The Use of Poetry to Raise Intercultural Awareness of EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

Learning a new language does not involve learning only the four skills - reading, writing, speaking and listening - grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation of the target language. It is not possible to consider a target language without understanding and appreciation of its culture. CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) highlights the importance of raising intercultural awareness among language learners in order to appreciate and respect the differences between home and target cultures. Literary works are invaluable resources to convey the culture of the target language to students. In this study, poetry was used in language classrooms to foster students' intercultural awareness. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether the use of poetry in EFL classrooms can raise intercultural awareness of the students or not. In this quantitative research, an intercultural awareness instrument was formed and it was applied to the experimental and control groups as pre- and post-test. The results showed teaching poetry in language classrooms improved the intercultural awareness of the students.

In the history of language teaching there were times when literature was included in and excluded from language teaching classrooms; "humanistic education" gave importance to literature for the sake of teaching practical language skills whereas "situational, audio-lingual and communicative approaches" eliminated literature in language classrooms in order to focus on oral communication competence (Appel, 1995, p. 89). The use of literature for foreign language teaching dates back to Grammar-Translation Method and the reason why this method was adopted was to encourage students to be able to understand

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literature of different languages as well as praising it (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). For the study of literature, there are many other current approaches which have been adopted until now. Among them Lazar (1993, pp. 23-24) puts forward the following possible approaches for literature teaching: Language-Based Approach, Literature as Content and Literature for personal enrichment.

As an invaluable tool in foreign language classrooms, literature has a number of benefits for language learners: Literature is naturally an authentic material by which the learners receive original input for language learning (Ghosn, 2002). Paran (2008) points out that literature is a motivating and engaging tool which is very special for language learning. Literature helps students to appreciate and understand different cultures of the world (Negrete, 2007). Zafeiriadou (2001) argues that literary works are the evidence of culture; therefore by working on literature, the students are able to understand and praise different cultures and ideologies which are far from their own time and space. Lazar (1993, p.62) states that "exposing students to literature from other cultures is an enriching and exciting way of increasing their awareness of different values, beliefs, social structures and so on." Depending on Lazar's (1993) views on literature and language teaching, it can be possible to remark that literature heightens cultural and intercultural awareness of students in language classrooms. Using literature in EFL classrooms also helps teachers to inspire their students to read, thus reinforcing students' individual growth (Carter and Long, 1991). If the students want to make sense of the ambiguous texts, they should act like a detective searching for the cues; therefore they are totally involved in the texts (Brumfit & Carter, 1986). Langer (1997) states that when students are involved in a literary activity, they can think about their own lives, learning procedure and language, so literature helps them to explore the limits of possible answers to be given promoting their interpretation and reflection skills during the lesson. Manzi (1994) suggests that for teaching grammar structures of English language such as "determiners, nouns and noun phrases, adjective order" etc. in university language classrooms, literary texts can be a suited instrument (p.14). With all these contributions to language teaching, literature should be involved in the foreign language teaching procedure.

On the other hand, it has been commonly thought that literary texts are quite difficult for EFL learners to deal with. Many students are discouraged from studying with the idea of "literature" itself even before starting to analyze a literary text. However, by considering some important elements while selecting a literary text, it is possible to encourage the students to be for covering literature in their lessons.

According to Hadaway, Vardall and Young (2001), poetry has continuously been the one to be ignored of all the genres available to teachers in a literature based curriculum. It is also traditionally believed that poetry is one of the most complicated forms which require literary and linguistic competence (Finch, 2003). However, Lazar (1993, p. 99) states that "it has been argued that poetry frequently breaks the 'rules' of language, but by so doing it communicates with us in a fresh, original way." Being exposed to the original language used in poetry, students can have the chance to learn the real-life language. Moreover, Carter (1996) finds out that learners try to delve into the poem while making interpretations. The poem does not use the standard grammar rules and semantic structures, so that the learners are able to use their analytical skills and promote their language awareness (Carter, 1996). Collie and Slater (1987) also emphasize that when the learners read poetry, they have the chance of being involved in a literary language which is away from the sentence structure and lexis of standardized daily language. In addition, poetry is memorable with its rhythmic language, promotes reflective thinking of the learners with its multiple themes and helps learners to invest themselves by working on essential activities (Maley & Moulding, 1985). Güzel (1999, pp.110-111) also proposes the following advantages of using poetry in EFL classrooms as follows:

1. It appeals to our sensitivities most compared with other literary genres.

2. It gives a sense of music and rhythm while reading or listening to poetry.

3. It enables students to compare or contrast their native literature with target literature as they have riddles, rhymes and songs in their own native language with musical elements like poetry.

4. It is simple to keep a poem in mind with its repetitive form and sound patterns.

5. It has such a concise language that students should actively involve in the analysing process to give multiple interpretations for a poem.

6. It has a variety of capturing and essential themes.

Thinking of the numerous benefits of poetry for the foreign language students, language programmers, curriculum planners and teachers should involve poetry in the teaching process. With carefully chosen poets, well- equipped teachers in terms of using literature in English classes and effective and efficient activities, students can have the chance to make the most use of literature.

In order to provide a common basis for language learning, teaching and assessment throughout Europe, The Council of Europe, and Language Division developed the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2007). According to the European Commission's Action Plan for language learning and linguistic diversity (as cited in Dombi, 2010), language learners are expected to develop the level of language skills in two languages together with intercultural competencies. In their meeting in Cracow, Poland on 15th - 17th October 2000, all member countries and also Turkey decided to apply European Language Portfolio (ELP) project in foreign language teaching systems (Demirel, 2005). Language learning is a lifelong process and learners' motivation, skill and confidence are of utmost importance and the ELP has a format in which all kinds of language learning and cultural experiences are recorded and formally recognised as the reflection of the learner (Council of Europe, 2007). As a personal document, The ELP gives value to all language and cultural competences and experiences, promotes plurilingualism and multiculturalism and also helps to develop learner autonomy (Lenz, 2004, p.22). Plurilingualism and intercultural awareness are important notions in order to integrate Europe (Dombi, 2010, p.166) and the ELP can have a role in meeting the challenge of multilingual and intercultural communication (Vez, 2008, p. 6). Council of Europe in CEFR (2007) explains the definition of intercultural awareness as follows:

Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of target community' produce an intercultural awareness. It is, of course, important to note that intercultural awareness includes an awareness of regional and social diversity in both worlds. It is also enriched by awareness of wider range of cultures than those carried by the learner's L1 and L2 (p.103).

According to Ur (2012), raising cultural awareness of the language learners and promoting their intercultural competence which aims students' recognition and appreciation to other cultures has been of great importance nowadays. McKay (1982) states that students might have a broader sense of perception of the foreign culture by analyzing literary works which are also likely to result in promoting students' own imagination and creativity in the classroom. Considering EFL setting in language classrooms, Krieger (2005) likewise believes that language teachers can adorn their classrooms with various activities so that students will be guided to reconsider their own cultures and respect the beliefs of other cultures; as a result students' sensitivity to other cultures will foster their intercultural communication intelligence.

Correspondingly, Melin (2010) highlights that poetry as a part of literature is inherently attached to culture in a delicate way.

As can be recognised from the current trends in EFL, literature has recently gained great importance as a reflection of the target culture and therefore it has started to be integrated in foreign language curriculum to some extent. Using literature in EFL classes has numerous benefits for language learners such as improving language learning and instruction, understanding the target culture, increasing language awareness, developing creativity, promoting thinking skills and the like (Collie & Slater, 1987; Ghosn, 2002; Crumbley & Smith 2000). With its different genres, literature still makes great contributions to human life and learning. In this respect, literature is a fruitful issue that takes the attention of many researchers. Similarly, in this research it was examined if literature improves intercultural awareness of language learners, which is one of the main objectives of the CEFR.

2. Research Questions

1. Is there a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of intercultural interest?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of intercultural knowledge?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of intercultural respect?
4. Is there a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of intercultural activities?
5. Is there a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of intercultural communication?

3. Methodology

In this study, pre-test and post- test control group design of research was used. The study was implemented at İzmir Kâtip Çelebi University, School of Foreign Languages. 50 students all aged between 18-25 were involved in this study. The experimental and control groups were two equivalent groups in terms of students' ages, genders, departments and first-term grades. They were all at B1 level of English according to CEFR criteria.

In order to find out the intercultural awareness levels of the students, a five- point-Likert type scale involving 34 items related to intercultural issues was prepared. It was piloted on 173 preparatory class students at a private university in İzmir in order to carry out factor analysis of the items. After the piloting period and the factor analysis, 13 items were eliminated and finally, the questionnaire was formed as 21 items extracted in five factors. These factors were categorized as follows: Items 1-7 for intercultural interest, items 8-11 for intercultural knowledge, items 12-15 for intercultural respect, items 16-18 for intercultural activities and items 20-21 for intercultural communication.

Table 1.
Result of the factor analysis

	Factor 1 Intercultural Interest	Factor 2 Intercultural Knowledge	Factor 3 Intercultural Respect	Factor 4 Intercultural Activities	Factor 5 Intercultural Communication	Total

Variance explained	17.509%	13.145%	12.461%	11.372%	7.971%	62.458%
Cronbach's Alpha	.868	.800	.756	.711	.643	.895

KMO=.878   Bartlett Test of Sphericity: Chi Square : 1498.793   df=200   P=.000

During the piloting, it was recognized that only positive side of the scale (agree and completely agree) was chosen. It was thought that as all the participants were foreign language learners, they were all open to intercultural issues. Therefore it was decided to change the Five - point-Likert Type Scale into Five - point Rating Scale to determine how much they agree with the statements given. Students' degree of agreement varies from 5 (highest degree of agreement) to 1 (lowest degree of agreement). The questionnaire was designed and conducted in Turkish to prevent misunderstandings and to create a clear image of what is being asked among students.

As a quantitative instrument, the intercultural awareness questionnaire (Appendix A) was implemented on both control and experimental group students to see their attitudes towards the target culture. After the pre-test of the questionnaire, it was obtained that both groups were matching in terms of their attitudes towards the target culture as can be seen in Table 2. This result proves that both experimental and control groups were equal before the implementation in terms of five factors, intercultural interest, intercultural knowledge, intercultural respect, intercultural activities and intercultural communication respectively.

Table 2.

Pre-test results of the experimental and control groups

	Group	n	$\overline{X}$	sd	df	t	P
Intercultural Interest	experimental	25	3.86	0.56	48	0.640	0 .520
	control	25	3.76	0.61			
Intercultural Knowledge	experimental	25	2.40	0.64	48	0.940	0.350
	control	25	2.60	0.84			
Intercultural Respect	experimental	25	4.69	0.32	48	0.830	0.400
	control	25	4.78	0.42			
Intercultural Activity	experimental	25	3.60	0.90	48	1.640	0.108
	control	25	3.97	0.67			
Intercultural Communication	experimental	25	2.92	1.04	48	0.670	0.500
	control	25	3.12	1.03			

P>.05

After the pre-testing period, while the experimental group covered 8 poems during their English lessons, the control group kept on following its regular pacing without any poetry implementation. While selecting the poems, the levels of the poems, their inclusion of cultural themes and the relevance of the topic with personal interests of the students were all taken into consideration. Throughout the procedure 8 poems were used which were covered in the class beginning from easier to more difficult in terms of their lexis, grammar and syntax. It was also carefully considered that the poems should include different types of cultural elements such as war, superstitions, mythology etc. It was expected that if students related the theme of the poem to their own experience, they would improve their critical thinking skills as well as enjoying it. With this idea in mind, activities and exercises based on four linguistic skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking were prepared to apply in class. Poems were used as reading materials and regular reading procedure (pre- reading, while reading and post reading) with interactive activities was conducted in the experimental group. The students were supported to understand the topic, think about it and express their ideas freely.

The eight poems used in the study are as follows:

Week 1: Breakfast by Jacques Prevért (Campbell, 1997).
Week 2: The Unlucky Apple by Paul Lawrence Dunbar (Howells, 1962).
Week 3: In Flanders Fields by John McCrae (Ward, 2014).
Week 4: Richard Cory by Edwin Arlington Robinson (Miller, Cárdenas de Dwyer, Hayden, Hogan & Wood, 1979).
Week 5: Landscape with the Fall of Icarus by William Carlos Williams (Tomlinson, 1985).
Week 6: Superstition by Marin Sorescu (Sorescu, 1983).
Week 7: Weary Blues by Langston Hughes (Conarroe, 1991).
Week 8: All the World is a Stage by William Shakespeare (Craig, 1993).

4. Findings

Although poetry was the most difficult genre for the students, it was observed that students' motivation was high during the poetry sessions. They liked studying poetry and learning about different cultures. Beside the contributions of poetry teaching to classroom atmosphere and students' motivation, it is important to find out if it is beneficial to improve their intercultural awareness. In order to learn if it has such a function, the international awareness questionnaire was administered to the experimental and control groups once again as a post- test. The comparison of post- test results of the experimental group and control group after the implementation was made in terms of five factors:

As it is shown in Table 3, there is a statistically significant difference between experimental and control groups in terms of intercultural interest at the alpha level .001. The fact that the effect size of this difference (η^2=.256) is large means that at the end of the implementation, experimental group developed a higher level of intercultural interest compared to control group.

Table 3.

Post-test results of the experimental and control groups in terms of intercultural interest

Group	n	$\overline{X}$	sd	df	t	p	η^2
Experimental	25	4.40	.42	38.58	4.060***	.000	.256

Control	25	3.71	.73

***P<.001

Table 4 shows that there is a statistically significant difference between experimental and control groups in terms of intercultural knowledge at the alpha level .001. The effect size (η^2=.351) is also large and it indicates that experimental group developed more intercultural knowledge compared to control group at the end of the implementation.

Table 4.

Post-test results of the experimental and control groups in terms of intercultural knowledge

Group	n	$\overline{X}$	sd	df	t	p	η^2
Experimental	25	3.88	.78	48	5.100***	.000	.351
Control	25	2.66	.90				

***P<.001

As it is shown in Table 5, there is no statistically significant difference between experimental and control groups in terms of intercultural respect. Means of the experimental and control groups indicate that both groups show respect to different cultures of the world.

Table 5.

Post-test results of experimental and control groups in terms of intercultural respect

Group	n	$\overline{X}$	sd	df	t	p
Experimental	25	4.69	.32	48	- .836	.400
Control	25	4.78	.42			

P>.05

In Table 6 it can be clearly seen that there is no statistically significant difference between experimental and control groups in terms of intercultural activities. The fact that the means of the experimental and

control groups are so close that it reflects that control group is also interested in intercultural activities as much as the experimental group. This study did not have any effect which creates a difference in favour of the experimental group in terms of intercultural activities.

Table 6.

Post-test results of experimental and control groups in terms of intercultural activities

Group	n	$\overline{X}$	sd	df	t	p
Experimental	25	3.60	.90	48	- 1.640	.100
Control	25	3.97	.67			
P>.05						

As it is shown in Table 7, there is no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of intercultural communication. Means of the experimental and control groups show that both groups consider themselves competent while communicating with people of different cultures. This study did not have any effect on the improvement of intercultural communication of the experimental group.

Table 7.

Post-tests of the experimental and control groups in terms of intercultural communication

Group	n	$\overline{X}$	sd	df	t	p
Experimental	25	2.92	1.04	48	- .679	.500
Control	25	3.12	1.03			
P> .05						

Together with the quantitative results, it was observed that there was a great difference in the classroom atmosphere before and after the implementation. Using poems including cultural elements took the attention of the students. At the beginning, they were not much interested in the idea of studying poetry in class, however, they started to pay more attention while getting into the world of poetry. Poems sparked curiosity in them for different cultural aspects in different societies. Their behaviours in class and their attitudes towards poetry changed. They voluntarily participated in the discussions about the topics and cultural issues in them. The teacher also wanted them to comment on the poem after the lesson. These written comments revealed that teaching poems in EFL classes helped students develop intercultural awareness.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study seeks to find an answer to the question of whether the use of poetry in EFL classrooms can raise the intercultural awareness of students or not. The effectiveness of the implementation was

examined using the international awareness questionnaire (Appendix A) including five aspects such as intercultural interest, intercultural knowledge, intercultural respect, intercultural activities and intercultural communication.

At the very beginning of the study, the intercultural awareness questionnaire was implemented on both control and experimental group students to see their ideas for the target culture. It was found that both groups were matching in terms of their ideas for the target culture that include their intercultural interest, intercultural knowledge, intercultural respect, intercultural activity and intercultural communication.

The first research question intends to find whether there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and control group in terms of intercultural interest after the implementation. The comparison of post-test results of both groups showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and control group. This means that teaching poetry to the experimental group increased their intercultural interests especially in terms of their willingness to explore different cultures of the world. Studying poems written by different poets from different countries sparked students' interest in different cultures. They wanted to learn more about those cultures.

For the second research question, it is intended to find out if there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and control group in terms of intercultural knowledge after the implementation. The results reflected that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of intercultural knowledge. The experimental group enjoyed getting information related to other people. Poetry teaching made a positive difference in their attitudes towards learning about different cultures.

In the third research question, it is intended to answer whether there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and control group in terms of intercultural respect after the implementation. According to the results, there is no statistically significant difference between the experimental group and control group in terms of intercultural respect. This shows that although experimental group was exposed to an 8-week - poetry implementation different from the control group, both experimental and control group students similarly respect to different cultures of the world.

The fourth research question looks for an answer to the question if there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and control group in terms of intercultural activities after the implementation. According to the results, there is no statistically significant difference between the experimental group and control group in terms of this aspect. The fact that the period of the implementation and the materials were limited – 8 poems for 8 weeks- can lead to such a result. If students had the chance to study more, the result in terms of intercultural activities might change. Learning about other cultures more can influence their attitudes and motivate them to join intercultural activities.

The fifth research question inquires if there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and control group in terms of intercultural communication after the implementation. According to the results, there is no statistically significant difference between the experimental group and control group in this respect. Like intercultural respect and intercultural activities, poetry teaching made no contributions to the experimental group students in terms of intercultural communication.

Consequently, this present study showed that it is possible to raise intercultural awareness of EFL students by using poetry in their lessons, like the results of previous research in the literature. In their research, Rodriguez and Puyal (2012) found that literary texts used contributed to the development of intercultural competence of the students and taught them to respect the values and customs of different cultural groups. In the same way, in the research of Nasirahmadi, Madarsara and Aghdam (2014), they reached the conclusion that incorporating short stories in EFL classrooms had a great influence on the

improvement of the students' cultural awareness and language skills. Glazier and A Seo (2005) suggested that multicultural literature should be used skilfully, discovering as a result of their study that it is an effective tool to teach young people about cultural diversity and to develop their intercultural and intracultural understanding. Among the five dimensions of intercultural awareness questionnaire in this study, the most desired items to be improved were the intercultural interest and intercultural knowledge of the students, which were achieved at the end of this study. The study was able to promote students to become more interested in different cultures of the world by using poetry. The study also helped them to be aware of various cultures around the world via covering intercultural poems during their English lessons. Therefore, poems should be included in the foreign language programmes in order to show students cultural aspects of the target language and through these lessons to improve their intercultural awareness. It can be expected to improve other aspects of intercultural awareness questionnaire if more time and more materials are presented to the students or if this kind of courses is given in a multi- cultural class. It is recommended for further studies to carry out researches on developing intercultural awareness by using different genres of literature especially in multilingual and multicultural learning environment.

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Appendix A

(This is the English translation of the questionnaire used in the research)

Intercultural Awareness Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

The questionnaire below has been prepared in order to understand whether Foreign Language students are aware of differences between the target culture and their native culture. The results of the study will be used for scientific purposes and your answers will not be shared with other people.

Thank you in advance for your participation and sincere answers.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Gender?   Male ( )   Female ( )

Age?   18-25 ( )   26 and above ( )

Your university and faculty: ……………………………………………………………………………

Your department   : …………………………………………………………………………….

Please indicate the degree of agreement which you think is most suitable for you.

INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS QUESTIONNAIRE	1	2	3	4	5
1. I am interested in learning other cultures.					
2. I would like to know what other people can react on a specific event.					
3. I think it is enjoyable to have friends with different cultural backgrounds.					
4. I like discovering beliefs, values and behaviours of other people.					
5. I am open to learning and experiencing other cultures.					
6. I am interested in learning the taboos of different cultures.					
7. I like comparing and contrasting my culture with the target culture.					
8. I'm interested in reading about the literature of different cultures/countries.					
9. When I read a piece of art in the target language, I wonder about the cultural background of it.					

10. Reading books about different cultures is my field of interest.					
11. I follow what other people in the world do through media, books and internet.					
12. I respect the cultural diversity of a society.					
13. I believe in the mutual understanding of different cultures.					
14. I respect other cultures.					
15. I believe that we should avoid cultural misunderstandings.					
16. I think if someone knows about the culture of the target language, s/he can understand the language better.					
17. I think it is important to learn the culture of the language we are learning.					
18. It can be enjoyable to participate in intercultural activities.					
19. I would like to have a foreign pen friend.					
20. I am good at communicating with the people of other countries.					
21. I can handle easily when there is a misunderstanding between me and people from other countries.					