Pre-service English teachers' intercultural sensitivity

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Abstract

Globalisation has helped the number of people to be cognizant of the importance of foreign language teaching and learning. As it is almost impossible to separate culture from language and the familiarization of diverse cultures from language do not help students for the real life because people from diverse cultural backgrounds use language differently, Kramsch (1993:258) holds that the aim of language learning is "cultivating international understanding, responsibility, and effective participation in a global age". The purpose of this article is to explore the intercultural sensitivity among teacher trainees. For this purpose two scales were administered to the pre- service teachers to see to what extent they have intercultural sensitivity and how they see culture teaching in the curriculum. The results yield that Turkish teacher trainees integrate language teaching objectives with culture teaching and they prioritize the attitudinal knowledge, showing tolerance and sympathy for the others.

Key Words*: Intercultural competence; teacher trainees; language learning; cultural insensitivity; adaptation

Introduction

The focus on integrating culture into English language teaching programs can also be seen in Turkey which started the language learning classes in the fourth grade. Foreign language instruction highlights cultural interactions and paves the way for the users to be able to use the language that facilitates and eases cross-cultural communication and the international exchange of information. The widespread learning of English is based on the perception of English as an international lingua franca. In order to enhance students' intercultural communicative competence and understanding, teaching culture as an inseparable part of the English language has become one of the objectives in the language learning

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curriculum.Recent approaches have subordinated "the memorisation of cultural facts to the acquisition of intercultural communication" (Savignon and Sysoyev, 2005: 517) and intercultural competence (Dahl, 1995; Kramsch, 1996). These approaches hold on to the idea that learners, no matter what their backgrounds are, should develop intercultural knowledge and communication needed for participating in diverse and changing cultures (Su, 2008: 380).

Intercultural learning is defined as"acquiring increased awareness of subjective cultural context, that is world view, including one's own, and developing greater ability to interact sensitively and competently across cultural contexts as both an immediate and long-term effect of Exchange" (Bennett, 2009: 2).

Cultural self-awareness is a necessary precursor of intercultural learning focussing upon both similaries and discrepancies among cultures. If students do not prove to possess some background knowledge, they will find it difficult to recognize and manage cultural differences. They may acquire something about the target culture, but that kind of culture learning is different from intercultural learning. Culture learning usually "refers to the acquisition of knowledge about, and perhaps even skills in enacting, a particular foreign culture" (Bennett, 2009: 3). Such "emic knowledge is not necessarily related to general intercultural competence, just as the knowledge of a particular foreign language is not necessarily related to a general competence in language learning" and it can be suggested that to acquire general intercultural competence, people need to have learned some etic, or culture-general categories for recognizing and dealing with a wide range of cultural differences (Bennett, 1993). The second part of the definition of intercultural learning involves the development of cultural awareness into intercultural sensitivity and competence. The term 'intercultural sensitivity' refers to the complexity of perception of cultural difference, so that higher sensitivity refers to more complex perceptual discriminations of such differences (Bennett, 2004: 65). The term 'competence' refers to the potential for enactment of culturally sensitive feeling into appropriate and effective behavior in another cultural context (Bennett, 2004). According to the developmental theory underlying these definitions, intercultural learning is transferable to other cultural contexts; for example, a student who develops intercultural sensitivity on an exchange program in France or the USA can apply that sensitivity in Taivan, or Ivory Coast, or with different ethnic groups.

Another popular belief is that cultural teaching should help students develop an awareness of their own ways of speaking, reading and writing, as well as understanding the various ways of the discourse that is culturally benchmarked. She describes culture in discourse as a symbolic social construct that it is the product of the perceptions of the self and others. More specifically, culture is perceived as an interpersonal process of meaning construction (Kramsch, 2003: 21).

Bhawuk and Brislin (1992: 416) suggest that to be effective in another culture, people must be interested in their cultures, be sensitive and curious enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behavior as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures. There are many developmental models of intercultural competence in the field of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. One of these commonly referenced models is the one developed by Bennett (1993: 22), The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), as a framework to explain the experience of students he observed over the course of months and sometimes years in intercultural workshops, classes, exchanges and graduate programs. Using the concepts from cognitive psychology and constructivism, Bennett organized these observations into a continuum of six stages of increasing sensitivity to cultural difference.

There are several assumptions underlying the DMIS. First, Bennett (1986, 1993) suggests that his intercultural sensitivity model captures the individual's experience of cultural difference, not objective behavior. In this sense, the model can be regarded as phenomenological in nature. Second, Bennett views intercultural sensitivity in developmental terms rather than static terms. Intercultural sensitivity is conceptualized as a continuum ranging from a more ethnocentric to a more ethnorelative worldview (25). The model displays that progression along the continuum can be through training and education. While it is not necessary to have the linear progression in development (particularly from Minimization to Defense), "each stage is meant to characterize a treatment of cultural difference that is fairly consistent for a particular individual at a particular point of development" (27). Third, the model offers a phenomenological explanation of how individuals construe their world in terms of dealing with cultural differences between themselves as members of a social/cultural group and others as members of social/cultural groups. This is important, for an individual's orientation towards cultural differences exists in

terms of their social identifications, which are based on group membership (Tajfel & Turner,1986). More specifically, the model describes "an individual's generalized perspective, based on ingroup/outgroup distinctions, towards people and cultures" which are regarded and depicted as different from their own group. Finally, the applicability of the measuring instrument is fundamentally grounded on the DMIS assumption that ingroup/outgroup categorization is a universal function.

The underlying assumption of the model is that as long as a person encounters various cultural norms and differences, then he would become more competent in intercultural relations. Bennett (2004) assumes that each stage is indicative of a particular cognitive structure and that certain kinds of attitudes and behavior would typically be associated with each configuration of a worldview. The six stages move from ethnocentrism meaning that "an individual's own culture is experienced as central to reality in some way to ethnorelativism meaning that an individual's culture is experienced in the context of other cultures (65).

The first three DMIS stages are ethnocentric, meaning that one's own culture is experienced as central to reality in some way: Denial means individuals' own culture is experienced as "the only real one, and consideration of other cultures is avoided by maintaining psychological and/or physical isolation from differences. In Defense, people's own culture is experienced as the only good one, and cultural difference is denigrated. In Minimization, elements of one's own cultural worldview are experienced as universal, hence in spite of differences from other cultures, deep down those cultures are seen as essentially similar to one's own. An individual in this stage acknowledges cultural differences, but trivializes them, believing that human similarities far outweigh any differences.

The second three DMIS stages are ethnorelative, meaning that one's own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures and they can be summarized in the following way: In Acceptance, other cultures are experienced as equally complex but different constructions of reality. Individuals recognize and value cultural differences without evaluating those differences as positive or negative. This stage moves an individual from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. First comes a respect for cultural differences in behavior, and then a deeper respect for cultural differences in values. In Adaptation, one attains the

ability to shift perspective in and out of another cultural worldview; thus, one's experience potentially includes the different cultural experience of someone from another culture. In Integration, one's experience of self is expanded to include the movement in and out of different cultural worldviews. Individuals in this stage not only value a variety of cultures, but are constantly defining their own identity and evaluating behavior and values in contrast to and in concert with a multitude of cultures. Rising above the limitations of living in one cultural context, these individuals integrate aspects of their own original cultural perspectives with those of other cultures.

Another intercultural model is developed by Terry Cross (1989) and he has six stages as well.

1. Cultural Destructiveness

This stage is considered as the most negative end of the continuum represented by attitudes, policies, and practices that are destructive to cultures and consequently to the individuals wit the cultures. Individuals in this phase view culture as a problem, believe that if culture can be suppressed or destroyed, people will be better off, think that people should be more like the mainstream and assume that one culture is superior and should eradicate lesser cultures (1).

2. Cultural Incapacity (corresponds with the Denial stage of the Bennett Model) is the stage in which individuals in his phase are supposed to lack cultural awareness and skills, may have been brought up in a homogeneous society and been taught to behave in certain ways and have never questioned it, believe in racial superiority of a dominant group and assume a paternalistic posture toward others, maintain stereotypes (1-3)

3. Cultural Blindness (corresponds with Bennett's Minimization stage) is the stage in which individuals are regarded as somewhere between noticing the others and being stil influenced by their own culture. Individuals in this phase see others in terms of their own culture and claim that all people are exactly alike, believe that culture makes no difference. They think we are all the same and believe that all people should be treated in the same way regardless of race, ethnicity and nationality (4).

4. Cultural Pre -Competence (corresponds with Bennett's Acceptance stage) is the stage in which individuals notice that there are a lot of cultural differences and begin to train themselves and others concerning these differences and come to the conclusion about their shortcomings in interacting within a diverse environment and finally become complacent in their efforts.

5. Basic Cultural Competence (corresponds with Bennett's Adaptation stage) is on the continuum where individuals at this stage show some symptoms of accepting, appreciating and adjusting the cultural differences, start to appreciate diversity and accept and respect differences and acknowledge the influence of their own culture and embrace the cultural values, understand and manage the dynamics of difference when cultures intersect, and sort out the components the nuances of cultural interactions .

6. Advanced Cultural Competence is the stage in which individuals at this phase move beyond accepting, appreciating, and accommodating cultural difference and actively educate less informed individuals about cultural differences and seek out knowledge, develop skills to interact in diverse environments, become allies with and are comfortable interacting with others in multicultural settings (9).

Since language and culture cannot be separated from each other in language classes, it is almost impossible to not touch the issue of culture especially in reading and literature oriented classes. This study aims at exploring the intercultural sensitivity among pre service English teachers at a western university in Turkey.

Method

Participants

Sixty-five Turkish pre-service English teachers participated in the research project. The trainees were selected on a voluntary basis among the senior classes as they have already taken the methodology based courses such as The Approaches to Language Teaching Teaching Skills, and Practicum. Fifty-one teacher trainees were females and fourteen were male ones. They were all native speakers of Turkish and their ages varied between between 21-23.

Instruments

Pre-service English language teachers were administered the three-point Likert *Cultural Sensitivity Scale* of which reliability was .87 (adapted by the Project INCA www.inca.org) and then the interviews were held with them by the researcher and one of the staff members and they were asked questions about their perception of culture teaching. Sixty five pre-service teachers were administered the Cultural Sensitivity Scale in which the first section between 1-11 is about encounters with other people in home country, the statements between 12-15

are the situations where people meet people in home country , and the rest 16-21 are related to work situations with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds.

The second scale is a three-point Likert and the reliability for this .92 with the participants. This scale was adapted by Castro, Sercu and Mendez Garcia (2004) who utilized it for the nonnative speakers of English, that is why it was used for the Turkish pre-service teachers. In order to investigate the way in which teachers defined culture teaching in a foreign language education context, the respondents were asked to rank nine objectives in order of importance. "The statements 1-5 addressed the knowledge dimension, defining culture learning; 6-7 the attitudinal dimension, defining culture learning in terms of the adoption of intercultural attitudes, and the last two the skills dimension, defining culture learning in terms of the acquisition of behaviour in intercultural situations" (100). Then two raters went through the results of the first scale to fit them into the Bennett's model. The interrater reliability was .92.

Results

Pre-service teachers' intercultural sensivity

Sixty five pre-service teachers were administered the Cultural Sensitivity Scale in which the first section between 1-11 is about encounters with other people in home country, the statements between 12-15 are the situations where people meet people in home country , and the rest 16-21 are related to work situations with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds.

When the results are tackled, it is possible to see that pre-service teachers have positive attitude toward the other cultures and they are ready to notice the nuances and differences and can take initiatives to adapt themselves to the changing situations. In case of a misfortune or a catastrophe, they are concerned and feel worried. When the colleagues from another country wish for something or change their habits, pre-service teachers easily adjust to their habits saying that the colleagues are hosts in their country and it is their duty to make them feel home.

Table 1
Intercultural sensitivity

Items	Always	Never	Sometimes
1. In restaurants I often eat unfamiliar food	20	18	27
2. I seek contact with other people to learn more about their culture.	40	-	25
3. I notice it when other people do not feel comfortable in my presence	30	10	25
4. I find it hard to adapt to people from diverse origins.	40	5	20
5. When people behave in a way I do not understand, I ask them the reason.	30	9	27
6. When I hear about a disaster in another country, I think about the people and their fate.	55	-	10
7. When I am a newcomer in a group, I try to find out the rules by observing their behaviour.	34	6	25
8. When I cannot manage to hold a conversation with people from different countries, I ask everybody why.	15	32	18
9. When people use gestures and expressions unknown to me, I ignore them	6	30	29
10. While talking to other people, I watch their body language.	28	12	25
11. I avoid unclear expressions in conversations with speakers from other cultures.	13	8	43
12. I feel at a loss when I cannot read timetables in the country I visit	45	5	15
13. I try to understand how people from different cultures feel	35	8	22
14. I change my plans when I am abroad.	--	--	3
15. I avoid contacting with people from other cultures when their behavior alienates me.	35	8	22
16. I do not have problems in suddenly changing to other languages during a conversation.	--	--	3
17. I follow the rules of my culture if I am not sure how to behave properly	15	38	12
18. I adopt the work habits of my colleagues from other cultures when they come to work .	42	10	13
19. If I behave inappropriately to a colleague from another culture, I make up for it.	60	3	2
20. I try to involve colleagues from an ethnic minority in the majority group at work.	45	--	20
21. I consider changing my work habits when colleagues /superiors from other countries are not happy with my work.	20	25	20

Pre-service teachers' perceptions of culture teaching

When the teacher trainees were asked the following statements to rank, the results were

shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Pre-service teachers' perceptions of culture teaching

Items	Means
I familiarize students with daily life and routines of the target culture	6.45
I present information about shared values/ beliefs	7.86
I give information about the general information on the taregt culture	5.23
I provide experience with various cultural expressions	7.23
I stress increased understanding of students' own cultural beliefs/values	4.23
I promote attitudes of opennes and tolerance to other cultures	7.38
I stress the sense of empathy with people from different cultures	7.89
I stress the cultural differences	7.46
I exemplify the ways to cope with intercultural situations	6.45

Pre-service teachers view culture from a pragmatic point of view, which means that culture teaching is defined in terms of the acquisition of information which allows pupils to participate and survive in the sociocultural reality of the foreign language. They predominantly think their job is to highlight the ability to empathize with the other cultures and focus on shared values and beliefs among cultures such as hospitality, generosity, integrity, love for nature, environmentalism, human rights, and animal rights. The least ranking statement is to promote only Turkish values. In language classes they focus more on shared values (7.86) than the national ones (4.23). Thus, Turkish pre-service teachers tend to consider culture teaching in terms of in attitudinal dimension (statements 6-7) and then knowledge dimension of teaching culture (statements 1-5)

Intercultural sensitivity model

The raters went through all the statements and responses of sixty-five teacher trainees to make them fit into the Bennett's Intercultural sensitivity Model in the following rubric prepared by the INCA project where the items to measure students" cultural sensitivity are categorized as tolerance, denial, communicative awareness, acceptance, respect and empathy.

Table 3

Intercultural Sensitivity Model

Stages	Basic	Intermediate	Advanced	Total
Denial	-	-	-	-
Defense	1	1	2	4
Minimization	2	3	4	9
Acceptance	7	12	5	24
Adaptation	6	11	6	23
Integration	2	2	1	5

Table 3 highlights that students fall into mainly acceptance and adaptation categories, which imply that language learning paves the way for the them to open themselves up to the target culture and broaden their horizons to get to know the other various cultures.

Discussion

In general, it is possible to observe that pre-service English teachers integrate language teaching objectives with culture teaching and they prioritize the attitudinal knowledge , showing tolerance and sympathy for the others. They perceive that intercultural sensitivity is very significant Nevertheless, they are willing to try and attain culture learning objectives in foreign language education. They highlight the promotion of the culture. Intercultural objectives that aim at promoting the acquisition of intercultural skills are regarded important by many scholars (Byram, 1994; 1997;1999; Hammer, 1989; Martin, 1989) .

Language teachers have to be familiar not only with these concepts, but also with what lies behind the new skills and strategies their students are expected to learn. For this, teachers are asked to teach for intercultural understanding, which means that "they need explicit training in dealing with social and cultural values, the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity and citizenship" (Garrido & Alvares, 2006: 163). Hence, it is important to analyse how the cultural dimension contributes to language learning proficiency and motivation (Lazar, 2001; Crawford-Lange & Lange, 1984). Actually, this cultural aspect is not something new. The importance of the training of teachers for intercultural understanding was officially acknowledged by The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (1984) in a document that suggested that the training given to teachers should equip them to adopt an intercultural approach and be based on an awareness of the enrichment constituted by intercultural understanding and of the value and originality of each culture (2). In 1992, the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) created the Commission of Cultural Competence, which by 1995 had proposed a framework that promoted the understanding and knowledge of French-speaking societies (Gaston, 1992; Garrido & Alvarez, 2006:166). Likewise, The Ministry of Education in Turkey developed benchmarking statements that promoted and highlighted the intercultural nature of language learning by passing the Act 1835 related to the teacher efficacies and responsibilities at school on June 4, 2008.

Language teaching profession is a lifelong process that is supposed to occur both inside and outside organised and designed teaching and learning contexts at school and in life and the globalized world requires everybody from different countries and ethnic groups to empathize with each other, to merge with each other and to bond with each other and to pay attention to daily cultural interactions in person and online so that they can enhance their own conceptual understanding of what cultural knowledge really is, what intercultural concept is, and how important the exposure and being able to empathize with each other is. In order to represent a model for their students, all teachers especially language teachers need to establish which resources and strategies are needed for the realization of this intercultural sensitivity.

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