Over the past two decades, growth-demands and policy-driven demands resulted in national teacher markets shortages internationally. To avoid negative effects on quality, the demand for high-quality teachers is often met through recruitment of foreign educated teachers (McKinnon, Moussa-Inaty, & Barza, 2014). Studies suggest that teacher-child interactions, essential to quality teaching (Hamre & Pianta, 2014), are less positive and supportive when teachers and students do not share the same ethno-cultural background (Howes & Shivers, 2006; Saft, Pianta, & Paro, 2008). In the present study, we present a first attempt to systematically investigate how globally mobile teachers respond to ethno-cultural classroom diversity in their day-to-day classroom interactions. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a country that strongly depends on culturally foreign teachers (McKinnon et al., 2013). We focused on Western educated teachers (many from the United Kingdom and the United States) in relation to Arab children and children of international foreign workers in the UAE.

**EDUCATION IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

The rapid transformation of the UAE from one of the poorest nations to one of the highest per capita income of the world has impacted the education system (McKinnon et al., 2013). An important characteristic of the current education system in the UAE is its wide diversity of educational providers and curricula. In the country’s efforts to adapt and uphold international standards, the Abu Dhabi Education Council has developed a 10-year strategic plan to enhance students’ academic skills and characteristic of the current education system in the UAE.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Is there a mismatch between teachers’ and students’ ethno-cultural background? Is there lower quality teacher-child interaction in kindergarten classrooms?
2. How stable is the quality of teacher-child interactions in kindergarten classrooms over the course of the school day and does it differ based on classroom ethno-cultural composition?

**METHOD**

### Participants:

- 21 female Western educated teachers (M<sub>age</sub> = 38 years, SD = 9.85) from 7 schools in the UAE
- 10 teachers had on average 10 years of experience teaching in early childhood education settings.
- Classrooms were divided into two groups based on classrooms’ teacher-student ethno-cultural composition:
  - 11 classrooms with teacher-student ethno-cultural mismatch (primarily Arab students with a Western teacher)
  - 15 classrooms with a teacher-student ethno-cultural match (international, primarily Western students with a Western teacher)

### Observations of teacher-child interactions:

- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS Pre-K; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008)
- Four observations cycles during a regular school morning
- Cronbach’s alpha were .87 for emotional support, .80 for classroom organization, and .79 for instructional support.

### RESULTS

#### RESULT 1

**Describing the quality of classroom interactions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classrooms</th>
<th>Emotional Support</th>
<th>Classroom Organization</th>
<th>Instructional Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Quality</td>
<td>Medium Quality</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>5.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Organization</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust Means Modeling:
- Significant differences in the level of emotional support (estimate = 1.023, S.E. = 3.98, p < .010) and classroom organization (estimate = 7.67, S.E. = 28.8, p = .008)
- No significant differences with regard to the level of instructional support (estimate = 555, S.E. = .345, p = .108)

**Table 1. Comparison of Teacher-Child Interactions Across Classrooms of Differing Ethno-Cultural Composition**

- Emotional support (estimate = .555, S.E. = .345, p = .010)
- Classroom organization (estimate = .767, S.E. = .288, p = .008)
- Instructional support (estimate = .398, S.E. = .288, p = .008)

#### RESULT 2

**Within-morning variability as a function of ethno-cultural classroom composition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Intercept</th>
<th>Slope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>5.090**</td>
<td>-.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom organization</td>
<td>2.057**</td>
<td>-.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional support</td>
<td>5.508**</td>
<td>-.343*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Parameters of Multilevel Growth Models (observation cycles entered as repeated measurement points for the three CLASS Pre-K domains)**

- Emotional support (estimate = .609**, p < .05)
- Classroom organization (estimate = .286***, p < .001)
- Instructional support (estimate = .612**, p < .05)

**CONCLUSIONS**

Results of the study show that teacher-student ethno-cultural mismatch pose a challenge for teachers. Levels of emotional support for Western teachers with mostly Arab students were lower as compared to Western teachers with international (mostly Western) students. Therefore, teachers who interacted with students of cultures more similar to their own were better at creating a positive classroom climate and were more sensitive to students’ needs. In addition, teacher-student cultural compatibility was associated with proactive and effectively reducing misbehavior. These findings support previous research in the UAE which showed lower teaching self-efficacy among foreign educated teachers, suggesting that cultural adaptation may influence efficacy (McKinnon, Moussa-Inaty, & Barza, 2014). Results imply that support for teachers to adapt and apply their teaching strategies with students who are ethno-culturally different from them is important for ensuring teacher quality. A limitation of the present study, however, is that it utilized a quasi-experimental design with no random assignment of teachers to classrooms. Thus, confounding variables due to school and individual student differences could have accounted for the results.

**REFERENCES**