

THE IMPACT OF E-MAIL EXCHANGE ON RAISING CULTURAL AWARENESS OF TURKISH AND BELARUSIAN STUDENTS

English has long been recognized as the international language, offering not only access to information but also access to other cultures, speakers of other cultures, and job opportunities in various communities. Although the ELT students in Turkey acknowledge English as an international language, their perception of other cultures is overviewed with the cultures of English speaking countries. Globalization makes the world smaller and enables the learners to interact with any community, through a number of means, the most accessible of which is the Internet. However, the learners should be provided with the opportunities to raise cultural awareness rather than throwing them in at the deep end.

The increasing use of information technologies promises access to a variety of cultures offering communication and vocational opportunities. However, the Internet in its current use, in our opinion, bears the danger of lack of in-depth information and hence reinforces established stereotypes about other cultures. In this respect, it is the responsibility of the educational institutions to provide the learners with the guidance and assistance in accordance with the principles of the educational settings. It is our belief that the learners can greatly benefit from the Internet technologies, e-mail exchange in particular, as they get genuine communication opportunities with the speakers of other cultures.

To this end, the participants in this study, Turkish ELT and Belarusian foreign language students, are given the opportunity to exchange e-mails and discuss cultural issues, namely, language, education, religion, media, literature, multiculturalism, and politics. This study seeks to find out how they can increase their awareness of the mentioned cultures via e-mails despite long distances. The participants exchange e-mails for seven weeks, at the end of which they are given a questionnaire, interviews, and tests to evaluate any changes in the cultural awareness of the participants. The results of this study are presented in the paper.

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