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Comparative investigation of cultural components in Turkish and German language coursebooks

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Abstract

It must be noted that students, as from the elementary school, get to know their own cultures and other cultures and they are taught to acquire necessary skills to be able to constructively communicate with people from different cultures, while bracing themselves for the real challenges of today's globalizing world. The main purpose of this study is to investigate cultural components of 4th grade Turkish and German language course books comparatively. Qualitative design, particularly document analysis technique, was used to identify cultural components embedded in the course books. The findings of the study revealed that in spite of the fact that some cultural components were handled and presented in a very similar way, some of them were very unique to German and Turkish culture.

Key words: Culturel components, coursebooks

1. Introduction

Culture serves as a guideline for individuals to determine the way they behave, their social status, their expectations from each other within the social life, and their responsibilities (Brown, 1994). Identifying values, perspectives, applications and products of social groups, and the way those groups interact with each other, culture (Eriksen, 2002) can broadly be defined as beliefs, behaviors, values, or shared and learned codes that influence the communication among individuals (Hofstede, 2001). Equipping especially primary school students with the necessary skills to build communication with individuals from different cultures requires acknowledging the importance of knowing about one's own and other cultures. Primary education institutions are special places where students can both cognitively and affectively conceptualize a set of cultural behaviors, values, beliefs and symbols, and where they can find their place within the society through various activities based on cultural concepts. In this way, students begin to understand the society they live in, to determine their role as a member of that society, and to direct themselves towards self-improvement (Rogoff, 2003). Language courses at primary schools bear a major importance as a means of cultural transmission. Every sub-title about culture can effectively be taught through an instructional domain that may directly be related with that cultural subject matter. In other words, language classes can be used to teach about culture efficiently since language itself is one of the salient building blocks of culture. Coursebooks also have a considerable role as supplementary materials of primary education curriculum in furnishing students with a cultural standpoint. Besides, coursebooks are basic conveyers of cultural images and

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perspectives because they are actively used as teaching materials as part of the educational system. Students' knowledge and skills can be extended by the help of cultural images and explanation within the coursebooks.

1.1. Purpose

The main purpose of this research is to compare and contrast cultural components in Turkish and German language coursebooks. Accordingly, answers to following two questions have been sought:

1. How should cultural components in the primary school 4th grade Turkish language coursebook be conveyed?
2. How should cultural components in the primary school 4th grade German language coursebook be conveyed?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the way cultural components are conveyed in Turkish and German language coursebooks?

2.Method

2.1. Research model

Being conducted to compare the cultural components in both Turkish and German language coursebooks, this research has been completed through document reviewing, one of qualitative research methods. Data has been analyzed through descriptive analysis.

2.2. Participants

Typical case sampling—one of purposeful sampling techniques—was utilized during the identification of the research sample. Typical case sampling is generally used to introduce a new application or to work on new things within a series of cases by determining the most typical ones and analyzing them (Yildirim and Simsek, 2005). Primary school 4th grade Turkish and German language coursebooks used in this research were found to be comprehensive enough in terms of reflecting the case conceptually.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

Data was collected through document reviewing, one of qualitative research methods. Document reviewing includes examining written materials that bear information regarding the issue to be investigated (Yildirim and Simsek, 2005). Providing real, easily accessible and available data, documents are used to figure out solutions to problems by researchers. The word 'document' is used as an umbrella term that covers all written and visual materials (Merriam, 1998). Three types of documents are as follows: public documents, personal documents, and physical materials. Physical materials used on a daily basis are tools and instruments, devices, and handcrafts (Hodder, 2000; Merriam, 1998). Since primary school 4th grade Turkish and German language coursebooks are used in this research, among the document types, physical materials have been utilized.

Descriptive analyses have been employed during the analysis and interpretation of the data. Descriptive analysis includes decoding of the data, developing a coding key, coding the data onto the key, classifying the data in terms of emerging thematic frames, identifying the findings, and interpreting those findings (Yildirim and Simsek, 2004, p. 171). Following sheds light on the analysis of data. A form that would be used in order to examine the texts in Turkish and German coursebooks in terms of cultural components was developed and two additional sections, namely 'descriptive index' and 'researcher's opinions', were added; and these extra two sections were filled out by the researcher. Subsequently, the researcher and a field expert negotiated over their opinions within descriptive index part, and they reached a consensus. Then, all texts underwent the same procedure. Next, coding was carried out in accordance with the themes identified along with research questions, and findings were presented within relevant themes. Direct quotation was used during presentation of the findings.

3.Findings and Interpretation

In accordance with the research questions, findings are presented in three categories as "Cultural components in primary school 4th grade Turkish language coursebooks", "Cultural components in primary school 4th grade German language coursebooks", and "A comparison of cultural components in primary school 4th grade Turkish and German language coursebooks".

3.1. Findings regarding the cultural components in Turkish language coursebooks.

Table 1 displays the findings related to the first research question.

Table 1. Cultural Components in Primary School 4th Grade Turkish Coursebook

Cultural Component	Text Name	Sub-Components	f	
Customs and Traditions	Smell	Hosting Guests	1	
	Smell	Greetings	2	
	Drawing	(Welcome-Kissing)		
	Holiday Joy	Merry Holiday	1	
	Holiday Joy	Kissing hands of the elderly	1	
	Holiday Joy	Taking pocket money	1	
	Holiday Joy	Holiday visits	1	
	Values	Cooking holiday dessert	1	
		Clothing for the Holiday	1	
Food Culture	My Turkey	Turkish Cuisine	2	
	My Anatolia	Turkish Dishes	1	
Clothes	My Anatolia	Scarf	1	
Daily Routines	Smell	Asking for parental permission	1	
	Values	Wearing slippers at home	1	
Historical Figures	News	Ataturk	4	
	I'm Mustafa Kemal			
	Ataturk's in Anatolia			
	Ataturk and Arts			
	As you like it	Michelangelo	1	
	Communication	Samuel Mors	1	
	Technology in our Lives	Neil Armstrong	1	
	Letter Sample	Karagoz Hacivat	1	
	My Turkey	Mevlana	1	
		Nasrettin Hoca	1	
Traditional Crafts	Mottling	Traditional Turkish Arts	1	
	My Anatolia	Tiling	1	
Traditional Sports	My Anatolia	Turkish Oil Wrestling	1	
School Culture	You are as much as you believe	Flag ceremony	1	
Religious Values	We've Found	Helping Others	1	
Values	Tolerance (poem)	Tolerance (U-E)	1	
	Rewards	Respecting others' rights Courtesy	2	
	Rewards	Environmental Sensitivity	1	
	Keep it Clean	Benevolence	2	
	We've found what you like	Both national and global need for individuals	1	
	Children are born Scientists	who investigate and question.	1	
	Hosting Different Cultures	My Turkey	Cultural Heritage	1
	Proverbs	Holiday Joy	Don't count your chickens before they hatch	1
		Other	Turkish	1
	Other	Our language Turkish	Folk Songs	1
Our language Turkish		Lullabies	1	
Money		Turkish Lira	1	
My Anatolia		Traditional Musical Instruments (Drum-shrill pipe)	1	
Museum		Protecting historical artifacts	1	

As can be seen in Table 1, primary school 4th grade Turkish coursebook includes many of the cultural components. Turkish customs and traditions, food culture, daily life routines, historical figures, heroes, traditional Turkish handicrafts, traditional sports, national and global values, Turkish culture as a host to many others, language, traditional musical instruments, and money are all within the scope of the Turkish coursebook.

Analysis of the texts in the coursebook has revealed that there are some expressions reflecting Turkish values and traditions. For example, the quotation from “You’re as much as you believe”—*Once again, a week was over, and it was Friday. We used to have flag ceremony after the school on Fridays*—and the one from “Smell”—*I barely got permission from my mom to go to my friend Aysu. My mom used to insist not to send me to my friends whose*

families and lives were not known by her—depicts a general picture about both school and family life in Turkish culture. The text Mottling—a traditional Turkish handcraft—included the following; “*Mottling is a Turkish handcraft. It refers to the designs that are transferred from water onto paper in cloud shapes... It is taken from the root of tragacanth. This dye is mixed with drinking water after being exposed to several processes. This is the basic step for mottling.*” Another text on Holiday Joy has a lot of information on traditions and habits: “*Finally, it was the Holiday morning. ... all of us wore special clothes for the holiday and sat at the table for breakfast. After the breakfast, my sister and I first kissed daddy’s hand and then mommy’s hand to get our first pocket money on that day. Since my dad is the oldest in his family, all my uncles and aunts visited us till the noon. ... My duty was to give slippers to the guests and to tidy up their shoes left outside the house. My sister was serving candies and tea for the guests*”. The text ‘My Turkey’ also points to many cultural components as follows: “*Almost twenty civilizations made this country the heir of history. These lands always live the past with the statues of gods and goddesses, temples, theaters, mosques, churches, tombs, ancient theological schools, palaces, and caravansaries. ... One shouldn’t miss Mevlana’s tomb in Konya during a visit to our country. How about visiting famous humor figure Nasrettin Hoca in Aksehir? Remember to learn about Yunus Emre when you go through Eskisehir. ... If you ever mention about our country, you must talk about our cuisine. Turkish cuisine is one the three famous cuisines in the world. ... Some foods and beverages are said with a “Turkish” adding due to their special tastes. Turkish dishes, Turkish dessert, Turkish delight, Turkish coffee, Turkish tea... traditional bean and rice... ”*

3.2. Findings regarding the cultural components in Turkish language coursebooks.

Table 2 displays the findings related to the second research question.

Table 2. Cultural Components in Primary School 4th Grade German Coursebook

Cultural Component	Text Name	Sub-Components	f
Customs and Traditions	Everything is new, and everything is better	Laundry traditions 100 years ago	1
Historical Figures	Each day is a new start Another world	J. Wolfgang Goethe	1
		Martin Luther King	1
Hosting Different Cultures	Another world	Neil Armstrong	1
		Vietnam War	1
		Gandhi	1
		Sister Theresa	1
		Aborigine Life Style	1
		The Unknown Australian	1
		The Land of Indians	1
Proverbs	Going on with school or work? Making tough decisions	Craft is a gift	1
		An eye for an eye	1
		If everybody believes in an eye for an eye, everybody becomes blind (Gandhi)	1
		Regional dialects, standard dialect, slang,	1
Other	Dialectal differences across regions		

As seen in Table 2, analysis of the cultural components in German language coursebook yields that there are one text on old traditions, 2 texts about historical figures, 7 texts on knowing about other cultures, 2 texts that include proverbs, and one text about dialectal differences.

Following quote sheds light on laundry routines; “*A laundry from 100 years ago. A clean lady has only one day in a month to do her laundry*” while another one mentions about other cultures as; “*Martin Luther King and his dream about the peace between the white and the black*”. About the dialectal differences, following has been quoted ; “*People refer to the same thing with different words in different regions. If a person travels from Nordfrisland to South Trole, s/he probably encounters some dialects that s/he cannot understand.*

3.3. A comparison of cultural components in primary school 4th grade Turkish and German language coursebooks

Examination of cultural components in both coursebooks has yielded that Turkish coursebook has a theme and text based structure whereas German coursebook has several current texts free from a general theme and it also

emphasizes German grammar, phonology, and morphology in almost one third of the book. Besides, Turkish coursebook underlines national cultural values more while German coursebook includes more examples of dialectal differences due to its grammar based format. Moreover, German coursebook contains more examples of people from other cultures and cultural differences than Turkish coursebook. Both books are alike in texts about technology although texts are of different style, and they both aim to equip students with similar cultural values (such as respect for other cultures)

4. Results and Suggestions

In accordance with the research questions, results are presented in three categories as “Cultural components in primary school 4th grade Turkish language coursebooks”, “Cultural components in primary school 4th grade German language coursebooks”, and “A comparison of cultural components in primary school 4th grade Turkish and German language coursebooks”.

Results regarding the first research question show that Turkish coursebook includes many cultural components, not in detail though, such as traditions and customs, food culture, daily life routines, historical figures, heroes, traditional handcrafts, traditional sports, both national and global cultural values, Turkish culture as a host to other cultures, language, and money.

Analysis of the German coursebook shows that the book has a grammar based approach (one third of the book is dedicated to grammar matters), and it aims to improve native language usage through texts about culture. Moreover, the book also contains other texts explaining cultural values through lives of people from different cultures.

Turkish and German coursebooks have been compared in accordance with the third research question, and the results point that Turkish coursebook has more on national cultural values, and German coursebook has more information on grammar, phonology, syntax, and morphology, while introducing other cultures through texts. Subjects in both books can be considered within basic experience area.

Results prove that there is a further need to analyze all the books used in primary schools in more detail.

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