, and she felt very comfortable around them.

The last thing that made Mila feel like she belonged to the environment in the mid-semester was moving out of her solo apartment, as she felt alone living alone. She took action and mobilized people around to get help finding a house with roommates. In the end, she moved to a new house as the fifth resident in a house with Serbian students. She was confident in changing her lifestyle and blending in with her roommates. They communicated half Turkish and half Serbian and used Google Translate from time to time.

In evaluating around the 2,5-3 months of her journey in the third reflective journal, Mila wrote that she felt more confident about the moment and future. The things she was more comfortable with were talking and meeting new people, as well as using foreign languages. Moreover, she was confident initiating conversations and planning trips with her girls' team, including five students from her classes. She said they were talking about

everything and added, “I have made deeper friendships and connections than I ever expected, and that makes me so happy” (3rd Reflective Journal – 03.06.2024).

4.3.4 Mila’s emerging intercultural identity during the fourth round of data

Is it sadness, relief, or mixed emotions for Mila?

The mind map below summarizes Mila’s data from the last round of interviews, critical incidents, and reflective journals. As seen in Figure 15, the thematic analysis produced three primary groupings. The theme analysis lists these as growing *open-minded and empathetic*, *advancing confidence in communication*, and *seeing the journey as an opportunity for personal growth*. These three primary categories could be regarded as the turning points in Mila's developing intercultural identity throughout the last part of her journey.



Figure 15.

The Main Categories Revealed from the Fourth Round of Data

In the category of **growing as open-minded and empathetic**, Mila dwells upon the intercultural abilities she developed throughout the journey. During the last interview, Mila evaluated her intercultural awareness, indicating that she developed that awareness through empathy. Accordingly, in time, she realized there was nothing to fear in talking. She specifically observed her classmates and concluded that “*They are the same as me*”, and it is “*Their first experience as well*” (3rd Interview - 05.07.2024). These thoughts

encouraged her to take action to communicate and put effort into bonding with the new people in her new environment. Her exact words on commenting on the first step necessary to take in approaching new people were as follows:

“Sometimes you have to take that first step. Because at first, the girls were afraid to talk to me. They were shy, to be more precise. I did not go to them the first day. But then I tried to start a topic by saying something. Then they were expecting this anyway. We wanted to talk to you, too, but they suddenly came up to you and said they did not want to scare you like that. Because they were in a group like that. I joined them. And when you take action like that, it starts. And of course, you have to be open-minded. I think you have to approach people in a friendly way.” (3rd Interview - 05.07.2024)

The last critical incident of Mila was titled “*The Girl I Met at the mosque*”. It was about an unexpected meeting at a mosque visit, where two other girls approached Mila and offered their fruit. Mila did her best to understand Serbian, so they communicated in Serbian and English. Mila wrote that this incident was so memorable because it was a random moment, a random approach leading to having sincere friendships with an open mind. Moreover, it positively affected her intercultural identity because of the following reason in her extract: “*Meeting strangers and people I really like, even at random, chatting with them and forming bonds with them had a positive impact on my intercultural identity*” (4th Critical Incident – 09.06.2024)

In the category of ***advancing confidence in communication***, Mila portrays herself as someone with a significant ICC development, thanks to her experiences in her intercultural journey. As her last reflection on her ICC and intercultural awareness, by evaluating the whole journey, Mila indicated that she gained the ability to feel comfortable talking to others from different nationalities through studying abroad. However, her efforts in the process were very significant for Mila: “*If I had not gone and sat down or made an effort to talk to anyone, I would not have realized how important communication is. I would not have won*”. (3rd Interview - 05.07.2024). Furthermore, in terms of her intercultural awareness, her change of view through empathizing can be seen in the following extract:

“So, awareness, as I mentioned earlier, I realized that communicating with people and different people is not something to be afraid of. Because after all, they will probably have such an experience for the first time. They will talk to a Turkish person for the first time.

They will also be excited. And it will be a good experience for them. That is why I realized that I am less shy...” (3rd Interview - 05.07.2024)

Previously, Mila indicated that she broke down her anxiety about using English during her interactions. This time, during the last interview, she was asked to evaluate the changes she observed in her English language use. She said that her English language level had positively changed, and she was thrilled with a friend recently complimenting her on improving her English-speaking level. She was then feeling very confident. In addition to the developments in English language skills and gaining confidence in using English, being able to use the Serbian language was also significant in Mila's ICC development. Learning a new language and being able to use the language in its native environment also boosted her confidence level, as she stated in her last interview.

All these experiences brought confidence in communication to Mila, and that confidence led her to make very good friends that helped her become more intercultural in her journey. In her fourth reflective journal, she indicated that the friendships that she made were the best outcome of the journey. Moreover, sincerity was the most memorable thing from her interactions during her study-abroad process. Concerning this, when she was asked to talk about the thing that she would miss about her study-abroad semester during the last interview, the first thing that she mentioned was friendships

In the category of *seeing the journey as an opportunity for personal growth*, Mila reflects on her thoughts regarding the journey she sees as an opportunity. After around five months, 'sadness' was Mila's main feeling because of the end of the journey, but at the same time, she was happy to have a chance to have friends for life. During her last interview, she frequently mentioned the importance of people, language exchange, and trying and learning throughout the whole journey.

Mila was asked to explain her opinion in the last reflective journal to evaluate her awareness regarding the intercultural process. According to Mila, all the intercultural interactions she had had had a massive impact on her life perspective. She believed she gained personal growth by getting to know herself throughout the semester. Moreover, she realized the following by getting out of her comfort zone: “It made me realize that even though I was in a situation outside my comfort zone, I could adapt with a little effort” (4th Reflective Journal – 21.06.2024).

During the last interview, she further commented on her personal growth and indicated that she gained a new personality. According to Mila, the effects of her intercultural interactions on her new personality were invaluable. She was sure she would be more extroverted when she returned to her home university. She had already made plans to attend more student clubs and organizations. Moreover, she also mentioned that those interactions led to her realizing the beauty of getting to know people and communicating, as each brought a new perspective to Mila's life.

Lastly, during the last interview of her journey, Mila was asked to reflect on her plans in consideration of intercultural interactions. In response, she said that she was curious about learning more about intercultural environments. That is, she wished to visit back during holidays, attend more study-abroad projects, and meet more different cultures.

4.3.5 The whole experience in a glimpse

Did time fly, or was it more than enough to return home for Mila?

During the last focus group interview, Mila evaluated her experiences related to living in another culture. She said that she first felt lucky to see a familiar culture in Novi Pazar and did not have issues with belongingness at first due to the unknown environment. Moreover, it felt amazing for her to see herself bonding through communication. In doing that, the more interaction she had, the more bonds she created daily. She felt lucky to have friends to bond with.

In addition to evaluating the journey, the group focused on another topic during the interview was the advantages of living in an intercultural environment and studying abroad. Mila said she was thrilled to see the possibility of making strong connections with people of different nationalities. She also added that she considered herself lucky because most of the people were curious and approached her easily during her time in Novi Pazar. Her comments that were shared with the group were presented in the following extract:

“I realized that they were not actually that far away. The more we communicated, the deeper our friendships became. And the fact that I was able to start from scratch and still make so many friends made me feel happy, and I thought, well, this can be done too.” (2nd FG)

On the topic of '*I wish I had done this,*' Mila had nothing to comment on among the group members. She was confident that her efforts paid off, and she created strong bonds with people while developing her intercultural identity. Following the next topic, which was about the thoughts on their intercultural identity development, Mila pointed out that she felt more confident interacting with people. As a result, gaining confidence in communication was a primary medium and outcome of her intercultural identity development.

Lastly, the focus group was asked to discuss their perspective and awareness of intercultural communication concerning their journey. Mila stepped in and shared that she became aware of the importance of speaking English in a simplified way in Europe. Moreover, while feeling more comfortable speaking English properly at first, she was also hanging back in case she needed to modify. However, she later gained competence in communication and approaches to different levels of English speakers. Furthermore, learning the local language was also a significant support for her in gaining this kind of competence.

4.3.6 Summary of the transformation journey of Mila's emerging teacher identity

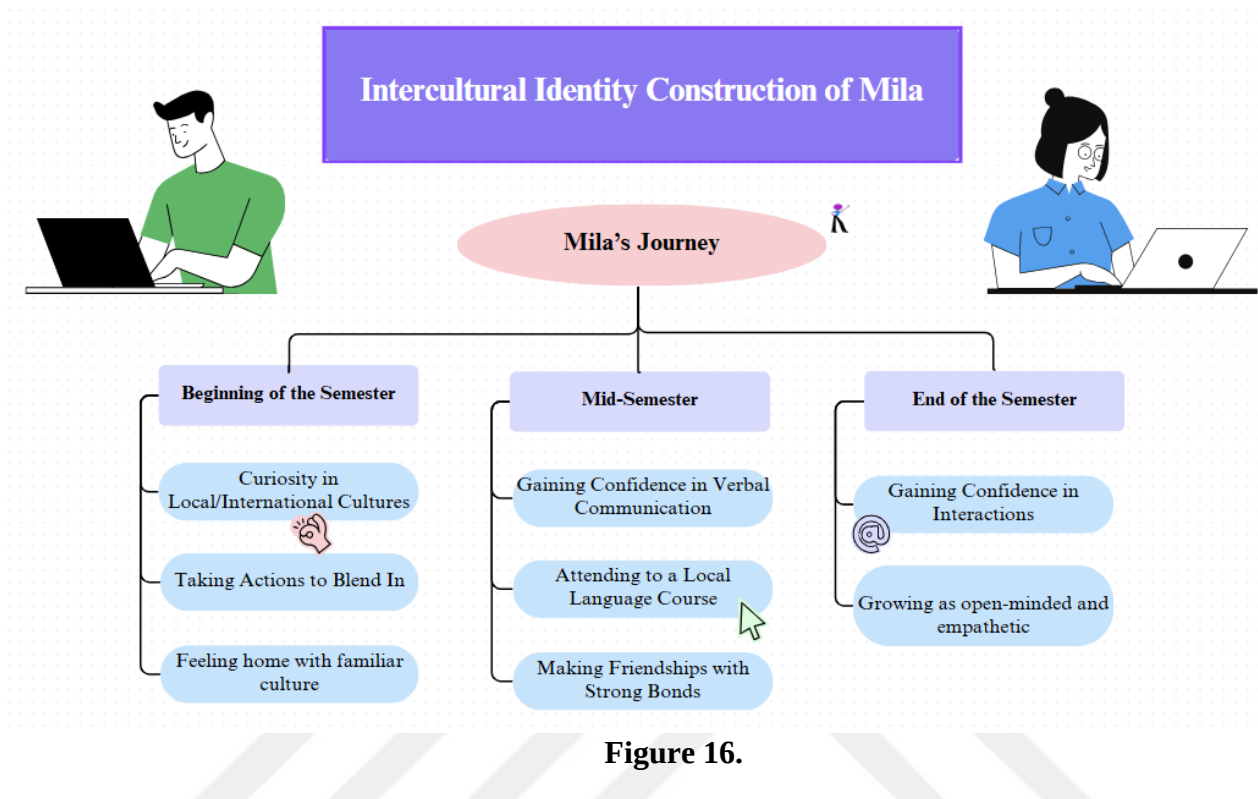


Figure 16.

Mila's Intercultural Identity Transformation Journey

In summary, as seen in Figure 16, Mila began to develop her intercultural identity by blending into the intercultural environment at the beginning of the semester. She was living in a Balkan country with a culture similar to the Turkish one, and that familiar culture made her feel at home earlier than the other participants. However, a similar culture was not enough by itself; Mila used her curiosity about local culture. She was eager to ask questions about the similarities and differences between the cultures of her classmates she met at school. Moreover, that was also how she began interacting with the two international students in her class. She enjoyed initiating conversations with them and learning about their experiences. Lastly, in order to blend into her environment, she also began taking Serbian courses. In that way, she got a chance to meet more students, including the ones who were learning Turkish in the same course. In addition, she was confident in starting up new activities at school, such as a speaking club for English Language learners.

During the mid-semester, Mila was found to make friendships with strong bonds, thanks to the non-stop actions she took to blend in. As she was living in a small city, the friendships that she made were an important factor in getting her to adapt and develop an intercultural identity. She even moved out from her single apartment to a house with four other Serbian students. She indicated that those friendships helped her broaden her vision toward other cultures and made her realize that such strong bonds were possible with individuals from other countries. In the meantime, she improved her Serbian so much that she gained confidence in communicating in Serbian as well as English. She was able to talk with her friends' parents, who invited her to their homes on many occasions. She was also able to carry out deeper conversations about various topics with her friends.

At the end of the semester, Mila observed changes in her personality, such as developing empathy towards other people with different backgrounds. Instead of judging people for not approaching her, she understood they could be shy about her reaction, just like her. Moreover, she became more open-minded and gained confidence in initiating conversations with local people and her peers. She saw the whole semester as a journey of personal growth by trying, learning, getting to know her capabilities, developing herself, and making friends for life.

4.4 The Journey of Elif

4.4.1 Intercultural background of Elif

Elif is a 19-year-old second-year ELT student at a public University in Türkiye. She is from a city located in the Central Anatolia Region of Türkiye. Her hometown is three hours away by bus from where she studies. She has two sisters. She lives in a dormitory with three other girls, and she visits her hometown from time to time. She loves languages and frequently dreams about visiting and spending time studying or working in every country in the World. She also likes traveling, and thanks to her passions, she was drawn to the Erasmus+ study-abroad program to continue carrying out her passion.

Elif's traveling-abroad life began at the beginning of her university life. She visited Germany and spent time with relatives. She also had a chance to visit a couple of cities in Türkiye. While applying for the Erasmus+ program, although she was indecisive

between Germany and Poland, her first option was the city of Slupsk, in Poland, mainly due to economic reasons.

During the summer of her first year, she had a chance to travel to Germany to live with her relatives while working there for three months in a restaurant. Besides those three months in Germany, she had not physically been in another intercultural environment. She had made some friends there, but as a result of living with her relatives, she says that she could not get the real sense of being intercultural at the beginning of her first interview.

In addition to being in an intercultural environment in Germany, Elif had some online friends. For example, she was once interested in the Arabic language, and thus, she joined an online language learning group. As a result, his lifetime intercultural experiences were limited to a 3-month work visit to Germany and some online friends from language groups.

4.4.2 Elif's emerging intercultural identity during the first round of data

Was it love at first sight or a total disappointment for Elif?

The beginning of this journey was not love at first sight but rather a mixture of emotions and observations. Figure 17 below provides a summary of the participant's first-round interview, critical incident, and reflective journal data under the pseudonym Elif. As can be seen, the thematic analysis yielded three main categories: *creating a comfort zone*, *using non-verbal communication to handle the language barrier*, and *breaking down prejudices*. These three primary categories might be considered the foundation for Elif's developing intercultural identity negotiation at the very beginning of the study-abroad semester.

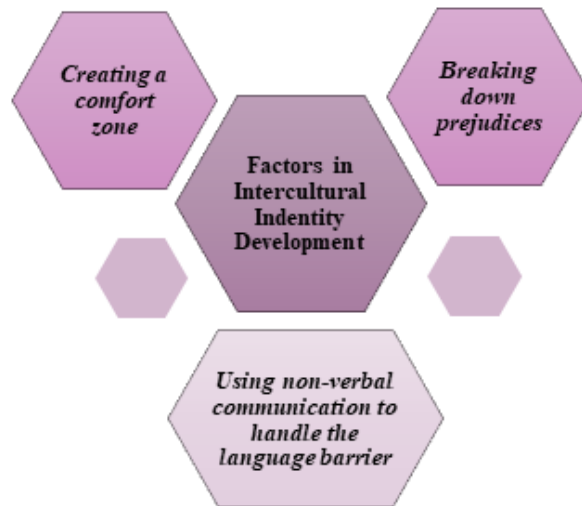


Figure 17.

The Main Themes Revealed from the First Round of Data

In the category of ***creating a comfort zone***, Elif elaborated upon her first impressions and the process of adapting to the intercultural environment through her efforts. In the first reflective journal, the first question that Elif was asked to reflect on was, “What did I notice the first day I arrived here?” (1st Reflective Journal - 04.04.2024). In response, she wrote that the city was even more beautiful than she had expected. It differed from the photos and was similar to the city she studied in Türkiye. Following this Turkish familiarity, Julia, her Polish student mentor, was the first person she met in Slupsk. She volunteered to help Erasmus students and had previously done an Erasmus program in Türkiye. She was happy to receive help on her first day and said, “The girl was kind enough to buy my bus ticket, carry my luggage, and offer me refreshments” (1st Reflective Journal, 04.04.2024).

Despite the feeling of familiarity and comfort that came from the first impressions of the city and her mentor student, Elif labeled the initial feeling and impression as disappointment during the first interview after her arrival. That impression was mainly because of the dormitory that Elif was supposed to live in. According to her, that disappointment was mainly due to the lack of information from the host university before mobility. The room was too small for two people. She told herself, “*It seems like I will figure it out and handle it*” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024). Moreover, she bought flowers

for the room to brighten and get used to the environment. She observed that the people in Slupsk had a culture of buying flowers, and Elif loved it. During the first Reflective Journal, she also brought up the flowers and wrote, “She is still with me, and I think she got used to the room and started to grow” (1st Reflective Journal- 04.04.2024).

Considering Elif's impressions and observations, she was asked to express what he had found interesting in her daily life. The first interview showed she preferred lingering in the dorm room until the course schedule was settled. She indicated she could not go out much, thinking she would not go far. She expressed that, “*I cannot go out much, thinking I cannot go far. Underline this is something personal*” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024). This was a personal challenge for Elif, with a fear of taking steps outside. On the other hand, she was trying to observe inside and outside the dormitory in search of activities to help her adapt.

Elif built a special impression inside the dorm room during her first two weeks. The impression was about something special that she had seen as soon as she looked out the window during the first days and could not forget since then. It was her imagination from the book of Sherlock Holmes – the Baskerville Dog series. The scene was exactly what she thought it would be in real life. She was excited to talk about that and explained her thoughts further with the following extract:

“Am I in that scene or what? - It is the same place I pictured there in my head. And every time I look out the window, I remember that place. It seemed very strange to me. Yes, I walked there and stuff. Oh, I am going crazy.” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024)

This impression was also the topic of Elif's first critical incident, “*The similarity of my imagination with a Polish person*” (1st Critical Incident - 20.03.2024). Accordingly, following her imagined book scene, she was curious and asked others if they had the same impression as her. She did not get the same feeling with others but her mentor student. The mentor student completed her sentence and said the same thing. The possibility of dreaming the same thing as someone from the other side of the world amazed Elif. She said, “*I was not alone. I was so surprised*” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024). In her first critical incident, she added the following further comment:

“I do not know how this is possible, but this incident still amazes me. I later learned that Julia had written projects on the book we were talking about and that she was familiar with the similarity of the environment we were in.” (1st Critical Incident - 20.03.2024)

Moreover, Elif thought that that incident positively affected her intercultural identity development, especially in her perspectives towards people around her. She reflected on her thoughts as follows:

“Even though we had no connection, we had many differences, we dreamed of the same scene and felt the same emotions. This changed my perspective on people. I learned that being more social and sharing my thoughts with others - even though it sounds ridiculous - can sometimes have very positive results.” (1st Critical Incident - 20.03.2024)

Elif could not start interacting with a local student, so she was thrilled to bring up that imaginary situation as she had her first bond with a local student through a common interest. The things that Elif liked other than the book scene from her dorm room were her interactions with different nations at the dormitory. She interacted with the Ukrainians the most. During the first interview, she was happy to announce that Elif and some other students were planning a dinner with everyone's traditional food. As food was the main thing Elif missed about home, she felt excellent about that cooking plan.

In the category of ***using non-verbal communication to handle the language barrier***, Elif brings up the issues she has recognized regarding the language barrier and how she reacted to the related situations. Following Elif's nonverbal communication with the cashiers at the markets, she said she also had to use her mimes and gestures at the entrance of the dormitory in order to show her student ID. She added, “*We neither know the numbers in Polish nor do we have a student ID yet*’ (1st Interview – 04.03.2024). She wrote down the room number and showed it to the security guard. Thanks to the non-verbal solutions, Elif indicated that the communication was good enough: “*She gives my key back, and we smile at each other. And that is done. I wish everything were done that easily everywhere!*” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024). Elif also made a joke about the Polish language being the ninth most challenging language during the first interview. She needed to teach it, but she wished the people there would know English instead. As a result, she indicated that she tried to learn, but saying 410 was too complicated and complex, and in the end, she found an easy way out to tell the room number.

In the dormitory, Elif had some further challenges. When she was asked about the times she had challenges in using English, she gave the time at the laundry in the dormitory as an example. Accordingly, when she returned to the laundry room to collect her clothes, Elif saw them on the floor. She was so annoyed that she wanted to tell her Polish mentor about it. However, she could not put the words together because of anger, and she wanted to tell it to the mentor perfectly. Then, as a solution, she just cried out to Google Translate and showed it to her mentor student. Her exact feelings were verbalized during the interview as follows:

“I was very angry about this, and I thought about how I could explain this situation to my mentor. Is there anything that can be done? Is it a normal thing here? And it has happened before. They do it here. Now I will tell my mentor, I will tell him, but I am so angry that I could not get my sentences together. Finally, I opened Google Translate. I pressed the voice button and talked and talked. Then, I translated and sent it. Actually, no, I did not. There were a few words that I did not know. Then we met face to face later, and I told him as much as I could remember.” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024)

Other than the dormitory, Elif also had to interact with the locals. She said that 100 Polish Złoty was big money there. The cashiers usually did not want to make a change. Most of the time, Elif misunderstood and showed them her empty wallet, thinking that the person asked for more money to pay. In response to that misunderstanding, she added, “I realized this when I left the market and laughed at myself so much” (1st Reflective Journal - 04.04.2024). When she was alone, she usually used Google Translate and the Internet to communicate with them. Following that language barrier challenge, Elif made the following comments: “At least, I am trying not to interact as much as possible. So that there is no language barrier.”, “Sometimes there are English speakers, which is good” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024).

In sum, Elif preferred to handle the language barrier in non-verbal ways most of the time. It was observed that she considered them as an easy way out. Although usually Elif seemed to be comfortable in initiating the interactions by asking questions, initiating short chats in the shared kitchen, or softening the atmosphere, she showed resistance to learning Polish as can be seen from her following comments during the first interview: “I have learned just to say hello and thank you in Polish. I guess that is enough.”, “Well, I need to learn Polish, but of course, maybe if they knew English, it would be nice” (1st

Interview – 04.03.2024). As a result, no matter where she had the language challenge, she leaned towards using non-verbal communication, such as using visuals and translation apps. The following comments are also about the strategies Elif used to avoid verbal communication at the market:

“Now when I go to the market alone, I use the internet. I do translations, etc. I try not to communicate as much as I can, at least. To avoid that clash of languages. But sometimes there are people who know English.”, “I show that my wallet is empty and so on.” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024).

In the category of *breaking down prejudices*, Elif verbalizes her current reflections upon her initial nation-based opinions. Elif was observed to have a tendency to form nation-based opinions during the first part of her journey. On the other hand, she showed some actions to break her initial judgments towards the end of her first month. Firstly, the environment in the dormitory becomes interesting after Elif discovers the common kitchen. She had a chance to observe many nations from different countries, such as Ukraine, Türkiye, and Romania, as well as students from villages in Poland. In that sense, she was happy to share that she often met international people in the dormitory. Only her mentor student was Polish. She wanted to explain her thoughts on her interactions with Polish students with the following extract:

“So, I cannot say that I get along very well with local people yet. I have not had the chance to really get to know the locals yet. The only Polish person is the one I am talking about. She did Erasmus in Türkiye; maybe that is why he is interested in Turks. So...” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024)

“I do not really expect a normal Polish person to come and be friends” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024). This was an additional comment from Elif regarding meeting Polish students based on her first impressions during the first two weeks. On the other hand, she mentioned she liked the Kazakh girls she met in the park next to the dorm while taking a walk with her other friends. The detail she wanted to point out was that they hugged at the first moment. They talked about language similarities, food, and the common instruments among their cultures. Elif also added that they planned an iftar meal for Ramadan in the end and said, ‘Oh beautiful!’, “We were drawn together as if we were relatives, I do not know,” and “I think Kazakhs are generally friendly” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024).

She also began exploring the city while spending time in her new accommodation. Regarding the impressions of the local environment in the city, Elif pointed out that the people were straight-faced and sometimes had their eyes from head to foot. This was also another judgment formed by Elif toward local people. At the end of the 1st interview, Elif was asked to share her thoughts on what she was expecting until the second interview. She said that she was expecting to meet more Polish people and added, “I mean, I hope they will break my prejudice against them” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024).

All in all, during the first part of her journey, Elif seemed to have some difficulties in blending into her intercultural environment. She was also disappointed with not having the friendship circle that she had dreamed of. In terms of language, she tried to make use of non-verbal communication and translating apps. To get used to her environment, she tried to create her own comfort zone in and around the dormitory. When she was asked to tell about her expectations for her journey until the second interview, she said she was expecting to travel more and to vlog some experiences to feel closer to the journey: “Maybe after I do things, I can warm up to the environment a little more” (1st Interview – 04.03.2024). Furthermore, as Elif had already liked taking walks around the dorm in the forest, she saw herself doing that more in the future. She indicated that the more she did that, the more she felt belongingness to the environment and felt free walking around.

4.4.3 Elif’s emerging intercultural identity during the second and third rounds of data

How is Elif doing in his intercultural journey?

After spending 2 - 2,5 months in Szupsk, Elif completed half of her study-abroad journey. Thanks to the second interview, as well as the two critical incidents and two reflective journals, the findings from her intercultural life and updates from her intercultural identity-building process were revealed. The data on the second and third rounds for Elif is disentangled in Figure 18. As can be seen, there are three main categories yielded from the thematic analysis: *self-positioning through verbal communication, gaining skills through challenges, and developing strategies for facing the language barrier*. These three main categories are the interchange points of Elif’s emerging intercultural identity construction at the midway of the study-abroad journey.



Figure 18.

The Main Themes Revealed from the Second and Third Rounds of Data

In the category of ***self-positioning through verbal communication***, Elif dwells upon the ways in which she finds herself comfortable and *feels understood* through communicating with her surroundings. As this was something missing at the beginning of her journey, it was significant for her to share, and she was able to position herself in her intercultural life through the communications. One of the ways she managed that was her mini-travels. Elif liked the train rides around the city. It was something she frequently mentioned throughout the data collection process. Her second critical incident was related to an incident on one of her train rides titled “My conversation with a Polish woman on the train” (2nd Critical Incident - 26.04.2024). Accordingly, it was a train ride to Warsaw, and Elif was sitting alone in a train compartment when a girl with a flower-designed dress and a flowery smell entered. Elif could not help but say, “You smell like a flower” (2nd Critical Incident - 26.04.2024). The girl liked what she heard, and they complimented each other the whole way. As Elif called her, the Flower girl wanted to give her perfume as a present while Elif shared her snacks. At the end of the ride, they even shared a funny moment as Elif wrote, “After getting off the train, she ran after me, and I took a video of her from inside the train. It was like a breakup scene in a movie” (2nd Critical Incident - 26.04.2024).

When Elif was asked to write the reason why she chose that particular train ride, she wrote, “I learned that a small compliment can lead to great friendships. That is why I chose this experience” (2nd Critical Incident - 26.04.2024). Moreover, at the end of the task, Elif indicated that the incident affected her intercultural identity development by encouraging her to be more extroverted in approaching people and showing the importance of good words and manners. Following this, she added:

“I think it has helped me be a little more outgoing. It has encouraged me to give more compliments and make new friends. I now know that when I see a cute girl and say, 'You are so cute,' it makes both her day and mine. That kind of positive feedback helps me be more outgoing.” (2nd Critical Incident - 26.04.2024)

The trains were one of the main places where Elif interacted with people. She said that her way of initiating a talk was by softening the atmosphere first by sharing her food or snack. Other than trains, the places where she interacted and communicated with different nationalities were in class, at the markets, and while shopping. She also had spontaneous friendships in the city center. This was revealed through Elif’s third critical incident, a month after the first, titled “*My Conversation with an American in Poland.*” Accordingly, in the center of Słupsk, Elif met an old American man at a coffee shop after class with her other Turkish friends. The man heard them talking, approached them, and started a conversation. He was an English Language teacher, and he talked about his experiences in language schools for years, which he did mainly in Palestine. They discussed many things and were surprised that they had many common thoughts. Elif wrote: “*I showed him that I liked and appreciated his way of thinking. I asked questions, and we exchanged information*” (3rd Critical Incident – 26.05.2024). Elif enjoyed agreeing with someone from another culture and added that the incident affected her intercultural identity:

“I know that I can experience things that I would never have imagined at a time when I least expect it. If I met a 70-year-old American who shared my thoughts, I think anything could happen” (3rd Critical Incident – 26.05.2024)

As a result, she became open to the possibility of a surprise interaction on a typical day and getting along with someone from another culture.

Following the enjoyable conversation in the incident, when Elif was asked to reflect on the most enjoyable conversation so far, in her third reflective journal, she gave the example of a time at a hostel in Milano with the other two female participants of this study, traveling together and trying to imitate a viral video while recording. Then, she wrote, *“Of course, there have been countless conversations that I have had a lot of fun with, but the one I had the most fun with was probably one where I laughed for minutes”* (3rd Reflective Journal – 03.06.2024). She also shared that they bonded through the current study they voluntarily participated in and made a plan to travel together.

In terms of university life, she pointed out that she was very active at school in her second reflective journal. The courses that she was active in were all of them in general. Each involved speaking and discussing, but her favorite was the ‘Creative speaking’ course because she liked using her imagination in activities such as commenting on pictures. When asked how she integrated herself into the intercultural environment and those conversations, she wrote *“By being myself”* (2nd Reflective Journal – 03.05.2024) as the first thing. Then, she elaborated as follows:

“By striking up conversations with people I felt close to, by often asking for help on certain topics. For example, I asked for an online version of a book they had. Another day, I asked someone to demonstrate the type of question a teacher might ask.” (2nd Reflective Journal – 03.05.2024)

All in all, as can be seen until now, these spontaneous interactions lead to intercultural understanding and self-positioning in her intercultural environment in blending. Moreover, it should also be mentioned that Elif got used to the spontaneity of her intercultural environment and conversations with new people in her life throughout half of her journey. In this process, *‘feeling understood’* was important for her. She said, *“I talked mostly to Kazakhs, and there are one or two Ukrainian girls. Well, to be honest, Erasmus students. Because we understand each other. I tried to communicate more with them”* (2nd Interview – 14.05.2024).

In the category of ***gaining skills through challenges***, Elif reassures that she is not the same person she was at the beginning of her journey. Instead, she developed *a sense of empathy, tolerance, and critical observation skills* along the way. In reflecting on developing a sense of *empathy*, she had much to say during the second interview. While

reflecting on the interactions with the people she met during the half of the journey in general, she first said, “My communication is at extreme levels” (2nd Interview – 14.05.2024). This was because she thought that her classmates were not open to communication. Then, she added,

“In other words, there has to be a common topic that we will talk about together as a class. Otherwise, they will not come and talk to me, or I will not go and talk to them. That kind of environment does not really happen.” (2nd Interview – 14.05.2024)

Following the classmates being shy away from her, she pointed out that the interaction and conversation were always better among international Erasmus+ students because they were the same as Elif. As a result, Elif explains why she also stepped back: “You are shy to ask questions because you think they are shy of you. I guess I stand out because of my look” (2nd Interview – 14.05.2024). In this way, she kept trying to understand their side of the situation.

In the class, Elif also observed that the classmates’ interactions were at extreme levels. That is, they either talked too much, or there was no talking in class. She also found it annoying when a girl often tried to interrupt Elif while she was talking during the class. “Of course, she wants to talk, I understand. I think the girl is very quick-witted. I did not understand, though. She interrupts everyone and starts speaking English directly” (2nd Interview – 14.05.2024). Besides the personal interactions with her classmates, Elif actively participated in class work. She felt comfortable explaining herself and talking about her lifestyle as well as her religious outlook. She became happy when she felt understood by others. During the second interview, she gave an example from one of her courses where the weekly topic was ‘Traditions are not to be understood but to be respected.’. Elif explained the Muslim festival of sacrifices to the class during the course. After she explained, she felt happy with the reaction from a classmate: ‘Oh, I think it is great to hand out meat as a present to people in need.’

In reflecting on developing *tolerance* and better *critical observation skills*, one can witness that Elif also gained awareness of different cultural behaviors. In the dormitory, there was a multicultural environment, and in that environment, there were things that annoyed Elif every time they happened. It was about some other students in the dorm who acted like crazy, as Elif described, in many ways, such as making noise in

the shared kitchen or making a comment while she passed through. When she was asked how she handled them, she explained that she always tried handling them by trying to ignore them:

“I ignore most of the time or... I respond to them with a look. We compete to see who will look away first. So, I try to make it fun in some way. Because sometimes it can get very annoying.” (2nd Interview – 14.05.2024)

Moreover, Elif also switches languages when she is annoyed. In her third reflective journal, she wrote, “I used Turkish in every environment where I did not want to be understood” (3rd Reflective Journal – 03.06.2024). All things considered, Elif evaluated her intercultural environment and communications positively. She observed her self-growth and joked by saying that she had upgraded herself to three levels at the end of the second interview. She was no longer hesitating to talk and hear something she did not want. Moreover:

“In other words, because I see that people can be different and I have to respect that, I remind myself a little more in every situation. That level, that bar is getting higher and higher. I actually like seeing people's differences in a way.” (2nd Interview – 14.05.2024)

In addition, she stated in her third reflective journal that she became more tolerant and improved in analyzing the things and people around her. Besides, she also became more comfortable doing things such as going out, shopping, traveling on trains, etc., and added, “*Since I realized that no harm would come to the people here, I have become more comfortable doing these things*” (3rd Reflective Journal – 03.06.2024). Furthermore, she also mentioned the changes in communication skills, which she describes as ‘slow but continuous progress’:

“I now speak without fear of making mistakes, knowing that the person I am speaking to is not very good at the language level. However, sometimes, I hesitate when I encounter people whose language skills are more advanced than mine.” (3rd Reflective Journal – 03.06.2024)

In the category of ***developing strategies for facing the language barrier***, the data demonstrates that in the case of a challenge in verbal communication, Elif tended to use *technology* to avoid conflicts in communication, *use her native language*, Turkish, or use *mimes and gestures*. For example, mostly while communicating with the locals, she had

challenges. The second interview's findings revealed that she tried to handle the situation in every case. For example, she said, *"It is true that I had to use Google Translate"* (2nd Interview – 14.05.2024). Sometimes, she asked her student mentor, Julia, to accompany her. When Julia was not with her, she had misunderstandings at the food shopping. She explains it with the following extract:

"I guess the market is a must anyway. With the cashiers. We put them through so much. Did we not understand each other? Did he not give the wrong change when he was supposed to give it? Yes. There was a lot of confusion, but we somehow sorted it out." (2nd Interview – 14.05.2024)

In addition, during the interview, Elif laughed and said that the security at the dorm had hung a sign on the ground floor of our dormitory saying, *"If you do not know Polish, use a translator."* So, she did what they said.

By considering her own solutions in each case where she needed to interact with local people, Elif said she did not intend to learn more local language. She knew only a few words, such as *hello, good day, yes, and no*. She believed there was no place to use Polish, and nobody asked. As a result, when she was asked about whom she would contact for help and consultation, she said, *"I would ask someone who I am sure knows English"* (2nd Interview – 14.05.2024). According to Elif, another reason for this choice was because the local people were timid. Furthermore, Elif's ignorance of the noise coming from the shared kitchen with a tense look was also an example of a strategy she developed to communicate with a non-verbal action.

4.4.4 Elif's emerging intercultural identity during the fourth round of data

Is it sadness, relief, or mixed emotions for Elif?

After around five months, Elif's intercultural study-abroad journey came to an end. The themes analyzed from the fourth round of data, which corresponds to the fourth critical incident, reflective journal, and the third interview, are listed in the mind map diagram as seen in Figure 19 below. Accordingly, two main categories are unearthed from the thematic analysis: *a changed mindset towards the intercultural environment and becoming a new intercultural person*. These two main categories might be considered as

the summary of the emerging intercultural identity of Elif at the last stages of the study-abroad semester in Poland.,

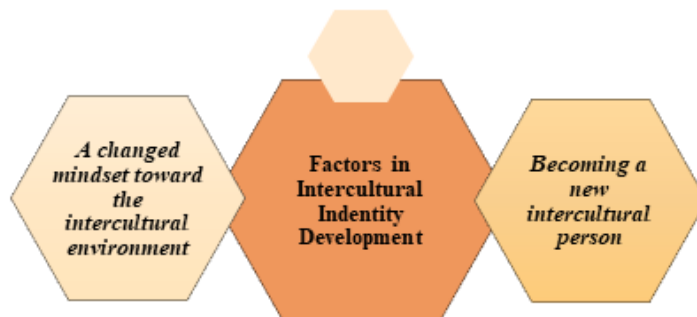


Figure 19.

The Main Themes Revealed from the Fourth Round of Data

In the category of **a changed mindset toward the intercultural environment**, Elif dwells upon her bonds with close friends, how she embraces them, and the ways in which she evaluates her own interactions, approaches, and behaviors in the intercultural environment. Toward the end of her journey, Elif wrote about her last critical incident, which was connected to the second critical incident, where she met the ‘*Flower Girl*’ on the train ride. This incident is called “*Second meeting with the girl I met on the train.*” Accordingly, Elif wrote to that girl, whom she met two months ago on a train, and promised to meet again. They planned the trip, met in Sopot city, tried street food, drank coffee, explored, and talked for hours. They also exchanged gifts and talked about life. She further reflected on enjoying the moments while being herself as follows:

“I believe that the conversations we had that day affected both of us deeply. She said so herself. It seemed very strange to think that we had traveled from one end of the world to the other to touch some people's lives...” (4th Critical Incident – 17.06.2024)

Elif stated that she finally had a best friend from Poland. In response to the question about how that incident affected her intercultural identity, she reflected on her approaches to locals. She did self-reflection: “Not only did it change my mindset, it also reminded me of the importance of approaching people more moderately. It helped me

remember that I should pay attention to my tone while speaking” (4th Critical Incident – 17.06.2024).

On the other hand, Elif was also looking for a similar friendship bond at school throughout the whole semester, but it ended up becoming the main thing that disappointed Elif. During the data collection, she often indicated that although she did her best at school to connect with the students and offered many collective activities, none seemed eager to join. This also caused Elif to become withdrawn from the Polish people in the first place. Nevertheless, the two strong connections Elif made with the girl on the train ride and the mentor-student from the university led her to change her mindset toward nation-based evaluations. During the last reflective journal, she even wrote, “*The most important thing is the friendships I made here*” (4th Reflective Journal – 27.06.2024).

In the category of ***becoming a new intercultural person***, Elif reflects upon the personal growth her study-abroad process provided. Firstly, Elif mostly tended to observe and try to find commonalities in blending into her intercultural environment. As a result, according to her, gaining skills in her intercultural environment, such as problem-solving and tolerance, was the primary outcome she received from the program. During the last reflective journal, she reflected as follows: “I think I am understanding. And most importantly, I think I have improved in problem-solving, staying calm in difficult situations, and making quick decisions” (4th Reflective Journal – 27.06.2024). Moreover, she also learned to appreciate both cultures, which led her to become an open-minded person: “I believe that I have become a much more outgoing and open-minded person” (4th Reflective Journal – 27.06.2024)

In addition, Elif believed that she had the opportunity to look at life from many different windows: “I witness different people, their lives, and their reactions to situations, and this gives me the opportunity to look at life from many different perspectives” (4th Reflective Journal – 27.06.2024)

Regarding her personal growth, Elif also unearthed the fundamental changes that she realized in her personality as a result of her intercultural interactions. In this process, she created her own comfort zone and became a person who stood on her own feet and coped with challenging situations. When asked what she gained and what changed in her

perspective regarding intercultural awareness and intercultural communication when considering the whole process, Elif first pointed out that she had *a new personality* in that she gained confidence. That is, she now knows what to do, how to react in different situations, and how not to be shy in interacting with people anymore. Moreover, she also gained awareness of new cultures and cultural behaviors. She had a chance to get to know other cultures, try new recipes from different cuisines, and adapt to the cultural norms that she was living in.

In addition, Elif indicated that her study-abroad process and intercultural interactions affected her in a way that every time she had a challenge ahead, she coped with it by appreciating her journey as follows:

“I said, I am living my prayer. I am living what I wanted, my dream from the past right now. And this thing came at such a moment that I wanted to go like this. Then I stopped and said, You used to want this so much. Enjoy it and all. I became like this”. (3rd Interview – 06.07.2024)

All in all, thanks to her interactions and communications in her intercultural environment, Elif changed her mindset toward her nation-based prejudgments while gaining personality traits such as empathy and problem-solving.

4.4.5 The whole experience in a glimpse

Did time fly, or was it more than enough to return home for Elif?

During the last focus group interview, Elif dwelled upon her experience living in another culture by evaluating the whole study-abroad semester. Accordingly, Elif appreciated the opportunity that enabled her to see the good and evil in an intercultural environment in natural contexts. The reason was that she gained the ability to observe both her culture and the culture in Poland critically. She added, “When it is touristic, you say, 'Oh, those places are beautiful, ' etc. That is all there is to it because you cannot see anything else” (2nd FG Interview – 17.07.2024).

In addition to experiencing the real life of the host culture, Elif reflected on the advantages of living in an intercultural environment and studying. She indicated that being able to see education abroad was also a unique opportunity, saying, “If we think

about it realistically, it is a new badge to add to a CV. Nice” (2nd FG Interview—17.07.2024).

Besides the advantages, the participants were asked to share their thoughts on what they wished they had done during the journey. Elif’s reflections were related to her friendships and the natural environment of the city that she liked: *“I wish I could have made more friends, but it was not about me. It was more about the other side. They were not very approachable. I think I tried”, “I wish I had traveled more. Or gotten wet more in the rain.”* (2nd FG Interview – 17.07.2024).

Lastly, when the group in the interview was asked to share their observations on their Intercultural Identity Development, Elif mentioned that she became more talkative and all-rounder. Moreover, she added, *“I think my ability to speak in public increased a little more”* (2nd FG Interview – 17.07.2024). Furthermore, in reflecting on her perspective and awareness of Intercultural Communication, Elif pointed out that she developed an awareness of the cultures and languages around her throughout the whole study-abroad journey. Her comments, especially on the host culture, were as follows:

“I can say something, for example, an awareness has been created towards that race. When I see a Polish person, I know how to greet them. For example, I know what topics I should not talk about. Very nice. So, there has been such an awareness. Nice.” (2nd FG Interview – 17.07.2024).

Considering all the findings derived from the data related to Elif’s intercultural identity construction journey and the commonalities among the mind maps created for the beginning, middle, and end of the journey, the factors that affected her journey will be summarized in the following section.

4.4.6 Summary of the transformation journey of Elif

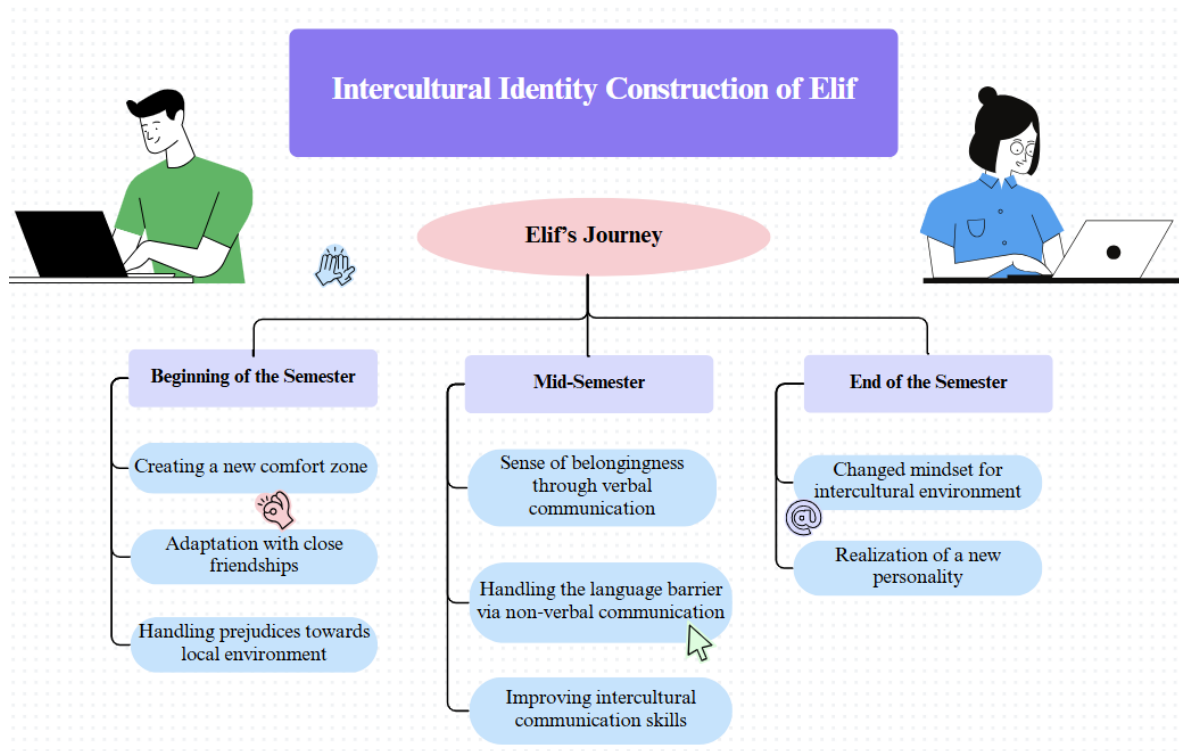


Figure 20.

Elif's Intercultural Identity Transformation Journey

In summary, as seen in Figure 20, Elif began to develop her intercultural identity by creating a new comfort zone for herself as she was disappointed by the physical conditions of the dormitory. She enjoyed the view outside of her window and tried to adapt to the cultural things she first noticed, such as buying flowers. Elif had challenges creating that zone with the people in her environment because she tended to stand back from the locals and did not want to initiate interactions with them initially. That was because she usually tended to make meaning from people's looks and non-existent approaches toward her. However, as she started doing more activities and trips and got over her shy approach, she began to make friends randomly, which was a perfect friendship for her.

During the mid-semester, Elif became more open to initiating interactions in her intercultural environment. Those communications with friends she bonded with gave Elif a sense of belonging. In the meantime, although she refused to learn the local language properly, she developed different non-verbal communication strategies to handle the

language barrier, such as mimes and gestures, technology, and using her native language when annoyed. Moreover, she developed intercultural skills such as empathy, tolerance, and critical observation of her intercultural environment.

At the end of the semester, Elif ended up with a changed mindset toward the intercultural environment and realized that she had developed a new personality involving empathy and understanding with an intercultural mind.

4.5 The Journey of Güneş

4.5.1 Intercultural background of Güneş

Güneş is a 19-year-old second-year ELT student at a public University in Türkiye. She is from a city located in the Central Anatolia Region of Türkiye. Her hometown is three hours away by bus from where she studies. She has one younger brother. She lives in a dormitory on campus. She likes the campus life.

Güneş has never been abroad. Her intercultural background is limited to a few international friends in her classroom. Those students are usually from Turkic countries, and Işık made some friends from Turkmenistan. Other than that, she had some friends online. However, she is not talking to them anymore because, as she pointed out during the first interview, she prefers face-to-face conversations and does not regard online talking as worthy of making friendships.

As the study-abroad program was her dream, she was very excited to see that she had a grant from her home university and was accepted by a University in Romania. The reasons why she picked that specific university to apply to were economic and linguistic. That is, she wanted to live somewhere where she would not have any hardship due to life expenses, and she did not want to have much difficulty learning the local language. As a result, she researched the Romanian language and learned some beginner words and phrases from an application called *Duolingo*. Moreover, the previous Erasmus students in the same city and their experiences were also contributing factors that made Güneş excited to be accepted by the University of Craiova in Romania.

4.5.2 Güneş's emerging intercultural identity during the first round of data

Was it love at first sight or a total disappointment for Güneş?

Figure 21 below summarizes the last participant's first-round interview, critical incident, and reflective journal data under the pseudonym Güneş. Three primary categories emerged from the thematic analysis: *handling the language barrier challenge*, *blending in through cultural similarities and differences*, and *feeling included via friendly approaches*. At the start of the study-abroad semester, Güneş's evolving intercultural identity negotiation may be regarded as being based on these three main areas.

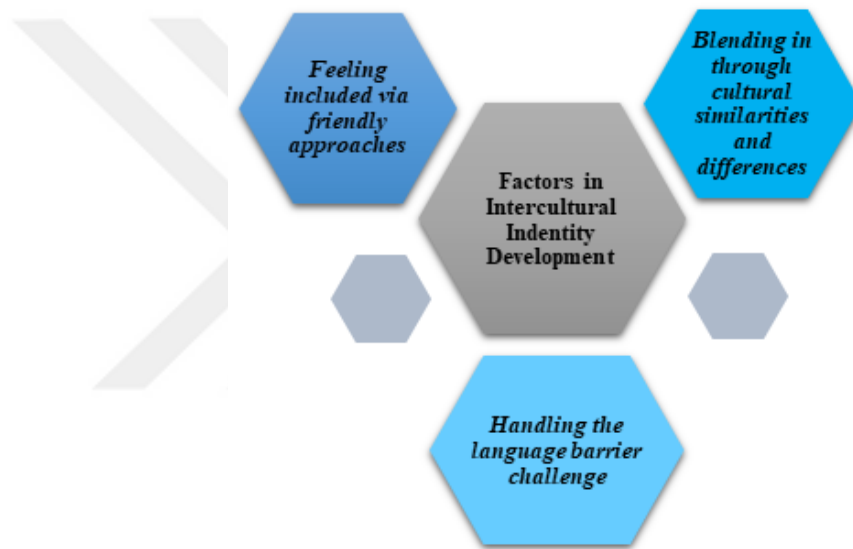


Figure 21.

The Main Themes Revealed from the First Round of Data

In the category of ***feeling included via friendly approaches***, Güneş shared her view on how she felt included in her intercultural environment during the first one-and-half months of her study-abroad journey. *Feeling included* was a very significant factor for Güneş because she spent the first two weeks feeling depressed. This feeling was mainly due to the stress of being unable to interact with the new people around and living alone in a room for the first time. She met different students from various nationalities, such as French, Italian, Spanish, and Russian, during the trips organized by the ESN student organization of the host university. However, since she was staying in a different dormitory from them, there was no further close communication.

On the other hand, around 20 Erasmus students lived in the same dormitory as Güneş, including eight other Turkish Erasmus students. One of her classmates was also living in that dormitory. Although Güneş was happy about the friendly approach of the other Turkish students who invited her to a WhatsApp group that they created only for Turkish students, she was a little frustrated by spending almost the whole time with the whole Turkish group and attending every event altogether, which was preventing Güneş from getting intercultural.

Another reason that Güneş was feeling stressed was that she could not see the environment she was used to back in her home environment, which included coffee shops and such places to chill during a school day. On the other side, the possible friends in her new environment seemed to have different interests than her, mainly involving partying. As a result, as she indicated during the first interview, she had a massive fear of not being able to blend in the intercultural environment: “I mean, of course, I do not want to be excluded, but I also have a lot of fears about how I am going to create my social life here because I do not want to do anything” (1st Interview – 05.03.2024).

The fear of being excluded in her intercultural environment was observed to fade in the first reflective journal of Güneş, which she wrote toward the end of the first month in Craiova. The more she attended the courses, the more she began to get along with her classmates. Moreover, by receiving sincere approaches from both classmates and professors, she began to feel included in her new environment, as she explained:

“... even though they seemed very cold on the outside (as if they were judgmental), they all helped me as much as they could. I realized that even though they seemed cold on the outside, they were actually warm and helpful.” (1st Reflective Journal – 05.04.2024).

As she reflected on her first reflective journal, she could not forget the time when a Romanian girl in the classroom helped out at the end of the first course. Accordingly, Güneş entered the first classroom under the stress of being new there. When the class was dismissed, the classmate left her number written on a piece of paper. The girl named Anita handed out that piece of paper and told Güneş to call her so she could help with everything. Güneş was so stressed that the act of sincerity and the unexpected help meant the world to her. Moreover, that act led to a great friendship, including meetings and coffee dates outside the school. She verbalized her happiness with the following

sentences: “I was about to cry with happiness, I immediately recorded it and sent a message and we started talking.”; “The girl was so cheerful that she was like a sun shining on my dark clouds at that time” (1st Reflective Journal – 05.04.2024).

The classmates' approaches were critical for Güneş to blend in. Although some of them were shy in the beginning, they started to break down their shyness. In addition to her classmates, most of the professors in Güneş spread these sincere approaches. During the first interview, Güneş was so happy to talk about walking home with a professor while talking about their education system, ‘*as colleagues.*’ Moreover, the fact that it was the professor who offered to walk together made Güneş feel very special. Furthermore, another professor was interested in the Turkish language and culture. She tended to start conversations and asked questions about Güneş’s culture and some recommendations, as she wanted to visit Türkiye soon. As a result, talking about her own culture and country and interacting with a professor who was so enthusiastic about them made Güneş feel very much like she belonged to the environment she was studying in.

In the category of ***blending in through cultural similarities and differences***, the participant draws on her experiences, including her observations about the culture that she was blending in. Güneş frequently did that throughout the semester because creating a comfort zone was very important for her. She seemed to find comfort in gaining the ability to critically analyze the similarities and differences between her own culture and the new cultures she met. For example, she liked the flower culture she observed in the city, which was different than Turkish culture. She saw many flower shops and local people frequently buying flowers on the streets.

Another example that Güneş was intrigued with was explained in her first critical incident titled ‘*Crumbs in the Church*’. The incident took place during the Craiova city orientation trip organized by the ESN student organization, which included activities such as museum and church visits. In one of the famous churches, a plate with breadcrumbs on it as well as a glass of wine next to it. Güneş was curious and asked one of the Romanian students. It turned out that the priest prays over bread and leaves them at the entrance so that people can eat and get closer to God spiritually. Güneş was so surprised that it was a very similar religious act in Türkiye, as well: “*I was not surprised at the part where she said that priests pray over bread because we do a similar thing to pray over*

food” (1st Critical Incident – 23.03.2024). As a result, learning something she had never heard about the religion of the people of the country she was in made her write this experience. Moreover, she indicated that this incident positively affected her intercultural identity development in those cultural similarities, and differentiating them increased her curiosity toward the local culture and eased her into blending into the environment. The exact feelings of gaining understanding were written as follows:

“To understand a person, you need to know what they like and believe in. You need to know what kind of culture and family they were raised in and what kind of way of thinking they have. And religion has a big impact on all of these things. So, one way to understand the people where you live is to understand their beliefs. Even though I still do not know much about Christianity, I think that every new thing I learn will bring me a little closer to understanding them.” (1st Critical Incident – 23.03.2024).

Besides the collective activities, Güneş also kept observing the cultural acts individually. In her reflective journal, she mentioned that she was surprised to see Romanian friends hugging only one side when greeting. However, in Turkish culture, friends hug from both sides. She wrote, “*I taught them this, now they do it twice every time they hug me*” (1st Reflective Journal – 05.04.2024). By teaching them to hug from both sides, Güneş blended the two cultures to communicate while bonding with local students. She was happy to see their reaction.

Lastly, in the category of ***handling the language barrier challenge***, Güneş elaborated upon her first impressions and the process of adapting to a different language in her intercultural environment. During the first interview, Güneş talked about her feelings about hearing a new language around her. She mentioned that although she was very curious about what the students around her were talking or laughing about, she was sad that she could not understand what they were laughing about. As a solution, she began to ease into the group conversations by initiating the talks. As the people around her did not speak English well, she tried her best by modifying her English: “It is not how well you speak English, but on the contrary, the more primitive English you speak, the better you get along” (1st Interview – 05.03.2024). Moreover, she picked up some Romanian words to get used to the environment. At the end of the first month, she was happy to be able to use the essential words with the locals at the markets. She explained the benefits of it as follows:

“I learned some phrases/words to communicate with people a little better. Because cashiers always say good afternoon/evening according to the time of day, and I could not help but say good afternoon/evening in return. Even if they do not know each other, they greet each other and say thank you a lot, so I learned how to say these things”. (1st Reflective Journal – 05.04.2024).

Even though it was easier to blend into the school and dormitory environment regarding language use in conversations, Güneş had some challenges, especially in supermarkets and some other local shops, where she could use either non-verbal communication or no communication at all. During the first interview, she explained how she had to draw a house in the air to explain herself to the officer at the student registrar's office when she forgot her passport at the dormitory. She added that the women somehow understood her. In addition, using Google Translate at the dormitory for security or trying to get some Romanian words from context were other strategies she used to handle the challenge. Besides, the language barrier she faced at a ticket shop was the most challenging experience for her. In that case, the translation did not work because she did not know what kind of ticket to take. As a solution, Güneş went back there with a Romanian friend the next day.

Overall, the first one and a half months of Güneş stood as the building blocks of her intercultural identity construction. She put effort into fighting challenges with small steps, such as learning some phrases in Romanian, being curious about the similarities and differences between cultures, and initiating communications with classmates while using non-verbal communication with locals. Although she had difficulty adapting to the environment, which was out of her comfort zone and living alone, she began to feel included with the approaches of her classmates and professors around.

4.5.3 Güneş's emerging intercultural identity during the second and third rounds of data

How is Güneş doing in his intercultural journey?

After spending 2 - 2,5 months in Craiova city in Romania, Güneş completed half of her study-abroad journey. Thanks to the second interview, as well as the two critical incidents and two reflective journals, the findings from her intercultural life and updates

from her intercultural identity-building process were found. The figure summarizes the analysis below, as seen in Figure 22. As can be seen, four main branches are yielded from the thematic analysis. According to the analysis, these are registered as *blending in through cultural positioning*, *handling the language barrier*, *feeling belongingness through sincere relations*, and *enhancing personal growth*. These four main categories might signal the development of the emerging intercultural identity of Güneş during the study-abroad semester.

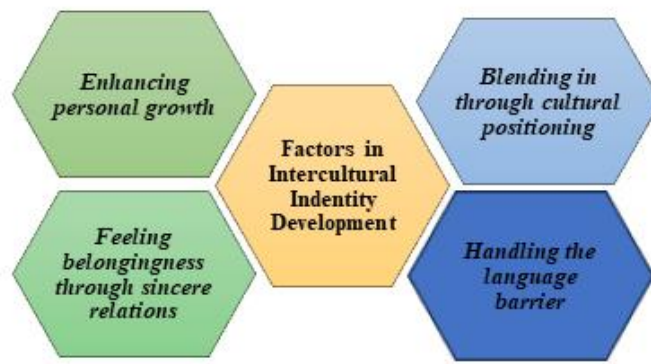


Figure 22.

The Main Themes Revealed from the Second and Third Rounds of Data

In the category of ***blending in through cultural positioning***, Güneş touches upon her increased curiosity about Romanian culture and the actions she took to experience it. Moreover, she reflects on how she gained skills by blending into the cultural norms throughout the semester.

The instances of Güneş digging deeper into the culture in her intercultural environment were usually reflected in her critical incidents. As she was interested in observing and getting to know more about her environment, the cultural instances were considered critical for her. For example, her second critical incident was called ‘*Does your name have a birthday?*’, which she wrote after almost two months after the semester’s beginning. Accordingly, one day, after class, she was talking to her Romanian

friends in front of the school when one of them said that she was going to her relatives in the coastal city that weekend to celebrate her name. At first, she thought she was talking about a birthday celebration, but it turned out that some names had their own special celebration day. Names with a sacred meaning in particular had their special days, and everyone with that name celebrated their name on that day.

She was surprised and inspired by the intriguing cultural act that she learned. By critically observing and understanding the host culture, Güneş asked more questions to clarify and analyze the similarities and differences between her culture and the host culture. She even imagined adapting it to Turkish culture and reflected on how this incident affected her intercultural identity development as follows:

“Why don’t we do something like that? Of course, the adaptation of this to us should have been a little modified. For example, I thought that historically important names could have days that were appropriate for their dates and that this could also help us embrace our history more. For example, the day when the Great Seljuk ruler Alp Arslan won the Battle of Malazgirt and opened the doors of Anatolia could be the day of the name “Alparslan” I think trying to adapt something from another culture to my own culture makes my intercultural identity more fluid.” (2nd Critical Incident – 19.04.2024).

The incident apparently contributed to her intercultural identity development by making her more flexible. In addition, another cultural reflection was provided by Güneş on her third critical incident, which was titled ‘*Easter*’. In this incident, Güneş was invited to the Easter celebration that was going to be held that night by the ESN student organization. Nevertheless, according to what they said, it would be midnight. Thus, she called a Romanian friend to ensure this was how Easter celebrations were and to learn more about it. The friend confirmed that everyone would be in the churches that night. Then she started telling Güneş more about Easter. People prepare food for this day; they paint eggs red. If Güneş went to the church that night, the people would give her a bag with food and sweets there, and if they did, she should say “*Bogda Proste*”, which means *God bless you for it* in return. Receiving this bag was considered a blessing. In addition, as Güneş was very intrigued by the custom, she asked more questions and received information from her friend. Later that night, she attended the celebrations.

According to her, by exploring and experiencing the cultural and religious practices, Güneş gained an understanding that affected her intercultural identity development. Her salient reflections can be seen in the following extracts: "... one way to understand the people where you live is to understand their beliefs.", "I think every new thing I learn will bring me a little closer to understanding them.", "It increases my general knowledge" (3rd Critical Incident – 29.05.2024)

In the category of *handling the language barrier*, Güneş dwells on the language barrier she faced and the ways in which she handled those challenges. By the time she reached the midway point of her journey, she got along with her classmates and had some connections at the dormitory as well. During the second interview, she said, "I generally feel comfortable talking to my friends. Because I can understand them because they know English. Or I can talk to the teachers anyway" (2nd Interview – 15.05.2024). On the other hand, she tended to complain about the way she felt terrible because of her not talking in Romanian: "Everyone speaks Romanian all the time. I do not understand it. It feels so foreign, so outsider-like sometimes." (2nd Interview – 15.05.2024); "Yes, you may be used to living, you may know what to do, but... It does not feel like home... It is not just that you cannot understand them, it is that they cannot understand you either." (2nd Interview – 15.05.2024). During the third reflective journal, she also mentioned not feeling comfortable with the judgmental looks for not knowing Romanian as follows:

"Usually, if the Romanian person I am trying to talk to has a judgmental mindset like "How can I not know Romanian even though I live here!", they will give me a look like "Ugh, I cannot deal with this". (3rd Reflective Journal – 05.06.2024)

In addition, she had a lot to say in the reflective journal for the question regarding the moment that Güneş needed to interact with people the most. According to Güneş, the moments she spent at the Vodafone reseller to renew her monthly package were a good example of the language barrier challenge. She reflects on her feelings as follows:

"I try to talk to them using Google Translate and try to be polite and formal, but I am very disappointed when I get a tired expression on their face and a feeling of 'Oh, you again, enough, go away. (2nd Reflective Journal – 03.05.2024).

She needed to go to the store every month to renew her package but never had anyone who spoke English there: “I always had to talk only to people who spoke Romanian, and it was quite challenging” (2nd Reflective Journal – 03.05.2024). Even translation did not help; as a solution, she handled it by bringing one of her Romanian friends. Moreover, she usually used non-verbal communication while ordering or paying, e.g., showing with her hands, and handled the challenge.

During the second interview, Güneş mentioned that she tried learning Romanian a little. However, somehow, she lost her self-confidence and enthusiasm, mainly because of the Romanian teacher at school. According to her, the teacher kept delaying the course, and Güneş gave up in the end. On the other hand, receiving compliments during the Shakespeare festival at school for a couple of phrases she picked up made her excited. As a result, one salient topic related to the language barrier was Güneş’s regret of not learning the local language beforehand. During the second interview, she talks about her regrets, which could have made her ease into adapting to the environment:

“If I knew a little more, at least if I knew enough to have a basic conversation, I would have had incredible fun. Because at least I had a purpose. Not just a purpose. I really like the sinister look on their faces when I talk to them. Yes. Actually. And I wish I had learned a little more before; it would be easier.” (2nd Interview – 15.05.2024)

In the category of *feeling belongingness through sincere relations*, Güneş reflects on her intercultural identity development through her interactions and strong bonds created with the people in her intercultural environment. During the second interview, she evaluated her communication during the first half of the semester. Accordingly, Güneş pointed out that she was more comfortable communicating and had best friends from classes, where she usually had to take the first steps with her classmates. She made both Romanian and two other international students from Serbia and Morocco. On the other hand, in courses where she did not have any reaction, she was challenged at first, but later, she picked up her courage and tried to interact as she explains below:

“I did not talk to anyone in that class for a very long time. Because no one was taking any steps. I was trying to do something, but it was not working. Because there was a bit of a wall, it was very different from the others. I was also very nervous. No one is my friend. How am I going to get information about something? Because they do not have a phone number. I do

not have any contact. I finally got up the courage to talk to the girl and said, Can you give me your phone number? She did.” (2nd Interview – 15.05.2024)

By expanding her friendship circle through new friends at school, in her data from the second and third rounds of tasks, it could be seen that feeling welcomed and comfortable was a significant factor for Güneş to adapt to her environment. In this way, she both *felt belonging and broke down her prejudices*.

Creating personal connections with professors contributed significantly to her adaptation process. For example, she mentioned a professor teaching the *linguistic theories* course. She felt pleased to walk and chat together after class on the way back home at the beginning of the semester. In addition to the professor, her classmates also contributed to this development. The importance of sincere approaches leading Güneş to adapt was obvious. She belonged to the place where she felt welcomed. She evaluated the interactions as superficial and short-term with other Erasmus students who did not even participate in the collective activities. Thus, the school became her comfort place:

“I generally felt 'welcomed' when I was among the Romanians at school. Most of them were not good at speaking, and you could easily sense that some of them wanted to talk but were shy. I am friends with the ones who spoke well. I took the first step with some of them, and they did the same with others. At first, I was very nervous about making friends because, at first glance, they seemed cold.” (2nd Reflective Journal – 03.05.2024)

Although Güneş was nervous about initiating conversations in the beginning, she figured out how to get out of her comfort zone and not wait for them to approach her first, providing a new perspective and creating stronger bonds with her classmates. Moreover, she further commented on the friendships she created through communication and interaction:

“Frankly, I had no trouble communicating with the Romanians who are now my friends. They were all very friendly and respectful. Our mindsets were similar. They just seemed a little cold from a distance at first, that's all. That's their general facial expression anyway.” (2nd Reflective Journal – 03.05.2024)

At last, by creating stronger bonds in her university environment, she was able to have deeper conversations with her classmates and share her emotions: “That day, for the

first time, she told me her life story, which not everyone knew. I shared something like this with her afterward”. (3rd Reflective Journal – 05.06.2024).

In the category of *enhancing personal growth*, Güneş dwells upon some specific skills that she observed and developed throughout almost three months of her study-abroad period. The first one was related to her communication skills. In response to the question of the changes in her communication skills in her intercultural environment in the third reflective journal, she wrote that she became much more confident in talking and initiating conversations with her friends. Her exact words were as follows:

“I feel much more confident because I realized that the people I was talking to actually wanted to talk to me but were hesitant to do so and that they were staying away not because they did not want to talk to me as I thought, but because they were hesitant/not confident in their English. (Also, they are all kind of interested in Turkish culture -because of the TV series 😊). I am very cheerful when I talk, and I always bring up new topics. (3rd Reflective Journal – 05.06.2024)

In addition to her communication skills, Güneş also observed changes in herself and personal growth. It should be mentioned here that it was not all fun and games for Güneş. It was a complete struggle for survival, especially during the first two months. One reason for that was mentioned among the things she could not forget about the first one and a half months of her journey. It was the physical conditions of the dormitory that led to a huge disappointment. As a result, she believed that she developed her *survival skills*. Moreover, she observed that she gained *problem-solving skills* and became confident in *making decisions alone*, as she explained in her third reflective journal:

“I did not have much trouble speaking at first, but I was a bit shy. Now that shyness is gone. (It got better as I got to know people and/environment more). I learned not to depend on others' decisions too much; if I want something myself, I learned to do it. In other words, I stopped waiting for someone to be with me all the time to do something.” (3rd Reflective Journal – 05.06.2024)

Also, Güneş became more open interculturally. She volunteered in the ‘Shakespeare Festival’ organized at her university and planned to attend some concerts later. Moreover, she was challenged with an emotional void in the beginning. She indicated, “Because I was usually alone there, and because I did not have a very close

friend here at that time. (2nd Interview – 15.05.2024). Later on, by being more open to new topics and longer conversations, she managed to fill the void: “When I first came, I was shy. Then I became more, I mean, more open” (2nd Interview – 15.05.2024).

Lastly, although she struggled with many things throughout the whole journey, she tried her best to integrate into the intercultural environment and learned to be grateful: “Still, I said I am glad I came...It made me realize that I have a lot of things to be grateful for” (2nd Interview—15.05.2024).

Overall, toward the end of her study-abroad journey, Güneş made the most of her cultural curiosity in blending into the intercultural environment she was living in. In the meantime, thanks to the sincere approaches of her classmates and professors, she gained confidence in her communication skills and made good friends. During the process, she faced the challenges of the language barrier and unwell dormitory conditions. Somehow, she built strategies and handled these challenges while developing personal growth and improving skills such as problem-solving, understanding, and openness.

4.5.4 Güneş’s emerging intercultural identity during the fourth round of data

Is it sadness, relief, or mixed emotions for Güneş?

Güneş's intercultural study-abroad experience ended after around five months. Figure 23 below lists the topics examined from the fourth round of data, which relates to the third interview, the fourth critical incident, and the reflective journal. As a result, the thematic analysis revealed one primary category: *gaining a broadened perspective toward the intercultural environment with a new personality*. This primary category might be regarded as an overview of Elif's developing international identity during the final weeks of her study-abroad program in Romania.

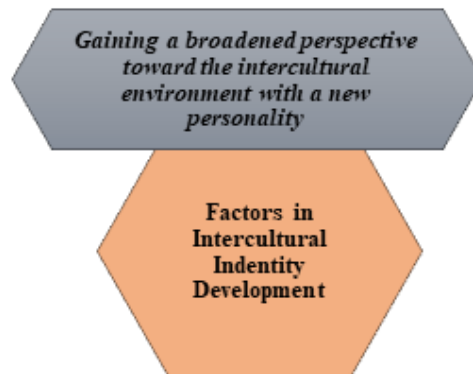


Figure 23.

The Main Themes Revealed from the Fourth Round of Data

In the category of ***gaining a broadened perspective toward the intercultural environment with a new personality***, Güneş dwells upon the outcomes of how she felt belonged to her intercultural environment by getting to know the culture while focusing on her relationships with close friends, how she values them, and how she assesses her own interactions, approaches, and actions in an intercultural setting. Moreover, Güneş reflects on the changes she observed in herself throughout the whole intercultural identity development process. During the last reflective journal, she was asked to reflect on the changes her intercultural interactions had caused in her life and perspective. In return, she touched upon how she gained an understanding of other cultures and how this experience made her open-minded in her life. A detailed explanation can be found in the following extract:

“Meeting different people here and learning about their cultures really changed my perspective on life. I am now more comfortable talking to people from different cultures, and I can understand their perspectives better... This experience helped me see the world from a broader perspective and taught me to be more open-minded to differences”. (4th Reflective Journal – 28.06.2024)

As can be seen in the extract, her friendships were a significant factor in intercultural identity development. Likewise, when she was asked about the things she would always remember about her semester study-abroad experience, she indicated that

it was collecting unforgettable memories with friends and other study participants: “Our European tour with the girls, the Romanian and Turkish friends I made here, and the experiences I had with them were definitely the best”. (4th Reflective Journal – 28.06.2024).

Communication was a very important factor in developing an intercultural identity. When Güneş was asked to reflect on her thoughts on how her intercultural identity developed in Craiova, she mainly mentioned making local friends and getting to know the local culture in making her feeling belonged to her environment. These factors affected her *personality*, as well. For example, she mentioned how her confidence increased in general. She reflected on the things that changed in the intercultural development process as follows: “*During this process, my ability to communicate with people from different cultures improved, and I felt more open-minded.*”; “*I learned a lot about Romanian culture, and this knowledge shaped my intercultural identity.*”; “*I gained more English-speaking practice and my self-confidence increased...*” (4th Reflective Journal – 28.06.2024). According to Güneş, internalizing cultural norms and intercultural interactions stem from being open to new experiences and wanting to get to know different cultures. In addition, the hospitality and sincerity of the peers were contributing factors.

Moreover, *confidence* was another thing she gained in her environment. During the last interview, she mentioned how proud she was because she was now helping the newcomers as follows:

“I was actually doing things with someone's guidance all the time, but later on I got so used to it that I acted as a guide for the people who came after me, for example, look, there is this here, there is this there, you do it like this, you do it like this, you take it like this.” (3rd Interview – 06.07.2024)

All in all, although she had some challenges in the adaptation process at the beginning of her study-abroad journey, including feeling alone and facing the bad physical conditions in the dormitory, she chose to handle the challenges by making friends and getting used to the city. In doing that, she benefitted from both verbal and non-verbal communication. Lastly, she got to know herself and realized her strengths

while embracing the people around her: “In fact, what makes me happy is not where I am but the people around me” (3rd Interview – 06.07.2024).

4.5.5 The whole experience in a glimpse

Did time fly, or was it more than enough to return home for Güneş?

During the last focus group interview, Güneş reflected upon her experience of living with another culture by evaluating the whole study-abroad semester. Accordingly, Güneş appreciated the culture and friendships but did not fancy living out of her comfort zone for too long. Moreover, while talking about the advantages of living in an intercultural environment and studying, she mentioned the value of making long-term friendships once more while considering representing her own culture and getting to know the local one as another advantage. Following this idea, she shared the following example with the group:

“When I was in class, for example, when we talked about language, the structure of the language, or things like that, they would usually ask me how this happened in Turkish. I would say that, too. You know, it comes from representing your own country. You feel proud, no lie.” (2nd FC Interview – 17.07.2024).

In addition to the advantages of living and studying abroad, the focus group was asked to reflect on how the journey of studying abroad affected their intercultural identity development. Güneş stepped in and indicated that she gained awareness of the time being precious with friends, and therefore, she became more wishing to pursue new experiences.

Lastly, while discussing the changes in their perspectives and awareness of intercultural communication, Güneş said, “The universal language is body language” (2nd FC Interview—17.07.2024). That is, the journey provided her with a realization of the importance of nonverbal communication and modifications in verbal communication.

4.5.6 Summary of the transformation journey of Güneş's emerging teacher identity

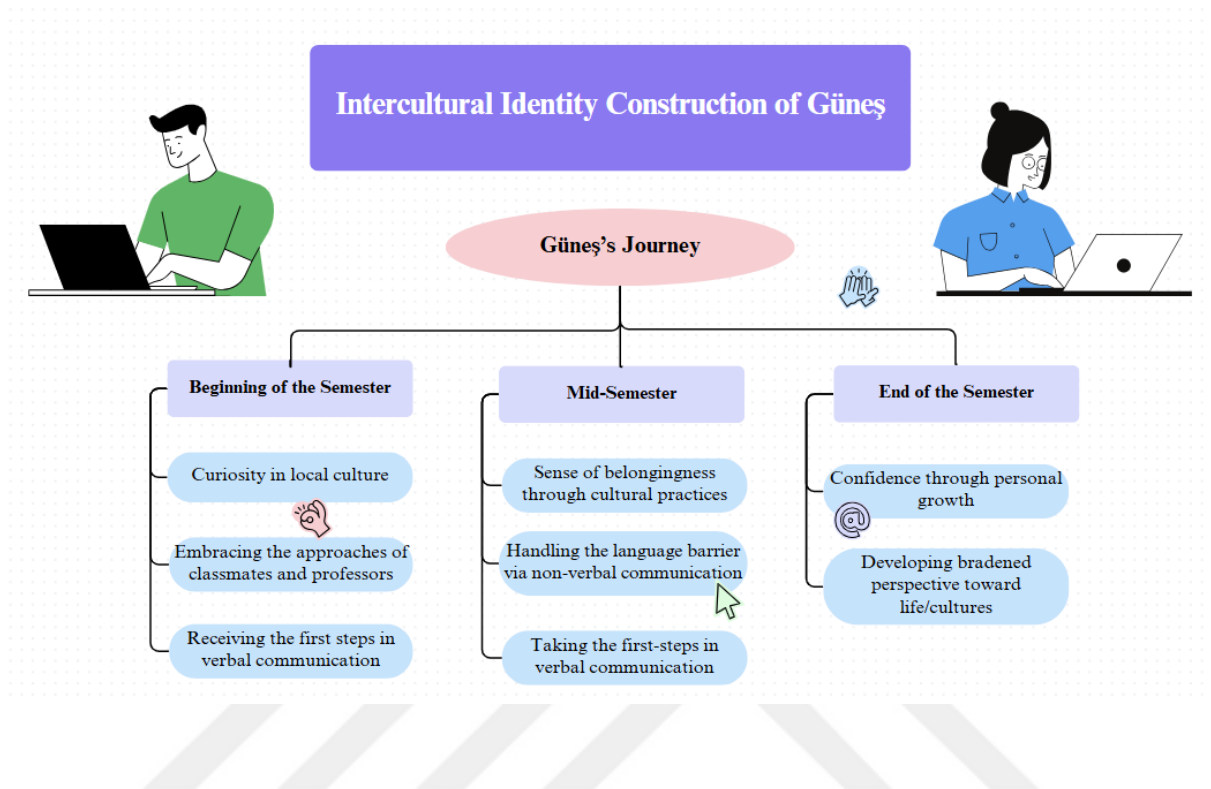


Figure 24.

Güneş's Intercultural Identity Transformation Journey

In summary, as seen in Figure 24, Güneş began to develop her intercultural identity by using her curiosity about local culture and asking about local friends at the beginning of the semester. In addition, as she experienced the challenge of having an emotional void for being alone, the sincere and welcomed approaches of her classmates and professors during the first weeks were significant factors that contributed to her adaptation process. As her classrooms were full of Romanian students, she was too shy to initiate the interactions at first, and therefore, receiving the first steps in communication was also appreciated by her emerging intercultural identity.

During the mid-semester, thanks to her efforts and curiosity to participate in cultural practices, Güneş developed a sense of belonging in her intercultural environment. In a similar vein, she also gained confidence in taking the first steps in verbal communication. However, she faced challenges when it came to her interaction with daily

life in the local environment. In fact, not learning the local language became a regret for her at the end of the semester. In that process, she used non-verbal communication to handle the barrier in her daily conversations. She mostly preferred translation applications and hand gestures.

At the end of the semester, Güneş was observed to have gained confidence and personal growth, in addition to a sense of belonging to her intercultural environment and the ability to handle language challenges. She became more extroverted and turned to herself by looking at the cultures and life from a broadened perspective. It became vital for her to empathize with the other person she was talking to and understand their perspectives.

4.6 Summary of the Findings

Using Vygotsky's Social Constructionism, underpinned by the theoretical toolkit of Yang (2017) for the development of TESOL teacher intercultural identity, involving Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communication competence, the current study, which is a qualitative, multiple-case study with a narrative perspective, attempts to uncover the negotiations of emerging intercultural identities of four Turkish preservice English teachers during their study-abroad semester. In order to do this, data has been gathered through focus group interviews conducted before and after the semester, three semi-structured individual interviews conducted at the beginning, mid, and at the end of the semester, as well as critical incident reports, and reflective journals both of which required reflections of the participants every two weeks throughout their journeys. Thematic analysis, in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) qualitative thematic analysis instructions, was used to examine the data. A fuller understanding of the components of the dynamic interplay in the construction of emerging intercultural identities is thus intended by the framework presented below for the negotiation of the developing intercultural identities of Turkish preservice EFL teachers. The figure shows that continuous intercultural development throughout the semester can be recognized with commonalities from the four different intercultural settings.

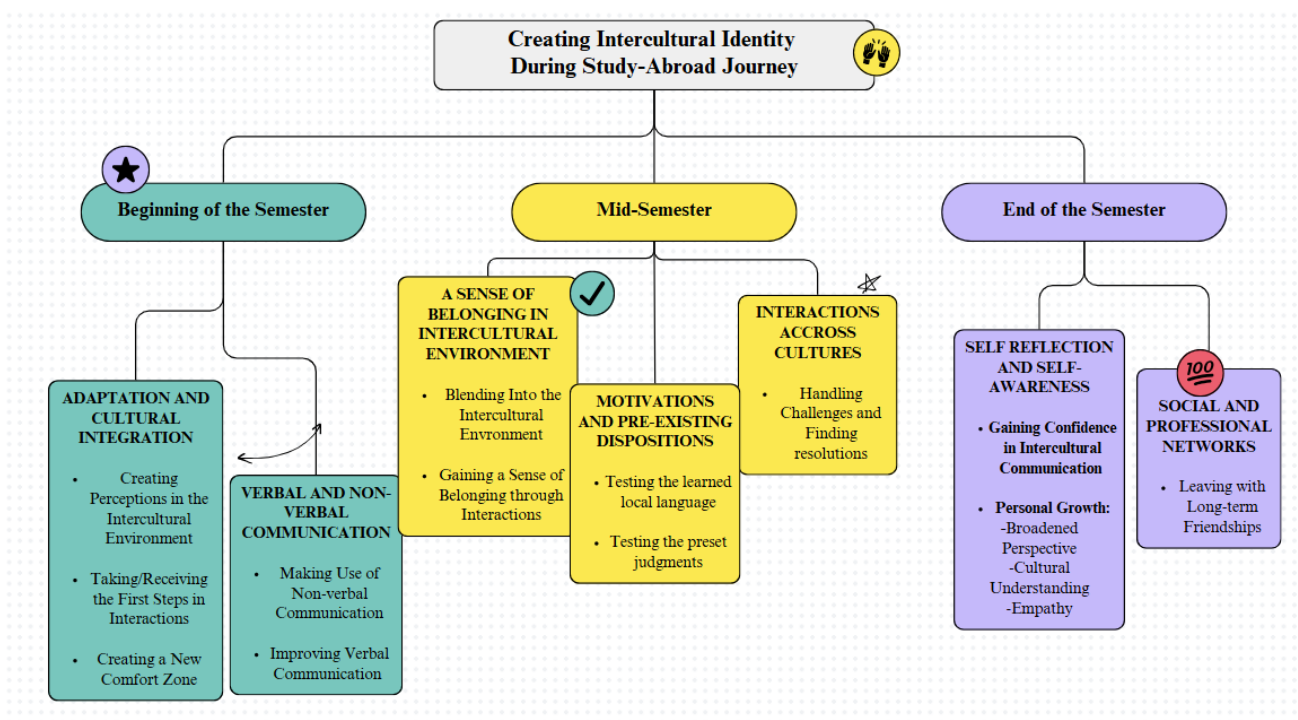


Figure 25.

Emerging Intercultural Identity Framework for Preservice EFL Teachers

As can be seen from the framework in Figure 25, titled ‘*Beginning of the Semester*’, the preservice teachers began their intercultural identity construction journey by creating perceptions and first impressions of their intercultural environment, which were primarily influenced by their observations of the approaches they received from local people and the first people they met at school and the accommodation. While investigating the intercultural environment, they used non-verbal communication as they all had a challenge with language when talking to locals. Their preferences mostly involved Google Translate. In the meantime, as non-verbal communication was not enough to have close relations with people around, the participants worked on the ways in which they can operate verbal communication, as well. Two of them took a quick step and found a course where the local language was being taught. The others, on the other hand, preferred keeping local language learning on the basic level but instead focused on finding international contacts. Eventually, around the end of their first month, they developed confidence in taking the first steps in communication, which encouraged them to become intercultural more quickly. Lastly, in every case, the participants were found to be looking for a comfort zone in their intercultural environment. As soon as they found it, making friends and getting intercultural became faster and easier. The comfort zone

changed in each case. While it was the shared kitchen for one participant at the dormitory, the others felt comfortable in the classroom or at the park in front of the dormitory. The process is summarized under each case's "Emerging teacher identity during the first round of data" aspect. These components helped create the emerging Intercultural Identity at the beginning of the journey, which was discovered using the information obtained from the initial round of interviews, critical incidents, and reflective journals at the beginning of the data-gathering procedure.

Regarding the 'Mid-semester' component in Figure 25 above, the participants had to manage their adaptation process to the local culture and intercultural norms while putting efforts into blending into their intercultural environment. The more they knew the cultures, the easier they adapted to the environment. They gained a sense of belonging, which provided them with a broader perspective to test their prejudices toward other cultures and gain understanding. In doing that, the approaches people made, the friendships they made, the close interactions, collective activities, and personal actions in getting to know the local culture were significant in their intercultural identity development process. In addition, learning the local language was another important act for participants to blend into their environment. During the mid-semester, moreover, the participants had a chance to solidify their friendships and use the local language they learned, both of which opened up doors for more intercultural experiences. They all had a chance to be hosted by a local family on their journey. Lastly, they also faced challenges such as conflicts with their roommates or feeling alone, and they gained the ability to find solutions for them. This process is summarized under the *"Emerging teacher identity during the second and third rounds of data"* aspect. These components helped create the emerging intercultural identity amid the journey, which was discovered using the information obtained from the second round of interviews and the second and third rounds of critical incidents and reflective journals during the data-gathering procedure.

Lastly, as seen in the Figure above, the 'end of the semester' was more related to the individual selves of the participants. It was the part where they could reflect on the whole journey and evaluate the changes in them. Accordingly, they gained confidence in their intercultural communication abilities and personal growth, including broadened perspectives, understanding, and empathy toward different cultures. Moreover, they all gained long-term friendships. This process is summarized under the *"Emerging teacher*

identity during the fourth of data" aspect. These components helped create the emerging intercultural identity at the end of the journey, which was discovered using the information obtained from the fourth round of interviews and the fourth rounds of critical incidents and reflective journals during the data-gathering procedure.

4.6.1 Summary of the factors impacting emerging teacher identity constructions

The elements that have greatly influenced the participants' developing intercultural identities have been highlighted throughout the investigations. However, one must stand back and look at the elements as a whole to understand how pre-service EFL teachers' emergent intercultural identities were constructed during their study-abroad journey. A compact diagram, as shown in Figure 26, is used below as a summary map to distill the components essential to developing the evolving intercultural identities of pre-service EFL teachers during their study-abroad semester discussed in this study. In light of this, six main factors—*sense of belonging, friendship dynamics, critical reflection, local language familiarity, verbal communication, and non-verbal communication*—seem to best capture the participants' reflections from the beginning of the semester till the end.

One can definitively uncover the participants' intercultural identity-related trajectories by delving into the meanings encoded inside these factors. Firstly, *a sense of belonging* was found to be an important factor in developing an intercultural identity for the participants. As they gained this feeling, they became more confident in building a lifestyle in their new environments. They were observed to gain that sense through cultural experiences and sincere approaches from locals and peers. Another significant factor was 'friendship dynamics', which mostly involved the accommodation and classroom environment. As they spent most of their time in these two places, they made an effort to make friends. When they did, they embraced their friendships.

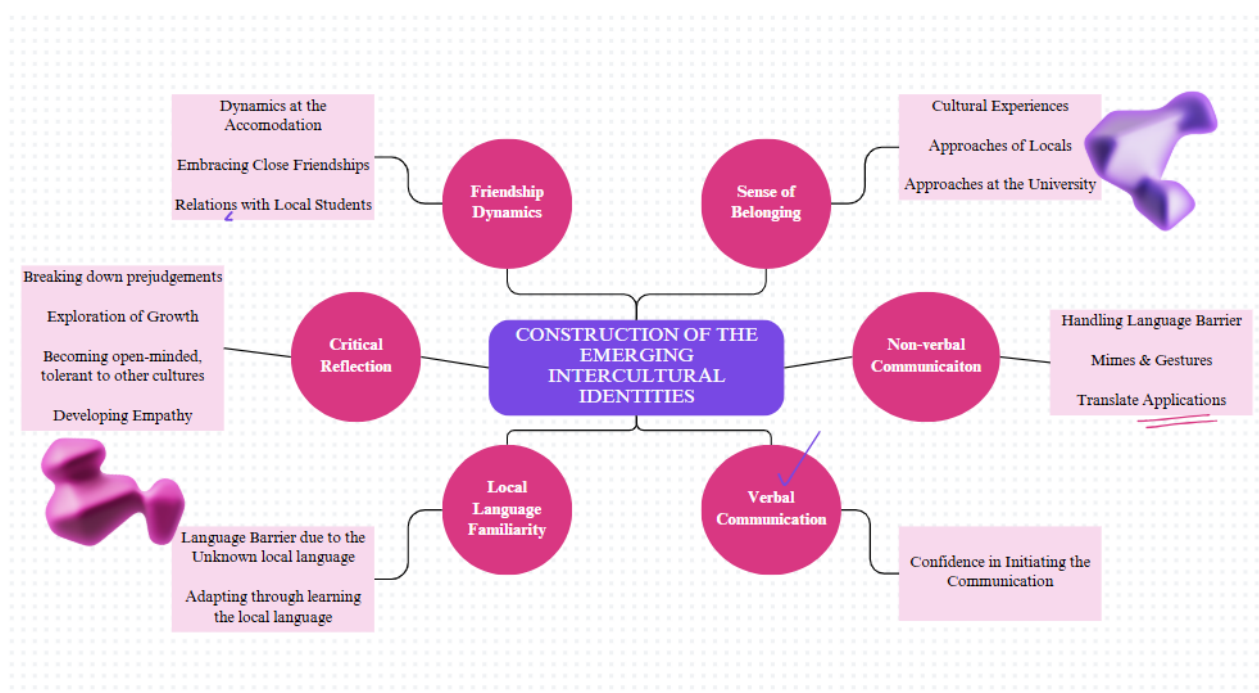


Figure 26.

Factors Impacting the Construction of Emerging Intercultural Identities

When it came to ‘critical reflection,’ it could be seen that, especially at the end of the journey, they became able to reflect critically on themselves and their journeys. This reflection led to the discovery of newly gained skills such as breaking down prejudgments, exploring growth, becoming open-minded and tolerant of other cultures, and developing empathy toward others.

Until now, it can be realized that the factors were related to either the people in the intercultural environment or the participants themselves. Besides these factors, *language* was essential in the development of their intercultural identity. As they did not know the local language at first, they used non-verbal communication to handle the challenge of miscommunication. They developed strategies according to their situation, such as using mimes and gestures or translation apps. However, on the other hand, ‘local language familiarity’ was a significant factor in their adaptation process. The participants who advanced in the local language during their study-abroad semester were observed to become more confident in their daily lives in terms of communication and interaction. Lastly, although the participants were not confident initiating communication at first, ‘verbal communication’ became an important factor in encouraging them in cultural and

international contexts. Joining activities, creating events, and asking for help were some of the actions that supported their improvement in verbal communication.

Overall, the current study narrates the journeys of four Turkish EFL teachers as they search for their “intercultural selves” over the turbulent study-abroad journey. They have challenged themselves by getting out of their comfort zones and trying to build a new lifestyle in a foreign environment. In the process, they reshaped their intercultural identity negotiations by utilizing the interaction of multiple factors after being introduced to new intercultural settings. Their experiences are probably among the ones that many Erasmus students have experienced in various international contexts. For this reason, sharing their journeys may help them become more self-aware and gain a sense of recognition in the long run by empowering them in their journeys of becoming intercultural and assisting them in making the process of constructing their intercultural identities as transparent as possible.

The current study's results should be analyzed in light of the reviewed literature and appropriate conclusions in the following section.

CHAPTER FIVE

5 DISCUSSION

The theoretical concept of identity emphasizes how dynamic and complex self-construction is, especially in educational and cross-cultural contexts. The synthesis of identity research reveals a change from static definitions to a dynamic understanding of identity as a socially produced and changing phenomenon. Understanding how people, especially teachers, negotiate social and personal factors to form their identities is made possible by Erikson's (1994) psychosocial framework and sociocultural theories first rooted by Vygotsky. By examining the innumerable components that interact to generate this dynamic construct, the multifaceted nature of the developing intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers, especially, has been explored in this section, along with the arguments from earlier research. As Kavrayıcı (2020) asserts, "It is evident that exploring teacher identity is crucial during the process of teacher education".

In this study, pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural identities during their study-abroad experiences were examined in terms of intercultural interactions that are incorporated into *Social Constructionism*, discussed, and supported by *Intercultural Communication Competence*. The creation of intercultural identity in socially diverse contexts was examined from the standpoint of the communicative and interactive environment in intercultural settings in order to relate it to study-abroad intercultural contexts. This section discusses various arguments that highlight opportunities and challenges associated with Erasmus exchange programs. It aims to explore ways to enhance preparation for the study-abroad experience and offers insights for fostering the development of intercultural identities among pre-service EFL teachers. A thorough analysis of recent research and the burgeoning literature is anticipated to yield deeper insights that could perhaps clarify the phenomenon's intricacies and shed light on this important stage of becoming intercultural. In the following subsection, a general overview of the emerging intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers in their study-abroad processes is discussed, and the ideas and studies in the related literature regarding the features of intercultural identity are compared.

5.1 The Navigation of Emerging Intercultural Identity of Pre-service EFL Teachers

The results of this study highlight how study-abroad programs, which immerse individuals in culturally and linguistically diverse surroundings, stimulate the development of intercultural identities. Therefore, the first and the second research questions, *'What are pre-service EFL teachers' dispositions toward their study-abroad experiences related to their intercultural identity?'* and *'How do EFL teachers' intercultural identity development trajectories unfold in the course of study-abroad?'* were vital to answer.

First of all, regarding pre-service EFL teachers' dispositions toward their study-abroad experiences related to their intercultural identity, it can be seen that pre-service EFL teachers participate in cycles of adaptation and development through their interactions with host communities. Through increased self-awareness and a more sophisticated comprehension of cultural diversity, these experiences improve their intercultural communication skills while developing intercultural identity. In this sense, the participants' internalization of interculturality in this study aligns with what many scholars asserted as the features of becoming intercultural: grasping various cultures without passing judgment, embracing these multicultural settings and associated characteristics, and being aware of the various linguistic behaviors that other people may exhibit (Ishihara & Menard-Warwick, 2018; Kramsch, 2005; Menard-Warwick, 2014).

The findings of this research are consistent with the growing significance of intercultural identity, particularly in conditions of our 'globalized village' (Yang, 2017). As Menard-Warwick (2008) indicates, intercultural identity forms its basis in international contexts with experiences, which was confirmed in this study. That is, while the participants began their study-abroad journey with knowledge limited to their cultures, they were observed to invest in many other cultures during the semester as they got to know more people. Even Mila, who lived in Serbia, where the culture was very similar to hers, invested in embracing the two cultures' similarities while investigating the differences with a critical observation. Moreover, navigating their emergent intercultural identity showed that the participants bonded with two or more cultural communities

(Chen, 2017) while acknowledging that an effective interaction was necessary for them to blend into their environment (Byram, 1997).

According to the literature, intercultural identity is a combination of cultural belonging and cultural adaptability. The concepts of "*acculturation*" and "*deculturation*" proposed by Kim (2008) and "*viewing the world through multiple cultural lenses*" proposed by Menard-Warwick (2008, p. 622) are in line with the experiences of pre-service EFL teachers of this study who took part in a study-abroad program. The findings revealed that such a program has noteworthy contributions for cultivating personal development, improving adaptability, and cultivating cultural awareness. None of the participants were able to meaningfully interpret or reflect on their experiences abroad until they had undergone a period of cultural adaptation within the host community. This indicates that, at first, the participants found it difficult to comprehend or make sense of their environment, actions, or social interactions inside the host culture. They couldn't start thinking more clearly and insightfully about their experiences until they had adapted to the customs, rituals, and expectations of the new setting. In essence, the adaptation process gave them the perspective they needed to better understand their cross-cultural interactions. Vogt (2016) also regarded critical cultural awareness as a gain from studying abroad. In line with what Önen (2017) found, the study-abroad program helped the participants in this study develop academically, socially, personally, and professionally, as well as with language acquisition and cultural accumulation.

Following a general look at how scholars in the field evaluate intercultural identity and the ways in which it echoes this study, further detailed discussion with specific studies compared to the results of this study shall be given here. In general, considering the second research question, the findings in this study show how pre-service EFL teachers formed their intercultural identities during their study-abroad experiences, highlighting both commonalities and individual differences. Looking into the commonalities and differences in navigating the emerging intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers in this study, the themes shown in Figure 25 (see p. 168) will be discussed in this section:

Adaptation and cultural integration: This study's first and foremost component was adaptation and cultural integration. Participants' emotional reactions to cultural difficulties differed. Individual variations in coping strategies and resilience are reflected

in the frustration or alienation felt by some (participants Elif and Güneş), while others saw such difficulties as chances for personal development (participants Burak and Mila).

As Fernández-Agüero and Garrote (2019) argued, the participants developed and used specific strategies to ease their adaptation process, and these strategies provided a more successful process for developing an intercultural identity. All four participants' strategies were in line with the ones that Yang (2017, p. 534) offered to promote the intercultural identity development of foreign language teachers. Accordingly, 'learning an additional language' was a savior for them to blend into the local culture easily. This was visible, especially with Burak and Mila, who advanced in the local language throughout the whole semester. However, this did not mean the other two did not develop their identity. They needed to try other strategies along the way. Following Yang's proposed strategies, he also mentioned 'undertaking cultural immersion' as participating in cultural acts. This was significant in each case. The more the participants became curious about the culture, the better and faster they adapted. Finally, 'promoting multicultural education in and outside of classroom settings' was another strategy driven from the data that was very helpful for the participants here in blending, especially into the educational environment. An example of this could be the participant (Mila) who came up with a 'speaking club' idea at school and offered it to a professor. In addition, she visited the schools where her Serbian classmates did their internships and observed their teaching practices. The outcome of these actions was blending in effortlessly. The participants who took these kinds of actions made new friends and created a welcoming environment for themselves.

Other than the strategies mentioned above, *creating a new comfort zone* was found to be a significant strategy, salient to this study, which the participants used to blend into their environments, which appears to be absent in the related literature. The participants first created perceptions in their intercultural environments. Then, taking and/or receiving the first steps in interactions held importance, all of which led to creating a new comfort zone. In their cross-cultural study, Gu and Benson (2015) revealed that individuals depend on immediate contextual factors to shape identity. They indicate, "Engagement, alignment, and imagination operate simultaneously in pre-service teachers' identity construction, mutually influencing and shaping meanings and practices across different dimensions" (p.199). For example, in this study, Elif, imagining a scene from a Sherlock

Holmes book in front of her dorm window, was a good example for this case. She bought flowers and put them in front of the window. These actions made her recreate her comfort zone in a foreign environment and made her new environment more likeable.

In Aydın's (2012) study, the Erasmus program enhanced participants' views toward culture and leisure activities, as well as their language skills and knowledge, professional and personal development, and more. In this study, by creating a new comfort zone, the participants were observed to create a new lifestyle. They began to get to know that they were capable of doing more. Burak, for example, became more outgoing and extroverted. He thought he would never be comfortable with that many people around, but he ended up having tea parties in his Polish friends' grandparents' house in a small village. Aydın's (2012) study also raised some possible issues with formality, the process of adaption, and language and cultural disparities. Here, the participants also had challenges, but they were in a constant effort for solutions by not seeing the challenges as problems. Everybody found their own way.

It can be seen that establishing an intercultural identity largely depends on engagement in the host culture. It becomes essential for pre-service teachers to adjust to new social customs, languages, and practices. This is consistent with the "*stress-adaptation-growth*" cycle proposed by Kim (2008), in which individuals overcome obstacles, adapt to new cultural contexts, and develop both personally and professionally. Increased awareness of different cultures and the capacity to negotiate various cultural viewpoints come from these experiences. In relation to this, Fernández-Agüero and Garrote (2019) mention that the pre-service teachers in their study tended to avoid any intercultural interactions in their settings, and this could be because the participants lacked intercultural expertise in other natural settings. They had no opportunity to connect with another kind of identity except for professional identity. In this study, for example, Elif was seen to avoid intercultural interaction for a while. It took some time for her to break that until she found herself in random interactions with local students and became friends with them. This demonstrates that not everyone's path is the same.

Lastly, following from the challenges, participants' emotional reactions to cultural challenges are consistent with the findings of Tian and Lowe (2014), who found that American students in China went through cycles of stress, cultural naivety, and eventual

adaption. They were also seen to acquire the skills of "individualization," which is the elimination of stereotypes and acceptance of each person as unique, and "universalization," which is the recognition of the similarities between themselves and other cultural groups. Both skills took place as an outcome in this study. For instance, Burak had challenges with his roommate from a different culture. Burak is an only child living with his parents in Eskişehir. Thus, having challenges with his roommate can also be linked to the fact that he never had a roommate. However, in time, he started to empathize and changed his approach toward him more smoothly. Ultimately, he accepted the roommate as a unique person and embraced the companionship. Moreover, this study shows that individuals' emotional reactions varied, with some exhibiting instant adaptability and others experiencing severe cultural dissonance. For example, it was easier for Mila to adapt to the intercultural environment because the culture and the traditional environment were almost the same as the Turkish one. On the other hand, Elif had a severe dissonance due to her frustration coming from the way people stared at her because she wore a headscarf. In time, she developed a coping mechanism and approached them with empathy, and she stopped her constant observations about their looks.

A sense of belonging in an intercultural environment: This category is connected to 'adaptation and cultural integration,' but during the mid-semester, 'a sense of belonging' emerged as another category. This is salient to this study as there is no mention of it in the literature.

Although the extent of cultural involvement differed, blending into the intercultural environment and gaining a sense of belonging through interactions were important for the participants to construct an intercultural identity, especially in the mid-semester. Some participants maintained more surface-level participation, frequently limited by random interactions and limited activities, while others fully embraced the host culture by taking part in local activities and forming relationships with members of the host community. Eventually, they frequently mentioned how they felt they 'belonged' during their reflections. For example, cooking dinner and eating together with many different nationalities in the shared kitchen of the dormitory was the moment when Burak had a sense of belonging. This experience led to further confidence in his actions as well.

However, it must be mentioned that the ones who took part in cultural activities (Burak and Mila) were found to have a smoother process in developing intercultural identities.

Verbal and nonverbal communication: The results of this study have highlighted the preservice EFL teachers' use of verbal and nonverbal communication as they negotiate their developing intercultural identities in their study-abroad journey. This supports Yang's (2017) framework, which states that verbal and nonverbal communication are vitally important for the successful construction of such an identity.

After the cultural accommodation and blending process, the next building block of the intercultural identity of the participants in this study was communication. Language stood as a bridge during their intercultural identity development. All participants emphasized the importance of language in promoting cross-cultural communication, making it a uniting factor. For Burak, Güneş, and Elif, the shared kitchen at the dormitory, where many internationals had a chance to communicate, was a uniting place. Moreover, meaningful contacts and the negotiation of intercultural understanding were made possible through language. The increasing curiosity of Mila, the half-Serbian and half-Pakistani student's British accent, and intercultural experiences are a good fit for the topic of *verbal and nonverbal communication*. She was very proud that she learned new phrases from the students and improved her understanding of the British accent, which she liked. The results were similar to a Chinese context, where Zhang and Wang (2022) found that along with gaining educational advantages, pre-service EFL teachers were found to increase language proficiency and knowledge as well as intercultural competency and cultural awareness. Making use of non-verbal communication and improving verbal communication was vital for the emergent intercultural identity.

Communication and language skills are essential for fostering intercultural identities. In consistency with Aydın's (2012) study, the participants' studying abroad experience boosted self-esteem, lessened communication anxiety, and raised understanding of the contextual usage of English as a second language in the target nation. By employing verbal and non-verbal communication skills, the participants here engraved their intercultural identities. For example, Elif and Güneş paid special attention to their vanished anxiety when talking about their cultural elements and traditions in a classroom environment. Elif was happy to talk about the Muslim Festival of Sacrifices

with correct vocabulary and gain confidence in introducing her religious outlook in the class. On the other hand, they all mentioned becoming aware of the contextual use of English throughout their journey. While using advanced English in a classroom environment and improving their language skills, they learned to modify their English by communicating in single words or talking slowly with people with low English skills.

Lastly, in terms of non-verbal communication, Yang (2017) appears to be the only one in the related literature who linked it to the framework of intercultural identity development as a significant component. This study echoes his framework, and thus, the results are very special. Non-verbal communication was a savior for the participants in this study. Especially until they adapted to their environment or learned the local language, they made use of mimes, gestures, visuals, and most importantly, translating apps. They were challenged by the store cashiers and staff in dormitories and student affairs at school. Burak and Mila decided to advance in the local language in order to prevent further challenges, while the other two participants improved their non-verbal communication. This demonstrates that although they went through similar paths on the way to successful intercultural identity, each one created their own comfort zone and strategies.

Motivations and pre-existing dispositions: The extent to which the participants build their intercultural identities is greatly influenced by their early receptivity to new experiences and their drive to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Meaningful growth throughout their study-abroad experience is facilitated by an intrinsic curiosity about different cultures and a readiness to accept ambiguity and change. Güneş participated in local festivals and even volunteered in one while Burak attended a religious ceremony in a church with his Polish best friend. It made them become more motivated and blend into their environment more quickly. These components work together to facilitate the complex and continuous process of developing an intercultural identity.

Moreover, throughout the process, the participants solidified their intercultural identity by testing the learned local language and testing their pre-existing dispositions. Regarding language, Burak's motivation was the Polish language while blending in, and he got more motivated as he practiced his Polish with the families of his Polish friends.

About the judgments, for example, although Elif felt judgmental looks from local people and labeled them as cold, she changed those prejudices as she made a couple of good local friends through some random coincidences.

Interactions across cultures: Handling challenges and finding resolutions in cultural integration was significant for participants in their study-abroad journey. Participants frequently experienced cultural dissonance, including linguistic barriers and divergent social standards. According to Kim's (2008) stress-adaptation-growth model, this called for cycles of growth and adaptation. These difficulties turned into crucial times for reflection and identity development. This research demonstrates that intercultural identity development entails negotiating cultural belonging and adopting different cultural lenses through interactions with different cultures, which is consistent with Menard-Warwick's (2008) findings.

Following the challenges in the cycle of intercultural identity development, in Önen's (2017) study, the challenges were communication and socializing, the differences in the education systems, language problems, economic problems, and culture shock. In this study, the participants also faced some of these challenges, but they mostly focused on turning the challenges into gains. For example, differences in the education system were a chance for Güneş to ask for help from classmates who were too shy to talk to her before. Accordingly, Güneş was supposed to take quizzes every week, which was not the case in her home University in Türkiye. As a result, she frequently consulted her classmates about the quizzes. In this way, however, she was able to interact and make her way to blend into the classroom environment.

In terms of the benefits of intercultural interactions, this study was in line with what Arfiandhani and Suraya's (2021) study revealed, which was that the participants had developed an understanding of different countries and cultures. Burak, for example, had never thought of living with a Chinese person before, but thanks to this journey, he got a chance to interact with a very different culture. Moreover, in both studies, according to the data, intercultural interactions seemed to have a positive influence on language development, particularly in enhancing English proficiency and familiarity with the local language.

Finally, Larzén-Östermark's study (2021) brought out the topic of 'casual conversations' as a benefit for pre-service EFL teachers in their study-abroad processes. This was also very salient in this study. Casual conversations played a significant role, especially in Elif's intercultural identity development. As Elif liked traveling, she usually made friends on the rides, and this made her enjoy her interactions and gain confidence in taking the first steps to interact. Speaking of taking the first steps, Larzén-Östermark also asserted that the intercultural outcomes of studying abroad for pre-service EFL teachers were highly dependent upon the actions they take and the conversations they initiate, as well as the activities they take part in. This was very true for all participants. Güneş, for example, waited to be approached by her classmates at first, but then, as she empathized with them and realized that they could also be too shy to talk to her, she took the first steps to approach them.

Self-reflection and intercultural awareness: Larzén-Östermark (2011) claims that the studying abroad journey begins as studying abroad to learn a language and discover other cultures but "*ends in learning most about oneself*" (p. 455). In the final data, all participants mentioned how they developed personal growth by obtaining awareness and empathy, as well as broadened perspectives, among others.

The result of this study also agrees with what Varghese et al. (2005) indicated, that the intercultural identity of the pre-service EFL teachers is built in a social context, including both the individual self and the socially blended self. Every participant in this study showed an increase in cultural understanding and awareness, acknowledging and respecting various cultural customs and traditions with a broadened perspective and empathy toward other cultures. In line with Tütüncü's (2014) findings, the study-abroad experience affected their personal development with an increase in being 'self-confident, more flexible, more understandable, more tolerable, and a better communicator.' (p.87). In doing that, self-reflection became a common approach for overcoming cultural disparities among participants. According to Kim (2008), This reflective process promotes individuation and universalization by enhancing the understanding of one's own culture in relation to others. As participants balanced their own identities with the cultural dynamics of the world, they gained a more complex understanding of who they are in this study.

In literature, *intercultural awareness* has been considered an important dimension in intercultural identity development, and recognizing cultural similarities and differences is regarded as a must (Chen & Starosta, 1996). Byram (2008) also asserts that developing self-awareness of an individual's interculturality is of utmost importance to carrying out the rest of the process. Teachers' intercultural identity development journeys are seen to require intercultural self-awareness in addition to the cultural component of intercultural awareness (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Fernández-Agüero & Garrote, 2019). The teacher first needs to be empathetic and culturally aware (Yang, 2017). In relation to this, Fernández-Agüero and Garrote (2019) found that the pre-service teachers were naive and unaware of their intercultural identity, despite their apparent confidence in their professional lives and duties as future educators.

Similar to the results in Back's (2023) and Gieser's (2015) studies, intercultural awareness of the participants gradually increased regarding their and others' identities in this study. Every participant had different activities and actions to develop this awareness. For example, Burak frequently visited his friends' families' houses, while Elif had picnics with Kazakh girls many times and had a chance to see the similarities between both cultures. Moreover, just like in Back's findings, 'cultural excavation', which basically refers to observing and participating in cultural occasions, was found to be significant in intercultural identity awareness. The example of Güneş calling her Romanian friend to get more information about the Easter holiday tradition fits this case. Moreover, she was also able to compare a tradition in a church with her religious act and found praying over food to be a similarity that shows the significance of cultural excavation.

In terms of *personal growth*, in consistency with Sal-İlhan and Külekçi's (2022) study and Arfiandhani and Suraya's (2021) study, the Turkish pre-service EFL teachers in this study thought that their personal and cultural growth was one of the primary outcomes of the study-abroad journey that helped them accomplish intercultural identity development. The most common topic was learning how to cope with challenges and finding solutions during their study-abroad process, gaining improved confidence, adaptability, and independence. For example, each one built a new lifestyle away from their home. Güneş was challenged with the lack of water in her dormitory floor, which led her to interact with the local students and ask for help in their floor. On the other hand, Mila was challenged by the absence of exchange students in her university, which led her

to enroll in a Serbian language course and learn the local language. In addition, Burak learnt how to cope with crisis while living with a roommate from a different culture. He felt more confident in interacting with his roommate at the end of the semester.

Social and professional networks: Friendship dynamics was a very vital component of the emergent intercultural identity of the participants in this study. These networks introduced people to other cultural customs, encouraged cooperation, and offered assistance. According to Yang (2017), the dynamic interaction within these communities encourages the co-construction of intercultural identity. As Burr (1995) and Fernández-Agüero and Garrote (2019) suggested, the intercultural development of the participants required social contexts. Without a network initially, they had a massive challenge in blending into their environment. Meaningful exchanges that shaped multicultural identity were facilitated by interactions with peers, other international students, and host community members. The necessity of this socialization process, including international interactions, was among the main findings of several research studies about intercultural identity development (Fotovatian, 2010; Ortaçtepe, 2015; Mutlu & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Reeves, 2018). Similarly, the participants in this study were found to prioritize social interactions throughout the journey. At the end of the study-abroad journey, leaving with long-term friendships was a mutual topic brought out by all participants.

For Burak, the most substantial dynamics that helped him grow were his friends from his dorm and his Polish mentor student, while for Mila, it was the classmates and people from the language course as she did not live in a dorm. On the other hand, for Güneş, it was both some classmates and Turkish people from her dorm, while for Merve, it was people from her dorm, including Turkish and Kazakh students.

Lastly, the administrators also played a significant role in creating a network with the participants. For example, Güneş frequently mentioned her professor walking with her on the way to their mutual street as a sincere act. In addition, Mila's Erasmus coordinator introduced her to the class, and Turkish students created a good start for a social network. On the other hand, Burak's international courses, including field trips to schools, made an impact on his professional skills. However, in Elif's case, it was somehow different. She had difficulties in reaching responsible coordinators at school during her semester, and teachers were not a big help. She could not manage to get the

correct information about the weekly quizzes and homework. Therefore, she was stressed and challenged at school. This might be closely connected to why she could not bond with her classmates, which demonstrates the importance of the dynamics at the school to welcome international students

All in all, the mediating role of language, friendships, adaptation to and a sense of belonging in the intercultural environment, and personal growth in general terms were in line with the findings of previous studies. It should be mentioned that the results are also consistent with Dervin and Jackson (2018) and Peker et al. (2020), who highlight the important role that international exchange programs like Erasmus+ play in promoting self-awareness and intercultural competence. The study's findings support and broaden earlier investigations on intercultural identity in the context of study-abroad and language instruction in order to reinforce interculturally competent EFL teachers (Spinelli & Dolci, 2008).

5.2 Investigation of the Factors Influencing Developing Teacher Identity

This study is important because it sheds light on the state and evolution of multicultural identity in relation to pre-service English teachers' perspectives in the setting of EFL. Finding the primary factors and particular instances that are closely connected to pre-service teachers' intercultural experiences is crucial when examining this developmental aspect. Therefore, the third research question, '*What are the factors that affect the intercultural identity development of pre-service EFL teachers?*' was vital to investigate and discuss. As a result of the data collected from the participants, six main factors were found to influence intercultural identity development (see Figure 26, p.): *sense of belonging, friendship dynamics, critical reflection, local language familiarity, non-verbal communication, and verbal communication*. Considering the literature behind it, it is also important to discuss its findings by comparing them to the related previous studies here.

In general, by conducting a systematic review, Chen et al. (2016) found that the main factors affecting the construction of intercultural identities of pre-service EFL teachers in EFL contexts are the *differences in language, values, and socialization*. In a similar vein, Fang et al. (2024) conducted a detailed analysis to find out the factors that

were dominant in developing Chinese pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural identity in study-abroad experiences and found several contextual factors. The factors that they found coincide with the factors found in this study. The first factor they found was being exposed to intercultural conflicts and differences in lifestyle. Just like in Fang et al.'s (2024) findings, the participants struggled with communication and miscommunication when trying to figure out answers. However, as time went on, they grew more at ease and perfected their *verbal communication* skills. By learning the local language, Burak and Mila, for example, interacted with their environment more comfortably. Although they were struggling with grocery shopping at first, they became more motivated as they understood and explained themselves in the local language. An additional factor that did not exist in Fang et al.'s study was *non-verbal communication*, which also contributed to the development of intercultural identity. The participants used mimes and gestures as well as translating applications until they completely adapted to their intercultural environment. Elif and Güneş benefitted from non-verbal communication frequently. That was the way they became more comfortable in expressing themselves in a dormitory and while shopping, for example. They also made use of translation apps even when using English. The more they communicated, the more confidence they obtained in initiating conversations in their environments.

In a similar vein, through self-reflection, the participants in this study also gained intercultural awareness after realizing that everyone handled situations differently. *Critical reflection* was also a vital factor contributing to intercultural identity development. As the participants reflected on themselves and became aware of the cultures around them, they were observed to break down their prejudgments toward different cultures and become open-minded, tolerant of other cultures, and empathetic. Critical thinking, self-awareness, language awareness, and an open mind were crucial for overcoming prejudices and stereotypes and navigating cross-cultural interactions while making sense of their experiences. (Byram, 2021; McConacy, 2022). Like in Fang et al.'s (2024) study, some participants mentioned that becoming a global citizen means cultivating critical perspectives outside the classroom.

As all participants lived in countries where English was being used as a foreign language, each one faced a language barrier due to the unknown local language. At that point, *local language familiarity* became important in boosting the pre-service EFL

teachers' intercultural identity development. The participants who were more into learning the local language were observed to adapt to their environment more easily. This factor was found to correspond only in Fang et al.'s (2023). Accordingly, due to their lack of investment in a new environment, "power relations" become a defining characteristic (Norton, 2013). They frequently exhibited avoidance tactics and a lack of willingness to communicate, even when faced with a small challenge. In this sense, Elif's case, where Elif avoided learning the local language for a long time, sets a good example. She tended to use avoidance and did not communicate with locals until she finally made some local friends. Additionally, their readiness to interact with the unknown (including the difficulties with regional dialects and jokes that do not fit the mold) taught them to appreciate the local culture. For example, the time when Burak figured out there was no correspondence to a sign language, which meant 'very delicious' in Turkish culture, after eating in a local Polish household was a good example of this. Later, he curiously asked his Polish friend about what to say at a dinner table in Polish culture and learned to appreciate a different culture.

Kaçar (2021) calls the emergence of intercultural identity a transformative process. Following this process, the participants in her study were observed to become more open to receiving different perspectives and developing awareness of intercultural contexts after the Comenius language assistantship program. In this study, it can also be seen as a transformative process. In relation to this, a *sense of belonging* was a significant factor in the participants' intercultural identity construction process. The more they felt a sense of belonging, the more they blended into their intercultural environment. Individual efforts worked for some participants. For example, during the first weeks, Elif had difficulty blending in, but she later started observing her environment and changed her life. She liked the flower tradition of the culture and bought one for her room. After some time, she began to speak for the flower with descriptions of how it liked its place, how it grew, or how it belonged to the window with a fantastic view. So, in a way, the flower described her belongingness. Moreover, in obtaining this sense, cultural experiences, approaches of locals, as well as the approaches of the peers and professors at the university were vital.

In Fang et al.'s (2023) study, developing understanding by taking part in different social activities was an important factor. Similarly, by actively participating in local and

international communities, the participants here invested in their intercultural identity, which broadened their perspective and sense of criticality. For example, Burak attended every activity of the ESN Erasmus student organization of the university and met many people. On the other hand, Mila was not lucky enough to have a special organization in her small city, but she voluntarily visited other classrooms where students learned the Turkish language and made friends. As a result, the social activities made them feel a part of their environment and develop a sense of belonging in the local community.

Throughout the process, *friendship dynamics* was another factor without which the participants had difficulty adapting and developing an intercultural identity. The dynamics at their accommodation and relations with local students greatly influenced this development. For example, the dinners that Burak prepared together with other international students in the shared kitchen of their dormitory made him feel at home while leading his confidence in communication skills to improve. Although this was not found as a factor in other studies, in this study, it was very salient in each case. It should also be mentioned that studying abroad was mentioned as a unique experience by the participants several times during the study. As they had unique friendships from different backgrounds, living in a different culture made them believe that they had developed an intercultural identity.

5.3 Intercultural Communication Competence as a Key Dimension

A significant component in the formation of pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural identities throughout their study-abroad experiences was intercultural communication. Like Fang et al.'s (2023) findings, communication was determined to be the primary aspect that aided in constructing their identity in this study. Both as a challenge and a bridge, effective communication in culturally different settings allows individuals to share ideas, values, and experiences that influence their developing intercultural identities. In this study, a theoretical toolkit by Yang (2017) for the development of TESOL teacher intercultural identity is taken as the basis, and the construction of identity is considered to be built through communication, following Byram's (1997) ICC model that involves interactions through communication. Therefore, discussing the ICC in a separate section was considered necessary. Theoretical frameworks such as Yang's (2017) intercultural identity development cycle emphasize

the importance of co-constructed intercultural interactions and verbal and nonverbal communication competence in identity construction.

Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) refers to the ability to effectively and appropriately communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Byram, 1997). Considering the initial perceptions of the participants about ICC, the first focus group interview should be mentioned. During the interview, when the participants were asked to talk about their thoughts on intercultural communication competence, it was revealed that only two of them were somewhat familiar with the concept. The responses highlighted different aspects of this concept. Accordingly, one participant connected ICC with the effective use of a foreign language by seeing language as a tool for communication. This perspective emphasizes the practical dimension of ICC, where linguistic skills are central to successful interaction in multicultural settings (Byram, 1997). On the other hand, by looking at the concept from a global perspective, another participant interpreted ICC as "being a world citizen" (Byram, 2008). This viewpoint reflects a broader understanding of ICC, encompassing language skills, openness, adaptability, and the ability to navigate cultural differences with respect and empathy. For this participant, ICC is tied to a sense of global belonging and responsibility, where one appreciates diversity and contributes to fostering connections across cultures.

There were unaddressed responses, which may indicate a lack of familiarity with the term or the need to explore its meaning further. Moreover, in relation to what Bouchard (2017) suggested, ICC is related to the ability to cope with differences. However, the participants did not have experience in intercultural environments before; thus, they were probably unable to take any action in case of a communication lapse. This highlights the importance of education and awareness in fostering ICC, as individuals may develop their understanding through exposure to and engagement with diverse cultures. However, participants' initial dispositions toward intercultural communication competence showed gradual change and development as they interacted with their intercultural environment during their study-abroad journey. Similar to what Saricoban and Oz (2014) and Zhang and Wang (2022) revealed, in addition to diverse cultural experiences, their study-abroad process provided the development of intercultural communication skills.

ICC involves more than language proficiency; it requires cultural awareness, adaptability, and a global mindset. While language skills are essential for clear communication, actual competence lies in understanding and respecting cultural nuances, fostering meaningful connections, and embracing diversity as a global citizen. As highlighted by the responses, ICC is both a skill set and a mindset that empowers individuals to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. Following this, the participants in this study obtained the capacity to demonstrate working knowledge about the differences between their home language and culture and that of others, as well as their communication skills and their attitude toward intercultural interaction with others. Moreover, the literature indicates that in terms of verbal communication in developing intercultural identity, it is important to communicate effectively and appropriately (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Wiseman, 2002). In this study, the participants emphasized the significance of verbal exchanges in overcoming cultural differences. Conversing with locals and other international students increased their language skills and cultural awareness. These interactions aided the growth of the abilities and knowledge described in Byram's (1997) model. These *savoirs* involved intercultural attitudes such as openness to other cultures and relativizing individuals' beliefs and behaviors; knowledge of social processes or people with different backgrounds; skills of interpreting and relating as well as discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. In different contexts, the participants were able to obtain the *savoirs*.

Fantini (2000) takes Byram's model's basics and adds a linguistic element, 'being proficient in the host tongue,' to describe the EFL teachers as having ICC. Although in this study, it was a strong component that boosted their intercultural identity development, the ones who did not intend to learn the local language with the local language also developed that kind of identity by developing other strategies. In terms of English Language, in line with Vu's (2020) and Fang et al.'s (2024) findings, the participants here became active users of knowledge rather than only consumers of the English language during their intercultural identity development process. They stopped seeing English only as a tool during their study-abroad contexts. They learned to accommodate their English language by seeing different uses of English. Their perceptions evolved with intercultural communication and language diversity around them. They gained language awareness. For instance, Burak noted that he has learned to pay attention to what others say in a

conversation. This aligns with Lee's (2009) study, which found communication-wise improvements in speaking and listening skills through interactions. Lee also calls this a transformation process, such as going from feeling more confident to encountering a perplexing situation and from critically reflecting to taking on new roles. One of Burak's critical incidents was a good fit for this finding, where Burak was stuck in a bus station at the end of his semester and confidently gathered the other people who were also waiting for the bus to find solutions by himself.

In looking at the outcomes of competence in verbal and non-verbal communication, it has been shown that empathy is essential for effective cross-cultural communication. Those who made an effort in this study to learn about other people's viewpoints could better negotiate cultural differences and form deep bonds. This was in line with Genç's (2018) findings of the key components: 'ambiguity tolerance', 'empathy', and 'open-mindedness' for developing ICC. Barrow (2023) finds that ICC development of pre-service EFL teachers who did not have former experience facilitated critical reflection, which led them to make sense of their experience and ICC development, just like what happened in this study. On the other hand, similar to what Genç (2018) found, the participants showed higher levels of tolerance for ambiguity. Ambiguity tolerance, empathy, and open-mindedness were the factors that predicted ICC.

Lastly, the discussion demonstrates that it would be challenging to develop an intercultural identity without all the abovementioned factors, unlike what Çelik (2018) claimed in his study. In his opinion, EFL teachers do not need to go abroad or be in contact with an English language user to build their intercultural identity and become aware of that, which is the opposite of what has been discussed throughout this study.

All in all, it has been clear that the ICC development of the participants in this study matches with the related literature in terms of its importance in the intercultural identity development process. Following the discussion of the literature and the result of this study regarding the intercultural identity of EFL teachers during their study-abroad journey, the conclusion should be addressed, and implications should be drawn in the next section.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of the Study

This study emphasizes how study-abroad experiences affect pre-service EFL teachers' intercultural identity formation. By immersing themselves in culturally varied contexts, participants overcame obstacles, adjusted to new standards, and developed a deeper understanding of their personal and professional identities. Self-reflection, interpersonal communication, cultural immersion, and program structure were important determinants of this development. The results confirm the importance of intercultural communication in this process, serving as a learning tool and a bridge that helps participants negotiate challenging cultural environments.

In this qualitative study, four Turkish pre-service EFL teachers' narratives about negotiating their developing intercultural identities during their study-abroad semester as exchange students are examined, considering Social Constructionism theory, underpinned by the theoretical toolkit of for TESOL teacher intercultural identity, as well as the intercultural communication competence model (Byram, 1997; Yang, 2017). Semi-structured interviews were utilized at the start, midway, and end of the study-abroad process. At the same time, reflective journals and critical incidents were collected every two weeks throughout the whole semester better to track the navigation of emerging intercultural identity negotiations and to obtain additional insight into the unexplored areas of intercultural identity.

Furthermore, two focus group interviews were conducted with the group before and after the exchange semester better to understand the participants' dynamic representations of intercultural identities. The interviews, reflective journals, and critical incidents were all part of the data-gathering process to guarantee a comprehensive contextualization and triangulation of the data. After the data was collected, the interviews were transcribed, coded, and reviewed using thematic analysis with a narrative approach paradigm (Barkhuizen, 2011; Braun & Clarke, 2006). To gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of EFL teachers' intercultural identity development in a Turkish context, the findings have been examined by considering each participant independently before integrating them.

Concerning the first research question about what the pre-service EFL teachers' dispositions toward their study-abroad experiences related to their intercultural identity are, the first round of data collection revealed the initial perspectives and experiences of the participants. All participants expected to become a different person while developing an intercultural identity during a semester abroad in the focus group interview. They also foresaw that they would leave their comfort zone and become more open to communication. However, neither of them had an opinion about the intercultural communication competence concept. Throughout the first part of their study-abroad semester, they began creating perceptions in the intercultural environment, and their dispositions began evolving toward creating a new comfort zone, experiencing the first steps of interaction, and making use of verbal and non-verbal communication.

Regarding the second study question, which examines how EFL teachers' intercultural identity development trajectories unfold in the course of study-abroad, the results showed that the preservice teachers expanded their network of support in developing their intercultural identity in three phases throughout their study-abroad semester. At the beginning of the semester, '*adaptation and cultural integration*' and '*verbal and non-verbal communication*' were the main concepts that began shaping a new identity for them. In mid-semester, '*a sense of belonging in an intercultural environment*,' '*motivations and pre-existing dispositions*,' and '*interactions across cultures*' were the categories that helped participants develop their intercultural identity. Finally, all participants' data showed that personal growth took place at the end of the semester. In this process, '*self-reflection and self-awareness*' and '*social and professional networks*' were the categories that supported their personal and professional growth as a part of their intercultural identity. Although the results were mostly consistent with the related literature, some categories were salient to this study. For example, '*creating a new comfort zone*' under the category of '*adaptation and cultural integration*' was a salient theme that appeared to have helped all participants in their emergent intercultural identity at the beginning of the semester. Moreover, the mid-semester category, '*a sense of belonging in an intercultural environment*,' was also nowhere to be found in previous studies, making it salient to this study.

As for the third study question about the factors that affect the formation of emerging intercultural identities, numerous layers are shown to be embedded in this

construction. Accordingly, six main factors were found to affect the development of the intercultural identity of the participants: *sense of belonging, friendship dynamics, critical reflection, local language familiarity, verbal communication, and non-verbal communication*. According to the thematic analyses, some of these layers are consistent with related literature, such as a *sense of belonging, critical reflection, verbal communication, and non-verbal communication*. Moreover, there were factors salient to this study that were revealed from the participants' journeys, *friendship dynamics*, and *local language familiarity* that became important factors in boosting their intercultural identity.

All in all, the study has concluded that in addition to intercultural communication competence, other elements such as adaptation and cultural integration, developing a sense of belonging in an intercultural environment, interactions across cultures, self-reflection and self-awareness, and social and professional networks within the intercultural contexts are crucial in the negotiation and construction of the emerging intercultural identities of pre-service EFL teachers. Along with these elements, the factors that affect the construction of the intercultural identity salient to this study were friendship dynamics and local language familiarity, compared to the related literature.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

In terms of the limitations of the study, firstly, the total number of participants, which meets the requirements of the multiple case study design, may represent one of the study's shortcomings. However, the participants' motives, goals, and journeys in navigating their emergent intercultural identities as pre-service EFL teachers during their study-abroad period have been varied with a tremendous amount of data. Similarly, subjectivity could be seen as a drawback, which is why the reliability of the data gathering and analysis process was further examined. In this regard, inter-raters on coded transcriptions, member-checking, and expert opinions have all been used openly.

Moreover, the participants shared somewhat similar backgrounds, notably their attendance at the same university. This commonality may have shaped their personal histories in ways that influenced the dynamics of the focus group interviews. For instance, prior familiarity or shared experiences could have affected how openly they expressed

their views, potentially leading to conformity, hesitation to challenge each other's opinions, or a reinforcement of similar perspectives. These factors might have introduced a degree of bias or limited the diversity of viewpoints during the discussions. As such, future researchers should consider the implications of participant homogeneity and explore whether a more varied participant pool could yield richer, more nuanced insights. Additionally, three of the participants were female, while only one was male. In order to have a variety of viewpoints and conceptualizations, it could be beneficial to include an equal number of both genders in further studies.

6.3 Implications of the Study

The conclusions of this study could direct future studies and pedagogical approaches regarding the intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers, and therefore, implications should also be mentioned here. Based on the conclusions of this study, the implications can be considered twofold: *implications for EFL teacher education programs* and *implications for study-abroad programs*.

❖ Implications for EFL teacher education programs:

First of all, this study highlights implications for teacher education programs. The integration of intercultural training would be the first implication here. This study suggests that teacher education programs should integrate intercultural competency training as a core curriculum component. Unlike intercultural communication training alone, intercultural competency encompasses a broader range of skills, including cultural awareness, empathy, adaptability, and the ability to implement inclusive teaching practices. By equipping pre-service teachers with these competencies, programs can better prepare them to navigate diverse classroom environments, address cultural differences sensitively, and foster inclusive learning spaces. The benefits persist as these teachers transition into in-service roles, enabling them to engage more effectively with students and families from various cultural backgrounds and contribute to more equitable educational outcomes.

Promoting reflective practices would be another important implication as the results of this study showed the importance of reflection in developing an intercultural

identity. To assist participants in processing and learning from their experiences, EFL teacher education programs should incorporate structured reflection exercises such as journaling or group discussions. In addition, promoting openness and resilience for pre-service EFL teachers would also be a very significant implication of this study. Pre-service teachers should be encouraged to welcome ambiguity and approach study-abroad opportunities with an open mind. Building resilience will enable them to overcome challenges and see them as opportunities for personal development during their study-abroad period. In order to accomplish this, offering an elective course in the EFL teacher education programs regarding interculturality and intercultural communication would be beneficial. It would be beneficial to include an elective course on interculturality and intercultural communication in EFL teacher education programs. In universities where such courses do not yet exist, introducing them would fill a curricular gap, while in programs where they already exist, expanding the content to include themes such as intercultural identity construction, self-awareness, and critical reflection would further enhance their impact. These additions would help pre-service teachers develop greater awareness of their evolving teacher identities and equip them with practical strategies to foster intercultural understanding in their future classrooms. Pre-service teachers could use such a course as a hands-on opportunity to interact with important ideas about culture, identity, communication styles, and global perspectives. By designing the course with an interactive syllabus—including group discussions, role plays, intercultural case studies, collaborative projects with international peers, and reflective activities—teacher candidates would gain meaningful opportunities for cross-cultural interaction and critical self-reflection. This course could also integrate online meetings with Erasmus+ partner institutions, allowing students to exchange knowledge and experiences with peers abroad, even without physical mobility. Moreover, online intercultural exchanges with existing Erasmus partners could strengthen ongoing collaboration and broaden students' intercultural engagement. Through these experiences, pre-service EFL teachers can become more culturally sensitive, enhance their cross-cultural communication abilities, and cultivate inclusive attitudes—all of which are critical in today's multicultural and multilingual classrooms. The courses can provide diverse interaction opportunities by including an interactive syllabus. In this way, encouraging participants to engage with peers worldwide and in local communities will improve their intercultural communication abilities and extend their cultural horizons.

For education policymakers, supporting exchange programs would be the right implication, given their importance in developing intercultural competency and equipping teachers for increasingly globalized classrooms. Therefore, policymakers should prioritize international exchange programs in teacher education. By strengthening international exchange programs, policymakers can support the development of internationally competent educators who can successfully navigate a variety of cultural contexts. In addition to improving students' educational experiences, this meets the growing need for culturally sensitive instruction in societies that are becoming more diverse. In addition, to maximize the advantages of intercultural education, efforts should be made to guarantee fair access to study-abroad opportunities, especially for students from underrepresented backgrounds. This equity in access policy would benefit the internationalization of the country and the pre-service teachers equally.

❖ **Implications for study-abroad programs:**

In addition to insights gained from education programs, it's crucial to explore how we can adjust pedagogy for study-abroad initiatives. One question here would be, '*What kind of implications are there for Erasmus's outgoing students?*' because it is important to prepare the students beforehand so that they would be ready for challenges and aware of the new type of identity they would develop. This would soften the adapting process in intercultural contexts. At this point, structured support systems are necessary in the Universities. Programs should incorporate mentoring, cultural workshops, and orientation sessions to assist Study-abroad program participants in adjusting to the challenges of living and studying in a new cultural setting. For international offices of the Universities, adding an extra orientation meeting for outgoing students, including experience-sharing with former students, would be beneficial to hear the first-hand experiences.

Pre-service EFL teachers incorporate these experiences into their developing professional identities in addition to developing intercultural competence. This gives them the tools they need to create inclusive learning environments and use culturally sensitive teaching methods. To optimize their developmental potential, study-abroad programs must provide individualized support due to individual variances in adaptability, emotional reactions, and program involvement. Following this importance, international offices at international Universities in Türkiye and abroad can be informed about the

importance of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) / Erasmus Student Club and the volunteer students in forming buddy/mentorship programs for incoming Erasmus students. These offices can also be encouraged to support their ESN Clubs. In this study, it was apparent that the participant who had buddy support (Burak) was able to overcome challenges and adapt to the intercultural environment more easily.

Furthermore, emphasis on early identity formation must be drawn for intercultural identity research. To comprehend how these experiences influence long-term professional practices, future research should examine the early phases of intercultural identity development in various situations. Comparative studies would be a great help because a deeper understanding of the elements impacting multicultural identity development can be gained by comparing various study-abroad programs and cultural situations.

Lastly, stakeholders in study-abroad and teacher education programs can promote the growth of interculturally competent teachers who are prepared to handle the challenges of a worldwide educational environment by addressing these consequences. This study highlights the significance of intercultural identity as a dynamic construct that fosters human development and empowers educators to design inclusive and productive learning environments.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUP AND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (ORIGINAL TURKISH VERSION)

A. Odak Grup Görüşmesi Soruları – I (Süreçten Önce)

1. Daha önce hiç kendi kültürünüzün dışındaki kültürlerde tanışma/yaşama şansınız oldu mu?
2. Farklı kültürlerin etkileşimde olduğu bir ortamda yaşamının/egitim almanın avantajları nelerdir sizce?
3. Kültürlerarası iletişim yeterliliği (Intercultural Communication Competence) kavramına aşina mısınız?
 - a. Bunu nasıl tarif edersiniz?
4. ‘Kültürlerarası Kimlik’ (Intercultural Identity) kavramı sizde ne çağırıştırıyor?
 - a. Bu 2 terimi size kısaca açıklamak isterim, sonrasında tartışalım.
5. Kültürlerarası bir ortamda bir sohbet başlatabileceğinizi veya başkalarıyla rahat bir şekilde tanışabileceğinizi düşünüyor musunuz? Hangi şekillerde?

B. Bireysel Görüşme Soruları- I (Süreç Başı)

Bölüm I.

Zoom toplantısı selamlaşma ile başlar. Görüşmeci kendini tanıtır, çalışmanın amacını hatırlatır ve görüşülen kişilere görüşmenin kayıt altına alınacağını hatırlatır.

Erasmus+ döneminiz boyunca yurt dışında eğitim deneyiminizi ve bunun kültürlerarası kimliğinizi nasıl etkileyebileceğini keşfetmeyi çok merak ettiğim için, bu toplantıda şu ana kadarki deneyimlerinize ilgili bazı sorular sormaktan büyük mutluluk duyarım. Bu görüşme yaklaşık 30 dakika sürecektir. Şimdiden teşekkür ederim.

Bölüm II.

1. Bu sizin ilk kez yurt dışında eğitim deneyiminiz mi?
 - a. İlk duygularınız ve izlenimleriniz neler?

2. Kùltùrlerarası bir ortamda ilk kez mi bulunuyorsunuz?
 - a. İlk duygularınız ve izlenimleriniz neler?
3. Erasmus+ deęişim döneminiz için hangi ùlkede/şehirde yaşıyorsunuz?
 - a. Bu ùlkeyi seçmenizin özel bir nedeni var mı?
4. Kentin kùltùrlerarası ortamını nasıl tanımlarsınız?
5. Erasmus+ deęişim döneminiz için hangi üniversitede eğitim görüyorsunuz?
 - a. Üniversite hayatına dair ilk izlenimleriniz neler?
6. Üniversitenin ve kaldığınız yerin kùltùrlerarası ortamını nasıl tanımlarsınız?
7. Henüz yeni insanlarla tanışma fırsatınız oldu mu?
 - a. Yerliler miydi yoksa uluslararası öğrenciler mi?
8. Yeni insanlarla tanıştığınız veya kùltùrlerarası bir ortamda bulunduğunuz bazı spesifik durumları bana anlatabilir misiniz?
 - a. Konuşma nasıl başladı?
 - b. Bunu kim başlattı?
 - c. Konuşma size ne hissettirdi?
9. Günlük yaşamdan herhangi bir şey dikkatinizi çekti mi ya da yaşadığınız yerle ilgili merakınızı artırdı mı?
 - a. Cevabınız evet ise bana bundan bahseder misiniz?
10. Bugüne kadar günlük yaşamınızı ve farklı kültürel kökenden insanlarla olan etkileşimlerinizi nasıl tanımlarsınız?
11. İnsanlarla iletişime geçmeniz gereken anlardan birkaç örnek verebilir misiniz?

- a. Onlar kimdi?
 - b. İletişimi nasıl başlattınız?
 - c. İletişime geçme nedeni neydi?
 - d. Onlarla iletişime geçtiğinizde neler hissettiniz?
12. Farklı kültürel kökenden gelen kişilerle kültürlerarası iletişim kurmaya çalıştınız mı?
- a. Kiminle?
 - b. Durum neydi?
13. Ev sahibi ülkenize geldiğinizden beri hiç kendi ülkenizi ve kültürünüzü özlediniz mi?
- a. Kendi ülkeniz ve kültürünüz ile ilgili neyi veya neleri özlediniz?
14. İngilizceyi kullanmakta zorlandığınız bir zamanı bana anlatabilir misiniz?
- a. Bununla nasıl başa çıktınız?
15. Herhangi bir etkinliğe katıldınız mı?
- a. Yalnız mıydınız?
 - b. Değilse, kendi ülkenizden veya uluslararası kişilerden insanlarla birlikte miydiniz?
 - c. Bu bilerek yapılan bir seçim miydi?
16. Kültürlerarası ortamınızda rahatsız edici bir şey yaşadınız mı? Bu durumla nasıl başa çıktınız?
17. Kültürlerarası ortamınızda kendinizi rahat hissettiğiniz şeyler nelerdi?

18. Ev sahibi ülkenize geldiğinizden bu yana yaşadığınız kültürlerarası deneyimleriniz hakkında başka bir şey eklemek ister misiniz?

19. İkinci görüşme için tekrar buluşana kadar kültürlerarası yaşamınızın nasıl olacağını düşünüyorsunuz?

Bölüm III.

Çok teşekkür ederim. Kültürlerarası bir ortamda yurt dışı eğitim hayatınızın ilk haftalarını kapsayan röportajımız burada sona eriyor. Bu deneyimler çok değerli. Şu ana kadar yaşadıklarınıza ilişkin eklemek istediğiniz başka bir şey var mı?

Dönem ortasında yapacağınız bir sonraki görüşme için sizinle e-posta veya WhatsApp yoluyla iletişime geçmemin bir sakıncası olur mu?

C. Bireysel Görüşme Soruları- II (Süreç Ortası)

I. Bölüm

Zoom toplantısı selamlaşma ile başlar. Görüşmeci kendini tanıtır, çalışmanın amacını hatırlatır ve görüşülen kişilere görüşmenin kayıt altına alınacağını hatırlatır.

Erasmus+ döneminiz boyunca yurt dışında eğitim deneyiminizi ve bunun kültürlerarası kimliğinizi nasıl etkileyebileceğini keşfetmeyi çok merak ettiğim için, bu toplantıda en son görüşmemizden dönem ortasına kadarki deneyimlerinizle ilgili bazı sorular sormak isterim. Bu görüşme yaklaşık 30 dakika sürecektir. Şimdiden teşekkür ederim.

II. Bölüm

1. Dönem ortasına kadar tanıştığınız arkadaşlarla iletişiminiz nasıldı?

a. İlk duygularınız ve izlenimleriniz nelerdir?

b. En çok hangi an ve durumlarda arkadaş edindiniz?

2. Çokkültürlü ortamlarda başkaları nasıl iletişim kuruyor?

- a. Bu konudaki duygularınız ve izlenimleriniz nelerdir?
3. Yerel halkla hangi durumlarda iletişime geçmeniz gerekti?
- a. Kurduğunuz iletişimi nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?
4. Hangi ortamlarda iletişim konusunda daha rahattınız?
- a. Neden? Hangi açılardan?
5. Sınıf arkadaşlarınızla ne zaman iletişim kurmaya başladınız?
- a. Konuşmaların içeriği neydi?
- b. Arkadaşlarınızın ulusal/uluslararası olmalarının kurduğunuz iletişime bir etkisi var mıydı?
6. Dönemin ortasına kadar günlük yaşamınızda size başta farklı gelen fakat şu anda alıştığınız şeyler nelerdir?
7. Peki, okulda ya da sınıfta size başta farklı gelen fakat şu anda alıştığınız şeyler nelerdir?
8. Konakladığınız yerle ilgili biraz konuşalım.
- a. Nerede konaklıyorsunuz?
- b. Oda arkadaşınızla iletişiminiz nasıl?
9. Kaldığınız yerde başka insanlarla tanışma fırsatınız oldu mu?
- a. Evet ise, ne gibi durumlarda iletişim kurdunuz?
- b. İletişiminiz hangi sebeple başladı?
- c. Bir aradayken kendinizi nasıl hissettiniz?

10. Kaldığınız yerle ilgili gözlemleriniz nelerdir? (Sevdiğiniz, sevmediğiniz, şaşırdığınız şeyler... vb.)
11. Sınıfta farklı kültürlerden gelen kişilerle kültürlerarası iletişim kurmaya çalıştınız mı?
- a. Kimlerle?
- b. Hangi durumlarda/konularda?
12. Ev sahibi ülkenize geldiğinizden beri kendi ülkenizi ve kültürünüzü özlediniz mi?
- a. Kendi ülkeniz ve kültürünüz ile ilgili neyi veya neleri özlediniz?
13. İngilizceyi kullanmakta ne kadar rahattınız? Bunu ilk geldiğiniz günlerle kıyaslayabilir misiniz?
14. Dönemin ortasına kadar herhangi bir etkinliğe katıldınız mı?
- a. Yalnız mıydınız?
- b. Yalnız değilseniz, kendi ülkenizden veya başka ülkelerden gelen kişilerle mi birlikteydiniz?
- c. Bu seçimi bilerek mi yaptınız? Neden?
15. Kültürlerarası ortamınızda rahatsız edici bir şey yaşadınız mı? Bu durumla nasıl başa çıktınız?
16. Kültürlerarası ortamınızda kendinizi rahat hissettiğiniz şeyler nelerdi? Neden?
17. Bulunduğunuz kültürlerarası ortam ve iletişimleriniz hayatınızda nasıl bir etki yarattı?
18. Geldiğiniz ilk günden bu yana ev sahibi ülkede gösterdiğiniz, tutum, duygu, düşünce ve iletişim kurma biçiminizde herhangi bir değişiklik oldu mu? Örnek verebilir misiniz?

III. Bölüm

Çok teşekkür ederim. Kültürlerarası bir ortamda yurt dışı eğitim hayatınızın ilk yarısını kapsayan röportajımız burada sona eriyor. Bu deneyimleriniz çok değerli. Şu ana kadar yaşadıklarınıza ilişkin eklemek istediğiniz başka bir şey var mı?

D. Bireysel Görüşme (III) Soruları (Süreç Sonu)

Bölüm I.

Zoom toplantısı selamlaşma ile başlar. Görüşmeci çalışmanın amacını ve görüşülen kişilere görüşmenin kayıt altına alınacağını hatırlatır.

Erasmus+ döneminiz boyunca yurt dışında eğitim deneyiminizi ve bunun kültürlerarası kimliğinizi nasıl etkileyebileceğini keşfetmeyi çok merak ettiğim için, bu toplantıda artık sonuna geldiğiniz Erasmus+ yurtdışı eğitim tecrübenizle ilgili bazı sorular sormaktan büyük mutluluk duyarım. Bu görüşme yaklaşık 30 dakika sürecektir. Şimdiden teşekkür ederim.

Bölüm II.

1. Erasmus+ öğrenim hareketliliği döneminizin bitmiş olması size neler hissettiriyor?
2. Kültürlerarası ortamınıza yönelik özleyeceğiniz şeyler neler? Sizce neden?
3. Döneme ilk başladığınızda adapte olmakta zorlandığınız şeyler nelerdi? Sizce neden ve nasıl?
 - a. Sonrasında alışma sürecinizde neler etkili oldu? Örnek verebilir misiniz?
4. Okulda kurduğunuz iletişimlerde rahat mıydınız? Sizce neden ve nasıl?
 - a. Kültürlerarası iletişim becerilerinizi nasıl etkiledi?
5. Günlük yaşamdaki sokak kültüründe iletişim kurarken rahat mıydınız? Nasıl?

- a. K lt rlerarası iletiřim becerilerinizi nasıl etkiledi?  rnek verebilir misiniz?
6. S zs z iletiřim kurmak zorunda kaldığınız anlardan  rnekler verebilir misiniz? Sizce o anlarda neden s zs z iletiřime bařvurdunuz?
7. Sizce s zl  iletiřim kullanma beceriniz bařta ve sonda aynı mıydı?
 - a. Var ise, ne gibi farklılıklar vardı?
8. S re  boyunca daha  ok T rk arkadařınız mı oldu, yoksa uluslararası arkadařınız mı?
 - a. Sizce neden?
 - b. Kurduėunuz iletiřimler size neler hissettirdi?
9. Bu s recinizin ve k lt rlerarası etkileřimlerinizin gelecek planlarınıza etkileri neler olacak? Sizce neden?
 - a. Bu s recinizin ve k lt rlerarası etkileřimlerinizin yeni kiřiliėinize etkileri nasıl olacak?
10. T m s recinizi g z  n ne aldıėınızda k lt rlerarası farkındalık ve k lt rlerarası iletiřime y nelik ne kazandınız? Bakıř a ınızda neler deėiřti?

B l m III.

 ok teřekk r ederim. K lt rlerarası bir ortamda yurt dıřı eėitim s recinizin tamamına y nelik bu deneyimler  ok deėerli. S recinizin sonuna dair eklemek istediėiniz bařka bir řey var mı?

E. Odak Grup G r řmesi (II) Soruları (S re  Bittikten Sonra)

1. Daha  nce hi  tanımadığınız ve kendi k lt r n z dıřındaki k lt rlerle tanışmak ve yařamak sizce nasıl bir tecr beydi?

2. Farklı kültürlerin etkileşimde olduğu bir ortamda yaşamamanın/eğitim almanın avantajları sizce neler oldu? Örnek verebilir misiniz?
3. Geri dönüp sürecinize baktığınızda ‘keşke şöyle yapsaydım’ dediğiniz bir şey var mı? Neden?
4. Sizce yurt dışında eğitim görmenin kültürlerarası kimliğinizin gelişimine etkileri neler oldu?
 - a. Çok kültürlü ortamlar açısından?
 - b. Dil engeli açısından?
 - c. Okul ortamı açısından?
 - d. Sosyal aktiviteler açısından?
5. Genel olarak baktığınızda kültürlerarası etkileşime yönelik bakış açınıza ve farkındalığınıza yönelik ne kazandınız?
6. Eklemek istediğiniz başka bir şey var mı?

APPENDIX 2: FOCUS GROUP AND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (ENGLISH VERSION)

A. Focus Group Interview (I) Questions (Before Mobility)

1. Have you ever had the chance to meet/live in cultures other than your own?
2. What do you think are the advantages of living/studying in an environment where different cultures interact?
3. Are you familiar with the concept of Intercultural Communication Competence?
 - a. How would you describe this?
4. What does the concept of 'Intercultural Identity' remind you of?

a. I would like to explain these two terms to you briefly, then let's discuss.

5. How do you think you will develop your intercultural identity in the country you visit?

6. Do you think you can start a conversation or meet others comfortably in an intercultural environment? In what ways?

B. Individual Interview (I) Questions (Beginning of the Mobility)

Part I. Opening Schedule

The Zoom meeting starts with a greeting. The interviewer introduces himself/herself, reminds the purpose of the study, and reminds the interviewees that the interview will be recorded.

Since I am very curious to discover your experience of studying abroad during your Erasmus+ period and how this may affect your intercultural identity, I would be delighted to ask you some questions about your experiences so far at this meeting. This meeting will take approximately 30 minutes. Thank you from now.

Part II. Body Schedule

1. Is this your first time study-abroad experience?

a. What are your initial feelings and impressions?

2. Is this your first time being in an intercultural environment?

a. What are your initial feelings and impressions?

3. Which country/city are you living in for your Erasmus+ exchange semester?

a. Is there any specific reason that you chose that country?

4. How would you describe the intercultural environment of the city?

5. Which University are you studying at for your Erasmus+ exchange semester?

- a. What are your first impressions regarding university life?
6. How would you describe the intercultural environment of the University?
7. Have you had a chance to meet new people yet?
 - a. Were they locals or international students?
8. Could you tell me some specific situations where you met new people or happened to be in an intercultural environment?
 - a. How was the conversation initiated?
 - b. Who initiated it?
 - c. What did the conversation feel like?
9. Did anything from daily life take your attention/or increase your curiosity about where you live?
 - a. If yes, could you tell me about it?
10. How would you describe your daily life and interactions with people from various cultural backgrounds so far?
11. Could you tell me some examples of moments when you needed to contact people?
 - a. Who were they?
 - b. How did you initiate the contact?
 - c. What was the reason for the contact?
 - d. What were your feelings in contacting them?
12. Did you try to engage in intercultural communication with others from different cultural backgrounds?

- a. With whom?
- b. What was the case?
- 13. Have you ever felt homesick since you arrived in your host country?
 - a. If yes, could you describe the reasons?
- 14. Can you tell me a time when you felt challenging to use English?
 - a. How did you cope with that?
- 15. Did you take part in any activities?
 - a. Were you alone?
 - b. If not, were you with people from your home country or internationals?
 - c. Was this a choice on purpose?
- 16. Did you experience something that felt uncomfortable within your intercultural environment? How did you cope with the situation?
- 17. What were the things that you felt comfortable with within your intercultural environment?
- 18. Would you like to add anything else about your intercultural experiences since you arrived in your host country?
- 19. What do you think your intercultural life will be like until we meet again for the second interview?

Part III. Closing Schedule

Thank you very much. Our interview, including the first weeks of your study-abroad life in an intercultural environment, comes to an end here. These experiences are very valuable. Is there anything else that you would like to add regarding your experiences so far?

Is it okay if I contact you for the next interview, which will be in the middle of your semester, via e-mail or WhatsApp?

C. Individual Interview (II) Questions (During the Mobility)

Part I. Opening Schedule

The Zoom meeting starts with greetings. The interviewer introduces himself/herself, reminds the purpose of the study, and reminds the interviewees that the interview will be recorded.

As I am very curious to explore your experience of studying abroad during your Erasmus+ period and how it may have affected your intercultural identity, I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences from the last meeting until the middle of the semester in this meeting. This interview will last approximately 30 minutes. Thank you in advance.

Part II (Body Schedule)

1. How was your communication with the friends you met until the middle of the semester?

a. What were your first feelings and impressions?

b. In which moments and situations did you make the most friends?

2. How do others communicate in multicultural environments?

a. What are your feelings and impressions about this?

3. In what situations did you have to communicate with the local people?

a. How would you evaluate your communication?

4. In which environments were you more comfortable communicating?

a. Why? In what ways?

5. When did you start communicating with your classmates?

a. What was the content of the conversations?

b. Did the fact that your friends were national/international have an impact on your communication?

6. What things in your daily life seemed different to you until the middle of the semester, but you have gotten used to them now?

7. So, what things seemed different to you in school or in class, but you have gotten used to them now?

8. Let us talk a little about where you are staying.

a. Where are you staying?

b. How is your communication with your roommate?

9. Did you have the opportunity to meet other people where you were staying?

a. If yes, in what situations did you communicate?

b. What was the reason for your communication?

c. How did you feel when you were together?

10. What are your observations about where you are staying? (Things you liked, did not like, surprised you, etc.)

11. Did you try to communicate interculturally with people from different cultures in class?

a. With whom?

b. In what situations/subjects?

12. Have you missed your own country and culture since you arrived in your host country?

a. What did you miss about your own country and culture?

13. How comfortable were you with using English? Can you compare this to the days you first arrived?

14. Did you participate in any activities until the middle of the semester?

a. Were you alone?

b. If you were not alone, were you with people from your own country or from other countries?

c. Did you make this choice consciously? Why?

15. Did you experience anything disturbing in your intercultural environment? How did you cope with this situation?

16. What were the things that made you feel comfortable in your intercultural environment? Why?

17. How did the intercultural environment and your communications affect your life?

18. Have there been any changes in your attitudes, feelings, thoughts, and communication styles in the host country since the first day you arrived? Can you give an example?

Part III (Closing Schedule)

Thank you very much. This is the end of our interview covering the first half of your education abroad in an intercultural environment. These experiences are very valuable. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences so far?

APPENDIX 3: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL QUESTIONS/PROMPTS (ORIGINAL TURKISH VERSION)

YANSITICI GÜNLÜK I.

Bu günlük, sizin Erasmus Değişim Programı hareketliliğiniz sırasında yaşadığınız deneyimler hakkındaki düşüncelerinize yöneliktir. Lütfen cümleleri okuyun ve sağ sütuna anlatmaya başlayın. Sizden düşünmeniz istenen 10 durum var. Lütfen her birinde deneyiminizi düşünün ve en az 5 cümle ile anlatın.

KONU	GÜNLÜK GİRİŞLERİ
Buraya geldiğim ilk gün ne fark ettim?	
Burada tanıştığım ilk kişi kimdi ve hakkında neler öğrendim? (Meslek, statü, kişilik, vs.)	
Bu kişiyle ilk iletişimimiz ne şekilde başladı?	
Farklı kültürel kökenden gelen insanlarla bazı yollarla iletişim kurdum. Bunlar nelerdi?	

Etkileşim kurma konusunda zorlandığım an neydi?	..... ..... .....
Buranın kültürüne alışmak için yaptığım şeyler nelerdi?	..... ..... .....
Bu iki hafta içinde buradaki kültürle ilgili fark ettiğim bir şey neydi?	..... ..... .....
Buradaki kültür benimkine nasıl benziyor?	..... ..... .....
Buradaki kültür benimkinden nasıl farklı?	

İlk 2 haftamla ilgili unutamadığım şey/şeyler neydi?	
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YANSITICI GÜNLÜK II.

Bu günlük, sizin Erasmus Değişim Programı hareketliliğiniz sırasında yaşadığınız deneyimler hakkındaki düşüncelerinize yöneliktir. Lütfen cümleleri okuyun ve sağ sütuna anlatmaya başlayın. Sizden düşünmeniz istenen 10 durum var. Lütfen her birinde deneyiminizi düşünün ve en az 5 cümle ile anlatın.

Burada insanlarla en çok iletişim kurmamı gerektiliren anlar nelerdi?	..... ..... .....
Kurduğum iletişimdeki tutumumu nasıl değerlendiririm?	..... ..... .....
Okulumda tanıştığım ilk kişi kimdi ve nasıl tanıştım?	..... ..... .....

En çok katılım gösterdiğim derslerim hangileriydi ve ne şekilde katılım gösterdim?	..... ..... .....
Derse katılımlarımla ilgili aklımda kalan bir örnek de verebilirim.	..... ..... .....
Kültürlerarası Erasmus ortamına kendimi nasıl dahil ettim? Neler hissettim?	..... ..... .....
Başka kültürlere sahip yeni çevremle iletişim kurarken en çok hangi konuda zorlandım? Neden?	..... ..... .....
Burada iletişim kurarken en rahat hissettiğim anlar hangileriydi? Nasıl hissettim?	..... ..... .....
Şu ana kadar buradaki insanların	.....

iletişimiyle ilgili dikkatimi çeken 3 şey neydi? (Olumlu ve/veya olumsuz)	..... .....
Buradaki insanların günlük yaşantılarında gözlemlediğim ve en çok hoşuma giden 3 şey neydi? Neden hoşuma gitti?	..... ..... .....

YANSITICI GÜNLÜK III.

Bu günlük, sizin Erasmus Değişim Programı hareketliliğiniz sırasında yaşadığınız deneyimler hakkındaki düşüncelerinize yöneliktir. Lütfen cümleleri okuyun ve sağ sütuna anlatmaya başlayın. Sizden düşünmeniz istenen 10 durum var. Lütfen her birinde deneyiminizi düşünün ve en az 5 cümle ile anlatın.

Erasmus sürecimde bugüne kadar en eğlendiğim sohbet hangisiydi? Neden? Kiminle/kimlerle konuşuyordum? Neredeydim?	
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Genellikle tanıdığım ya da tanımadığım insanlara soru sormak zorunda kaldığım anlar nelerdi?	
İngilizce kullanmakta rahat hissetmediğim durum neydi? Detay vererek açıklayayım.	..... ..... .....
Günlük hayatımda sözlü iletişimden kaçındığım anlar nelerdi? Neden kaçındım?	..... ..... .....
Burada yeni tanıştığım kişilere ilk bahsettiğim konular nelerdi?	..... ..... .....
Okulda iletişimimin en iyi olduğu dersin hocası kimdi? Neden?	..... ..... .....
Burada geçirdiğim 2,5 ayın sonunda kendimde	.....

gördüğüm değişiklikler neler?	..... .....
Buradaki yaşantımda artık kendimi hangi alanlarda daha rahat hissediyorum? (örn. Konuşurken, plan yaparken)	..... ..... .....
Konuşurken en rahat hissettiğim arkadaşlarım kimler? Normal bir ortamda onlarla neler konuşuyoruz?	..... ..... .....
İçinde bulunduğum kültürlerarası ortamımda iletişim becerilerimde gördüğüm değişiklikler neler?	..... ..... .....

YANSITICI GÜNLÜK IV.

Bu günlük, sizin Erasmus Değişim Programı hareketliliğiniz sırasında yaşadığınız deneyimler hakkındaki düşüncelerinize yöneliktir. Lütfen cümleleri okuyun ve sağ sütuna anlatmaya başlayın. Sizden düşünmeniz istenen 10 durum var. Lütfen her birinde deneyiminizi düşünün ve en az 5 cümle ile anlatın.

Buradaki adaptasyon sürecim nasıl gelişti?	..... ..... .....
Buradaki kültürlerarası kimliğim nasıl gelişti? Süreçte neler değışti? Değerlendireyim.	..... ..... .....
Kültürel etkileşimlerim sonucu buradaki kültüre ait benimsediğim ve benim de hayatıma dahil ettiğim şeyler var mı? Varsa neler?	..... ..... .....
Benimsememin sebepleri neler?	..... ..... .....
Buradayken alıştığım ve Türkiye'ye döndüğümde yokluğunda zorlanacağım şeyler	..... ..... .....

neler? Neden zorlanacağım?	
Buradaki kültürlerarası etkileşimlerim hayatımda / hayata bakış açımda ne gibi değişikliklere sebep oldu?	..... ..... .....
Buraya geleli artık 4,5 ay oldu. Şu an rutin bir günüm nasıl geçiyor, neler yapıyorum?	..... ..... .....
Şu an samimi olduğum kişiler kimler? Nereliler? Birlikte nasıl vakit geçiriyoruz? Geçirdiğimiz vakit bana/hayatıma ne katıyor?	..... ..... .....
Sınıf arkadaşlarımla iletişimim nasıl? Konuşmaları genelde kim başlatıyor? Süreci kim yönetiyor?	..... ..... .....

Etkileşime katılımın nasıl?	
Bu bir dönemlik yurtdışı eğitim tecrübemle ilgili hep aklımda kalacak şeyler neler? Neden?	..... ..... .....

APPENDIX 4: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL QUESTIONS/PROMPTS (ENGLISH VERSION)

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL I.

This journal is about your reflection on the experiences you had during your Erasmus. Please read the prompts and continue the sentences in the journal entry column. There are 10 prompts for you to think about. Please think about the experience and talk about it in at least five sentences.

PROMPTS

JOURNAL ENTRIES

What did I notice the first day I came here?	
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Who was the first person I met here, and what did I learn about him? (Profession, status, personality, etc.)	
How did our first communication with this person begin?	
I communicated in some ways with people from different cultural backgrounds. What were these?	
What was the moment where I struggled to engage?	
What were the things I did to get used to the culture of this place?	

What is something I noticed about the culture here in these two weeks?	..... ..... .....
How is the culture here similar to mine?	..... ..... .....
How is the culture here different from mine?	..... ..... .....
What was/are the unforgettable things about my first 2 weeks?	..... ..... .....

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL II.

This journal is about your reflection on the experiences you had during your Erasmus. Please read the prompts and continue the sentences in the journal entry column. There are 10 prompts for you to think about. Please think about the experience and talk about it in at least five sentences.

What were the moments that required me to communicate with people the most here?	..... ..... .....
How would I evaluate my attitude in my communication?	..... ..... .....
Who was the first person I met at my school, and how did I meet them?	..... ..... .....
Which were the classes I attended the most, and how did I participate?	..... ..... .....

I can also give an example that I remember about my participation in classes.	..... ..... .....
How did I include myself in the intercultural Erasmus environment? What did I feel?	..... ..... .....
Which aspect did I have the most difficulty in communicating with my new environment of different cultures? Why?	..... ..... .....
Which were the moments when I felt the most comfortable communicating here? How did I feel?	..... ..... .....
What were the 3 things that caught my attention so far about the communication of people here? (Positive and/or negative)	..... ..... .....

What were the 3 things I observed in the daily lives of people here that I liked the most? Why did I like it?	
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REFLECTIVE JOURNAL III.

This journal is about your reflection on the experiences you had during your Erasmus. Please read the prompts and continue the sentences in the journal entry column. There are 10 prompts for you to think about. Please think about the experience and talk about it in at least five sentences.

What was the most enjoyable conversation I had during my Erasmus process so far? Why? Who was I talking to? Where was I?	..... ..... .....
What were the moments when I usually had to ask questions to people I knew or did not know?	..... ..... .....
What was the situation where I did not	.....

feel comfortable using English? Let me explain in detail.	..... .....
What were the moments when I avoided verbal communication in my daily life? Why did I avoid it?	..... ..... .....
What were the first topics I talked about to people I met here?	..... ..... .....
Who was the teacher of the course in which I communicated best at school? Why?	..... ..... .....
What are the changes I have seen in myself at the end of the 2.5 months I spent here?	..... ..... .....
In which areas do I feel more comfortable in my life here? (e.g., talking, making plans)	..... .....

	
Who are the friends I feel most comfortable talking to? What do we talk about with them in a normal environment?	..... ..... .....
What are the changes I have seen in my communication skills in the intercultural environment I am in?	..... ..... .....

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL IV.

This journal is about your reflection on the experiences you had during your Erasmus. Please read the prompts and continue the sentences in the journal entry column. There are 10 prompts for you to think about. Please think about the experience and talk about it in at least five sentences.

How did my adaptation process here develop?	
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How did my intercultural identity develop here? What changed during the process? Let me evaluate.	
As a result of my cultural interactions, are there things that I have adopted from the culture here and incorporated into my life? If so, what are they?	..... ..... .....
What are my reasons for adopting it?	..... ..... .....
What are the things that I got used to while I was here and will have difficulty without when I return to Turkey? Why will I have difficulty?	..... ..... .....
What kind of changes did my intercultural interactions here cause in	.....

my life/perspective on life?	..... .....
It has been 4.5 months since I came here. How do I spend a routine day right now? What do I do?	..... ..... .....
Who are the people I am close to right now? Where are they from? How do we spend time together? What does the time we spend add to me/my life?	..... ..... .....
How is my communication with my classmates? Who usually initiates the conversations? Who manages the process? How do you participate in the interaction?	..... ..... .....
What are the things that will always stay in my mind about this one-term	

study-abroad experience? Why?	
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APPENDIX 5: CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORT OUTLINE (ORIGINAL TURKISH VERSION)

Kritik Olay (I-II-III-IV).

1. Erasmus+ Değişim Programı hareketliliğiniz sırasında sizin için önemli olan bir deneyim seçin.

Sizi şaşırtan, tedirgin eden, sevindiren bir karşılaşma, hatta sizi derinden düşündüren bir olay olabilir. Bu karşılaşma veya olay sizinkinden farklı bir kültürden bireyleri da içermelidir.

2. Şimdi, onun hakkında yazmadan önce bu deneyime bir başlık verin.

Örneğin. 'Macaristan'da bir Polonyalı ile sohbet' veya 'Çöpü dışarı çıkarma deneyimim'

3. Son olarak deneyim hakkında düşünmenin zamanı geldi. Lütfen aşağıdaki talimatları izleyerek deneyiminizi yazın. Bu deneyim, bu özel kültürlerarası karşılaşmanızın ayrıntılarını fark etmenize yardımcı olacaktır. Dolayısıyla deneyiminizin olumlu ya da olumsuz olması önemli değildir.

İsim:

Şu anda yaşadığım Ülke ve Şehir:

Kritik Olay Numarası: ...

Bugünün Tarihi:

Başlık:

Yer:

Yaşadığım karşılaşma veya olay:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Önem:

Neden bu deneyimi seçtiniz?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Bu size ne hissettirdi? (Lütfen bir veya daha fazlasını veya diğer seçeneğini işaretleyin)

- Beni şaşırttı. ____
- Bana ilham verdi. ____
- Beni hayal kırıklığına uğrattı. ____
- Beni memnun etti. ____
- Beni kızdırdı/sinirlendirdi. ____
- Beni değiştirdi. ____
- Diğer: _____

Bu deneyim gerçekleştiğinde tepkiniz ne oldu? Lütfen ayrıntılı olarak açıklayın.

.....
.....

.....
.....

Bu deneyimle nasıl başa çıktınız? Lütfen ayrıntılı olarak açıklayın.

.....
.....
.....
.....

Bu deneyimin Kültürlerarası Kimliğinizi (Intercultural Identity) nasıl etkileyeceğini/etkilediğini düşünüyorsunuz? Lütfen ayrıntılı olarak açıklayın.

.....
.....
.....
.....

APPENDIX 6: CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORT OUTLINE (ENGLISH VERSION)

Critical Incident (I-II-III-IV).

1. Pick an experience that felt important to you during your Erasmus.

It could be an encounter that made you feel surprised, nervous, joyful, or even an occurrence that made you think deeply. This encounter should include others from a different culture than yours.

2. Now, title this experience before talking about it.

e.g. ‘A conversation with a Polish in Hungary’, or ‘My experience of taking the trash out’

3. Lastly, it is time to think about the experience. Please write down what happened by following the instructions below. This autobiography will help you realize the details

of this specific intercultural encounter of yours. Thus, it will not matter whether your experience is positive or negative. All are special.

Name.

The Country/City that I am studying in now.

Encounter number

Today's date:

Title:

Location:

Description:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Importance:

Why have you chosen this experience?

.....
.....
.....
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What did it make you feel? (Please tick one or more or other)

• It surprised me. ____

• It inspired me. ____

• It disappointed me. ____

- It pleased me. ____
- It angered/annoyed me. ____
- It changed me. ____
- Other: _____

What was your reaction as this encounter happened? Please explain in detail.

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How did you cope with this experience? Please explain in detail.

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How do you think this experience will affect/has affected your IC? Please explain in detail.

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APPENDIX 7: TRANSLATION TABLE FOR VERBATIM EXTRACTS

<i>Translation Table for Verbatim Extracts</i>		
Verbatim Extract Order and Page Number	Original Text	Translated Text
Mila (p. 78) (Focus Group Interview - 1)	<i>“Ya bence de zaten dili etkili kullanmak, hani İngilizceyi biliyoruz ama hani günlük hayatta çok sık kullanmadığımız için hiç böyle aklımıza gelmeyecek alanlarda kullanmamız gerekiyor. Mesela dün telefon hattı almaya gittim, dondum kaldım. Nasıl hiçbir şey hani telefon tarifi, telefon hattı ne diyeceğim bilmiyorum ve bunları bilmediğimi fark ettim. Bunları öğrenmem benim için iyi oldu.”</i>	<i>“Well, I think using the language effectively is... we know English, but we do not use it very often in our daily lives, so we have to use it in areas that we would never think of. For example, yesterday, I went to get a phone line and froze. I did not know anything, like phone tariffs, phone lines, or what to say, and I realized I did not know these things. It was good for me to learn these things.”</i>
Güneş (p. 79) (Focus Group Interview - 1)	<i>“Sonuçta her dil ve her kültür farklı bakış açısına sahip. Yani hepsi aslında birer karakter gibi düşünüyorum birazcık. Ve hani onların gözüyle bakmak bazı şeylere, onların perspektifinden görmek, onların düşünme</i>	<i>“After all, every language and every culture has a different perspective. I mean, I think of them all as characters, to some extent. And maybe looking at things through their eyes, seeing them from their perspective, thinking</i>

	<i>biçimine düşünmek belki olabilir.”</i>	<i>about their way of thinking would be an advantage.”</i>
Burak (p. 79) (Focus Group Interview - 1)	<i>“Ben de İngilizce konuşurken vs. kendimin tamamen bambaşka bir kişiyle büründüğünü düşünüyorum. Farklı düşünüyorum. Kullandığım kelimelerin register'ları farklı, daha polite. Mesela Türkçe'de çok fazla lütfen... kullanmıyorken ben burada her cümlemin başında please ile başlıyorum yabancılarla konuşurken. Affedersin demem Türkçe'de ama İngilizce'de burada konuşurken excuse me ile başlıyorum. Böyle bir farklılık oluşuyor.”</i>	<i>“... when I speak English, I assume a completely different person. I think differently. The registers of the words I use are different and more polite. For example, while I do not use "please..." very much in Turkish, I start every sentence with "please" when speaking to foreigners. I do not say "excuse me" in Turkish, but when I speak here in English, I start with "excuse me". Such a difference occurs.”</i>
Güneş (p. 80) (Focus Group Interview - 1)	<i>“...daha az yargılayıcı olmam gerektiğini düşünüyorum.”</i>	<i>“I think I need to be less judgmental”</i>
Burak (Interviews) (p. 85)	<i>“Polonyalı mısın?”</i>	<i>“Are you Polish?”</i>

(p. 85)	<i>“Neler neler yaptık birlikte. Ben de o konuşmayı başlatmasaydım bunların hiçbiri olmayacaktı.”</i>	<i>“The things we did together! If I had not started that conversation, none of this would have happened.”</i>
(p. 86)	<i>“Şunu yap deyince yapıyor. Bir şeyler söyleyince yapıyor ama bana da çok zor geliyor bu. Ben söyleyemem çünkü şunu yap, bunu yap insanı asla değilim. Onu söyleyemiyorum. Bana zor geliyor o yüzden.”</i>	<i>“He does it when I tell him to do something, but I find it very difficult. I can't say it because I'm never a do this, do that person. I cannot just say that. That is why it is difficult for me.”</i>
(p. 87)	<i>“Bir çeşit ‘identity’ arayışı içerisindeydim sanırım iki haftalarda. Ve onu kendim yaratmaya çalıştım ya da buldum”</i>	<i>“I guess I was searching for some kind of identity for the last two weeks. And I tried to create it myself, or rather I found it”</i>
(p. 90)	<i>“Mesela sabahın köründe ben yürüyüşe çıkıyorum. Burası çok güzel kokuyor çünkü.”</i>	<i>“I take a walk in the morning now, and it smells beautiful over here.”</i>
(p. 93)	<i>“En çok istediğim şeylerden biri buydu hani beni turist olarak görmesinler.”</i>	<i>“One of the things I wanted most was for them not to see me as a tourist.”</i>

(p. 94)	<i>“Burada 4,5-5 ay önceki Osman ile şu anki Osman arasında çok büyük bir yeterlilik farkı var. Osman çok yetemiyordu kendine . Mesela ben dün açıkçası ağladım bu konuda. Çünkü ilk aylarındaki Osman aklıma geldi. İlk başta otobüse binerken bile böyle... Evet, çok üzüldüm, çok üzüldüm.”</i>	<i>“There is a huge difference in competence between Burak 4.5-5 months ago and Burak now. Burak was not very self-sufficient. For example, I cried yesterday about this. Because Burak, in his early months, came to my mind. Even when I first got on the bus, I was like this... Yes, I was very upset, very upset.”</i>
(p. 95)	<i>“Turistik bir tecrübe değildi.”</i>	<i>“It was not a touristic experience”</i>
(p. 95)	<i>“Ama şu an mesela aynı terziye gitsek kendi derdimi kendim açıklayabilirim çünkü o seviyede bir Lehçem var.”</i>	<i>“But right now, for example, if we go to the same tailor, I can explain my own problem because I have a Polish level of that level.”</i>
(p. 96)	<i>“Hangi milletten olduklarına bakmaksızın, ondan bağımsız olarak herkesi bireysel olarak ele alma. Herkesin kendisinin çok farklı dünyalar barındırmasını görme.”</i>	<i>“Treating everyone as an individual, regardless of their nationality. Seeing that everyone embodies very different worlds.”</i>

(p. 96)	<i>“Tamamen yaşadıkları kültürel backgroundlar bağımsız olarak değerlendirebiliyorum onları artık.”</i>	<i>“I can now evaluate them completely independent of the cultural background they live in.”,</i>
(p. 96)	<i>“Ayrıca her kültürün kendine özgü zenginlikleri ve katkıları olduğunu fark ettim. Bu farkındalık, dünyaya daha geniş bir perspektiften bakmama ve kültürel çeşitliliği bir zenginlik olarak görmeme yardımcı oldu”</i>	<i>“I also realized that each culture has its own unique richness and contributions. This awareness helped me look at the world from a broader perspective and see cultural diversity as a wealth.”</i>
(p. 97)	<i>“Ben şunu fark ettim. Hani Türkiye’de bile gitmediğim o kadar çok şehir, görmediğim o kadar çok yer var ki... Ben cumartesi günü geldim. Pazartesi günü de bir tane Karadeniz turu satın aldık ailecek. Oraya gideceğiz mesela. Daha önce hiç böyle bir şey yapmazdım.”</i>	<i>“I realized this. Even in Türkiye, there are so many cities I haven't been to and so many places I have not seen... I arrived here on Saturday. On Monday, we bought a Black Sea tour as a family. We will go there, for example. I would never have done something like this before”.</i>
Mila (Interviews) (p. 101)	<i>“Bu his bir de çok değişti.”.</i>	<i>‘A different feeling’</i>

(p. 101)	<i>“Yani çok fazla yabancı hissetmediğim için hani çok zorlanmıyorum.”</i>	<i>“I don't have much difficulty because I don't feel too foreign.”</i>
(p. 102)	<i>“Dedim ki ben bu dili, hani buranın dilini öğrenmem lazım. Hani iyi kötü de olsa hani bir A2 seviyesine kadar gelmem lazım.”</i>	<i>“I said, I need to learn this language, the language of here. You know, even if it's good or bad, I need to get to an A2 level.”</i>
(p. 104)	<i>“Benle konuşmaya başladı bir tane kız. Hani hiç mi bilmiyorsun falan filan. Ben de evet hani hiçbir şey anlamadım dedim. Sonra biz sana yardım ederiz. Hani öğretiriz, ederiz falan dedi. Sonra hani orada konuşmaya başladık.”</i>	<i>“A girl started talking to me. You know, you do not know anything, etc. I said yes, I did not understand anything. Then she said, We will help you. We will teach you, we will do it, etc. Then we started talking there.”</i>
(p. 104)	<i>“Yani bu sayede kötü bir durum olsa da arkadaş edinmeme sebep oldu diyebilirim.”</i>	<i>“So, I can say that even though it was a bad situation, it helped me make friends.”</i>
(p. 105)	<i>“Hatta benim hani Anadolu'da da o şekilde olmuştu biraz. Sınavlar sayesinde yeni arkadaşlıklar kurmuştum. Burada da</i>	<i>“It was a bit like that in home university too. I made new friends thanks to the exams. Maybe something similar could happen here. I think so.”</i>

	<i>benzer bir şey olabilir belki. Evet diye düşünüyorum.”</i>	
(p. 106)	<i>“Hani mesela ben geçen gün arkadaşlarımla birinin evinde kaldım falan hani film izledik, bir şeyler yaptık. Evet hani sanki böyle çok daha uzun süredir tanıştıyormuşuz gibi oldu.”</i>	<i>“For example, the other day I stayed with my friends at one of their houses, we watched movies, did some things. Yes, it was as if we had known each other for a longer time.”</i>
(p. 107)	<i>“Bir sürü yerde yaşamış ve baya dil biliyor. Hani onunla konuşmak keyifli oluyor bazen. Çünkü hani anlatacak bir sürü şey var, bir sürü şey yaşamış. Farklı kültürler tanımış. Hep ona soru soruyorum. İşte bu burada nasıl? Hangi yeri daha çok beğendin? Nerede yaşamak isterdin? Ben de aslında onunla konuşurken sizin gibi sanki böyle bir interview yapıyormuş gibi oluyorum.”</i>	<i>“He has lived in many places and speaks many languages. Sometimes, it is enjoyable to talk to him. Because he has a lot to tell, he has lived a lot. He has known different cultures. I always ask him questions. How is it here? Which place did you like the most? Where would you like to live? When I talk to him, I feel like I am doing an interview like this, just like you.”</i>
(p. 108)	<i>“Yani böyle farklı bir yerde bir sürü insanla iletişim kurmak insanın vizyonunu geliştiriyor kesinlikle. Hani onların hayatlarını</i>	<i>“I mean, communicating with a lot of people in a different place like this definitely improves one's vision. You see their lives, what kind of life they live, what their</i>

	<i>görüyorsun, nasıl bir yaşam yaşıyorlar, hayalleri neler, neler istiyorlar mesela. Beklentileri nedir? Bunları öğrenmek güzel.”</i>	<i>dreams are, what they want, for example. What are their expectations? Even these can be different things sometimes. It is nice to learn these things.”</i>
(p. 111)	<i>“Onlar da benim gibiler.”</i>	<i>“They are the same as me”,</i>
(p. 111)	<i>“Onların da ilk deneyimleri.”</i>	<i>“Their first experience as well”</i>
(p. 112)	<i>“Hani birazcık böyle bir o ilk adımı atmak gerekiyor bazen. Çünkü hani ilk başta kızlar benle mesela konuşmayı korkmuşlardı. Hani çekinmişlerdi daha doğrusu. Ben de ilk gün onların yanına gitmedim. Ama sonra bir şeyler söyleyerek konu başlatmaya çalıştım. Sonra onlar da zaten bunu bekliyorlarmış. Sonradan böyle konuştuğumuzu söylediler. Hani biz de seninle konuşmak istiyorduk ama bir anda yanına gelip seni böyle korkutmak istemedik. Çünkü böyle bir grup şekлиндelerdi. Onlara dahil oldum. Ve hani böyle bir şekilde atılınca başlıyor. Ve tabii böyle açık</i>	<i>“Sometimes you have to take that first step. Because at first, the girls were afraid to talk to me. They were shy, to be more precise. I didn't go to them the first day. But then I tried to start a topic by saying something. Then they were expecting this anyway. We wanted to talk to you, too, but they suddenly came up to you and said they did not want to scare you like that. Because they were in a group like that. I joined them. And when you take action like that, it starts. And of course, you have to be open-minded. I think you have to approach people in a friendly way.”</i>

	<i>fikirli olmak lazım. İnsanlara böyle arkadaşça yaklaşmak lazım bence.”</i>	
(p. 112)	<i>“...gidip otursam veya kimseyle konuşmak için çabalamasam iletişimin ne kadar önemli bir şey olduğunu fark edemeyecektim. ben kazanamayacaktım.”</i>	<i>“If I hadn't gone and sat down or made an effort to talk to anyone, I wouldn't have realized how important communication is. I would not have won.”</i>
(p. 112)	<i>“Yani farkındalık, az önce bahsettiğim gibi insanlarla ve farklı insanlarla iletişim kurmanın aslında o kadar da korkulacak bir şey olmadığını fark ettim. Çünkü onlar da sonuçta muhtemelen ilk defa öyle bir deneyim yaşayacaklar. Onlarla belki ilk defa Türk biriyle konuşacaklar. Onlar da heyecanlan. Ve onlar için de güzel bir deneyim olacak. Hani o yüzden daha az çekindiğimi fark ettim.”</i>	<i>“So, awareness, as I mentioned earlier, I realized that communicating with people and different people is not something to be afraid of. Because after all, they will probably have such an experience for the first time. They will talk to a Turkish person for the first time. They will also be excited. And it will be a good experience for them. That is why I realized that I am less shy...”</i>
(p. 114)	<i>“Hani onlar aslında o kadar uzak olmadığını fark ettim. İletişim kurdukça daha böyle</i>	<i>“I realized that they weren't actually that far away. The more we communicated, the deeper our</i>

	<i>derin arkadaşlık bağlarımız oldu. Ve hani tamamen sıfırdan başlayıp yine de böyle bir sürü arkadaş edinebilmek beni aslında mutlu hissettirdi ve hani demek ki bu da yapılabiliyormuş dedim.”</i>	<i>friendships became. And the fact that I was able to start from scratch and still make so many friends made me feel happy, and I thought, well, this can be done too.”</i>
Elif (Interviews) (p. 119)	<i>“Ama herhalde toparlayacağız gibi görünüyor.”</i>	<i>“It seems like I will figure it out and handle it”</i>
(p. 120)	<i>“Çünkü hani çok fazla dışarı çıkamıyordum. İşte uzaklaşamam falan gibisinden. Bu benimle ilgili.”</i>	<i>“I cannot go out much, thinking I cannot go far. Underline this is something personal.”</i>
(p. 120)	<i>“Diyorum ki ben şu an o sahnenin içinde miyim? - Orada kafamda canlandırıdığım yerin aynısı. Ve her pencereden baktığımda orayı hatırlıyorum hani. Çok tuhaf geldi bana. Evet, orada yürüdüm falan da. Ay deliririm.”</i>	<i>“Am I in that scene or what? - It is the same place I pictured there in my head. And every time I look out the window, I remember that place. It seemed very strange to me. Yes, I walked there and stuff. Oh, I am going crazy.”</i>

(p. 120)	“Yalnız değilmişim. Çok şaşırdım.”	<i>“I wasn’t alone, I was so surprised”</i>
(p. 121)	“Ama şimdi biz ne sayıları biliyoruz, ne öğrenci kartımız var vs.”	<i>“We neither know the numbers in Polish nor do we have a student ID yet’</i>
(p. 122)	“Şimdi ben buna çok sinirlendim. Ve bu durumu nasıl anlatabilirim mentoruma, onu düşündüm. Acaba yapılabilecek bir şey var mı? Burada normal bir şey mi? Ve daha önce de olmuş. Hani burada yapıyorlarmış. Şimdi mentöre anlatacağım, anlatacağım ama o kadar sinirliyim ki cümlelerimi toparlayamadım böyle. En son açtım translate’i. Ses butonuna bastım, konuştum konuştum böyle. Sonra çevirip gönderdim. Gerçi hayır göndermedim. Oradan bir iki kelime çıktı bilmediğim. Sonra işte daha sonra yüz yüze görüştük. Aklımdan kaldığı kadarıyla söyledim.”	<i>“I was very angry about this, and I thought about how I could explain this situation to my mentor. Is there anything that can be done? Is it a normal thing here? And it has happened before. They do it here. Now I’ll tell my mentor, I’ll tell him, but I’m so angry that I couldn’t get my sentences together. Finally, I opened Google Translate. I pressed the voice button and talked and talked. Then, I translated and sent it. Actually, no, I didn’t. There were a few words that I did not know. Then we met face to face later, and I told him as much as I could remember.”</i>

(p. 122)	<i>“Bazen İngilizce konuşanlar da oluyor, bu iyi bir şey.”</i>	<i>“Sometimes there are English speakers, which is good.”</i>
(p. 122)	<i>“Sadece selam vermeyi ve teşekkür etmeyi öğrendim. O da yeterli oluyor galiba.”</i>	<i>“I have learned to just say hello and thank you in Polish. I guess that is enough.”</i>
(p. 122)	<i>“Evet, Lehçe öğrenmem lazım ama tabii ki onlar da İngilizce bilseler iyi olurdu.”</i>	<i>“Well, I need to learn Polish, but of course, maybe if they knew English, it would be nice.”</i>
(p. 123)	<i>“Şimdi tek başıma pazara gittiğimde interneti kullanıyorum. Çeviriler yapıyorum, vb. En azından mümkün olduğunca iletişim kurmamaya çalışıyorum. Dillerin çatışmasını önlemek için. Ama bazen İngilizce bilen insanlar oluyor.”, “Cüzdanımın boş olduğunu gösteriyorum, vb.”</i>	<i>“Now when I go to the market alone, I use the internet. I do translations, etc. I try not to communicate as much as I can, at least. To avoid that clash of languages. But sometimes there are people who know English.”, “I show that my wallet is empty and so on.”</i>
(p. 123)	<i>“Yani henüz yerli birileriyle çok da iyi anlaştığını söyleyemem. Henüz yerli halkı gerçekten tanıma fırsatı elde edemedim. Bahsettiğim Polonyalı kişidir. Türkiye’de Erasmus yapmış, belki o</i>	<i>“So, I cannot say that I get along very well with local people yet. I have not had the chance to really get to know the locals yet. The only Polish person is the one I am talking about. She did Erasmus in</i>

	<i>yuздendir T�rklere karřı ilgisi. Yani.”</i>	<i>T�rkiye; maybe that is why he is interested in Turks. So...”</i>
(p. 123)	<i>“Normal bir Polonyalı'nın gelip de arkadař olmasını beklemiyorum pek.”</i>	<i>“I don't really expect a normal Polish person to come and be friends.”</i>
(p. 123)	<i>“Ya ok g�zel. B�yle herhalde kan ekti, bilmiyorum”</i>	<i>‘Oh beautiful!’, “We were drawn together as if we were relatives, I do not know.”</i>
(p. 123)	<i>“Kazaklar genelde canına yakın oluyorlar bence.”</i>	<i>“I think Kazakhs are generally friendly.”</i>
(p. 124)	<i>“Yani umarım onlara karřı olan �nyargımı kırarlar.”</i>	<i>“I mean, I hope they will break my prejudice against them.”</i>
(p. 124)	<i>“Onları yaptıka buraya daha ok ait hissedecięime inanıyorum.”</i>	<i>“Maybe after I do things, I can warm up to the environment a little more.”</i>
(p. 127)	<i>“Daha ok Kazaklarla konuřtum. Bir de Ukraynalı bir iki kız var. İřte Erasmus �ęrencileriyle aıkası. Yani birbirimizi anladıęımız iin. Onlarla daha ok iletiřim kurmaya alıřtım.”</i>	<i>“I talked mostly to Kazakhs. And there are one or two Ukrainian girls. Well, to be honest, Erasmus students. Because we understand each other. I tried to communicate more with them.”</i>

(p. 128)	<i>“İletişimlerim çok uç noktadalar.”</i>	<i>“My communication is at extreme levels”</i>
(p. 128)	<i>“Yani illa ortak bir konu olacak beraber sınıfça konuşacağız. Yoksa hani kendileri gelip benimle sohbet etmezler ya da ben gidip onlarla sohbet etmem. Öyle bir ortam oluşmuyor çok fazla.”</i>	<i>“In other words, there has to be a common topic that we will talk about together as a class. Otherwise, they won't come and talk to me, or I won't go and talk to them. That kind of environment doesn't really happen.”</i>
(p. 128)	<i>“Yani soru sormaya çekiniyorsunuz çünkü onların sizden çekindiğini düşünüyorsunuz. Biraz göze batıyorum galiba.”</i>	<i>“You're shy to ask questions because you think they are shy of you. I guess I stand out because of my looks.”</i>
(p. 128)	<i>“Tabii konuşmak istiyor. Kız çok tez canlı sanırım. Anlamadım ama. Herkesin sözünü kesip direkt İngilizce konuşmaya başlıyor falan.”</i>	<i>“Of course, she wants to talk, I understand. I think the girl is very quick-witted. I didn't understand, though. She interrupts everyone and starts speaking English directly.”</i>
(p. 128)	<i>“...bu çok güzel bir hediye dedi. Yani birine et hediye etmek aslında...”</i>	<i>‘Oh, I think it is great to hand out meat as a present to people in need.’</i>

(p. 129)	“Görmezden geliyorum çoğu zaman ya da... Bakışla karşılık veriyorum. Kim önce bakışını kaçırarak yarışı yapıyoruz. Yani olayı bir şekilde eğlenceli hale getirmeye çalışıyorum. Çünkü bazen gerçekten çok sinir bozucu hale gelebiliyor.”	<i>“I ignore most of the time or... I respond to them with a look. We compete to see who will look away first. So, I try to make it fun in some way. Because sometimes it can get very annoying.”</i>
(p. 129)	“Yani insanların farklı olabileceğini görüp bunlara saygı duymam gerektiğini her olayda kendime biraz daha hatırlattığım için. O seviye, o çita biraz daha artıyor, yukarılara çıkıyor. Hoşuma gidiyor aslında insanların farklılıklarını görmek bir yerde.”	<i>“In other words, because I see that people can be different and I have to respect that, I remind myself a little more in every situation. That level, that bar is getting higher and higher. I actually like seeing people's differences in a way.”</i>
(p. 130)	“Çeviri kullanmak durumunda kaldım doğrudur.”	<i>“It is true that I had to use Google Translate.”</i>
(p. 130)	“Zaten market olmazsa olmaz sanırım. Herkesin. Ortak. Kasiyerlerle. Onlara çok çektirdik. Birbirimizi mi anlamadık? Para üstü	<i>“I guess the market is a must anyway. With the cashiers. We put them through so much. Did we not understand each other? Did he not give the wrong change when he was</i>

	<i>vermesi gerektiğinde yanlış mı vermedi? Çok karışıklık oldu da bir şekilde hallettik.”</i>	<i>supposed to give it? Yes. There was a lot of confusion, but we somehow sorted it out.”</i>
(p. 130)	<i>“İngilizce bildiğinden emin olduğum birine sorarım.”</i>	<i>“I would ask someone who I am sure knows English.”</i>
(p. 133)	<i>“Dedim ki ben duamı yaşıyorum. Ben istediğim şeyi, geçmişteki hayalimi yaşıyorum şu an. Ve hani bu şey öyle bir anda geldi ki artık böyle gideyim istiyorum. Sonra durdum ve dedim ki, sen bunu bir zamanlar çok istiyordun. Tadını çıkartsana falan. Böyle oldum.”</i>	<i>“I said, I am living my prayer. I am living what I wanted, my dream from the past right now. And this thing came at such a moment that I wanted to go like this. Then I stopped and said, You used to want this so much. Enjoy it and all. I became like this.”</i>
(p. 133)	<i>“Turistik olunca şey, ya çok güzel oralar falan. Orada kalıyor, devamını göremiyorsun çünkü.”</i>	<i>“When it's touristic, you say, 'Oh, those places are beautiful, ' etc. That's all there is to it because you can't see anything else.”</i>
(p. 134)	<i>“Gerçekçe düşünecek olursak bir CV'ye eklenecek yeni bir alamet var. Güzel.”</i>	<i>“If we think about it realistically, it is a new badge to add to a CV. Nice.”</i>
(p. 134)	<i>“Daha çok arkadaş edinebilseydim ama bu benimle ilgili bir şey değildi</i>	<i>“I wish I could have made more friends, but it was not about me. It was more about the other side. They</i>

	ya. Daha çok karşı tarafla ilgiliydi. Pek yanaşmıyorlardı. Ben denedim bence.” “Daha çok gezseydim. Ya da yağmurun altında daha çok ıslansaydım.”	were not very approachable. I think I tried”, “I wish I had traveled more. Or gotten wet more in the rain.”
(p. 134)	“Toplum içinde konuşma şeyim biraz daha arttı galiba.”	“I think my ability to speak in public increased a little more.”
(p. 134)	“Ben bir şey diyebilirim mesela, bir farkındalık oluştu o ırka karşı. İşte Polonyalı biri görünce nasıl selam vereceğimi biliyorum. Ne konular üzerine konuşmamam gerektiğini biliyorum mesela. Çok güzel. Yani böyle bir farkındalık olmuş oldu. Güzel.”	“I can say something, for example, an awareness has been created towards that race. When I see a Polish person, I know how to greet them. For example, I know what topics I shouldn't talk about. Very nice. So, there has been such an awareness. Nice.”
Güneş (Interviews) (p. 138)	“Yani tabi işte hem dışlanmak istemiyorum ama hem de şey yapmak istemediğim için buradaki sosyalliğimi nasıl yaratacağım konusunda baya bir korkularım var açıkçası.”	“I mean, of course, I don't want to be excluded, but I also have a lot of fears about how I am going to create my social life here because I don't want to do anything.”

(p. 140)	<i>“Ne kadar iyi İngilizce konuşursan değil, tam tersi ne kadar ilkel İngilizce konuşursan o kadar iyi anlaşıyorsun.”</i>	<i>“It's not how well you speak English, but on the contrary, the more primitive English you speak, the better you get along.”</i>
(p. 144)	<i>“Genelde arkadaşlarımla konuşurken rahat ediyorum. Çünkü İngilizce bildikleri için anlaşabiliyorum. Ya da hocalarla konuşabiliyorum zaten.”</i>	<i>“I generally feel comfortable talking to my friends. Because I can understand them because they know English. Or I can talk to the teachers anyway.”</i>
(p. 144)	<i>“Herkes sürekli Rumence konuşuyor. Ben anlamıyorum ya. Çok yabancı, çok outsider gibi hissettiriyor bazen.”</i>	<i>“Everyone speaks Romanian all the time. I do not understand it. It feels so foreign, so outsider-like sometimes.”</i>
(p. 144)	<i>“Evet, alışmış olabilirsiniz yaşamaya, ne yapacağını biliyor olabilirsiniz ama... Ev gibi hissettirmiyor yani... Onları anlayamamak değil sadece, onların da seni anlayamaması.”</i>	<i>“Yes, you may be used to living, you may know what to do, but... It doesn't feel like home... It's not just that you can't understand them, it's that they cannot understand you either.”</i>
(p. 145)	<i>“Biraz daha biliyor olsaydım yani en azından basic conversation yürütebilecek kadar biliyor olsaydım</i>	<i>“If I knew a little more, at least if I knew enough to have a basic conversation, I would have had incredible fun. Because at least I</i>

	inanılmaz eğlenirdim. Çünkü en azından bir amacım oldu. Sadece amaç değil. Bunları dinle konuştuğum zaman onların yüzündeki böyle sinisterlik çok hoşuma gidiyor. Evet. Aslında. Ve keşke biraz daha öğrenebilseydim öncesinde ki daha kolay...”	had a purpose. Not just a purpose. I really like the sinister look on their faces when I talk to them. Yes. Actually. And I wish I had learned a little more before, it would be easier.”
(p. 145)	“Hani o derste çok uzun bir süre kimseyle konuşmadım. Çünkü hiç kimse adım atmıyordu. Hani ben şey yapmaya çalışıyordum ama pek olmuyor. Çünkü biraz duvar var gibiydi biraz. Hani diğerlerinden çok farklıydı. Çok da gerilmiştim. Ya kimse hani arkadaşım değil. Ben nasıl şey hakkında bilgi alacağım? Telefonları da yok çünkü. Hiçbir kontaktım yok. Kızla en son bir cesaretimi toplayıp işte dedim hani telefonu verir misin? Verdi.”	“I did not talk to anyone in that class for a very long time. Because no one was taking any steps. I was trying to do something, but it wasn't working. Because there was a bit of a wall. It was very different from the others. I was also very nervous. No one is my friend. How am I going to get information about something? Because they don't have a phone number. I do not have any contact. I finally got up the courage to talk to the girl and said, Can you give me your phone number? She did.”
(p. 147)	“Tek başıma olduğum için orada da genelde, burada da	“Because I was usually alone there and because I didn't have a very close friend here at that time.

	<i>çok yakın bir arkadaşım o zamanlarda olmadığı için...”</i>	
(p. 148)	<i>“İlk geldiğimde daha çekingendim. Sonra daha şeyim, yani daha açıldım.”</i>	<i>“When I first came, I was shy. Then I became more, I mean, more open”</i>
(p. 148)	<i>“Yine de iyi ki gelmişim dedim... It made me realize that I have a lot of things to be grateful for.”</i>	<i>“Still, I said I am glad I came...It made me realize that I have a lot of things to be grateful for.”</i>
(p. 150)	<i>“Hani sürekli birinin guide'lığıyla aslında şey yapıyordum ama daha sonrasında o kadar alıştım ki mesela benden sonra gelen kişilere ben guide'lık yaptım mesela bak gel burada bu var şurada şu var bunu şöyle yaparsın bunu böyle yaparsın bunu şöyle alırsın.”</i>	<i>“I was actually doing things with someone's guidance all the time, but later on I got so used to it that I acted as a guide for the people who came after me, for example, look, there is this here, there is this there, you do it like this, you do it like this, you take it like this.”</i>
(p. 150)	<i>“Benim mutluluğumu sağlayan şey olduğum yer değil, etrafımdaki insanlarmış aslında.”</i>	<i>“In fact, what makes me happy is not where I am, but the people around me.”</i>
(p. 151)	<i>“Ben derslerdeyken mesela dille alakalı işte dilin yapısıyla ya da bu tarz</i>	<i>“When I was in class, for example, when we talked about language, the structure of the language, or things</i>

	<i>şeylerle alakalı şeyler konuştuğumuz zaman genelde bana soruyorlardı Türkçe’de bu nasıl oluyor diye. Ben de onu söylüyordum falan. Hani yani kendi ülkenin temsil etme şeyinde doğuyor. Birazcık gururlu hissediyorsun yalan yok.”</i>	<i>like that, they would usually ask me how this happened in Turkish. I would say that, too. You know, it comes from representing your own country. You feel proud, no lie.”</i>
(p. 151)	<i>“Evrensel dil beden dili.”</i>	<i>“The universal language is body language.”.</i>

APPENDIX 8: SAMPLE CODING TABLES (PRELIMINARY)

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW 1 DATE: 21.02.2024	MAIN THEME	SUB-THEMES
Farklı kültürlerin etkileşimde olduğu bir ortamda yaşamının/ eğitim almanın avantajları nelerdir sizce?		
BURAK <i>For me, it was a step I took to transform my personality. You see, I live with my family in Eskişehir, and I've never really had the chance to experience living in a different city on my own, standing on my own two feet, building my own life independently.</i>	Personal growth	• Standing on his own feet • Building a new lifestyle in another culture
MİLA <i>"Well, I think using the language effectively is... we know English but we don't use it very often in our daily lives so we have to use it in areas that we would never think of."</i>	Active use of the foreign language	• Gaining the skills to use the right phrases
ELİF <i>"Let me add something to what my friends have already said. I love learning how to cook new dishes, and I've already been learning to cook some. But when I go there, I'll try to learn how to cook their traditional dishes as well. I'll add them to my list, try new flavors, and so on."</i>	Experiencing the culture of the host country	• Trying out traditional food, • Cooking host country cuisine
GÜNEŞ <i>"After all, every language and every culture has a different perspective. I mean, I think of them all as characters, to some extent. And maybe looking at things through their eyes, seeing them from their perspective, thinking about their way of thinking would be an advantage."</i>	Experiencing the culture of the host country	• Empathizing with people from different cultures

‘Kültürlerarası Kimlik’ (Intercultural Identity) kavramı sizde ne çağrıştırıyor?		
BURAK <i>“... when I speak English, I assume a completely different person. I think differently. The registers of the words I use are different and more polite.”</i>	Being a different person	Being more talkative
MİLA <i>"I've noticed that I become more outgoing when I speak English. Maybe it's because I have to express myself, and if I don't open up somehow, no one will be able to understand me. So, in a way, I have to be more outgoing, but it doesn't bother me — on the contrary, it actually feels better."</i>	Being a different person	Being more outgoing
ELİF <i>"It feels like when I get to know a new culture, it somehow blends with my own culture, and something new comes out of it. Still, I see it as something beautiful. I can continue with it, but I can also go back to my roots whenever I want. That's how it feels to me."</i>	Being a different person	Being a person with a mixture of two cultures
GÜNEŞ <i>"I'm not really sure if this counts, but at least for me, for example, I notice that I speak differently when I speak English. I mean, the types of words I use, or how can I say... I tend to speak more politely.", "I think I need to be less judgmental."</i>	Being a different person	- Being more extroverted - Being more open-minded and less judgmental

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL 1

DATE: 05.04.2024

QUESTIONS & QUOTES	THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1. Buraya geldiğim ilk gün ne fark ettim?	The feeling of being alone at first	
2. Burada tanıştığım ilk kişi kimdi ve hakkında neler öğrendim? (Meslek, statü, kişilik, vs.)	Finding the first friendships	- Local students - Erasmus Student Network Organization
3. Bu kişiyle ilk iletişimimiz ne şekilde başladı?		
4. Farklı kültürel kökenden gelen insanlarla bazı yollarla iletişim kurdum. Bunlar nelerdi?	Using different ways to communicate	- Non-verbal communication - Translate apps - Universal words
5. Etkileşim kurma konusunda zorlandığım an neydi?		
6. Buranın kültürüne alışmak için yaptığım şeyler nelerdi? ✓ <i>"I asked my Polish friend Macek for instructions on how to behave and what to do so that I would be perceived as a local rather than a tourist. I thought that doing something they often do would make it easier for me to see the world through their eyes. In addition, I watched cultural videos on YouTube about things you should never do in Poland, etc."</i>	Needing to blend in	Actions taken: getting Polish hair cut
7. Bu iki hafta içinde buradaki kültürle ilgili fark ettiğim bir şey neydi?		

APPENDIX 9 – ETİK KURUL İZNİ

Evrak Kayıt Tarihi: 06.12.2023	Protokol No: 661715	Tarih: 28.12.2023
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ANADOLU ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL VE BEŞERÎ BİLİMLER BİLİMSEL ARAŞTIRMA VE YAYIN ETİĞİ KURULU
KARAR BELGESİ

ÇALIŞMANIN TÜRÜ:	Doktora Tez Çalışması
KONU:	Eğitim Bilimleri
BAŞLIK:	İngilizce Öğretmeni Adaylarının Yurtdışında-Eğitim Deneyimlerindeki Kültürlerarası Kimliğin Keşfedilmesi: Bir Çoklu Durum Çalışması Exploring The Intercultural identity of pre-service EFL teachers during their study-abroad experiences: A multiple case study
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Dombaycı, M., & İpek, H. (2025). Nonnative Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Native and Non- Native English-Speaking Teachers: An Exploration in Turkish Contexts. *Romaya Journal*, 5(1), 142-154. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15258082>

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Bilimsel Faaliyetleri:

Dombaycı, M., & İpek, H. (2022). *Nonnative pre-service EFL teachers’ perceptions on native and non-native English-speaking teachers and how being a non-native English-speaking teacher might impact their future teaching practices*. International Language Teacher Psychology Conference: Teachers Matter (Özet Bildiri/Sözlü Sunum), Mersin, Türkiye.

Sertifika:

Bilimsel Bir Makale Nasıl Yazılır ve Yayımlanır Eğitimi (TÜBİTAK- BİDEB), TÜBİTAK Bilim İnsanı Destek Programları Başkanlığı (BİDEB) tarafından 2237-A Bilimsel Eğitim Etkinlikleri Desteği Programı kapsamında düzenlenmiştir., Çevrimiçi, Sertifika, 29.05.2023-02.06.2023 (Ulusal)

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