A MULTI-CULTURAL INTERACTION THROUGH VIDEO CONFERENCING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated Turkish and Canadian primary school students' ways of expressing their perception of cultural understanding through video conferencing and that of cultural interaction through video conferencing. The qualitative research data were collected in the form of interviews.

The results obtained were analyzed and interpreted based on the quantitative content analysis method. The research results revealed that the majority of the students explained their viewpoints through the effectiveness of the process. The students highlighted the importance of learning a different culture, using technology effective and recognizing new friends in the process. Most of the students indicated that videoconferencing encouraged them to learn and understand about different cultures, helped them develop cultural awareness, attracted their attention and increased their motivation.

Keywords: Video-conferencing; multi-cultural interaction, multi-cultural understanding, cultural awareness

INTRODUCTION

As individuals develop awareness of different cultures, it is quite important for them to understand the need for existence, the differences between cultures, and the relationships between cultures (Guiherme, 2002). Understanding intercultural differences and intercultural relationship is possible via establishing intercultural interactions.

This interaction, in a sense, can be regarded as multi-culturalism because multi-culturalism aims at developing individuals' interest in other cultures -which they interact with and do not know— apart from their own cultural identities. In fact, intercultural interaction can be defined as being interested in one's own culture and in other cultures, communicating with one's own culture and with other cultures, raising cultural awareness, and as giving importance to cultural awareness and cultural differences (Bhawuk & Brislin1992; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003). Therefore, it could be stated that establishing and maintaining relationships, protecting cultural awareness, and developing positive attitudes towards and raising awareness of intercultural interactions all constitute the basis of the effectiveness of intercultural interaction.

Establishing multi-cultural interaction is extremely important especially in educational environments because such interaction provides students with a multi-cultural view point.

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Considering the influence of educational environments on societies, an approach giving importance to multi-cultural interaction in the educational process is inevitable.

It is possible to raise multi-cultural awareness effectively especially via establishing interaction and communication with different cultures in educational institutions. Within the context of multi-cultural interaction, educational environments should include various directions that help students develop multi-cultural skills, attitudes, values and knowledge (Jafar & Roland, 1992; Lustig & Koester, 2006).

There are a number of benefits of establishing multi-cultural interaction and educational environments in that way. These benefits include recognizing and giving meaning to cultural values; helping students understand, adopt and interact with different cultures by evoking interest in these cultures; reflecting cultural awareness into the educational environment as a means of developing students' imagination; developing students' critical thinking skills by training students as individuals who can interrogate and interpret multi-cultural interaction; and helping students gain a viewpoint about cultural interactions by relating the values and events that culturally shape societies (Mason & Gearon, 2005). Influence of different cultures is important for students because human behaviour is shaped at an early age. Children naturally have a sub-structure made up of values, expectations and information about the culture they belong to. A multi-cultural educational program allows students to interact with and give meaning to other cultures. Students become aware of how important different cultures and cultural values are to enrich social life.

Video conferencing

Today, video-conferencing is an educational technology, which is found in interactive environments supported by effective opportunities and widely used in universal activities, are among educational technologies that allow using certain opportunities and environments in the instructional process, which cannot be provided in face-to-face education.

In addition, video-conferencing systems allow transmitting interaction and different experiences between different educational settings with the help of rich communication tools (Motamedi, 2001). These systems are also used widely in studies on multi-cultural interaction projects (Rural Advanced Community of Learners, 2004). In contemporary educational institutions, considering the fact that it is necessary to prepare students for a universal society, students should develop and improve educational environments and curriculums within the context of interaction and communication (Leeman & Ledoux, 2003).

A number of interactions such as universal educational applications, international cooperation, cultural change, cultural interaction and cultural transfer and multi-cultural understanding can be carried out effectively within the context of video-conferencing technologies (Motamedi, 2001). The video-conferencing is a powerful instructional tool for multi-cultural education, multicultural relationship and positive understanding of diversity (Cifuentes and Murphy, 2000; Harrow, 1997; Gauntlett, 1995) As individuals develop awareness of different cultures, it is quite important for them to understand the need for existence, the differences between cultures, and the relationships between cultures (Guiherme, 2002).

Understanding multi-cultural differences and intercultural relationship is possible via establishing intercultural interactions. This interaction, in a sense, can be regarded as multi-culturalism because multi-culturalism aims at developing individuals' interest in other cultures - which they interact with and do not know – apart from their own cultural identities.

In fact, intercultural interaction can be defined as being interested in one's own culture and in other cultures, communicating with one's own culture and with other cultures, raising cultural awareness, and as giving importance to cultural awareness and cultural differences (Bhawuk & Brislin1992; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003). Therefore, it could be stated that establishing and maintaining relationships, protecting cultural awareness, and developing positive attitudes towards and raising awareness of intercultural interactions all constitute the basis of the effectiveness of intercultural interaction.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study investigated students' perceptions about technology-supported art education and multi-cultural interactions. More specifically, the purpose was to investigate perceptions of students at two different primary schools -one in Canada and the other in Turkey- regarding the technology and art in the process of raising cultural awareness and cultural interaction while they are sharing cultural art applications through video-conferencing. Based on this basic purpose, the following questions were directed in the study:

> ➢ What are primary school students' perceptions regarding cultural interaction?
> ➢ What are primary school students' views about cultural interaction via technology?
> ➢ What are primary school students' views about different cultures?
> ➢ How do primary school students express their perceptions of their own culture?

METHOD

Research Design
Qualitative research methods were followed to investigate primary school students' percepotions regarding intercultural interaction. To analyse and interpret the interview data content analysis was used. Coding with respect to the concepts revealed from the data was particularly helpful (Yildirim & Simsek, 2006). All data were analyzed through determining the themes and relating the data with those themes.

Participants
The study was conducted with one of the two fifth-grade classes in Cagdas Primary School at a town of Eskisehir, Turkey and with the W.H. Day Public School (Simcoe County District School Board) in Ontario, Canada. Criterion sampling was used to determine the schools for application. In the criterion sampling, the Turkish students' proficiency in English Language and the technological facilities of the schools both in Canada and in Turkey (the technology and facilities to allow effective use of video-conferencing) were determined as criteria.

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The reason for conducting the study with primary school fifth-grade students was that the students in both schools were old enough to reflect what they understood and learnt through their pictorial representations (Artut, 2001). The study was carried out with 44 students: 22 were from Canada and 22 were from Turkey.

Application Process

In the application process of the present study, an interactive art course was carried out with the use of video-conferencing technique between two primary school students, one in Canada and the other in Turkey. For multi-cultural acquisition during the application process, Byram's (1997) five-item approach (Alred, Byram & Fleming, 2003) was used.

These were attitudes (developing curiosity, clarity, and preparation for acquisition of other cultures), knowledge (being knowledgeable about one's own culture and about other cultures), ability to establish relationships and to make related interpretations (interpreting, explaining and relating events and concepts that belong to another culture), skills of interaction and discovery (becoming knowledgeable about a culture and making related interpretations), ability to evaluate cultural awareness from a critical perspective (becoming aware of different cultures and interpreting and evaluating them from a critical perspective) (Alred, Byram & Fleming, 2003).

The elementary school fifth-grade students in Turkey -where multi-cultural interaction would be established in the 'attitude development process' regarding multi-cultural acquisition in the art education application within the scope of Byram's (1997) approach- were interviewed regarding the possible differences between the two cultures, regarding their interest in the other culture and regarding their desire to communicate with that culture. Thus, the children gained a certain level of readiness regarding that culture. In the second phase, the process of 'knowledge development' in multi-cultural interaction was carried out.

The researcher of the present study and the art teachers of the students both in Canada and in Turkey participated in the process of knowledge development. In this phase, sample applications and examples from Canadian and Turkish art of drawings as well as the way of informing were determined. In this process, a criterion was set for choosing the artists and the types of art applications similar in both cultures. Within the scope of this criterion, Nusret Çolpan (an artist) and the Turkish Miniatures (a Turkish painting art) were chosen. The Ted Harrison Style as a Canadian painting art and Ted Harrison as an artist were chosen. The artistic applications of both artists had clear outlines, bright colours and authenticity. These features were in accordance with the artistic development periods of students and allowed relating one application to another.

After the researcher and the teachers from both cultures decided the information to be shared, they created a pool of information tools. The pool of information tools included videos, websites, pictures, photos and application samples regarding the subjects determined. Next, this information was shared between the two teachers through the guidance of the researcher. The information in the pool of information tools was used by the teachers to help students become knowledgeable about each other's cultures and understanding of art and about the two artists. This process was carried out in four course-hours (4x40 minutes) in two weeks.

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Following the information process, the students from both cultures were asked to draw pictures by using the method of artistic narration in their own cultures. The Turkish children drew pictures based on Nusret Çolpan's style, and the Canadian children drew pictures in line with Ted Harrison's style. Then, these drawings were uploaded on a website designed by the researcher and the teachers to share with the students. Sample applications of the students as well as those of the artists were found on this website. The website designed was also used to give information to the students about the understanding of art for the other culture.

In the next phase, which was 'ability to establish relationship and to make interpretations', the students themselves discussed the artistic style chosen from the other culture in line with the information they had obtained up to that time, and they examined the drawings belonging to the other culture and explored the perspectives and techniques of that culture.

In the following phase, 'interaction and the ability to discover', the video-conferencing application was included in the process. Before the application, the art teachers both in Canada and in Turkey were asked to prepare a 30-minute lesson regarding the determined subjects. To carry out the video-conferencing effectively, the connection was tested in addition to time adjustments for synchronization. That is, the students in Canada came to the school at eight o'clock in the morning whereas Turkish students came to the school at three o'clock in the afternoon. During the activity process, the video-conference room of the primary school in Canada - where the application was carried out – and the Video-Conference Room at Open Education Faculty of Anadolu University in Turkey were used by the researcher and the participants in the application. Special attention was paid to the fact that the features and qualities of these two video-conferencing rooms were similar to each other.

The activity was carried out with the help of video-conferencing in the phase of interaction with different cultures via Byram's (1997) 'interaction and the ability to discover'. This activity was carried out in a period of two course-hours. In the first thirty minutes of this period, Mali, the art teacher in Canada, taught the drawing features of Ted Harrison style practically with the help of the video-conferencing system. All the students participating in the application in Canada in the process showed their drawings to their peers in Turkey and talked about what they wanted to depict and about the things they considered while drawing. Turkish students asked questions to the art teacher in Canada about the application. In the second part of the activity, the art teacher and the students in Turkey carried out the same application. The students showed the students in Canada their drawings they made in line with Nusret Çolpan's style and told the Canadian students about the cultural elements in their drawings.

The Canadian students asked questions to the art teacher in Turkey about the art of miniature and to the students about the subjects of the Turkish students' drawings. The medium of communication was English in all interactions. For Turkish students simultaneous translations were available when necessary. In the remaining part of the activity, the students were asked to direct questions to each other and to say what they wanted to say. The Turkish students showed the Canadian students their drawings and puppets of their own culture. The Turkish students also talked about basic cultural subjects including clothing, meals and dance.

In addition, Turkish students asked questions to the Canadian students about the weather conditions in Canada, about the clothes they wore at school in Canada and about their likes and dislikes. Similarly, the students in Canada asked similar context and culture related questions to the Turkish students.

There was intensive communication and interaction among the participants throughout the application. At the end of the application, in the phase of Byram's 'ability to evaluate cultural awareness with a critical perspective", the Turkish and Canadian students were asked to state their views about the application and to apply the art style they learnt.

The Canadian students drew pictures under the influence of miniature and Nusret Çolpan's style. The Turkish students drew pictures according to Ted Harrison's style.

These drawings were uploaded on website previously designed for sharing. During the forum activities carried out via the website, the art teachers both in Canada and in Turkey shared their experiences and reported that the students enjoyed the activity and that it was quite interesting for the students to learn about a different culture. Regarding these drawings and activities, semi-structured interviews were held with the students.

These interviews included questions about participants' thoughts regarding the course itself, the situations that increased their attention and motivation, their thoughts regarding video-conferencing, their thoughts regarding interaction with a different culture and art, their perceptions regarding the use of technology in art course, and what they wanted to depict in their drawings.

Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation

In line with the findings obtained based on the interviews held with the students in the process of the collection of the research data, three main themes were determined through the effectiveness of video conferencing system. These were the dimensions of 'Cultural Interaction', 'Communication', 'Technology use', and 'In-class communication and physical environment'.

Due to the limited interview process regarding the dimension of 'technology use', one of the main themes obtained, an open-ended question was asked to the participating students to gather more detailed data. The findings obtained through the open ended questions constituted the sub-themes of the main theme of 'technology use'.

The primary school students were also asked to reflect their acquisitions regarding multi-cultural interaction carried out technology and to reflect their perceptions of different cultures via their pictorial representations, and the data were collected via documents (pictures) and written representations through pictures. In addition, the researcher took part in the process as a 'participatory observer'. Some of the data regarding the evaluation of the process were obtained through this observation.

The students' views about the application process and technology use in the process were revealed through semi-structured interviews.

As a result of the application, the data collected through the pictures were obtained via document analysis. In order to collect data from the interviews, video records were used. Regarding these drawings and activities, semi-structured interviews were held with the students. These interviews included questions about participants' thoughts regarding the course itself, the situations that increased their attention and motivation, their thoughts regarding interaction with a different culture.

The semi-structured interviews were first transcribed. The data obtained from the interview transcriptions were interpreted. The findings obtained via the examination of the interviews were presented as frequency distributions. Then, the students' views were interpreted. To maintain the reliability of the study, following the application, the interview-coding keys and the interview transcriptions were read by three independent researchers, who discussed the subjects they "agreed" and "disagreed" on. Necessary adjustments were made accordingly. For the purpose of calculating the reliability of the study, the reliability formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 64) was used, which revealed a reliability value of 98 percent.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The findings obtained in the study were gathered under four main themes as ``*Cultural Interaction'*, *'Communication'*, *'Technology use'*, and *'In-class communication and physical environment'* were presented as frequency distributions. These dimensions were gathered from 22 students in Turkey through one by one interview.

Table: 1
Students' Perceptions of Interactive Art Course

Students' Views (N=22)	f
Cultural Interaction	**17**
Learning the culture	*17*
Teaching the culture	*11*
Cultural differences	*6*
Cultural Sharing	*3*
Communication	**14**
Establishing communication in different countries	*12*
Establishing new friendships	*7*
Technology Use	**22**
Learning how to do video-conferencing	*7*
Contribution of video-conference to the activity process and to the course	*12*
Learning with fun via technology	*16*
In-Class Communication and Physical Environment	**15**
Students' behaviour in class	*8*
Physical conditions in class and in the environment they live in (class order, different climate, different language, clothing, time-difference)	*15*

Additionally an online interview with 22 students in Canada was structured to gather data and the students were observed during the application process by the researcher. At the end of the process both Turkish and Canadian art teachers were interviewed through the application.

Dimension of Culture

One of the themes revealed by the views of the students participating in the study was the *'Dimension of Culture'*. Views of 17 students about the interactive art course constituted the theme of '*Dimension of Culture'.* The students' views about the '*Dimension of Culture'* revealed four sub-dimensions. These sub-dimensions were '*Teaching culture, learning culture, cultural sharing and cultural differences'.* Among these, the prominent ones were '*learning culture'* and *'teaching culture'.*

Zeynep stated;

> '*The two countries introduced their cultures to each other by the help of viedo-conferencing. We introduced our culture to them, and they introduced their culture to us. In this way, we learnt some things about Canadian culture, and they learnt about our culture. Thus, I think there could be closer relationships between the two countries'.*

Damla Nisa reported her views saying;

> '*Learning different cultures is permanent and informative, and students thus become more social. By using technology and video-conferencing in this way, we established communication with people from other countries and introduced out culture to them. I also learnt about their culture and became aware of how beneficial technology is. I just want to take lessons executed in this way. I want to learn more about Canadian culture and about cultures in other countries. And we can become more social'.*

One of the sub-dimensions of *'Dimensions of Culture'* was '*Cultural differences'.* Batuhan pointed out the sub-dimension of '*Cultural differences'* saying;

> '*Our language was different from theirs. Also, there were cultural differences. Well, because they live in Canada, they belong to the Canadian culture. And the climate is different in Canada. Their clothing style is different. They wear warm and casual clothes. And we wear school uniforms, and we do not wear warm clothes because it is summer here. Our clothes are formal'.*

In addition, Batuhan reported his views about the sub-dimension of '*cultural sharing'* saying;

> '*I believe that execution of this course in this way is useful for the transfer of culture between countries. Whatever race or nation people belong to, such interaction between people from different countries allow them to learn about common heritages they have'.*

In-class communication and physical environment

One of the themes revealed in the study was the dimension of *'In-class communication and physical environment'.* During the interviews held with the students by the researcher, they made clear comparisons regarding this dimension.

These comparisons also raised awareness of multi-cultural differences.

Adal compared her attitudes and the Canadian students' attitudes during the activity process stating *'During the lesson, I did not ask the things I wanted to learn because I am a shy person, but they freely asked questions to us'.*
In addition, some of the students reported that they were shy and avoided asking questions and that the Canadian students comfortably asked questions, though.

Melis stated *'Their communicative abilities were very good. Without any hesitation, they comfortably asked us any question they wanted, but we couldn't because we were a little bit shy. As it was our first meeting, we were shy'.* Berke mentioned the time-difference between the two countries and students' attitudes during the lesson stating;

> *'We didn't ask many questions, but they asked a lot of questions to us. They asked how the weather was here. There is time-difference between Turkey and Canada. We drew pictures at night, and they drew at six o'clock in the morning. And a boy in one of the front desks was demonstrating dance figures. He was very relaxed'.*

Utku said;

> *'…while you are talking to the teacher during video-conferencing, a boy was dancing at the back of the class. I thought he was a naughty student. They are very relaxed. We asked fewer questions than they did, but we learnt about the things we wondered. The students that we met via video-conferencing were a bit naughty'.*

Pınar compared the physical conditions in classrooms and stated *'Their classroom was quite different from ours. Ours is not similar to theirs. Our advantage was that the order of the desks in our classroom was better'* (the order of the desks in the classroom in Canada was in a circular shape; however, in Turkey, the desks were put one after another in the classroom). The students also reported their views about the differences between the clothing styles in both cultures (the students in Turkey have to wear a uniform in class, while those in Canada can come to school with their casual clothes on). Deniz İpek reported his views about the difference in clothing and about the physical conditions in class stating;

> *'Their clothes interested me. They didn't have any school uniforms. The studies carried out in class also drew my attention. I was also interested in their class order. In Turkey, two students sit on a single desk. However, they put the desks side by side. There was a desk for the teacher to draw a picture on. This table attracted my attention. In addition, there was a TV room'.*

Some of the students pointed out the differences between the climates of the two countries as well as the differences between the languages spoken in both countries. Batuhan;

> *'Our language was different from theirs. And also we had different cultures. Because they live in Canada, they have Canadian culture. And the climate was different in Canada. Their clothing style was different. They were wearing warm and casual clothes, but we wear school uniforms in our school. Because it is summer in Turkey, we don't wear warm clothes'.*

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In fact, the views of the students were indicators of the cultural differences. The students' views about cultural differences show their awareness of cultural differences. Under the dimension of 'In-class communication and physical environment', a majority of the students made comparisons regarding in-class attitudes, physical conditions, social interaction and clothing style.

Besides in-class communication and interaction, the other subjects pointed out by the students as cultural differences were the difference between the climates of the two countries, the time-difference, and the difference between the languages of the two countries.

Establishing communication in different countries
Among all participants, the views of 13 students about the interactive art course constituted the theme of 'Establishing communication in different countries'. Adal reported her views saying 'To me, it was a really nice thing. We made new friends from another country, and we strengthened the peace between the two countries'. Similarly, Onur Alp stated 'It was really interesting and entertaining to communicate with children from another country. You establish communication with people from other countries. You talk to them, and this was really nice'. Melis reported her views saying 'We established communication with Canada, and we created friendship and established sincere communication with them. I think this is a very good thing'. Another student, Eda, stated;

> 'It was really nice to meet a lot of friends, and they were all very friendly. They wanted to make friends with us, and so did we. Similarly, we asked them the things we wondered. It was really beautiful. We met a lot of students from Canada, and we made friends with them. We wanted them to come to Turkey, and they invited us there, too. It was a very nice activity'.

Dimension of Technology Use
One of the themes revealed in the study was 'Dimension of Technology Use'. Regarding this main theme the findings revealed the following sub-dimensions: 'Learning how to do video-conferencing', 'Learning via observing and speaking', 'Learning a new culture by using technology', 'Learning a new art by using technology', 'Making new friends by using technology' and 'Learning with fun via technology'. Regarding the dimension of technology use, a majority of the students mentioned subjects like learning a new culture, makingnew friends, learning a new art style, taking a course from another teacher, learning via observing and learning effectively and with fun.

Derin Mert pointed out the contribution of technology to his learning saying 'I prefer learning via seeing to learning via writing. We learnt a different art technique thanks to technology'.

Zeynep stated;

> '...We use technology. We learn about different cultures. We strengthen communication with the help of a common language. We transfer our culture to them. We introduce our culture. I think technology has developed throughout the world.

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Not everybody can have this opportunity. It was great fun to take a lesson from a teacher from a different culture. With the help of video-conferencing, we established communication with students from a different part of the world, and we learnt about their culture. We are really lucky students...It was quite a technological and beneficial lesson. Thanks to the advanced communication technology, it was a beautiful lesson.'

Zeynep gathered the contributions of technology to the lesson under the following headings: learning different cultures, learning a different art technique and cultural transfer.

Lamia mentioned the contribution of video-conferencing to learning different cultures saying;

'To me, it was quite entertaining to do the video-conferencing activity in the lesson. And during the lesson, we had more fun by meeting people from another country. I learnt about their culture, and they learnt about ours, too. We learnt about both the Turkish culture and other cultures'.

Melisa pointed out the contribution of learning in that way to memorability stating;
'It was better to learn about their culture directly from them instead of learning from other related sources. First of all, technology has developed. They helped us develop our cultural knowledge.'

Eda mentioned the contribution of this activity to increasing motivation saying;

'We made friends with them thanks to video-conferencing. It was very entertaining. I learnt the subjects better via video-conferencing and this aroused my interest in the lesson'.

Ege mentioned the effectiveness of a Canadian art teacher's instruction via video-conferencing during the activity process saying:

'It was fun to do the lesson at the same time with the Canadian students. We became knowledgeable about them. And it was quite effective that a Canadian teacher taught us the Canadian culture'.

Bengisu pointed out the contribution of a Canadian art teacher's instruction to increasing motivation saying;

'When a different teacher teaches something to us, I get more excited and interested in the lesson. Thanks to that teacher. Video-conferencing allowed us to interact with other students far away from us'.

David explained why the activity process made the lesson more entertaining stating;
'We learnt a new culture. To me, it was very nice for us to learn about such things. It was very entertaining. I never got bored during the lesson because there was television, and we saw the students from another country on TV'.

The students thought that the lessons were entertaining because they communicated and interacted with other students during the activity, they were able to see the other students via video-conferencing and they learnt new things about art.

Ipek reported her views about the things she learnt saying;

'You can communicate with people from other countries via video-conferencing. It would really be difficult to give education without technology. Thanks to technology, I understood the lesson better, and I and I enjoyed the lesson more. I had never been interested in the different cultures before. It was quite exciting'.

Zeynep reported her views saying;

'It was a nice lesson. It was different because we were introduced to the Canadian students. There were different people. Their language was different. We communicated with them in English. This lesson demonstrates that technology has really developed. It was really beautiful to establish communication with the Canadian students'.

As revealed by the views of almost all the students, the execution of the activity via synchronous video-conferencing resulted in sharing and interaction in the activity process.

The fact that the students came together with their peers and asked questions to each other and that they showed their own drawings to each other made the art course as well as artistic activity more interesting.

In addition, it was observed by the researcher that a majority of the students were interested in the applications and the subjects during the activity process and that they eagerly participated in the lesson. It was also observed that in a majority of the Canadian students were focused on cultural themes, sharing cultural themes and effectiveness of technology use during lesson.

Both Turkish and Canadian students found the interaction process entertaining. In addition, they reported that it was exciting to learn about different cultures.

Moreover, the students pointed out the importance of learning a subject from a knowledgeable teacher from a different culture.

Furthermore, the teachers agreed with their students as well. The effectiveness of the learning process regarding the support of technology could be emphasized based on their views.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The role of video-conferencing is quite important for multi-cultural interactions. The reason is that such interactions enable students to raise cultural awareness, know about their own cultural identities and understand and explain the cultural differences and similarities (Chalmer, 1996).

Considering the themes determined based on the students' views in the current study, it was seen that the activity-based interaction was evaluated in different dimensions.

These dimensions were learning different cultures, teaching culture, sharing cultural points, raising awareness of cultural differences, establishing communication, raising awareness of new technologies and opportunities and comparing different cultures. A majority of the students reported positive views about these dimensions. It could be stated that this activity carried out via the technology of video-conferencing helped the students raise positive awareness of both the use of technology and cultural sharing.

Providing a clear co-operation opportunity regarding the dimension of cultural sharing and interaction, the video-conferencing system resulted in significantly positive contributions to the interaction dimension of the course. In this respect, the findings of a study carried out by Arnold et. Al. (2002) on the use of video-conference software in primary school education supports the findings of the present study. Arnold et al. (2002) mention positive effects of the use of video-conferencing systems in the education process. These effects were related to increasing co-operation between schools, improving language learning, accessing far more learning opportunities, involving a field expert in the subject during the learning process, developing multi-cultural interaction, establishing links between the school and the society, and providing teachers with opportunities to access different sources regarding professional development.

Siraj-Blatchford (2001) revealed the influence of the video-conferencing system on elementary school students and maintained that the use of video-conferencing technology increased students' awareness of technology use in the learning process. This finding supports the findings of the current study regarding students' views about the dimension of technology use since the current participants stated that they learnt how to use video-conferencing during the activity process; that they learnt the subjects with fun; and that they had positive views about the contribution of video-conferencing to the lesson. The findings of the present study regarding the effectiveness of video-conferencing and regarding its contribution to the lesson were also parallel to the finding of a doctorate thesis carried out by Stromsland (1999). In Stromsland's (1999) study it was pointed out that the video-conferencing system had positive effects on students' perceptions and motivation. The findings obtained in the present study regarding awareness of technology and regarding learning with fun and understanding technology were also supported by the findings of another study carried out by Yost (2001) with nursery school students.

The contribution of the video-conferencing system to multi-cultural interaction can be considered in line with the findings regarding raising students' cultural awareness, learning about different cultures and regarding cultural transfer. In this regard, the findings were similar to the findings of other studies carried out by Cifuentes and Murphy (2000b) and by Gerstein (2000) on the positive contributions of video-conferencing systems to the processes of developing students' multi-cultural awareness, collaboration and understanding. Most of the researches reported in the literature focus on collaborations between classes (Gage, Nickson & Beardon, 2002; Green, 1999; Thurston, 2004).

Most of the Turkish students reported that the students in Canada were in more comfort; that they were not unsociable; that they comfortably asked questions; that they did not have to wear a uniform at school; and that their order of sitting in class was different. These views of the students revealed students' awareness of the differences in interaction, behaviour, values and their awareness of experiences in two different cultures. In addition, the questions directed by the students in Canada to those in Turkey regarding the differences during the activity process indicated their raising such awareness. Another study conducted by Cifuentes and Murphy (2000) who gathered two fourth-grade students -one from Mexico and the other from USA- via a video-conferencing system revealed that the students became aware of the experiences, values and behaviours as well as the differences and similarities between the two cultures. This finding of Cifuentes and Murphy (2000) supported the findings of the present study regarding the views of the participating students about social interaction and physical environment. It could be stated that this activity carried out through video-conferencing helped the students raise awareness of cultural sharing.

Although the students both from Canada and Turkey were free in their pictorial representations in terms of content and although technical aspects were emphasized during the activity process, they focused on the culture theme and were eager to talk to each other about their own cultures. A majority of the Turkish students talked about the historical places and subjects via their pictorial representations, while most of their Canadian peers chose important constructions, objects and living beings, the Canada's flag, and the daily-life images as their subjects.

This different perspective could be a result of the fact that the students' priorities regarding their history, culture, region and human relations were different. Depending on the influence of culture on behaviour, the individuals belonging to the same ethnic culture (or nation) are likely to have similar views about their own social realities or cultural values (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975).

Every culture leads individuals to evaluate their perspectives and views about events as well as attitudes towards these events differently. Cultural values enable individuals to form such criteria belonging to certain cultures as choice, evaluation, judgment and interpretation (Kluckhohn, 1951; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). Furthermore, considering the multi-cultural structure of Canada, students could be expected to present cultural images related not to a certain date but to the daily life.

The reason is that multi-cultural societies form their identities in line with the general cultural images in their daily lives (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995). Additionally Byram's (1997) five-item approach (Alred, Byram & Fleming, 2003) which was used at the research supplied researcher, teachers and students understanding of how interaction across cultures operates.

In keeping with Byram's views on multi-cultural interactions that help students to analyse, understand and appreciate cultural diversity and awareness of different cultures, an instructional structure was developed during the research and students used video-conferencing tools for understanding, questioning and analysing the cultural information supplied in the course.

Considering the themes determined based on the students' views, it was seen that the interaction regarding the activity was evaluated in different dimensions. These dimensions were establishing communication, raising awareness of new technologies and opportunities, and interacting with another culture.

Most of the students reported positive views about these dimensions. It could be stated that this activity carried out through video-conferencing helped the students raise awareness of cultural interaction and technology use.

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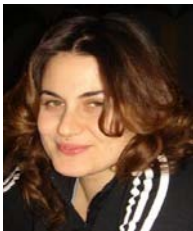
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