Exploring Native English Teachers' Perceptions on Developing Intercultural Awareness: The Turkish Context

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Cultural Awareness

Hymes(1972)→culture a privileged and crucial position in language classes.

Byram(1997)→'critical cultural awareness' for learners to develop their intercultural communicative skills.

According to Baker (2012: 65), *"cultural awareness can be defined as a conscious understanding of the role culture plays in language learning and communication in both first and foreign languages".*

- In relation to foreign language teaching, Kramsch (2009: 190) notes this:

"the goals of traditional language teaching have been found wanting in this new era of globalization. Its main tenets (monolingual native speakers, homogeneous national cultures, pure standard national languages, instrumental goals of education, functional criteria of success) have all become problematic in a world that is increasingly multilingual and multicultural".

In today's language classes…

- The aim of teaching a foreign language is no longer just to develop communicational competence, but also the acquisition of intercultural competence(IC).

- IC → beyond the 'target' community, but pluralism of communicative practices.

Why teachers' beliefs?

- Teachers' beliefs directly affect their teaching practices in the classroom.

Aims of the Study

- To explore native English teachers' perceptions on raising intercultural awareness in EFL classes.

Research questions:

1. What do native English teachers think about the incorporation of target, local and world culture into their EFL classes?

2. To what extent do they see intercultural awareness as an objective in their language classrooms?

3. What do they think about their strengths and weaknesses as a native English teacher in promoting intercultural awareness?

Metholodogy

- A qualitative design based on interviewing.

Participants

- 9 native English teachers of three private universities in Turkey.
- 6 female & 3 male participants.
- 8 Americans, 1 New Zealander.
  - *Teaching experience:*
- Between 2,5 and 25 years.
  - *Educational background:*
- 3 with a BA,
- 5 with a MA,
- 1 with a PhD.

Data Collection

- A questionnaire on demographic information.
- Semi-structured interviews.

Data Analysis

- Interviews→audio-recorded→ transcribed.

- The interview data was analyzed through the software Hyperresearch and through thematic analysis, emerging categories from the data were categorized and subcategorized accordingly.

Findings

- 4 themes →an evidence for the need for incorporation of a worldview in language teaching and the potential benefits of inclusion of intercultural awareness.

‘culture’ definitions…

Mm I consider it to be anything that makes mm the background of the identity of a student or a person so their language, where they come from, customs, ideas, thought patterns, methods of communication if they are high context or low context. (Informant 1)

I don’t know if I would define it differently from how I would otherwise define it, which is I guess that set of beliefs and attitudes and… I don’t know. Sort of a mental you know it is a worldview includes customs and things like that. (Informant 6)

Culture is every aspect of the life within a country. So it is mm values and morals and hmm history and … preferences among people and mutual differences. (Informant 8)

Theme 1:Limited Knowledge of Other Cultures

*For English I think I would say target culture would be Engla English culture, American, Australian since I only have any kind of experience with American culture that's in my classrooms that's all I can do. Because I don't wanna I don't wanna tell them anything wrong. I like it (local culture), unfortunately I don't know very much about local Turkish culture. And just being here short time but I found some of the best parts of my EFL classes are when students are sharing parts of local culture with me and I am sharing parts of American culture with them. So it is something that I really I really like and I think it helps them learn. (*Informant 5)

Well I can give them a good perspective on American culture. I probably do depend on it too much. That's a weakness I am you know mm I am not bringing their attention to other cultures. Mm… (Informant 9)

Theme 1:Limited Knowledge of Other Cultures

My knowledge is somewhat limited since I am not from there but I know I think the most of the group I would know about British culture, I have been there and I have some friends there. So a lot of times we would talk about different spellings, words or holidays so they come into the class as well with students. (Informant 1)

Mm I am I have very limited mm experience with people from Australia. So I don't make generalizations about things. And then mm the same for Canada. Although I lived, you know close and I visited, I can't speak from, you know personal standpoint. (Informant 3)

Theme 2: Time Limitations

Again given time constraints. Mm we are limited right now, listening and speaking teachers are only giving 2 hours a week for the elementary students and 4 hours a week for the intermediate students. The pre-intermediate we are not teaching right now because of the first semester of the year. If I had the opportunity, I would definitely teach more world culture. I find here in Turkey and I knew it no better than I do, but I have found in years that… the knowledge of world cultures is very limited in Turkish education. I am not getting people who are finished with their bachelors; I am getting people who have started who just finish the lycee. (Informant 7)

I do try as much as possibly I can. Mm when time when time permits because I only see my students five hours a week and I know from our curriculum unit the vocabulary and listening sections are the most important things so I try to I try to get those as quickly as possible. And if we have time, for more cultural… (Informant 4)

Theme 2: Time Limitations

It (intercultural awareness) is not…..None. Unfortunately it is it is kind of like I see none the cake. It is not really something we work toward. Mm it is something that we do or something that happens occasionally when we occasionally have time. But because it is filled with because the objectives of the class are filled with so much with other stuff and that's not one of them, unfortunately. If I could design the objectives for my classroom, that would be different. (Informant 5)

Well its… it is a skills-based curriculum which I mean I don't I wouldn't say that that necessarily that in teaching culture are not mutually exclusive. I think that can be done. But I just I don't see it as an objective here. Look at Ankara there are hardly any foreigners in the city. For Istanbul in a very diverse area, it might be a different subject. But I don't see it as my mission to teach these kids about world cultures. It is not my job. All I can do is to try to teach them the material, teach them about my culture, teach them something about their own culture. So the global culture is the thing making them global citizens. I hope it happens, but this is not my job. (Informant 6)

Theme 3: Being Open to New Experiences

Just being from another culture I think is a strength and coming into a culture with new eyes, you know I can see things that other people native people here get used to so I can ask questions and they can hopefully think about the things in new way that they assumed that they have taken for granted. So mm I think you can spark a lot of creative thinking. Mm…just I enjoy what I am doing, you know so. I love teaching and mm enjoy being in Turkey. So it is very self-motivating. (Informant 8)

Theme 3: Being Open to New Experiences

Mm the fact that I have had three years of exposure to other cultures and I can help them to understand even though my you know it is a strength not a weakness. I am not an expert on it but I know enough to be able to tell my students 'hey this is how this is'. Mm I think also major strength is the fact that I am willing to learn about other cultures. And then in part that knowledge to my students. (Informant 4)

Well, I think the fact that I have been to a lot of countries, and I am aware of other cultures and other religions. And just the difference between cultures I think gives me the strength to be able to teach the cultural awareness. And you know the fact that I have eaten different food and I have lived in different countries, I think that for them is an advantage if they were interested. (Informant 2)

Theme 4: Being a Language Learner

I was a student, I was studying Spanish. So mm that that's probably going back to the strength question. Another strength that I have is that I can tell my students not necessarily culture but as far as language goes, I have been where you are before and I know how difficult it is. But you can't stop you can't give up. You have to keep walking otherwise you know you lose everything you watch for. (Informant 4)

Theme 4: Being a Language Learner

Mm one thing that helps my teaching is like here even though I don't know Turkish, I am multilingual; I speak Spanish and German as well. So I think that helps because students are used to like oh teachers making me learn this, but teacher doesn't know any other languages either. So that helps with them. Mm they like I I said at least I am trying to learn some Turkish. And mm I don't know I mean I I will tell stories like you know if we talk about Christmas. For example, I would say in Germany they do this and you know I talk about Spain a lot; that was my most recent experience. So the students would say oh teacher I want to I wanna go to Spain, tell me about this.so.. (Informant 1)

Conclusion

Teachers have a crucial role in developing intercultural awareness to help students to overcome potential ignorance,racist attitudes about other cultures, and act as global citizens. Most participants of the study fail to provide students with a deeper knowledge of global and societal issues. Deeper discussion on raising intercultural awareness was missing and they grounded this on insufficient time and lack of knowledge.

Conclusion

Participants stated that intercultural approach is necessary and appropriate, but tended to be unable or unwilling to put it into practice. The reasons for this were lack of learner interest, a lack of curricular support, a lack of suitable teaching materials and institutional needs.

Pedagogical Implications

It is necessary to raise awareness by providing relevant literature for teachers to set appropriate learning objectives and by exploring the challenges and potential benefits of practical teaching examples, intercultural methodology can be integrated better. The study of intercultural awareness should be complemented by study of the self.

Pedagogical Implications

Teachers tend to approach culture in a superficial way; they confine interculturalism to themes such as food, fashion, festivals and folklore. These activities do not develop intercultural awareness. Therefore, teachers need to reflect more, and more deeply, on it.

Pedagogical Implications

Teachers have little control over their profession due to externally imposed regulations, curriculum and policy demands. Although developing intercultural awareness is mostly affected badly by this vulnerability, teachers' personality, interests and motivation can compensate for it to a certain extent.

Pedagogical Implications

Content in course books still tend to deal only with superficial aspects of cultural differences, and thus needed to be supplemented or replaced to provide more relevant and useful materials for students.

References

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Thank you ☺

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for any questions.