



A Tale of Two Skills: Attitudes of Learners towards Reading and Writing in Foreign Context and Target Context

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ABSTRACT

Though there are many studies on reading and writing skills focusing on different dimensions, the relationship between the learning context and the development of reading and writing is an area needing further attention. This comparative case study was purposed to investigate the attitudes of two groups of language learners towards reading and writing based on their understandings of the relationship between the learning context and their reading and writing development. Selected by purposeful sampling, one group consisted of students learning English as a foreign language in Turkey, representing the foreign context group; and the other involved international students from different countries learning Turkish in Turkey, representing the target context group. The data were collected through open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews. The results obtained through content analysis revealed that while the foreign context group held positive views towards reading, they had almost-negative attitudes towards writing. The target context group, on the other hand, had positive attitudes towards both reading and writing. The results also pointed at some contextual factors influencing the attitudes of the participants towards these skills. Setting out from the results of this study, some practical suggestions are provided with an aim to promote effectiveness of reading and writing classes.

Keywords: foreign context; target context; reading skills; writing skills; attitudes; (foreign) language education

INTRODUCTION

Reading and writing have always preserved their prominent places in foreign/target language education because they indicate the extent language learners receive and produce information and ideas in languages. Therefore, these literacy skills have been among the topics of investigation in language education studies. Many studies with different foci have been conducted on reading and writing development and performances of language learners including the affective factors in the process (Güvendir, 2014), strategy training (McMullen, 2009) and technology integration in skill development (Al-Jarf, 2004). There are also some studies, though

not many in number, examining the effects of the learning context on students' perceptions of reading and writing skills (Hasbi, 2013). Most of these studies have been conducted on reading and writing development in English as a foreign and/or second language. Yet, there exists a gap in the literature in terms of research examining the relationship between contextual factors in the learning environment and learners' attitudes towards reading and writing in foreign and target learning contexts. With an aim to present a different perspective, this study presents the attitudes of learners receiving language education in two contextually different learning contexts towards reading and writing. The study is expected to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between learning context and learners' attitudes towards these skills.

Studies on Reading

As one of the main parts of the four foreign/target language skills, reading has traditionally been defined as the activity or sometimes the skill to obtain information from different written sources. From a broad perspective, Rubin (1982) defines reading as the process of "the bringing and the getting of meaning from the printed page" (p.8). Course (2017) proposes that reading is a skill in which a reader interacts with the text in order to reach an understanding of the message relying on existing textual clues combined with previous knowledge. Readers, in the act of reading, try to understand the message by bringing their experiences, emotions and background knowledge into reading context. Eskey (2005) considers the reading process as the activity of constructing meaning taking place between the text and the reader. In this process, text-driven factors like phonemic and syntactic aspects and knowledge-driven factors like background knowledge and metacognitive awareness play key roles. Regarding the dynamic nature of reading, Hamra and Syatriana (2010) explain that interpretation and thinking are the main processes in reading and add that emotional and cognitive factors affect reading success.

Reading has received attention as a subject of investigation in language teaching with different foci. With a group of 100 freshman students studying non-English majors, Mori (2004) examined the effects of motivational attitudes on reading in an EFL context. The results revealed that participants' general motivation towards language learning and reading as well as task-specific motivation can be among the factors to impact their reading practices. Working in an EFL context, Lin and Chen (2007) aimed to assess the effectiveness of four kinds of computer-generated visuals in promoting reading comprehension and retention. Dividing the participants into four groups respectively receiving instruction with static visual alone; animation alone; animation integrated with descriptive advance organizer, and animation accompanied by question advance organizer, the researchers pointed out that instruction with animation worked more efficiently compared to the instruction type with static visuals alone. From a motivational perspective, İçmez (2009) explored how Critical Reading can be applied in conventional reading lessons in EFL contexts and found out that integrating Critical Reading in EFL reading lessons increased learner motivation.

Approaching reading from a different angle, Güvendir (2014) considered *anxiety* as an affective factor influencing foreign language reading. The results obtained from think aloud

protocols and interviews with a group of EFL learners revealed that the process of developing reading skill can be affected by twelve main factors, some of which are reading aloud, text length, topic familiarity, text type and teacher/student questions. In a two-year study, Course (2017) examined the effects of integrating reading diaries and instructional reading strategies on learner autonomy and strategy use by students. The results pointed at the benefits of strategy instruction in developing participants' strategy use, especially metacognitive strategies, compared to their previous experiences.

Studies on Writing

Writing, as a productive skill, can be described as the process of conveying information or ideas in the form of written symbols. As a skill combining thinking, analysis, organization and production, writing can be demanding as it requires the successful combination of linguistic and cognitive skills. Improving writing skill is especially essential in foreign/target language education since learners need to go through diverse contexts in their educational and professional lives.

Similar to reading, there have been different angles in studies on writing focusing on, investigating, analyzing and commenting on various aspects of the skill. The effects of reading skill on writing performances form the basis of some studies. Lee and Hsu (2009) searched the effects of extensive reading and silent reading on the writing productions of vocational college students with low proficiency in English. The results revealed the positive contributions of both reading types to reading fluency and writing. In a similar vein, McCaw (2011) examined the effect of close reading on creative writing and maintained that interpreting texts in a narrow and practice-based manner limits the development of creative writing. The researcher suggested that cultural components of language should be emphasized in close reading so that texts may become meaningful and helpful for learners in the process of writing.

The effectiveness of strategy training on writing performances has also been a subject of investigation. Rao (2007) aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of training and brainstorming on participants' writing perceptions and products. The results of the experimental design revealed positive effects of training and brainstorming strategies on writing productions. Besides, the brainstorming strategy positively influenced the participants' perceptions of writing as a fundamental language skill. Centering specifically on language learning strategies, McMullen (2009) investigated the effects of strategy training on the language learning experiences of a group of EFL learners by designing a Strategy Based Instruction Program to examine whether strategy instruction can enhance the writing of the participants. The results of the program implementation showed positive effects of strategy instruction on participants' writing skills.

Affective issues impacting learners' writing performances have also been examined in writing-related research. Focusing on the attitudes of ESL and EFL learners towards four language skills, Hasbi (2013) reported that the participants in the EFL group held positive attitudes towards reading but negative attitudes towards writing. On the other hand, the ESL group had more positive attitudes towards writing skill. Conducting a study with international

students who took one-year of Turkish preparatory education at a state university in Turkey, Şahin and Genç (2015) investigated the participants' self-efficacy in terms of writing skills. The researchers found that the participants experienced little difficulties in expressing their meanings in written form.

Web-based instructional designs which have recently gained momentum in language teaching as an aspect to enrich learning context are also examined in writing studies. Al-Jarf (2004) carried out research in order to make a comparison of traditional in-class writing instruction with textbook and traditional writing instruction accompanied with web-based design in which the participants could post different kinds of writing on discussion boards. The results pointed at the superiority of the experimental group receiving traditional instruction accompanied with web-based design. Having a similar purpose with that of Al-Jarf (2004) since both suggested the integration of a new web-based design in writing classes, Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) conducted a study to evaluate the efficiency of three types of online facilities (forums, wikis and blogs) into writing activities at a university in a foreign language context. The results revealed that the participants favored the new design of blended course including forums, wikis and blogs.

In conclusion, it can be inferred from an evaluation of the above-mentioned research that different aspects of reading and writing skills in foreign/second language education have been among the major topics of investigation in language education. Some researchers examined reading and writing skills separately while others investigated the effects of reading on writing skill. The common aspect among the above-mentioned studies is that almost all were conducted in contexts displaying the characteristics of foreign language learning settings. Literature also presents studies making comparison of foreign contexts and target contexts but almost all were conducted in two different learning settings (countries). There is no study known to the researcher comparing learners' attitudes specifically towards reading and writing skills in two different learning contexts, the foreign context and target context in the same setting. Therefore, the present study, the first of its kind, was designed to reflect a different perspective as it involved two different participant groups learning two different languages in the same setting: one group learning Turkish, the other English. Holding this research perspective, the main purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the learning context on the way learners experience, perceive and approach the reading and writing skills.

METHODOLOGY

A comparative case study methodology was adopted in this study to understand the issue under investigation from the perspectives of the participants directly involved in two different cases. In this way, the researcher could reach detailed views of the participants in their natural setting (Creswell, 1998). Regarding case study, Yin (1984) also suggests that this design enables researchers to investigate "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (p. 13). In

understanding “what resides beneath” (Haverkamp, et. al. 2005, p.124), case study offers detailed descriptions of the case (Merriam, 1998).

Setting

In this comparative case study, the learning context (Turkey) was a foreign context for Turkish learners of English while it was a target context for the participants coming from different countries and learning Turkish in Turkey.

The foreign context in which Turkish learners of English were receiving language education offered learners an environment in which they could be exposed to the target language mostly in the classroom environment. Learners in such a language setting could not have many chances of being exposed to the language use in its practical form. They could not have enough opportunities to practice the language because the learning context could not provide interactive chances with native speakers. Therefore, reading became the main skill for language development. As to their practices in writing, the participants in the foreign context were observed to experience difficulties in writing. Since they did not have much productive practices in the target language, they experienced inevitable challenges in writing.

The target context in this study, on the other hand, offered ample chances of being exposed to the target language in its daily use as well as its in-class usage. In addition, learners in the target context had many opportunities to interact with native speakers of the target language in and out of the language classrooms and could also reach information in the target language through reading. As a result, these learners felt themselves more comfortable in expressing their ideas in the written language. The chances of exposure and practice can be said to have positive effects on the way the learners in the target context perceived reading and writing skills.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was adopted for participant selection (Patton, 1987). There were 10 participants representing each case. Both groups were studying the last week of their prep-class language education. The foreign language group was composed of Turkish students learning English in Turkey. These students were studying at an ELT Department at a state university and had from two to six years of language learning experience (However, they all noted that they did not receive extensive language education and they needed to have prep-class education for a year).

The target language group consisted of students from different nationalities (Georgia, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, Mongolia) learning Turkish in Turkey. These learners had little or no experience of learning Turkish in their home countries and received one year-long preparatory Turkish education in Turkey.

Instruments

This study was grounded on comparative case study. With an aim to reach an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences in and their attitudes towards reading and writing in language education, the data were collected through open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews. These instruments were adopted for data triangulation. As each instrument focused on the topic from different dimensions, they were thought to present separate data sources ensuring trustworthiness of the findings.

The open-ended questions were formed by the researcher based on the examination of previous studies on reading and writing and her out of class discussions with the learners. For each group of learners, there were six questions. The open-ended questions were formed in English for the foreign-context group and in Turkish for the target-context group. Each question set was checked and revised by two experts (two language teaching experts in English for the questions for the foreign-context group and two language experts in Turkish for the target-context group) for understandability, appropriateness and clarity, which was done to increase the validity of the instruments. The questions posed to the participants are presented below:

1. What is your attitude towards reading skill in learning English in Turkey (“learning Turkish in Turkey” for the target-context group)?
2. What is your attitude towards writing skill in learning English in Turkey (“learning Turkish in Turkey” for the target-context group)?
3. Does learning English in Turkey (“learning Turkish in Turkey” for the target-context group) contribute to your development in reading skill or writing skill?
4. With which skill do you feel yourself more comfortable; reading or writing? Why?
5. For which skill do you spend more time to develop; reading or writing? Why?
6. Would your reading and writing development be different if you learned English in a target context (“learned Turkish in your own country” for the target-context group)?

The second data collection instrument was semi-structured interviews. To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, this instrument was used for data triangulation with an aim to cross-check the participants' responses to open-ended questions. The guiding questions in semi-structured interviews were formed in line with the answers of the participants to open-ended questions. The questions were related to the participants' evaluations of the effects of the learning context on their reading and writing. There were also questions about whether it would be different to study the target language in a different context (target context for the foreign-context group and foreign context for the target-context group). In this way, they were also asked to compare their perceptions of foreign and target contexts in terms of language learning.

Data Collection

The data were collected in the last week of the educational year (open-ended questions) and two weeks after the semester was over (semi-structured interviews) so that the participants could have a year-long experience of learning and practicing the target language. After the

official approval was obtained from the department, the participants were informed about their rights and responsibilities in the process. Then, they signed the consent form showing their voluntary participation in the study.

The participants in the foreign context were presented the open-ended questions in English and the target-context participants in Turkish. The foreign-context participants could have answered also in their native language, Turkish; however, answering in their native languages would not have been possible for the target-context participants since they had different native languages. Therefore, the researcher preferred benefitting from the languages which were common to the members of these two different groups.

The questions for the foreign context-participants were in English and they were asked to provide written answers in English. However, they were also provided with the flexibility to switch to their native language (Turkish) in some cases when they had difficulty in expressing their ideas in English. Though most of the answers were in English, there were also a few examples in Turkish. These answers were translated into English by the researcher and a native-speaker did the proofreading. For the target-context group, the same questions were translated into Turkish and the participants were required to provide written answers in Turkish. As all the target-context participants could use English at least at B1 level, they were offered the option to use English when they cannot express their experiences and ideas in Turkish. The answers of this group written in Turkish were also translated into English and the same native speaker conducted the proofreading.

The semi-structured interviews were carried out two weeks later, at the end of the final exam process. Guiding questions prepared in light of the participants' answers to open-ended questions were utilized during the interviews accompanied with several questions asked according to the flow of the interview. A similar process in collecting data with open-ended questions was followed in semi-structured interviews. The questions were in English for the foreign-context participants and in Turkish for the target-context participants. Though each group was asked to answer in their target language, they were also given the flexibility to switch to Turkish (for the foreign-context group) and English (for the target-context group). The interviews lasted ten-to-fifteen minutes for each participant. The interview records were transcribed and some answers in Turkish were also translated into English. The native speaker did the proofreading.

Data Analysis

Before conducting the analysis procedure, the researcher followed participant approval in order to ensure trustworthiness of the findings. Each participant was asked to revise the transcripts and an early analysis was conducted by the researcher regarding their reflections.

Content analysis was adopted to analyze the data. The researcher examined the two data sets separately for each group. First, the open-ended questions were analyzed for individual participants in each group. Then, an in-group analysis was conducted in which the answers of the

participants in the same group were compared to one another to compare the cases of the participants receiving language education in the same context. This process revealed recurring codes in different participant comments, which were presented in the Results section with direct participant quotations to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. The coding process was followed in relation to the concepts exerted from the participants' answers (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After an in-group analysis, a cross-group analysis was also carried out to compare and contrast the experiences of learners in different contexts. The data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed in the same procedure (individual analysis, in-group analysis and cross-group analysis). The same system of analysis in both data sets and the in-group and cross-group comparisons for/between open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews were followed to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the analysis. The analysis of the two data sets revealed similar points of discussion, which also strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings.

The researcher also asked a field expert to analyze two data sets through content analysis. This process was followed to ensure interrater reliability and to eliminate possible bias stemming from single rater analysis conducted by the researcher. The Internal Rate of Return was 82% for exact, 12% for similar and 6% for different codings, which again strengthened the trustworthiness of data analysis.

RESULTS

This section offers a presentation of the results obtained from the foreign-context and target-context groups regarding their experiences in and attitudes towards reading and writing in relation to their language learning settings. The results are displayed in two sections involving related codes and categories accompanied with participant quotations: results from the foreign-context group and results from the target-context group. At the beginning of each sub-section, there is a table presenting the codes and relevant categories identified as a result of content analysis. Since the cross-analysis of the data gathered through open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews revealed similar points, a single table is used to display the recurring items in participants' comments. As there were two sources of data, OQ stands for open-ended questions and SI for semi-structured interview. For example, P3-OQ means the quotation from the third participant in open-ended questions and P7-SI for the semi-structured interview with the seventh participant.

Results from the foreign-context group: Participants learning English in Turkey

Table 1 presents the results obtained from the contextual experiences directing the attitudes of the foreign-context group following the process of learning English in Turkey.

Table 1. Attitudes of the Foreign Context Group

Theme 1: The attitudes of the foreign context group	
Category 1: Attitudes towards reading	Ample exposure to reading texts A source of obtaining information Focus on comprehension Not much critical analysis Feeling more comfortable in reading
Category 2: Attitudes towards writing	Lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge in pragmatic usage Linguistic and contextual differences between L1 and L2 Focus on grammatical feedback Limited practice in writing Product based Feeling more anxious in writing

The participants in the foreign context held more positive attitudes towards reading compared to writing and liked reading classes more than writing classes. They generally enjoyed reading classes considering reading as the main source to obtain information, as can be seen in Table 1. Stating that he enjoyed spending time on developing his reading, a participant expressed that reading should be improved because “reading is the tool through which we can reach information” (P3-OQ). Appreciated as an information source, reading was enjoyed because adequate practice on reading increased learners’ motivation and self-confidence. A participant touching upon the relationship between exposure to reading and motivation stated that “the more we have reading practice and see how something should be used in written form, the more motivated we can be because our knowledge of the target language increases” (P2-SI). The same participant also added that reading development is important for them while learning English in the foreign context because it is generally through reading that they can receive linguistic and pragmatic input in the target language:

Developing my reading is a source of motivation for me in the process of learning English. I think this is mainly because we don’t have adequate chances of developing our productive skills in the foreign context. So, reading remains as a skill to develop while learning English as a foreign language. (P2-OQ)

However, a few participants in the foreign context group reported their discomfort with reading especially when they were asked to read aloud in classes. One of the participants, experiencing reading anxiety stemming from read-aloud practices, stated that she felt herself “uneasy about reading when teachers asks read-alouds” (P6-OQ) and added that she did not enjoy attending reading classes:

I don’t like read-alouds because I don’t think I have native-like pronunciation. So, I don’t like reading things aloud especially in the classroom. I think if I had chances of

interacting with native speakers while learning the target language, which I actually don't have in this context, I could have better pronunciation in English. (P6-SI)

Though most of the participants favored reading skill, there were some points of criticism towards the way reading was approached. Some of the participants criticized the traditional way of conducting reading classes focusing on comprehension questions without critically analyzing the text at hand much. This point was referred to in the written answers and during the interviews. A participant favoring critical reading more than the traditional reading classes expressed that “the traditional way of conducting reading classes is not of much benefit to language learners unless they are taught how to analyze a text in a critical manner” (P1-SI). Another participant suggested the integration of critical reading:

I believe critical analysis in reading would be more beneficial for us because reading is almost the main skill to develop our knowledge and competencies in the target language. As a Turkish learner of English in foreign context, I think reading classes should be conducted more effectively in foreign context because reading is the main source for our language development. (P5-OQ)

Table I also shows that the foreign-context participants generally held more negative attitudes towards writing. All the participants stated that they generally felt anxious in writing classes mainly because of the lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Some of the participants noted that several contextual factors like the lack of exposure to appropriate language forms and lack of practice in the target language were negatively influencing their writing development. Complaining about the lack of engagement in the pragmatic usages in the target language, a participant referred to this point as follows:

Writing is problematic for us; we design what to say in our minds but we cannot convey the idea because we don't have adequate structural and lexical knowledge of the target language... We cannot hear the proper forms of target language and we cannot practice it in different contexts in authentic settings. Learning the target language in a foreign context is a negative factor for our writing development. (P9-SI).

The linguistic, contextual and pragmatic differences between their native language and target language were also sources of stress and confusion for some of the foreign-context participants who had negative attitudes towards writing. They explained that the way they thought and wrote in their L1 was not the same as the way they were expected to write in the L2, which inevitably negatively impacted their approach to writing skill. These participants again noted that the limited chances of using the target language naturally resulted in poor writing performances. Having such experiences especially in the first term of the preparatory year, a participant put the common feelings into the following words:

I feel nervous in almost all writing classes...I suppose it is because I cannot always form grammatically correct sentences and I sometimes cannot express my ideas as I should because I don't know the proper words to express them. Receiving language education in a foreign context negatively impacts my writing development because we cannot hear the target language the way it is normally used. (P5-OQ)

Another reason why most of these participants had almost-negative attitudes towards writing was the type of feedback they were usually receiving. More than half of the participants said that feedback was generally related to incorrect use of grammatical rules and inappropriate vocabulary. A participant complained that the feedback they received did not compensate for limitations posed by the foreign context:

The type of feedback we generally receive on our writing products does not actually contribute much to our pragmatic knowledge in the target language. The focus is mostly on the grammatical and lexical mistakes. I believe, however, we need more comprehensive feedback on our writings including the pragmatic side of the language. (P8-OQ)

The emphasis on the final product and neglecting the phases in the writing process was also a point of criticism as displayed in Table 1. Nearly half of the participants in the foreign context did not appreciate the product based approach to writing. They expressed their desire to have writing classes as a whole process instead of a product obtained at the end of the process. Establishing a connection between the foreign context and the process-based assessment in writing, a participant noted that “writing classes could be much more effective if teachers could concentrate on each phase from the beginning to the end... Writing classes should be based on a process-based design because classroom is mostly the only environment we can learn and practice the target language in the foreign language learning environment” (P4-OQ).

When they were asked about their attitudes towards writing, almost all the foreign-context participants maintained that they did not favor writing much mainly because of the reasons presented above. An all-inclusive comment from a participant reflects the general views of the foreign-context participants towards writing skill:

When I compare reading and writing, I can see that I like reading more because it seems easier. In writing, just knowing what to write is not enough, I need to know how to write it and this means I need to have a good knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Actually, this is not enough, too. I need to know how something should be written in the target language and this means I need pragmatic knowledge. Well... this is not easy in this system in foreign context, unfortunately. (P10-SI)

The overall evaluation of the first theme shows that the participants in the foreign context group, though sometimes criticizing the traditional way of conducting reading classes, held positive attitudes towards reading as a major skill of receiving information from different sources. However, similar positive attitudes were not observed for writing. Almost all of the participants, with two exceptions, expressed their almost negative attitudes towards writing because of their lack of grammar and vocabulary knowledge combined with the linguistic and contextual differences between their native language and the target language. Lack of practice and the type of feedback with a focus on linguistic accuracy combined with limited chances of exposure to and practice in the target language in the foreign language learning environment also negatively affected the attitudes of participants towards writing in their language education.

Results from the target-context group: Participants learning Turkish in Turkey

The contextual experiences shaping the attitudes of the participants in the target context towards reading and writing are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Attitudes of the Target Context Group

Theme 1: The attitudes of the target context group	
Category 1: Attitudes towards reading	Adequate exposure to reading texts A source of obtaining information Feeling comfortable in reading
Category 2: Attitudes towards writing	Adequate practice in writing Enjoying the practice of producing Feedback on meaning and grammar Lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge Orthographic, linguistic and syntactic differences between L1 and L2 Feeling comfortable in writing

The results revealed that the participants in the target context group enjoyed reading classes like those in the foreign context group. However, unlike foreign-context participants, the target-context group also favored writing classes with only one exception.

Considering reading, eight out of ten participants in the target context reported that they liked reading activities in and out of class as they viewed reading as a skill to obtain information, which was a similar point their foreign-context counterparts touched upon. A participant stated she liked reading classes because she could “learn many things through many sources and this is done through reading” (P4-OQ).

The chance to reach a variety of reading materials was also appreciated by these participants. Target-context learners can find something to read in many different settings and, in this way, they can be exposed to the target language in different versions. A participant enjoying this chance stated that she liked reading “because there is something to read everywhere; the magazines in the bookstore, the books in the library, the messages from friends and even the signs on the road” (P1-SI).

An additional positive perception of reading experienced by almost all the target-context participants was the feeling of comfort with reading in general. They expressed that they did not have reading anxiety because reading was just a natural part of their everyday practice. They were constantly engaging themselves in reading activities in and out of classroom, as reflected as follows:

Reading is such a natural part of the learning process that it is like eating or drinking. Wherever we go, whatever we do, we are generally involved in a form of reading. We read the news on the newspapers, on TV or online or we look for an advertisement and

read about it. So, reading is everywhere, it is not something just peculiar to language learning. (P7-OQ)

As regards writing skill, nine out of ten learners in the target context group stated that they liked writing. They pointed out that they enjoyed writing classes and noted that they were also engaging in extra activities to develop their writing out of the class. Half of them said that they liked writing because the act of writing gave them the joy of producing something, increasing their enthusiasm. Feeling eager to do writing practices, a participant explained that as they were living in the target environment, they were naturally engaging themselves in writing practices in different contexts and this helped them develop their writing:

Writing some things on the paper gives you the feeling that you are not just passively receiving information through reading but also actively producing things on your own... Writing is enjoyable because I can interact with many native speakers through writing in the target context. (P2-OQ)

Six target-context participants also referred to the feedback on their writings. They expressed the satisfaction of receiving feedback marking not only linguistic aspects in their writings but also such contextual features as the appropriate usage of items and coherence and cohesion. Finding the type of feedback focusing on textual and contextual aspects more efficient compared to grammar-only feedback, a participant appreciated ample chances of feedback provided in the target context and stated that “feedback in and out of classroom, which is an advantage of learning the language in its target context, is a useful tool to see the correct and incorrect points with an emphasis on a detailed analysis of linguistic, contextual and pragmatic aspects of the writing” (P6-OQ).

Though the participants in the target context had more positive attitudes towards writing compared to the foreign context group, they also faced some difficulties. They were aware of the advantages of the target context but still they sometimes had difficulties originating from grammatical and lexical aspects of language use. As also expressed by one of the foreign-context participants, a target-context participant, who was not content with cases in which she had something to say but could not say it, stated that she felt “restricted to a limited number of words though I really have something almost perfect in mind. The main problem I experience in writing is the lack of linguistic and lexical knowledge in Turkish” (P8-SI). However, the same participant also noted that she still had the advantage of learning the target language in its natural setting. She explained that “being exposed to the language in the target context is an advantage because the native speakers all around naturally expose us to the target language in different forms; so we can benefit from these exposures in our writings” (P8-OQ).

The orthographic, linguistic and syntactic differences between L1 and L2 sometimes paved the way for some of the participants to have negative attitudes towards writing. As their native languages were Arabic, Persian, Russian, Georgian and so on, the participants stated that the alphabet, directionality of writing and sentence structures were the factors creating difficulties in writing in Turkish. However, they were able to adapt themselves to the written

form of the target language in time. The only participant in the target context group who stated that he did not like writing in the target language provided the reason below:

I don't like writing because I am not so good at forming correct sentences in Turkish. Why? Because, first of all, our alphabet is different from that of Turkish. I also have difficulty in forming grammatically correct sentences because the way we form sentences in my native language is different from the way in Turkish. This is a great challenge for me. (P9-OQ)

The participants experiencing the above-mentioned difficulties also noted that they were conscious of the advantage of learning Turkish in its natural context. Even if they faced some challenges, they could still manage the language learning process more effectively with the help of the available chances in the target context, as also underlined in the comment below:

Of course, there are many differences between our native language and the target language and it will take some time to have the desired level of language proficiency in Turkish. However, I believe that we are lucky to learn Turkish in Turkey. With the help of ample chances of exposure and practice, we can develop our reading and writing skills better and more quickly compared to learning it in our home countries. (P10-OQ)

In sum, as seen in Table 1 and Table 2, learners in both contexts had positive attitudes towards reading. They held the general consideration that reading is the skill through which they could reach information. Learners in both contexts were aware of the importance to develop their reading in the target language. The foreign-context participants especially favored reading as a tool to obtain information in the target language because they did not have adequate chances of exposure to target language and considered reading as a way of compensating the limitations in the foreign language learning context. For the target-context group, reading was a skill which they could practice in and out of classroom. The available opportunities to be exposed to different forms of written language naturally helped them develop their reading and hold positive attitudes towards reading.

On the other hand, similar perspectives were not shared by both groups for writing. While almost all the participants in the target context stated that they liked writing because of the joy to produce things, most of the participants in the foreign context expressed their discomfort with writing as they were experiencing difficulties in producing appropriate writings. The possible reason underlying the difference between the attitudes of both groups towards writing was the contextual differences. While the target-context participants had limitless chances of exposure to the language in both its spoken and its written form, the foreign-context participants had writing practices mostly in the classroom and did not have adequate chances of exposure to the target language in authentic contexts, resulting in negative attitudes towards writing.

In conclusion, it can be stated that reading and writing became a natural part of daily as well as educational practices for the target-context participants. As they could have reading and writing practices in the target language both in and out of the classroom, they considered these two skills as usual parts in the language learning process. However, attitudes of the foreign-context participants towards writing were negatively affected by the limited nature of the

opportunities of exposure and practice in the target language in natural contexts. Reading and mainly writing were skills that were practiced basically in the classroom environment for these participants for educational purposes. This means they did not have adequate out of class writing practice in different forms with native speakers in the target language. All in all, the chances or the limitations present in the learning environment affected the attitudes of language learners towards reading and writing.

DISCUSSION

While target context offers learners ample opportunities for exposure to the target language and is full of practical chances in and out of the language classroom, foreign context is comparatively limited in terms of the opportunities for exposure and practice. In either context, language learners are expected to develop their reading and writing. However, both contexts present different conditions and opportunities for learners.

The overall results of this comparative case study revealed that almost all the participants in the target context had positive attitudes towards reading and writing. As for the foreign context group, while most of the participants favored reading, more than half of the participants held almost-negative attitudes towards writing. Regarding reading, the participants in both contexts favored reading as a skill to develop considering it as the key tool to reach information. The results pointing at the positive attitudes towards reading can be expected particularly in foreign contexts because in these settings reading is generally the skill to receive more attention among the basic skills. The foreign-context participants in this study who were learning English in Turkey stated that they were receiving language education in a system centering on reading while little emphasis is on writing. While learners are provided enough input for receptive skills, they cannot reach the desired progress in productive skills since they are not provided with appropriate chances for output, which is actually essential for the development of productive skills like writing (Swain, 1985, 1995). In line with this argument, Lee (2016) also maintained that foreign language classes present learners with large amounts of input yet inadequate chances for output, which becomes a challenge for foreign-context learners as they do not have sufficient chances to practice the language in the foreign context.

The limited chances for output accompanied with limited chances for out of class authentic language practice can be challenging for foreign-context learners to develop their writing. The level of development in this skill has natural and inevitable effects on the attitudes of the learners. The foreign-context learners have writing practices mostly for educational purposes unlike their target-context counterparts who can have different forms of writing practices in the target context, a point also touched upon by Wu and Zhang (2017). While writing mostly becomes a daily practice for target-context learners, it is basically an educational practice in classes for the foreign-context learners. Therefore, the latter group may not feel as motivated as target context learners to develop the sense that writing is a natural part of language development. The result is, as Ay (2010) reported in her study of foreign language anxiety

among Turkish learners of English, foreign language learners experience high levels of anxiety in productive skills despite reaching good levels of language proficiency, which directed them to develop negative attitudes towards writing.

Touching upon the differences between foreign context and target context in terms of language learning opportunities and practices, this article lends support to findings of studies which have focused on reading and/or writing. As maintained by McKay and Wong (1996) learners value language skills differently and there are different dynamics underlying this difference including contextual factors. Yang and Lyster (2010) maintain that foreign and target contexts are observed to stimulate different outcomes based on their available contextual opportunities. Investigating the attitudes of ESL and EFL learners towards four main skills focusing on the effects of contextual factors, Hasbi (2013) reached similar conclusions as those in the present study pointing at the positive attitudes towards reading and the almost-negative attitudes towards writing for the foreign-context group while positive attitudes towards reading and neutral attitudes towards writing for the target context (ESL) group. In their study on the level of writing anxiety, Cheng, et al. (1999) found out that Taiwanese EFL learners experience high levels of writing anxiety in language education. Focusing on the Thai case, Wu and Lin (2014), Choomthong (2014), and Akkakoson (2016) reported that the language education system in Taiwan emphasizes grammar, vocabulary, and reading over productive skills. These researchers maintained that despite years of language education, foreign-context learners could not develop their productive skills at an expected level because of the lack of out of class authentic practice. Referring to the 'grammar-vocabulary-reading' cycle, Lee (2016) compared foreign and target contexts in terms of opportunities and practices. The participants stated that in the foreign context; reading texts, memorizing vocabulary and analyzing grammar were the main but they had limited out of classroom practice, which negatively affected the development of their productive skills. However, the target-context participants could have more written practices in and out of classroom; therefore, they had more positive attitudes towards writing. The common point between the results of the present study and the previous ones was that contextual factors influence the way learners develop attitudes towards reading and writing in the language learning process.

CONCLUSION

The existing professional literature presents us studies on reading and writing handling different aspects in the instructional and developmental processes in these skills. Holding a different perspective combining the examination of the attitudes of a group of Turkish learners learning English in foreign context and a group of learners from different nationalities learning Turkish in the target context, this comparative case study aimed to understand the attitudes of these learners towards reading and writing based on their experiences in these different learning contexts. This study is expected to enlighten the understanding of the relationship between language learning context and learners' attitudes towards reading and writing. As learning

contexts pose various characteristics and present different opportunities, this understanding is significant to design course materials and modify classroom conducts, resulting in more fruitful language learning processes in which learners can develop positive attitudes towards different skills.

In the light of the results, supporting the participants' desire for pedagogically-efficient change, some practical suggestions that can be easily followed in reading and writing classes in foreign and target contexts can be provided as follows:

In foreign contexts;

- Reading texts involving the presentation of the cultural and pragmatic elements of the target language can be preferred. In this way, learners can receive cultural and pragmatic knowledge besides linguistic knowledge to be utilized in their writings.
- Learners' awareness of different reading strategies can be raised in order to equip learners with some practical tactics to conduct more critical analysis of reading texts.
- Since most of the foreign-context learners center their attention on writing grammatically appropriate sentences, other main components of writing such as cohesion, coherence and unity should be instructed and exemplified for learners.
- The scope and content of feedback for writings should be revised to place emphasis not only on grammatical correction but also on constructive pragmatic feedback.
- Instead of a product-based approach in which the final products are evaluated, a more process-based approach should be followed in writing as the classroom is the main place of development in the foreign context.

In target contexts;

- Since there are students from different nationalities in target-context classrooms, reading texts should involve examples from different cultures to form a unity and global understanding as well as paying attention to the pragmatic aspects of the language.
- Because of the orthographic and linguistic differences between the L1 and the L2, additional writing practices can be conducted in and out of class.

This research has also some limitations to mention. The main limitation is related to the number of the participants. There were 10 participants in each group. Therefore, to reach more comprehensive results, future studies can be conducted with more participants. The data were collected through open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews. To strengthen data triangulation, future research can involve classroom observations as an instrument to add in-depth understandings. In addition, further research can follow mixed methods research design to include analysis from quantitative data and to include a larger group of participants. Experimental studies can also be conducted in order to present the relationship between learning context and participants' attitudes towards reading and writing. In addition, longitudinal studies can also be a way of understanding the relationship between learning context and the participants' attitudes towards language skills.

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