

The Effect of Cultural Background Knowledge on Reading Comprehension in Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language¹

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the reading comprehension processes of B1-level Kazakh students learning Turkish as a foreign language at Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University through texts overlapping with their cultural background knowledge. The study was designed based on Schema Theory (Rumelhart, 1980) and conducted using a qualitative case study design. The impact of culturally familiar content on meaning-making processes was examined through qualitative data. The participants consisted of 20 Kazakh students enrolled in the university's Preparatory Program who have reached B1 level proficiency in Turkish. Data were collected via open-ended questionnaire forms and classroom-based reading activities, and analyzed using the content analysis method with MAXQDA software. Findings indicate that B1-level students were able to employ higher-order cognitive processes such as inference, establishing conceptual relationships, and interpretation when engaging with culturally familiar texts. The structuring of meaning-making through their prior cultural experiences and shared schemas significantly enhances their comprehension, particularly in texts where contextual clues are prominent. In this regard, the study demonstrates that culturally aligned content serves as a supportive tool for meaning construction among intermediate-level learners, offering qualitative and original contributions to the literature by highlighting the necessity of considering cultural compatibility in text selection for teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

Keywords: *Turkish language teaching, reading comprehension, cultural schema, B1 level, Kazakh students.*

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Kültürel Arka Plan Bilgisinin Türkçenin Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğretiminde Okuduğunu Anlama Üzerindeki Etkisi

Öz

Bu çalışma, Hoca Ahmet Yesevi Uluslararası Türk-Kazak Üniversitesinde Türkçeyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen B1 düzeyindeki Kazak öğrencilerin, kültürel arka plan bilgileriyle örtüşen metinler aracılığıyla yürüttükleri okuduğunu anlama süreçlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, Şema Kuramı'na (Rumelhart, 1980) dayalı olarak tasarlanmış olup, nitel araştırma yaklaşımlarından durum çalışması deseni kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Kültürel olarak tanıdık içeriklerin anlam kurma süreçleri üzerindeki etkisi nitel veriler aracılığıyla incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın katılımcılarını, üniversitenin hazırlık programında öğrenim gören ve Türkçede B1 düzeyine ulaşmış 20 Kazak öğrenci oluşturmaktadır. Veriler, açık uçlu anket formları ve sınıf temelli okuma etkinlikleri aracılığıyla toplanmış; elde edilen nitel veriler MAXQDA yazılımı kullanılarak içerik analizi yöntemi aracılığıyla çözümlenmiştir.

Bulgular, B1 düzeyindeki öğrencilerin kültürel olarak tanıdık metinlerle etkileşim kurduklarında çıkarım yapma, kavramsal ilişkiler kurma ve yorumlama gibi üst düzey bilişsel süreçleri daha etkili biçimde kullandıklarını göstermektedir. Öğrencilerin, anlam kurma sürecini önceden sahip oldukları kültürel deneyimler ve ortak şemalar aracılığıyla yapılandırmaları, özellikle bağlamsal ipuçlarının yoğun olduğu metinlerde anlama başarısını anlamlı düzeyde artırmıştır. Bu bağlamda, araştırma bulguları kültürel olarak uyumlu içeriklerin orta düzey dil öğrenenler için anlam kurma sürecini destekleyici bir araç işlevi gördüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, Türkçenin yabancı dil olarak öğretiminde metin seçiminde kültürel uyumun gözetilmesi gerekliliğine dikkat çekerek, alanyazına niteliksel ve özgün katkılar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Türkçe öğretimi, okuduğunu anlama, kültürel şema, B1 düzeyi, Kazak öğrenciler.*

Introduction

Foreign language teaching is a multifaceted domain that extends beyond the simple transmission of grammatical rules, encompassing cultural, cognitive, and contextual dimensions. Among these, reading comprehension is particularly linked to the cognitive aspects of language proficiency, requiring learners not only to decode linguistic elements but also to interpret cultural references embedded within texts. In this context, learners' pre-existing knowledge structures—commonly referred to as schemas—play a vital role in making sense of new information (Rumelhart, 1980).

According to Schema Theory, individuals interpret texts not merely by analyzing the literal meanings of words but by drawing upon prior experiences, cultural background, and mental representations. Consequently, a learner's perception of a text as “familiar” can significantly impact their reading comprehension performance. While culturally familiar themes tend to facilitate meaning-making, culturally distant or unfamiliar texts may hinder comprehension (Al-Salmi, 2011; Wang, 2024). Within the context of teaching Turkish as a foreign language, however, the role of culturally congruent content has been explored only sparingly—and predominantly through quantitative methods. Qualitative studies investigating how cultural schemas are activated during reading, and what kinds of interpretive strategies learners employ, remain limited. This gap is particularly pronounced at the intermediate (B1) proficiency level, where understanding the role of cultural background knowledge in shaping meaning-making strategies is crucial for effective pedagogy.

Durmuş and Sumruk (2021) argue that cultural content in teaching Turkish as a foreign language should be designed not only around instructional materials but also in ways that help learners relate the content to their own cultural backgrounds. This perspective highlights the instructor's intercultural competence as essential in the meaning-making process.

This study aims to explore how B1-level Kazakh students learning Turkish at Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University construct their reading comprehension processes when engaging with culturally familiar content. Grounded in Schema Theory, the research investigates which cognitive and cultural strategies learners employ during meaning-making and examines how the inclusion of culturally relevant texts influences learning outcomes.

The theoretical foundation of this study is built upon Schema Theory (Rumelhart, 1980), which posits that mental frameworks—schemas—formed through prior experiences, knowledge, and cultural exposure are actively engaged in the perception and understanding of new information. Reading comprehension, therefore, goes beyond word recognition or syntactic parsing, involving a dynamic cognitive interaction between the reader and the text. Within this process, pre-existing schemas guide essential cognitive operations such as making inferences, bridging informational gaps, and constructing meaning. The role of schemas is even more pronounced in second language reading. Al-Salmi (2011), for instance, found that learners' comprehension abilities improved when texts featured culturally familiar themes. The capacity of language learners to transfer culturally grounded schemas from their native language to the second language enhances the meaning-making process. Thus, comprehension in a second language is not solely dependent on linguistic competence but also deeply intertwined with contextual and cultural knowledge (Wang, 2024).

The influence of cultural schemas on reading comprehension is strongly linked to how familiar the content of a text is perceived to be by the reader. When the thematic elements of a text align with a learner's cultural background, comprehension becomes more intuitive and efficient. Familiar cultural references activate pre-existing knowledge structures, allowing learners to make connections, draw inferences, and construct meaning with greater ease. Conversely, culturally distant or unfamiliar content may conflict with the reader's established schemas, increasing cognitive load and impeding comprehension (Rumelhart, 1980; Wang, 2024).

In this study, Schema Theory serves as the core theoretical framework to investigate how Kazakh students learning Turkish as a foreign language navigate culturally familiar texts. It specifically examines the cognitive strategies these learners develop and the extent to which they activate cultural schemas to support the construction of meaning. The premise is that reading comprehension is not driven solely by lexical knowledge or syntactic proficiency, but rather by the dynamic interplay between language input and culturally mediated cognition.

Reading comprehension is widely recognized as a cornerstone of second language acquisition. Yet, its effectiveness hinges not only on vocabulary and grammar but also on the learner's ability to interact meaningfully with

the cultural context embedded in the text (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Especially in L2 contexts, learners' engagement with written material varies based on the alignment between their own cultural frameworks and the thematic structure of the text. When there is a strong cultural match, readers are more likely to interpret content deeply and critically; when cultural congruence is lacking, comprehension tends to remain surface-level and fragmented.

Empirical evidence further supports this assertion. Erten and Razi (2009), in a study involving Turkish students learning English, found that texts embedded with familiar cultural elements significantly enhanced comprehension. Learners grasped key concepts more easily and deployed higher-order cognitive strategies, such as synthesis and inference. Similarly, Al-Salmi (2011) observed that Arab learners demonstrated reduced motivation and comprehension when exposed to culturally alien texts, while Wang (2024) emphasized the dual impact of cultural relevance on both conceptual processing and emotional engagement.

What sets the present study apart from previous research is its qualitative approach to exploring this cultural-cognitive interface. Rather than relying solely on test-based performance metrics, it delves into the interpretive strategies that B1-level Kazakh students employ when reading texts aligned with their cultural background. By doing so, it contributes a nuanced understanding of how cultural familiarity facilitates not just comprehension but also deeper learning engagement in foreign language contexts.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how B1-level Kazakh students learning Turkish as a foreign language construct meaning from culturally familiar texts. The case study approach was chosen for its ability to provide a rich, holistic understanding of complex cognitive and cultural processes within a naturalistic educational setting (Creswell, 2015). This design enabled the researcher to examine participants' meaning-making strategies in depth, capturing not only verbal responses but also behavioral cues and contextual interactions. The focus on a single cultural and linguistic group allowed for an intensive, context-specific analysis of schema activation during reading, thereby aligning closely with the study's theoretical framework and exploratory aims.

Study Group

The study was conducted with a purposive sample of 20 Kazakh students (aged 18–24) enrolled in the Turkish Preparatory Program at Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University. All participants had attained B1-level proficiency in Turkish, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and shared a common cultural background, as they were all citizens of Kazakhstan. To ensure representational diversity within this culturally homogeneous group, maximum variation sampling was applied. This included stratification by gender, academic department, and length of time in the preparatory program. The aim was to capture variations in schema activation and reading strategies across individuals with differing academic orientations and personal experiences, while maintaining a consistent cultural context (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Therefore, the findings of this study should be interpreted within the context of B1-level Kazakh learners in this institutional setting.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through a combination of classroom-based participant observation and structured reading activities, ensuring both behavioral and reflective insights into students' comprehension processes.

First, the researcher conducted 28 hours of non-intrusive participant observation over four weeks during regular Turkish language instruction. Detailed field notes were recorded to capture students' real-time interactions with texts, including their verbal reactions, non-verbal cues, and behavioral responses to culturally familiar content. These observations allowed for naturalistic insights into schema activation during authentic learning contexts.

Second, a structured text-based reading task was administered. In this task, two students read a culturally familiar text aloud in sequence, followed by individual silent reading by all participants. Immediately afterward, students responded to a series of open-ended comprehension questions designed to elicit interpretive strategies and meaning-making patterns. To complement these qualitative responses, a ten-item Likert-scale questionnaire was also administered. This instrument assessed perceived comprehensibility of the text, focusing on lexical familiarity, cultural resonance, and overall ease of understanding.

All observations and data collection procedures were conducted by the researcher in the students' usual classroom environment to preserve ecological validity and ensure that participant behaviors reflected natural language use.

Data Analysis

All qualitative data were analyzed using MAXQDA software through a hybrid coding strategy that combined both deductive and inductive approaches. Initially, a set of deductive codes was developed based on the theoretical constructs of Schema Theory and Cultural Schema Theory, specifically targeting mechanisms through which cultural familiarity enhances reading comprehension. These codes guided the initial analysis of both observational data and open-ended student responses.

Subsequently, inductive coding was applied to identify emergent patterns and themes that were not captured by the initial theoretical framework. This allowed the data to speak for itself and revealed new dimensions of meaning-making and schema activation specific to the learner group.

The resulting codes were then organized into higher-order thematic categories that reflected the cognitive, cultural, and emotional aspects of students' engagement with the reading materials. To ensure coding reliability, an inter-coder agreement procedure was conducted in collaboration with a second researcher. Both researchers independently coded a portion of the qualitative data and the results were compared. Inter-coder reliability was calculated using the formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994): $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{(\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement})} \times 100$. Based on this calculation, the inter-coder agreement was found to be 85%, indicating a satisfactory level of coding consistency. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), an agreement level above **80%** is considered acceptable in qualitative research.

The coding process was conducted iteratively, and emerging themes were continuously compared and refined to ensure conceptual consistency throughout the analysis.

To enhance the validity of the findings, data triangulation was performed using three distinct sources: classroom observation notes, open-ended written responses, and results from the Likert-scale questionnaire. Select verbatim excerpts from student responses were incorporated to illustrate

core themes and strengthen the credibility and interpretive depth of the analysis.

Findings

This section presents the key findings regarding the impact of culturally familiar content on the reading comprehension, motivation, and cognitive engagement of B1-level Kazakh students learning Turkish as a foreign language. The results are drawn from three data sources: structured reading activities, classroom-based participant observation, and a post-reading Likert-scale questionnaire. The triangulated analysis reveals consistent patterns across all methods, highlighting the facilitating role of cultural relevance in learners' meaning-making processes. The findings are organized under three thematic categories: (1) Comprehension and Schema Activation, (2) Learner Motivation and Engagement, and (3) Content Recall and Cognitive Depth.

Cultural Familiarity and Reading Comprehension

Overall, students reported that texts incorporating their own cultural background significantly enhanced comprehension.

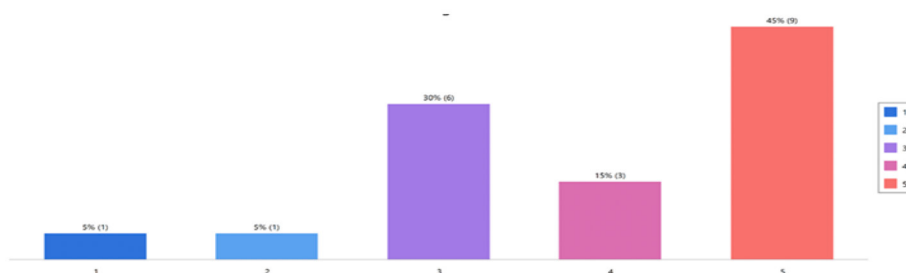


Figure 1. Students' opinions on the extent to which culturally relevant content facilitates comprehension

As shown in Figure 1, 45% (n=9) indicated that including information related to their own culture greatly facilitated understanding, 30% (n=6) reported moderate facilitation, 15% (n=3) considerable facilitation, and smaller proportions (5% each; n=1) reported slight or no facilitation.

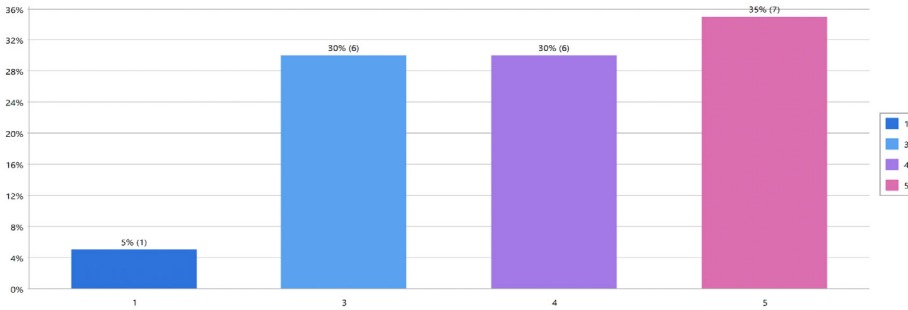


Figure 2. Students' opinions on the effect of Kazakh cultural details on reading comprehension

Similarly, Figure 2 demonstrates that details related to Kazakh culture supported comprehension for nearly all students. Specifically, 35% (n=7) stated such details greatly enhanced understanding, 30% (n=6) reported considerable effect, another 30% (n=6) reported moderate effect, while only one student (5%; n=1) reported no effect.

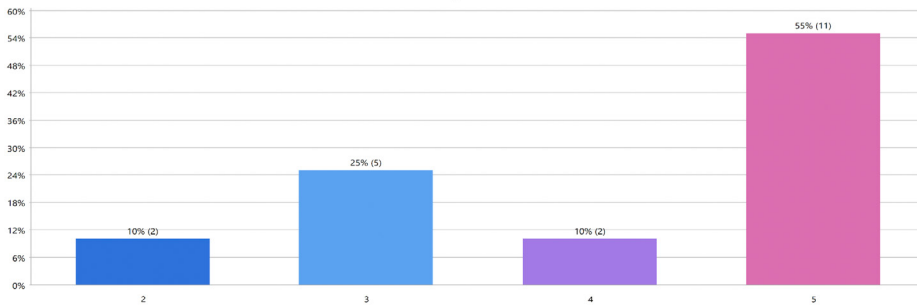


Figure 3. Students' comprehension levels of the text about the Khoja Ahmed Mausoleum

Additionally, Figure 3 shows that 55% (n=11) found the text about the Khoja Ahmed Mausoleum highly comprehensible, with 25% (n=5) indicating moderate comprehensibility, and smaller proportions finding it slightly (10%; n=2) or considerably (10%; n=2) comprehensible.

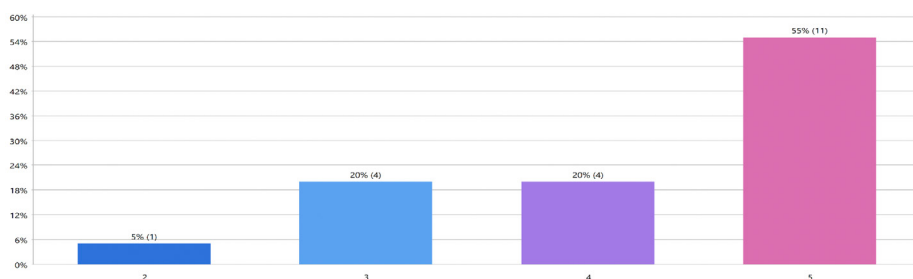


Figure 4. *Perceived effect of culturally relevant topics on students' success in Turkish classes*

Finally, Figure 4 reveals that 65% (n=13) perceived texts reflecting Kazakh culture as definitely more straightforward to comprehend than those focusing on Turkish culture, 20% (n=4) found them somewhat easier, and 15% (n=3) evaluated both as equally easy.

These findings align with Schema Theory (Rumelhart, 1980) and Cultural Schema Theory (Nishida, 1999), suggesting that activating culturally grounded knowledge structures enables students to interpret new information more efficiently, bridging prior knowledge with new concepts while reducing cognitive load (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). According to Durmuş and Sumruk (2021), learners comprehend more effectively when the cultural content resonates with their prior knowledge and experiences. Familiar cultural schemas facilitate smoother cognitive processing and engagement during reading.

Impact on Motivation and Interest

Incorporating culturally relevant content also had a strong motivational impact.

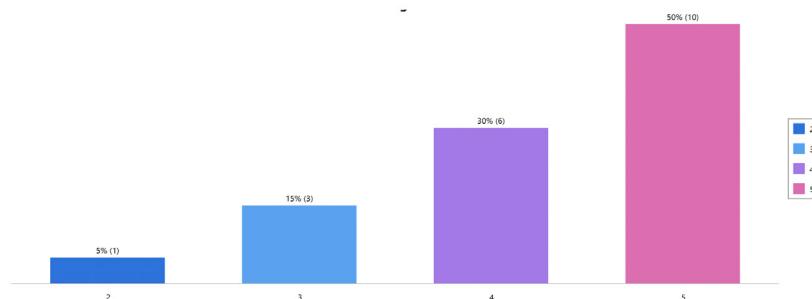


Figure 5. *Effect of culturally relevant texts on students' motivation to learn the Turkish language*

As shown in Figure 5, 50% (n=10) reported that reading texts addressing their own culture significantly boosted motivation to learn Turkish, 30% (n=6) reported a considerable increase, 15% (n=3) a moderate increase, and 5% (n=1) a slight increase.

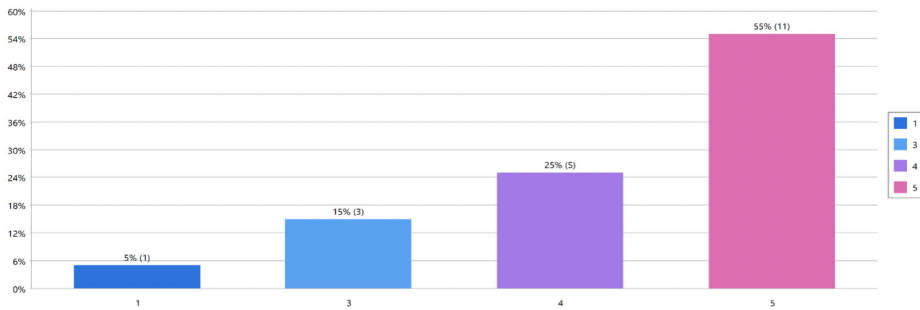


Figure 6. Effect of cultural content on students' interest in Turkish lessons

Similarly, Figure 6 indicates that 55% (n=11) felt that including cultural content in lessons significantly increased their interest, 25% (n=5) reported a considerable increase, 15% (n=3) a moderate increase, and only 5% (n=1) indicated no increase.

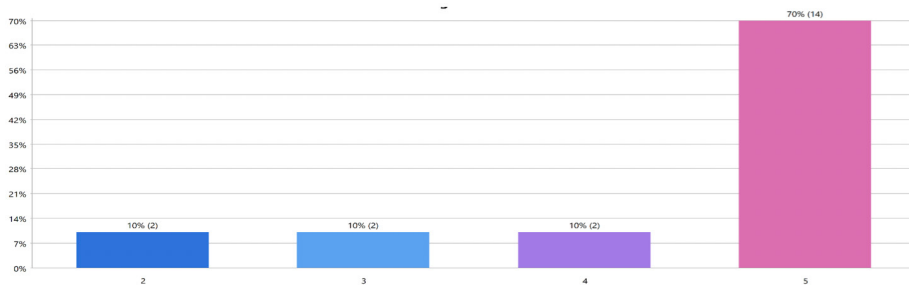


Figure 7. Students' opinions on including topics related to their own culture in Turkish lessons

Moreover, Figure 7 shows that 70% (n=14) firmly believed that more topics related to their own culture should be included in Turkish classes, while 10% (n=2) each reported considerable, moderate, or slight agreement.

These findings support established motivational theories in second language acquisition, which emphasise that cultural relevance and learner

identity significantly influence emotional engagement and learning motivation (Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Ushioda, 2011).

Comprehensibility and Recall

Cultural familiarity also improved recall of reading content.

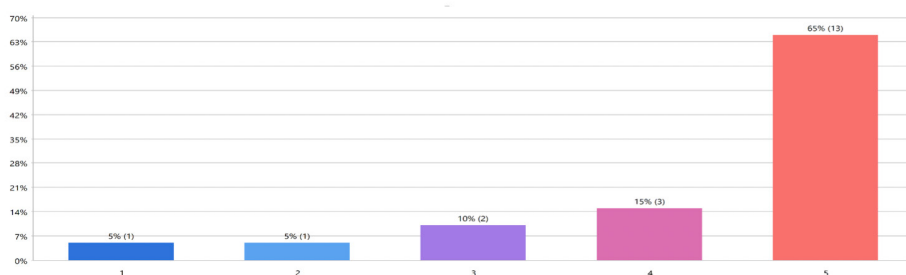


Figure 8. *Effect of Kazakh cultural details on students' recall of reading content*

As shown in Figure 8, 65% (n=13) indicated that Kazakh cultural details greatly facilitated their recall, 15% (n=3) reported considerable facilitation, 10% (n=2) moderate facilitation, while smaller proportions reported slight facilitation (5%; n=1) or no facilitation (5%; n=1).

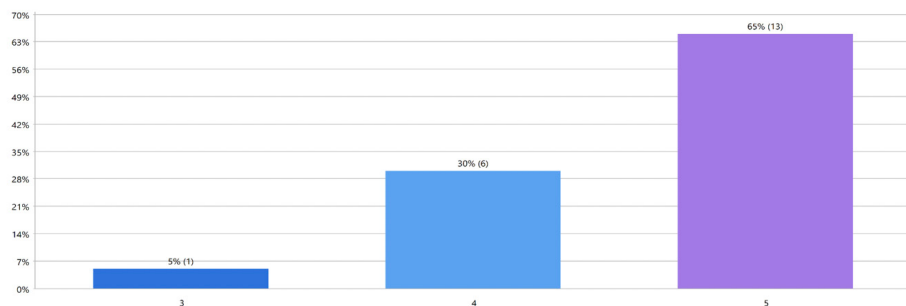


Figure 9. *Students' comprehension of information about Khoja Ahmed Yassawi and Turkish culture*

Additionally, Figure 9 shows that understanding information about Khoja Ahmed Yassawi and Turkish culture was very easy for 65% (n=13), considerably easy for 30% (n=6), and moderately easy for 5% (n=1).

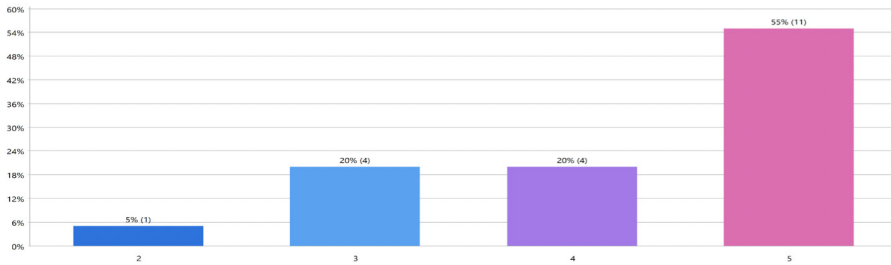


Figure 10. *Perceived effect of culturally relevant topics on students' success in Turkish classes*

Finally, Figure 10 demonstrates that incorporating topics related to their own culture has a positive influence on perceived success in Turkish classes, with 55% (n=11) reporting a significant effect, 20% (n=4) a considerable effect, 20% (n=4) a moderate effect, and 5% (n=1) a slight effect.

These patterns align with the Levels of Processing Theory, which suggests that culturally relevant information is processed at a deeper cognitive level, leading to improved retention (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). Furthermore, this aligns with research emphasising the role of learner confidence and cultural familiarity in enhancing academic performance and self-regulation (Anderson, 2000).

Discussion

This study examined the influence of culturally familiar content on the reading comprehension, motivation, and cognitive engagement of B1-level Kazakh students learning Turkish as a foreign language. The findings consistently demonstrated that students perceived texts embedded with cultural elements familiar to their own background—particularly those reflecting Kazakh heritage—as easier to understand, more engaging, and more memorable. These results reinforce the core tenets of Schema Theory, which posits that comprehension emerges through the activation of prior knowledge structures in the reader's mind (Rumelhart, 1980). Students' improved understanding of culturally aligned texts aligns with Cultural Schema Theory, which emphasizes that shared cultural references facilitate meaning-making and reduce cognitive load (Nishida, 1999).

In line with existing research in second language acquisition (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983), students demonstrated a greater ability to process lan-

guage efficiently when cultural barriers were minimized. Rather than allocating mental effort to decode unfamiliar cultural concepts, learners could focus their cognitive resources on syntactic and semantic comprehension. This not only enhanced immediate understanding but also improved the depth and confidence of textual engagement.

Durmuş (2013) notes that the performance of Turkish language learners varies significantly depending on the linguistic distance between their native language and Turkish. Learners from Turkic-speaking backgrounds tend to achieve higher comprehension outcomes due to positive transfer and shared grammatical or lexical structures. Furthermore, he emphasizes the importance of aligning reading materials with learners' proficiency levels—simplified texts for beginners and authentic materials for advanced learners—underscoring the pedagogical principle of “input suitability” for optimizing comprehension and engagement.

A further key finding was the enhancement of content recall. This aligns with the Levels of Processing Theory (Craik & Lockhart, 1972), which suggests that material processed at deeper semantic levels—often due to emotional or cultural salience—is more likely to be encoded into long-term memory. Anderson (2000) similarly argues that when content resonates with an individual's self-schema, it is not only processed more efficiently but is also more readily retrievable. In this study, texts related to Kazakh culture seemed to trigger such deep processing, resulting in stronger retention and higher recall accuracy.

From a pedagogical standpoint, these insights advocate for the systematic integration of culturally responsive materials into Turkish language curricula. Using culturally familiar texts at the initial stages of instruction can scaffold learners' cognitive engagement, build linguistic confidence, and serve as a bridge toward more complex, target-culture materials. This “cultural bridging” approach supports inclusive pedagogy while fostering intercultural competence and learner autonomy (Johnson, 1982). Additionally, students' motivational responses suggest that such materials not only support academic outcomes but also reinforce identity validation within the language learning process.

Nonetheless, the study has several limitations. One limitation of this study is that it was conducted with B1-level Kazakh students from a single institutional context. Although the study provides valuable insights into the

role of cultural background knowledge in reading comprehension, the findings cannot be generalized to all learners of Turkish as a foreign language. Future research could apply similar research designs with learners at different proficiency levels and from diverse cultural backgrounds in order to provide a broader understanding of the relationship between cultural familiarity and reading comprehension. In addition, longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of culturally responsive instruction on vocabulary retention and critical reading development may provide further insights into this issue.

In sum, the findings provide compelling evidence that culturally familiar content significantly enhances language learners' comprehension, memory retention, and motivation. When integrated thoughtfully, such content not only fosters linguistic proficiency but also cultivates a more meaningful and inclusive learning environment. These results underline the pedagogical imperative of embedding cultural relevance into foreign language instruction, particularly in multicultural or multilingual learning contexts. As emphasized by Durmuş and Sumruk (2021), language instructors are not merely transmitters of linguistic rules but cultural mediators who bridge the learner's worldview with the target language's cultural framework. Their work highlights the critical role of intercultural competence in shaping meaningful classroom experiences and supporting learners' identity negotiation through culturally responsive pedagogy.

Conclusion

This study offers clear evidence that integrating culturally familiar content into Turkish language instruction significantly enhances learners' reading comprehension, motivation, and information recall. By activating students' pre-existing cultural schemas, such materials facilitate deeper cognitive engagement and promote more meaningful interaction with textual content. Furthermore, culturally resonant texts reinforce learner identity, fostering emotional connection and intrinsic motivation in the language learning process. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings support the implementation of "cultural bridging" strategies—beginning with texts grounded in the learner's own cultural context before transitioning to target culture materials. This approach not only strengthens linguistic competence but also builds learner confidence and promotes intercultural awareness.

Although the study focused on a specific cohort of B1-level Kazakh students within a single institutional setting, its implications extend beyond this context. Future research should explore how cultural familiarity influences comprehension across proficiency levels, investigate the role of different text genres, and assess long-term impacts on lexical development and critical literacy skills through longitudinal designs.

Ultimately, incorporating culturally responsive materials should be considered a foundational component of effective and inclusive language teaching. Such integration supports not only language development but also the broader educational goals of learner autonomy, engagement, and intercultural competence.

Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the “*Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions*”. All ethical standards related to research integrity, participant consent, and data confidentiality were strictly observed throughout the research process.

Ethics Committee Approval

This study was reviewed and approved by the *Hacettepe University Social and Humanities Research Ethics Committee* (Decision Date: 25 March 2025, Meeting No: 2025/06).

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship and publication of this article.

Author Contribution Statement

Aisale Turatova contributed 50% and Mustafa Durmuş contributed 50% to the study. Both authors contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, analysis, interpretation of the findings, and revision of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence tools were used in conducting the research, analyzing or interpreting the data, or generating the scholarly content of this manuscript.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışma, Türkçeyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Kazak öğrencilerin okuduğunu anlama süreçlerinde kültürel arka plan bilgisinin etkisini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, Şema Kuramı (Rumelhart, 1980) ve Kültürel Şema Kuramı (Nishida, 1999) çerçevesinde yapılandırılmış; kültürel olarak tanındık içeriklerin, yabancı dilde anlam kurma süreçlerinde bilişsel etkinlik, motivasyonel yönelim ve belleksel kalıcılık üzerindeki etkisini nitel veriler aracılığıyla ortaya koymayı hedeflemiştir. Çalışmanın temel varsayımı, bireylerin yeni bilgiyi anlamlandırma sürecinde önceden sahip oldukları kültürel şemaları harekete geçirdikleri ve bu süreçte kültürel tanıdıklığın anlam kurmayı kolaylaştırdığı yönündedir.

Yabancı dil öğretimi, yalnızca dilbilgisel yapıların aktarımıyla sınırlı olmayan; bilişsel, kültürel ve duyuşsal bileşenleri bir arada barındıran çok katmanlı bir öğrenme alanıdır. Okuduğunu anlama becerisi, bu alanın en karmaşık ve üst düzey zihinsel işlemlerinden biridir. Anlam kurma, sözcük çözümlemenin ötesinde, okuyucunun önceki deneyimlerinden ve kültürel referanslarından beslenen bilişsel bir etkileşim sürecidir. Bu çerçevede Şema Kuramı, bireyin zihninde önceden var olan bilgi yapılarını (şemaları) yeni girdilerle etkileşime sokarak anlamı yapılandırıldığını öne sürer. Özellikle ikinci dil bağlamında, bu şemalar yalnızca dilsel yeterlik düzeyini değil, aynı zamanda metin içeriğinin kültürel uyumluluğunu da belir-

leyici hâle getirir. Öğrenenin kültürel arka planıyla örtüşen metinler, anlamlandırma sürecini kolaylaştırırken; kültürel olarak uzak veya yabancı temalar bilişsel yükü artırabilir (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Wang, 2024).

Araştırma, nitel durum çalışması deseniyle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu desen, karmaşık bilişsel süreçlerin doğal öğrenme ortamı içinde derinlemesine analiz edilmesine imkân tanımaktadır. Çalışma grubu, Hoca Ahmet Yesevi Uluslararası Türk-Kazak Üniversitesi Türkçe Hazırlık Programı'nda öğrenim gören, B1 düzeyinde Türkçe yeterliğine sahip 20 Kazak öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Katılımcılar, amaçlı örnekleme yöntemiyle belirlenmiş; cinsiyet, akademik bölüm ve öğrenim süresi bakımından çeşitlilik sağlanmıştır. Böylece homojen bir kültürel yapı içerisinde bireysel farklılıkların bilişsel yansımaları gözlemlenebilmiştir.

Veri toplama süreci üç temel kaynaktan oluşmaktadır: sınıf içi katımlı gözlem, okuma etkinlikleri ve anket formu. Gözlem sürecinde, öğrencilerin kültürel olarak tanıdık metinlerle etkileşimleri 28 saat boyunca sistematik biçimde izlenmiş, sözel ve davranışsal göstergeler alan notlarına kaydedilmiştir. Okuma etkinliklerinde öğrencilerden, Kazak kültürüyle ilişkili metinleri önce sesli, ardından sessiz biçimde okumaları ve ardından açık uçlu anlama sorularını yanıtlamaları istenmiştir. Ayrıca, kültürel yakınlık ve anlaşılabilirlik düzeyini belirlemeye yönelik 10 maddelik Likert tipi bir ölçek uygulanmıştır.

Toplanan veriler, MAXQDA yazılımı aracılığıyla karma (indüktif ve dedüktif) kodlama stratejisi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. İlk aşamada, Şema Kuramı'nın kuramsal bileşenlerinden türetilen ön kodlar aracılığıyla verinin temel yapısı belirlenmiş, ardından veri içinde kendiliğinden ortaya çıkan örüntüler üzerinden yeni kodlar oluşturulmuştur. Kodlar, üç üst temada bütünleştirilmiştir: (1) Anlama ve Şema Aktivasyonu, (2) Motivasyonel Katılım ve Duyuşsal Yönelim, (3) Bilişsel Derinlik ve Hatırlama. Kodlama güvenilirliğini sağlamak amacıyla veriler iki araştırmacı tarafından bağımsız olarak kodlanmıştır. Kodlama sürecinde ortaya çıkan kodlar karşılaştırılmış ve görüş birliği ile görüş ayrılıkları belirlenmiştir. Kodlayıcılar arası güvenilirlik Miles ve Huberman (1994) tarafından önerilen formül kullanılarak hesaplanmıştır ($\text{Güvenirlik} = \frac{\text{Görüş Birliği}}{\text{Görüş Birliği} + \text{Görüş Ayrılığı}} \times 100$). Yapılan hesaplama sonucunda kodlayıcılar arası uyum oranı %85 olarak bulunmuştur.

Bulgular, kültürel olarak tanıdık içeriklerin öğrencilerin okuduğunu anlama, ilgilenme ve hatırlama performansları üzerinde anlamlı etkiler yarattığını ortaya koymaktadır. Katılımcıların %45'i, kendi kültürlerine ait öğeler içeren metinlerin "anlamayı büyük ölçüde kolaylaştırdığını" belirtmiş; %30'u "oldukça kolaylaştırdığını", %15'i ise "kısmen kolaylaştırdığını" ifade etmiştir. Öğrencilerin %65'i, Kazak kültürüne ilişkin metinleri Türk kültürüne ait metinlerden daha kolay anladıklarını bildirmiştir. Bu sonuçlar, kültürel şemaların etkinleştirilmesinin bilişsel yükü azalttığını ve anlam kurma süreçlerinde üst düzey bilişsel stratejilerin (çıkarım yapma, kavramsal ilişkilendirme, yorumsama) daha etkin kullanılmasına olanak tanıdığını göstermektedir. Motivasyonel açıdan, öğrencilerin büyük çoğunluğu (%80) kendi kültürlerinden temalar içeren metinleri okuduklarında Türkçeye yönelik ilgilerinin ve öğrenme motivasyonlarının arttığını ifade etmiştir. Bu durum, Ushioda'nın (2011) "özerk motivasyon" kuramında vurgulanan özdeşleşmiş öğrenme biçimiyle örtüşmektedir. Öğrenciler, kültürel olarak tanıdık içeriklerle karşılaştıklarında kendilerini öğrenme sürecinin öznesi olarak konumlandırmakta, bu da duyuşsal katılımı güçlendirmektedir.

Bellek ve hatırlama açısından da belirgin bir avantaj gözlemlenmiştir. Katılımcıların %65'i kültürel olarak aşına oldukları metinlerdeki bilgileri "çok kolay hatırladıklarını" belirtmiştir. Bu bulgu, İşleme Düzeyleri Kuramı (Craik & Lockhart, 1972) ile örtüşmekte; kültürel olarak anlam yüklü bilgilerin daha derin bilişsel düzeylerde işlendiğini ve dolayısıyla uzun süreli bellekte daha kalıcı temsiller oluşturduğunu göstermektedir.

Tartışma bölümünde, elde edilen bulgular önceki araştırmalarla (Erten & Razi, 2009; Al-Salmi, 2011; Wang, 2024) karşılaştırılmıştır. Bulgular, yabancı dil öğretiminde kültürel uygunluk ilkesinin öğrenme başarısına olan katkısını açık biçimde ortaya koymaktadır. Öğrenciler, kültürel olarak tanıdık metinlerde yalnızca dilsel çözümleme değil, aynı zamanda anlam yapılandırma ve eleştirel yorumlama becerilerini de daha yüksek düzeyde sergilemiştir. Bu durum, okuma sürecinin yalnızca bilişsel değil, aynı zamanda kültürel bir müzakere süreci olduğunu göstermektedir.

Pedagojik açıdan çalışma, Türkçe öğretiminde kültürel köprüleme stratejisinin (cultural bridging) sistematik biçimde kullanılmasını önermektedir. Bu strateji, öğrenme sürecinin erken evrelerinde öğrencilerin kendi kültürel bağlamlarına dayalı metinlerle başlamasını, ardından hedef kül-

tür odaklı metinlere kademeli geçiş yapılmasını öngörmektedir. Böyle bir yaklaşım, hem anlam kurma becerisini hem de öğrencinin kimlik doğrulamasını destekleyerek öğrenme sürecini bütüncül hâle getirir.

Araştırma bulguları, kültürel tanışıklığın dil öğreniminde bilişsel, duyuşsal ve motivasyonel boyutlarda belirleyici bir değişken olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Kültürel olarak uyumlu içerikler, öğrencilerin ön bilgilerinin etkinleştirilmesini sağlayarak anlam kurma süreçlerini kolaylaştırmakta; aynı zamanda öğrenme motivasyonunu, özgüveni ve akademik başarıyı artırmaktadır. Bu veriler, Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçe Öğretimi alanında kültürel uyum ilkesinin, öğretim programlarının tasarımında temel bir parametre olarak değerlendirilmesi gerektiğini göstermektedir. Gelecek araştırmalarda farklı kültürel topluluklar, değişen yeterlik düzeyleri (A2, B2, C1) ve çeşitli metin türleri (anlatısal, betimleyici, akademik) üzerinde karşılaştırmalı çalışmalar yürütülmesi önerilmektedir. Ayrıca, uzunlamasına desenlerle kültürel olarak uyumlu materyallerin sözcük kalıcılığı ve eleştirel okuma becerileri üzerindeki etkisinin incelenmesi, alana metodolojik derinlik kazandıracaktır.

Bu bulgular, kültürel şemaların etkinleştirilmesinin yalnızca dilsel yeterliğin bir parçası değil, aynı zamanda anlamın kültürlerarası inşasının merkezinde yer alan bir süreç olduğunu açık biçimde göstermektedir. Dolayısıyla, öğreticilerin kültürlerarası duyarlılığı ve pedagojik farkındalığı, Türkçenin yabancı dil olarak öğretiminde başarının en kritik belirleyicilerinden biri olarak değerlendirilmektedir.