

PREP CLASS STUDENTS' THOUGHTS ON USING LITERARY SOURCES IN READING LESSONS

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ABSTRACT

Preparing or arranging course materials for the reading lessons is a challenging process that most teachers prefer to use the books, articles or short stories. Literary works are common materials used in those lessons, because of their accessibility and ease of use. Regarding that situation, the purpose of this study is to gather the prep class students' thoughts about literary works as a course material and examine the data by taking into consideration the national identity and class distinction. In this case study, Jane Austen's two novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* are discussed in reading lessons from 27th of February to 31st March 2017 as course materials in prep classes. In her works, Jane Austen focuses on the class distinction by giving specific examples of her time. The ways they eat and behave are determined by the strict rules of the society in 1850. At the ends of this process, totally 19 students are asked to complete an unstructured form to express their thoughts on these books. The result shows that the students take part in the study give different answers about using literary sources in prep classes. Almost half of the students state that choosing sources from literature make them aware of author's intentions, and the contextual factors such as the political, social, and historical background of the text.¹ Data is also evaluated according to the national identity of the students in order to find out their opinions on class distinction and the relation of the language, culture, and literature.

Key Words: Literature, ELT, Social Context, Jane Austen

INTRODUCTION

Reading which is defined by Cheng (2012) as the bringing back process of the orthographic, semantic and phonological information hidden by the writer is one of the most important of four language skills in ELT courses. Arranging course materials is one of the challenging processes in language education. So, it should be bear in mind that there is a strong relation between the reader and the material. Selecting the right material plays a vital role in the process of language education. Remembering the fact that, an ideal ELT classroom consists of many different students who have various interests. For that reason, it is one of the main duties of the instructors to choose rich materials for the students to take their attention into lessons. Many authors and critics claim that literary texts are products that reflect different aspects of society, thus choosing literary sources as a reading material in ELT classrooms can meet this need.

¹ Also look, Khatip Mohammad, *Literature in EFL/ESL Classroom*, English Language Teaching, Vol. 4, No. 1; March 2011, (201-208), 206.

By taking into consideration the materials needs of ELT classes and literary sources ability to fulfil this need, this study will try to gather the prep class students' thoughts about literary works as a course material and examine the data by giving importance to the national identity and class distinction.

Our research questions are developed as:

1. What kind of materials do the students read outside the school?
2. What do students think about the usage of literary materials in ELT classes? Whether students like this method or not?
3. What do the students think about the class distinction in these novels?
4. How do students evaluate these novels by taking into consideration their national identity?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is not only a process of finding the hidden message of the writer. It needs the activation of various micro and macro skills according to a definite goal. Because of this reason, teaching reading in ELT courses is a challenging process. On the authority of Roozafzai (2012) "It is now generally believed that a range of reader with text factors affect the reading process to a considerable extent. So, teachers of EFL need to be aware of the important role of teaching materials" (p.7).

Being able to select the correct type of material not only has cognitive but also affective effects on the students. The motivation which is a significant character in the psychological side of the teaching process can be enhanced or lowered with the course materials. For example; Kaya, Han, and Aybirdi (2015) who used ninety-five volunteered participants and a questionnaire in their studies found out that using authentic materials has positive effects on the quality of the language education courses. One of the reasons of authentic materials positive effects on the course quality is the classical reading materials influence of being boring in the long term. Because of this reason, reading teachers try to use their own authentic materials such as newspaper or magazine articles. However, these materials are not easy to find as many of them are not favourable to use in the classrooms, and this requires finding a more favourable and easy to find a material type of material for the reading courses.

Vural (2013) supports the usage of authentic materials especially literary sources in the reading course in order to increase the motivation and tries to prove their effects with an experimental study. The results of Vural's study revealed that both the final test and attitude survey results of the experimental group who used literary short stories are better than control groups. Participants in the experimental group were more successful and have a positive attitude about the use of literary sources in the reading course. Using literary sources increase students' motivation which is beneficial for reading courses.

Language is inseparable from its culture. Learning a language and being able to use it just native speakers do necessitates the learning of the target culture. Keshavarzi (2012) thinks that "Literature is culture; that is, it is not to say that literature deals with culture, but it should be said that literature is the culture of the people using that language" (p.554). Literature includes the lifestyle, family relations, histories, and epic of the target culture. Using literary sources in the courses help students to understand target culture and how native speakers speak or behave in different situations. In addition to their effects on the increase of comprehension and motivation as mentioned by Vural (2013), literary sources have positive effects on the

understanding of the system of the language and how to use this system correctly. Keshavarzi (2012) mentioned 4 benefits of using literature in the reading courses as developing the language, increasing the knowledge of culture and society which is also desired by the students as mentioned in Rodliyah, Imperiani, and Amalia (2014) who examined the students' ideas about the materials in the target and local culture and found that students have positive attitude both for types of materials whether they include the target or local culture, helping the acquisition of the language, and helping to focus on the meaning.

This study will give importance to the examination of the use of literary sources in terms of nationalism which is an ideology about national consciousness, ethnical or linguistic identity or just a cultural phenomenon based on the language, sentiments, and symbolism (Aksakal, 2015 and Uzer, 2016). Examination of the students' ideas by taking into consideration their nationalist views is important because Turkish students' points of views can show differences when their nationalist character is examined. Kaysılı and Acar (2014) point out that Turkish youth gives important to national values while taking decisions about the social venue, shopping centre, or wedding. The people who give importance to the national values for the previous decisions can also evaluate the course materials according to those values. Although its roots reach to the Ancient Greek, nationalism started to increase in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. According to Uzer (2016), the reasons for the birth of Turkish nationalism are independence movements of Greeks, Serbs, Albanians, and Arabs in the Ottoman period, historical and linguistic studies in the Europe and Ottoman Empire, and the immigration of highly educated Turks from certain countries. The nationalism which was increased in the later period of Ottoman Empire has an important effect on the people's choices in their social and academic life. We think that this nationalistic view should also be examined in the material choices of the L2 learners.

Believing the importance of material choice in the reading courses and the possible effects of nationalism on this choice, we tried to examine prep- class students' ideas about using literary sources in the reading courses by 5 research questions.

METHOD

1. Research Design

Case study research design which is used for an in-depth examination of the certain people or groups is used in this study. It aimed to find out the attitudes, behaviours, and ideas of the students who used literary sources as a course material in their reading lessons. The writer used this method to be able to find out students' ideas and reaction after a month reading course with literary materials.

2. Participants

19 volunteered participants who are from different parts of Turkey and study in the prep-classes of Recep Tayyip Erdogan University English Language and Literature Department. Although they study in the same department, being from dissimilar regions of the country and having divergent personalities make these participants create a heterogeneous group. Researchers do not interfere the participants selecting process in order not to distort the results. A number of the participants are enough for this study because Creswell (2012) expresses that the participants can range from 1 to 40 in a qualitative study. All required permissions are gathered from the participants and the institution.

3. Instrument

An unstructured interview is used to collect and record qualitative data from the students. “An open-ended response to a question allows the participant to create the options for responding” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). Participants are not forced to give definite responses. This interview consists of 8 questions and developed by the researchers by examining the research questions.

4. Procedure

After finding the participants and gathering the required permissions, Jane Austen’s two novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* are discussed in reading lessons from 27th of February to 31st March 2017 as course materials in prep classes. Students’ ideas are gathered with an interview that includes open-ended questions. In addition to these interviews, students are examined and some notes are taken during the courses. Lessons are not recorded in order not to make students change their behaviours. Then, data is analysed manually.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data is analysed manually because of the reasons of not having a huge amount of data and the desire of being close to the collected information. Before the analysing process, data is organized, transcribed, and coded into themes. Then, related ideas are founded and combined into definite descriptions. Observation notes were added to these descriptions and these descriptions were tried to be used to answer the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first research question tries to find out “What kind of materials do the students read outside the school?”. To examine this, we asked students what kind of materials do you read outside the school? and how often do you read books that explains and publicise the foreign cultures? Most of the students just read novels in their free time. Another kind of materials that students read can be classified as a self-help book, historical book, essay, magazine, newspaper, short stories, and poems. Only one student reads a newspaper outside the school. The newspaper and magazine articles are most important authentic materials for teachers but students choose to read novels instead of them. This also proves that students have positive ideas for the use of literary sources in the reading courses. Language education is the combination of the acquisition of the system and culture of the target language. However, participants in our study do not read books that explain the target culture. Because of this reason, using literary sources in reading courses will also have a complementary effect on the process.

Student’s emotions about the use of literary sources are tried to be understood with research question 2. 16 of the 19 participants expressed positive ideas about using literary sources in ELT classes stressing the intriguing, entertaining, interesting, pleasing, beneficial, encouraging, and developing sides of the literary sources. Participants not only think about emotional sides of the materials but also expressed that literary materials are effective in developing the vocabulary capacity and cultural information of the target language. Participant 19 mentioned that “I think I have cultural developments after reading these sources.” This participant is supported by participant 11 who mentioned the importance of the literary sources in teaching the culture as “we understand the literature of the target culture by reading its sources. And this is significant for us.” Using literature develops the individual not only by increasing its vocabulary capacity or cultural information as mentioned by the interviewees but also help the students understand the system of the language. Literature is the alive side of the

language and language is the gadget of the literature. Because of this reason, using literature is both a source of enjoyment and has too many benefits on language learners. Participants 2 think that literature helps them to examine the social events from a different angle. They have a chance of comparing what they learned in the course and happenings of these days. Literature helps them to have a more conscious approach to events. These ideas are supported by the writer's own observations since the participants who used literary sources in the courses were active and happy in the classroom. Other three participants who do not mention their positive ideas about the process think that the subject of the materials is important. If the subjects of those materials are interesting for me, I like the process.

Class distinction and women's value at this period of the history are two main subjects that students mentioned in their interviews. They think that both concepts are irritating and painful. Participant 10 summarizes the data clearly as women need to find a rich husband to marry in order to preserve their class. Class distinction is too widespread in the society and economical condition of the lower classes is too bad.

In order to be able to answer the research question 4 and examine students' evaluation of these materials according to their national identity, students are asked 4 different questions. To start with, it is tried to be understood whether students found any concepts that emphasize the western nationality or not. Most of the participants think that literary sources have an aim of proving the virtue of western nations especially by giving importance to the superiority of the white skins when compared with blacks. Colonialism and religion discrimination are other important national concepts of those sources. Participants 1 express that as "all the sources have those nationalistic concepts. Especially, action movies such as Robison Cruose and Lord Jim show high number of religion segregation and racism. I think Heatcliff in Wuthering Heights is an example of this." Participant 8 supports his/her friend by mentioning that "yes, there is too many nationalist concepts of western civilizations especially about white and black people. They think white people are superior and they want to protect white people.

Literary sources do not only provide reading passages to read and do comprehension questions. They are also effective in the activation of more complex process as the students analyse and compare the ideas of these passages with their own culture. This means to activate the human brain in order for more complex thinking and analyse processes. Students compared the reading passages but did not find an important concept or subject contrary to their nationalistic view. However, most of the students think that western civilization had more class distinction when compared with our country. Women's position was also worse than Turkish countries at that time of the history. Participant 8 states the situation as "I think we have the class distinction of the UK of that time in Turkey now. We are far behind of their civilization. The people who work hard earn less but who work less earn much in our country." Participant 10 also touches the Turkish-Kurdish, rich-poor, alevi-muslim discriminations.

Examination of the 4th and 8th questions of the interview also supports the findings that students are not against reading literary sources because of their nationalist view. Most of the students think that reading literary sources help them to learn the target culture and compare it with their own but these sources do not impose them anything. Students also desire to read the original versions of the materials not Turkish translations because the think translation causes meaning loss as the translator is not able to express everything the writer tried to mention.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This qualitative case study tries to understand students' ideas about using literary sources as ELT reading materials by also giving importance to the students' national identity and their ideas about national concepts of the reading materials. After the examination of the transcribed interviews of 19 participants and observation data, it is understood that using literary sources in ELT reading courses is beneficial in developing the language and cultural information and helpful in creating a bed of roses place to study. Although students compare the target culture and their native one, they do not want to give up reading the literary sources because of their nationalist view. Most of the students think that reading literary sources in ELT courses is beneficial and full of enjoyment.

Taking into consideration the students ideas and observations of the researchers and using literary sources in ELT classes can create challenging and better L2 learning atmosphere. Contrary to the general belief that literary sources are boring, using them properly in the courses can increase the learning outcome, in addition, to help the students to judge the historical periods of the target and native culture. This study was carried out in an English Language and Literature Department's prep class students and can be extended by using other prep class students or different universities.

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