



Promoting intercultural competence of Turkish EFL pre-service teachers via Twitter*

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Abstract

Promoting intercultural competence of learners during language learning process has been found crucial recently. However, this side of language learning has been neglected. Teachers complain about lack of time, up-to-date materials about other cultures, and access to cultural materials. This paper searched for a way to promote intercultural competence in an innovative way, that is, by using Twitter, the second most popular social networking site. Twenty-one pre-service teachers took part in the study by doing research about other cultures in six different topics, namely, food and drink style, clothing style, leisure time activities, family relationships, body language and marriage/wedding traditions during six weeks and by sharing what they found via Twitter. Pre (prior to the implementation) and post (following the implementation) interviews were conducted in order to see the differences in their opinions. Reports were required from the pre-service teachers weekly in order to check their remarks during the process. The analysis of the interview and reports revealed that pre-service teachers considerably increased their intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in terms of knowledge and attitude dimensions with the help of Twitter. Therefore, this study suggests that Twitter is effective in developing ICC of pre-service teachers regarding knowledge and attitudes dimension.

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Keywords: Intercultural competence; social networking; teacher education; EFL pre-service teachers

1. Introduction

In recent years, language teaching has gained new purposes by going beyond teaching grammar. In addition, it goes beyond acquiring communicative competence. The purpose of language learning and teaching now involves getting aware of, knowledgeable and developing some skills related to other cultures involving not only the culture of the language but also the other cultures since it is an undeniable fact that English is now a lingua franca and being an English language teacher and student requires to be aware of both the culture of English speaking people and the other cultures in the world as much as possible. It is really vital to know other cultures, to become aware of both the differing/varying cultures

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and one's own culture, to behave and communicate effectively and appropriately, and to get the knowledge, skills and attitude to adapt to the different situations in different cultural environments (Gibson, Hyde, & Gordon, 2015; Hall, 1959; Novinger, 2001; Sercu, 2002). These are all the components of intercultural competence.

In recent years, researchers have become increasingly interested in the importance of ICC in foreign language learning and teaching processes. It has been put forward that foreign language learning should be more than acquiring language competence and it should also involve intercultural competence (Alptekin, 2002; Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002; Fantini, 1995a; Gokmen, 2005; Ozdemir, 2004). Furthermore, in other studies it has been emphasized that intercultural competence is an inevitable skill (Kawamura, 2011) in foreign language learning and teaching since language learning should be more than acquiring language competence and involve more communication and all communication patterns are affected by culture (Novinger, 2011), which leads us to the notion that intercultural competence becomes a crucial issue in foreign language learning and teaching.

Given the pervasiveness of intercultural competence and its effect on foreign language learning, it is probably expected that foreign language teachers and students are conscious of intercultural competence. Nevertheless, despite the importance attributed to intercultural competence by researchers from different countries, the extent to which foreign language teachers and students are conscious of it as a topic is still debated. Moreover, it is not clear whether foreign language students and teachers have a proper perspective about the prominence of intercultural competence, and positive or a negative perspective towards it. Though foreign language teachers may supposedly notice the importance of promoting intercultural competence, it should not be inferred that the topic is common to all language teachers. Sercu (2005) claims that most teachers want to integrate intercultural competence to their teaching environments, but they still have some confusion about the meaning of the term. What is more, Atay (2005) has found in her study that prospective teachers of English think that they do not have enough chance to learn about other cultures. The study also revealed that the students felt that they lack the necessary knowledge about other cultures. The point that is emphasized in the study of Sercu, Méndez García and Castro Prieto (2005) is that teachers have great difficulty in finding the suitable materials for increasing cultural awareness. Furthermore, teachers believe that textbooks do not have enough cultural content because textbooks are outdated; thus, the teachers feel themselves responsible to prepare their own materials, and again this is time-consuming. Such findings suggest that teachers and students of foreign language are not completely aware of the importance of intercultural competence and also even if they are aware, they have great difficulty in implementing it to the learning environment. All the same, students and teachers are the main shareholders in the language learning and teaching process; for this reason, research that investigates their awareness of, and attitudes towards ICC are very crucial if the topic is to be apprehended and utilized accordingly. Unless teachers and students regard intercultural competence to be a determinant in their teaching or learning process, is it likely that efforts to find strategies to develop intercultural competence will ever occur?

Now that we are in the 21st century, we have the advantages of technology. So, what about using technology in promoting intercultural competence of foreign language learners? Through the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), the class activities have taken a new perspective. There have been lots of web 2.0 tools and most of them are adjustable to education. Among them are social networking sites popular. Twitter, the second most frequently used social networking site, is gaining more and more popularity in education (Grosbeck & Holotescu, 2008; McCool, 2011). Its ease of use in projects and group works can give an innovative way for sharing information (Avatar languages, 2015). Due to its “relevance, quick, distinct style, and conversational” features (Avatar languages, 2015), Twitter can be used in foreign language learning to promote ICC.

Up to now, very little work has been reported in terms of how to promote ICC of English language learners. The first analysis of microblogging usage of Twitter about cultural awareness has been carried out by Borau, Ullrich, Feng and Shen (2003). In this study, it was revealed that the interaction in Twitter both among EFL students themselves and with the native speakers has a profound effect on improving the intercultural competence of students. However, in their study, Twitter was selected to give the students the chance to “practice the target language as well as their communicative and cultural competence” (Borau et al., 2003, p. 78). Therefore, it must be underlined that there has not been a study related to direct use of Twitter for promoting intercultural competence. Another point that must be emphasized is that especially pre-service teachers' should raise awareness about the importance of ICC because they will soon be actively taking part in the field of teaching. Before pre-service teachers start their profession, they should be made aware of the current situation and be prepared for what is waiting them in the actual teaching environment. Therefore, the primary focus of this paper is to promote the intercultural competence of Turkish English as a foreign language (EFL) pre-service teachers via Twitter.

1.1. Research questions

The research question of this study is as follows:

1. Is Twitter effective in promoting ICC of Turkish EFL pre-service teachers?

In order to answer this research question, answers to the following sub-questions will be sought:

(a) Is there a difference in the pre interview and post interview opinions of Turkish EFL pre-service teachers in the implementation group?

(b) What are the opinions of Turkish EFL pre-service teachers about the implementation to promote ICC via Twitter?

2. Method

Using a case study as a type of qualitative research, the researchers aimed to investigate whether ICC of Turkish EFL pre-service teachers would be promoted via Twitter. Case study has been chosen from different types of qualitative methods because case studies and interviews are categorized as the top two ways to assess intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2009). “A case study is a research approach in which one or a few instances of a phenomenon are studied in depth” (Given, 2008, p. 68). Case study was chosen for the research because “sometimes much can be learned from studying just one individual, one classroom, one school, or one school district” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011, p. 434). The scope of this particular case is the usage of Twitter to promote ICC of Turkish EFL pre-service teachers.

2.1. Sample / Participants

Sixty pre-service teachers were informed about the study in the ELT department at a state university. Twenty one pre-service teachers volunteered for the study. The participants (17 female and 4 male) searched for some cultural aspects (food and drink, clothing style, marriage/ wedding traditions, leisure time activities, family relationships, and body language) of the different regions (South Asian, Far East, Arabic, European, South-Mid-North American, and African). They were selected in terms of convenience sampling. “A convenience sample is a group of individuals who (conveniently) are available for study” (Fraenkel et al., 2011, p. 91). It means “research participants are selected based on their ease of availability” (Given, 2008, p. 124).

2.2. Instrument(s)

2.2.1. The interview

Data were obtained using an interview (prior to and following the implementation) and reports. The interview was prepared in terms of Byram's model (see Appendix A) below in figure 1.

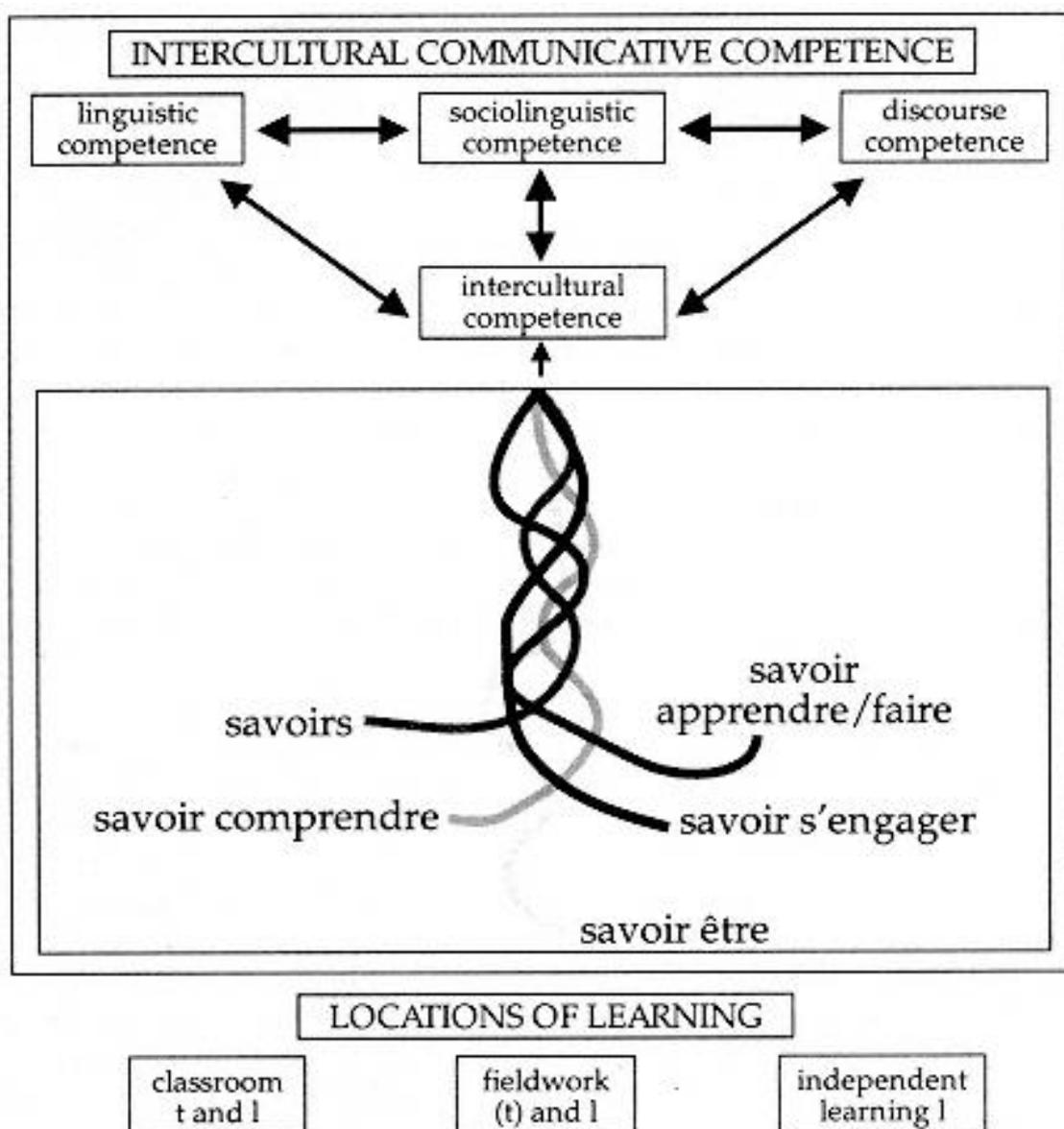


Figure 1. A summary of the model by Byram, adapted from “Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence”, by M. Byram, 1997, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, p. 73.

The interview is composed of two parts. Part 1 is about the pre-service teachers' current opinions about other cultures. There are 6 questions in this part and the first is about the food and drink types, the second is about body language symbols, the third is about leisure time activities, the fourth is about family relationships, the fifth is about clothing styles, and the sixth is about marriage/wedding traditions of European, Southern-Middle-Northern American, Arabic, Far East, South Asian, and African continent/regions. The questions were formed in terms of knowledge dimension in Byram's model (Byram, 1997, p. 51) in figure 1. However, not all objectives were included in the study. Four objectives were selected related to the topics searched during the study. Byram (1997) explains that

...there are three inter-related categories of savoirs included in the definition of the knowledge objective:^[1]_[SEP]

- about aspects of a foreign culture^[1]_[SEP]
- about one's own culture
- about relationships between cultures at societal and individual level (p. 96).

The questions are about aspects of a foreign culture socially and individually. With this regard, objectives below have been chosen for the analysis:

- the types of cause and process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins
- social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's
- institutions, and perceptions of them, which impinge on daily life within one's own and one's interlocutor's country and which conduct and influence relationships between them
- the processes of social interaction in one's interlocutor's country

Based on these objectives, under the first objective, body language and marriage/wedding traditions were categorized. Food and drink and clothing style were placed under the second objective. Leisure time activities were set under the third objective. Furthermore, family relations were put under the fourth objective. These categorizations are based on the model of Byram (1997, pp. 59–60).

Also, attitude dimension of ICC was checked in order to have an idea about pre-service teachers' attitudes towards other cultures while writing comments. For this, three objectives were chosen for the attitude dimension (Byram, 1997, pp. 57–58):

- a. willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality; this should be distinguished from attitudes of seeking out the exotic or of seeking to profit from others;^[1]_[SEP]
- b. interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices;
- c. willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment.

Part 2 is about their awareness about Twitter. Pre-service teachers were asked three questions, which are for what purpose they use Twitter, what other purposes they think they can use Twitter, and whether they believe that Twitter can enhance their intercultural perspective.

2.2.2. *The reports*

The report was designed as a self-assessment and reflection of what they did in that week (see Appendix B). There were questions about knowledge about other cultures, and Twitter usage. They were all open-ended questions. The pre-service teachers submitted the reports each week. The reports were demanded from the pre-service teachers to observe the progress of the implementation.

2.3. *Credibility*

Credibility is a term preferred by qualitative researchers “to encompass not only instrument validity and reliability but internal validity as well” (Fraenkel et al., 2011, p. 458). In order to ensure the credibility of the study, multiple sources of evidence (reports, interviews, and tweets) were collected (Yin, 2003). Example tweets were demonstrated in order to see the matching examples of what the

participants wrote in their reports, interviews and their tweets in order to provide the internal validity of the research (Yin, 2003) since it is crucial to observe that the change in pre-service teachers' opinions are due to their experience on Twitter. Though external validity has become a serious concern in case studies due to the nature of qualitative studies (Yin, 2003), the procedure of the study was explained in detail in order to increase the chance for the study's replicability.

Before the administration, the interview and report were submitted to experts so as to increase the credibility. Expert A was an associate professor, and professional in the measurement field with an experience of ten years. Expert B was an assistant professor, in ELT Department, interested in ICC. Expert C was again an assistant professor, in ELT Department, giving doctorate lectures about this topic. Expert D was a research assistant and interested in qualitative data tools doing her Phd. Expert E was an associate professor, in ELT department and interested in web 2.0 technologies and assessment methods. Expert F was an assistant professor, in ELT department, giving master lectures about integrating technology into language teaching and learning, interested in web 2.0 technologies and giving undergraduate lectures of linguistics and sociolinguistic lectures as elective courses.

A pilot study was conducted to increase the credibility of the data gathering instruments before the actual implementation. The pilot study was carried out so as to see whether the interview and report questions are clear and in terms of the feedback, the interview questions and report were revised. Then, the interview questions and report were again presented to the same experts above and after getting feedback from them, the implementation started.

2.4. Data collection procedures

Twenty-one pre-service teachers were asked to open a Twitter account even if they have one already to avoid the Twitter spam by sharing daily activities like 'hungry', 'tired', or 'good morning'. After that, each chose a continent/region (South Asian, Far East, Arabic, European, South-Mid-North American, and African regions) and was requested to do research on the topics (food and drink, clothing style, marriage/ wedding traditions, family relationships, leisure time activities, and body language). They chose their regions willingly. The procedure went on like that: after they chose their country, a working plan was prepared showing each person what topic to study in which week in which country. For example, the first participant found her/his name on the plan. The first participant noticed that she/he was the 10th student in the study and saw that she/he was supposed to do research about Arabic regions. The country the first participant studied did not change but the topic the first participant studied per week. The first participant clearly saw what topic she/he was going to focus that week because they were separated week by week (first week, second week) with each topic assigned. To illustrate, the topic of first week was food and drink style for the first participant. This meant that the first participant would search food and drink style during a week and would tweet what she/he had found for a week. Detailed information was given how they were going to use Twitter for the study. The participants were informed face to face about Twitter's such features as tweets, retweets, trending topics part, search part, and how to follow somebody even if they do not know in person.

Following this, a list was designed on Twitter (see Appendix C), to see all the tweets in an organized way. After the pre-service teachers followed the researchers on Twitter, they were added to the list. Also, a hashtag was created. This means that anyone who will search for the list will find the tweets. Nevertheless, due to being a time consuming task, writing the list name after each tweet, it was not compulsory. After all, what they tweet will automatically be seen on the list (see Appendix D). The researchers were also on the list to check what they shared and whether they were active or not. The researchers were in the position of participant-as-observer (more observer than participant). The researchers were just in the position of observing what the pre-service teachers shared during the week

and when they came across something different, they also shared it to the list so that the other members could benefit from their information and contribute to their ICC. The researchers never intervened in the participant's tweets or the process.

After the participants shared what they had found on Twitter for a week, they were supposed to write a report within a week. The study lasted for six weeks and at the end of each week, a report was demanded from each participant.

2.5. Data analysis

Content analysis was conducted for the study because content analysis is “extremely useful as a means of analysing interview and observational data” (Fraenkel et al., 2011, p. 489). Additionally, coding was carried out in order to look into the recurring topics in pre-service teachers' interviews and reports. Creswell (p. 243) indicates that “the object of the coding process is to make sense out of text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes. Accordingly, Given (2008) emphasizes that “whatever the purpose is for coding, the aims are “to identify categories and themes by making their criteria explicit and providing evidence for them—and the conclusions based on them—that is drawn from the data” (p. 86).

3. Results

3.1. Findings from interviews

The research question of this study is as follows:

1. Is Twitter effective in promoting ICC of Turkish EFL pre-service teachers?

In order to answer research question, answers to the following sub-questions will be sought:

(a) Is there a difference in the pre interview and post interview opinions of Turkish EFL pre-service teachers in the implementation group?

The participants during their six-week experience with Twitter shared numerous tweets and some of them were presented in figure 3, figure 4 and figure 5.

Based on the findings, the numerical changes will be given in detail below in terms of three ways. The changes in the number of different answers and total answers indicate how many different answers and total answers there are between the pre and post interview opinions of the participants (see figure 6 & figure 7). The number of pre-service teachers shows the difference between the pre-service teachers with an opinion prior to and following the implementation (see figure 8).

It can be observed from the figures 6, 7, and 8 that there seems an increase in the number of different answers and total answers, and the number of teacher trainees answering the questions about food and drink, clothing style, marriage/ wedding traditions, family relationships, leisure time activities, and body language.

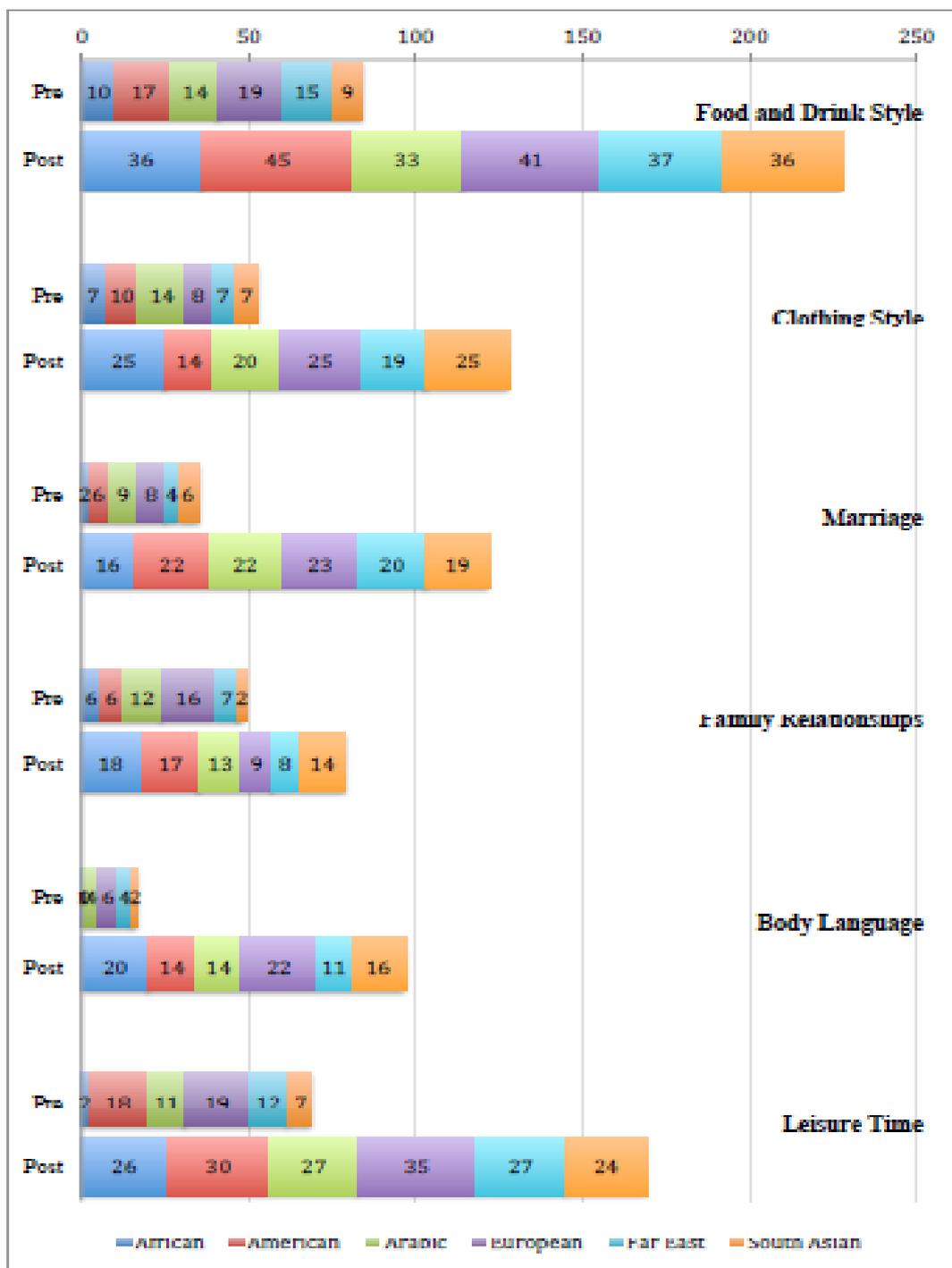


Figure 6. The number of different answers in terms of six questions

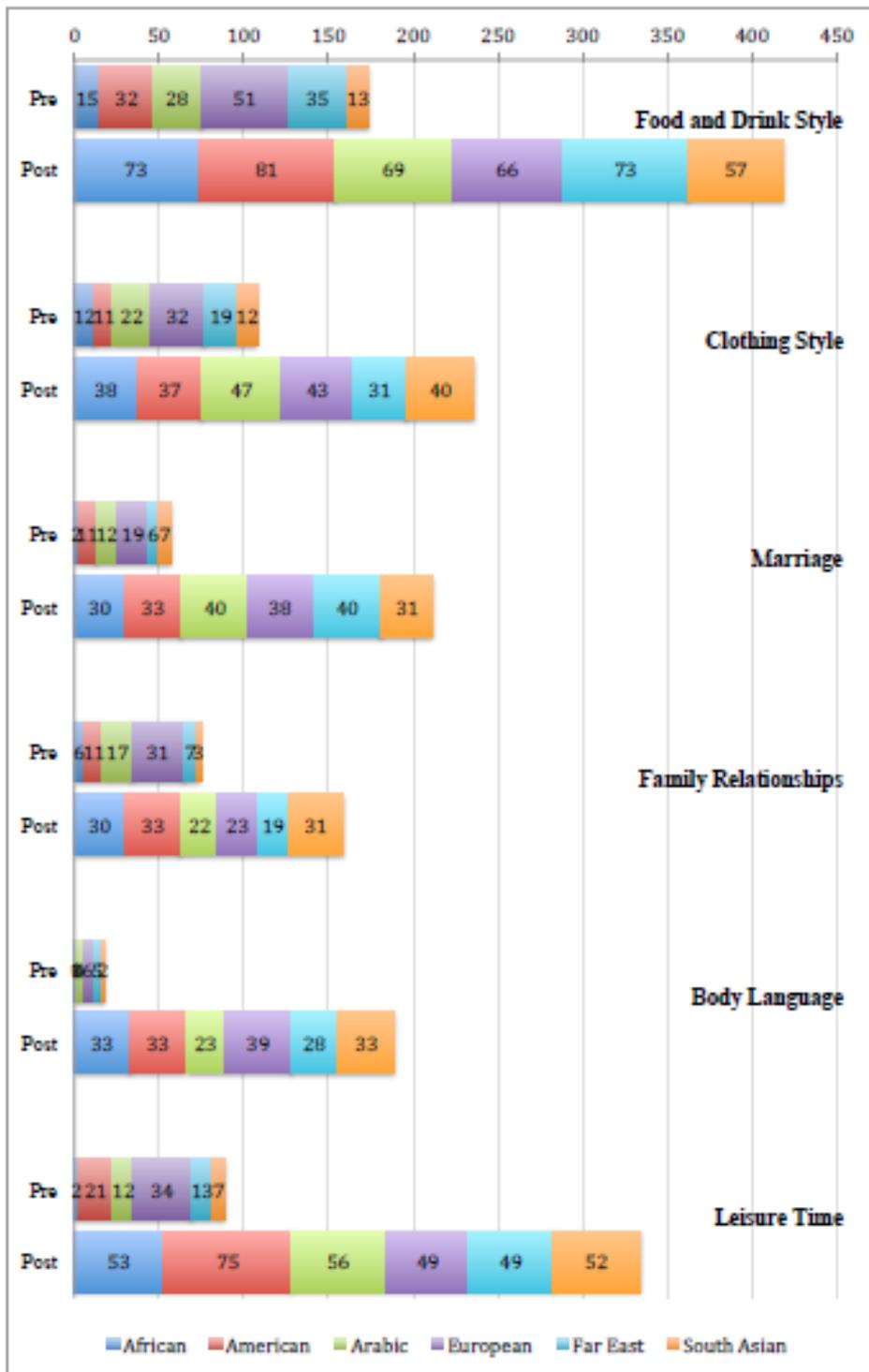


Figure 7. The number of total answers in terms of six questions



Figure 8. The number of teacher trainees in terms of six questions

The second sub-question of the research is:

(b) What are the opinions of the pre-service teachers about the implementation to promote ICC via Twitter?

Firstly, the participants were asked about the reasons pre-service teachers use Twitter. The opinions can be observed in table 1 and table 2.

Table 1. Remarks about purposes for using Twitter

Pre Interview		Post Interview	
Remarks	Number of subjects	Remarks	Number of subjects
To get information about what is happening in the world	6	To follow the events of the world	4
To follow famous people	2	To see my friend's tweets	2
Other*	10	To have more knowledge about everything	3
No**	2	To have some information about other cultures	3
No answer***	6	To get and to share information	3
		To learn concert dates of my favorite music bands	3
		To share photos with friends	3
		Other	11
Total	20	Total	32

*There is only one comment. **The student answered 'no'. ***The student did not write any comment

It can be assumed that in both interviews 'to follow the events of the world' is the most frequently given answer. However, it can be seen that in the post interview that there are more comments towards having more knowledge about everything, having some information about other cultures, getting and sharing information, using for educational purposes, catching up with news, and communicating. This may indicate that following the implementation and having active roles on Twitter, they have used its information sharing, catching up with instant news, and reading each other's tweets features. This may also explain that they have benefited from the list.

Table 2. Remarks about other usage purposes of Twitter

Pre Interview		Post Interview	
Remarks	Number of subjects	Remarks	Number of subjects
To learn the worldwide news	2	Playing computer games	2
To connect with people	2	With the help of top trends, we can follow many regions' agenda	3
Other	9	To gain information	3
No answer	12	To meet people all over the world	5
		Suitable to get in touch in extraordinary situation like war, political events	3

		To keep up with the daily news	3
		Sending direct messages	3
		Other	5
Total	13	Total	27

It can be seen from the remarks that while in the pre interview there are such comments as learning worldwide news, connecting with people, finding information, in the post interview there are such remarks as meeting people all over the world, following regions' agenda thanks to top trends, getting in touch in extreme situations, and keeping up with daily news. Therefore, it can be commented that following the implementation the pre-service teachers have different opinions towards other usage purposes of Twitter, and it can be added that they have benefited from Twitter's such specialties as top trend, the opportunity to follow anybody you like and keep up with latest news.

The participants were also asked whether they believe Twitter can enhance their intercultural perspective. The answers can be seen in table 3.

Table 3. Remarks about Twitter for intercultural perspective

Pre Interview		Post Interview	
Remarks about the reasons	Number of subjects	Remarks about the reasons	Number of subjects
Used by the people all over the world	3	The easiest and the most direct way to have the knowledge of other cultures	2
Connecting to any person	4	You can have a friend from other regions and the only thing for you to follow his/her tweets and learn many things about his/her culture	4
Learning new things	2	One of the most entertaining ways to enhance my cultural perspective	2
Other	8	The chance to get lots of information about other cultures	5
		It is used by different people from different cultures	3
		The way to reach any information you want to learn	3
		The way to widen your perspective	2
		In our daily lives, we cannot find people from the other regions with just one click	2
		Easy to share information about cultures with my friends	2
		Other	3
Total	17	Total	28

It can be deduced from the remarks that while there are just two remarks about cultural perspective in the pre interview, pre-service teachers have eight remarks about this aspect in the post interview (twenty two opinions were about culture from twenty eight opinions in total). This may show that following the implementation pre-service teachers have different perspective towards using Twitter for

enhancing cultural knowledge and awareness. Besides, it can be seen in their comments that they think Twitter is easy to use, which makes sharing information about cultures easy and entertaining.

3.2. Findings from the reports

Below, the general comments about the study can be seen. It can be said that there are generally positive attitudes towards Twitter:

Participant (P.). 1: “I think Twitter provides us so many cultures and so much information about other regions. I think we can use it for researching about cultures. Because the information we can find is very authentic and from their daily life. I didn’t know many things about other regions”.

P. 2: “After checking out my research topic, I go through and have a look at other tweets. The thing that motivates me is that sentences have to be short without comment. You just get the information you need and you are not opposed to unnecessary words”.

P. 8: “You can find whatever you want to learn and you can access Twitter easily in everywhere and every time. You can search on Twitter when something comes to your mind about foreign culture even in bus”.

It can be observed that there are 3 pre-service teachers who did not like Twitter:

P. 9-10-11: “Actually I don’t like using such kind of social platforms therefore it didn’t promote me anything. I believe that these applications can’t promote any awareness except for NEWS”.

P. 11: “Twitter is useful but I choose Facebook or Google if I want to learn anything about other cultures”.

It can be said that the pre-service teachers have some moderate attitudes towards varying/differing cultures:

P. 6: “I learned different information about my topic in different regions”.

P. 4-5: “Every culture has different life styles and point of view”.

P. 5: “I learned that about the same regions the information that we search is quite different from region to region”.

P. 11: “I have learned that popular culture affects everyone in the world and our hobbies or what we do in our leisure times are becoming the same. Going a mall, shopping, meeting someone, drinking or eating something with friends, these are all what the people all around the world do in their leisure times”.

There are some pre-service teachers who have pointed out that they have changed their previous opinions:

P. 11: “I read the information that my friends shared. I have learned that many Americans spend their leisure time in volunteer work helping others. This was really interesting info for me because we know American citizens as lazy people”.

P. 4: “Before my searching, I was thinking that Africa is full of war and slavery. However, actually African people are educated. They want to go back their hometowns to contribute to their regions after their education. Their culture is colorful. I want to learn more”.

It can be said that pre-service teachers generally found using Twitter easy. According to some, it was first difficult in the beginning, and then, it became easier. In addition, it can be seen that some may have had difficulty in searching the topics.

P. 13: “At first, I was confused how to tweet the information or how to transfer it to the group but later I found that it is very simple”.

P. 8: “I haven’t encountered any difficulty in terms of searching topics and finding information”.

P. 16: “I didn’t have difficulty”.

It can be observed from the pre-service teachers’ comments that they were generally satisfied with the experience of using Twitter for promoting ICC. In addition, those three pre-service teachers mentioned that it was useful in terms of contributing to their intercultural competence while they comment negatively in terms of Twitter proficiency.

P. 14: “I experienced that Twitter can be used to get information about other cultures, it is an effective way to share ideas and get new things about other cultures. I had information about developments around the world via Twitter. It is funny and useful”.

P. 8: “I can find whatever I want to learn on Twitter. I have learned some cultural words by following my friends. I learned some interesting information about other cultures”.

P. 18: “It enhances my knowledge about other cultures. I have more knowledge about the world now. It was useful for my intercultural competence as each week”.

In terms of attitudes, it can be said that attitudes towards Twitter for cultural awareness is generally positive, and they seem to be willing to take part in interactions with otherness. It may be said that thanks to Twitter, they can get interested in finding out different aspects of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in their and differing/varying cultures. Finally, it can be assumed that Twitter can present them opportunities to ask questions about the values and presuppositions in cultural experiences.

4. Discussion

It can be deduced from the findings that there is an increase in the number of teacher trainees with a perspective, in the number of different answers and in the total number of all responses. It can be put forward that they have promoted their knowledge about other cultures. Chen and Starosta (1996) refer to cognitive dimension of ICC as “intercultural awareness”. What is more, it can be said that awareness has become a substantial element of ICC development (Fantini, 1995b). All of the teacher trainees have remarked in their reports their awareness towards other cultures and different opinions have increased. İşisağ (2010) finds cultural awareness important in his study by stating that what is appropriate in a culture can be something offensive in another.

It can be assumed both from the remarks on the reports and from the comments of the usage purposes of Twitter, many pre-service teachers think that it is a good way to catch up what is going on not only in one’s country but also around the world like following their agenda. Therefore, the pre-service teachers’ opinion about this backs up that Twitter is the world’s real-time newspaper (O’Reilly & Milstein, 2009). Besides, in the comments, it can also be seen that pre-service teachers think that they can get, share and have more knowledge about everything thanks to Twitter. This can be related to such basic features of these new tools as “interconnectedness, immediacy, interactivity, communications, and community” (Solomon & Schrum, 2007, p. 24). Moreover, the opinions can illustrate that some of them have mentioned this and they also have had the chance to analyze and reason what is relevant to their search and share it. They have done some research also on other platforms but they all have shared it on #iccgazi, Twitter and created their own content. This may indicate us that web 2.0 tools give chance for its users to create their own content (Steinman, 2010). This can also be related to Twitter’s user-extensible way like producing hashtags, mentions, tweets (O’Reilly, 2008). What is more, O’Reilly and Milstein (2009, p. 61) see the Twitter search part as “a goldmine of ideas, feelings, and conversations”.

It can be explored from the comments that they have benefited from #iccgazi a lot. It can be due to the fact that although they have made their research in different platforms, they have had the chance to

archive it thanks to #iccgazi and they have access to the content whenever they want (Tu, Blocher & Robberts, 2008). Hence, Twitter's 'list feature' has given chance to pre-service teachers to gather their tweets into a place namely a mashup. Furthermore, they have collaborated during the process and this has contributed to their interaction. Kumar and Tammelin (2008) state that information and communication technologies in the language classes increase the opportunities for "cooperation and collaboration in students". Steinman (2010) also explains that Web 2.0 tools make collaboration, interaction, communication, and information exchange easy and it is a big advantage that should be benefited from in the education field. So, the opinions of pre-service teachers back up that Twitter is a good place "to use the technology to communicate, gather and share information and also beneficial for "social opportunities for interaction" (Lenhart & Fox, 2009). Minocha (2009) finds out that Twitter is good for understanding the needs of the students in a more effective way thanks to its easy accessibility and it gives everyone the opportunity to help partners in a friendly way.

It can be observed from the remarks of pre-service teachers both in the reports and in other parts, Twitter is a good platform to get in touch with other cultures since it is easy to follow and get in touch with different people from different cultures on Twitter. Vurdien (2014) indicates that "as a form of telecollaboration, social networking fosters online intercultural interaction between students of different countries with a view to developing intercultural competence" (p. 398). Elola and Oskoz (2008) point out that the students may not always have the opportunity to have first-hand experience with the native speakers and technology compensates for it. Pre-service teachers in this study think that Twitter gives the opportunity to meet new people all around the world and to get in touch with them with just one click. Moreover, we can have the chance to meet people we otherwise would not have known (Grosbeck & Holotescu, 2008; Martin & Nakayama, 2007). Besides, pre-service teachers think that they have the chance to get lots of information about other cultures in an entertaining and easy way. This may be due to the fact that textbooks are limited in terms of variety for cultural context, motivation, and authenticity-reality (Sercu, 2005). Twitter is easy to use as pointed out by O'Reilly (2008) stating that "Twitter is simple", and McCool's (2011) research that Twitter is often preferred for educational purposes because of its "accessibility and immediacy". Jurich (2001) emphasizes that with the help of technology, the students can have an understanding of the other people's way of life from their homes. In addition, Carel (2001) mentions that previously it was only possible to interact with people from different cultures via going to another country. On the other hand, now thanks to Internet, it is rather easy to communicate with people from various regions. Furthermore, in addition to making new friends, one will have the opportunity to meet new cultures and languages that is a valuable experience (What is social networking, 2015).

It can be analyzed from the comments that the teacher trainees seem willing to use what they have shared and got during the research in their real life and in their probable culturally diverse classes as Kawamura (2011) expresses that English teachers' responsibility is more than just making students acquire language skills and teachers should have a desire to understand the culture of their students, and the status of teaching English as a lingua franca which opens the path for differing/varying cultures. This attitude of teacher trainees can be defined as a good manner since foreign language teachers are becoming foreign language & intercultural competence teachers (Sercu, 2005, p. 160).

Another point that must be highlighted is that this study is student-centered. Actually, Twitter presents this chance to the students, which was mentioned in the reports. This can be related to the characteristics of Twitter that there are many ways people can connect to Twitter like mobile phones, PCs, websites, and desktop programs and this suggests that one can have access to Twitter everywhere. The pre-service teachers take the responsibility of their own research and share tweets whenever they find time and find something they think as "interesting information" (O'Reilly & Milstein, 2009, p. 7). According to Erben, Ban and Castañeda (2009), one of the benefits of technology is that the class will

be more learner-centered. Therefore, the students will take the responsibility of their own learning and they are going to internalize what they have learned, so their learning about other cultures will be possibly more long-lasting.

It can be summarized from the pre-service teachers' comments that Twitter gives them the chance to meet authentic and daily life information. Therefore, this opinion supports that technology is a golden opportunity in that it provides authentic material (Erben et al., 2009). It can be suggested that Twitter is like real-life interaction. According to O' Reilly (2008), "Twitter works like people do" and Sawyer and Chen (2012) acknowledge that "people across the globe can interact with each other within seconds of sending and receiving messages" (p. 151).

After all these remarks, it should be concluded that Twitter can be an effective way in promoting awareness and ICC of students in terms of knowledge and attitudes dimension as it has already been proposed that technology can be an effective way for promoting intercultural competence (Borau et. al 2009, Dervin, 2009; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Martin & Nakayama, 2007; Kawamura, 2011; Vurdien, 2014).

5. Conclusions

In this study, whether or not Twitter's contribution to developing Turkish EFL pre-service teachers' ICC was investigated. The research design of the study was based on case studies because case studies are one of the two most popular ways to assess ICC. Twenty-one voluntary senior pre-service teachers were chosen because they are going to be English language teachers in a year hopefully and they need to develop this awareness before becoming a teacher. Data were gathered from the interview and report questions. Interview was applied twice, that is pre interview prior to implementation and post interview following the implementation. The reports were gathered weekly. The opinions were analyzed in terms of differences prior to and following the implementation. The reports were analyzed by content analysis and coding.

In relation to the first-sub question of the research, pre-service teachers' opinions differ from the comments in the pre interview in terms of food and drink, body language symbols, leisure time, family relationships, clothing style, and marriage/wedding traditions in European, Southern-Middle-Northern, Arabic, Far East, South Asian, and African regions. In addition, the number of total answers and teacher trainees is observed to increase after the implementation in all topics and regions. Lastly, Twitter seems to be appreciated by pre-service teachers and they seem to have positive attitudes towards its use for increasing cultural awareness.

It should be emphasized that learner autonomy has highly been supported since the pre-service teachers have carried out the whole process. Pre-service teachers think that Twitter is an easy and entertaining way to promote intercultural competence. In addition, they think Twitter has lots of advantages like easy access to information, providing authentic information, presenting opportunity to meet different people from different cultures, and catching up with the world's agenda.

6. Pedagogical implications and suggestions

The findings reveal that using social networking sites namely Twitter in fostering ICC of pre-service teachers can present some benefits to both the pre-service teachers and teacher educators. One of them

is that pre-service teachers can benefit from Twitter both in promoting their awareness and showing understanding towards varying/differing cultures. Another benefit is that Twitter helps pre-service teachers become more aware towards their own cultures and by taking this notion into consideration, accepting other cultures as the way they are and keeping in mind each culture is unique can be achieved. It should be highlighted that English language being a lingua franca makes intercultural awareness an indispensable part of language teaching and learning. The findings of this study open a new path for pre-service teachers to become more aware of the importance given to cultures, part of all languages. Furthermore, English is a global language and this study has contributed to pre-service teachers' understanding that the only culture they should be aware of should not be just the cultures of American and British but the whole world. Based on the findings of this research, the pre-service teachers have become more familiar with Twitter, and they have seen many benefits of using it both in their classes and in real life. Atay (2005) has found in her study that prospective teachers of English think they do not have enough chance to learn about other cultures and feel they lack the necessary knowledge about other cultures. Therefore, findings of this study indicate that one of the chances to make EFL pre-service teachers get access to the varying/differing cultures can be Twitter. The findings of the present study appear to present a student-centered approach to promote ICC. The tweets and all the information shared during the implementation tend to give the idea of development in pre-service teachers' ICC with regard to knowledge and attitudes dimensions of ICC. Although not investigated in this study, it can be suggested that mere culture teaching by the teacher would not have as much development as in this study in terms of these dimensions of intercultural competence.

The results of this study have revealed some suggestions for further study. While in the study, only Twitter has been used, other social networking sites could be tried for other studies. It can be kept in mind that no one can become completely an intercultural person but what is important is to show the ways to interpret and understand the cases. Due to this, in long term, technology-integrated (web 2.0 tools, social networking sites) teacher education programs towards promoting ICC could be developed and they could be a part of the curriculum. What is more, it probably will be helpful to carry on a study with a larger sample as this study is limited to a single university. In addition, the pre-service teachers have shared lots of data on Twitter and have different opinions towards other cultures in terms of knowledge and attitudes. A study can also be conducted to see whether they will use the knowledge they acquired through tweets in real-life interaction to promote the skills dimension of intercultural competence.

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Appendix A. Interview questions

PART 1: Your opinions about other cultures

What do you know about the types of food and drink in the regions below?

European regions

Southern-Middle-
Northern American
regions

Arabic regions

Far East regions

South Asian regions

African regions

What kind of body language symbols do you know in the regions below?

European regions

Southern-Middle-
Northern
American regions

Arabic regions

Far East regions

South Asian
regions

African regions

What kind of activities do the people in the regions below do in their leisure time?

European
regions

Southern-
Middle-
Northern
American
regions

Arabic regions

Far East regions

South Asian
regions

African regions

What do you know about the family relationships in the regions below?

European
regions

Southern-
Middle-
Northern
American
regions

Arabic regions

Far East regions

South Asian
regions

African regions

What kind of clothes do the people in the regions below wear?

European
regions

Southern-
Middle-
Northern
American
regions

Arabic regions

Far East regions

South Asian
regions

African regions

What do you know about the marriage/wedding traditions in the regions below?

European
regions

Southern-
Middle-
Northern
American
regions

Arabic regions

Far East regions

South Asian
regions

African regions

PART 2: Your opinions about Twitter

- For what purpose do you use Twitter?
- What other purposes do you think you can use Twitter?
- Do you believe that Twitter can enhance your intercultural perspective? Why?

Appendix B. The report

Evaluation about Twitter

- What topics did you check in the Twitter search part?
- What trends were top in Twitter in your own region (the region you have searched)?
- What do you think about Twitter's promoting your awareness about other cultures?
- What do you think Twitter's promoting your cultural awareness in your probable culturally diverse classes?

Evaluation about cultural information

- What information did you learn about the varying/differing cultures (in terms of what you searched)?
- What information did you learn about the varying/differing cultures (in terms of what has been shared in the list by all the members)?

Evaluation about yourself

- What did this week's search contribute to you in terms of Twitter proficiency?
- What did this week's search contribute to you in terms of its effective usage in learning about other cultures?
- What did this week's search contribute to you in terms of promoting your intercultural competence?

Appendix C. Twitter list

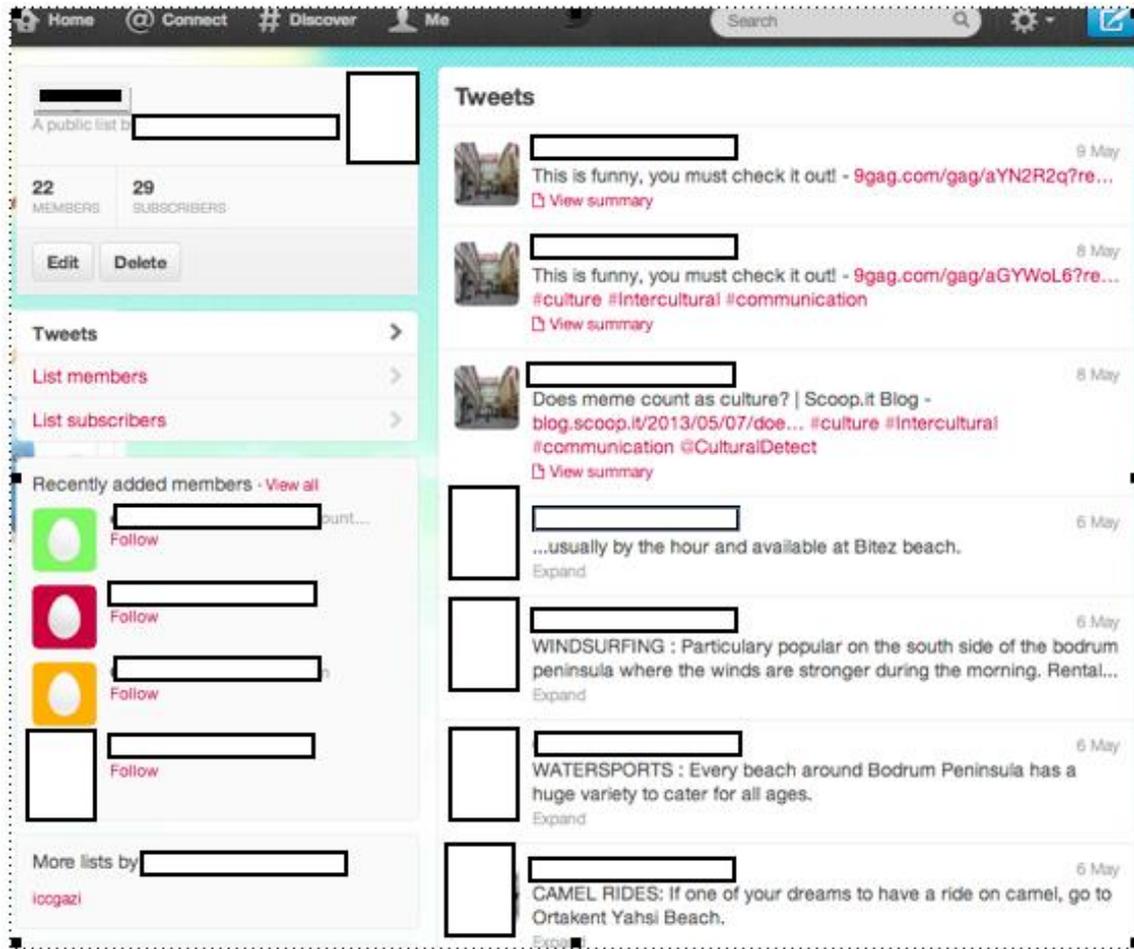


Figure 2. Twitter list

Appendix D. An example of tweets



Figure 3. An example of tweets about food and drink in Far East regions

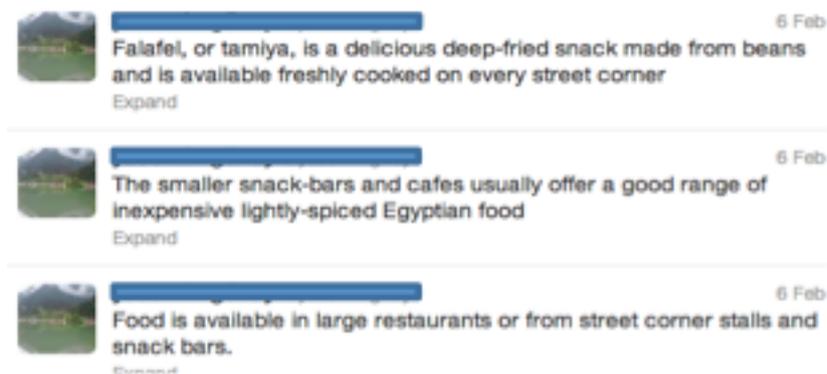


Figure 4. An example of tweets about food and drink in African regions



Figure 5. An example of tweets in terms of marriage/wedding traditions in South Asian regions

Türk İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarının Twitter yoluyla kültürlerarası iletişim yetilerinin geliştirilmesi

Öz

Dil öğrenimi sürecinde öğrencilerin kültürlerarası iletişim yetilerinin desteklenmesi son zamanlarda önemli bulunmuştur. Ancak, dil öğreniminin bu tarafı ihmal edilmiştir. Öğretmenler zaman eksikliği, diğer kültürler hakkında güncel materyaller ve kültürel materyallere erişim konusunda şikayet etmektedirler. Bu makalede, kültürlerarası iletişim yetisini yenilikçi bir şekilde, diğer bir deyişle en popüler ikinci sosyal paylaşım sitesi olan Twitter'ı kullanarak geliştirme yolu amaçlanmıştır. Yirmi bir öğretmen adayı, altı hafta boyunca diğer kültürlerle ilgili yiyecek ve içecek tarzı, giyim tarzı, boş zaman etkinlikleri, aile ilişkileri, beden dili ve evlilik / düğün gelenekleri konularında araştırma yaparak ve Twitter aracılığıyla bulduğu şeyleri paylaşarak çalışmada yer almıştır. Görüşlerindeki farklılıkları görebilmek için ön (uygulamadan önce) ve son (uygulamadan sonra) görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Süreç boyunca görüşlerini kontrol etmek için öğretmen adaylarından haftalık olarak raporlar istenmiştir. Görüşmelerin ve raporların analizi, öğretmen adaylarının kültürlerarası iletişim yetilerinde Twitter'ın yardımıyla bilgi ve tutum boyutları açısından önemli ölçüde gelişme olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma Twitter'ın öğretmen adaylarının bilgi ve tutum boyutunda kültürlerarası iletişim yetilerini geliştirmede etkili olduğunu önermektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: kültürlerarası iletişim yetisi; sosyal ağ; öğretmen eğitimi; İngilizce öğretmeni adayları

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