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CULTURAL AWARENESS OF KAZAKHSTANI STUDENTS IN LEARNING TURKISH LANGUAGE IN TARGET COUNTRY

Abstract. This study aims to investigate the cultural awareness of Kazakhstani students who are studying at state universities in Turkey. In other words, the current study attempted to find out what Kazakhstani students in Turkey think about the effects of the target culture in learning Turkish as a foreign language they attended in TÖMER in the first year when they came to Turkey. The quantitative data collected utilizing a questionnaire. The participants of this research were thirty students who were enrolling in different universities in Turkey. Moreover, all of the participants studied the Turkish language as a foreign language in language courses. The findings of the data analysis revealed that Kazakhstani students have raised cultural awareness and have positive perceptions about learning Turkish culture. In addition, the results indicated that attending a Turkish language class in the target country was beneficial to know better about the cultural differences of the country.

Keywords: cultural awareness, Kazakhstani students, Turkish culture, foreign language learning

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Түркиядағы қазақстандық студенттердің түрік тілін үйренудегі мәдени сана-сезімі

Аңдатпа. Бұл зерттеу Түркияның мемлекеттік университеттерінде оқитын қазақстандық студенттердің мәдени сана-сезімін зерттеуге бағытталған. Басқаша айтқанда, бұл зерттеу жұмысы Түркиядағы алғашқы жылында Түрік Тілін Үйрету Орталығында (TÖMER) түрік тілін үйрету курсына қатысқан қазақстандық студенттердің шетел тілі ретінде түрік тілін үйренудегі түрік мәдениетінің әсері туралы не ойлайтынын білуге арналған. Сауалнаманы қолдана отырып жиналған сандық мәліметтерге талдау жасалынған. Бұл зерттеуге Түркиядағы әр түрлі университеттерге түскен отыз студент қатысты. Сонымен қатар, қатысушылардың барлығы тілдік курстарда түрік тілін шет тілі ретінде оқыды. Деректерді талдаудың нәтижелері қазақстандық студенттердің мәдени сана-сезімінің артқанын және түрік мәдениетін үйрену туралы оң пікірлерін анықтады. Сондай-ақ

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нәтижелер түрік еліндегі түрік тілі сабағына қатысу елдің мәдени айырмашылықтары туралы көбірек білуде пайдалы болғанын көрсетті.

Кілт сөздер: мәдени сана-сезім, қазақстандық студенттер, түрік мәдениеті, шетел тілін үйрену.

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Культурное самосознание казахстанских студентов в изучении турецкого языка в Турции

Аннотация. Это исследование направлено на изучение культурного сознания казахстанских студентов, обучающихся в государственных университетах Турции. Другими словами, данное исследование призвано выяснить, что думают о влиянии турецкой культуры на изучение турецкого языка как иностранного казахстанские студенты, которые обучались турецкому языку в Центре обучения турецкому языку (TÖMER) в первый год прибытия в страну. Проведен анализ количественных данных, собранных с помощью опроса. В исследовании приняли участие тридцать студентов, поступивших в различные университеты Турции. Более того, все участники на языковых курсах изучали турецкий язык как иностранный. Результаты анализа данных выявили рост культурного самосознания казахстанских студентов и положительные отзывы об изучении турецкой культуры. Результаты также показали, что посещение уроков турецкого языка в Турции было полезным, чтобы лучше узнать о культурных различиях страны.

Ключевые слова: культурная осведомленность, казахстанские студенты, турецкая культура, изучение иностранных языков.

Introduction

Turkish is a deeply rooted and widely spoken language by more than 250 million people worldwide [1]. Turkish languages' very long histories, Turkey's geographical importance and its active role in world politics, the choice of Turkey in terms of foreign travel, and Turkey's reliable image increase the demand for learning the Turkish language. Learning Turkish as a foreign language will undoubtedly increase Turkey's value in the world of culture and politics.

In the history of teaching, different approaches have been used, but they can be broadly divided into two categories: purposeful, culturally oriented (monocultural approach), and based on the student's own identity and comparison with another culture (comparative approach). Widely recognized in linguistics, students need not only knowledge and skills of language grammar, but also the ability to adequately use the language socially and culturally.

The integration of culture into language teaching has been studied in various studies in Turkish contexts [2; 3; 4]. Önalın, for example, focused on Turkish teachers' views on teaching culture [3]. Bada and Genç examined the effectiveness of a separate culture course and found that a separate course on target culture raises learners' motivation and awareness [2]. In Turkey, since 1993 TÖMER has tried to teach Turkish to foreigners in the name of the Turkish Government via Ankara University.

Culture and Language

It is not easy to define culture. For some, it is related to general knowledge and for others, it is related to ways of life. When we agree on the latter definition, we are faced with a whole bunch of choices that range from categories like holidays to the flag of the target country or from food to

special occasions. Hence, language teachers and planners are inevitably faced with the issue of selection of the cultural elements that are most applicable for their teaching contexts.

One way to understand culture is to know people about a particular society. This information can be processed in various ways: as information about cultural or artistic works; as information about places and institutions; as information about events and symbols; or as information about lifestyle. This aspect of culture can also be considered from the point of view of education and brought up as a set of learned rules that students can adopt on their own. When translated into the language of teaching and learning, this knowledge-based expression of culture often takes the form of learning information about another country, its people, institutions, etc. However, culture is not just a community of knowledge, it is a structure in which people live and convey common meanings to each other.

When it comes to the relation between language and culture, many researchers seem to indicate a close relationship between them. Brown, for example, states that language is a component of a culture, and culture is a part of the language; the two are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them without losing the significance of either culture or language [5].

Byram makes the point that “the language holds the culture through denotations and connotations of its semantics” [6]. All in all, the relation between language and culture is so tight that it is almost impossible to think of one as independent of the other. Therefore, the teaching of any language inevitably involves the teaching of culture, either explicitly or implicitly.

In short, it would be wise to converge on the point Hinkel and Long stated that there are “as many definitions of culture as there are fields of inquiry into human societies, groups, system, behaviors, and activities” [7]. Therefore, a study into target culture learning and teaching would have to include everything that can be viewed as part of a culture.

It is generally accepted that language is a part of the culture as a whole, and its culture plays a very important role in this. Some social scientists believe that culture is impossible without language. Language also reflects the culture and is influenced and shaped by it. In a broad sense, it is a symbolic image of people, as it includes people's historical and cultural environment, attitudes to life, lifestyles, and ways of thinking.

Brown pointed out that language is part of the culture, and culture is also part of the language; because they are intertwined, they cannot be separated without losing the meaning of language or culture [5].

The use of culture in language teaching and has been at the center of interest of many scientists and has undergone a profound development. The intersection of language and culture is studied by methods of cognitive anthropology. It is believed that even the slightest differences in the culture are encoded in its vocabulary. Recent research, especially in the last decade, has focused on the issues between Second Language Teaching and target culture teaching through the writings of scholars such as Byram and Kramsch [6; 8].

Because culture and language are inextricably linked, culture must be taught alongside the target language. Culture in foreign language today is undoubtedly much more than teaching the great works of literature. It has made inroads into the fields of applied linguistics and foreign language education. Social values, attitudes, and cultural elements are integrated with the communicative approach to enhance the effectiveness of foreign language acquisition. Recent research has focused on the seamless link between foreign language and target culture instruction, particularly in the last decade with the work of researchers like Byram and Kramsch [6; 8].

If languages are taught without culture, students remain foreigners, unfamiliar with the languages being studied. In language lessons, it is necessary to carefully study the cultural elements of the language being studied. Ellis, McCullough, Wallendorf and Tan said that students who are interested in the social and cultural life of their hometown are more likely to learn a foreign language than other students. Therefore, such students should be supported to receive the necessary cultural education [9]. Jiang means that it is impossible to teach the target language without learning

the target culture [10]. If students do not study the cultural aspects of the destination country, they are faced with an empty language structure. A very important role in this course is played by the culture of teaching in foreign language lessons. It is well known that the teaching of language and culture are interrelated, and students need social and cultural awareness in international relations.

Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language

Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language (TTFL) has become a more spoken and working subject in Turkey and abroad, especially in the last twenty years. When Turkish is compared to other languages as a foreign language that has not received due attention for several years, the problem becomes much different. The process of teaching English as a foreign language began a long time ago, now it has gained functionality and is recognized worldwide as a scientific language. Similarly, the history of teaching German and French as foreign languages goes back a long way. Although the beginnings of teaching Turkish as a foreign language are outdated, it would be wrong to say that the first thorough tests based on deliberate and modern methods began in the early 1980s. Along with the beginning of the teaching of languages such as English, German, and French as foreign languages, the process of preparing and developing the necessary programs and materials in the process of teaching these languages to foreigners has accelerated. The same cannot be said about the process of teaching Turkish to foreigners.

Many countries have begun the process of institutionalization to manage these processes and build efficient language policies, given that language instruction is directly tied to teaching and introducing culture. The British Council and the Goethe Institute are the first two effective examples that come to mind [11].

According to the agenda of the seminar on the study of Turkish as a foreign language, 165 million people in the world speak so far, according to the United Nations, and 220 million people in the world speak, according to the Turkish languages institution. Turkish as a mother tongue. Turkish Chinese English is the most widely spoken language among Indian languages. In addition, the demand for Turkish language learning is increasing every day during the process of full membership in the European Union [12].

In recent years, there has been a growing trend in teaching Turkish as a foreign language for a variety of reasons. The number of people wishing to learn Turkish as a foreign language is increasing in parallel with this trend. However, although there have been studies conducted for investigating different aspects of teaching Turkish as a foreign language, these studies can be accepted as the starting point of a long and arduous academic journey since teaching Turkish as a foreign language has gained popularity in very recent years. Thus, there is a considerable need for more academic research on the topic. In classes where Turkish is taught as a foreign language, teachers are the mainstay of teaching. As expressed before, culture is an inseparable part of the language. Therefore, teaching Turkish as a foreign language should be investigated in terms of cultural elements belonging to Turkish culture.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants for the study were selected from among Kazakh students enrolling at the state universities in Turkey in the fall semester. The participants were two BA, 14 MA students, and 14 Ph.D. students. Their age ranged between 20 and 32. The majority of the participants were male students (N=20). They were all native-speakers of the Kazakh language who learned Turkish as a foreign language. All these participants were enrolled at TOMER and had certifications. Their majors are different. Contact was made with the participants mostly by mail.

Data collection

Sources of data included a quantitative questionnaire with the students. The questionnaire consists of two parts. In the first part, demographics and questions regarding some personal information are given. The second part contains personal preferences concerning the teaching and learning of culture in the target language. Consequently, some of the existing questionnaires and open-ended questions were made use of and some new ones were further added. The questionnaire included 5 Likert scale items from Strongly agree to strongly disagree (items 1- 15).

Data analysis

In the analysis of this study, a numerical method was used. The survey results were analyzed by calculating characteristic statistics, such as frequency and averages. The data was analyzed based on demographic factors to determine the relationship with the results.

Findings

Participants' gender is described in Table 1 below through the frequency and percentage of 30 participants in this study, 10 of them, namely 30 are females, while 30 of them, 70 are males. Thus, it can be stated that the number of males is more than the number of females in this study.

Table 1. Gender Variety

	N	F
Female	10	30
Male	20	70
Total	30	100

The questionnaire results are given below (Table 2).

Table 2. Cultural awareness of the students

Items (N=15)	5		4		3		2		1	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Language teachers explain the culture while teaching	6	20	11	37	10	33	1	3	2	7
2. I don't need to know about the target culture	1	3.3	5	16.6	0		11	36.6	13	43.3
3. To be aware of the culture of the language they are learning should be compulsory for students.	4	13.3	8	26.6	3	10	11	36.6	4	13.3
4. Turkish can be learned without ever addressing the cultural item of Turkey.	2	6.6	6	20	4	13.3	15	50	3	10
5. Turkish teachers should be well equipped with cultural patterns of the language they teach.	10	33.3	3	10	15	50	1	3.3	2	7
6. I do not feel comfortable when it is asked about the target culture in the classroom.	0		3	10	6	20	13	43.3	8	26.6

Continuation of Table 2

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
7. Being aware of the Turkish culture enhances our language skills.	5	16.6	9	30	10	33.3	5	16.6	1	3.3
8. Knowing cultural elements develop our ability to learn the language.	6	20	7	23.3	11	33.3	5	16.6	1	3.3
9. Turkish education books should include items from Turkish culture.	6	20	8	26.6	14	46.6	1	3.3	1	3.3
10. Cultural content should be included in the Turkish curriculum.	7	23.3	5	16.6	14	46.6	3	10	1	3.3
11. Turkish language teachers should teach only language, not the culture.	1	3.3	1	3.3	4	13.3	14	46.6	10	33.3
12. I should learn the target culture in language classes.	0		5	16.6	9	30	14	46.6	2	6.6
13. Learning a foreign culture harms our own culture.	0		2	6.6	1	3.3	6	20	21	70
14. I learn more about target culture outside of the classroom, not inside.	3	10	14	46.6	9	30	3	10	1	3.3
15. I need to know about the target culture while learning Turkish	6	20	5	16.6	16	53.3	2	6.6	1	3.3

Results

The results indicated that (questions (I) 1–15), Kazakh students had positive opinions towards the cultural awareness in general. As can be seen from Table 2, for item 1, 33% of the students stated that “Language teachers explain the culture while teaching”, 37% of them slightly agree with this statement, and 20% of them stated that they strongly agree. However, 7% stated that they do not agree.

For the statement “I shouldn't know about target culture” (Item=2), 43% stated that they do not agree, it shows that majority of the participants state that they need to know about the target culture. For Item=3, “To be aware of the culture of the language they are learning should be compulsory for students”, 33% of the participants state that they do not agree, which means that there shouldn't be compulsory.

50% of students state that Turkish can be learned without ever addressing the cultural item of Turkey. However, 20% disagree with this statement. 50% of the students disagree with the statement, “Turkish teachers should be well equipped with cultural patterns of the language they teach”. It shows that there is no problem if the teacher doesn't know about the target culture. 43% state that they feel comfortable when it is asked about the target culture in the classroom. In addition, 26% state that they strongly agree with the statement. For Item=7, “Being aware of the Turkish culture enhances our language skills”, 30% of the students disagree, at the same time, 33% state that they agree, when we calculate in general, most of them disagree. Almost 33% disagree with the statement “Knowing cultural elements enhances our ability to learn our language”. It means that the students can develop their language learning ability without knowing cultural elements. However, 20% of the participants strongly agree, so they believe that knowing cultural elements develop their language learning ability. 46% disagree with item 9, “Turkish education

books should include items from Turkish culture”. However, almost 27% state that Turkish education books should include items from Turkish culture. Almost 47% state that, “Cultural content should not be included in the Turkish curriculum”. However, almost 40% agree that cultural content should be included in the Turkish curriculum. So, we cannot give a strong comment on this statement. Almost 47% disagree with item 11, “Turkish language teachers should teach only language, not the culture”. 33% strongly disagree, which shows that almost 80% of the participants of the study state that the teachers can teach about the target culture. For item 12, 46% slightly disagree with the statement “I should learn the target culture in language classes”. 30% of the students also disagree, which means that they should not learn about the target culture in language classes. 70% of the students strongly disagree with the statement, “Learning a foreign culture harms our own culture”. Almost 47% state that they learn more about target culture outside of the classroom, not inside. Also, 10% strongly agree with item 14, however, 30% disagree. Almost 53% disagree with the statement “I need to know about the target culture while learning Turkish”, while almost 36% agree with item 15.

Conclusion

Considering the results of the present study, it is obvious that there is no exact rule while teaching target culture; some students state that there is no problem if the target culture is taught; however, some students state that Turkish education books should not include items from Turkish culture. The findings of this research indicated that the language teachers should teach the target culture when it is necessary. The findings show that majority of the participants state that the teachers can teach about the target culture. Kazakh students’ attitudes were expressed positively or negatively, as indicated, depending on various factors.

There is a lot of cultural information in the course books; however, the way teachers present it is very important. As learning culture plays an important role in the success of the student, the teacher has to be very careful in preparing her lessons on the target culture. The tendency the teacher has will directly affect the tendency the student will get. Thus, while preparing a culture class, the teacher has to balance the amount of time s/he will leave for teaching as well as s/he has to be careful in choosing the topic.

Suggestions for further research

Further research is to be conducted with a large sample for inferential results, especially to see the differences between different variables such as gender, level of study, and length of study concerning cultural awareness.

Further research can be done on the relationship between culture learning and language learning or the relationship between success in language learning and cultural awareness. From examining the course books used in the TOMER classes in Turkey, the place of culture can be examined. Do course books have enough supplementary materials for the cultural information they include or not and are teachers aware of the cultural elements the course books can be another research topic. The research raises many questions because the role of teaching Turkish as a foreign language was not examined enough.

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