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THE EFFECTS OF A STUDY-ABROAD EXPERIENCE ON PRE-SERVICE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS' TEACHING PHILOSOPHIES

Summary. With the globalization of the world and the ease to travel to different parts of the globe, the popularity of exchange programs for students has increased. Many students around the world apply such programs in order to have international learning experiences in which they can, besides educational purposes, meet new social and cultural values while introducing their native cultures. As study-abroad experiences have attracted attention regarding their various effects on the participants, research focusing on students participating in such programs may provide useful insight on their contributions to pre-service teachers' teaching philosophies. Therefore, this study is intended to investigate the effects of a study-abroad experience on the way three pre-service teachers perceived the teaching profession and whether it modified their teaching philosophy. The data were collected through reflection reports and semi-structured interviews with three Turkish pre-service teachers who spent a semester in Hungary on a study-abroad experience. Content analysis was adopted for data analysis. The results revealed that the participants developed in terms of their linguistic, personal, social, cultural and educational understanding, which in turn contributed to their perceptions and conceptions of the teaching profession and caused them to adjust their teaching philosophies. In the light of these results, some suggestions are provided.

Keywords: study abroad experience; pre-service teachers; teaching philosophy; international experience.

Introduction

Globalization provides an impetus for nations around the world to share their cultural, linguistic and educational acquisitions with one another. Intercultural visits stimulate a sharing environment and form the basis for building global understanding and appreciation. As a type of intercultural visit, student exchange programs serve the purpose of cultural and educational sharing, enabling undergraduate students to directly observe and evaluate cultural, social and educational constructs in their natural settings from multiple perspectives.

Student exchange programs offer learners an international experience in which the participants can share their own linguistic, cultural, social and educational peculiarities, at the same time learning about those of the host country for a comprehensive evaluation of the similarities and differences. This process of observation and experience-sharing is of particular significance for pre-service foreign language teachers, who are expected to teach not only the linguistic elements of the target language, but also its social and cultural features. Therefore, an examination of the study-abroad experiences of prospective language teachers may be expected to provide a significant contribution to their future professional lives.

Amid the growing attention given to this area of study, international experiences have been shown to support students' linguistic development (Alred & Byram, 2002; Jackson, 2006), personal conceptions (Ateşkan, 2016; Rodriguez, 2011), psychological states (Niendorf & Alberts, 2017; Şahin, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001) and cultural sensitivity (Hadis, 2005; Jackson, 2006; Rapoport, 2011). These contributions are of great value for teacher training in general, and for foreign language teacher training, in particular; as language teachers serve as a bridge between two essential issue in human life: language and education. Therefore, though the personal, psychological and intercultural benefits of study-abroad experiences have been the subject of frequent investigation, the impact of the combination of these experiences on learners' conceptions of their professional identities and roles as prospective teachers still needs examination.

Literature Review

Research on the effect of international experiences on the professional conceptions and development of participants can be presented in two categories: studies on the experiences of in-service teachers and studies on the experiences of pre-service teachers.

For instance, in a qualitative study, Hamza (2010) worked with nine American faculty members and administrators who were employed at universities in the Arab region. Applying multiple tools for data collection such as phone interviews, follow-up interviews and documents, the researcher reported that there were observable changes in the personal and professional

perspectives of the participants. With regard to professional contributions, the participants noted that they benefitted from the observation of different classroom practices and that their global perspectives expanded as a result of this experience.

Another study on the international experiences of Fulbright participants was reported by Biraimah and Jotia (2012). Their data were collected from two groups of participants in two different projects. The first group was composed of four faculty members and eight teachers; the second consisted of two faculty members and eleven teachers and education students. Investigating the longitudinal effects of a study-abroad experience on the participants' field-specific knowledge and professional understanding, the researchers concluded that the experienced increased their content knowledge. In addition, the personal and professional views of the participants comprising their cultural awareness and preferences for teaching methodologies also expanded as a result of the project.

Furthermore, in an examination of the long-term effects of a month-long teaching abroad program, Driscoll et al. (2014) worked with a group of practitioners who were once student teachers participating in the project. Forty-nine participants were asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of both Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. The results revealed that their experiences in teaching abroad had a long-lasting positive impact on their professional skills. The participants reported that, as a result of this experience, they were better able to evaluate and reflect on their teaching practices. Moreover, they became more confident in their ability to critically analyze existing practices and to introduce different approaches and exercises.

The second group of studies centered on the benefits of international experiences on pre-service teachers' professional development. One of the seminal studies in this group belongs to Willard-Holt (2001), who examined the perceptions of twenty-two elementary pre-service teachers regarding a one-week-long international teaching experience. The results, obtained from the pre- and post- questionnaires, interviews and field notes, showed that the experience had a long-term impact on the personal and professional conceptions of the participants, and that their sensitivity and empathy towards different cultures had increased. In teaching, their patience increased; and

their reflective skills with respect to their teaching improved, with a broader consideration of global education.

Furthermore, Cushner and Mahon (2002), who worked with fifty student teachers participating an overseas experience; Barkhuizen and Feryok (2006), who conducted research with fifteen pre-service English second language teachers attending a six-week international program; Pence and Macgillivra (2008), who worked with fifteen teacher education students in a month-long intercultural experience; and Lee (2009), who studied with fifteen student teachers in a six-week overseas program; all reached similar results to those offered by Willar-Holt (2001). These researchers maintained that aside from linguistic, cultural and personal gains, the participants also benefitted from international experiences from a professional standpoint. By means of these experiences, participants developed more global-minded perspectives and improved their pedagogical understanding.

To evaluate the efficiency of a short-term international immersion trip for six pre-service students, Rodriguez (2011) conducted a qualitative study through open-ended questions, exploring the benefits of the experience from various standpoints. The results showed that the participants obtained both personal and professional benefits from the experience. For instance, as a result of increased cultural sensitivity, almost all of the participants stated that they were more willing to teach learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Lupi et al. (2012) focused on the contributions of a three-week international experience to the professional conception of fifty-six pre-service teachers as revealed in their reflection notes. The findings of this study pointed at a growing understanding of such pedagogical issues as the responsibilities of students and teachers, time management, classroom management and teaching materials. Kabilan (2013), moreover, carried out a study with six pre-service teachers based on their experiences in a six-week international teaching practicum. Their reflective journals and responses to open-ended questions demonstrated that the experience contributed positively to their professional understanding by increasing their teaching confidence, broadening their pedagogical perspectives, improving their communicative skills and raising their awareness of global educational matters.

In another case, Pilonieta, et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the changes in the professional perceptions of sixteen pre-

service language teachers. The results of their analysis of participant surveys, interviews and reflections showed that the experience of feeling like outsiders increased the participants' sense of empathy toward language learners, thus shaping their future pedagogical dispositions. A similar intensified level of empathy in participants as a result of international experiences was also reported by Pray and Marx (2010) and Marx and Pray (2011).

There are a small number of Turkish studies that have focused on study-abroad programs carried out in the Turkish context. One of these was carried about by Şahin (2008), in an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of an international internship program. Data was collected through surveys with twenty-six Turkish student teachers and their mentor teachers via mail; and interviews were conducted with six students. The researcher drew concluded that that the internship program helped the personal and professional development of the participants, in that observing the practices and applying them in their natural setting and having the chance to compare the systems in their culture with those of the target culture increased the students' self-confidence and cultural awareness and improved their professional conceptions. Similarly, Ozek (2009) investigated the efficacy of a teaching experience in Turkish schools, collecting data from five foreign pre-service teachers and eight Turkish student teachers. The results, obtained from open-ended questions and participant journals concerning their attitudes towards and expectations from the pre-teaching experience, revealed that the experience positively contributed to the personal and professional development of both groups. In the case of the foreign students, the participants noted that the overseas teaching experience offered them a chance to increase their self-confidence and cultural awareness, as well as providing them with greater insight about teaching. Examining the social and cultural experiences of nine students coming to Turkey with Erasmus program, Çelik, Kazazoğlu and Karaca (2013) reported, based on the results of the open-ended questionnaires, that though mostly holding positive attitudes towards the Turkish culture, the participants considered the culture inaccessible and could not improve their language skills in Turkish. In an examination of the experiences of Turkish pre-service teachers in a two-month international teaching experience, Ateşkan (2016) obtained data through questionnaires and reflective journals from 289 participants attending an international project over

a ten-year period. The participants reported appreciation for the personal and professional contributions of the international experience, explaining that their interactions with mentors, friends and people in the host country enlarged their knowledge of the new culture, thus positively affecting their teaching practice.

In light of the existing literature, one can conclude that international experiences of pre-service teachers for various durations have positive benefits in terms of personal development, linguistic improvement, cultural awareness and sensitivity, and global perspectives. In addition, these experiences have been shown to positively influence pre-service teachers' perceptions of teaching and to reinforce their conceptions of the profession. However, though there has been a gradual increase in the attention towards the contributions of international experiences to participants' professional understanding and development, further research is needed to shed more light on the benefits of these international visits to the professional development of participants. Therefore, the influence of study-abroad experiences on pre-service foreign language teachers' teaching philosophy, which is the personal beliefs about teaching and learning, needs further investigation, since these individuals will be tasked with training future generations with the consciousness of the importance of language education.

This study is expected to provide a different perspective towards the understanding of the international experiences in terms of their contributions to the formation and configuration of the teaching philosophies of pre-service teachers. Focusing on teaching philosophy changes of the participants can be considered essential in that they are prospective teachers who are supposed to shape language education processes in an effective way. The intercultural experiences through their participation in the exchange programs are expected to broaden the horizons of prospective language teachers in that the pre-service teachers are provided with ample chances of interaction in various social, cultural and pedagogical events, which are to help these students adopt more open-minded perspectives in their professional as well as personal and social lives.

Method

This study was grounded on case study design, since it enables the researcher to obtain and interpret in-depth and rich descriptions of the experiences of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) in the study-abroad process. Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, the following questions were selected to guide this study:

1. What are the general experiences of pre-service teachers in their study-abroad experiences?

2. How did these experiences influence the perceptions and conceptions of the participants towards the teaching profession?

These research questions were thought to form the basis of the study as they were centering around the way the participants thought about their roles in the profession (perception) and the way they understood their professional roles (conception). Their experiences in the international setting were thought to change how the participants' previous teaching philosophies.

Participants

The participants in the study were three junior students, (one female and two male) enrolled in an English Language Teaching Department at a state university in Turkey. The students spent a semester abroad in Hungary through the Erasmus program, where they took some departmental courses, as well as conducting cultural visits in both Hungary and some other European countries.

Prior to their participation in the study, the students were notified by mail that participation was voluntary and that they would be kept informed about the progress of the study. For this purpose, they were asked, again through mailing, to sign a consent form confirming voluntary participation.

Data Source and Collection Procedures

The data were collected through two instruments: reflection reports and semi-structured interviews. The main reason for utilizing two different data sources was to ensure validity and trustworthiness through data triangulation.

The first instrument consisted of reflection reports written by the participants. After examining previous literature, the researcher formulated a guide for the participants to follow when preparing their reports. A field expert was consulted to provide feedback on the items included in the guide, which included items such as the participants' personal, linguistic, social, cultural and educational challenges; the coping mechanisms they developed to deal with these challenges; and the overall contributions of these points to their conceptions of teaching. The participants were asked to prepare five reflection reports; one introductory report reflecting their expectations before going abroad and their first week's experiences in the host country and institution; three intermediary reports about the items provided in the guide; and one final report mirroring their overall experiences and evaluations of the participants concerning the international experience. The final report was like a summary of the whole experience and, besides referring to the items provided in the guide, the participants were also asked to narrate the particular way this experience influenced their teaching perspectives. The participants were expected to send the introductory report in the first week, the three middle reports in one-month intervals and the final report in the last week of their study-abroad experiences. These reports were gathered in certain intervals so that the researcher could observe the change and development in participant views over a process.

As soon as they had completed their study-abroad experience and returned to Turkey, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants, drawing on items prepared in accordance with points included in the participants' reflection reports. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and was recorded by the researcher. The recordings were transcribed by the researcher from Turkish to English, and a native speaker of English proofread the transcripts.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through the constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher conducted ongoing data analysis as the participants submitted their reflection reports. First, open coding was applied, wherein initial codes were identified from the data, and then

the researcher connected the codes into categories via axial-coding. The same procedure was followed for both data sets (the reflection reports and the semi-structured interviews) in terms of organizing the existing codes and categories. To ensure the trustworthiness and dependability of the analysis, the analyses of two data sets were compared with each other; the researcher also consulted a second rater to conduct additional analysis.

Results

This section presents the experiences of the participants in the study-abroad process, as well as the effects of these experiences on their perceptions and conceptions of being a pre-service foreign language teacher. The analysis pointed at two sub-sections: The expectations of the pre-service teachers prior to the study-abroad experience and the effects of the experience on their teaching philosophy. To better understand the influence of this international visit, the results are presented with sample quotations from the participants.

The expectations prior to the study-abroad experience

In their initial report, all three participants noted that they left Turkey with some hopes and expectations from their visit to the host country and institution. One of the notable expectations of the participants was the desire to compare and contrast the education system between Turkey and Hungary by observing the system in the host country. Since they received language education which placed emphasis mostly on the linguistic aspects of the target language in Turkey, the participants stated they expected that the host institution, as placed in a European country, would employ a system in which the communicative aspects of the language would be practiced more, as expressed by a participant as follows:

In Turkey, there is generally the wrong perception that the mastery of the target language means learning its grammatical rules and applying them correctly. And, unfortunately, I received language education in this framework till I came to university. Still, at university, I have some instructors not using English as the medium of instruction very much in classes. Therefore, before I

went to Hungary, I had high expectations about the way English would be used as the target language in educational settings. (from the interview)

Referring to a combination of different expectations, another participant also counted possible cultural and social experiences he could have in the study-abroad process. Like his friends, he expected a system in which the practical and interactional aspects of the target language would be much more integrated into instructional settings. With this expectation in mind, the participant aimed to make comparisons between the practices in these two countries to shape his teaching philosophy; therefore, his future professional career. The participant had additional expectations as regards the comparisons of the cultural and social aspects of the two countries:

The social, religious and cultural aspects of Turkey and Hungary are different. Both cultures have their own characteristics. I believe this experience will be a great chance for us to learn about a new culture and make comparisons between a different life style and ours. Besides the social and cultural aspects, I think the host institution will follow a more 'European' style in education. So, we can observe the differences and adopt the beneficial ones when we return back to Turkey (from the initial reflection report).

The effects of the study-abroad experience on the teaching philosophy of the pre-service teachers

To provide a more detailed examination of the effects of the study-abroad experience, the influence of different factors on the pre-service teachers' (PSTs hereafter) conceptions of teaching and on the changes in their teaching philosophy can be presented with reference to the effects of linguistic, personal, social, cultural and educational factors. These factors have common aspects with each other, inevitably forming a basis for intercultural experiences. The reason for presenting these aspects separately is to present the participants' reflections in detail.

The effects of language-related experiences on the teaching philosophy of PSTs. During their study-abroad experience, the participants reported using English as the common means of communication with students and the faculty in the host institution and with the local people in the host city. They were content that this experience helped them develop their communicative

competence in the target language and to use it in a much more confident and fluent way. Taking this language-related development into account, the participants appreciated the observable progress in their communicative skills and pointed at an increase in their awareness of the importance of using the target language competently, which altered their previously imposed perspective that language teachers should focus on the development of perfect linguistic mastery in the target language. One participant, who frequently referred to the change in his consideration of communicative competence in language learning and teaching, offered the below explanation:

I am really happy to have this experience. Aside from other benefits, this study-abroad experience helped me improve the way I use the target language... Previously, I was imposed the notion that language teachers should have perfect command of linguistic knowledge in the target language and I shaped my philosophy accordingly centering on how to teach the structural aspects. However, this experience changed my perspective as I could observe the way the instructors in the host institution were using the language successfully in communication, which resulted in better and effective teaching. I experienced the change in my teaching philosophy from a focus on the grammatical side of the language to a focus on its interactional side (from the interview).

The effects of personal experiences on the teaching philosophy of PSTs:
When they left their native country for the host country for the study-abroad experience, the participants inevitably took their personal characteristics with them. They later reported that they had both positive and negative experiences and that they developed strategies for dealing with different cases that reflected these characteristics. The combination of these experiences, whether positive or negative, enabled the participants to discover themselves and identify their strengths and weaknesses as human beings. These discoveries had an indirect impact on the teaching philosophy of the participants. One of the major effects was the realization of the participants that they could exceed their limitations more than they had anticipated, as they noted that the experience pushed them beyond their foreseeable capabilities. Seeing that they could go beyond their perceived boundaries can be considered essential for the participants because as prospective teachers they are to encounter

many cases in which they can be forced to exceed their limits, which was reflected in the below quote:

Before I had this experience, I was thinking that I had some rules and even if I become a teacher, nothing can change this. However, my personal experiences in the host institution and country showed me that I can act the way I hadn't thought of. This, I believe, helped me change my teaching philosophy because I once realized that the teaching profession involves many different cases in which I need to be flexible. While I once thought that I would have some strict attitude as a teacher, now I suppose I would be more flexible (from the final report).

Another impact of the personal experiences was that the participants could understand themselves better in terms of identifying their stronger and weaker aspects. This experience offered them a chance at self-realization, as maintained by a participant who reported some changes in her teaching philosophy:

Here, we have experienced many things, and I can say that I tested and discovered myself through these experiences. Now, I believe I know myself better; I know what I can or cannot do, I know my limits and capabilities. This personal realization actually influenced my teaching philosophy, as well. Previously, I thought that people could not change; that they would be who they are. Now, I believe that people can change and go beyond their limits. So, as a prospective teacher, I want to respect my students as unique individuals and plan to encourage them to understand who they actually are and be aware of their real potential by giving them chance to discover and express themselves (from the final report).

The effects of social experiences on the teaching philosophy of PSTs. The participants, either willingly or unwillingly, engaged themselves in different social environments and events in their study-abroad experience. Their participation in these events caused them to encounter different people with different lifestyles, cultures, aims and perspectives. Through their interactions, the participants both learned from them and taught them new ideas, which provided a unique opportunity to reach a more comprehensive and global understanding, awareness and appreciation of other people living in different parts of the world. The increase in global awareness through social experiences and interactions was naturally reflected in the ways that the participants

perceived their profession. For instance, one of the participants explained that before his visit to the host country, he had some prejudices against foreigners in general; but he stated that this all changed with the help of this study-abroad experience, in which he met people with different nationalities and religions. He explained that the social interactions and interchanges with these people increased his social and cultural sensitivity and global understanding and also broadened his cultural perspectives as a language teacher:

The social interactions, meeting new people and having new friends were all precious and helped me to have a broader and increased sense of understanding and appreciation. Now, I know that we are all human beings, whichever nationality we belong to... This experience reinforced my teaching philosophy. Now, when I become a language teacher, I plan to increase the global understanding of my students and their appreciation of diversity, which was not among the plans in my previous teaching philosophy (from an intermediary report).

The effects of cultural experiences on the teaching philosophy of PSTs.

The opportunities for cultural development created through visits within and outside the host country and through interactions with different people were among the points to which the participants frequently referred. In this sense, they stated that the cultural characteristics and patterns they observed during their study-abroad experience expanded their horizons and their world view; adding that this was particularly significant for them as prospective language teachers. Since language and culture are integrated concepts, the participants were glad that they could accumulate a variety of cultural experiences that could have benefits for their teaching. As one participant expressed:

In this study-abroad experience, we were able to visit different places and meet different people. These were great opportunities for us to learn about other cultures, and they increased our cultural sensitivity, awareness and knowledge. I believe this is especially important for us as language teachers, because language and culture are inseparable. I once again realized the importance of integrating cultural components in language teaching, which strengthened my teaching philosophy from the intercultural perspective (from an intermediary report).

The effects of educational experiences on the teaching philosophy of PSTs.

When making comparisons between the system in Turkey and abroad, the participants referred to several points. First of all, they observed that the system that was followed abroad was more student-centered; as learners were held to be responsible for their own learning. Having had the opportunity to directly observe this student-centered system, a participant conveyed his observations with the below statement:

The main difference between the Turkish system and Hungarian system was the student-centered education environment. Here (in Hungary), teachers have a guiding role; they are just showing students the way to reach knowledge... As I had been educated in a teacher-centered system, my teaching philosophy was shaped accordingly. However, upon directly experiencing the learners-centered style, I believe I can alter my philosophy towards a more student-centered educational style (from the final report).

Another aspect that the participants compared in terms of instructional applications was the way that multiple intelligences were integrated in classes in the host country. One participant stated that most instructors abroad utilized different materials during the classes to teach a given topic. In this way, they were able not only to attract students' attention, but also to present different aspects of a topic for better understanding. Favoring this type of lesson approach more than the traditional teaching style, this participant commented on his plans for future course designs:

We have been taught in the host institution that referring to multiple intelligences is important in language education, and I observed its effectiveness myself. While I was previously thinking of following the course book as the main material, I think I will integrate different materials referring to different intelligence types in my future teaching (from an intermediary report).

An additional noteworthy observation from their time abroad related to the contexts created for learning in some of the classes they observed. The participants stated that some instructors prepared different settings for their lessons and offered their learners a chance to acquire the topics in a more

enjoyable and permanent way. A participant who liked this application expressed the desire to implement a similar system in his own teaching:

I really liked the application of contextualization in the classroom, as this can be especially enjoyable and instructive... Therefore, I want to apply this contextualizing notion in my own classes. For example, if the topic is weather, I can create a context of rain in the class with my students; or if it is fruit and vegetables, we can go to a greengrocers' and buy some things to eat. They can have fun and learn. Observing and experiencing the application of contextualization really helped me the way I perceived contextualization, affecting my teaching philosophy from a more traditional to a more contextual way of teaching (from the interview).

The final point in the participant comments about the effects of the educational experience is related to the issue of assessment. The participants reported that the way students were assessed in most of the classes in the host institution was more of a process-based system, wherein it was important for students to be evaluated not only on their final products, but also on their progress throughout the process. Finding this type of assessment system more effective in language education, a participant provided the below remark:

I can now better evaluate the outcomes of product-based and process-based assessment, because I have been assessed in both styles... As a student and a prospective language teacher, I changed my mind from the traditional product-based assessment to the contemporary process-based assessment. While I was favoring traditional system more before, in order to truly evaluate the development of my students, I plan now to follow process-based assessment when I become a teacher (from an intermediary report).

In conclusion, the results revealed that the study-abroad experiences of the participants offered them the opportunity to gain personal, social, cultural and pedagogical experiences the combination of which helped them to modify their teaching philosophies. It can be inferred from the results that the participants developed their teaching philosophies as pre-service teachers under the influence of what they had been exposed during their educational lives as students. However, this international experience provided them with the opportunity to consider previously-held beliefs and ideas from different

perspectives, naturally influencing their teaching philosophies. Throughout this study-abroad experience, the participants could make comparisons between the social, cultural and educational systems in their home and host country and could benefit from their experiences in the process of modifying their teaching philosophies in terms of language instruction.

Discussion

The overall results of this study revealed that the study-abroad experience made positive contributions to the participants in terms of their linguistic, personal, social, cultural and educational development. In addition, the combination of all these factors became sources of inspiration for the PSTs to reshape their existing teaching philosophies as prospective foreign language teachers.

One of the contributions of the study-abroad experience was improvement in the target language. Living abroad for a semester was a great opportunity for the participants to use English, which is the target language for them, as the common means of interaction with people in the host country. This practice naturally resulted in the development of their linguistic and communicative skills, as underlined in Alred and Byram's (2002) and Jackson's (2006) studies. This language-related development is also of particular importance since it helped the participants to modify their previously imposed perception that language education should be based on full mastery of linguistic aspects of the language. As teachers of future, the participants felt the need to develop their interactive skills in the target language, changing their teaching philosophy.

Another benefit noted by the participants was the personal development stemming from the study-abroad experience; this is also among the reported contributions of international experiences in many other studies (Niendorf & Alberts, 2017; Pilonieta, et al., 2017; Scoffham & Barnes, 2009). The participants in the present study stated that they were able to test themselves and better identify their strengths and weaknesses during their stay abroad as well as developing a personal understanding of the world as also noted in Ozek's (2009) and Rodriguez's (2011) research on pre-service teachers' study-abroad experiences. The experiences in the process created

opportunities for the participants to better understand themselves through self-realization, which is said to be an essential phase in human life (Rodriguez, 2011), as it informs future decisions and actions. Although it may seem to be a personal matter, self-realization is in fact necessary for teachers in their professional lives, because without knowing themselves and their limitations and capabilities, teachers are neither able to overcome their own limitations nor help their learners to go beyond theirs. Therefore, it can be commented that the experiences of the participants better knowing their personal identities helped them better shape their professional identities.

The enhanced social development brought about by their experiences in the study-abroad process was also among the factors promoting the participants' conceptions of teaching. As with Alred and Byram (2002), in their examination of the short-term and long-term effects of study-abroad process on teaching assistants, the social interactions experienced in diverse contexts enabled the participants to meet new people and learn new things about their cultures and lifestyles in the course of cultural interactions. A similar result was also reported by Kabilan (2013), who expressed that such experiences allow participants to "learn from and about each other, and understand the different ideas and philosophies of diverse groups of individuals" (p. 198). This atmosphere of interchanging ideas, notions and experiences creates a unique opportunity for personal and social growth. Moreover, this bi-directional experience-sharing stimulates empathy and understanding among participants towards personal, social and cultural differences (Malewski & Phillion, 2009; Ochoa, 2010) through the process of observing how things are and how they are conducted in other parts of the globe (Goldoni, 2007). All in all, the social experiences of the participants can be said to have affected the way they considered their professional roles not only as knowledge-providers but also as culture-presenters, integrating language and culture in the education process.

The primary contribution of the social interactions in the study-abroad experience was related to the development of a global understanding and appreciation, along with increased respect and acceptance of the individuals themselves and of other people; this benefit was also noted by researchers such as Willard-Holt (2001); Cushner and Mahon (2002); Phillion, et al. (2009) and Çelik, et al. (2013), in their investigations of the effects of international experiences. This global-minded perspective was created by establishing

interactions with different world citizens during the participants' stay in the host country and their visits to other countries. These opportunities facilitated the broader understanding that all people are equal, no matter their nationality or religion (Takkaç Tulgar, 2017). Developing this sense of equality and global mindset is of paramount significance for teachers, especially language teachers who are meant to spread this understanding through foreign languages and who are tasked with supporting future generations in developing certain global values.

Since language and culture are inseparable, the cultural gains in this international experience are also worthy of discussion. The participants in this study noted that they learned a great deal from their cultural visits and interactions, and that these new understandings expanded their world knowledge and cultural awareness. Therefore, it can be stated that the study-abroad experience was a significant opportunity for the PSTs to familiarize themselves with various cultures by examining them in their authentic setting. In this way, as also expressed in the studies conducted by Willard-Holt (2001), Papatsiba (2006), Pence and Macgillivray (2008) and Leutwyler and Meierhans (2016), the participants developed their cultural awareness and respect. Additionally, besides cultural awareness with respect to other nations, the participants were encouraged to "hold up a mirror" (Stevens, 2000, p. 45) to their own culture and become more aware of their own cultural identities (Dolby, 2004), a point which was also highlighted by Takkaç Tulgar (2018). Awareness of their own culture, as well as other world cultures, may be helpful for PSTs in terms of guiding their students more consciously in developing their cultural knowledge and increasing their respect and appreciation for diversity, which helped the participants to direct their teaching philosophies towards a more global teaching perspective, which was also highlighted by Yoon (2008) explaining that language learners need not only "effective teaching methods but also teachers who care and are sensitive to their cultural differences and needs" (p. 517).

The contributions of the educational experiences to the teaching philosophies of the participants are also indisputable. First of all, the study-abroad experience provided the participants with the opportunity, as also emphasized in other studies (Biraimah & Joita, 2012; Clement & Outlaw, 2002; Pilonieta, et al., 2017; Rodriguez, 2011; Şahin, 2008), to observe and make

comparisons between the systems in their home country and the host country, noting their advantages and disadvantages. This enabled the participants in the present study to recognize that the European system places much greater emphasis on student-centered teaching. In this respect, the participants reported that the host institution was following this system better than a majority of Turkish institutions. The participants in this study explained that most of the students in the host country were instructed to take responsibility for their own learning, a situation that has been observed by participants in other studies (Ateşkan, 2016; Driscoll & Rowe, 2012). Influenced by their direct observations of this case not in theory, but in application, the participants decided to modify their teaching philosophies, noting that they planned to follow a student-centered approach in their teaching, assuming the role of a professional guide and directing learners in the educational process.

In sum, the results of this study indicated that the study-abroad experience positively contributed to the participants in many areas. They became more self-aware, more sensitive and respectful towards other communities and cultures, more global-minded and more empathetic. What was more promising was that all of the experiences became thought-provoking cases that encouraged the participants to analyze the teaching profession from different perspectives and inspired them to make alterations to their teaching philosophies as prospective foreign language teachers.

Through their observations and experiences during the study-abroad experience, the pre-service teachers in the present study were encouraged to break down the stereotypes coming from familiar ways of forming their teaching philosophies imposed by their experiences in the more traditional teaching-learning contexts. While previously holding a more teacher-centered perspective in which linguistic aspects of the target language were placed emphasis, the participants were motivated to adjust the basis upon which they would establish their future teaching philosophies valuing intercultural understanding towards other communities, empathy towards language learners and the ability to critically analyze the teaching methods. Referred to as fieldwork by Byram (1997), this experience offered the participants a context in which they were able to compare their linguistic, social, cultural and educational systems with those of the host country in different dimensions and reach a more intercultural and global appreciation of the differences; this

positively affected their teaching philosophies and professional identities as prospective teachers. In other words, this experience influenced what the participants would "teach and how, as well as their perceptions and attitudes towards other countries and cultures" (Burn, 1980, p. 131). As such, these pre-service teachers can pass the benefits of this accumulation of experiences in their teaching by conveying their knowledge and experience to their students.

However, the fact that the degree of benefit a participant can gain from such an experience depends more on the individual than on other factors should not be overlooked. If the person is shy or not willing to participate in different communities and engage in interchange of ideas or experiences, then s/he is less likely to experience the advantages of the intercultural visit. Regarding this matter, Bennett (1993) maintains that the gains out of these experiences do not come naturally; individual effort is required to achieve the full benefit.

Several limitations to this study should also be noted. The first of these is the number of participants; with only three participants attending study-abroad program in that term; the data were limited to their experiences. Additional research with a larger number of participants may be recommended. Furthermore, future studies with pre-service teachers traveling to other countries may be carried out to make comparisons between multiple educational settings. Finally, the study was limited in terms of the data collection tools, which consisted of reflection reports and semi-structured interviews. Researchers may consider developing scales to evaluate changes in participants as a result of study-abroad experience from various aspects.

Conclusion

During their study abroad, the participants were exposed to a field experience as pre-service foreign language teacher, observing a foreign setting from diverse standpoints. They all noted that they were able to internalize a variety of experiences and that they gained various benefits from the process that positively influenced their existing teaching philosophies.

In light of the results of this study, some pedagogical suggestions can be provided to maximize the positive contributions of study-abroad experiences:

- The frequency and length of the opportunities for study-abroad experiences should be increased to offer more exposure to diverse cultures, with more opportunities for interaction.
- The quota for the number of students to participate in international experiences should also be increased to provide more students with the chance of enhancing their world view and broadening their educational perspectives.
- The frequency of these programs should also be considered for inclusion in an educational faculty to allow more pre-service teachers to enhance their personal and professional identities through comparisons between different systems.
- The curriculum in ELT departments should be revised to encompass more internationalized content in order to develop a global perspective in teachers who are responsible for educating future generations.
- Students participating in study-abroad experiences should be encouraged, through the provision of some theoretical content and practical chances, to benefit not just from the educational aspects, but from the social and cultural aspects, as well; since the combination of all types of gains naturally influence the professional viewpoints of the participants.
- Students who attend such programs may be encouraged to keep reflection reports to observe the changes in their perspectives over a given period. This may motivate them to engage in greater efforts to develop themselves. In addition, when these experiences are shared in related courses or in informal conversations, they can encourage other students to participate in these programs.

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STUDIJŲ UŽSIENYJE ĮTAKA IKIMOKYKLINIO UGDYMO UŽSIENIO KALBŲ MOKYTOJŲ UGDYMO FILOSOFIJAI

Santrauka. Studentų mainų programų populiarumas ženkliai išaugo dėl globalizacijos ir galimybės laisvai keliauti į skirtingas pasaulio šalis. Daugelis studentų iš viso pasaulio dalyvauja šiose programose ne tik dėl švietimo tikslų, tačiau tam kad įgytų tarptautinės mokymosi patirties, taip pat galėtų susipažinti su naujomis socialinėmis ir kultūrinėmis vertybėmis bei pristatytų savo gimtąją kultūrą. Dauguma mokslininkų analizuodami studijų užsienyje patirtis atkreipė dėmesį į skirtingą jų poveikį dalyviams, todėl studentų dalyvavusių šiose programose tyrimas gali suteikti naudingos informacijos apie šių patirčių indėlį į ikimokyklinio ugdymo užsienio kalbų mokytojų ugdymo filosofiją. Šio tyrimo tikslas yra ištirti studijų užsienyje poveikį trijų ikimokyklinio ugdymo amžiaus vaikų mokytojų profesijos suvokimui ir įtaką jų ugdymo filosofijai. Duomenys buvo renkami pusiau struktūrizuoto interviu metodu, taip pat klausantis pranešimų ir įvairių apmąstymų. Tyrimui pasirinkti trys turkų ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokytojai, kurie vieną semestrą dalyvavo studijų užsienyje programoje Vengrijoje. Empirinio tyrimo metu gauti duomenys ištirti turinio analizės metodu. Rezultatai parodė, kad dalyviai patobulino savo lingvistinį, asmeninį, socialinį, kultūrinį ir edukacinį suvokimą, kuris prisidėjo prie jų mokytojo profesijos suvokimo ir sampratos, ir paskatino pritaikyti šias žinias ugdymo filosofijoje. Atsižvelgiant į šiuos rezultatus yra pateikiami pasiūlymai.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: studijų užsienyje patirtis; ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokytojai; ugdymo filosofija; tarptautinė patirtis.