

Contributions of Culturally Responsive Elementary School Teachers in the Education Process

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Abstract

In this study, contributions of culturally responsive elementary teachers in the education process are examined. It has been found that having culturally responsive competencies could create positive results in individual, school and societal levels. Within this context, culturally responsive elementary teachers would make a great contribution in the educational process and for education stakeholders, especially for themselves. In addition, culturally responsive elementary teachers would be able to use their individual and professional capacity more effectively since their sociological readiness would be greater. Culturally responsive elementary teachers could also increase students' motivation for school and learning.

Keywords: multicultural education, cultural responsiveness, elementary education, teaching and learning.

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There are important cognitive and affective factors in the shaping of individuals. Culture, which is one of these factors, consists of abstract views, values and perceptions of the world, which provide information about the behavior of people and reflect these behaviors (Haviland et al., 2008). According to Turhan (1997), culture is a material and spiritual whole with all kinds of information, interests, habits, value judgments, attitudes, opinions, thoughts and behaviors that are present in society. In this context, it can be said that culture gives an individual an identity and that the individual's thoughts, attitudes and reactions are determined by the cultural framework and social norms. In fact, Macionis (2015) emphasizes the impact of being culturally responsive to human life and the fact that actions set against cultural backgrounds are meaningful depending on culturally responsiveness. In this context, it is thought that it is necessary to be culturally responsive and sensitive to the characteristics of individuals within the education process.

As individual's cognitive and affective characteristics develop under the influence of their cultural backgrounds and experiences, culture is accepted as one of the natural components of the learning process (Karatas & Oral, 2019). The fact that the individual's mental development is based on specific experiences as a result of interactions with other people in the cultural framework is one of the basic assumptions of socio-cultural learning theory and it is suggested that the social and cultural environment is an important factor in the realization of individuals' learning (Schunk, 2014). Vygotsky draws attention to cultural and social processes in the period of knowledge building and meaning formation of individuals. In addition, logic, symbolic thinking, concepts, thought patterns, signs, numbers and words are expressed under the socio-cultural conditions of the tools that people use when building a world in which they live together (Aydin, 2012). In this respect, it is important to consider cultural components in designing an effective learning-teaching process for individuals and it is important that culture is at the center of shaping an educational context. On this basis, the learning-teaching process is a culturally

responsive pedagogy. It is emphasized that within the thought of ‘education for all’, education should be organized in a more inclusive way which emphasizes the cultural differences of students (Karatas & Oral, 2016). Phuntsog (1999) mentions that a culturally responsive pedagogical approach provides an intellectual environment of respect for the diversity of all learners, creates a safe learning environment where everyone will respect each other, integrates culturally responsive teaching practices into all learning disciplines and adapts the curriculum according to the principles of social justice and social equality.

Culturally responsive teaching is considered to be a powerful approach that contributes to an increase in an individual’s participation in classes, an improvement in their academic performance and an increase in their level of success (Byrd, 2016). However, culturally responsive teaching is not only an approach that will contribute cultural responsiveness to students in the classroom, but also a social aspect that will enable the development of feelings of citizenship and social justice, and the voluntary participation of social change and equality (Bassey, 2016). In this context, culturally responsive pedagogy is not only an application that is confined to the classroom, but has an individual contribution as it is an approach that contributes qualified transformation to social interaction in addition to class environment. In this respect, teachers should be equipped with knowledge and skills that are culturally responsive in order to strengthen an understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy in the education process.

The Culturally Responsive Elementary School Teacher

For the reliable cognitive and affective development of the student, the components of school systems should be culturally responsive. Teachers, who are an important component of the school system, could increase the quality of learning-teaching process if they are aware of the cultural experiences of students and the environmental conditions in which they grow. Teachers who are not aware of the effects of a cultural environment or context on the learning of students are not be able to design an effective learning-teaching process (Hutchison, 2006). In this regard,

teachers should have an understanding of and some certain competencies related to culturally responsive pedagogy.

According to Gay (2002), teachers are expected to have certain culturally responsive competencies: a) being aware of their cultural identity and prejudices; b) a tendency to learn the world views of groups that are different from their own culture; and c) the development of culturally responsive teaching methods. Phuntsog (1999) emphasizes the key points of field experts in the context of the characteristics of teachers in culturally responsive education. These are as follows: to provide motivation for all learners; to create a safe learning environment where everyone respects each other and cultural differences are not denied; to integrate culture-based teaching practices into disciplines; and to provide transitions to social justice and socially equal principles in the curriculum. Jackson (1994) proposes culturally responsive teaching to the teacher: building trust; having cultural literacy; knowing various teaching methods and techniques; using effective inquiry techniques; providing effective feedback; analyzing teaching materials; and being able to establish a positive home-school relationship. In light of the principles of social justice, Brown (2007) stresses the following points for teachers in terms of realizing the classroom practices that overlap with the cultural backgrounds and experiences of students within the framework of respect for pluralistic understanding and differences:

- To be aware of racist thoughts and prejudices,
- To learn about the cultural backgrounds of students,
- To understand the social, economic and political status of students,
- To develop classroom management skills that are culturally responsive
- To demonstrate loyalty in approaching a culturally responsive pedagogy in the teaching process.

When teachers acquire knowledge about cultural differences and diversity, and they take steps to make their lives more culturally responsive, they can experience cultural diversity in the classroom. This is because the efficiency of the learning-teaching process is dependent on the knowledge, skill and proficiency levels of the teacher. It has been found that teachers who are culturally responsive have a much better understanding of teaching. Students' academic achievements, motivation, cultural awareness and critical thinking-questioning skills increase in mathematics, science, social studies and history courses where teaching activities are designed and conducted based on culturally responsive pedagogy (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Fulton, 2009; Hubert, 2013; Leonard, 2008; Milner, 2011). In this context, teachers should take the cultural background and experiences of the students into consideration in the teaching process. Senemoğlu (2004) states that the quality of education in children in the early years has a significant impact on the future success of children and their thoughts about school, lessons and their general attitudes. Therefore, it has been said by Senemoğlu that elementary teachers play an important role in shaping the future of children and having a healthy personality. In this respect, it is important to consider the social context of students during the primary school period and to make cultural resources an instrument to develop their sense of belonging to a school, to be motivated and make learning easier and to learn to develop their academic skills (Conglin, 2010).

In order for future elementary school teachers to have an understanding of cultural differences on achievement and to reflect this situation on the education-teaching process, it is important that teacher training programs have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes towards culturally responsive pedagogy. However, instructors who are the practitioners of the teacher training programs are also expected to internalize this culturally responsive pedagogy. The role of the instructor in teaching pedagogical knowledge and skills that are culturally responsive is truly important for teacher candidates. An instructor's culturally responsive pedagogy, knowledge, skills and tendencies should act as a model for teacher candidates to

contribute to their academic development (Prater & Devereaux, 2009). According to Darling-Hammond, Frech and Garcia-Lopez (2002), the aim is that instructors need to design experiences that will enable teacher candidates to explore issues related to diversity, such as social, cultural, linguistic, religious and so on. In this sense, instructors are an important component at the point of educating teacher candidates to be culturally responsive.

In this research, the opinions of instructors and reflections of elementary teachers in Turkey who are culturally responsive in the education process are investigated. It is thought that the findings obtained from this research will contribute to the vision of educating culturally responsive elementary school teachers. In addition, it is foreseen that educational stakeholders will provide a better understanding of the individual and social impact of culturally responsive pedagogy. Finally, it is considered important that prospective teachers, who will build the society of the future with their knowledge and skills, develop basic values such as democracy, human rights, equality, respect for differences, and social justice. At this point, it is believed by educators that it is necessary to accelerate attempts to educate not only the elementary teacher candidates, but also candidates from all branches of teaching with cultural responsiveness. With this purpose and scope, the following questions are posed:

- What kind of contributions does acquiring culturally responsive teaching skills add to teachers?
- What are the contributions of culturally responsive classroom teachers for their students?
- What are the contributions of being a culturally responsive elementary teacher to the society?

Research Methods

Research Design and Participants

In this research, a phenomenological design is preferred because the aim is the in-depth exploration of how culturally responsive elementary teachers contribute to the education processes. In this phenomenological design, the researcher investigates how participants impose meaning on facts and actions, and try to learn about the experiences of the participants concerning the phenomenon with ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Gliner, et al., 2015). The instructors who participated in the study were selected by criterion sampling. Criterion sampling provides a better understanding of a subject and the opportunity to study it in depth, and to identify situations where it is of importance (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). In this context, while identifying instructors to be included in the research, consideration was given to those holding a BA or MA degree in the department of elementary teaching or, even if they had a BA or an MA degree from a different department, a background of academic study and experience in the field of elementary teaching was deemed important. This criterion was introduced because of the wealth of knowledge and experience of the instructors related to the investigated phenomenon. In this context, data was gathered from three female and six male instructors working at four Turkish universities in elementary teaching degree programs. Two of the instructors were associate professors, three were assistant professors, and four were research assistants.

Data collection

In the data collection process of the research, the interview method from qualitative research methods was adopted. In order to obtain the basic structure and reality that underlies opinions and experiences, the interview was considered as the primary data collection method (Merriam, 2002). In this context, research data was collected from instructors through semi-

structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews, which are frequently used in qualitative research, provide researchers with the opportunity to identify the main framework of the subject and to ask questions within their own subjects. This is, at the same time, providing a flexible structure that allows them to add questions, according to new situations, which may arise during the interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). A semi-structured interview draft form was created by the researcher in accordance with the purpose and scope of the research. In the draft interview form, opinions of experts in the field of education and two elementary teachers were taken into consideration and necessary corrections made. In the last part of the semi-structured interview form, questions about how the elementary teacher, who is culturally responsive, reflected on the education process were posed. The effects of teachers who are culturally responsive on the subject in terms of teachers, students and society was sought.

At the commencement of the data collection process, permission was obtained from the relevant institutions to interview the participants. Then the purpose and scope of the research was clearly explained to the participants before the start of the interviews. In addition, it was confirmed that any data obtained from the interviews would only be used for a scientific study and that personal data and raw data would not be shared with any other person or institution. The interviews were started after the verbal and written approval of the participants. In the first five to ten minutes of the interviews, questions were asked to identify the participants. Following this, questions in a semi-structured interview form were directed for approximately 25 to 50 minutes and the necessary data obtained for the research. During the interview process, the researcher adopted a detailed, sensitive and inquisitive attitude to reveal deeper meanings in the views of the participants. Depending on the approval of the participants, the interviews were recorded by voice recorder with notes also being kept. The data obtained from those participants who did not allow the use of a recording device was noted in the interview process.

Data analysis

In the analysis of the qualitative data, a descriptive analysis method was used to analyze the data obtained through interview. Descriptive analysis is a type of qualitative data analysis, which includes summarizing and interpreting data according to predetermined themes. The main purpose of this type of analysis is to provide a systematic presentation of raw data obtained by encoding and transforming it into themes (Yildirim & Simşek, 2011). In this context, in the framework proposed by Robson (2007), the analysis of the data was started by first deciphering the data with the first codes related to the data being produced. A separate file in the computer was opened for each interviewer. As a whole, data were read several times and semantic patterns were researched in detail in order to prepare for coding and theming after tallying and editing of the data. After this, items that could be a theme were put together and themes were determined. At this point, whether or not the themes and the coded parts were associated with the whole data set were checked, and the codes and themes were then reviewed. In the last stage of the data analysis, the analysis was terminated by the creation of thematic networks, the relationship among the themes, and the interpretation and integration of the themes. While the themes were named, care was taken to remain compatible with the aim and theoretical framework of the research and also to make the themes as sensitive and comprehensive as possible to the data. In addition, the visualization of the relationship between the themes obtained from the data is presented and outlined in the relevant sections. Finally, the findings of the participants are presented and explained with participants coded P.1, P.2, P.3 etc.

Validity and Reliability of Research

In order to increase the credibility of the data obtained from the study, care was taken to allocate sufficient time for data collection in order to understand and analyze the investigated phenomenon. In addition, data was collected from people who could provide rich and appropriate data for the purpose of the study. However, the choice of the criterion sampling

method in the selection of the participants of the study was seen as a different factor that would enable the findings of the research to be applied and conveyed by stakeholders in different fields. On the other hand, in an ethical dimension of the study, participants were informed about its purpose, the protection of the participants' privacy, the known risks and benefits related to participation in the study, as well as assurances being given.

In the process of data acquisition, the interviews continued until repetition of data to be attributed to the findings and the satisfaction level of the data was reached. However, in order to prevent misunderstandings that may arise from any subjective assumptions of the inferences and comments made about the outcomes of the study, participant confirmation was obtained on the themes and findings. The findings of the research process are presented in an objective manner and are supported by direct quotations. In order to increase the consistency of the research, to review and critically evaluate the processes from the research design to the writing of the themes, field experts were contacted and corrections made in line with their recommendations. While presenting and interpreting the findings, a rich and intense description emerges with the raw data being shared with readers within the framework of the specific themes, by making direct quotations from the views of the instructors for the transferability of the research findings.

Results

In this section, the data obtained from the instructors is presented in the light of the findings of culturally responsive elementary teachers.

Reflections of the Culturally Responsive Elementary Teacher

All of the instructors interviewed stated that a culturally responsive elementary teacher will have positive reflections on the education process and stakeholders, especially on themselves. However, they also stated that they do not find the elementary teachers' degree program sufficient enough in terms of prospective teachers gaining knowledge and awareness in a way that is culturally responsive.

In Terms of Reflection to the Teacher. The instructors think that the fact that elementary teachers gain cultural awareness, and that they are aware of the culture of the possible places they will work and also the characteristics of the individuals within that culture, will provide many personal and professional benefits for the elementary teachers. In addition, the fact that elementary teachers will not be exposed to cultural shock related to the places where they will work, and will know about the living conditions of the locals, indicates that elementary teachers will accelerate the process of adaptation to the culture and locality. On the other hand, the fact that elementary teachers are aware of the dominant cultural characteristics of the society where they will work will also contribute to the provision of sociological readiness, thereby avoiding any strife or anxiety. Excerpts from the views of the instructors regarding this idea are presented below:

P.2: He (the teacher candidate) won't begin with prejudices, in other words, he is at the stage of accepting everyone with their diversity. Therefore, when it comes to professional life, he will not be confronted with such confusion. He won't be confused about what to do. Yes, there can be such a difference. I think they're going to be a little more ready.

P. 5: Sociologically, she (the teacher candidate) knows how to behave, at least in society, especially at least in having advance information concerning the structure of the society and its customs and culture or of how to talk. The lady knows how to be in relationships, that according to her, at least in social life, and has done good mental coding according to the society.

P. 1: When the individual, who is a graduate from Istanbul University or Inonu University, is assigned to Sirnak, there is a fear. The individual does not know Sirnak culture, that area, the way of life, or the local traditions. This will be prevented if undergraduate programs provide information on these subjects.

P. 9: According to the region, the level of readiness increases. I think the conditions in Eastern or South East Anatolia are more discussed, or what is the most extreme disadvantage of children (teacher candidates) to feel the level of readiness. Being aware of the conditions, his/her attendance level allows him/her to tolerate the distance he/she will take in a year, or maybe two weeks in a year. That will help.

In Terms of Reflection to Students. The instructors anticipate that an elementary teacher who is aware of the cultural characteristics of his/her students, and who is culturally responsive, will first consider the student unconditionally. The teacher will attempt to create a democratic/free educational environment and will contribute to the development of a sense of belonging to the school and the education process, thereby preventing the alienation of the student to either school or the education process. The views of the instructors regarding this situation are as follows:

P.3: For children to be taught, the following situations may occur. They will find themselves unfamiliar with their own culture, or rather outside ones will not find them. At the same time, this is not a deficiency or a redundancy and is a normal situation they will accept and adopt, so good communication will be created.

P. 2: The teacher should be able to not only make cognitive transmission but also sensory transfer. He needs to communicate with the children. Cultural differences are mostly associated with the South East Anatolia Region with various ethnic cultural religious beliefs. I think the children here will perceive themselves as precious when they learn something about themselves. Because our cultural characteristics constitute our identity and our culture is to be appreciated, trying to learn actually means that our identity is loved and appreciated. In other words, I think that me as a person is appreciated and will create a more positive relationship between teachers and students. I believe this will have a positive impact on academic outcomes, especially if the child loves the elementary school teacher.

P. 6: Cultural elements of cultural values; these cultural elements certainly need to know the elementary teachers. They certainly need to know because you think the simplest. When you contact a parent, imagine that you go to an elementary teacher. For example, an elementary teacher in Bodrum goes to the Black Sea region. Although there are differences in culture, despite the fact that both sides are similar in geographical factors. So, what will he do? The teacher's sensitivity needs to be increased. The teacher needs to be able to recognize these cultural differences. What does that mean? These will really contribute positively, which is positive for students, since when this awareness is raised, cultural factors and cultural elements are created.

After completing the process of adaptation to the culture of the place where the teachers are culturally responsive, they think that the professional efficiency of the teachers will increase. In addition, while the teacher is planning the learning/teaching process, the students will use the concepts that they are familiar with during lessons and gain culture-specific motifs in classroom activities. Therefore, they think that this situation will contribute to the formation of a qualified

academic climate, to increase the motivation of students to learn and to increase the academic success. Excerpts from the views of instructors of this opinion are as follows:

P. 8: As we say in the principles of teaching, from known to unknown, from concrete to abstract. So, this is the simplest example. Now when we talk about a subject, we must first give examples of the culture from the child's own environment, so that the child learns the distant culture and learns the distant environment...Or let the child know what's abstract, and learn the unknown. For instance, there is a plan to visit Anitkabir. We're working in Muş. Visiting the Mausoleum is a tragi-comic situation. What are we going to do with the child? Behold, there is a bridge that connects the Murat River, and it is famous, you will see it this visit. If we know the elements in that culture, it is more effective in teaching and learning if we use it in lectures.

P.4: To accept this cultural diversity as a mosaic and to accept different opinions, there may be different beliefs, different ideas, different cultures, and especially to bring people closer to each other, providing an education within the framework of love and tolerance. This, of course, increases motivation efficiency in terms of both students and teachers.

P.7: The school, especially in the classroom, has a positive climate. A combination of quality of education and success increases with this. We have to give this education in a quality manner at the undergraduate degree level. Of course, it is clear that such training will succeed. Individuals who are different in terms of individual differences will actively participate in lessons as well as the perception of this awareness by the teacher. The teacher will enjoy taking classes. It always affects positively and provides positive gains.

In Terms of Society Reflection. The instructors predict that they will serve social integration in the long term with the activities that elementary teachers who are culturally responsive will perform in the classroom and with strong communication with parents outside the classroom. Another point that instructors make is that if the elementary teacher is the head of an educational process that is culturally responsive, they will create social peace, by creating social and cultural exclusion and by preventing certain individuals and groups who terrorize educational phenomena. A number of the lecturers' opinions are presented below:

P.3: Now we have a great wound that is bleeding; events in the south east. Teachers in the south east always have this problem when they go. The student that I taught has experienced it. They even generated a movie entitled, 'Two Languages a Suitcase'. Emre acting in that film was my student. Now you know the problem the student is experiencing. He does not speak Kurdish, and the students do not speak Turkish. If only he knew a little Kurdish... if he tried to teach Turkish in that way, I wonder would he not have been more successful. It's misunderstood by some people...very misinterpreted by most people. Should the elementary teacher learn Kurdish now? No, I don't think that way. Perhaps if

this had been carried out years ago, there wouldn't be many children in the south east who couldn't speak Turkish.

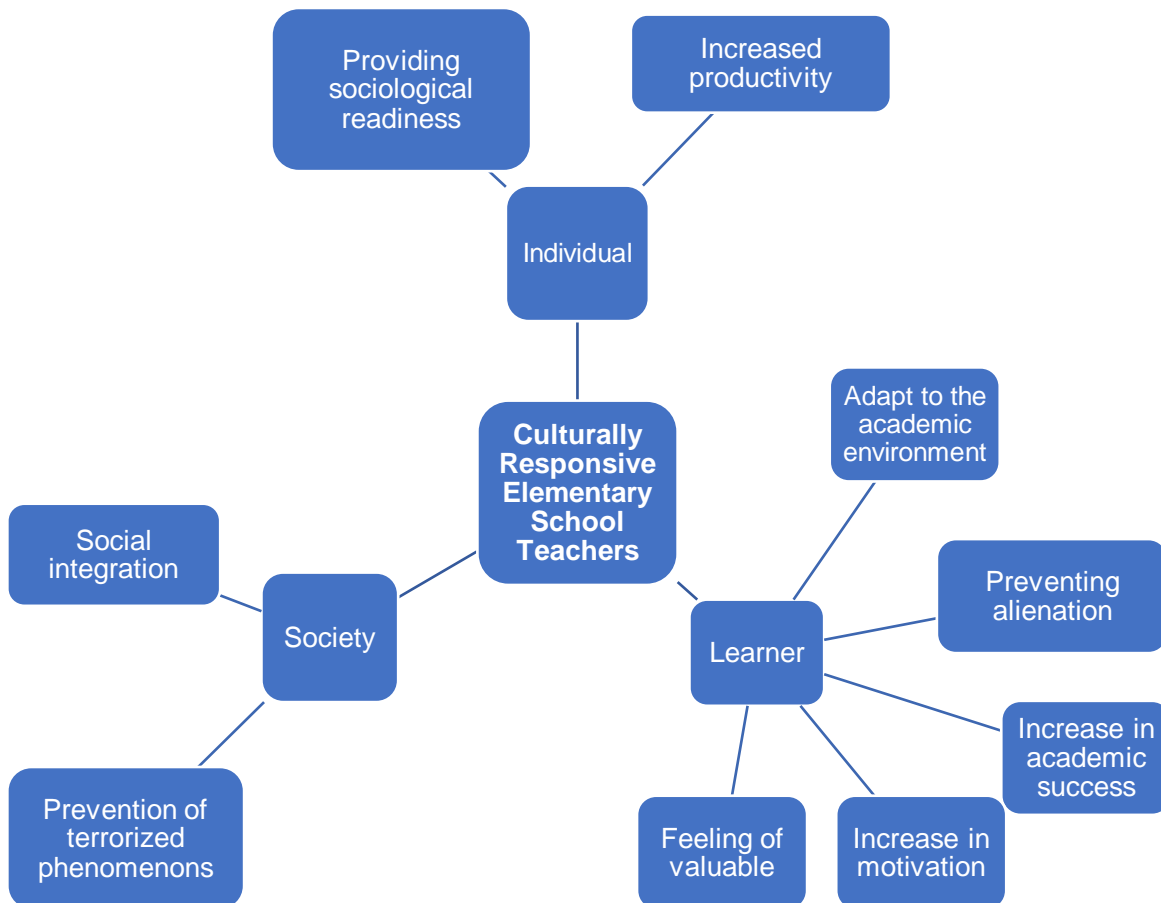
P.6: It will contribute to social peace. This is because both the students and the people in that town will respect the teacher, seeing that the teacher that goes there respecting their culture, and refers to them. It will make a multi-dimensional contribution to social peace. It will make a positive contribution to the union of the country.

P.9: If we say Kurdish, does the child misunderstand? If you don't say this, he greatly misunderstands or thinks something else in his mind. Relax! You're our child, you're our son. Say these words. You see what happens. If it is approached in this way, I think that we can genuinely contribute to the problems of society.

The visual content of the theme network, obtained as a result of the interviews with the instructors within the scope of this theme, is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Reflections of Culturally Responsive Elementary School Teachers



As a result of the findings of the research, it can be seen that teachers who are culturally responsive are expected to have positive contribution in their professional readiness and professional efficiency. In the same way, it is stated that the development of the cognitive and affective characteristics of the students for whom they provide educational services will contribute positively to the realization of the social integration of society and the elimination of separatist activities.

Discussion and Conclusion

The culturally responsive teachers who are performing this pedagogy affect the educational process in the short and long term. According to the findings obtained in this research, in case of prospective teachers achieving knowledge, skills, awareness and competence towards cultural responsiveness, there are many benefits, in particular for them; including for the learning-teaching process and for their stakeholders when they begin to teach as teachers.

Teachers are like the intersection of the point of cultures. To be able to perform the role and responsibility of cultural diversity within a class by blending and synthesizing cultures, they must be aware of their own prejudices regarding cultures and have knowledge of the cultures represented within the class. In fact, considering the components which cause cultural differences, such as language, beliefs, socio-economic levels, gender and so on, it is highly likely that students in the classes in which the teachers teach will have different social and cultural experiences. Having education in a culturally diverse classroom is considered as a situation that concerns the individual and professional capacity of the teacher. In this context, it can be seen as an important requirement for prospective teachers to be ready for education which is culturally responsive during their undergraduate training (Barnes , 2006; Fairbanks and et al., 2010; Guo et al., 2009; Lenski, et al. , 2005). This means that the trainee or the teacher is prepared to be cognitive, affective and behavioral in terms of the required qualifications, behavior and level of performance as a prerequisite for teaching in a class of students with different cultural

responsiveness (Karatas & Oral, 2017). In this context, a teacher who is culturally responsive in terms of individual and professional aspects can adapt quickly to the school and students where they will teach without experiencing any cultural shock. It can also minimize any sense of confusion, fear or uneasiness that may occur. In fact, Karatas (2018) found that prospective elementary teachers fear being appointed as teachers to places with different cultural characteristics from their own cultures when they graduated, and that the levels of readiness for teaching in elementary classes having cultural differences are low. In this respect, it is important to enable them to gain a socio-cultural perspective and to develop their intercultural communication skills in order to prepare better prospective elementary teachers. Banks (2008) emphasizes that prospective teachers need to gain a socio-cultural perspective and that student teachers should be aware of the cultural influences that their students live under and think about their sociocultural boundaries. At this point, the teacher may be quicker solving problems they may face during the education process in a socio-cultural context. Otherwise, teachers who cannot play an active role in solving problems are likely to become stressed and have a sense of occupational burnout as a result of their cultural and environmental pressures (Celik & Ustuner, 2018). Banks (2008) states that if teachers learn about cultural diversity themselves and become more culturally responsive, they may become more powerful in the education process. Therefore, if the professional capacity of the teacher develops, they can perform the role better and may have a positive attitude towards his/her profession.

Within the scope of this research, it has been found that classroom teachers who are culturally responsive will accept their students unconditionally. They will make an effort to create a democratic free educational environment and will contribute to the development of belonging to the school and the education process by preventing student alienation to school and the education process. The education process is accepted as a socio-cultural activity. The formation of the teaching and learning process in this field is seen as important for the quality of

education with the input of personal, contextual and situational components. In an understanding of culturally responsive teaching, teaching activities are organized and realized by taking into consideration previous achievements, individual and cultural strengths and the intellectual competences of students. At this point, teachers have a responsibility to maintain cultural diversity in the classroom environment with a culturally responsive pedagogical approach and to do the best they can for all students (Goodlad, 1994). In fact, the knowledge, behavior and skills to be given in accordance with the cultural identity and values of the students are considered as important factors in the development of cultural, national, regional and world identity/belonging in individuals. At this point, elementary teachers should use the concepts that students are socially and culturally familiar with and organize culture-specific motifs when planning the learning-teaching process. In this context, students will be encouraged to increase their motivation to learn and to increase their academic success. For their students another reflection of culturally responsive elementary teachers is that students can be seen as a development of the consciousness of being democratic and receiving acceptance and respect for others. In order to do this, it is necessary that teachers who educate generations should have an understanding of social justice, break down their prejudices, and not discriminate, as well as strengthening their intercultural awareness, cultural diversity, human rights, democracy and equality of opportunity (Kaya, 2014). According to Slavin (2003), teachers are expected to create a positive learning and communication environment with an empathic approach while avoiding prejudiced communication, and that each student should have a high opinion of their cultural heritage, history and civilization. When these expectations become a reality, a democratic educational environment will be created and students will be aware of other students' cultural responsiveness and contribute to the development of an awareness that each and every culture should be respected and accepted.

Education focused on cultural responsiveness is an approach based on the principles of equality and pluralism. This approach advocates that the educational process takes place in a democratic environment, because it refuses to ignore cultural differences in the educational process and approves cultural diversity. In this sense, in the event that a culturally diverse class environment is considered valuable and strengthening, students will respect and accept each other with social justice and equality being created by elementary teachers in the classroom. This would be the basis for the development of many emotional properties, such as preventing prejudices among children, exhibiting empathetic tendencies regarding differences, developing self-confidence and courage and so on (Gay, 2010; Karatas, 2018). According to Lynch and Hanson (1998), as students' self-identity, cultural understanding, prejudice and stereotypes are shaped during their school period. It is emphasized by them that teachers should have positive perceptions about cultural diversity and should adopt pedagogical approaches to enhance cultural responsiveness. According to Acar-Ciftci and Aydin (2014), in a learning environment where cultural differences are not taken into consideration, students experience cultural contradiction and cultural discontinuity and they feel unfamiliar with school. Gay (1994) states that students feel like outsiders in the school environment and that if their identities are not affirmed or supported, this will prevent them from concentrating on academic tasks. In addition, stress and anxiety, accompanying a lack of support and affirmation, indicate that this will cause a decrease in their mental attention, energy and effort. In this sense, the experience, cultures, and perspectives of these students can be marginalized when their dreams and prospects are not reflected in the teaching process. In this respect, in schools where education is given, it is necessary to recognize the cultural responsiveness of individuals to discover the essence and meaning of cultural experience, to recognize and respect different cultural responsiveness and to create opportunities.

Elementary teachers, who have an understanding of culturally responsive teaching, lead students to connect emotionally with each other. In the short term, effective interaction in a classroom atmosphere is expected to contribute to social peace and integration and, in the long term, it is expected to bring psychological benefit to the general public. In light of these research findings, a culturally responsive elementary teacher has an effect, not only on the individual and academic development of their students, but also on social integration and empowerment. Schools are considered not only as places of education, but also as social institutions where the change and transformation of society take place. They are seen as places where all students are provided with educational experiences to reach their full potential as socially aware and active people at local, national and world levels (Banks, 2013). Kostova (2009) suggests that students should be prepared to live together in harmony in a multicultural society in schools, and to adopt the educational process in a way that will provide the basis for integration and tolerance. In this respect, with a culturally responsive education process, a culturally responsive elementary teacher can provide an important contribution in terms of maintaining social justice, and maintaining and implementing equality within society. Without this, the cultural differences within the society can become arguments that serve separation and this separatism may bring about unwanted consequences. In the long term, social conflict and social inequality can be created and social peace can be lost. In this sense, the role and responsibility of elementary teachers who are culturally responsive are great in order for an acceptance of cultural diversity as richness, and not seeing social unity and integrity as a threat. A teacher who accepts cultural responsiveness, as an adoption of the concept of education that will increase and improve the socio-cultural consciousness of students, will be reflected in society in a positive way.

As a result, considering the importance of cultural responsiveness for human life, it is necessary to pay more attention to a culturally responsive approach, and this approach ought to become an important value that should be included in the education system. This is because there

are many personal and social benefits in education which are culturally responsive and which reflect on teachers' educational process and the social dimension. In order to ensure these benefits and ensure their continuity, attention should be paid to the training of elementary teachers in order to be culturally responsive in the process of undergraduate education program. Teacher training programs should be designed on the basis of the principles of social justice and multicultural education, strengthening the cultural knowledge databases of prospective teachers and increasing culturally responsive pedagogical skills. Teacher trainers are expected to take the initiative in addressing the importance of cultural responsiveness in relevant courses, approving cultural differences, raising awareness about cultural differences, applying cultural references of prospective teachers, and conducting a learning-teaching process with an understanding that will improve intercultural sensitivity. Finally, the knowledge and skill levels of teachers who are currently teaching cultural responsiveness should be increased through in-service training.

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