

Computer Mediated Communication for Raising Cultural Awareness between Cultures

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Abstract

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) offers language learners genuine communication opportunities where language is the means and not the end of the process. This paper argues that CMC can be utilised as a useful tool to raise cultural awareness between the members of two non-native English speaking cultures using English as the medium of communication. This study explores the nature of e-mail exchange between Turkish and Belarusian language learners over the course of seven weeks. The findings point out that the participants choose to inform the members of the other culture about their practical daily life experiences as members of that culture rather than providing them with information that is more typically accessible via the Internet; and that the participants value the information from the members of that culture from their experiences as members as accurate and efficient to learn about a culture. Thus, this study suggests that CMC can be a beneficial tool to raise cultural awareness as well as providing language practice.

Key Words: Computer Mediated Communication, e-mail exchange, cultural awareness

Kltrler Arası Farkındalık Yaratmak İin E-Postayla İletişim

zet

Dil öğretiminde Bilgisayar Destekli İletişim (CMC) öğrencilere dilin amaç değil araç olarak kullanıldığı gerçek iletişim için fırsatlar sunmaktadır. Bu alıřma, anadili İngilizce olmayan iki kltr arasında, kltr farkındalığı yaratmak için, iletişimin İngilizce sürdürldđ CMC'den yararlanılabileceđini öne smektedir. Bu amaçla bu arařtırmada Trk ve Beyazrusya'lı katılımcılar arasında yedi hafta sreyle devam etmiř olan elektronik posta yoluyla iletişimin sonularını incelemektedir. Bulgular, katılımcıların birbirlerine yolladıkları elektronik postalarda birbirlerine kltrleriyle ilgili verdikleri bilgilerin, internette elde edilebilecek gibi bilgiler yerine, iinde buldukları kltrde edinmiř oldukları bireysel, gnlk deneyimlerinden bahsetmeyi semiř olduklarını gstermektedir. Bulgular aynı zamanda, katılımcıların bu bilgileri dođru ve etkili olarak deđerlendirdikleri ve bir kltr tanımak için önemli olarak grdklerini gstermektedir. Bu nedenle bu alıřma CMC'nin dil öğreniminde sadece

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dil kullanımı saęlamak amacıyla deęil, aynı zamanda kultur farkındalığı yaratmak için de kullanılabilceğini one surmektedir.

Anahtar Szckler: Bilgisayar destekli iletisim, elektronik posta ile iletisim, kultur farkındalığı

Giriř

Olduka yakın zaman nce kullanıma sunulmuř olmasına raęmen internet insan hayatının byk bir parası halini aldı. İnternet'in yaygın olarak kullanılmasının ardındaki en nemli etkenlerden biri olan kolay bilgi eriřimi, bu bilginin oęunlukla yzeysel ve eleřtirel bakıř aısından yoksun olması nedeni ile, dikkatle deęerlendirilmelidir. Bu zellikle de farklı kltrler, lkeler, milletler iin bulunan bilgilerin nyargılar yaratmasına neden olabileceęi iin nemlidir. İnternet aynı zamanda, bilgisayar destekli iletiřim (CMC) ile farklı kltrler arasında iletiřim saęlama zellięi ile bu kltrlere mensup bireyler arasında iletiřim kurulmasını saęlayarak bu kltrler arasında derinlemesine bilgi edinilmesi ve olası nyargıların ařılması iin de olanak saęlamaktadır. Bu alıřmada, Trk ve Beyaz Rusya'lı katılımcılar arasında kltr farkındalığı yaratmada elektronik posta ile kurulan iletiřimin rol arařtırılmaktadır.

Alan Tarama

Bilgisayar ve İnternet sadece bireysel ęrenim iin deęil, rgn ęrenim iinde de kullanılmaktadır. Dil ęretiminde internetten, dili ara deęil ama olarak kullanmak, ęrenci motivasyonunu arttırmak, yazma becerilerini geliřtirmek, otonom ęrenimi arttırmak da dahil pek ok ama iin faydalanılmaktadır (Warschauer et. al., 2002; Carter, 1998; Skinner ve Austin, 1999).

Btn bunların yanı sıra, dil ęretiminde CMC'den, ve elektronik posta iletiřiminden sıklıkla yararlanılmaktadır. Elektronik posta iletiřiminin kullanım amaları arasında, yazma becerilerini geliřtirmek (Warschauer 2002), ęrenci grup dinamiklerini harekete geirmek (Sanchez-Castro 2007), uzaktan ęretim (Sanchez-Castro 2007) gibi farklı alanlara ynelik amalar bulunmaktadır. CMC, dil ęretiminde genel sınıf prosedrlerinin bir parası olan dilin gerek iletiřim iin kullanılması sonucuna ynelik olarak, gerek iletiřim saęlama potansiyeli nedeniyle, bilgi alıřveriřine ynelik olarak ęrencilere ęrenme srelerinde daha aktif rol oynama fırsatı vermektedir (Mansor 2007). Bu amaca ynelik olarak genellikle ęrenilen dilin konuřulduęu kltrn mensuplarıyla elektronik posta alıřveriři kullanılmaktadır (Hirvela , 2006;

Hauck, Youngs, 2008). Ancak, İngilizce uluslararası dil olarak, lingua franca, kabul görmekte ve sadece anadili İngilizce olan kültürlerle değil, bütün kültürlerle iletişim kurmak için kullanılmaktadır. Bu nedenlere, CMC'den farklı kültürler arasında iletişim kurmak, kültür farkındalığı ve karşılıklı anlayış geliştirmek için de faydalanılabilmektedir.

Çalışma ve Hedefleri

Bu çalışma elektronik posta ile İngilizce iletişimin anadili İngilizce olmayan iki kültür arsında kültürel farkındalık yaratmadaki rolünü araştırmaktadır. Bu amaçla, Beyaz Rusya Ekonomi Üniversitesi, Yabancı Dil bölümünden dokuz öğrenci ve Çukurova Üniversitesi, İngilizce öğretmenliği bölümünden 21 öğrenci gönüllü olarak bu çalışmaya katılmışlardır. Elektronik posta alışverişi Türkçe öğrenmekte olan Beyaz Rusya'lı öğrenciler için hedef kültür ile iletişim; İngilizce öğretmenliği öğrencileri olan Türk katılımcılar için ise hedef dil kullanımı sağlamaktadır.

Katılımcılara elektronik posta ile birbirleriyle iletişime geçmeden önce diğer kültür hakkında ne kadar bilgi sahibi olduklarını görmek için anket verilmiştir. Bu ankette, diğer kültürde din, dil, eğitim, çok kültürlülük, edebiyat, medya, yönetim sistemleri ne bildikleri sorulmuştur. Anketin hemen ardından yedi hafta boyunca bu yedi konu ile ilgili olarak katılımcılar birbirlerini elektronik posta yoluyla bilgilendirmişlerdir. Yedi haftanın sonunda ise katılımcılara ikinci bir anket verilerek bu iletişim hakkındaki düşünceleri sorulmuştur. Bu çalışmada katılımcıların her iki ankete verdikleri yanıtlar ve elektronik postaların içerikleri analiz edilmiştir

Bulgular

İlk ankete verilen cevaplar katılımcıların yukarıdaki konularda internet'in sağladığı bilgilerden faydalandıklarını göstermektedir. Bu cevaplar, kısıtlı, yüzeysel, zaman zaman da önyargılı değerlendirmeler içermektedir. Yukarıda belirtilen yedi konudan ilki olan din konusunda öğrenciler ankette bu Ülkelerdeki en yaygın inanç sistemlerini belirtmişler ancak bu ülkelerde mensubu bulunan diğer dinlerden bahsetmemişler yada bu dinlere dair ne kadar bilgi sahibi olduklarını belirtmemişlerdir. Yapılan elektronik posta alışverişinde ise Beyaz Rusya'lı katılımcılar kendi kültürlerinde yer alan diğer inanç sistemlerinden bahsetmişler, buna karşılık Türk katılımcılar, dini bayramlarda yer alan geleneksel kutlamalarla ilgili detaylı bilgi vermişlerdir.

Dil konusunda ise anketlere verilen cevaplarda ağırlıklı olarak, kullanılan alfabeler, bu dili konuşan insan sayısı, bu dillerin konuşulduğu coğrafi bölgeler yazılmış, verilen cevaplarda istatistik bilgileri görülmüştür. Beyaz Rusya'lı katılımcıların göndermiş oldukları elektronik postalarda ise kullanılan dilin aynı dil ailesine mensup olan diğer dillerle ilişkisi ve bu dildeki ses sistemlerinden bahsedilmiş; benzer şekilde, Türk katılımcılar da kendi dillerinin ses sistemlerinden, gramer yapılarından örnekler vermişlerdir.

Eğitim ile ilgili anket sorularına verilen cevaplar çoğunlukla eğitim sisteminin kaç aşamalı olduğundan, zorunlu eğitim süresinden, sunulan yüksek öğretimden ve mesleki eğitimden bahsedilmiş, bu bilgilerin yine istatistiki bilgiler olduğu görülmüştür. Beyaz Rusya'lı katılımcılar göndermiş oldukları elektronik postalarda yüksek öğretim üzerine yoğunlaşmış, üniversite sistemlerinden ve üniversite öğrencisi olarak kendi tecrübelerinden bahsetmişlerdir. Buna karşılık, Türk katılımcılar üniversite öğrencisi olarak yaşadıkları deneyimlerin yani sıra ilk öğretim eğitim sürecinde günlük hayata dayalı pratikler doğrultusunda yazmışlardır.

Çok kültürlülük konusunda ankete verilen cevaplar yukarıdaki konularda olduğu gibi derinlikten yoksun olmakla birlikte, önyargıları da barındırmaktadır. Bu alandaki elektronik postalar bu ülkelerdeki varolan farklı kültürlerle ve komşu ülkelerde olan kültürlerle olan bağlara odaklanmaktadır.

Son olarak ankette edebiyat alanında sorulan soruya çok fazla cevap verilmemiş, verilen cevaplar da yine yüzeysel olmuştur. Özellikle Türk öğrenciler tarafından pek çok yazar ve şair ismi verilmiş, ancak bu isimlerle ilgili olarak katılımcıların ne kadar bilgi sahibi oldukları belirtilmemiş, isimler uzun listeler halinde verilmiştir. Elektronik postalarda ise, her iki grup da, edebiyattan değil geleneksel sanatlardan ve halk edebiyatından bahsetmeyi seçmişlerdir.

Son iki konu olan medya ve yönetim sistemlerinde ise katılımcılar, bu alanlar diğerleri kadar günlük yaşamlarındaki tecrübelerinde yer tutmadığından, diğer konulardan farklı olarak kendi deneyimlerine değil, istatistiki, ansiklopedik bilgilere dayalı elektronik postalar göndermişlerdir.

Verilen ikinci anketteki cevaplar katılımcıların CMC'nin, iletişime dayalı doğası gereği, o kültüre mensup kişiler tarafından dorudan verilen bilgilerin doğru ve etkili olduğunu düşündüklerini göstermektedir. Katılımcılar

edindikleri deneyime dayalı bilgilerin o kültüre ait bakış açısını ve yaşamı yansıttığını, bu nedenle CMC'yi faydalı bulduklarını belirtmişlerdir.

Sonuç ve Öneriler

Bulgular CMC'nin kültürel farkındalık yaratmakta faydalı olduğunu göstermektedir. Her iki grubun katılımcıları da elektronik postalarda, konu elverdiğince, günlük yasama dair edindikleri tecrübelerden ve bakış açılarından hareketle bilgi vermeyi seçmişlerdir ve benzer şekilde edindikleri bilgileri doğru ve etkili olarak değerlendirmişlerdir.

İlk anketteki yüzeysel ve zaman zaman yanlış bilgilerin aksine CMC ile kurulan iletişimdeki katılımcılar ortak noktalardan hareketle kendi tecrübelerini ve bakış açılarını yansıtmışlardır ki bu tür bir yaklaşım kültürler arası iletişim ve karşılıklı anlayış kurmada önem taşımaktadır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmanın bulguları CMC'nin İngilizce öğretiminde yalnızca dil öğretim yöntemlerine yada öğrenilen dilin kültürüne yönelik olarak değil, İngilizce'nin lingua franca rolü doğrultusunda, farklı kültürlerden öğrencilerle kültürel farkındalık yaratmak için önemli bir araç olduğunu göstermektedir.

Introduction

Although World Wide Web (WWW) has been invented just over a decade, it is now an essential component of everyday life. One of the most commonly used feature provided by the Internet is the easy access to information. Yet, this also entails dangers to the Internet users unless they are critical about the information retrieved, which is more likely to lack an in-depth and critical approach to the subject of inquiry. Even more so, if their search is about different cultures and countries, since, there is a danger of taking stereotypical information for its face value. On the other hand, the Internet can also serve to remove the stereotypes and provide the users with the insights of the members of that culture through providing genuine communication between the members of different cultures via Computer Meditated Communication (CMC). In the case of this study, cultural awareness via e-mail exchange between Turkish participants, studying English language teaching and Belarusian participants, learners of Turkish language, is investigated.

The Internet and CMC in Formal Education

The Internet is not only used for informal learning experiences but also as part of formal education. Although a relatively new aspect of our lives, computers have been adapted soon after its invention as a part of educational settings and educational research. The Internet in particular offers a wide range of uses for language learners from discussion boards, student collaboration, to providing authentic language, audience, and a purpose for the students to increase student motivation, to develop writing skills, promoting learner autonomy, and so on (Warschauer et. al., 2002; Carter, 1998; Skinner and Austin, 1999). However, as Timucin (2006) remarks, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is an interdisciplinary issue, and as such, it involves other aspects as well as language learning methodologies.

Within the broader study of CALL, Computer Mediated Communication or e-mail exchange has been made use of extensively in language education. Although it is used mainly for developing writing skills (Warschauer 2002), CMC has been made use of in a wide range of areas from fostering learner group dynamics (Sanchez-Castro 2007) to distance education (Luppicini, 2002). Since CMC promotes “active engagement, discovery learning, sociocultural context, and co-construction of knowledge in knowledge communities or communities of practice” (Luppicini, 2002: 89) through interaction, CMC results in more active students, who inquires and provides more in their writings since e-mail exchange provides the students with opportunities in foreign language teaching for genuine communication (Mansor 2007).

Therefore, it is not surprising that CMC is made use of for creating opportunities for the language learners to communicate with each other, without the risks involved in face-to-face classroom interaction; and with the members of the target culture (Hirvela , 2006; Hauck, Youngs, 2008). Nonetheless, the role of English as an international language, lingua franca, has long been acknowledged. Hence, it bears great potential to build communication and understanding between two cultures, the members of which are EFL learners/speakers, using English as the medium. Thus, CMC also serves to increase social awareness (Belisle 1996). We believe that CMC bears a great potential in raising cultural awareness, as well as its uses in ELT methodology

as reviewed above. Thus, this study explores the issue of raising cultural awareness in two non-native speaker contexts through CMC.

Study

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this research is to inquire about the effect of e-mail exchange in raising cultural awareness in the contexts of Turkey and Belarus. Nine students from Foreign Language Department at Belarus State Economic University, Belarus, and 21 students enrolled in the Culture course at ELT department, Cukurova University, Turkey, participated in this study. Belarusian students are studying Turkish, thus, CMC provided access to target culture for these participants, while providing the use of target language, English, for the Turkish participants. The participants were selected on voluntary basis to answer the question "Is CMC beneficial in raising cultural awareness between two non-native English speaking cultures?"

Method of Study

This study adopts a qualitative approach since data collected and analysed calls for content analysis of the e-mails exchanged and the responses to the questionnaires with open questions. The participants' answers to questionnaire 1 and the themes emerging from e-mails are also presented with their frequencies for the purposed of providing the reader with a broader picture.

Procedure

The study was conducted over a period of seven weeks. At the beginning of the study, the participants from both countries were e-mailed questionnaire 1 to find out about their present information on the other culture, which inquired about the participants' present information on the religion, language, education, multiculturalism, literature, media, and government systems of the other culture. These seven topics were later used as prompts to initiate the e-mail exchange between the participants in groups of 5-6. On each week, the participants were asked to exchange e-mails on one of the above topics. Each member of the groups read and responded to the emails collectively. At the end of the course, the students were given a second questionnaire investigating whether or not they found CMC to be beneficial in

learning about the other culture and their perception of the role of e-mail exchange in raising cultural awareness

Research Instruments

Prior to the written interaction between the Belarusian and Turkish participants, both groups were given a questionnaire as a baseline to find out about their awareness of the two mentioned cultures. At the end of the study the participants were given the second questionnaire to investigate their evaluation of the e-mail exchange. Furthermore, the content of the emails were analysed to find out about the nature of the information exchanged, as it was anticipated that it would provide data on the role of the e-mail exchange in raising cultural awareness since the contents of the emails were decided upon by the participants themselves.

Findings

Before and During E-mail Exchange

The responses to the first questionnaire show that the participants do not have an in-depth knowledge about the other culture, as anticipated. Although they provide answers to the questions about the seven topics mentioned above, their answers lack the in-depth understanding about that culture and have statistical, and at times stereotypical information available to the Internet users.

Through CMC, however, it is found out that the participants utilised CMC to give / receive in-depth, detailed information about their culture, along with the unique insiders' perspective as the members of that culture. Using the opportunity of genuine communication with each other, the participants chose to provide information and inquire about more practical, everyday knowledge the other party could provide them from the insiders' perspective. It is also found out that the e-mails on the media and governmental systems failed to provide the insight and the first-hand experience that the e-mails on other topics reflected. Below, the student responses to the first questionnaire and the contents of the e-mails exchanged are presented for each of these topics.

1. Religion

The participants' responses to the question "What is/are the religion(s) practiced in Belarus/ Turkey and what do you know about it/ them?" reveal that the participants already have an awareness of the faith systems practiced in these countries. However, this awareness is rather limited. The Belarusian

participants respond to this question as “Islam”, while the response from the Turkish participants is “Orthodox Christianity”. Although the responses reflect recognition of the major belief systems in both countries, they fail to recognise other religions practiced. Similarly, the responses do not provide any clues on whether or not the participants are in any way familiar with these religions and their practices.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the participants take this opportunity to provide the members of the other culture with detailed insight on these issues. The emails exchanged give a detailed account of the practiced religions. The Belarusian participants choose to emphasise the practice of other religions in their culture:

Over its entire history, Belarus has been at the junction where two worlds, two cultures and ideologies met. This has defined its unique cultural and historical position in Europe. The Belarusian nation's culture has been enriched with achievements of other cultures absorbing primarily the values that could be adapted to the local environment. Traditional religions played an important role in developing general culture of the Belarusian nation.

...

Many Roman Catholic Churches in Belarus are the centers of not only religious, but also cultural and educational life. The Church of Saint Simon and Helena in Minsk became one of such centers (Sunday schools for children and adults, youth societies).

...

Followers of the Judaism were known in Belarus as far back as in the 9-13th centuries. The second half of the 17th and first half of the 18th centuries saw the most powerful inflow of the Jewish population to Belarus.

...

Islam propagated in Belarus in 14-16th centuries. The Grand Dukes of Lithuania who invited Moslem Tatars from the Crimea and Golden Horde to protect the state frontiers promoted that process. Since the 14th century, the Tatars were offered a settled way of life, state ranks and offices.

Turkish participants, on the other hand chose to focus on religious celebrations in their own experiences that have become a part of the culture:

In Turkey, where Ramadan celebrations are infused with more national traditions, and where country-wide celebrations, religious and secular alike, are altogether referred to as Bayram, it is customary for people to greet one another with "Bayramınız Kutlu Olsun" ("May Your Bayram Be Celebrated"), "Mutlu Bayramlar" ("Happy Bayram"), or the more quaint "Bayramınız Mübarek Olsun" (May Your Bayram Be Holy", i.e. "Holy Bayram Upon You"), while enjoying a number of local customs.

...

It is a time for people to attend services, put on their best clothes (referred to as "Bayramlık", often purchased just for the occasion) and to visit all their loved ones (such as friends, relatives and neighbours) and pay their respects to the deceased with organized visits to cemeteries, where large, temporary bazaars of flowers, water (for watering the plants adorning a grave), and prayer books are set up for the three-day occasion

...

It is regarded as especially important to honour elderly citizens by kissing their right hand and placing it on one's forehead while wishing them Bayram greetings. It is also customary for young children to go around their neighbourhood, door to door, and wish everyone a happy Bayram, for which they are awarded candy, chocolates, traditional sweets such as Baklava and Turkish Delight, or a

small amount of money at every door, almost in a Halloween-like fashion.

It is safe to argue at this point that the participants embrace CMC as an opportunity to gain and raise awareness on this topic, providing in-depth information along with the examples of actual practices they have been experiencing from unique perspectives of insiders.

2. Language

The participants' answers to Questionnaire 1 demonstrate statistical and factual knowledge about the languages. Table 1 shows that the most common theme in the answers to this question is the alphabet used in these languages, followed by the speakers and geographical area in which that language is spoken. Yet, when it comes to learn from each other about their languages, the respondents choose to provide a more in-depth perspective to the other party. The information exchanged about languages spoken in each culture includes the below themes as well as a brief overview of the grammatical and phonetic systems.

Table 1: Responses on language and language policy

What do you know about Belarusian/ Turkish language , and language policies in Belarus/ Turkey?	
<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Alphabet	10
Speakers	7
Geographical area in which the language is spoken	6
Language family	1
Historical development of the language	1

Again, the responses to the first questionnaire are rather limited to statistical and encyclopaedic knowledge. The most common response is the alphabet, i.e. Turkish language uses Latin alphabet and Belarusian language uses Cyrillic alphabet, followed by the number of the speakers of these languages, accessed via the Internet.

While one response to the questionnaire refers to the language families, the e-mail received from the Belarusian participants regarding

languages and language policies give a much detailed account of this theme, building links between the Slavic languages and Belarusian. This email also emphasises the differences between native Russian and Belarusian, voicing a concern that Belarusian is losing influence as the official language is Russian. This group moves on to give information on the phonetics of their language:

Belarusian has 5 vowel phonemes /i/, /e/, /a/, /u/, /o/. The vowels /o/ and /a/ are distinguished only in stressed positions. Unstressed /o/ becomes /a/. The vowels /i/ and /e/ are also distinguished only in stressed position. In unstressed positions, /e/ becomes /i/. Belarusian has 38 consonant.

In response, the Turkish participants also choose to provide information on the phonetics together with the grammatical structure of their language:

There is another interesting letter which is called "the soft g". This symbol is created by adding a cedilla this time to the top of the letter "g". The reason why it is called "the soft g" is the fact that you prolong the preceding vowel when there is a "soft g", in a way softening the utterance. To give you an example and let's kill two words, (ooppss) birds with one stone here; every foreigner, at least at the beginning, finds it very difficult to say "thank you" in Turkish, "tesekkur ederim". Instead, there is a more friendly and easier way, that is, by saying "sagol", and the "g" here is a "soft g" and it is described with a cedilla dot on its top. So, you read it as "saaol" by prolonging the "a" sound, making it as if it were double. "Saaol", "Thanks". ...The reason why we do not put these letters right here on this section is that your browser might not support Turkish characters and you may find totally irrelevant letters if not signs instead.

...

Turkish is an agglutinative language, meaning a fairly large number of affixes in Turkish may be added to the root; each affix has one meaning or grammatical function and retains its form more or less unaffected by the morphemes surrounding it. This term is traditionally used in the typological classification of languages. Turkish. To put it more simply, there are suffixes added to the stem of the words to generate new words or even sentences.

Similar to the contents of the e-mails exchanged, the information on this topic reflects the participants' own experiences, values, and insider perspectives. The e-mail from the Belarusian group, reflect their perspective regarding the perceived role of their language in relation to other languages by the Belarusian participants. It is safe to claim that this perspective is unique to the native speakers of that language.

Since the participants are students of language, they also chose to give information to each other on the linguistic aspect of their languages, i.e. phonetic and grammatical structure of their languages. This information, however, is again, presented together with the practical, everyday information that they consider useful for the other party, where the Turkish participants provide pronunciation tips for informal greeting in Turkish.

3. Education

As the extract above shows, while the participants' knowledge of Turkish and/ or Belarusian languages were initially limited to encyclopaedic and statistical knowledge, e-mail Exchange gave the participants to provide deeper and more detailed insight into the workings of these languages as well as a more detailed account of the themes that emerged from the initial responses. Participants' answers to the question regarding education follows a similar trend, as will be discussed below.

Table 2: Responses on education

What do you know about education and policies of education in Belarus/ Turkey?	
<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Three phases of school education: primary, secondary, high school	8
Compulsory education between ages of...	7
Higher education 1. public and private 2. student-exchange programmes 3. institutions, centres, and departments	5
Vocational education	4
(No) education fee	2
Pre-school education	1
Sports education	1

The most commonly referred to aspect of the educational systems of these countries in the first questionnaire is the three phases of formal education, that educational system offers primary, secondary, and high school education in both countries. The next most frequent theme is the length of time required for compulsory education, followed by the responses regarding higher education. These responses give information about the public and private universities, student-exchange programmes, and diversity of higher education programmes offered in different institutions, centres, and departments. Four responses mention the diversity of vocational education offered in both countries. It should be remarked here that these answers note short, factual information on the themes above; they do not provide detailed information on either of these aspects. Yet, the contents of the e-mails exchanged, again, provide personal, everyday experiences of the members of these cultures in relation to these topics as well as more detailed information on the themes emerging from the responses to the questionnaire. The Turkish students write on the structure of the Educational system:

The general structure of Turkish educational system is similar to that of most countries. It comprises pre-primary education, primary education, secondary and higher

education. There are many universities in Turkey. They train different trades and professions. In Turkey, it is very prestigious to be a student. Still, there is a significant number of illiterate people, especially in rural areas.

And on their experiences as students:

Students attend school in uniforms, which are usually blue or very occasionally black for public schools. The uniforms of private schools are generally more colorful and with ornament

...

At the beginning of the week on Monday mornings and at the end of the week during Friday afternoons, flag ceremonies are held with all the teachers and students present in the courtyard or playground of each school. Each morning, primary school students pledge in chorus to be honest and studious, to protect the young and respect the old, to love their country more than themselves.

...

Students show respect for their teachers by addressing them "HOCAM", which means "sir" or "teacher", or by standing up as a class when a teacher enters the classroom.

...

A special feature of primary schools is that one teacher takes care of all the students in one class, from the first grade on and continues with those children for eight years until they finish their compulsory education.

The school age population of Turkey is very large and often school buildings and teachers are insufficient to cope. This

results in two sessions of school, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

...

Students are admitted to universities through an examination held once a year. In order to obtain a good future, students want to study in good departments at good universities. This is why they start studying for the entrance exams as much as two years in advance; generally taking private courses as well.

Similarly, Belarusian participants' email focuses on the structure of the educational system in Belarus:

In Belarus, School education falls into three levels: primary (4 years), basic (9 years) and secondary (11 years). A child can be admitted to school at 6 or 7 years of age. Basic education is compulsory for all children.

This group also moves on to giving information on the structure of the universities in Belarus stating that the universities are established in specific fields such as Agriculture University, Medical University and so on. Both Turkish and Belarusian participants also write about their experiences as university students.

Again, via CMC the participants write from an insider perspective, providing information which is not accessible via usual resources. Similar to the results of language, the nature of the information the participants exchange via e-mails is more detailed and provides first-hand experiences.

4. Multiculturalism

The small number of responses regarding multiculturalism from both groups shows a lack of information on this topic. Besides, the responses to multiculturalism reflect the superficial, at times inaccurate and stereotypical nature of the information available on World Wide Web. When inquired about the multicultural structure of the other culture, the responses reveal a great confusion, lack of in depth knowledge and a stereotypical understanding of these cultures as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Responses on multiculturalism

What do you know about the multicultural structure in Belarus/ Turkey?	
Responses by the Turkish participants	Frequency
Belarusian , Russian ,Polish , Ukrainian ,Jewish ,other	6
Responses by the Belarusian participants	
Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kurdish (but suppressed)*	1
Kurdish	1
Lack of recognition of ethnic and cultural diversity and terrorism*	2

* Participants' own wording

The few responses by the Belarusian participants' show confusion on the multiculturalism in Turkey with the Turkic countries. Furthermore, the responses reveal biased information on the current multicultural structure of Turkey. Turkish participants' responses, likewise, lack an accurate understanding of this culture, since they are limited to the names and statistical information, i.e. the population and percentage, of the mentioned ethnicities, and fail to show any insight on the role of these ethnicities in Belarusian culture.

The e-mail exchange in this topic show the participants' willingness to provide insight on multiculturalism in both countries. The Turkish participants' e-mail opens with a definition of nation:

The Turkish people are a nation defined more by a sense of sharing a common Turkish culture, than by ethnicity, religion or by being subjects to any particular country.

The e-mail then moves on to giving a comprehensive list of the ethnic groups living in Turkey, and a list of the countries the members of which have recently been migrating to Turkey or to EU via Turkey. Similarly, the information provided by the Belarusian students focus on the ethnic groups living in Belarus together with the close family ties with the neighbouring countries.

The e-mails exchanged on this topic lack the typical personal, everyday experiences of the participants as visible in other e-mails. Yet, they provide information on the multicultural structure of their cultures, which was missing in the participants' responses to questionnaire 1; and reflect the perspective of the members of that culture, e.g. adopted definitions of nation, which, we would like to argue, is invaluable especially at the face of biased information easily available. Communication between members of different cultures can prove to be of immense use to eliminate such biases and to build common ground between different cultures.

5. Literature/ Folk art

As discussed above, the information retrieved from third parties such as the Internet can be biased and inaccurate. Students' responses to the question regarding literature in questionnaire 1 show that such information can also be rich in breadth but not in depth. The exhaustive list of Belarusian writers in the responses of Turkish students denote that their familiarity to Belarusian literature is limited to encyclopaedic knowledge accessed via the Internet as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Responses on literature

Each culture has its own literature. Upon this knowledge, can you give any specific example you have found very interesting in Belarusian/ Turkish literature?	
<i>Responses by the Turkish participants</i>	Frequency
Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas	1
Frantsysk Skaryna, Symon Polatski, Yan Chachot, Vincent Dunin- Martsinkyevich, Maksim Bahdanovich, Ales Harun, Vladimir Zylka, Kazimir Svayak, Yanka Kupala, and Yakub Kolas and the prose writers Zmitrok Byadulya and Maksim Haretski	2
Vasil Bykaŭ and Uładzimir Karatkievič .	1
<i>Responses by the Belarusian participants</i>	
Omer Hayyam, Turkish fairy-tales and the main character Nasredin Hoca	2
Turkish folk literature is very rich and comprises anonymous works of bard poets. It reflects the influence of Islam and at the same time represents universal human values.	1
Nobel prize winner Orhan Pamuk	1

The responses to this question generate names of literary figures. However, it is not clear whether the participants, especially the Turkish participants, are familiar with the works of these names or if they simply run a search engine looking for information on the target culture. The responses of Belarusian participants, on the other hand, generate less names, Omer Hayyam, Nasreddin Hoca, a fictional character of many moral stories, and Orhan Pamuk. It should be noted here that Orhan Pamuk is the only Turkish writer among these names. Omer Hayyam, though famous for his work in Turkey too as in many other countries, was not Turkish and Nasreddin Hoca stories are indeed famous examples of oral tradition, yet are not typical representatives of Turkish Literature.

Interestingly, the participants did not volunteer to provide each other with examples of or suggestions for reading lists from their literature in their e-mails. Instead, they preferred to exchange information on folk art:

The Belarusian folk art has been developing predominantly as a domestic craft and only some types of it were practiced as trade for sale. Such specifics of its existence and actually non-market orientation defined the major features of the Belarusian folk art: profound traditional nature, explicit functionality of goods, generalization of forms, reserved and predominantly geometric symbolic decor.

...

Refinement and delicacy of coloristics and ornamentation are characteristic of woven goods among which towels (rushniky) have a significant place, since Belarusians have been using them for long not only for utilitarian and decorative purposes, but also for performing important rites. Ancient rhombic and geometric motives prevail in the woven or embroidered ornament of symbolic red color.

...

A special attention was attributed to female festive clothing. Perception of a woman as a transmitter of life and home keeper significantly influenced her dress. It is characterized by more complex forms than that of a man and has an extremely ancient semantics of both components of the set and its decor.

...

Turkish folk literature is an oral tradition. It reflects the problems of people who have abandoned their nomadic lifestyles. One example of this is the series of folktales surrounding the figure of Keloğlan, a young boy beset with the difficulties of finding a wife, helping his mother to keep the family house intact, and dealing with the problems caused by his neighbours. Another example is the rather mysterious figure of Nasreddin, a trickster who often plays jokes, of a sort, on his neighbours.

...

Much of the poetry and song of the aşık/ozan tradition, being almost exclusively oral until the 19th century, remains anonymous. There are, however, a few well-known aşiks before that time whose names have survived together with their works...

Although it is not clear why the participants preferred to focus on folk art and folk literature in their e-mails rather than information on the literary works or figures or suggestions for possible literary works to read, the e-mails still reflect a detailed account of the chosen direction. Especially the emails written by the Belarusian students reflect their personal experiences of folk art.

The contents of the e-mail exchange on the topic of media and governmental system, however, fail to generate personal experiences of the participants as the members of that culture. They are rather limited to factual

knowledge on the legislation systems, election systems, names of the major printed and visual media. We would like to argue that the main reason for this is the difficulty of personalizing these topics or infusing them in one's everyday life, which has been the direction the participants chose to embark on since the very beginning of e-mail exchange.

After the E-mail Exchange

At the end of the seven-week period, the students were given questionnaire 2 asking about in what ways they found the email-exchange to be beneficial, if they at all found it beneficial. Of the 24 questionnaires returned, all stated that they found the experience beneficial. As anticipated, the responses point out that the participants valued the first-hand experiences in the other culture form the very members of that culture, through two-way communication.

The most common theme raised by the students' answers is the value of two-way communication, which leads to what the students report to be accurate and efficient information about the other culture. Student A writes:

We can obtain the information from the first hand and in that way we are not limited to what a book says, we can ask whatever we wonder, which is very important to learn about a certain culture.

As anticipated, based on the contents of the emails exchanged, the students' responses on the benefits of CMC focus on the value of information obtained from the members of the target culture. It is no surprise that the students' answers remark the perspective and the experiences of the members of that culture as an important advantage of CMC, since throughout the course they chose to provide each other with this kind of information wherever they could. Student B remarks:

People carry culture inside themselves, in their minds, sometimes even without realizing it. Learning from them, asking them about their culture was a big advantage. Sharing ideas, thoughts and beliefs, we also shared a part of our cultures, and in that way it helped us learn in a better and more effective and efficient way. This communication helps learners to avoid situations of cultural misunderstanding while being in this foreign country, to avoid a

conflict and a cultural shock. Finally, learning form others always helps us to understand ourselves better.

The value of the two-way communication lies in the possibility to inquire about an issue, i.e. initiate request for information, and that the information they received is effective, i.e. obtained directly in a short amount of time, which is also considered to be accurate.

Student C: Most probably, people living in one country are the ones who know that language and culture the best. Secondly, learning another culture from its members certainly entails a more natural process which consequently gives more useful results. Last, but not least, it is more fun as the ones you are interacting with are more dominant, learned, comfortable with what they are doing.

Student D: ...form what I got, I can say that they explained to me what you can never find in books, Internet or elsewhere. I got information in a very fair, concise and effective way. That was a help. I don't have much time to read lots of newspapers in order to understand what goes on in the country, and being abroad the opinion that I usually get is manipulated by someone, or at least influenced. Turkish students let me know what are their ideas about happening events. That gave me a very good, large and quite rich perspective of the view of events in a very short time.

It is also very important that the participants not only value CMC to provide effective, accurate information via personal experiences but also acknowledge the value of the unique perspective of the members of that culture. Hence, the students found e-mail exchange beneficial not only in distancing themselves from stereotypes but also in understanding themselves better.

Student E: I noticed that Turkish people are different in a lot of ways. ... Native speakers teach you more quickly and more precisely. They explain to you through their own experience what they think about this and that tradition. Observing people

personally helps you to stay distantly from stereotypes and make your own perception of people. Not all the nation is like the one that described in a book, and people differ even inside the nation. Building personal contacts with as many people as possible through personal contacts improves your understanding of the culture.

Discussion Of The Findings And Implications

This study aims at answering the question whether or not CMC is beneficial in raising cultural awareness between two non-native English-speaking cultures. The findings of the content analysis of the e-mail exchange and questionnaire 2 point out that CMC is a beneficial tool in raising cultural awareness. The most interesting finding is the direction the participants from both cultures chose to take in their e-mails. It is important that the participants used e-mail exchange as an opportunity to provide and access information, that is not typically available to them via other means, such as the Internet, and can be provided only by the members of that culture.

Both groups of students focused on providing each other with everyday, first-hand experiences in the broad topics they were provided with to serve as prompts for e-mail exchange. Such personal, practical experiences involved informing each other about a wide range of issues from traditional practices of religious festivals to past and present experiences as students. Besides the actual experiences, the participants also provided each other with the unique insider perspective, values and beliefs on the given topics, which are most visible in the e-mails on multiculturalism, and language policies. The findings also point out that the participants value personal experiences and perspectives of the other group as accurate and efficient, as discussed in analysis of the second questionnaire.

We would also like to argue that the recognition of the value of such information is vital since there is a great information flow available via communication technologies, the most influential one being the Internet. Yet such information bears the risk of being superficial and at times stereotypical, as can be seen in the students' answers to questionnaire 1. At this point, enabling the members of different cultures to speak for themselves will not only provide a chance to see the value of target language as means of genuine communication but also much needed intercultural communication, which will

open doors to the learners in many aspects from personal development to building an understanding where human values are shared and celebrated. Therefore, we would like to argue, CMC bears a great potential in raising cultural awareness, as well as for the more commonly used aspects in foreign language teaching methodologies.

Due to time limitations, this course's impact on students' writing skills were not investigated. We would like to suggest that further research on the impact of CMC for raising cultural awareness on students' writing skills will help add to wider body of knowledge. Similarly, time limitations in this study led to allocating one week for e-mail exchange for each of the seven topics mentioned above. We would also like to suggest that further research where possible topics are not required to be covered in such limited time can prove to be fruitful in developing a deeper understanding of the nature of the cultural awareness raised in such courses.

Conclusion

The contents of the email exchange show that the participants embraced the opportunity to exchange information on the above topics. Although the responses to the questionnaire before CMC note limited, and at times stereotypical knowledge about each culture, the e-mails focus on practical, experience based information. In fact, the participants of this study preferred to focus on their perspectives as insiders, wherever they could. The results of the study show that CMC does not have to be limited to practicing target language skills. When provided with the opportunity, the learners use CMC to build relationships to understand the other culture and to introduce their own.

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