ÇUKUROVA ARAŞTIRMALARI

E-ISSN: 2458-7559

Araştırma Makalesi/Research Article

DOI Number: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18560/cukurova.43177>

Ulum, Ö. G. (2020). Türk bağlamında sınıf etnografyası. *Çukurova Araştırmaları*, 6(1), 57-67.

CİLT 6, SAYI 1, YAZ 2020, s. 57-67

TÜRK BAĞLAMINDA SINIF ETNOGRAFYASI

Ömer Gökhan ULUM¹

Öz

Etnografya bir yaklaşım olarak, öncelikle kültür antropologları tarafından bir toplumun kültürünü araştırmak için kullanılmıştır. Sınıf etnografyası sınıf ortamlarının incelenmesinde kullanılan bir yaklaşımdır. Sınıf etnografyası öğrenmede motivasyon yapılarını ve boyutlarını da analiz eder. Etnografik bir çalışma bireyin davranışları üzerine yoğunlaşırsa, birey doğal olarak söz konusu grubun örneği olarak kabul edilir. Bunun yanı sıra, etnografik toplulukla ilgilenir, çünkü etnografin izlediği, görüştüğü ve etnografin kişisel bağlarını geliştirdiği bir topluluktur. Etnografik çalışmalarda incelenen kültürel davranışlar bir grubun ortak davranışları olduğundan, bu çalışmalarda bireylerden ziyade gruplara odaklanır. Örneğin, bir dil sınıfını gözlemleyen bir etnografin, kişisel dil öğrenme sorunlarına beklenir çünkü motivasyon, öğrencilerin hedeflerine ulaşmalarında sınıf koordinasyonunun işlevini saptaması kendimizi değil, başka insanları sorgulamayla ilgilidir. Ayrıca etnografya, deneysel olmaktan ziyade ilgili bağlamda katılımcı gözlemine dayanmaktadır. Etnografya, deneysel çalışmalarla veya diğer nicel yöntemlerle etkili bir şekilde denetlenemeyen eğitim konularını incelemek için kullanılan bir tür nitel yöntemdir. Etnografik toplulukla ilgilenir, çünkü etnografin izlediği, röportaj yaptığı ve etnografin kişisel bağlarını geliştirdiği topluluktur. Kültürel davranışlar bir grubun ortak davranışları olduğundan, etnografik çalışmalar bireylerden ziyade gruplara odaklanır. Tüm bunları göz önünde bulundurarak, bu çalışma bir sınıfın etnografisini birinci şahıs bakış açısıyla sorgulamaktadır. Çalışmanın bulguları, küreselleşme, teknoloji ve sosyal medya etkisiyle tüm dünyada gözlemlenebilir bir ortak sınıf kültürü oluştuğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sınıf etnografyası, kültür, etnografya, etnograf

CLASSROOM ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE TURKISH CONTEXT

Abstract

Ethnography, as an approach, was primarily utilized by cultural anthropologists to investigate the culture of a community. Classroom ethnography is an approach to the study of classroom settings. Ethnographic studies also analyze motivational structures and dimensions of learning. Prominently, if an ethnographic account is centralized on an individual's behaviors, then the individual is naturally considered the sample of the referred group. Ethnographers deal with the community because it is the people of a community who are monitored, interviewed, and with whom the ethnographer fosters

¹ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Mersin Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Bölümü, omergokhanulum@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7000-5056>

Article Info/ Makale Bilgisi

Received/Geliş: 26.04.2020

Accepted/Kabul: 30.04.2020

personal ties. Ethnographic studies focus on groups rather than individuals as cultural behaviors are the shared behaviors of a group. For instance, an ethnographer observing a language classroom is expected to pinpoint to the function of classroom coordination in learners' attaining language input, rather than focusing on personal language-learning problems because motivation plays an important role in helping learners achieve their goals. Ethnography is related to the inquiry of other people, not ourselves. Further, ethnography is based on participant-observation in the related context rather than being experimental. Ethnography is a kind of qualitative method employed to examine educational matters which cannot be efficiently inspected by experimental studies or other sorts of quantitative methods. Ethnographers deal with the community because it is the people of a community who are monitored, interviewed, and with whom the ethnographer fosters personal ties. Ethnographic studies focus on groups rather than individuals as cultural behaviors are the shared behaviors of a group. Considering all these in mind, this paper inquires the ethnography of a classroom from a first-person perspective. The findings of the study suggest that the consequence of the boost in technology and social media, as well as globalization formed a common classroom culture which may be encountered all around the world.

Keywords: Classroom ethnography, culture, ethnography, ethnographers

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethnography has recently become popular in foreign or second language classrooms and educational research (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). Ethnography, as an approach, was primarily utilized by cultural anthropologists to investigate the culture of a community. Ethnography is related to the inquiry of other people, not ourselves. Further, ethnography is based on participant-observation in the related context rather than being experimental. Nonetheless, it does not mean that ethnographic research cannot be utilized to examine one's own culture (Hymes, 2003; Reeves, Peller, Goldman, & Kitto, 2013). It is a must that ethnographic procedures are adopted through the whole research process– its methods and tools for data collection and analysis as well (Saville-Troike 1989). In ethnographic queries, it is possible to make use of all the available sources which are believed to be reasonable. When somebody desires to learn about a culture, a community, or a lifestyle, they utilize every available source. Further, they do not refuse to learn anything since they appreciate and utilize each approach that can be supportive (Hymes, 2003). Plasassung (2003) states that an ethnographic inquiry requires the ethnographers to practice fieldwork for which they use extensive, instead of intensive, time living in the group of people studied. Therefore, it is consistently a longitudinal study, the duration of which may change based on the complicatedness of the problem and required time, however mainly it prevails for months and even for many years. Throughout the field study, recurring observations that will consequently supply true data are substantial. In the event of ethnography, an ideal outsider needs much time in the inquired group to learn more details about the community. Ethnography is a specifically proper method for its adaptation to cultural insights, its focus on regional contexts and its awareness of the prominence of embodying various perspectives related to inspected phenomena (Davis, 1995). Initially flourished in anthropology to define the "living" of a communal group, ethnography refers to individuals' behaviors and attitudes in naturally emerging and developing environments, and hints on the cultural explanation of manners (Heath, 1982). The ethnographer's aim is to supply a definition and an analytical-interpretive report of what social environments such as classrooms, neighborhoods, villages, or any community, consequence of their cooperation, and the way they do anything (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). Ethnographers deal with the community because it is the people of a community who are monitored, interviewed, and with whom the ethnographer fosters personal ties. Ethnographic studies focus on groups rather than individuals as cultural behaviors are the shared behaviors of a group. For instance, an ethnographer observing a language classroom is expected to pinpoint to the function of classroom coordination in learners' attaining language input, rather than focusing on personal language-

learning problems because motivation plays an important role in helping learners achieve their goals (Ordem, 2017a; Cesur & Ertaş, 2013). Ethnographic studies also analyze motivational structures and dimensions of learning. Prominently, if an ethnographic account is centralized on an individual's behaviors, then the individual is naturally considered the sample of the referred group (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). Ethnography is a kind of qualitative method employed to examine educational matters which cannot be efficiently inspected by experimental studies or other sorts of quantitative methods. Serving a number of practical techniques and ranks of analysis, ethnography proposes a structured, participant-acknowledging, and holistic dimension of education; either in the general sense, or specific terms which Geertz (1973) defines as a thick description of cultural contexts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). This article therefore employs ethnography– a qualitative approach– to probe an EFL classroom from a first-person perspective, in our case through the eyes of EFL students.

2. METHOD

Participants

In the study, an EFL student observed his 20 classmates (12 females and 8 males). The participants were prep-class EFL students from a state university in the south of Turkey. The observation was realized in the English Main Course in the spring semester of 2019 education year. The aim of the course was to help students develop English language skills.

Classroom procedures

The study for the ethnographic classroom observation encompassed two weeks. The students were informed about what an ethnographic observation is and they had consent for the inquiry. They were also informed about that the study had no effect on their course grades. A volunteer was chosen to observe the class in their English Main Course for two weeks. The convenience sampling method was utilized to choose the participants as the target population was too large and not reachable.

Instruments and Data Procedure

A qualitative method of data collection– ethnographic inquiry was utilized to explore the cultural characteristics of Turkish EFL students in this study. Observations interpret behaviors, attitudes, communication characteristics, and workflows in particular settings (Jorgensen, 2015). In this study, the observational data were gathered through an unstructured diary (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015) kept by a volunteer student. The data of the study were collected in 2019 education year. Further, the research and publication ethics specified in the 8th item of 2020 TR Dizin Journal Evaluation Criteria were followed in this study. The researcher analyzed the diary accounts and wrote his personal reflections on classroom practices. The aim of the EFL classroom observation was to develop a comprehension of the particular knowledge of the target culture's behaviors and attitudes demonstrated in EFL courses. Participant observation is one of the most fundamental methodological approaches utilized in ethnography (Reeves, Peller, Goldman, & Kitto, 2013). Participant observation is a more functioning cooperation with research participants, necessitating the ethnographer to stabilize the insider against outside continuum. By engaging in the observation, the ethnographer behaves and lives like an insider, yet constantly keeps his/her objectivity towards observation (Adler, P. A. & Adler, P., 1994). Basically, there is a range of participation observation, the levels of which were defined in Gold's typology (as stated in Pope, 2005) as shown in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. Gold's Typology of Research Roles

Gold created this typology of participant roles to interpret the levels of participation. In this ethnographic observation study, the volunteer student is a *participant as observer* as defined by Gold.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this section, the results of the study and the findings are described based on the data obtained from the diary of the observer. The common behaviors and attitudes represented by the students are categorized and clarified. Table 1 provides an overview of emerging themes derived from the observations from the first day.

Table 1. Diary on Monday

Time	Observation
Break	Students listening to music loudly
	Half of the students chewing the fat
	Students falling in love with each other
Lesson	Students just seeming to listen to teacher
	A girl observing boys
	A girl checking her fingernail polish
	Girls texting messages
	Girls gossiping
	Boys arranging a football match
	Boys playing with their mobiles
	Some boys interrupting the teacher
	A girl always silent
	The most successful boy focusing on the lesson
Break	Newcomers trying to get accustomed
	Boys flirting with girls
Lesson	Boys talking about girls
	Tourist called girls joining the lesson
	Boys still talking about girls
	Boys playing with their mobiles
Lesson	Girls texting messages

On the first school day, during the first break, all the students listen to music loudly, while half of the students are chewing the fat. Further, a girl and a boy are falling in love with each other. On the other hand, during the first course phase, majority of the students just seem to listen to teacher, a girl is observing boys, another girl is checking her fingernail polish, while some girls are texting messages and gossiping. Besides, some boys are arranging a football match, some are playing with their mobiles, and some are interrupting the teacher. While a girl is always silent, the most successful boy who sits close to teacher is focusing on the lesson. Lastly, the newcomers are trying to get accustomed to the new class environment. Additionally, boys are flirting with girls during the second break while the rest of the boys are talking about girls. Furthermore, during the second course, the tourist called girls join the lesson, while some boys are still talking about girls and playing with their mobiles as well. Lastly, a few girls are still texting messages hastily.

In short, a nonacademic atmosphere is generally observed within this school setting. This may be attributed to the effects of social media which is a common problematic issue throughout the world.

Table 2. *Diary on Thursday*

Time	Observation
Break	Some dozing students
	Boys and girls sitting separately
Lesson	Most of the class playing with their mobiles
	Unpleasant teacher
	Only some students seeming to listen to teacher
	Some students chatting with each other
	Some boys trying to impress girls
	Only few students taking notes
	Some students worrying about their tasks
	Some dozing students
Break	Some boys interrupting the teacher
	Students smoking
	Boys discussing the high cost of cigarettes
	Boys talking about girls
	Girls talking about boys
	Girls talking about make-up
	Girls talking about clothes

On the second day of the week, some students are dozing during the break time. Moreover, boys and girls are sitting separately on two sides of the classroom. During the course time, most of the students are playing with their mobiles as usual which makes the teacher unpleasant. Only some students seem to listen to the teacher while some others are chatting. Additionally, some boys are trying to impress girls. However, only few students are taking notes while some are worrying about their tasks. Some students are still dozing while some boys are interrupting the teacher with unrelated questions. During the second break, some students are smoking, discussing the high

cost of cigarettes, and still talking about girls. Further, girls are talking about boys, their make-up, and clothes.

On the second school day, the atmosphere seems to be the same compared to the first day of the diary. The students again seem to be far from having the required motivation which may be attributed to several individual factors stemming from the students' socio-economical positions, the education system, or the related policies.

Table 3. *Diary on Wednesday*

Time	Observation
Lesson	Usual latecomers
	Students keeping their eyes open for the attendance sheet
	Some students chatting with each other
	Some students working on tasks
	Some students drinking coffee
	Some dozing students
	A boy taking notes
	A boy asking for the meaning of a word
	Some students playing with their mobiles
	Few students listening to teacher
	A boy frequently looking at his watch
Break	Students listening to music loudly
	Students playing with their mobiles

On Wednesday, during the course time, the usual latecomers come to lesson late. All the students are keeping their eyes open for the attendance sheet, some students are chatting with each other, and some other are working on their tasks. Further, some students are drinking coffee while some are dozing. However, a boy is trying to take notes, while a boy is asking for the meaning of an unknown word. Some students are still playing with their mobiles as usual. While only few students are listening to teacher, a boy frequently looks at his watch. During the break time, students are again listening to music loudly while some are playing with their mobiles.

As can be observed from the table, the motivation of the students is still low on the third day. In a similar vein, the classroom setting does not show any sign of development, which may be attributed to the established culture of the class.

Table 4. *Diary on Thursday*

Time	Observation
Break	Students doing their tasks
	Everyone seeming sleepless
	Students listening to music loudly
	Some dozing students

Lesson	Some students taking notes and listening to teacher
	A boy talking on the phone
	A girl reading a novel
Break	Some students having breakfast
	Some students talking on the phone
Lesson	Most of the class have just attended the course
	Two boys working on the course book
	Some boys arranging a football match
	Some girls watching a video on their mobiles
	A boy lost in thoughts
Break	Boys watching a video and commenting on it
	Boys talking about girls
Lesson	Teacher assigning a task
	Some students asking questions about the task
	Some students playing with their mobiles

On Thursday, during the first break, some students are doing their tasks. The class is listening to music loudly, but everyone seems sleepless. Some students are dozing during the lesson. On the other hand, some students are taking notes and listening to the teacher. A boy is talking on the phone and a girl is reading a novel although it is course time. During the second break, some students are having breakfast, while some others are talking on their mobile phones. In the second lesson, most of the students have just attended the class. During the lesson, only two boys are working on the course book, some boys are arranging a football match, some girls are watching a video on their mobile phones, and a boy is lost in thoughts. During the third break, boys are watching a video and commenting on it, while some other boys are talking about girls as usual. In the last course, the teacher assigns a task, some students ask questions about the task, and some others still play with their mobiles.

The settled culture of the class is still dominant on the 4th day of the diary. The only consistency observed in this class is its ingrained culture which makes it hard to promote a better learning environment.

Table 5. Diary on Friday

Time	Observation
Course	Boys and girls sitting separately
	A boy trying to impress girls
	The teacher trying to stop the boy impressing the girls
	The teacher changing the places of some students
	Students challenging the teacher

	Few students trying to focus on the lesson
Break	Some boys playing card games
	Some boys playing video games
Course	Boys asking to go to restroom and not coming again
	Some students listening to music with earphones
	A boy trying to impress girls again
	Girls observing boys
Break	Students listening to music loudly
	Students playing with their mobiles

On Friday, during the first course, boys and girls are sitting separately. A boy tries to impress girls while the teacher tries to stop him. Further, the teacher changes the places of some students, but some of them challenge her. Yet, few students try to focus on the lesson. During the first break, some boys play card games and some others play video games. During the second course, some boys ask teacher to go to restroom and never come again. Rather than focusing on the lesson, some students listen to music with their earphones. Further, while a boy tries to impress the girls again, some girls are observing the boys. Lastly, during the second break, the class is listening to music loudly as usual and playing with their mobiles.

Motivation in foreign language learning is not as simple as we think, since it is a complex term and bears a 'multidimensional nature. The ingrained culture of the class is still observed to be dominant on the 5th day of the diary which makes it hard to promote high motivation to learn English.

Discussion

It is clearly observed in the study that the boost in technology and social media, as well as globalization formed a stereotype classroom culture which may be encountered all around the world. In her study, Watson-Gegeo (1992) referred to the thick explanation in the ethnographic research of child socialization which was a longitudinal study of the problem of schooling. Further, in her review study, Watson-Gegeo (1988) aimed at clarifying true ethnographic work by referring to it as a systematic, detailed, and rigorous study, rather than anecdotal or impressionistic. She defined the ethnography term as well as its principles and practices in foreign language classrooms. In this present study, the typical characteristics of EFL students were represented by means of the principles mentioned by Watson-Gegeo. Besides, Smit (2010) hinted on English as a lingua franca in higher education through a longitudinal study of classroom discourse. Ernst (1994), in her study, discovered that although language classrooms are generally said to supply students with little opportunity for student-formed talk and meaningful use of language, a classroom event, the talking circle, can supply students with a rich opportunity to foster their receptive and productive repertoires in the L2. Further, she found out that such instructional practices provide opportunities for students to experience interaction, on the one hand, and to perform newly attained social and linguistic knowledge, on the other. Besides, she illuminated the value of ethnographic research in enhancing the understanding of talk and interaction in L2 classrooms. In the present study, an ethnographic research was also conducted to display the characteristics of EFL students in a typical day and found out that there is not much meaningful interaction among the students. Just like the present study, Willett (1995) thickly described the participation of ESL students in the daily classroom events of a mainstream first-grade classroom. She described how students cooperatively formed their ESL identities, social

relations, and ideologies as well as communicative competence through socially significant interactional routines. Moreover, she defined how the socio-cultural ecology of the classroom carved the nature of their language learning over the school year. In their study, Brice, Mastin, and Perkins (1998) described the results of a qualitative study conducted in an ESL classroom to detect instructor and learner functional uses of language (i.e., pragmatics), specifically language containing code-switching and code-mixing use. They found out that the ESL classroom was teacher directed as proved by a high degree of questioning, commands, feedback, and informatives. In the present study, it was figured out that there was not much interaction between the teacher and students and the course was also teacher directed. Poole (1992) inquired the types of cultural messages a foreign language teacher shows through classroom interaction. In a similar vein, she analyzed instructor/learner interaction in two elementary ESL classes in light of the language socialization perspective. She found out that the teacher's language behavior was culturally motivated. In the present study, the instructor/learner interaction was also mentioned and it was figured out that there was a weak interaction since majority of the students were not motivated to pay attention to the course. However, Ordem (2017a) mentioned that the teachers should consider different dimensions of motivation, which is a complex and dynamic issue in language learning, to enable them to increase their motivation level because there are various ethnographic levels and dimensions that affect learning. Ordem (2017b) also addresses the motivation of teachers by emphasizing that heightened teacher motivation can contribute to learners' motivation as well. Ordem (2017b) regards motivation as a dynamic, complex, productive and challenging process. It remains pivotal for teachers and learners to find ways to motivate each other in their learning settings. To sum up, like all the mentioned studies in the related study area, this paper employs ethnography– a qualitative approach– to probe an EFL classroom from a first-person perspective. Since observations interpret behaviors, attitudes, communication characteristics, and workflows in particular settings, this specific study made use of ethnographic inquiry to explore the cultural characteristics of Turkish EFL students in their natural school settings.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that motivation plays a significant role in foreign language education. It is one of the determining factors of foreign language learning achievement. However, motivation in foreign language learning is not as simple as we think, since it is a complex term and bears a 'multidimensional nature. In this study, the majority of the learners were found out to be unmotivated to learn English since they were not paying much attention to the course. They mostly represented nonacademic behaviors such as playing with a mobile phone, dozing, flirting, and etc. which are chiefly not the cultural characteristics of former traditional classrooms. It is evident that the consequence of the boost in technology and social media, as well as globalization formed a common classroom culture which may be encountered all around the world.

Implications

Having an idea on the cultural characteristics of the students or being aware of their individual differences promotes the quality of any educational setting. Thus, this study may provide great help for teachers accordingly. Further, this paper may stand as a supporting source for the researchers working on culture, language and culture, ethnography, and anthropology. Lastly, educational policies may be framed based on the cultural characteristics or individual differences of the students for a better learning.

REFERENCES

- Adler, P. A., and Adler, P. (1994). *Observational techniques*. In: Denzin NK, Lincoln YS, editors. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Bartlett, R., and Milligan, C. (2015). *What is diary method?*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Brice, A., Mastin, M., and Perkins, C. (1998). English, Spanish, and code-switching use in the ESL classroom: An ethnographic study. *Journal of Children's Communication Development*, 19(2), 11-20.
- Cesur, K., and Ertaş, A. (2013). Who is more responsible? Preparatory class students' perceptions of responsibility. *ELT Research Journal*, 2(2), 70-81.
- Davis, K. A. (1995). Qualitative theory and methods in applied linguistics research. *Tesol Quarterly*, 29(3), 427-453.
- Ernst, G. (1994). "Talking circle": Conversation and negotiation in the ESL classroom. *Tesol Quarterly*, 28(2), 293-322.
- Geertz, C. (2008). *Thick description. The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hymes, D. (2003). *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Towards an Understanding of Voice*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Martyn, H. and Paul, A. (1995). *Ethnography: Practices and principles (2nd ed.)*. New York: Routledge.
- Danny, J. (2015). *Participant observation. Emerging trends in the social and behavioral sciences: An interdisciplinary, searchable, and linkable resource*. CA: Sage.
- LeCompte, M. and Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnographic and qualitative design in educational research (2nd ed.)*. New York: Academic Press.
- Ordem, E. (2017a). A Longitudinal Study of Motivation in Foreign and Second Language Learning Context. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(2), 334-341.
- Ordem, E. (2017b). A Language Teacher's Reflection on Maladaptive Immunity, Possible Selves and Motivation. *International Education Studies*, 10(9), 1-8.
- Pasassung, N. (2003). Teaching English in an "acquisition-poor environment": an ethnographic example of a remote Indonesian efl classroom (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, University of Sydney, Sydney.
- Poole, D. (1992). Language socialization in the second language classroom. *Language learning*, 42(4), 593-616.
- Pope, C. (2005). Conducting ethnography in medical settings. *Medical education*, 39(12), 1180-1187.
- Reeves, S., Peller, J., Goldman, J., and Kitto, S. (2013). Ethnography in qualitative educational research: AMEE Guide No. 80. *Medical teacher*, 35(8), e1365-e1379.
- Saville-Troike, M. (1989). *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Smit, U. (2010). English as a lingua franca in higher education: A longitudinal study of classroom discourse (Vol. 2). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Watson-Gegeo, K. A. (1988). Ethnography in ESL: Defining the essentials. *Tesol quarterly*, 22(4), 575-592.

- Watson-Gegeo, K. A. (1992). Thick explanation in the ethnographic study of child socialization: A longitudinal study of the problem of schooling for Kwara'ae (Solomon Islands) children. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 1992(58), 51-66.
- Willett, J. (1995). Becoming first graders in an L2: An ethnographic study of L2 socialization. *Tesol Quarterly*, 29(3), 473-503.