

Full Length Research Paper

Becoming a dreamcatcher: Pre-service EFL teachers' experience of culturally relevant pedagogy as agents of flexibility

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Received 19 June, 2023; Accepted 21 July, 2023

The dynamics of the 21st century human life calls for adaptability to diversity, change and the ability to remove borders. Teacher education, in the midst of changes in social life, also calls for raising questions about pedagogical practices that can serve as a tool to make a difference. In this study, culturally relevant pedagogy is demonstrated as a promising strategy in promoting a positive environment in EFL classes that has the power to encourage acceptance of multiple perspectives, maintaining positive relationships and healthy thinking. In relation, this article aims to investigate pre-service EFL teachers' experience of culturally relevant pedagogy in order to become a culturally responsive teacher. The participants were a group of 40 students, who were the pre-service teachers of an English language teacher education program at a state university in western Turkey. The pre-service EFL teachers registered for an elective English course, Language and Culture, conducted during the 2021-2022 fall academic year. The objective was to promote pedagogical ideas for the pre-service teachers' future teaching practices. The qualitative data was gathered through narrative frames and focus group interviews and the analysis of the qualitative data indicated that the special modules designed for the course enabled them to become a culturally responsive teacher who could build resilience for their professional journeys and promote a non-judgmental mind in a multicultural setting.

Key words: Culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teacher, pre-service teacher education, English language teaching, resilience building, Syrian students in Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

According to Ladson-Billings (2009, p. 131) *Telling Isn't Teaching* as teachers in the 21st century can be identified as agents of flexibility and change, whom are expected to be aware of and well-prepared for the dynamics of multicultural classrooms that inherently welcome cultural diversity (Pantić and Florian, 2015;

Bourn, 2016; Datnow, 2020; Clausen et al., 2023). Therefore, teacher education programs must incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy to promote pre-service teachers to become culturally responsive instructors. As a competency for the 21st century, becoming a culturally responsive teacher can be regarded as a vital element of

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teacher education programs for culture and can be interpreted as a vital element of language and the language classroom (Mitchell and Myles, 2004; Ho, 2009). The indispensable relation between language and culture and vice versa (Halliday and Hassan, 1989; Moran, 2001) is also the root of the positive learning environment in which both the learners and the teacher act as citizens of the world. Therefore, the role of the teacher educators should encapsulate training of pre-service teachers to become culturally responsive individuals who are ready to respond to cultural diversity in the classroom as agents of flexibility and as global citizens.

In such an age, cultural boundaries are blurred with historical forces such as immigration and the characteristics of the 21st century such as globalization. It is therefore not surprising to define cultural awareness as a necessary skill for intercultural communication (Baker, 2009). Intercultural skills can be regarded as an essential element for a user of English as an intercultural communicator. As mentioned by Fantini (2012), intercultural competence also empowers the skills for an *affective* and *appropriate* intercultural communication to overcome cultural and linguistic differences. English language classrooms can be identified as one of the ideal places that have the potential to develop intercultural communicative competence (Young and Sachdev, 2011). However, in order to develop intercultural communicative competence, the teacher should be a culturally responsive teacher who is ready to develop pedagogies in culturally diverse classrooms (Bottiani et al., 2018). This study examined pre-service EFL teachers' experience of culturally responsive pedagogy. The following research questions were asked:

1. How do students' perceptions of their professional and individual identity evolve after their experience with culturally responsive pedagogy?
2. How does the special module alter the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers regarding the Syrian students in Turkey and British people, who are the representatives of the target language they will teach?

CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY AS AN AGENT OF FLEXIBILITY

When one thinks about the diversity in American culture, it may not be difficult to surmise that culturally relevant pedagogy originated from USA scholarship. Stressing the vital necessity of pedagogy as a strategic tool for teacher education, numerous practitioner scholars have underlined the importance of —multicultural teacher preparation in the 21st century” (Gay and Howard, 2000, p.3) as they believe that “the cultural and social distance between the student and the teachers” grows at an alarming rate and this can affect the instructional process

negatively (Gay, 1993, p. 287). In line with this, practitioner-scholars such as Gloria Ladson Billings, Geneva Gay, and Ana Maria Villegas and Tamara Lucas, who can be regarded as the pioneers of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), place cultural diversity and culturally responsive teachers at the center of education. These key researchers in the area concerned about the needs of diverse learners in such a multicultural world and the need of teacher candidates who are ready to understand how the dynamics of culture effect the teaching and learning process in classroom to create a better learning environment (Gay, 1993) and the ways to promote social justice and educational equity in classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Social justice, which is one of the core values of culturally responsive pedagogy, in education depends upon the belief that regardless of their background, race, gender, ethnicity, or other factors all students are valued and respected. Fostering a sense of belonging, social justice in education seeks to eliminate educational disparities.

Several terms can be used to define CRP including culturally congruent, culturally appropriate, culturally responsive or culturally relevant pedagogy, which was coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings, as one of the key researchers of the area. CRP asserts that learning should be connected to the main components of social, economic, political, ethnic and linguistic elements of daily life that promotes the necessary skills for the students —to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20). Placing diversity and culture at the center of educational conundrum, CRP derives its origin from the need of developing an educational system to safeguard minority students in the USA and creating classroom environment in which diversity is valued (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and in which learning is *for all students* through empowering teachers who are naïve about the difficulties of their job and the significance of cultural community as an integral part of their professional life (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Various research practitioners highlight that students should be aware of the fact that education has the power to eliminate the challenges that originate from differences among social groups (Sleeter, 2011; Samuels, 2018; Ladson-Billings, cited in de Silva et al., 2018, p. 27; Rodríguez-Abitia, 2023). CRP not only focuses upon the needs of the culturally diverse students but also empowering teacher candidates to be ready for such a multicultural learning environment (O’Keeffe et al., 2019; Maybin, 2019; Acquah and Szelei, 2020; Barrio, 2021). The important question is to what extent CRP can help the teacher and students to create a meaningful connection between their cultural community and individual identities (Ladson-Billings, 1994). While CRP, places connectedness with all students, it also creates pathways to promote a culturally responsive teacher who can develop *psychological safety* (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 79) in the classroom where the students feel

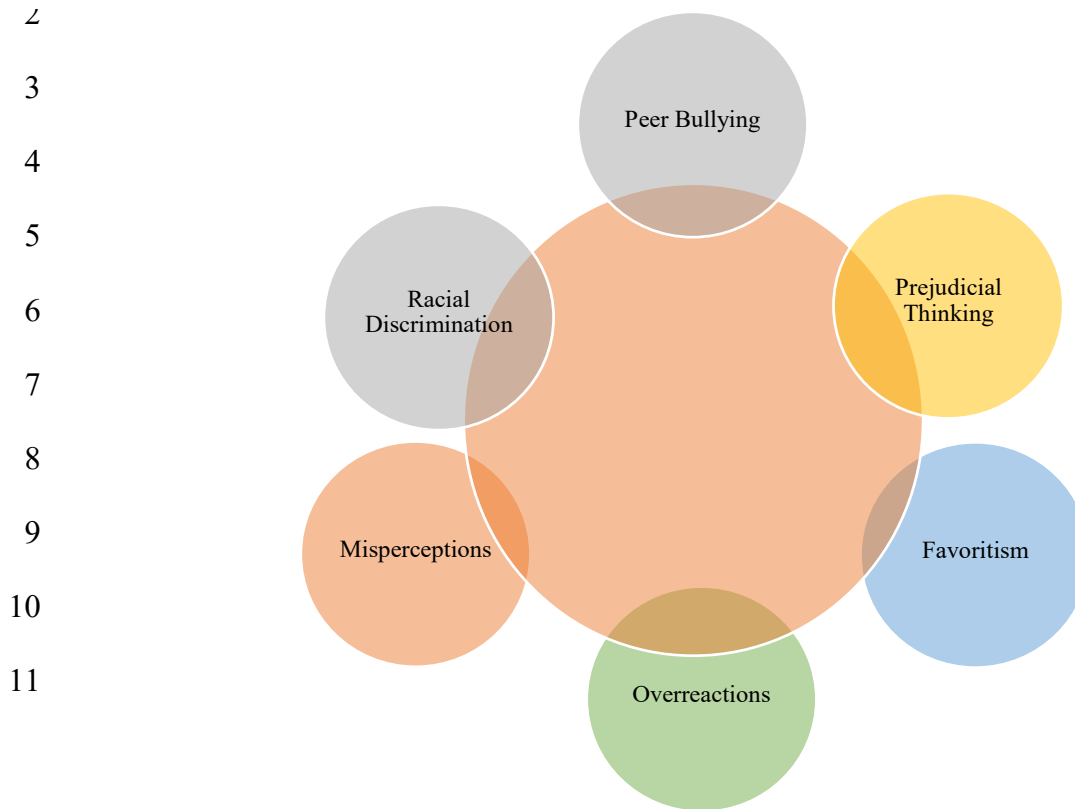


Figure 1. Defining culturally responsive teacher as a dreamcatcher.
Source: Author

themselves secure and supported (Billings, 2009) as culturally relevant teaching aims to eliminate racism, inequality, prejudice and injustice in social life (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Underlined by Ladson-Billings, CRP has the power to encourage pre-service teachers to become agents of change in order to promote equality and flexibility (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p.145). In line with this, culturally responsive teachers can act as agents of flexibility who can build mutual support and understanding as CRP believes that there is an indispensable relation between good teaching and good relationships (Ladson-Billings, 2009). While CRP concentrates upon promoting an environment of flexibility for culturally diverse learners, it also encourages teacher candidates to become agents of flexibility.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHERS AS DREAMCATCHERS

Each student has different needs and even coming from the same cultural background in the same country cannot change the reality that each family has its own cultural system and values. In such a multicultural and diverse social milieu that calls for flexibility, teachers should take into account the cultural therefore, ethnic differences in

the learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In *The Dream Keepers: Successful Children of African American Children*, Gloria Ladson-Billings underlines the importance of “keeping the dream alive” (2009, p.xvi) rather than identifying the cultural diversity as despair. Deriving inspiration from Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous speech “have a Dream”, Ladson-Billings underlines the need for sustained efforts to overcome systematic barriers and advocating equality and justice in education, especially for minority groups. She defines culturally responsive teachers as “theDreamkeepers” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. xvi) and she believes that the dream of equal opportunity for all students should be kept alive through educational practices. In line with this, the culturally responsive teacher can be interpreted as a metaphorical dreamcatcher. According to Native American traditions, a dreamcatcher is a symbol of protection, which is used to catch negative thoughts and dreams throughout the sleeping process just like a spider’s web. In this context, the term dreamcatcher is used to define a culturally responsive teacher in class, who acts like a symbolic dreamcatcher to protect the classroom environment from negative elements such as prejudice, misperceptions, prejudicial thinking and eliminate them (Figure 1).The culturally responsive teacher can create a web of relationships that is designed

to catch the possible negative elements in a classroom as that kind of pedagogy gives a way for maintaining positive relationships developed between the teacher and the student (Abacioglu et al., 2020; O'Leary et al., 2020).

Cultivating an environment of flexibility, in which differences and diversity are accepted as wealth, the culturally responsive teacher can cultivate an environment of mutual respect that can allow students to value everyone and honor differences. As a dreamcatcher, the increasingly complex demographic changes therefore would no longer serve as an obstacle for a culturally responsive teacher. The integration of CRP to the curricula of teacher preparation programs with the best possible approaches and strategies can promote the ability to understand and value differences. Educational practices of teacher education programs should therefore match the needs of the new theoretical perspectives, such as culturally responsive pedagogy, critical pedagogy, social-emotional learning (SEL), and universal design for learning (UDL), which can address the needs of the dynamism of multicultural classrooms. To promote equity and justice, teacher education must support culturally responsive pedagogy as a central area of investigation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design

Narrative inquiry is employed as the starting point of the current study. As a qualitative research approach, narrative inquiry aims to explore and understand individuals' lived experiences through the analysis of stories or narratives. Narrative inquiry analyzes stories and personal accounts to gain insights into their perspectives and the central focus is to examine how individuals make sense of their experiences and how they construct their stories. Narrative inquiry allows researchers to capture the experiences and complexities of individuals through an in-depth analysis of written documents (Chase, 2011). Narrative inquiry is used in this study as it gives the participants the opportunity to link their experiences and actions to make a story lived and told (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 68). Narrative research places the personal story at the center of collecting lived experiences that empowers the researcher to create meaning from the stories (Riessman, 2005). While listening and understanding the stories, narrative inquiry opens a "... window into people's beliefs and experiences" (Bell, 2002, p. 209) which helps the researcher to look for deeper meanings. In line with this, narrative inquiry encourages the researcher to analyze the stories of the participants flexibly to unveil the hidden meanings and messages behind their reflections. In this study, in order to draw meaning from narrative frames, the data collection process was followed by transcription and documentation. While capturing the narratives in written form, preserving the original content and structure was important. So as to gain a deep understanding of participants' lived experiences, themes and the context, the narratives were read and re-read. Focusing upon the commonalities or patterns emerged from the data; codes were assigned to specific elements or themes through thematic analysis. After looking for recurring themes or patterns across the narratives, similar codes were grouped together to form overarching themes or categories. Within the light of research questions and objectives, the relationships between the themes were examined. The findings

were documented in a clear and coherent manner. Finally the results of the narrative inquiry were presented, including supporting evidence from the narratives including the identified themes. The data analysis procedure involved revisiting previous steps as new insights emerged.

Participants and setting

The participants of the current study were 40 (20 females and 20 males) Turkish speaking pre-service teachers of an undergraduate English language teacher preparation program at a public university in western Turkey. The participants were between the ages of 18 and 30 and the study was conducted during the 2021-2022 fall academic year within the scope of the elected course *Language and Culture*. All the participants enrolled voluntarily on the elected course. The majority of the participants planned to be English language teachers and some of them had experiences abroad or lived abroad some time in their lives while others had foreign English-speaking friends. Under the supervision of the researcher, who has been the instructor of the same department and university, the students were exposed to culturally relevant pedagogy for the first time and 10 students (5 females and 5 males) participated in the focus group interviews. The participants were informed that their participation would be independent from the grading process and they all participated voluntarily and signed the consent forms.

Procedure

The conceptual framework of the course design encapsulates a multi-cultural education. In the autumn of 2021-2022, the researcher who conducted the course designed a syllabus to integrate culturally relevant pedagogy into the students curricula. The course was an elected course and the objective of the course was to develop pedagogical ideas for the participants' future teaching practices. The curriculum of the 14-weeks course covered the detailed analysis of the cuisine, literature, body language and gestures, popular culture, education systems, music, cinema, art, values and beliefs of 10 different cultures. Culturally, relevant pedagogy is infused into the course to encourage the pre-service teachers to interpret themselves as cultural beings and to develop cultural and ethnic knowledge about self and others for teaching students of all backgrounds. The multicultural background of the course is designed to encourage transformative learning for the participants' future teaching practices. The course content aimed to reflect diverse cultures and perspectives incorporating readings and materials to provide inclusive learning experience. The students were encouraged to explore how race and ethnicity influenced their experiences as a pre-service teacher and as an individual. Critical examination of power dynamics was supported by a positive learning environment and the participants encouraged sharing their perspectives through respectful discussions in order to foster self-reflection. Videos were also integrated into the course content to help the pre-service teachers to broaden their perspectives about minority groups. So as to empower the participants to take action for positive changes for minority groups, social justice issues were added to the course content. The voluntary participation was a wealth for the study and the course was taught in English. The pre-service teachers were divided into groups to encourage collaborative research. Each group chose a different culture and the members of the groups gathered outside the faculty to discuss the results of their researches and then they designed their presentations.

The specific cultures of the presentations were chosen as a result of the interest of the pre-service teachers. The teacher educator, who was also the researcher of the study, did not intervene in the selection process of the cultures. The participants

selected the culture they wanted to study and the teacher educator waited for them to see whether they would choose Syrian or British culture but none of them mentioned these cultures. Then the researcher underlined Syrian culture as there are many Syrian students in EFL classes in Turkey and British culture which represents the target language they will teach. Two of the groups preferred to change their subject and decided to present Syrian and British culture. The goal of the intercultural perspective of the course was to encourage pre-service teachers to interpret themselves as cultural beings. To encourage multicultural teacher preparation for the 21st world, cultural diversity was infused into the teaching process in order to make the participants develop cultural awareness and to realize multicultural requirements of a 21st century teacher. Over the semester, the participants were exposed to values, beliefs, traditions and important features of social life of different cultures. The students prepared their presentations and some of the groups brought the traditional foods and costumes of the selected culture that created a positive environment in the classroom.

According to the comments of the students, it can be assumed that the students enjoyed the multicultural course content. For instance many defined the course as “interesting,” “enjoyable,” “discoverable,” “didactic,” “attractive,” “entertaining,” and “fun.” They demonstrated how they felt after they had participated the course with the following words:

I felt like a tourist each week, visiting different places, tasting different foods, and I felt as if my friends who presented each culture as tourist guides (PST 10).

A young girl's best day on which she got many presents (PST 7).

A never-ending story in which I was feeling utterly free. Differences made me feel free (PST 33).

I was always curious about the diversity and richness of language and culture; the course was a great gift for me (PST 40).

A travel all around the world (PST 37).

An adventure times episode (PST 18).

Going to a completely different place for the first time (PST 29).

Data collection

The instruments used in this research were narrative frames and focus group interview. The narrative frame used in the study (Appendix) includes incomplete sentences and blank spaces in order to encourage the participants to share their experiences flexibly (Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 402). Narrative frames were used in the study to understand how the pre-service teachers link their experiences and the circumstances that shape their stories (Glesne, 2016). Data collection for this study also included focus group interviews of 10 (5 were females and 5 were males) pre-service EFL teachers who were part of the study. Interviewees were in the second, third and fourth grade to promote diversity. The focus group questions were developed in the light of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay and Howard, 2000). The interview protocol questions were conducted to gain in-depth information about pre-service teachers' experience of culturally responsive pedagogy. The focus group discussions were audio taped with the consent of the participants and transcribed and based on the following questions:

1. What does culturally responsive pedagogy used in the course mean to you?

2. What are the effects of culturally relevant pedagogy upon your professional and individual identity?

Data analysis

After the data were obtained, student excerpts were not corrected grammatically in order to preserve originality; the researcher transcribed and analyzed them within the light of thematic analysis procedure followed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis suited well to the analysis of the qualitative data gathered through the narrative frames and focus group interviews as thematic analysis is a method that promotes a systematic way to identify, organize and offer insight into the myriad of themes from the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p.57). Thematic analysis offered a certain kind of flexibility to the researcher to focus upon the preservice teachers' experiences of culturally responsive pedagogy as the narrators of their own lived experiences and their reflections highlighted in the themes gathered from the data set. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6 steps for thematic analysis, the researcher first familiarized herself with the data, and then she generated initial codes. She then searched for themes, reviewed, defined and named them. Finally, she produced the report. The use of thematic analysis in this study facilitated identifying and analyzing of the patterns of the qualitative data gathered from narrative frames and focus group interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The narrative frames and the transcriptions of the focus group interviews were re-read to highlight the frequency counts carried out and to search for commonalities and differences. The theme, which is the overarching theme, becoming a culturally responsive teacher organized into categories as 1 general theme; resilience building for professional journey, and 2 sub-themes; development of professional and individual identity, and development of a non-judgmental behavior (mind) that all mean maintaining a greater perspective as the prominent characteristic of a culturally responsive teacher.

Validity and reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, an independent researcher who is an expert of English language teaching for 25 years in the same ELT department analyzed and coded the data. The researcher of the study came together with the independent researcher and the data set was read and re-read. The theme and subthemes were based on the researchers' consensus and the reflexive exercise of the researchers helped them to identify whether their previous experiences have an impact upon their interpretation of the data (Braun and Clarke 2012).

FINDINGS

According to the qualitative data analyzed, the study revealed that pre-service teachers' vision of their future teaching experiences were affected positively as a result of their experience of culturally responsive pedagogy. The first noteworthy point to discuss is the pre-service teachers' building resilience for their professional journeys that promoted a non-judgmental mind, self-confidence, maintaining positive relationships and development of positive coping strategies. While narrative frame excerpts are underlined as PST with numbers, focus group interviews are presented as FG with numbers in the study. The qualitative findings are presented successively.

Becoming a culturally responsive teacher

Resilience building for professional journey (maintaining a bigger perspective)

Building resilience is the general theme of the qualitative data that showcased the result that culturally responsive pedagogy helped pre-service teachers' development of positive coping strategies in class as an emphatic, self-confident and non-judgmental individual and teacher.

Development of professional and individual identity

The qualitative data indicates that the participants' experience in culturally responsive pedagogy encouraged the participants to develop their professional and individual identity in a positive way. While their perceptions of their profession altered throughout the process, their interpretation of themselves as an individual was also affected in a positive way. The pre-service teachers displayed an enhancement of conceptual understanding of their profession and individual identity. Almost all of the participants interpreted the need for culturally responsive pedagogy as a —**must**” (PST 2; 11; 16; 20; 21; 27; 29; 33; 35, FG 3; 9; 10) or —a necessity” for a teacher candidate (PST3;8;12;14;17;22;26;28;30;32;34;38;40;FG2;5;8). The frequency of the use —**must**” and —a necessity” demonstrates that they recognized a culturally responsive teaching as a —**must**” after they had experienced culturally relevant pedagogy. The excerpts below display the need of becoming a culturally responsive teacher as a —**must**” or —a necessity” for an EFL teacher:

Knowing their cultural codes make it easier for me to understand other people from different cultures. If I have foreign students, I will communicate with them easily. As a teacher this is a must (PST 21).

Now, as I know English people and culture better I can teach that language more consciously. As a teacher this is a must (PST 35).

I was able to see the differences among cultures. As a teacher this means more empathy more tolerance and a better learning environment. I realized that a teacher should have the power to be tolerant and emphatic. This is a great necessity for a teacher. I begin to interpret my profession from a different perspective (PST 8).

I am able to interpret different perspectives and cultures respectfully this can provide me to become a better teacher as I believe that having the power to communicate interculturally is a must for a teacher (PST 27).

The course content must be taken as an important lesson by everyone.

It showed us differences and similarities and how to live with them. I am not aware of the fact that culture is that much important as an important necessity for an EFL teacher (PST 40).

The participants agreed that their experience of culturally responsive pedagogy helped them to interpret their profession from a different perspective and helped them to build resilience as they remarked that after the course they begun to feel themselves stronger as a professional and as an individual who is more emphatic than before. Many of the participants emphasized that their experience of culturally responsive pedagogy helped them to recognize professional and individual identity as a whole. As the following excerpts indicate:

As a teacher and as an individual, I learned about daily life, cuisine, education system, body language and gestures, what to do and not to do in public and in my classes. This is a great gift for a pre-service teacher and for an individual who wants to act as a civilized being (FG 3).

I realized that I did not know anything about different cultures; this would be a tragic gap for a teacher...Not to know how to act to foreign students. I did not even think about this. The course helped both my professional life and my social life (PST 10).

The course helped me to realize that we are all different yet unique. Now, I feel myself stronger than before as a teacher candidate (PST 24).

I realize that diversity is great. Before the course diversity was a trouble for me now I am strong enough to define it as great in my classrooms and in my private life (PST 4).

The OK sign means something completely different in another culture. Without that knowledge a teacher cannot be powerful. Now I feel myself quite strong as a world citizen. The course helped me to understand that a teacher should be a world citizen who is strong and civilized enough to teach all students (PST 15).

The participants shared that they began to interpret diversity positively after the course content and the course content affected both their professional and individual identities:

I feel more powerful. I have started to question the reason of why a usual action seems unusual for me. Now I am ready to understand any student or anyone from the world. I get to see a variety of richness in the world. I have never been part of such diversity. The teacher should be part of this diversity. I feel really self-confident (PST 9).

There are various perspectives that open new visions I

have never a chance to see. I define myself as a teacher differently (FG 10).

The course is like a new breath of life. This class encouraged me to defend the idea of “richness that exists in unknown and spoken world” as our culture will never be sufficient for us to conquer new knowledge as long as we keep living. I feel myself quite powerful as a teacher and as a human being (PST 13).

Another participant said that she learned to respect the “personal space” (PST 27) of her future students and other people in her life.

Development of non-judgmental behavior (mind)

Pre-service EFL teachers' other response to culturally responsive pedagogy is their development of non-judgmental behavior both as an individual and as a prospective teacher. Interviewees and the qualitative data gathered from the narrative frames highlighted that the pre-service teachers built resilience for their professional journey after they had taken the course as most of them agreed that their experience of culturally responsive pedagogy helped them to develop a non-judgmental attitude that means maintaining positive relationships with their students in professional life and in their social lives. Most of the participants linked this with the development of empathy. Another important gain of the course is the participants' altering perspectives of British and Syrian cultures and the members of these 2 cultures. Most of the participants stated that before their experience of culturally relevant pedagogy, they had had a negative attitude towards British and Syrian people. Many defined this as “prejudice” and a “danger” for a teacher. The frequency of the use of the words counts; “respect,” “tolerance,” “empathy” indicate that they define their experience of culturally responsive pedagogy with these terms. The excerpts from the student's narrative frames and focus-group interviews are as the following:

Now I know all the details about British culture. This is great because I realize that they are not cold and distant they just give importance to private space that kind of a consciousness will alter my perceptions about the culture of the language I will teach. I learned many things about different cultures. It provides me developing empathy and being more considerate. I was shocked about my prejudicial mind against British and Syrian people (PST 8).

One of the most interesting things that I've learned about the cultural differences is definitely the way parents see their children. Now I can understand and respect my European friends and their families better. Last but not least, my students (FG 7).

Each culture is valuable and is important and different and to understand them is a must. English people had seemed to be cold to me but after learning their cultures my perceptions of them changed completely. I understood the cause of this. I did not know how to understand them (PST 34).

I killed my prejudices towards British and Syrian people but I could only do this when I began to understand them (PST 1).

I learn to respect other cultures especially British and Syrian culture. To be honest, I am ashamed of not knowing how to respect their differences now I feel myself strong as a teacher (PST 20).

I totally altered my perceptions of English people. I thought that they were distant and cold but after I have studied their culture I learn how to respect them (PST 40).

I realized that learning English culture is very important for me to teach the language of that culture. My prejudices towards them disappeared (FG 3).

I learned a lot about Syrian culture. I did not know that this culture is very rich and diverse. I was quite prejudiced towards them but now I am not (PST 16). My worldview about Syrian culture changed a lot. I learned their cultural values and how to act when there is a Syrian student in my class (PST 22).

To be honest I was not aware of the fact that learning Syrian culture would be that much of effect in my life. While I will be teaching them, without this information probably I would develop a certain form of prejudice against them. Now I know that I can understand and respect their differences (PST 34).

Throughout this course I feel that difference is a great beauty in this life. Understanding differences and developing empathy are great comfort in my life especially when I think about my prejudices towards British and Syrian culture. I am happy now because I achieved to destroy them (PST 19).

The participants remarked that they linked becoming a culturally responsive teacher with becoming a strong teacher and an individual in social life. As highlighted by the participants:

I learned why we need to respect different ideas and thoughts. Knowing culture is becoming a strong teacher and a good human being. (FG 5)

I came from Germany and while listening German culture in this course I saw that the information that was given

were quite right. Two of my close friends told me that after the course they began to understand why sometimes I reacted differently to same cases that were experienced in our social lives. This was great for me as being understood by others made me feel free (PST 30).

Now I know why a student from one culture is more punctual than the other. It is just because cultural differences so as a teacher and as a living being now I am a world citizen who is strong enough to be a superhero (PST 25).

The course helped me to prevent misunderstandings during intercultural communication in my professional and my private life. Now I can say that difference is a positive term. Mimics, gestures, body language these are all wealth. Knowing culture is equal to having a peaceful life as a teacher (PST 17).

I changed my mind about culture and my profession. Now, I feel myself strong enough to get over differences. This will also help me in my private life (FG 4).

My worldview changed completely. Now, I know what I should do and should not do in class and in my personal life (PST 27).

All countries have distinctive features and I enjoy learning new gestures because some of them have unexpected meanings. In class this will help me a lot (FG 9).

Being late to a meeting is completely normal in one culture while it's not in another. It made me to develop a link between students' attitudes in class and their culture. So, I will respect them. (PST 15)

I began to interpret difference as beauty not as gap so I would try to be a tolerant teacher and a friend. (FG 1)

DISCUSSION

There is a dynamic relationship between language and culture and that kind of a relationship is the very root of culturally responsive teaching that acts as a bridge between home and school (Erikson and Mohatt, 1982). Originating from USA scholarship, culturally responsive pedagogy can be regarded as an important component of teacher education programs to empower social relations in classrooms as it limits the gap between the culture of home and classroom to promote cultural diversity (Ladson-Billings, 2009). As the students' academic success is directly affected by their cultural therefore, psychological well-being teacher education programs should focus upon the preparation of pre-service teachers for cultural diversity (King and Ladson-Billings, 1990; Noordhoff and Kleinfeld, 1991; Beyer, 1991;

Kleinfeld, 1992). As mentioned by Lipman (1993), the perspectives and beliefs of teachers generally remain unchanged towards some ethnic groups that underlines the need for the integration of culturally responsive pedagogy into the curriculum to develop a community of learners in classrooms where the interaction between the teacher and student is —fluid and humanely equitable” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 66). Culturally responsive pedagogy can be defined as a —theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469). The qualitative data analyzed in this study indicates that the pre-service teachers' experience of culturally responsive pedagogy altered the way they interpret themselves and others (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The overarching theme becoming a culturally responsive teacher organized into categories as one general theme; resilience building for professional journey and 2 sub-themes; development of professional and individual identity, and development of a non-judgmental mind that all mean maintaining a bigger perspective as a culturally responsive teacher.

Cultural diversity, as a significant component of the global world, has already blurred strict borders in social life and education (Kimmelman and Lang, 2019; Liu and Bal, 2019; Estellés and Fischman, 2021). In line with this, cultural diversity became the central motive of the curriculum for the selected course. The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that the pre-service teachers' response to culturally responsive pedagogy is building resilience that means maintaining a larger perspective as future teachers. According to Masten et al. (1990) resilience can be interpreted as an ability that gives the power to overcome challenging or threatening circumstances (p.425). The idea of building resilience is gaining importance day by day especially after the Covid-19 pandemic and when one thinks about the first 5 years of teachers most of whom are thinking about either leaving the profession or leaving directly without thinking (Wingfield, et al., 2000; Le Cornu, 2009; Tait, 2008). However, at the beginning of their career the teachers who can get over the obstacles they face in their professional journey are the ones who are resilient enough. (Ewing and Manuel, 2005; Le Cornu, 2013; Johnson et al., 2014) It might not be misleading to suggest that teacher burnout is therefore a significant barrier for many teachers (Madigan and Kim, 2021; Pressley, 2021). In line with this, the notion of resilience also gains importance in classrooms of diverse students where the increased attention of the teachers is culture and diversity. When one thinks about the 21st century teachers, burnout is one of the threatening elements for teachers especially in the first years and in culturally diverse classrooms the energy is much more open to burnout when the teacher is not a culturally responsive

instructor (Costa et al., 2023; Strasser, 2023; McCarthy et al., 2023). In relation, it can be claimed that building resilience should be a significant component of pre-service teacher education programs (Weatherby-Fell et al., 2019; Mansfield and Beltman, 2019; Weatherby-Fell et al., 2020; Lutovac and Assuncao, 2021; Ledger, 2021; McKay et al., 2023).

Pre-service teachers' experience of culturally relevant pedagogy encouraged them to develop resilience for their professional lives that is linked to their development of professional teacher identity (McKay and Manning, 2019). Teacher resilience, in this study, is understood as the ability to overcome the challenges of culturally diverse settings caused by unconscious biases and stereotypes, miscommunications and misunderstandings, a stronger sense of purpose in profession, and as "a trait that actively fosters well-being" (Pretsch et al., 2012, p. 322). In this study, becoming a culturally responsive teacher is identified as one of the dimensions of teacher resilience. It can be assumed that becoming a culturally responsive teacher and teacher resilience is closely interconnected. The more culturally responsive a pre-service teacher becomes the more adaptable and flexible he/she becomes. Culturally responsive teachers can adjust instructional strategies in order to meet the diverse needs of their students and this fuels their resilience by giving them a sense of purpose. The process of becoming a culturally responsive teacher also involves the development of strong connections and empathy with students. Culturally responsive teachers can build supportive relationships with their students that can also contribute to their resilience. Culturally responsive teachers nurture student resilience through providing emotional support to help students navigate challenges. Throughout the process, the teacher takes on leadership role as a bridge between educational and social community. This also empowers teacher resilience as while teachers are focusing on nurturing student resilience, they also develop a stronger sense of purpose in their profession. The analysis of the qualitative data suggests that the pre-service teachers build resilience in two ways. The participants' development of professional identity and, last but not least, the limitation of prejudicial thinking. Most of the participants mentioned that their exposition to culturally responsive pedagogy helped them to build resilience as in the narrative frames and focus group interviews many of them mentioned that after the course they had begun to feel themselves strong enough to cope with ever-changing conditions of diverse classrooms (Howard and Johnson, 2004). As mentioned by Van Huizen et al. (2005) beginning with the Vygostkian perspective, the target of teacher education programs has depended upon the development of professional identity. In relation, the analysis of the data indicates that the participants identify strength and confidence not only as a signal of development of resilience but also of professional identity.

The pre-service teachers found a meaningful connection between becoming a culturally responsive teacher and being a strong teacher who can build resilience as the frequency of the use of the words "must" and "necessity" showcase their definition of becoming a culturally responsive teacher as an essential component of their professional and individual identity. Their experience of culturally responsive pedagogy encouraged the majority of the participants to underline that "identity development occurs in an inter subjective field and can be best characterized as an ongoing process, a process of interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context" (Gee, 2001 as cited in Beijaard et al., 2004). The notion of professional identity is connected to the way teachers interpret their images of self (Nias, 1989). The pre-service teachers added that they started perceiving themselves as culturally responsive teachers and individuals who have the emotional and intellectual capacity to understand, tolerate and respect differences of culturally diverse students and individuals. Throughout the process, many highlighted that they identified themselves equipped enough for classrooms of culturally diverse students. The analysis of the data unveiled that most of the pre-service teachers were confronted with the reality of diversity in EFL classes for the first time that illuminated their professional maturation process throughout the course. Their perceptions of what an effective teacher were altered as they defined professional identity as being global teachers and world citizens. Therefore, their images of self and others were altered professionally and individually (Knowles, 1992).

The analysis of the qualitative data indicated that the second subtheme is the development of non-judgmental behavior (mind) both as a future teacher and as an individual. One of the challenges that awaits teachers is the need to develop a non-judgmental attitude for their professional journeys as they have to avoid being judgmental in culturally diverse classrooms. Non-judgmental individuals are generally prone to perceive differences, new opinions and diversity as wealth not as an obstacle and teachers do not have the luxury to set standards or benchmarks for their students and therefore the need of a non-judgmental attitude is a must. The focus group interviews and the analysis of the narrative frames probably postulated an air of freedom for the participants as they reflected on their experiences sincerely and candidly. One of the significant results of the data analysis is related to the danger of prejudice against individuals from other cultures especially students and members of Syrian and British Culture. In the Turkish education system the number of Syrian students is dramatically high and most of the participants indicated that they did not have any idea about Syrian culture and they were prejudiced against Syrian students before their experience of culturally relevant pedagogy. Many defined this as a "danger" for a teacher as many mentioned that

their perceptions of Syrian culture altered dramatically and they learned how to respect their differences and began to feel close to the richness of Syrian culture. Most of the students mentioned their surprise that Syrian culture is close to their own culture and defined “prejudice” as a danger for a teacher. Another significant point emerged from the qualitative data is the development of a non-judgmental attitude against British people. What is interesting is the fact that most of the participants had defined British people as cold and distant however, after their experience of culturally responsive pedagogy most of the pre-service teachers underlined that they are not cold and distant but they just give importance to private space. The frequency of the words use “empathy,” “tolerance,” and “respect” highlights that their experience of culturally responsive pedagogy altered their perceptions of other cultures especially Syrian culture, which represents the future students in their classes and British culture, which represents the culture of the target language they will teach. The analysis of the qualitative data demonstrated that the development of a non-judgmental mind (behavior) against other cultures also affected their degree of empathy, in a positive way, as most of the pre-service teachers underlined that after having become a culturally responsive teacher they could understand why a student acts differently from the other. This theme has a vital importance as most of the participants emphasized the significance of knowing of cultural differences as they defined this as a “must” for a teacher so as to promote mutual respect both in classrooms and in social life.

Another dimension of culturally responsive pedagogy for pre-service EFL teachers is that they had the chance of being confronted with classroom realities as almost all of the participants confessed that they had ignored the significance of intercultural communicative competence that promotes professional resilience. It can be assumed that many students become part of teacher education programs with their previous experiences and prejudices before university (Chang-Kredl and Kingsley, 2014) and culturally responsive pedagogy can serve as an efficient tool for them to overcome prejudices against *the other*. War, earthquake, pandemic, immigration and compulsory exile are the main components of the 21st century world that might offer a gloomy picture about the difficulties of becoming a teacher. Building resilience is therefore a must for a pre-service teacher to overcome the difficulties of the age they live in. Culturally responsive pedagogy can be used as an efficient tool to destroy the borders among differences that give a way to understand, respect, and tolerate culturally diverse students in classes. That kind of a pedagogy can both promote the development of professional resilience and individual success in social life. Pre-service teacher education that has the power to alter future generations should give emphasis to the curriculum that supports the development of culturally responsive teachers who are

well-equipped to the diversity that will welcome them. As agents of flexibility pre-service teachers should be thought to be role models to their students so as to promote respectful, empathic and tolerant generations.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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APPENDIX

Narrative frame for language and culture course

1. My journey with Language and Culture Course was like...This is because....
2. What I really enjoy while analyzing different cultures from all around the world is that...For example...
3. The socio-cultural analysis of different cultures in Language and Culture course made me develop insights about / an understanding of... For example...
4. If pre-service teachers' predictions were not compatible with culturally diverse classrooms...
I think...
5. If you wish, please tell me another story about your experiences in Language and Culture Course