

Rethinking Intercultural Training In Teacher Training

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Abstract

Often lauded for its role in language education, very little is said or written about the integration of intercultural education into language teacher training. This research spotlighted different approaches to interculturality as well as focusing on the processes that pre-service English language teachers went through during their intercultural training. The context of this study was one particular English Teacher Education Department in Turkey. The methodology rested on the use of focus-group interviews. 3 categories and 8 themes emerged from the analysed data indicated the importance of raising pre-service English language teachers' awareness of different approaches to interculturality, including these approaches in language teacher training as and relating them to pre-service English language teachers' future practice.

Keywords: *interculturality, teacher training, language education*

Introduction

Along with its growing influence, globalisation has increased the importance of intercultural education (IE) all around the world. More and more people are being exposed to different cultures through media, education and work nowadays (Jokikokko, 2010). This situation attracts the attention of language educators, researchers and education program designers, who need to prepare and adapt their programs accordingly.

In Turkish context, one of the outstanding changes has been made in the Primary School English Language Teaching Program (PSELTP) (MoNE, 2013). The program, which currently “mandates that English instruction be implemented from the 2nd grade onward, rather than the 4th grade” (MoNE, 2013: 2), has been updated and modified in accordance with the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) with a focus on intercultural awareness. However, there might be some problems regarding the changes stated above. PSELTP (MoNE, 2013) emphasises the importance of intercultural awareness in language teaching but the objectives stated in the document seem to disregard the complex nature of intercultural communication because it is controversial whether having only a certain amount of lexical knowledge in different languages as suggested in PSELTP (MoNE, 2013) necessarily guarantees or helps successful intercultural communication. The post-modern English language programs are rather expected to provide students with processes that focus on developing creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, autonomy, digital competences, and intercultural skills (Council of Europe, 2001).

Secondly, and more importantly, although English language teachers are expected to have had formal training in line with PSELTP (MoNE, 2013) and in this case, are supposed to teach interculturality, there are not any compulsory intercultural courses in the English Language Teaching (ELT) Program introduced by the Council of Higher Education (2007). Intercultural courses have just been integrated as elective courses into few programs (Alptekin, 2002; Hismanoglu, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

To be able to accomplish the aim of integrating interculturality into the 21st century English classrooms, it seems highly significant to follow and employ the recent approaches to interculturality that evolve day by day in line with changing ideas and needs of teachers and learners. Inspired by the distinction offered by Dervin (2006), it can be claimed that there are two main approaches to interculturality, namely the ‘solid’ approach and the ‘liquid’ approach.

The solid approach makes clear distinctions between national cultures by attempting to offer an objective description of them, and accepts national cultures as separate, fixed, homogenous and consistent by nature. Individuals are considered to have static identities based on their national cultures. From the ‘solid’ perspective, when it comes to intercultural encounters, or the interaction between agents of different nations, ‘culture’ is generally considered as common traditions, customs, beliefs and morals of a particular group (see Dervin, 2006).

On the other hand, the supporters of the liquid approach highlight the drawbacks of the solid approach. In the relevant literature, the solid approach has often been challenged as it is considered to be too “structuralist”, “culturalist” and “essentialist” (Holliday, 2010; Dervin et al., 2011). Transmitting knowledge on people of national cultures is perceived as limited, if not defective, because it disregards the socially constructed nature of culture (Kramsch, 1993). The liquid approach does not ignore the possible influence of gender, age, social class, education level etc. on behaviour and the way identity is created during interaction (Dervin, Gajardo & Lavanchy, 2011; Machart, Lim, Lim & Yamato, 2013). In this respect, among the supporters of the ‘liquid approach’, culture refers to actual people as well as “the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldviews created, shared and transformed by groups of people...” (Nieto, 2002, p.48).

Explaining the word ‘intercultural’ can be even more complex and difficult than defining ‘culture.’ As the relevant literature is very broad, various terms are used interchangeably with intercultural: cross-cultural, multicultural, pluralistic, global and international (Dervin; Gajardo & Lavancy, 2011). In some contexts, the term may refer to the individual cultural encounters (Jokikokko, 2010; Lasonenpill; Räsänen, 2007) whereas in some other contexts, it may be related to theories of global education (Coulby, 2006; Portera, 2008). Thus, interculturality is defined as a tricky notion (Aikman, 2012; Dervin et al., 2011; Piller, 2011). Halualani (2011) discusses the significance of ‘critical intercultural communication perspective and practice’. She puts forward the significance of asking the following questions: “What seems to be known about culture?” “Can we truly know a culture, let alone our own?” “How culture is positioned?” “Who benefits from specific versions and interpretations of culture?” (p. 44).

Set in a postmodern context, the liquid approach has some implications for foreign language teaching and foreign language teacher training. The relevant literature has some models of liquid approach which makes the use of liquid understanding of interculturality more applicable in foreign language teaching. Based on the model of Hyde & Kullman’s (2004), Dervin (2012) offers a model of interculturality consisting of three components as identity, otherization, and representation. In this model, the first component is identity, which is about giving up preconceptions, welcoming complexity of personal and cultural identity and avoiding overgeneralizations caused by individual experiences. The second component is otherization, which refers to avoiding prejudices and discourses that cause otherization. The final component, representation is about being aware of the media, political and institutional influences on society, which creates stereotypes that lead people to assume that an individual is like other people who belong to the same culture, and ignores the probability that the differences within a culture may surpass the differences between cultures (Jandt, 2013).

This study tried to implement the liquid understanding of interculturality into language teacher training in Turkish context, and aimed at exploring the phases of deconstructing the pre-service English language teachers’ preconceived perceptions concerning the role of interculturality in language teaching.

Method

In line with the objectives and the context, this study was designed as a qualitative case study due to the small number of the participants who were in the 4th- final year- of their studies, and the IE course itself, which was an elective course, was only selected by these pre-service teachers. The ELT program offered some theoretical and pedagogical courses such as ELT Methodology, Teaching Language Skills, Linguistics, and English Literature (see Council of Higher Education, 2007). The IE course was integrated into this program just before beginning of the study by the researcher.

In this study, the methodology rested on the use of focus-group interviews for the in-depth analysis. Focus-group interviews were chosen as they were considered valuable especially in “monitoring studies, needs assessment, and program evaluation because they are considered to provide an exploratory approach and even be more effective in certain research processes than the more traditional ones” (Fer, 2004, p. 572).

The following research question was formulated to answer the research question:

How do pre-service teachers' perceptions of intercultural education change while taking the Intercultural Education course?

Setting and participants of the study

The study was conducted with one class of 10 pre-service English language teachers who were studying in their final year in English Teacher Education Program at İnönü University during the 2013-2014 Academic Year. It was assumed that it would be easier for senior students to develop ideas about language teaching, IE and the relationship between the two since they had a better command of English language and teaching methods. The participants of the study were Turkish pre-service teachers who had not lived abroad before. The participants ranged in age from 22 to 24.

The IE course aimed to help pre-service English teachers become aware of growing importance of interculturality in English classrooms and inform them about the approaches to IE and practice how to integrate it into English lessons. The objectives of the course were as follows:

- Describe the role of English as an intercultural language
- Explain the importance of intercultural education in language teaching
- Distinguish between different approaches to interculturality
- Compare and contrast different approaches to intercultural education
- Prepare intercultural education integrated lesson plans
- Seek out information from a variety of sources, including print, media, internet

The content of the course included terminology regarding IE, components of and different approaches to interculturality, intercultural documents and movies.

Development of interview questions

Five interview questions were formulated in English to gain insights into how pre-service teachers' perceptions of IE had changed while taking the IE course, and the questions were revised by three experienced professors (see Appendix 1).

The participants were divided into two so that each focus-group could involve five participants. Each interview lasted around 25 minutes. The researcher introduced the topic and posed the questions in English since the participants could understand and speak English fluently. Yet, they were free to switch to their mother tongue when they needed to explain their points more clearly and effectively. The researcher asked the questions from general to specific, and asked the questions again or paraphrased

them when there were misunderstandings or when the participants seemed to miss a point. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim afterwards. The coding was done by an internal evaluator and an external evaluator separately.

Findings

Constant comparison analysis was chosen to analyse the data of this study. This kind of analysis gives the researcher the opportunity “to answer the questions that have arisen from the analysis of and reflection on the previous data” (Beige, 2002, p. 393), which makes it possible to delimit the categories and making connections systematically.

To verify inter-rater reliability, the qualitative data from the focus-group interviews were interpreted and categorized by the researcher and by an experienced ELT instructor independently. A cross-check of thematic categories showed a high degree of similarity. The degree of similarity between the qualitative analysis of two raters was calculated through Pearson Correlation Coefficient Procedure. There was a high correlation coefficient between the two sets of codes ($r: .983$ and $p < .01$).

First, open coding was revealed that 5 words out of 25 words were chosen. Later, the open-codes were studied to identify the three main categories. Words related to contributions and challenges of the course helped to form core categories and words related to reflection, IE and language education were categorized as ‘themes’ under core categories. Table 1 shows the categories and themes identified from analysis of the data. In the table, each theme is shown next to the participants who has put forward them. The themes that emerged during the analysis were as follows:

Table 1: *Findings from the interview*

Categories	Themes	Participants
General characteristics of the course	Improved interpretation and reflection skills	P1, P2, P3, P5, P8, P9
	Interculturality from theory to practice	P3, P5, P6, P8, P10
	Peer collaboration	P2, P4, P6, P10
Pedagogical characteristics of the course	Awareness of the importance of intercultural topics in language education	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10
	The relationship between IE course and teaching effectiveness	P1, P2, P4, P7
Challenges of the course	Process of making intercultural activities applicable in language classroom	P2, P5, P6, P7, P8
	Subjective nature of intercultural education	P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P10
	Handling vast literature on intercultural education	P1, P2, P4, P5

Category 1: General characteristics of the course

Category 1 depicted how the course had enabled the participants to reconsider or change their perspectives related to interculturality. Similar elements found in most pre-service teachers' answers suggested that the course topics including non-native speakership in English, components of interculturality, approaches to and materials about interculturality had contributed to this process.

Improved interpretation and reflection skills

Microteaching, which is one of the key methods in teacher education, was also made use of in this study. By definition, microteaching is a teaching situation that is minimized in terms of time, materials, skills, and the number of students (Cooper, 1992). Participants mentioned the connection between their improved reflection skills and the microteachings. They stated that the microteachings helped them think critically about intercultural topics, and as the topics required individual interpretation and reflection, the course contributed to their reflection and interpretation skills. P1 claimed:

The course helped me understand... how to design intercultural activities. We kept diaries and reflected on every topic... that we learned in the course. Microteachings were the most effective ones. We did research, designed lessons and shared our reflections. So... Everything became clear and more understandable.

The participant pointed out that writing diary entries each week encouraged them to comprehend and become familiar with the topics included in the course. She highlighted the process of designing microteachings and reflections acted as an experiential stage, and expanded their overall understanding of the course. Similarly, P2 put across, "Discussions on intercultural topics... The intercultural movie was the most didactic part in this course. We learned to interpret intercultural movies... and other intercultural materials..."

Interculturality from theory to practice

The interview revealed that the IE course combined theory and practice. P8 put across the theme as follows:

In this lesson... I have learned traditional and renewed understandings of intercultural education. After we learned these approaches, we connected it to the movie... The Namesake. I have seen... how English teachers can use intercultural movies in the classroom.

By referring to intercultural elements in the movie, *The Namesake*, the participant exemplified how she experienced the shift from theory to practice. Apart from serving as a tool for model teaching, the movie was employed to lead discussion related to approaches to interculturality in order to promote more reflection especially on the liquid understanding of interculturality.

P3 stated:

This course introduced new topics to us. Some of them were multilingualism, intercultural communication competence and strategies and so on. We revised the topics from the ELT Methodology course. We combined and put them into practice.

As the participant put forward, the microteaching sessions helped to stimulate the pre-service teachers' background knowledge of designing lesson plans since they felt the need to do more research on English lesson plans. In that sense, the IE course can have miscellaneous outcomes such as developing certain teaching skills

Peer collaboration

The findings showed that it was highly important, if not necessary, for the pre-service teachers to share and exchange information. During in-class discussions, their peers and the course tutor provided feedback, and peer collaboration had an important place in the IE course. P2 put it this way:

In these lessons... the teacher mentioned how a lesson plan should be prepared... showed samples of lesson plans. We worked on these plans. We tried to understand how we could prepare our lessons. My classmates and I watched some intercultural movies so that we could understand... which points were suitable for our lesson plans... Then, we brainstormed, discussed....

The participant expressed how the IE course promoted interaction among the pre-service teachers. They helped each other by watching various intercultural movies and identifying the movie segments that would be useful for their microteachings. This kind of interaction may be the primary step for the pre-service teachers' professional development by promoting collaboration among them.

The participants' quotations in this category indicated that reflection and in-class discussions evoked curiosity and encouraged them to learn more from their peers and to do more research about the topics raised during the lessons.

Category 2: Pedagogical characteristics of the course

Awareness about important intercultural topics in language education

The participants highlighted that the IE course raised their awareness about important intercultural topics in ELT. P4 pointed out:

Intercultural communication is a wide topic... to be searched... And there are lots of things to be learned about it. This course made me wonder and find more information... Also our teacher's question, 'How can you integrate intercultural education into your lesson?' motivated me to think and to do more research. I want to find more effective and different ways to teach it.

The quotation from the participant indicated that the course served as a source of inspiration and curiosity for the pre-service teachers rather than transmitting some concrete information. In that way, most of the pre-service teachers ended up developing their own philosophy of IE while raising awareness about the intercultural topics.

The relationship between teaching effectiveness and intercultural education

Preparing interculturality integrated English lesson plans and presenting them enabled the participants to learn more about teaching effectiveness. Most participants reported that they found out more about teaching effectiveness. P2 claimed, "Before this course, I had never designed an English lesson... that long... This course and the tutorials about my lesson helped me learn about skill-based English teaching and about general teaching strategies."

As it can be inferred from the participant quotation, while designing their microteachings, the pre-service teachers exchanged information and shared their ideas with each other. On the same token, P7 stated, "In this course, I have learned lots of new information about language use, learning strategies, language activities and strategies for intercultural communication. Also, before the course, I did not know anything about CEFR." It can be inferred that the IE course encouraged the pre-service teachers to refresh their knowledge about designing teaching strategies. The findings indicated that this kind of complex process helped pre-service teachers reconsider and become more critical about teaching practices.

In a nutshell, as there were many different points to consider while designing an intercultural integrated English lesson, the pre-service teachers reported that they had to focus on the content of the lesson, teaching strategies, skill-based instruction, and informal feedback to their teaching performances and time management.

Category 3: Challenges of the course

Process of making intercultural activities applicable in language classroom

Making intercultural activities applicable in a language classroom was another theme that showed up during the data analysis. P3 stated:

I think intercultural activities are very instructive... especially for younger learners. Intercultural cartoons, for example, are creative. But... One thing to consider... In order to provide effective intercultural teaching, we must choose materials according to the interests and age of our learners. Choosing these materials was a difficult and time-consuming process. However, I have learned a lot from this process.

It was highlighted by the participant that it was significant to take into account language learners' age and interest in order to be able to make intercultural activities applicable in the English classrooms. Therefore, it can be claimed that the IE course implicitly underlined the importance of conducting a need analysis not only related to language learners' language proficiency but also related to the learners' intercultural knowledge and understanding so that the course would be more engaging and comprehensible for learners.

Subjective nature of intercultural education

The results highlighted the participants' increased awareness about the subjective nature of interculturality. Learning and teaching interculturality, despite its interactive nature, include individual processes. P4 put across:

We learned many instructive things in this course. It was surprising to learn about different approaches to intercultural education. It was really entertaining to learn some information... while having fun. We were free to choose... any approach that we want... And design our lessons according to that approach.

The subjective nature of interculturality can be considered as a challenge in the first place because it was demanding and time-consuming for the pre-service teachers to deal with different approaches, make inferences and relate those to their own lives and experiences. During the IE course, the pre-service teachers struggled and discovered how to position themselves when they encountered different approaches to interculturality. However, it was described as a 'rewarding' experience at the end of the course.

Handling vast literature on interculturality

The availability of vast literature on interculturality can be considered both as a challenge and as a contribution to the IE course. P5 highlighted:

In this course, I noticed that there were many intercultural topics. I spent much time to read... complicated theories. In my opinion, recent approaches are significant. We directly or indirectly interact with each other... Communication or intercultural communication is shaped during interaction.

'Recent understanding of interculturality' and 'liquid approach' were terms used interchangeably during the IE course, so it can be concluded that the participant showed increased awareness regarding the existence and importance of the 'liquid' interculturality.

Discussion & Conclusion

The study let us explore the various interpretations of interculturality included in the relevant literature especially in English language education. The findings surely presented some examples of learning

outcomes of IE, which can help to transform and adapt English language education programs and English teacher training programs accordingly.

In the relevant literature, intercultural competence (IC) is considered to be more than acquiring a foreign language (Byram, 2001; Fantini, 2000; Jokikokko, 2010). IC is defined by some as cultural literacy that motivates individuals to act sensitively and effectively in a world of differences while some others argue that it very much depends on the context, the atmosphere and the individuals taking part in the interaction. The results of this study suggested that the IE course can contribute to pre-service teachers' their interpretation and reflection skills. In the relevant literature, interpretation was noted as one of sub-skills regarding intercultural competence (Coperías Aguilar, 2010). Hence, improvement in interpretation skills supported the relevant literature as an expected outcome of the intercultural training. Participants stated that the IE course promoted interpretation and reflection skills through materials such as movies, literature, etc. that were also suggested by Lázár et al. (2007) to develop intercultural competence.

Interpretation and reflection skills and integrating intercultural elements into English lessons, in language education context, can also help English language teachers to reconstruct, change and develop their students' ideas, communication skills and worldviews. Thus, just as it is suggested in the field of critical pedagogy, teachers can be 'transformative change agents' who address various societal issues in educational practice and encourage students to participate in these issues (McLaren, 2001; Popkewitz, 1999). Intercultural training can act as a transformative component for English language teaching curricula and English teacher training programs.

Sociocultural learning theories emphasise the importance of collaborative learning through which people can learn together through a mutual creation of knowledge (Wells & Claxton, 2002). In a similar way, the results of the study suggested that peer collaboration contributed to the participants' changing perspectives regarding IE and its role in language teaching.

Having tutorials on lesson plans, observing peer microteachings and in-class discussions related to designing lesson plans helped pre-service teachers gain better insights not only into intercultural training but also into English language education. The IE course drew the attention to the content of the lesson, teaching strategies, skill-based instruction, to name but a few.

The overall impression from the findings confirmed that at least some participants started to show an increased awareness related to the liquid interculturality. Conducting the research with a larger sample size, and maybe with teacher educators as well as developing and using an objective metric to assess the pre-service teachers' development regarding IE might be further research possibilities. Besides, having compulsory or elective intercultural courses based on the liquid approach to interculturality, or integrating them into the content of some teacher education courses (e.g. Specific Teaching Skills or Approaches and Methods) might be a possible solution to bridge the gap between English language teaching programs and teacher education programs regarding understanding of culture, interculturality and teaching culture.

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Appendix 1

Interview Form

1. What are your opinions related to the course?
2. What are the strengths of the course?
3. What are the weaknesses of the course?
4. Do you think the course has provided you with information about the role of intercultural education in language teaching? If yes, how?
5. Do you think the course has helped you understand how to make intercultural activities to be effective and applicable in your classroom? If yes, how?

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