

Teaching Foreign Language with Using Cultural Aspects of Literature

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Abstract: In this study, we shall examine the portfolio studies of the third grade student teachers of the English Language Teaching Department in Yıldız Technical University, as part of the requirements of the “Language and Literature” course offered. They include the worksheets designed by student teachers, mainly targeting teaching grammar, vocabulary, translation, textual cohesion and coherence. The research shall mainly focuses on the following points of (i) how student teachers approached literary texts, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages they encountered while coping with literary texts; (ii) which literary texts were chosen as teaching materials and how were these texts internalized and interpreted to target cultural enrichment; (iii) which language samples of real life settings were demonstrated. This paper aims to show that teaching language through literature initiates the student teachers’ pragmatic input in progress, and helps them to prepare authentic teaching materials in terms of developing teaching competencies.

Keywords: Student Teacher, Literature, Authentic Material, Intercultural Competence, Pragmatics

Edebiyatın Kültürel Yönlerini Kullanarak Yabancı Dil Öğretmek

Özet: Bu çalışmada, Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi İngilizce Öğretmenliği Bölümü 3. Sınıf öğrencilerinin Dil ve Edebiyat dersi için oluşturdukları çalışma dosyalarını inceledik. Bu dosyalar, öğretmen adayları tarafından hazırlanmış olup dilbilgisi, sözcük bilgisi, çeviri, metinsel bütünlük ve tutarlılık öğretimini hedefleyen çalışma kağıtlarını içermektedir. Araştırmamız başlıca şu noktalar üzerinde durmaktadır: Öğretmen adayları edebi metinlere nasıl yaklaşıyor? (Edebi metinlerle çalışırken ne gibi olumlu veya olumsuz yönlerle karşılaşılıyorlar?) Öğretim materyali olarak hangi edebi metinleri seçiyorlar? Hedef dil kültürünü nasıl içselleştirip yorumluyorlar? Gerçek hayattan hangi dil örneklerini gösteriyorlar? Amacımız, edebiyatı dil öğretiminde kullanırken öğretmen adaylarının edimbilimsel girdisini geliştirmektir. Böylece edebiyatın dil öğretiminde kullanımı, öğretmen yeterliliklerini geliştirmek açısından onlara özgün materyal hazırlama da yardımcı olacaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Öğretmen Adayı, Edebiyat, Özgün Materyal, Kültürlerarası Yetkinlik, Edimbilim

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Introduction

Kasper and Rose define pragmatics as “the study of communicative action in its socio-cultural context” (2001, p. 2). They were inspired by Crystal’s definition on pragmatics (1997, p. 301, cited in Kasper and Rose), which focused on the way language was used and exposed to social interactions. In the overall sense, the communication process has been one of the prevalent research topics due to its influences on foreign language teaching. Thus, interpretations and performances of communicative actions become noteworthy in studying the social perceptions of target language. Within this framework, pragmatics helps learners to gain communicative competence through engaging different types of discourse and texts.

Concisely, communicative action takes place within socio-cultural context. Related to this view, literature plays an important role in terms of authentic uses in classroom activities during language teaching processes (Uslu, 2005). Moreover, Arıkan’s proposal on pragmatic and cultural utterances (2008) appeals to us that creativity, which is highly supported by literature, would be required in order to decode pragmatic and cultural utterances during communication.

There are oppositions against using literature in language teaching, yet it can be seen that there are more benefits than limitations of using literature in language classes. Literature promotes language acquisition and learning motivation through providing authentic materials. It enriches cultural and language knowledge. Moreover, studying a foreign culture through literature may well increase students’ understanding of that culture and might encourage them to view the target culture positively. Studying culture is as useful as part of foreign language instruction due to its influence on language and communication. It gives students a reason to study the target language. It increases students’ interest and consciousness; helping them understand people of other cultures besides their own, rather than memorizing or imitating “the other” (Arıkan, 2005).

Currently, the foreign language teaching principles of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) are based on communicative approach, which basically gives priority to the functions of language rather than its structural features. The foreign language curriculum of the MoNE has been designed according to the Common European Framework References (CEFR), which aims to improve students’ cognitive, auditory and kinesthetic skills, learning strategies; communicative and cross-cultural language skills, and consequent-

ly, better self-expression. In addition to those skills, CEFR-based curriculum gives opportunities to students to evaluate themselves and construct learning atmospheres through collaboration.

In this study, I observed that literature guides the students through the reading process by focusing their attention not only on the plot, characters, grammar and vocabulary, but also, on interpreting what they have read, and internalizing it. Language only has meaning when understood within its cultural context, with that context, illuminated by the basic beliefs and values at the core of the society (Han, 2005, p. 76). By constructing the process of learning with correlating a sample of literary text to a real life situation, which is different from didactic texts, students are given access to a world of attitudes, values, collective imaginings and historical frames of the references that constitute the memory of people or a speech community (Gray, 2005).

While organizing this research I informed student teachers that they had to prepare their own portfolios including worksheets based on the activities taken from the book, *Literature* (Duff and Maley, 2007) and make their own comments about using literature in teaching a foreign language. They took the “Language and Literature” course for two semesters, and their portfolios were collected at the end of the academic year. When I reflected on the design of this study, I put forward that designing literature activities would help English Language Teaching (ELT) student teachers raise their cultural awareness, and gain an insight into authentic material while performing in-service teaching.

The Literature Activities

Integration of literature into foreign language education mainly aims at critical thinking on cultural studies, and this occurs via activities. Literary texts which are exposed to many diverse inferences and critics, would provide opportunities for making synthesis of materials, teaching objectives and learning styles. In this context, literary works convey the integrated forms of culture and life style that stimulate students’ perceptibility, comprehensibility and interpretation of language skills (Premawardhena, 2007). The acquisition of those skills would be beneficial for the student teachers’ own teaching strategies in the future. The literature activities may function as intermediary roles to expose linguistic and cultural difficulties in terms of grammar, vocabulary, translation, textual cohesion and coherence during the acquisition process. In

addition to this, Arıkan mentions that not only are grammatical structures taught through literary texts, but also variability of meanings are presented in different contexts (2008). So the activities studied in Duff and Maley's book (2007) were designed by extracting texts from novels, short stories, poems, plays, movies, TV series, diaries, letters, advertisements, street signs, magazines, newspapers, etc. All such extracts would give ideas about the other countries' history, folklore, arts, cuisine, economics, politics, geography.¹

The students mainly bring out the activities that provide improvement in speaking and writing skills. Besides, they believe that teaching skills can be improved through performing literature activities (Arıkan, 2005). Here, I shall highlight the activities targeting speaking and writing skills. Those activities are called "split exchanges, speculation, author's comments, street literature, matching texts, past and present, formal and informal language, combining texts, word arrays, screen adaptation, intralingual translation, speaking in role, rehearsal time, verbs: tenses and passive forms, conditionals, translation: frequent verbs, reverse translation, familiar expressions, inside the character's head and literature projects". All these activities serve as a starting point of creativity and production (Arıkan, 2005).

I would like to refer to the aims of those activities that make their functions explicit during the learning process. I observed that at the beginning of the study, the students mostly endeavored to teach the most difficult points of grammar and vocabulary isolated from the texts. They applied their language knowledge in a behaviorist way, apart from constructing new interpretations of the context or, basically comprehending the context. For them, it seemed easy to determine the grammatical complexities and select unknown words, disregarding textual coherence. However, with the guidance of literature activities, the students became aware of interrelations among grammar, vocabulary, translation, contextual and cultural characteristics that make students reflect on their own reading comprehensions, and afterwards sought to improve their speaking and writing skills.

The activities were determined according to grade, level, students' needs and

¹ For instance, Simon Schama, *Rembrandt's Eyes* (art history); Tim Severin, *Tracking Marco Polo* (travel/autobiography) (Duff and Maley, 2007, pp. 14-15); Misha Glenny, *The Balkans* (Duff and Maley, 2007, pp. 12-13). The extracts taken from these books expose the authenticity, which is narrated by characteristics of their genres and cultural tips.

expectations. A very brief list of these activities are shown: dialogue exchanges; combinations of texts; choosing appropriate vocabulary; mimics and gestures according to character; word plays; matching texts to stir up discussions; comparisons of language and attitudes from different time periods; differences between formal and informal usage in everyday life; reconstructing a written text or a speech; variation of expressions depending on situation; the use of phrasal and prepositional verbs in a certain context; increasing awareness of the hidden differences between mother tongue and target language; showing how everyday language can be used in literature; raising awareness of common collocations; focusing on conditionals, direct and indirect speech, and genre.

Method

The content analysis method (Miles and Huberman, 1994) has been adapted for the overall structure of my work. Content analysis, as one of the key components of action research, uses qualitative interpretative data in order to make teachers' practices more improved and qualified. The emphasis is given to interpretations and situations based on the practices. I preferred to use that model for practical reasoning on how the student teachers would adapt their cultural learning to their prospective teaching strategies.

Based on their portfolios, they were supposed to be acquainted with real life settings, and produce cross-cultural comparisons, and more creative activities and tasks derived from authentic materials. The instructional organizers of the research had been arranged in the order of 1.individual 2.group and 3.whole class. Each student teacher prepared his or her own portfolio, and then discussed the activities found in portfolios with the group and finally performed in front of the class to share the views of the whole class in order to evaluate the validity and functionality of the activities according to view point of the teaching language.

Data Analysis

The data for this study came from the portfolios of the third grade ELT students. Their interactions with the course lecturer (myself) for two semesters had also been noted down during the research process. In the portfolios, the student teachers created worksheets in which they applied their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, translation, textual cohesion and coherence to the target

language in real life settings. Additionally, at the end of each worksheet, they wrote down reflective paragraphs about linguistic, referential and cultural outcomes of the activities. They had to cite references (internet resources, books, brochures, magazines, interviews, songs, etc.) for the extracts. The data was used to analyze their performances on activities, self and peer evaluations on them. The designed activities showed level, time, aims, preparation, procedure, follow-up, sample texts and sources. When I examined the activities, the following blending points of language and literature were seen: "Frequent verbs, phrasal and prepositional verbs, tenses, passive forms, conditionals, direct and indirect speech, various speaking styles, synonyms, collocations, syntax, intonation, characters, period, themes, humor, irony, metaphor, imagery, frames of references, connotations, authors, setting, lengths of texts." However, I only mentioned the cultural aims of the extracts that were totally determined by student teachers.

Findings

Gillian Lazar (1993) considers the cultural aspects in literary texts, and claims that the teaching of culture in the language classroom could provoke controversial issues, and expresses two statements: "1. Language teachers should select literary texts, which are culturally universal or, at least culturally understandable to everyone. 2. Students' comprehension is frequently impeded not by linguistic features in a literary text, but by cultural ones. Cultural features could help students understand more fully the language in a text (pp.66-67). In addition to these statements, Duff and Maley (2007) mention their aim for teaching foreign language - to make students engage interactively with the text in considering the cultural difficulty/appropriacy of the foreign language (pp.6-7).

Here, I would like to give some samples of the student teachers' worksheets and their comments about the activities that enlightened the culture and language collaboration in class. I mainly focused on cultural aims of the worksheets while teaching English through literature.

Through these activities, the student teachers reflected on what and how to teach. Even though they were unable to distinguish between linguistic features and cultural characteristics, eventually they noticed that there were two distinctive parts they should focus on; language and culture. The activities initiated them to think critically in a textual coherence. They concluded to

classify cultural topics into two groups: Popular culture and classic culture. For instance, one of them used Beyonce's song "If I were a boy I'd roll out of bed in the morning" as a material for the activity of "conditionals". She made the class notice the utterances of conditionals in lyrics. The other student gave the samples of indirect speech from J.K. Rowling's interview. Certain tenses and passive forms were taken from the interview with Madonna and TV series such as "Lost". The examples of frequent verbs such as "do, make, get, bring" and translations were extracted from the interview with Twilight's author, Stephanie Meyer. One might say that all these examples were based on popular culture. However, I should take into consideration both the learner's needs and interests while selecting texts and organizing activities. When I read their comments about the activities they organized, they claim that it was reasonable and useful to use texts from interviews, advertisements, TV series, movies, plays, speech, etc. Not only were they captivating interests, they also stimulated visualization and concrete interpretations of the context as well.

On the other hand I also came across more eligible cultural points: One of the worksheets presented *Oliver Twist* for a "speculation" activity that he is an orphan, and lives in a workhouse. The student gave information about the workhouses during the period of the Industrial Revolution, and their relation to society. John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* was also used for the "speculation" activity, and the students were expected to have an idea about "The Great Depression" in the 1930's in America. Another student examined *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, and made comparisons in terms of addressing another. In the novel, even in a family setting, the wife calls his husband Mr. Bennet. When I look at Turkish culture, we use the words *bey* or *hanım*. For "formal and informal language" activity, the student distinguished formal and informal usage of language in everyday life by studying *Pygmalion* by Bernard Shaw. I frequently see this type of comparison on religious aspects such as Christmas, Baptism, Virgin Mary, etc. One of the prominent examples of religion is about Virgin Mary that takes place in the flower's setting of Katherine Mansfield's short story *A Dill Pickle*. The student gives information about the flowers mentioned in this story, and their cultural meanings. The student states that "marigold" is derived from "Mary's Gold", and the plant is associated with the Virgin Mary.

Conclusion

I discussed the significant role of literature in foreign language teaching based on classroom action research conducted through portfolios prepared by ELT students. I concluded that teaching language through literature would provide students with a taste of aesthetics², critical thinking, articulation, making discussion, comparisons, interpretations and arguments. Consequently, I would state that the student teachers expose self-explanatory activities, meaningfully clear and distinctive examples, elaborative internet and library research that gives intriguing information about the author, his/her work, environment and time period. In addition to a new awareness of cultural tips, the student teachers achieved the goal of inseparability of language and culture in classroom: At least now, they are able to design activities including real life settings; they know how to use authentic materials, make connections among linguistic, referential, conceptual and cultural features in a text. They could estimate the limitations of the authentic materials while preparing activities, and introduce the cultural points of the target language (Eren, 2004). While looking for the authentic texts, student teachers also made selections according to their special thematic interests, and focused better on them. Thus, this inclination encouraged students to become more aware of firstly, their own cultural background, and then intercultural competence, later, their subject-matter knowledge (Knapp, 1998). Finally, depending on the intermingled elements of literature and culture, they could evaluate themselves in terms of teaching internship and micro-peer teaching practices, whether all these performances project living language or otherwise.

² Hilmi Uçan (2006) mentions a constant relation between literary texts/literature theories and language/literature training. Language education can be accepted as the first step of literature training. The main purpose of reading literary texts is to acquire aesthetic sensitivity. I think that pre-service language teachers especially need to achieve literary aesthetic tastes during their training in the university, in order to get the qualifications of professionalism that in-service teaching requires.

GENİŞ ÖZET

Edebiyatın Kültürel Yönlerini Kullanarak Yabancı Dil Öğretmek

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Bu çalışmada, öğretmen adaylarının öğrendikleri yabancı dilin edimbilimsel özelliklerinin farkına edebiyat yoluyla nasıl daha kolay vararak dili öğretebilecekleri üzerinde durulmaktadır. Bu yolla kazanacakları farkındalık, öğretmen adaylarına dili öğrenirken yaşayacakları edimbilimsel zorlukları gözlemlemelerine ve onların hedef kültüre ilgilerinin artmasına olanak sağlayacaktır. Ayrıca özgün materyal olarak kabul edilen edebiyatla ilgili öğrenim materyalleri farklı dil seviyelerindeki öğrencilere uyarlanabilir ve çalışma kağıtları, testler, bulmacalar, çizim haritaları, şarkılar, sunumlar ve videolar gibi çeşitli öğretim materyallerine dönüştürülebilir.

Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi İngilizce Öğretmenliği üçüncü sınıf öğrencilerinin zorunlu derslerinden olan Dil ve Edebiyat dersi için hazırlanan gelişim dosyalarını inceledik. Gelişim dosyaları *Edebiyat* (Duff ve Malley, 2007) adlı ders kitabını içeriğine göre hazırlanmıştır. Dosyalar öğretmen adayları tarafından hazırlanmış olup dilbilgisini, sözcük bilgisi, çeviriyi, metinsel uyum ve uygunluğu başlıca öğretmeyi hedefleyen çalışma kağıtlarını içermektedir. Veriler, bu çalışma kağıtlarından toplanmış ve içerik analizi yöntemine (Miles ve Huberman, 1994) göre incelenmiştir.

Araştırma başlıca şu noktalara odaklanmıştır: Öğretmen adayları edebi metinlere nasıl yaklaşır? Öğretim materyali olarak hangi edebi metinleri seçerler? Hedef dildeki kültürel zenginliği nasıl içselleştirip yorumlarlar? Gerçek hayattan alınmış hangi örnekleri göstermeye çalışırlar? Edebiyat ile dil öğretimi öğretmen adaylarının edimbilimsel girdisini ileriye taşımaktadır. Ayrıca öğretim yetkinliklerini geliştirmek adına özgün materyal hazırlamalarına da yardım etmektedir.

Araştırmamızın temelini oluşturan edimbilim, yabancı dil öğrencilerine farklı söylem ve metin türleriyle karşılaştıklarında iletişimsel yetkinliklerini geliştirme için yardımcı olur. Yabancı dil eğitiminde iletişimin sosyo-kültürel bir bağlamda devam etmesi esastır. Bu açıdan özgün materyallerden yararlanmak

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bu sosyo-kültürel bağlamı anlamak ve içselleştirmek için önemlidir. Edebiyatın özgün bir malzeme olarak kullanılması, iletişimin akıcılığı ve doğruluğuna katkı sağlamaktadır. Edebiyatın, özellikle yabancı dil sınıflarında uygulanan etkinliklerde kullanılması, iletişimin akıcılığını sağlayan kültürel bağlamların çözümlenmesini ve dil edinimini kolaylaştırmaktadır (Uslu, 2005; Arıkan, 2008).

Bir dili öğrenirken bağlı olduğu kültürü ayrı tutmak mümkün değildir. Dil öğreniminde kullanılan özgün materyaller, kültürü ve o kültürdeki iletişimi de aynı zamanda tanıtmaktadır. Bu gibi çalışmalar öğrencinin ilgisini ve farkındalığını arttırmakta ve başka kültürlere mensup insanları anlamalarını kolaylaştırmaktadır. Ayrıca ezbere dayalı öğrenmeden çok dil kullanımında neyin, nerede, ne zaman, kime, nasıl kullanılacağını göstermektedir (Arıkan, 2005).

Dil, kendi kültürel bağlamında toplumsal değerleriyle ve inançlarıyla anlaşılabilir bir anlam ifade etmektedir (Han, 2005). Gerçek hayattan bir kesit olarak kullanılabilen edebiyat, öğrenme sürecindeki bu yapılanmayı tanıttığı değerlerle, tarihsel çerçevelerle ve örnek yaşantılarla inşa etmektedir (Gray, 2005).

Bu çalışmamızda öğretmen adayları, Duff ve Maley'nin *Edebiyat* (2007) kitabındaki yabancı dil öğretimi etkinliklerinden yararlanarak ders materyallerini hazırladılar. İki dönem boyunca aldıkları Dil ve Edebiyat dersi için edebiyattan yararlanarak etkinlikler geliştirdiler. Roman, kısa öykü, şiir, oyun, film, günlük, mektup gibi eserlerden yararlanarak oluşturulan metinler, ülkelerin tarihi, folkloru, sanatı, siyaseti ve diğer birçok konuda da bilgi vermektedir. Bu edebiyat etkinliklerinin, özgün materyallerin de katkısıyla öğrencilerin yabancı dil eğitimindeki farkındalıklarını arttıracaklarını ileri sürmekteyiz. Öğrenciler, metinleri çalışırken dilbilgisi, sözcük bilgisi, çeviri, bağlamsal ve kültürel özellikler arasındaki ilişkilendirmeleri gözlemler ve dil becerilerini geliştirmeye çalışırlar.

Miles ve Huberman'ın içerik analizi yöntemi (1994) kullanılarak öğretmen adaylarının çalışma dosyaları incelendi. Edebi metinlerden yola çıkarak nasıl etkinlikler düzenledikleri ve kültürel öğrenimi nasıl sağladıkları üzerinde durulmuştur. Yapılan incelemeler sonucunda görülen odur ki gerçek hayatla olan tanışıklığı arttırmak, kültürler arası benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları bulmak temel amaç olmuştur. Her öğretmen adayı hazırladığı materyali sınıfta sunmuş, uygulamış ve eleştirilere göre düzeltmelerini yapmıştır. Her bir etkinlik dilbilimsel, kültürel ve gönderimsel açıdan değerlendirilmiştir.

Dil sınıflarında kültür aktarımı, dil becerilerini geliştirdiği gibi başka kültürlerin anlaşılabilirliğini de sağlar. Ayrıca kültürel özellikler, dil kazanımını bir

bütünlük ve uyum içerisinde verirken eleştirel düşünmenin, estetik duygusunun, ilişkilendirme ve yorum yapabilme kabiliyetinin de gelişmesine katkıda bulunur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Öğretmen Adayı, Edebiyat, Özgün Materyal, Kültürlerarası Yetkinlik, Edimbilim

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