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[esogutlu@beder.edu.al](mailto:esogutlu@beder.edu.al)**How Can Language Learning Contribute To Peace****Abstract**

*In terms of distance, globalization has managed to transform our world into an enormous village in less than a 40-year period. Continuous technological and social developments as well have undoubtedly made their contribution to informing people about the unknown and the unfamiliar. Various significant attempts have been constantly made aiming at crossing borders and cultures in order to maintain peace among countries in different regions. Numerous organizations and associations have also made serious efforts to join this challenge. However, there is one thing which, despite not having been overlooked promises a lot and has yet a lot more to contribute to the cause of peace, and that is language. If peace as a concept means knowing, understanding and tolerating others, and the medium which enables the transmission of knowledge and culture is language, then we should accept that it is essential to comprehend the strong relationship between peace and language.*

*The aim of this article is to present a brief overview of concepts like global education and peace education with a focus on the relationship between these terms and language teaching. Another important issue this article addresses is how peace and global issues can be incorporated in various aspects of language teaching with the aim of raising students' awareness and commitment to matters of international importance and interest. Since educators and especially language teachers very often become their students' most affective role-models, this article also touches upon the significant role of language teachers' attitudes and viewpoints in teaching and promoting peace in the classroom and outside it.*

**Key words:** *language learning, peace education, global education, contribution, language teachers*

## 1-Introduction

The process of globalization has managed to shorten distances and to shrink the world into a global village in terms of trade, economy and technology. Constant developments and advance in these fields have increasingly contributed to informing people and spreading knowledge about remote places which they might have never heard of, therefore familiarizing them with previously unknown cultures and languages as well. Although as a process globalization has been an issue of controversy, the contribution it has made and continues to make to maintaining and making peace is unquestionable. For some the greatest value of globalization is its potential for creating a world of peace. (Marquardt, 2005) The means by which this is achieved vary and depend on different countries' policies and what their governments or international organizations put the emphasis on. However, the only means whose role in making and maintaining peace is vital and cannot be neglected is language. Despite not having been overlooked it promises and has a lot more to contribute to this issue.

If peace as a concept means knowing, understanding and tolerating the others and the medium which enables the transmission of knowledge and culture is language, then we should accept that it is essential to comprehend the strong relationship between peace and language. The main aspect of this relationship is the use of language to communicate something. The way we choose to convey our message will determine the nature of the context, a peaceful or a conflictive one. If, as Friedrich does, we do not equate peace with the absence of war, but rather see it as the building of solid social structures that allows individuals to have their rights respected, language is the means that enables this construction (Friedrich, 2009).

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## 2-Global Education

Along with globalization terms like global education and peace education emerged. When global education was still in its infancy in 1985 Alger and Harf defined it as “education that enables people to make decisions while taking into account the ways in which they are affected by a diversity of economic, social, political, military and natural phenomena that link together peoples of the world.” (Chadwick F. Alger, James E. Harf, 1985) Since this implies that all professions be prepared to get involved in all these systems, they suggested that global education requires the removal of the national border as a barrier in education at all levels and in all subjects. Among the five basic themes in worldwide relations and institutions they mention values. While nations, religions and various ethnic groups make efforts to assert and reassert their values, increasing attempts are being made to create common standards for life on the planet. Here I make my case for the important contribution of language to facilitating the utilization of these standards.

Ramler suggests that in global education we must move beyond factual and inquiry learning in order to teach students to look at issues from different perspectives, and what is more important, we should lead them to understand and respect other cultures. (Ramler, 1991) Because competence in other languages is vital to understanding other cultures one of the most important tools which makes this possible is learning the language of those cultures.

According to global educators the four core content areas of global education are the fields of peace education, human rights education, development education and environmental education. (Cates K. A., 1992) According to Cates a global education approach to language teaching should enable students to effectively use the foreign language and to equip them with the knowledge, skills and dedication to solve global problems (Cates K. A., 1992).

### 3-Peace Education

Peace education is the process of teaching people about the threats of violence and strategies for peace (Harris I. , 2010). It refers to both formal school-based and informal community education programs that teach about the dangers of violence and alternatives to violence (Harris I. M., 2003). Attempts to teach and promote peace among people and nations date back to early ages. They have varied from religious preaching of prophets to community-based peace teachings. Horrors of civil and world wars have always called for and resulted in the formation of peace movements and in the establishment of international peace organizations, which have always played a significant role in making or maintaining peace among certain countries. Another approach has been teaching and promoting peace in peaceful times aiming at preventing war. It is significant here to mention two concepts initially used in 1964 by Galtung. He argues that we should distinguish between negative peace, which “is the absence of violence, absence of war”, and the positive peace, which “is the integration of human society” (Galtung, An Editorial, 1964). Our main focus in this article is positive peace. In his arguments for positive peace Reardon classifies the following three approaches as part of education for positive peace: *environmental education*, *development education* and *human rights education*. (Reardon, 1988) Pamela Baxter defines peace education as “an attempt to change people’s behaviors” and in this kind of teaching besides other factors the language we choose is the most important (Pamela Baxter, Vick Ikobwa, 2005).

The strong connection between peace, language, communication, culture and power is unquestionable and we can all make our contributions to a world where respect for diversity and an understanding of cultural and linguistic differences are accessible to all. (Friedrich, 2009)

With language I do not mean mother tongue only; an important tool which facilitates understanding cultural differences is the language of the respective culture. In addition to supporting mother tongue as a means of improving education quality, the UNESCO Position Paper on “Education in a Multilingual World” also advocates “bilingual and/or multilingual education as a means of promoting gender and social equality and a key element of linguistically diverse societies.” (UNESCO, 2003). In the following section I shall mention some major undertakings of UNESCO with regard to promoting foreign language learning as an aid to peace education.

#### **4-Teaching Peace through Language Instruction**

The undisputable role of language teachers in teaching peace in and outside the classroom has been affirmed by most researchers and academics. In their study on language teaching and world peace academics from Turkey conclude that:

Language teachers have an important part in educating for peace and should emphasize peace elements in the target language to allow students to discover the importance of establishing a peaceful world and to respect differences for a worthy world (I. H. Mirici, Z. Ozturk, C. B. Arslan, 2009).

Although the authors of the following paragraph use their article to give arguments about how careless use of language makes language and its user part of violence in order to express their feminist views, I totally agree with their opinion about the role language plays in our thinking.

“...while at work on needed scholarship, we need to begin to change our talk and we need to teach differently. Insuring that our students recognize the patterns of language is an essential first step. They (and we) can learn to notice how language provides the path for thinking. ... That’s what lan-

guages do for us; they provide paths and make it hard to see what's off the trail. (Anita Taylor, M. J. Hardman, 2004)

The way we use language and knowing the other side and their sensibilities are other factors that affect communication researchers say: The language, which is both used in starting and preventing conflict, has a very important place. Using a constructive language in both communications of two parties from the same culture and different cultures both prevents the conflict and simplifies the resolutions of the conflicts that have come out. This can be possible by getting to know the other side and taking their sensibilities into account. Not knowing the other side or not being aware of their sensibilities is the conflict that the person can cause unintentionally. Teaching these sensibilities is the most important mission of foreign language teachers. (Sahin, 2011)

The importance of including issues of global education in the EFL curriculum is argued for by (Cates K. , 1990) as follows: If our language students are truly to become socially responsible world citizens, then global issues and the four goals of global education (knowledge, skills, attitude, and action) must appear explicitly in the language-teaching curriculum.

Since the role teachers play in dealing with peace issues in the classroom and in promoting peace education a good preparation of teachers becomes vital. According to Quezada and Romo this can be achieved in higher education or preparation programs:

Institutions of higher education and teacher preparation programs can be the impetus in preparing teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to promote peace education in their classrooms in order to build peaceful classrooms with students who value peace education and justice for all students. (Reyes Quezada, Jaime J. Romo, 2004)

Achieving desired levels of learning greatly depends on an essential element: teachers. "They are the most important factor in determining the quality of learning because they also impart values, model

behavior and play an important role in socialization.” (Smith, 2010)

## 5-What Exactly Can Efl Teachers Do

**5.1-Appropriate materials:** A lot of textbook authors have made great efforts to not just include global issues in their textbooks but to specifically deal with them. *The World Around Us* (Hoppenrath&Royal 1997) helps to develop the learners’ language skills and to encourage them to discuss and talk about social issues. *Folk Life Around the World* (Liebermann 1994) and *Worlds Together* (Amato&Hansen 1995) aim to develop different language skills and encourage learners to think critically while promoting awareness of other cultures and countries. Others deal directly with world problems, for example *Global Issues* (Randle, Gerard-Sharp, Yugi 1997).

Although most EFL teachers have to follow a particular strict curriculum and syllabus, which in most cases may be determined by education authorities, they still can choose among lots of authentic reading passages from newspapers, magazines or other sources. These can vary according to the world or social topics the teacher wants his/her students to be more aware of. The way the topic is introduced and then dealt with depends largely on the teacher and his/her creativity. Making the learners familiar with the specific vocabulary through the pre-reading activities is a very important step. Not only does it help the student to understand the passage better, but it also enables him/her to discuss about the topic using the relevant vocabulary. As a follow-up activity students may be given short paragraphs with examples from different people’s lives or with information about what has been done or is being done around the world about the topic, and then they can be asked to share their information with the class. Various activities can be selected and adapted to the learners’ age group.

Since it is much easier to instill virtues and universal values in a child than an adult, especially when illustrated with examples, one of the ways through which it can be achieved is encouraging young learners to read stories about these topics, or making them read in class as part of a lesson. Integration of peace education in reading comprehension lessons in primary schools is something that we should reconsider if we want children to grow up with positive thoughts about the world. (Yusuf, 2011) In her article Yusuf also gives examples of stories she used in her classes concluding that “reading comprehension lessons should be the starting point of shaping the personality, character and ethics of children at this level of education”. (Yusuf, 2011) In view of this, the same can be aimed and achieved through assorted listening activities as well. If we are to make our students listen to a song in class why not choose Michael Jackson’s *The Earth Song*. No other lesson would teach the importance of taking care of the environment better than his lyrics.

**5.2-Grammar lessons:** One might think that since grammar is the least fun to learn it should also be the last to utilize if you want to teach a global issue. Although not always aiming at teaching kindness or generosity, most EFL teachers will remember using “if I had one million pound” clause in order to teach the second conditional and most of them will remember most students saying they would use it for charity or to help the poor. A good way of practicing the past tense would be sharing the learners’ experience of participating in an environmental issues awareness-raising campaign. Comparative structures can be practiced by comparing polluted areas to clean ones, or as Cates suggests “by comparing human rights in different countries”. (Cates K. , 1990) Future tenses can be used to make predictions about how our actions will affect the whole life on our planet.

**5.3-Projects/Oral presentations:** Despite various arguments about the inappropriateness of oral presentations usage in EFL environments, when well-organized and planned they can benefit the learner and can also be an enjoyable activity for them. (Gonzalez, 1998) Preparation of oral presentations or projects can be set as a task for all the learners of a group/class at the beginning of the term, and dependent on their age, the learners may work individually, in pairs or groups. Selection of topics to be covered is done in advance by the teacher and the students are allowed to choose among them. Teachers should be careful to choose topics that appeal to the learners, which would make them work more willingly thus benefiting more. Another aspect to be considered is choosing issues of which the community and the learners need to be more conscious. Asking students to find information about the topic and about how it is dealt with in other cities or countries, will serve the familiarization of the students with relevant vocabulary and will be the first step towards awareness-raising about the issue.

**5.4-Debates:** Despite their contribution to enhancing EFL learners' L2 communicative competence, debates play a significant role in effective promotion of critical thinking in a classroom. In their study about the role debates play in enhancing reading comprehension skills and critical thinking Iranian researchers conclude that the impact on both aspects is significant and that "practicing critical thinking changes the learners from passive receivers of the new materials in to critical thinkers." (M. Rashtchi, F. Sadraeimanesh, 2011) If debate topics consist of environmental and social issues that concern the community we shall have citizens who will think critically about raising awareness and taking action.

**5.5-Pair/Group work:** The first lesson that pair/group work teaches the learners consists in instructing the students that it is much easier

to succeed when you are not alone. Whether as a class activity or as part of a project or debate preparation, having to collaborate with others will lead the learners to get to know, understand and tolerate each other, which will eventually result in a more peaceful learning environment. Group work is particularly effective with multicultural classes, where language learning and practicing in groups plays a crucial role in crossing culture barriers which might lead to misunderstandings. If we manage to teach our students how to live harmoniously with other cultures, languages and nationalities, then we will have already taught them enough about peace.

## **6-Conclusion**

The role foreign language and its instruction play in making and maintaining peace has never been underestimated. However, if we take into consideration the fact that it is through the language of a country that we learn and familiarize with its culture, then the contribution of language instruction to tolerance and eventually to peace should be reconsidered. Whatever nationality a child belongs to he will speak the language he hears and if we intend to teach the language of peace we should first teach its components. A combination of language learning activities incorporating environmental, social justice and human rights issues is essential to teaching how to live in harmony with diverse cultures and nature as well.

Including such topics in the instruction of the four basic skills reading, listening, speaking and writing, enhances and promotes the learners' knowledge of these issues and raises their awareness as well thus making learners feel able to cope with complex issues of modern age. A more contributive idea would be the integration of peace education in foreign language curricula and designation of whole peace education EFL textbooks or courses.

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Today's teachers are educating tomorrow's leaders, therefore, preparation of effective teachers who will be able to promote peace in the classroom and outside, it is another significant aspect. If we want to see future generations who appreciate humanistic values, respect diversity and applaud peace we need to see these features in current teachers.

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