

# Examining the Relationship Between Midwifery Department Students' Intercultural Sensitivity and Xenophobic Attitudes Towards Immigrants: A Cross-Sectional Research

## Ebelik Bölümü Öğrencilerinin Kültürlerarası Duyarlılıkları ve Göçmenlere Yönelik Zenofobik Tutumları Arasındaki İlişkinin İncelenmesi: Kesitsel Araştırma

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**ABSTRACT Objective:** The aim of the current study was to determine the relationship between the intercultural sensitivity of midwifery students and their xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants. **Material and Methods:** The study was conducted with 329 students studying midwifery. The data of the study were collected using a Personal Information Form, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ICS) and the Xenophobia Scale (XS) and an online survey method. Permission was obtained from the ethics committee and the relevant institution for the study. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS. **Results:** The students' total ICS score average was 78.60±6.18, and the total XS score average was 51.76±13.16. It was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the students' grades, having friends from different country/countries with whom they were in contact, choosing the midwifery profession willingly, considering working abroad after graduation, wanting to go to another country with Erasmus etc. programs during midwifery education, and experience of going abroad and the ICS score average ( $p<0.05$ ). It was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the students' grades, knowing a language other than their mother tongue, having friends from different country/countries with whom they were in contact, choosing the midwifery profession willingly and the XS score average ( $p<0.05$ ). Xenophobic attitude has a significant effect on the level of intercultural sensitivity ( $p=0.026$ ). **Conclusion:** It was found that there was a weak negative significant relationship between the students' intercultural sensitivity level and their xenophobic attitudes. Accordingly, as the students' intercultural sensitivity increases, their xenophobic attitudes decrease.

**Keywords:** Intercultural sensitivity; immigrant; xenophobia; midwifery; student

**ÖZET Amaç:** Mevcut araştırmada, ebelik bölümü öğrencilerinin kültürlerarası duyarlılıkları ve göçmenlere yönelik zenofobik tutumları arasındaki ilişkinin belirlenmesi amaçlanmıştır. **Gereç ve Yöntemler:** Araştırma, ebelik bölümünde öğrenim gören 329 öğrenci ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmanın verileri Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Kültürlerarası Duyarlılık Ölçeği (KDÖ) ve Zenofobi Ölçeği (ZÖ) ile çevrim içi anket yöntemiyle toplanmıştır. Araştırmanın yapılması için etik kurul ve ilgili kurum izni alınmıştır. Veriler IBM SPSS kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. **Bulgular:** Öğrencilerin KDÖ toplam puan ortalaması 78,60±6,18, ZÖ toplam puan ortalaması 51,76±13,16 idi. Öğrencilerin sınıfları, farklı ülke/ülkelerden iletişimde oldukları arkadaşlarının olması, ebelik mesleğini isteyerek seçme durumu, mezun olduktan sonra yurtdışında çalışmayı düşünme durumları, ebelik eğitimi sırasında Erasmus vb. programlarla başka bir ülkeye gitmeyi isteme durumu, yurtdışına çıkma deneyimi ile KDÖ puan ortalaması arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı farklılık olduğu saptanmıştır ( $p<0,05$ ). Öğrencilerin sınıfları, anadilden başka bir dil bilme durumu, farklı ülke/ülkelerden iletişimde oldukları arkadaşlarının olması, ebelik mesleğini isteyerek seçme durumu ile ZÖ puan ortalaması arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı farklılık olduğu bulunmuştur ( $p<0,05$ ). Zenofobik tutum, kültürlerarası duyarlılık düzeyi üzerinde anlamlı bir etkiye sahiptir ( $p=0,026$ ). **Sonuç:** Öğrencilerin kültürlerarası duyarlılık düzeyi ile zenofobik tutumları arasında negatif yönde zayıf düzeyde anlamlı bir ilişki olduğu bulunmuştur. Buna göre öğrencilerin kültürlerarası duyarlılıkları arttıkça zenofobik tutumları azalmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kültürlerarası duyarlılık; göçmen; zenofobi; ebelik; öğrenci

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Culture is known as the values, beliefs, customs, attitudes and behaviors learned, shared and passed on to the next generation by a community.<sup>1</sup> The concept of intercultural sensitivity is defined as the active desire to provide one's own motivation to understand, accept and appreciate cross-cultural differences.<sup>1</sup> Individuals with intercultural sensitivity are also highly motivated, have high self-esteem and self-control, and are open-minded individuals who know how to empathize.<sup>2</sup> The increasing transformation of societies into a multicultural structure increases the importance of cultural sensitivity, especially in service areas where one-to-one interaction with people is intense, such as health services. Therefore, it has become necessary to take cultural differences into account in the provision of health services.<sup>3</sup> In a study conducted with nursing students who provide care to immigrant patients, it was reported that the students' cultural sensitivity was at a good level and that the students gave importance to empathy and respect for the individual, which are components of cultural sensitivity.<sup>4</sup>

Global migration rates are increasing worldwide due to factors such as education, economic conditions, employment, marital status, war, ethnic and religious conflicts, misery, and hope for a better life.<sup>5,6</sup> International migrations bring with them cultural interaction. Migrants bring their past customs, traditions, language, religion, and cultural identities to the country they arrive in. In addition, these people may be both psychologically and socioculturally affected by the attitudes of the people of the country they migrate to.<sup>7</sup> In addition, xenophobic attitudes may also affect migrants. Xenophobia is a Greek word known as fear or hostility towards foreigners. It comes with attitudes, prejudices, and behaviors rejecting, excluding, or denigrating people since they are only foreign or alien to society or national identity.<sup>8,9</sup>

A migrant needs health services when needed. Health professionals trying to provide health services to migrants face several problems.<sup>10</sup> Midwives are a key element of health professionals in providing services. As a result, midwives should be aware of the differences in culture, beliefs, and perceptions of the gender attitudes of a migrant. Therefore, midwives should provide sensitive leadership in establishing and maintaining a safe and non-discriminatory atti-

tude in birth services towards migrant women.<sup>11,12</sup> Determining the cultural sensitivity and xenophobic attitude levels of midwifery students who will provide health care during clinical practice and will be the midwives of the future is very important for the quality of the health care services they will provide. There are also studies in the literature examining the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, cultural sensitivities, and xenophobic attitudes of midwifery students towards cultural differences and immigrants.<sup>13-16</sup>

This study was performed to examine the relationship between the intercultural sensitivity of midwifery students and their xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants during their clinical practice and participation in the health services provided.

### *Research Questions*

1. What are the levels of intercultural sensitivity of midwifery students?
2. What are the xenophobic attitudes of midwifery students towards immigrants?
3. Is there a relationship between the levels of intercultural sensitivity of midwifery students and their xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants?
4. What are the predictors of the levels of intercultural sensitivity of midwifery students and their xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants?

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

### **STUDY DESIGN**

This is a descriptive and cross-sectional study conducted with midwifery students. The population of the study consisted of students (n=368) studying in the Department of Midwifery in the Central Black Sea region of Türkiye. The 39 students who did not agree to participate in the study were not included in the study. The sample of the study consisted of 329 midwifery students who agreed to participate voluntarily in the study and filled out the survey forms.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

To collect the data, online survey forms prepared via Google Forms were sent to the midwifery students, and data were collected from October 1-December 15, 2022.

Data were obtained using a personal form to determine the descriptive characteristics of the students, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ICS), and the Xenophobia Scale (XS).

**Personal Questionnaire Form:** The questionnaire form, which was created by the researchers by scanning the relevant literature, includes questions to determine the sociodemographic characteristics of the students.<sup>2,10,13</sup>

**Intercultural Sensitivity Scale:** ICS was developed by Chen and Starosta in 2000, and its Turkish validity and reliability were determined by Bulduk et al.<sup>17</sup> The scale, which consists of 24 items and five dimensions, has a “Responsibility in Communication” dimension consisting of seven items (1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23, 24), a “Respect for Cultural Differences” dimension consisting of 6 items (2, 7, 8, 16, 18, 20), a “Self-Confidence in Communication” dimension consisting of five items (3, 4, 5, 6, 10), a “Enjoyment of Communication” dimension consisting of three items (9, 12, 15), and a “Care in Communication” dimension consisting of 3 items (14, 17, 19). Items 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20 and 22 in the scale are reverse coded. The scale is a 5-point Likert type and the total score varies between 24-120. A high score obtained from the scale is considered as a high level of intercultural sensitivity. The Cronbach alpha coefficient calculated for the Turkish ICS was reported as 0.72.<sup>17</sup> In this research, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was found to be 0.55.

**Xenophobia Scale:** The 5-point Likert-type scale, developed to measure individuals’ attitudes towards immigrants and their fear of immigrants, contains 18 items and 3 factors. These are hatred (items 3, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14), fear (items 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 16), and contempt (items 13, 15, 17, 18). The total scale score is between 18-90. A high score shows that the level of xenophobia is high, and a low score shows that the level of xenophobia is low. Items 7 and 11 on the scale are reverse-scored.<sup>18</sup> In this research, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was found to be 0.94.

## ETHICAL ASPECT OF THE RESEARCH

Before the research, ethical approval was obtained from the Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University Faculty of Health Sciences Social and Human Sciences Re-

search Ethics Committee (dated: August 8, 2022; no: 196434) and written research implementation permission (dated: September 29, 2022; no: 209116) from the midwifery department of the relevant faculty. Students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study were informed about the purpose of the study via a Google online form and were asked to select the option indicating that they accepted the study. The research was conducted by the Helsinki Declaration principles.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The research data were analyzed with the IBM SPSS package program. Numbers, percentages and averages were used in the analysis of numerical data. The normal distribution of the data was examined with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and t-test and one-way analysis of variance (advanced analysis Tukey HSD) were applied to evaluate the normally distributed variables. The correlation between the scales was examined with the Pearson correlation test. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between dependent and independent variables. A p value of less than 0.05 was accepted as statistical significance.

## RESULTS

The mean age of the students is  $20.86 \pm 1.59$  years. Of the students who participated in our study, 30.4% were in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the midwifery department, 26.7% were in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, 21.0% were in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year and 21.9% were in the 4<sup>th</sup> year. 95.1% of the students stated that their citizenship was the Republic of Türkiye, 43.5% knew a language other than their mother tongue at an intermediate level and 76.6% did not have any foreign friends from a different country that they communicate with. It was found that 89.7% of the students chose the midwifery profession willingly, 72.9% did not want to work abroad after graduation, 98.2% did not go to another country with programs such as Erasmus etc. during their midwifery education, 76.6% had participated in programs such as Erasmus etc. during their midwifery education and 93.6% of them have never gone abroad (Table 1).

In the study, no statistically significant difference was found between the student’s nationality,

**TABLE 1:** Comparison of the total scores of ICS and XS with the distribution of frequency and percentages according to the introductory characteristics of the students

Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	ICS $\bar{X} \pm SD$	p test value	XS $\bar{X} \pm SD$	p test value
Class						
1 <sup>st</sup>	100	30.4	78.39 $\pm$ 4.69 <sup>a</sup>		52.95 $\pm$ 13.81 <sup>a</sup>	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	88	26.7	78.03 $\pm$ 4.64 <sup>b</sup>	<b>F=11.555;</b>	49.63 $\pm$ 10.92 <sup>b</sup>	<b>F=3.921;</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup>	69	21.0	76.21 $\pm$ 3.72 <sup>c</sup>	<b>p&lt;0.001</b>	49.02 $\pm$ 12.88 <sup>c</sup>	<b>p=0.009</b>
4 <sup>th</sup>	72	21.9	81.90 $\pm$ 9.44 <sup>d*</sup>	<b>d&gt;a,b,c</b>	55.36 $\pm$ 14.19 <sup>d*</sup>	<b>d&gt;b,c</b>
Nationality						
Republic of Türkiye	313	95.1	78.58 $\pm$ 6.18	t=-0.342;	52.30 $\pm$ 13.04	t=3.305;
Foreign	16	4.9	79.12 $\pm$ 6.30	p=0.732	41.31 $\pm$ 11.28	p=0.250
Level of knowledge of a foreign language other than the mother tongue (speaking and understanding)						
Bad	109	33.1	77.72 $\pm$ 6.76	F=2.171;	55.64 $\pm$ 12.94 <sup>a</sup>	<b>F=15.031;</b>
Medium	143	43.5	78.74 $\pm$ 6.03	p=0.116	52.25 $\pm$ 11.58 <sup>b</sup>	<b>p&lt;0.001</b>
Good	77	23.4	79.61 $\pm$ 5.47		45.38 $\pm$ 14.00 <sup>c</sup>	<b>a&gt;b, b&gt;c</b>
Having foreign friends from different countries that you are in contact with						
Yes	77	23.4	80.20 $\pm$ 6.14	<b>t=2.616;</b>	46.87 $\pm$ 13.72	<b>t=-3.806;</b>
No	252	76.6	78.11 $\pm$ 6.12	<b>p=0.009</b>	53.26 $\pm$ 12.64	<b>p&lt;0.001</b>
Choosing the midwifery profession willingly						
Yes	295	89.7	78.01 $\pm$ 5.03	<b>t=-5.378;</b>	50.92 $\pm$ 12.83	<b>t=-3.466;</b>
No	34	10.3	83.79 $\pm$ 11.10	<b>p&lt;0.001</b>	59.05 $\pm$ 13.94	<b>p&lt;0.001</b>
Consideration of working abroad after graduation						
Yes <sup>a</sup>	51	15.5	80.47 $\pm$ 6.60	<b>F=8.055;</b>	52.54 $\pm$ 13.25	F=0.434;
No <sup>b</sup>	240	72.9	77.80 $\pm$ 4.88	<b>p&lt;0.001</b>	51.37 $\pm$ 13.04	p=0.648
Undecided <sup>c</sup>	38	11.6	81.21 $\pm$ 10.48	<b>a&gt;b; c&gt;b</b>	53.23 $\pm$ 13.99	
Going to another country with programs such as Erasmus etc. during midwifery education						
Yes	6	1.8	83.66 $\pm$ 9.09	t=1.382;	62.33 $\pm$ 18.44	t=1.422;
No	323	98.2	78.51 $\pm$ 6.09	p=0.224	51.57 $\pm$ 13.00	p=0.213
Wanting to go to another country with programs such as Erasmus etc. during midwifery education						
Yes	77	23.4	81.02 $\pm$ 8.48	<b>t=4.008;</b>	52.98 $\pm$ 12.76	t=0.101;
No	252	76.6	77.86 $\pm$ 5.08	<b>p&lt;0.001</b>	51.39 $\pm$ 13.29	p=0.355
Experience of going abroad						
Yes	21	6.4	82.76 $\pm$ 9.55	<b>t=3.226;</b>	48.42 $\pm$ 16.28	t=-1.202;
No	308	93.6	78.32 $\pm$ 5.80	<b>p=0.001</b>	51.99 $\pm$ 12.92	p=0.230

F: One-way analysis of variance; t: t-test; a,b,c,d: Indicates the results of further analysis regarding the cause of the difference. ICS: Intercultural Sensitivity Scale; SD: Standard deviation; XS: Xenophobia Scale

level of knowing a foreign language other than their mother tongue and going to another country with programs such as Erasmus, etc., and the mean ICS score ( $p>0.05$  for each) (Table 1).

It was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the student's classes and the mean ICS score ( $p<0.05$ ) (Table 1). In the advanced analyses, it was understood that the source of the difference was between the 4<sup>th</sup> graders and the others. Accordingly, the students' intercultural sensitivity level increased as the class level increased.

A significant difference was found between the students' having friends from different countries with whom they were in contact, students' willingness to choose the midwifery profession, status of wanting to go to another country with programs such as Erasmus during midwifery education, the experience of going abroad and the mean ICS score ( $p<0.05$ ).

It was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the students' status of their consideration of working abroad after graduation and their mean ICS scores ( $p<0.05$ ) (Table 1). In the ad-

vanced analyses, it was understood that the source of the difference was between those who were thinking about working and those who were not thinking about working and those who were undecided about working and those who were not.

It was detected that there was a statistically significant difference between the students' classes and their mean XS scores ( $p<0.05$ ) (Table 1). The advanced analyses found that the source of the difference was between the 4<sup>th</sup> grade-2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students. Accordingly, the xenophobia level of 4<sup>th</sup>-grade students is higher than that of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students.

A statistically significant difference was detected between the students' knowledge of a language other than their mother tongue and their XS score mean ( $p<0.05$ ) (Table 1). In the advanced analyses, it was understood that the source of the difference was between the students with bad-medium and medium-good levels. Accordingly, the xenophobia level of students with bad knowledge of a language other than their mother tongue was higher than those with moderate levels, and the xenophobia level of those with moderate levels was higher than those with good levels.

A difference was detected between the students' having friends from different countries with whom they were in contact, willingness to choose the mid-

wifery profession and the XS score mean ( $p<0.05$ ) (Table 1).

In the study, no statistically significant difference was detected between the student's nationality, their consideration of working abroad after graduation, their status of going to another country with programs such as Erasmus etc. and their desire to go there, their experience of going abroad and their mean XS score ( $p>0.05$  for each) (Table 1).

The students' total mean score on the ICS was detected to be  $78.60\pm6.18$ . The mean scores of the ICS sub-dimensions are shown in Table 2. The students' total mean score on the XS was  $51.76\pm13.16$ . The mean scores of the XS sub-dimensions are presented in Table 2.

**TABLE 2:** Total mean scores of students in ICS and XS

		$\bar{X}\pm SD$ (interval)
ICS	Total mean	$78.60\pm6.18$ (65-117)
	Responsibility in communication	$24.91\pm2.96$ (17-35)
	Respect for cultural differences	$19.02\pm2.51$ (13-28)
	Self-confidence in communication	$16.76\pm2.38$ (9-24)
	Enjoyment of communication	$7.03\pm2.00$ (3-15)
	Care in communication	$10.85\pm1.58$ (6-15)
XS	Total mean	$51.76\pm13.16$ (22-90)
	Hatred	$19.39\pm4.95$ (10-35)
	Fear	$21.33\pm5.50$ (7-35)
	Contempt	$11.03\pm3.54$ (4-20)

SD: Standard deviation; ICS: Intercultural Sensitivity Scale; XS: Xenophobia Scale

**TABLE 3:** Correlation between ICS and XS

		XS				
		Total	Hatred	Fear	Contempt	
ICS	Total	r value	-0.109*	0.149**	0.071	0.086
		p value	0.049	0.007	0.201	0.119
	Responsibility in communication	r value	-0.241**	-0.198**	-0.244**	-0.239**
		p value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
	Respect for cultural differences	r value	0.560**	0.545**	0.503**	0.540**
		p value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
	Self-confidence in communication	r value	-0.148**	-0.084	-0.191**	-0.137*
		p value	0.007	0.128	<0.001	0.013
	Enjoyment of communication	r value	0.275**	0.292**	0.210**	0.287**
		p value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
	Care in communication	r value	-0.140*	-0.159**	-0.043	-0.231**
		p value	0.011	0.004	0.440	<0.001

\* $p<0.05$ ; \*\* $p<0.01$ ; r: Pearson correlation coefficient; XS: Xenophobia Scale; ICS: Intercultural Sensitivity Scale



**TABLE 4:** Multiple linear regression analysis of ICS and XS

ICS- independent variables	B	S.E.	p value	95% CL	
				Lower	Upper
Class	0.745	0.283	<b>0.009</b>	0.188	1.302
Having foreign friends from different countries that you are in contact with	-0.500	0.825	0.545	-2.123	1.123
Choosing the midwifery profession willingly	5.115	1.088	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	2.974	7.257
Consideration of working abroad after graduation	0.169	0.645	0.793	-1.100	1.439
Wanting to go to another country with programs such as Erasmus etc. during midwifery education	-1.783	0.848	<b>0.036</b>	-3.452	-0.114
Experience of going abroad	-3.336	1.428	<b>0.020</b>	-6.145	-0.528
R=0.382 R <sup>2</sup> =0.146 F=9.185 p<0.001					
XS-independent variables	B	S.E.	p value	95% CL	
				Lower	Upper
Class	0.200	0.607	0.973	-1.174	1.215
Level of knowledge of a foreign language other than the mother tongue (speaking and understanding)	-4.183	0.949	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	-6.051	-2.315
Having foreign friends from different countries that you are in contact with	6.196	1.658	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	2.935	9.458
Choosing the midwifery profession willingly	6.236	2.386	<b>0.009</b>	1.541	10.931
ICS	0.262	0.117	<b>0.026</b>	0.031	0.492
R=0.386 R <sup>2</sup> =0.149 F=11.300 p<0.001					

ICS: Intercultural Sensitivity Scale; SE: Standard error; XS: Xenophobia Scale

As a result of the correlation analysis conducted to determine the relationship between the scales, a weak negative significant relationship was found between the ICS and the total score of the XS ( $r=-0.109$ ;  $p=0.049$ ) (Table 3). Accordingly, as the students' intercultural sensitivity increases, their xenophobic attitudes decrease.

The relationship between the variables that may affect the students' intercultural sensitivity and xenophobic attitudes and the ICS and XS scores was examined with a multiple linear regression model. In the model analyses, it was found that the model was a significant model in the model fit regression coefficients evaluation. In the created model, the variables explained 14.6% of the students' intercultural sensitivity level; while they explained 14.9% of their xenophobic attitudes. According to the model, the class, choosing the midwifery profession willingly, wanting to go to another country with programs such as Erasmus etc. during midwifery education, and the experience of going abroad are significant predictors on intercultural sensitivity; the level of knowing a foreign language other than the mother tongue, having foreign friends from different country/countries in contact, and choosing the midwifery profession willingly, ICS are significant predictors on xenophobic attitude (Table 4).

## DISCUSSION

Considering that societies are increasingly becoming multicultural, the importance of culturally sensitive practices and care in health-related issues is increasing. Culture-based care in line with the needs of the individual will increase the health of mothers and babies, who are mostly served by midwives and will increase the level of satisfaction.<sup>19</sup> Considering that midwifery students will provide services to migrant women on important issues such as reproductive health, birth, family planning, and pregnancy after graduation, this study aimed to examine the relationship between students' intercultural sensitivities and xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants.

The ICS mean score of the students included in the study was found to be  $78.60 \pm 6.18$  and this score was above the scale score mean. Similarly, in the study conducted by Altınkaya and Amanak with midwifery students, the mean score of the scale was  $78.04 \pm 5.86$ , in the study conducted by Özcan et al. with midwifery students, the mean score of the scale was  $91.29 \pm 14.54$ , in the study made by Bilgiç and Şahin with nursing students, the mean score of the scale was  $76.67 \pm 7.27$ , and in the study conducted by Baksi et al. with nursing students, the mean score of the scale was  $91.20 \pm 13.78$ .<sup>14,15,20,21</sup> In these studies, it

can be said that the students' intercultural sensitivity levels are generally moderate or high.

Healthcare team members must be competent to provide care to culturally diverse patients, families and groups.<sup>22</sup> Being in contact with individuals from different cultures, knowing a foreign language, perceiving interactions with people from different cultures as positive, and receiving education about culture can be listed among the factors affecting intercultural sensitivity.<sup>16</sup> Although a study conducted with health students reported that intercultural sensitivity increases as foreign language knowledge increases, this study found no statistically significant difference between the level of knowing a foreign language other than the mother tongue and the ICS score average.<sup>23</sup> This study determined that students who had friends from different countries with whom they were in contact had higher levels of intercultural sensitivity. In addition, in the current study, it was understood that students who wanted to go to another country with programs such as Erasmus during their midwifery education had higher levels of intercultural sensitivity. Midwifery students who will become health professionals after graduation can be supported in developing their foreign language skills during their education, by adding topics related to intercultural sensitivity and differences to their curriculum, and by increasing the participation of students in international student exchange programs such as Erasmus, in order to increase their cultural sensitivity levels. Similarly, it is unsurprising that the students who had previously gone abroad had higher levels of intercultural sensitivity in this study, because this experience provided them with the opportunity to see and compare different cultures.

Making friends with people from different countries offers a unique opportunity for individuals to develop their intercultural sensitivity. Such relationships provide the chance to experience different cultural perspectives, strengthen empathy, reduce prejudices and increase social awareness.<sup>1,24</sup> For students studying health, it is thought that these interactions will impact professional development. Research shows that students with friends from diverse countries have higher levels of intercultural sensitivity. This shows that when individuals come into di-

rect contact with different cultures, they become more open to understanding and respecting these cultures. Friendships with individuals from different cultures not only increase cultural understanding but also contribute to the development of foreign language skills and the adoption of a more flexible and open communication style.<sup>25</sup> In this study, it is understood that students who communicate with friends from different countries have higher levels of intercultural sensitivity, in line with the literature.

The midwifery profession requires providing physical, emotional and cultural support to individuals during the birth and reproductive health processes, one of the most important periods of human life. For this reason, it is observed that midwives who choose their profession willingly are more sensitive to the needs of the individuals they serve and have higher professional motivation. Intercultural sensitivity, in particular, is of great importance in the midwifery profession.<sup>14</sup> This study found that students who choose the midwifery profession willingly have higher levels of intercultural sensitivity. This finding reveals the effect of career choice motivation on developing cultural awareness and understanding. It is thought that students who choose the midwifery profession voluntarily and consciously better embrace the responsibilities required by the profession and have more respect for the cultural values of the individuals they serve. In the study of Yılmaz and Fışkın Siyahtaş, it was stated that although midwifery students' interest in the profession was high, they were not satisfied with their choices and this situation was associated with professional decision regret.<sup>26</sup> It is thought that the difficulties encountered in midwifery education or the failure to meet expectations fully may also affect the students' intercultural sensitivity.

In the current study, it was understood that the total XS score average of the students was  $51.76 \pm 13.16$  and was above the scale score average. In a similar study conducted with midwifery students in Türkiye, the students' XS score average was  $46.93 \pm 11.47$ .<sup>13</sup> It can be said that xenophobic attitudes and behaviors towards immigrants increased, especially after the pandemic in the field of health, and the style and language used in conveying information about the process caused xenophobic tenden-

cies to become widespread.<sup>27,28</sup> Therefore, since this study was conducted in the post-pandemic period, the high xenophobic attitudes of the students may be related to this. In addition, the fact that the xenophobia level of the 4<sup>th</sup>-grade students in the study was higher than the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students is a striking finding. The anxiety of students about the future and finding a job at the graduation stage, the increase in the number of immigrants in recent years, the extension of the stay of immigrants, and the economic and social problems experienced may be effective in the high xenophobic attitude.<sup>10</sup> It is very important for health education institutions to provide career counseling services to students before graduation and to organize case studies that will create positive perceptions about immigrants.<sup>29</sup>

One of the factors that make communication between health professionals and immigrants difficult in the provision of health services is the language problem. When immigrants and health professionals do not speak the same language, there may be disruptions in treatment and healthcare services.<sup>10</sup> In this study, xenophobia levels were found to be higher in students who had a poor level of knowledge of a language other than their mother tongue than in those who had an intermediate level and in those who had an intermediate level than in those who had a good level. Accordingly, it can be said that the xenophobic attitude of the student decreased as their foreign language knowledge increased. In a similar study conducted with a group of university students, most students stated that they could not communicate with foreign nationals due to the language problem or that the communication they established with foreign nationals was not sufficient/effective.<sup>30</sup> This situation can be interpreted as those who know a foreign language communicate and interact with people from different cultures and have knowledge about different cultures. As a result, individuals' attitudes towards immigrants and fears of immigrants are less pronounced.

Intercultural sensitivity and xenophobic attitudes are 2 important psychosocial dimensions that shape individuals' approaches to different cultures. In this study, a negative relationship was observed between ICS and XS. This finding shows that as individuals'

intercultural sensitivity increases, their xenophobic attitudes decrease. In particular, interaction with different cultures contributes to reducing prejudices in individuals and forming a more inclusive worldview. Intercultural sensitivity is an important skill that enables individuals to understand different cultural norms, values, and belief systems and to appreciate these differences.<sup>31</sup> In the current study, it was observed that attitudes such as responsibility in communication, respect for cultural differences, and being careful in communication were inversely related to xenophobic tendencies such as hatred and contempt. Accordingly, it can be said that individuals with a high level of responsibility in communication experience feelings of hatred and fearless.

Xenophobic attitudes are generally caused by lack of knowledge, prejudices, and lack of social interaction. The study results show that educational interventions aimed at increasing individuals' intercultural sensitivity can effectively reduce xenophobia levels. In particular, it is very important to integrate cultural awareness studies and activities that will enable students to have direct contact with different cultures into the curriculum during educational processes. In addition, developing foreign language skills and encouraging experiences abroad can allow students to be more open-minded towards different cultures.<sup>2</sup>

## CONCLUSION

According to the research findings, although the intercultural sensitivity levels of midwifery students are generally above the scale average, various strategic approaches need to be developed in order to increase this level further. In this context, it can be suggested to add courses on cultural differences and the effects of these differences on health services to the midwifery curriculum. In addition, encouraging exchange programs that will enable students to gain experience abroad and disseminating simulated training that will provide the ability to work with patients from different cultures can be quite effective. It can be suggested that practices be included to increase students' professional commitment and develop their intercultural awareness in the education process. In addition, social awareness studies, semi-



nars, workshops and intercultural communication skill development trainings can significantly contribute to reducing xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants.

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### Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest between the authors and / or family members of the scientific and medical committee members or members of the potential conflicts of interest, counseling, expertise, working conditions, share holding and similar situations in any firm.

### Authorship Contributions

**Idea/Concept:** Ayşe Çataloluk; **Design:** Ayşe Çataloluk; **Control/Supervision:** Ayşe Çataloluk; **Data Collection and/or Processing:** Beyzanur Sütü, Zehra Karataş; **Analysis and/or Interpretation:** Ayşe Çataloluk, Beyzanur Sütü, Zehra Karataş; **Literature Review:** Ayşe Çataloluk, Beyzanur Sütü, Zehra Karataş; **Writing the Article:** Ayşe Çataloluk, Beyzanur Sütü, Zehra Karataş; **Critical Review:** Ayşe Çataloluk.

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