

The Efficacy of Culture Based Syllabus in Teaching the Target Culture

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KEYWORDS Culture. Syllabus. Foreign Language. Superstitions. Teaching

ABSTRACT The aim of this study is to reveal prospective English language teachers' perceptions of a culture-oriented syllabus implemented in a foreign language context. The syllabus included drama-oriented activities, improvised writing, and a cross-cultural study focusing on teaching some pre-selected cultural elements. A total of 67 students enrolled in an English Language Teaching department at a state university participated in this study and the data was collected qualitatively. The research paradigm was used to investigate the contribution of culture-based syllabi to the development of linguistic and cultural knowledge of prospective English teachers. The study aimed to figure out the efficacy of the suggested culture-oriented syllabus. Thus the participants were requested to put forth their views stressing the three instructional activities that were specifically designed for the course. The research findings indicated that eighty-five percent of the participants were introduced to new cultural elements through the activities in which they were engaged. With regard to activities implemented in the course, it was also found that the participants were satisfied to a great extent with the syllabus, and as prospective teachers of English, they stated that they would like to implement some of them in their future career.

INTRODUCTION

It is well- documented in related literature that it is not possible to keep cultural belief systems out of a syllabus of foreign language teaching (Byram 1989; Kramsch 2001; Thanasoulas 2001; Peterson and Coltrane 2003). In a foreign language context, teachers who are non-native speakers cannot usually introduce a target culture adequately themselves. They sometimes avoid this issue because of their own perceived lack of knowledge, lack of training, or busy schedules. Target language students are expected to master both linguistic and cultural norms. Foreign language teachers, who are assigned to teach cultural issues in EFL contexts, inevitably tend to utilize various teaching materials and techniques to meet these requirements. From the perspectives of foreign language learners, it is conceivable that learners start from the very beginning, when they are introduced to the target language. Thus, learning a foreign culture does not start from an absolute zero as they have already acquired some concepts and expectations towards the target culture (Savignon and Sysoyev 2002). In this respect, handling the target culture effectively is often a hard issue for both teachers and learners. Simply put, as it is not always possible to teach cultural elements, which are often embedded in the reading and listening materials; thus, foreign language learn-

ers might have difficulty learning and internalizing them as required. As commonly seen in an EFL context, some teachers prefer to introduce target culture implicitly through teaching materials, while others tend to present it explicitly.

From an educational perspective, the attitudes of foreign language learners towards the target culture vary depending on the teaching contexts, motivation, or teachers (Peterson and Coltrane 2003). Some students act as anthropologists, exploring and understanding the target culture in relation to their own. In this manner, students achieve a level of empathy, appreciating that the way people do things in their respective cultures has its own coherence (Peterson and Coltrane 2003). Therefore, teachers attempt to create an atmosphere for learners to "become anthropologists" and explore the target culture. On the other hand, offering only some certain cultural elements embedded in the target language might not always foster motivation. Learners might need some other additional activities through which they can understand their own culture in comparison with the target culture. That is to say, every language has certain cultural elements, which reflect the way of life that subsumes every aspect of the society, from literal to non-literal expressions. Of the latter, superstitions, which are the main concern of this study, are important but are often neglected or overlooked by foreign language learners.

Literature Review

Culture in Foreign Language Teaching

Research proves that language and culture are interrelated, and that culture is an important component of language courses; as such, it should be integrated into language teaching (Chastain 1998; Seelye 1994; Brown 2000; Alptekin 2002). This issue has always been a hot topic, for both course designers and authors that learning a language cannot be divorced from cultural instruction (Laura 2003). A great number of researchers and educators in the field have discussed the place of culture in the classroom in many aspects, such as whether cultural instruction should be implicit or explicit, or whether they should teach the target culture or the world culture (McKay 2003; Bada 2000; Alptekin 2002; Thanasoulas 2001; Byram 1997; Kramsch 2001; Palmer and Sharifian 2007). To some, apart from the four language skills, culture is regarded as the fifth skill (Tomalin 2008). Therefore, the aim of language teaching in the classroom has always been to improve both the linguistic and cultural competence of foreign language learners. That is to say, being knowledgeable both in the structural and cultural aspects of the target language, having intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1989), are crucial in a foreign language-teaching context. Meyer (1991) defines intercultural competence as the ability of a person to behave adequately and in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures.

To have intercultural communicative competence, which involves all aspects of the target language and its culture, foreign language learners are provided with various instructional materials (Oz 2015). For Alptekin (2002), the materials to be used to teach culture should include not only the ones pertaining to one's culture, but also international cultural elements, considering the fact that English is used as an international language. However, it is worth mentioning that many language-teaching materials do not contain the instruction in the target languages' culture. Then, to what extent should culture be included in the English classes? It has been observed that many course materials and teaching activities do not give adequate attention to cultural elements (Çakir 2010). However, some of the instructional materials that do have culture

specific elements are confined to certain topics, such as foods, fairs, folklore, and statistical facts (Kramsch 1993). The implications of culture for language learning and use of it is, in fact, more complex than the four skills.

Why do we need to teach culture within the ELT curriculum? In the Turkish context, according to the Common European Framework (CEF 2001), one of the main aims of foreign language teaching is to develop learners' ability to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Understanding the socio-cultural elements of a language gives the learner an insight into the social function of the language, which in turn helps achieve better learning (Wilkins 1967:134). When the learners are the prospective English language teachers, this issue becomes doubly important. In this regard, in order to introduce cultural information to foreign language learners, teachers possess a great responsibility. Harmer (2003:291) believes that every teacher is the product of their culture, their training, their learning and their experiences. Thus, teachers should be culturally competent both, in the native and in the target language (Çelik 2013). It is unfortunate that in many classroom settings, few people are willing to teach the target culture.

Related Literature

Several studies conducted to determine the efficiency of target culture in EFL settings have revealed that having mastery of the linguistic features of the target language may not always be sufficient for mutual intelligibility. This is due to the fact that in many conversations in culturally specific settings speakers might get confused by some illiterate utterances, which might result in misunderstanding. Suggesting that this issue deserves study Fraser (2010:16) wrote, "It is often not given the emphasis it deserves in the teaching of a second language, with the result that second-language speakers, who lack pragmatic competence, may produce grammatically flawless speech that nonetheless fails to achieve its communicative aims."

So, as frequently repeated by many researchers, cultural elements should be adequately integrated into foreign language teaching syllabus. How then, should culture be implemented in the class? Should it be taught or caught? Pedagogically speaking, culture should be taught in its

sociocultural context (Valdes 1986; Brown 2000). While teaching it in its socio-cultural context, target language learners should not be forced to internalize the target culture. With regard to introducing the target culture to foreign language learners, various techniques may be implemented. Teachers can use either systematic or spontaneous approaches, depending on the course syllabus. In a systematic presentation, teachers plan in advance and the course is set accordingly, whereas in the spontaneous presentation teachers introduce the target culture without pre-planning, depending on the learners' participation and course content. Additionally, considering culture as a changing phenomenon, Kramersch (1993) suggests two approaches: presenting authentic documents through which learners will develop an understanding of the target culture, and reflecting on the cultural issues by creating opportunities for cross-cultural understanding.

Much of the research on teaching culture has been conducted with foreign language learners in a naturalistic environment (Caroll 1967; DeKeyser 1991; Meara 1994; Freed 1995). According to the findings of the research conducted with students abroad, foreign language learning was faster and better in comparison to non-study abroad groups of students, which supports the hypothesis put forward by Carlson et al. (1991). On the other hand, students were not so efficient in learning and functioning appropriately in the target culture (Byram 1989). In addition, teaching culture in the classroom has been examined in several studies (Genç and Bada 2005; Karabınar 2012; Frank 2013) in which the target culture was introduced through various techniques. Some of these studies intended to check learners' views on the target culture and their attitudes towards that culture. Some other studies conducted in the classroom to teach the target culture were based on activities that aimed to develop learners' cultural awareness. Unlike naturalistic settings, foreign language classrooms, where culture is introduced in an artificial setting, have some benefits for language and culture learning (Kramersch 1993). Students in artificial settings do not have constraints such as misunderstanding and pragmatic failure (Kasper 1992; Fraser 2010).

The research cited above primarily aims to integrate culture into foreign language syllabus in order to develop learners' intercultural com-

petence, which is defined by Bennett and Bennett (2004) as the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts. In other words, it means to be proficient in both the linguistic and the cultural aspects of a language. Barrett et al. (2013) define intercultural competence as a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action, which enables one, either singly or together with others. They add that because of intercultural competence, students understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations than themselves, respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people, establish positive and constructive relationships with such people, and understand oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural 'difference'.

Research suggests various techniques to incorporate cultural issues into the ELT syllabus. One of the most influential techniques, which helps learners become familiarized with the target culture, is drama (Flemming 1998). Drama is any kind of activity where learners are asked either to portray themselves or to portray someone else in an imaginary situation (Holden 1982). When implemented skillfully, drama activities are beneficial for foreign language learners in solving cross-cultural problems. Through drama activities, learners use their imaginations, and develop fluency in English. In becoming fluent, three skills are also developed: accurate memorization, speed of recall, and confidence. Furthermore, language is integrated in a natural way in drama activities. Maley and Duff (2005) list several contributions of drama presentations to language development, personal growth and cultural growth. According to them, drama integrates language skills in a natural way, involves verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication, draws upon both cognitive and affective domains, emphasizes multi-sensory inputs, fosters self-esteem and so on. As noted by Skehan (1996), chunks of dialogues in particular, which are acted out as drama activities, are easy to retain and learners can store them in their memories as they are repeatedly used during dramatizations. By the same token, Vygotsky (1987) points out that language learning can be better achieved when it is used in a social interaction in which knowledge becomes meaningful. Through

a meaningful context, a message can be conveyed in a timelier manner, and realistic situations provide learners with a tangible use of the target language (Esslin 1976; Makita-Discekici 1996; Mattevi 2005).

Another important activity through which the target culture can be incorporated into course syllabi is creative writing. Assigning tasks such as creating short stories, improvised writing and dialogue construction can be utilized to practice cultural topics. These student-generated products, written in meaningful contexts, can be read, discussed, or even illustrated with pictures in class. The writing products are composed of not only sentences but also cultural elements in both target language and native language. While writing, foreign language learners might be invited to study the cultural elements assigned in source language and the target language. A comparative study would be beneficial for learners to familiarize themselves with both cultures, and in intercultural foreign language education, the process of foreign language learning engages the learner in the role of a 'comparative ethnographer' (Byram 1991:19).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

From a foreign language learners' perspective, it is true that the more learners are familiar with the target language and culture, the easier and faster they understand the target language in communicative contexts (Singhal 1997). In teaching English to non-native speakers whose culture is different, the inclusion of cross-cultural issues in the curriculum deserves significant attention. That is to say, it is often accepted that proficiency in the culture of the target language is an important component that plays a crucial role in an intelligible communication. To this end, English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum, which aims to train qualified English language teachers in Turkey, needs to be supplemented with elective courses encompassing various cultural aspects of the target language.

Culture Specific Expressions and Lexical Competence, an elective course, was integrated into the ELT curriculum in the faculty of education at a state university in Turkey. Through the course syllabus, it was aimed to improve ELT majoring students' lexical competence and to introduce the target language's culture by focus-

ing on culture specific expressions existing in the target language.

This study is primarily concerned with determining the efficacy of the culture-based syllabus that was developed by the researcher in order to introduce the target culture to students majoring in ELT. In this regard, the current study focused on analyzing the efficacy of the activities implemented throughout the term, which were mainly based on the cross-cultural study, creative writing and drama. The study explored the answers of the following research questions:

1. What are the impacts of the activities implemented in the course on retention of some cultural elements?
2. What are the contributions of drama-oriented activities on the professional, cultural, and personal growth of the learners?
3. What are the reflections of the students on the suggested teaching activities implemented in the course syllabus?
4. What are the overall views of the participants on the suggested course syllabus?

Method

In this qualitative study, mixed research methods were used. In order to get the reflections of the participants on the culture-oriented syllabus, various instruments and procedures have been implemented. A mixed method usually provides opportunities for researchers to validate the data effectively (Levy 2000).

Participants and Setting

This study was conducted with 67 sophomore English Language Teaching major students intending to become EFL teachers. The reason for selecting this sample group was due to convenience as they were accessible to the researcher (Friedman 2012:186). The participants, who took part voluntarily in the activities throughout the research, were composed of 12 male and 55 female students from two divisions, ranging from 18 and 22 years old. The number of male students is less than the female ones because more female students than males in Turkey tend to prefer the department of English Language Teaching after the University Entrance Exam required by the government. For the course, the class met once a week for 90 minutes over 14 weeks. The course syllabus included some cultural elements,

such as superstitions, idioms and proverbs, existing in the target culture. These elements were scattered in each lesson throughout the term.

The course, in which the research was carried out, is an elective course, which specifically aims to offer some culture-specific expressions to the prospective English teachers, focusing on the cultural issues existing in target language. Apart from the course of Culture Specific Expressions and Lexical Competence, the ELT curriculum also includes another course, Lexical Competence, whose syllabus is generally based on the expansion of freshmen learners' vocabulary.

Data Collection

In this study, the participants were chosen on a voluntary basis and they were informed about the procedure. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher in order to get feedback from the participants regarding the course syllabus under discussion. While designing the research questionnaire, the researcher aimed to include questions regarding the efficacy of three activities: drama oriented-activities, improvised writing and cross-cultural study. Furthermore, the researcher used the techniques of field notes, classroom observation, and follow-up interview techniques to evaluate the course syllabus (Yin 2009). Considering the fact that the present study partly involves the techniques pertaining to case study, which is a way of organizing social data for the purpose of social reality (Best and Khan 2006:259), this paper aimed to probe deeply and analyze interactions between the factors that explain present status or that influence change or growth. Portfolio and cross-cultural notebooks that the participants were requested to keep regularly were also two important components of the culture-based syllabus. The results obtained from the techniques mentioned above were analyzed using the content analysis, percentage, and frequency techniques. In analyzing the qualitative data Miles and Huberman's (1994) methods were used, which consists of three procedures: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In line with this method, the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews and field notes, were also coded. After coding, the views of an expert and two colleagues checked the codes. Depending on their remarks, the codes were redesigned.

Classroom Procedure

In this study, the efficacy of three types of techniques in transmitting cultural elements was investigated through classroom implementation. The impact of the syllabus on developing learners' intercultural competence was analyzed in terms of the following three techniques, which were inserted in the course syllabus under the investigation: cross-cultural study, improvised writing and drama-oriented activity.

a. Cross-cultural Study: The participants were assigned to write the equivalents of the superstitions of the scheduled unit in the book (Collis 1998) in their own language (Turkish) for the following week. According to the comparative approach, foreign language culture should be related to the learners' own and it provides learners with a new perspective of their own culture and the target culture (Byram 1997). In other words, comparative studies help learners become aware of the similarities and differences between two languages. In this vein, every participant studied the superstitions in both languages and the students were asked to keep a culture notebook wherein every single cultural element was noted throughout the term. During the class, the whole class discussed the differences and similarities between two cultures.

b. Improvised Writing: In this activity, the participants were asked to work in groups and write a story of their own for the following week using the superstitions discussed during the course. As Byram (1988) points out, language has no function independent of the context in which it is used; language always refers to something beyond itself, the cultural context. The students studied collaboratively to fulfill the task and read their stories to the class. They kept these improvised stories in their folders that were used for their portfolio assessment along with other performances conducted during the term. As Miccoli (2005) suggests, portfolios have great benefits for teachers and learners to see the progress, learners' efforts, experiences, and to promote reflection and change.

c. Drama-Oriented Activity: At the end of the term, the participants were requested to write sketches in groups using two, three or more superstitions in order to perform it in front of the class. Each member in the group acted a role, which was specified in the sketch they created. The sketches were recorded and analyzed at the end of the performance in class.

Table 1: The suggested culture-oriented syllabus timeline

<i>Task</i>	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Classroom activity</i>	<i>Duration</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searching the equivalents of the superstitions in native culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To enable the participants to compare the native culture to the target culture • To keep a cross-cultural notebook • To share various aspects of the shared culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion • Presentation 	Weeks 2-8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing improvised stories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To facilitate target culture learning. • To develop writing skill. • To help the learners use the cultural elements in meaningful contexts. • To develop creativity, imagination. • To foster collaborative work. • To keep the created stories in a folder. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion • Reading • Discussion 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing/performing sketches using the superstitions studied during the lesson. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To encourage learners to work in groups • To motivate learners to write and perform meaningful sketches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing the sketch • Video recording • Evaluating the performance 	Weeks 9-13

The course syllabus was introduced to the participants at the beginning of the term, Week 1. The tasks, objectives, classroom activities, and weeks devoted to them are displayed clearly in Table 1. The last week, Week 14, was scheduled for evaluating the course syllabus and activities implemented using in-class discussion, follow-up interviews and questionnaires. Weekly tasks of searching for the equivalents of the cultural elements in native language, and of writing improvised stories or student generated writing activity are two important components of this study. The students were expected to keep a cross-cultural notebook in which they were suggested to keep everything they did in relation to course content. More specifically, one part of this notebook was devoted to bilingual study of superstitions, proverbs and idioms. The focus of the second entry of the cross-cultural notebook was writing improvised stories with the cultural expressions assigned each week by the instructor. The third component of this study was drama-oriented activities, which included collaborative work to create a sketch for group performance in the class.

FINDINGS

At the end of the term, the students were requested to reflect on the efficacy of the three activities, specified above, that were executed

throughout the term. Through whole-class discussion and the questionnaire, the students evaluated the impact of the activities on the syllabus. The researcher also evaluated the students' portfolios and cross-cultural notebooks at the end of the term. The data revealed that writing improvised stories in which they were required to create meaningful writing products using the superstitions handled that week had a great influence on developing their writing skill, creativity, and imagination. Moreover, they agreed to state that the course fostered their communication skills, fluency in speaking, and presentation skills (speaking/acting in front of the class). Most importantly, the majority of the participants attested that the course was not boring, and learning the target language was unexpectedly fun. The results also proved that the cross-cultural study, improvised writing and drama-oriented activities were beneficial for the participants in many respects. During the classroom implementation and whole-class discussions conducted on a regular basis, the researcher took notes. The data obtained from the field notes taken during the implementation of the program, revealed that many learners were introduced to various aspects of the same superstitions for different regions of Turkey for the first time. That is to say, the students who are from different regions of the country, even though they speak the same native language, Turkish, at times interpreted the same cultural element differently.

In order to get a satisfactory understanding of the research, it is best to analyze the results in detail.

Overall Reflections on the Course Syllabus

In order to determine the efficacy of the suggested course syllabus, the participants' reactions to the activities were investigated through a survey form developed by the researcher and administered at the end of the term. The 5-point Likert type questionnaire included four statements and participants were required to indicate the degree to which they benefited from the activities implemented throughout the course.

The results in Table 2 indicate that the percentage of the participants who were introduced to the cultural values of the target language for the first time is almost seventy-six percent (with the total percentage of those indicated as 'strongly agree' and 'agree'). Thus, the suggested syllabus had a great impact on the students' acquaintance with the cultural values in the target language. Surprisingly, the number of the participants who had a chance to learn new or different aspects of the same superstitions cannot be overestimated (46 out of 67). It is also shown that the participants generally took the advantage of writing improvised stories and sketches, which was one of the prominent components of this study (69%). As stated in the following part of this paper, almost half of the participants (49%) agreed to say that performing the written products, sketches, contributed to self-confidence gains for them, which certainly is beneficial for prospective teachers.

Perceptions on the Drama-Oriented Activities

The semi-structured questionnaire designed for this part of the research requested the partic-

ipants to complete it in order to highlight their opinions about the drama-oriented activities. The participants' reflections on the course syllabus were divided into three sub-categories: while writing sketches, while performing sketches, and after performing sketches.

Participants generally stated that they enjoyed taking part in every stage of the drama-oriented activities. As the percentages of the statements for the phase of writing sketches indicate, most of the participants (81% and 67%) had fun. The collaborative study to create a meaningful sketch provided a valuable result for the students (69% and 65%). It is also indicated in the Table 2 that while performing the sketches, learners were concentrated to a great extent (49%), and they were not so nervous (27%). Upon completing the performance, which was based on the sketches created by the participants themselves, the participants were asked to evaluate themselves. It was seen that they were generally satisfied (73% and 34%) with their performance. Furthermore, the results obtained from the survey suggest that drama activities have a great impact on the learners' development both personally and professionally. Professionally speaking, foreign language teachers are characterized as good actors/actresses due to the roles they play in the class. In this sense, Williams and Burden (1997) attest that, being a collaborative and participatory teaching approach, drama contributes positively to the development of the learners' self-esteem and self-efficacy (one's beliefs about their capabilities in certain areas) especially those who have rather low levels. Therefore, it is safe to say that the results are consistent with the views of several researchers, who are in favour of the outcomes of the drama activities in ELT classrooms (DiYanni 2000; Wessels

Table 2: Participants' general reflections on the course syllabus

<i>Culture-oriented activities implemented during the course</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Un-decided</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Strongly disagree</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
• Acquaintance with the cultural values of the target language	43	64	8	12	9	13	7	11	0	0
• Acquaintance with the superstitions existing in both languages	24	36	7	10	27	40	4	6	5	8
• Contribution of writing activities to development of writing ability	35	52	12	18	14	21	6	9	0	0
• Contribution of drama activities to development of self-confidence	17	25	16	24	22	35	9	13	3	5

1987; Daugill 1987). Consequently, some other researchers also advocate that, through drama-oriented activities, learners gain motivation, develop self-confidence, learn how to use language in a real-life context, overcome resistance to learning the target language, enjoy learning, gain cultural and language enrichment, and link the language-learning experience with the student's own experience of life (Taylor 2000; Williams and Burden 1997; Maley and Duff 1982).

Participants' Reflections on the Culture-Oriented Syllabus

Finally, as prospective ELT teachers, the participants were to express their reflections on the implication of the course. One of the fundamental aims of this part of the research was to validate the data obtained in the questions above. When analyzing the results indicated by the 67 participants using the content analysis technique (Cooper and Schindler 2003), the feedback given in common is listed as follows.

The data obtained for this part varied. However, the responses that were frequently given were displayed using the data reduction technique of Miles and Huberman's (1994). In this respect, six items were chosen as mostly repeated ones. With regard to activities implemented in the course, it was seen that the participants (77.61%) were satisfied with the course syllabus to a great extent. However, they (47.76%) note that while performing the products they created they would not like to be criticized. This statement reflects that students would be demotivated when someone else, who is undoubtedly the teacher, criticizes them. They added that if they were the teacher of this course, they would also certainly assign similar tasks such as writing sketches, doing cross-cultural studies, and projects, which is consistent with the statement '*I would want the class to internalize the cultural topics implemented in the class using them in meaningful contexts*' (70.01%).

The results validate that writing improvised stories was also appreciated by 62.68 percent of the participants. Furthermore, doing a cross-cultural study was also considered for implementation by the participants in their future career, (n=44) believing that such kind of activities would be more retainable for target language and target culture learners. The participants (50.4%) also believed that they would not evaluate stu-

dents' progress through pencil and paper exams. Instead, they would prefer performance-based assessment. Generally speaking, in the classroom evaluation process, performance-based assessment is based on creating, constructing, producing or doing something different from pencil and paper evaluation. This type of assessment usually calls on learners to evaluate themselves and their peers. Process is as important as product in this type of assessment.

Contributions of the Syllabus to the Development of Cultural Competence

As the aim of the course *Culture Specific Expressions and Lexical Competence* is to develop learners' lexical and cultural competencies, they are introduced to different components of the target culture such as idioms, proverbs, superstitions and customs. Particularly, one component, superstitions, was chosen in order to validate the efficacy of the course syllabus whose content was identified in Table 1. Having completed the activities as active participants, the participants were requested to write down the superstitions they could remember in order to figure out the significance of the course syllabus in retaining the cultural elements. As specified in the course procedure above, during the classroom implementation the superstitions under discussion were distributed as a sub-category of the target culture to eight groups in two sections consisting of four or five participants to create meaningful sketches to perform at the end of the term. Apart from the group activities, students were also assigned to work individually to write weekly student-generated meaningful stories of their own. Table 2 reveals the efficacy of all activities implemented throughout the course.

The participants were introduced to five or six superstitions each week along with other culture-specific elements. After an introduction to the items every week, the participants, either individually or in pairs, were assigned to use two of them in a creative writing activity in which they were expected to write an improvised story for the following week. Additionally, the participants were requested to work in groups for the drama performance to be presented before the class using the superstitions (three or four) assigned by the researcher. In analyzing the data that was obtained from the questionnaire it was

found that the participants recalled 48.52 percent (n=33) of the superstitions that were introduced throughout the term.

Additionally, in follow-up interviews with the participants, they were required to specify which items they retained most. Based on the data gathered from follow-up interviews and the questionnaire, the participants mostly stated that the items they used in the sketches were easily recalled. Some of them to list include, "Walking under a ladder" (92.53%), "Crossing a black cat on your path" (89.55%), and "Breaking a mirror" (86.56%), which were the most frequently remembered ones for the Turkish participants. The other reason for retaining some of these superstitions for the participants can be explained through parallelism between the cultures. That is, students may easily remember the cultural elements, which are identical in the source and target culture. On the other hand, it was discovered that those, which are not identical or similar to the ones in their native language, were not so easy for them to retain. These cultural items included "Throwing salt over the left shoulder" (31.34%), "The groom mustn't see the bride before the wedding" (26.86%), and "Looking over somebody's shoulder" (17.91%). However, it is clear that the participants who specifically dealt with some certain cultural issues to fulfill their tasks during the course easily remembered them.

The participants were also asked to state their views on the efficacy of the cross-cultural notebooks and the portfolio they kept during the term. The data obtained from the class discussion technique revealed that the learners saw great benefits from the culture notebook and portfolio. They generally agreed to say that with the help of cross-culture study they were introduced to some new cultural elements existing in their native language along with the ones in the target culture. Below is the statement of one of the participants in a class discussion session:

At the beginning, I thought that keeping a culture-notebook, and searching the Turkish equivalents of superstitions regularly was tiring and nonsense. Later on, I realized that by searching the cultural elements in both languages and keeping them in the notebook after class discussions was quite beneficial for me. I took notes for everything related to culture throughout the term. Thus, I was able to have a chance to be familiarized with different usage of the cultural elements. (Informant 1)

The benefits of keeping a culture notebook and a portfolio for the participants have been significant in observing their progress and cultural competence. The participants generally appreciated this part of the course. The following extract illustrates the impact of recording and keeping cultural items on a regular basis.

When I have a look at the culture notebook and the portfolio I have kept throughout the term, I can easily understand how much I have progressed. When I wonder or can't remember the meaning of an idiom, a proverb or a superstition that we have studied I immediately open my notebook and check it out. I also put the pictures that my friends took while I was performing the sketch we created with my friends. (Informant 2)

Despite being time consuming and tiring for the learners, the tasks were appreciated as useful for them. They agreed to state that they would like to follow a similar procedure while teaching English. The following extract from a participant reveals the general view of all participants.

At first, I believed that it was nonsense and time consuming to do such tasks at the university level. Now I can feel how much progress I have attained throughout the term. When I become a teacher, I want to have my students record cultural issues along with vocabulary in a notebook. Besides, I want to have my students keep all the documents I will submit in a folder. (Informant 3)

Three of the views noted by the participants reveal that culture notebooks and keeping a portfolio were influential for the participants. In general, the participants' remarks on the course syllabus indicate that such culture-based activities were regarded as beneficial for introduction of the target culture because the learners were engaged in the whole process.

DISCUSSION

Developing cultural competence is an unavoidable element in all language teaching contexts for foreign language learners and in particular for prospective foreign language teachers. In this respect, three types of presentation techniques of the target culture elements were selected. Primarily, the study investigated the efficacy of these techniques by student teachers of English. A total of 67 teacher trainees participated in the study. The data for the study was col-

lected from multiple sources: a semi-structured questionnaire, cultural notebooks, portfolios, observations, field notes and informal classroom discussions. The aim was to investigate the learners' views about the use of drama-oriented activities, cross-cultural study, and improvised writing activities that were implemented in the class. The outcomes of the suggested syllabus, whose content is cited above, are found to be beneficial for foreign language learners to study the target language culture. This result supports the findings of Genç and Bada's study (2005), in which they found that a culture class would prove to be a vital component of language learning and teaching and it has a great deal to offer to the development of communicative competence as well as other skills in the instruction of any language. Furthermore, apart from cultural growth, the results also indicate that the culture-based syllabus assisted learners to gain linguistic and professional growth, which is consistent with McKay's (2003) belief that culture influences language teaching in two ways: linguistic and pedagogical.

Professionally speaking, foreign language teachers need to be able to perform different roles when necessary, which is consistent with two of the findings of this study: "*I was very satisfied with my performance*" (34%) and "*I can act in any role in the class*" (36%). This study also proved that through the activities that the participants actively took part in, they gained presentation skills, self-esteem, motivation, and were able to produce grammatically and pragmatically correct sentences. Put another way, drama oriented activities had a great impact on the development of the participants' communicative competence. When drama is considered as a teaching method in the sense of being part of the eclectic approach to language teaching, then it can become a main aid in the acquisition of communicative competence (Davies 1990; Berlinger 2000). That is to say, it needs to be integrated into a language course to practice vocabulary or grammatical structures. In this vein, Celce-Murcia (2001) agrees that it is easier for learners to be engaged in a lesson through drama than through instructions or explanations. It can be advantageous for them as it includes various types of learnings. The theory of the learning pyramid (Dale 1969) also supports the effect of drama on learning. It claims that people generally remember ten percent of what they read, twenty per-

cent of what they hear, thirty percent of what they see, fifty percent of what they see and hear, seventy percent of what they say and write, and ninety percent of what they do. Simply put, all of the ways of learning propounded by Dale (1969) can be achieved through drama activities.

The other component of this research was based on the cross-cultural study in which the participants were requested to compare the cultural elements, superstitions in L1 to L2. In this regard, Davies (1990) believes that cross-cultural syllabus in the English language classroom is ultimately indispensable because it gives learners the chance to use their own personalities. In this way, learners compare the aspects of their own culture with those of the second one, and to interact with classmates, and through all this, they use their second language. The techniques integrated into the lesson introduced new perspectives and an interesting way of learning and practicing the target culture for the prospective English teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study mainly focused on the classroom implementation of a syllabus designed by the researcher for prospective English language teachers at a state university in Turkey. The results proved that implementation of the suggested syllabus was beneficial for the participants in developing their linguistic, cultural and even personal growths, in which they felt that they needed a great amount of support and encouragement.

The suggested syllabus and its contribution to the field is significant in that the activities implemented can be conducive to offering alternative ways of presenting the target culture. The course, which was the main concern of this study, can either be followed on its own, or suggested activities can separately be integrated into foreign language teaching classes. In other words, the study offers useful insights to teachers and course designers in developing a culture-based course. It is also hoped that the outline specified in this study to teach the target culture would be beneficial for the researchers and foreign language teachers.

To conclude in this small-scale descriptive study, which reveals the participants' development over a period, the objective was to present an alternative way of integrating cultural ele-

ments into a foreign language-teaching syllabus. It is true to state that the findings obtained only from 67 participants cannot be generalizable. Considering the fact that this is a pilot study, further research should be conducted to explore the efficacy of the suggested activities in this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As documented in the related literature, culture is a significant component of foreign language teaching. Teaching the target culture while teaching its language should be one of the main concerns of many non-native language teachers in order to raise cultural awareness adequately. In this context, this study suggests that cultural studies would also be a great help for foreign language teachers to motivate learners to learn. In this process, teachers need to utilize not only the cultural elements in the target culture but also the ones that exist in the native language. It is also highly recommended that teachers should be able to vary between the techniques to be used in presenting the topics, as suggested in this study, in order to draw the learners' attention and make the class fun and enjoyable. Lastly, a specific course based on teaching cultural expressions could be included in the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum.

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