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**THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF USING KEY-PAL AS A COMMUNICATION  
TOOL FOR ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE SECONDARY SCHOOL  
STUDENTS**

**THESIS BY  
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## APPROVAL PAGE

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## ÖZET

### KLAVYE ARKADAŞLIĞINI BİR İLETİŞİM ARACI OLARAK KULLANMANIN İNGİLİZCEYİ YABANCI DİL OLARAK ÖĞRENEN ORTAOKUL ÖĞRENCİLERİ İÇİN KATKILARI

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Bu araştırma bir klavye arkadaşına sahip olmanın bir Türk ortaokulunda 7. Sınıf öğrenciler için İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenme sürecindeki katkılarının ne olduğunu bulmak için yapılmıştır. On ortaokul öğrencisinin bir klavye arkadaşına sahip olmak hakkındaki fikirleri ve düşünceleri tartışılmıştır. Üç çeşit veri toplama aracı kullanılmıştır. İlk olarak, sosyal medya etkileşiminden sonra, katılımcılarla araştırma sorularını yanıtlayacak gerekli bilgileri toplamak için yarı yapılandırılmış bir röportajla görüşülmüştür. Daha sonra, bir başka yarı yapılandırılmış röportaj detaylı bir anlayış kazanmak için katılımcıların bir İngiliz dili öğretmenine uygulanmıştır. Son olarak, gerektiğinde sonuçları desteklemek adına alan notları kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın doğası gereği, ortaya çıkan temaları belirlemek için içerik çözümlemesi yapılmıştır. Sınıflandırma katılımcıların paylaştığı bilgilerle şekillendirilmiştir. Sonrasında, içerik tanımlanmıştır ve farklı araçlardan elde edilen veri eşleştirilmiş ve karşılıklı referans edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, klavye arkadaşlığı metodunun etkileri hakkındaki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları tanımlamak için literatür taramasında belirtilen teoriye karşı doğrulanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Klavye arkadaşlığı, klavye arkadaşlığının katkıları, sosyal medya etkileşimi, mektup arkadaşı.

**ABSTRACT****THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF USING KEY-PAL AS A COMMUNICATION  
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STUDENTS****Zeynep Büşra VARIŞLI****M.A. Thesis, Department of English Language Education****Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Şehnaz ŞAHİNKARAKAŞ****September, 2017, 78 pages**

This research was carried out in order to find out the contributions of key-pal in the process of learning English as a foreign language with 7<sup>th</sup> grade learners in a Turkish secondary school. The perspectives and reflections of ten secondary school students-participants about having a key-pal were also gathered in this study. Three types of instruments were used for data collection. First of all, after an initial social media interaction with their pals, the participants were interviewed via a semi-structured interview to collect the necessary data to answer the research questions. Thereafter, a further semi-structured interview was held with an English language teacher of the participants to gain a deeper understanding. Finally, notes of the researcher were used when necessary to supplement the findings. Due to the nature of the study, content analysis was used to describe the emerging themes. The classifications were shaped by the data shared by the participants, the English language teacher and the researcher. The content was then identified and the data from the various instruments was compared and cross-referenced. The findings were verified against the theory outlined in the literature review in order to identify the similarities and differences about the effects of using key-pal in the language learning process.

**Keywords:** Key-pal, contributions of key-pal, social media interaction, pen-friend.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CBC</b>	: Communication between Computers
<b>CMC</b>	: Computer Mediated Communication
<b>CMI</b>	: Computer Mediated Interactions
<b>EFL</b>	: English as a Foreign Language
<b>ESL</b>	: English as a Second Language
<b>P</b>	: Participant
<b>RN</b>	: Researcher Notes
<b>SNS</b>	: Social Networking Sites
<b>T</b>	: Teacher



## CHAPTER 1

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The present research investigates the contributions of key-pal in the process of learning English as a foreign language with secondary school EFL students in Turkey and determines the secondary school students' opinions about having a key-pal. This first chapter presents the background to the study, statement of the problem, aim of the study and the research questions to be considered.

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

As humans we use communication to understand our world, transfer our ideas, interact with society, keep ourselves up to date and educate each other. From the minute human beings are able to produce their first noise, they start communicating to draw the attention of their parents (Krashen, 1988). Over the years communication has never lost its importance. People who do not communicate tend to be isolated which in itself can lead to many problems; some of those people who lack the necessary communication skills may be labeled as having speech and language difficulty. For a healthy society, healthy communication is significant. This brings to mind the legend of the tower of Babel, the explanation of language diversity on Earth. According to the legend humans built a tower to reach the Creator and were confounded by him due to their intention to be better or different than others. Once, our ancestors had unique language and what appears surprising in the legend is God's annoyance and confusion of tongues as a penalty, which resulted in the language diversity we know and see, in the world today. The real lesson to be learnt from this legend is for us to be considerate of and to celebrate such language diversity. There are currently a great many languages spoken all over the world. In the legend, without language diversity, there was a lack of communication across nations. Given that languages across the nations are not the same, communication gaps appeared. Communication begins with language. Therefore, people should know how to use their languages in order to better understand each other. Today there are over 6.000 languages spoken in our world. According to American Council of English website,

English is the second most spoken language after Mandarin and is also the native language of more than 350 million people worldwide. Furthermore, there are more people communicating in English than those speaking Arabic and French collectively. The popularity of the language has established English as the international language of diplomacy, business, science, technology, banking, computing, medicine, aviation, engineering, tourism, UN & NATO armed forces, Hollywood films and the best pop and rock music of the world (2016).

English has been accepted as a lingua franca and is learned in various forms by people on different parts of our planet. Turkey is among those countries which give importance to the learning and teaching of English. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, modernization and westernization movements resulted in the demand for foreign languages and the spread of English language in Turkey. According to the Turkish Ministry of Education in 2005, fourth grade students should attend two hours per week of English language courses and in 2013 it was extended to include second grade students in primary schools (MEB, 2015).

In the 21st century, as educational settings become more linguistically and culturally diverse, there has been a growing recognition in the field of ELT (Menard-Warwick, 2005). The need for communication in the process of language learning is inevitable. Through technology, there have been a lot of platforms which may provide essential communication. Social media is a platform that enhances people's communication, ideas sharing, information and learning especially for today's young learners. Globally, the number of people using internet communication is on the increase. "Social media has created new possibilities for digitally native students to engage, interact and collaborate in learning tasks that foster learning processes and the overall learning experience" (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014, p. 1). Computer mediated communications create social interactions.

A language is better learned when it is used. Therefore, giving the opportunity for learners to use English in their everyday lives may be helpful in order to increase their level of desire to learn English. Gardner's (2001) motivation theory provides that constructing the desire raises students' motivation to learn a language. Also, social interactions are essential in language learning according to sociocultural theory. Within the sociocultural perspective "human cognition originates in and emerges out of participation in social activities"(Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 1). Pen-pal later referred to a key-pal is a method for language learners to use real-life communications

through exchanging messages. Many educationalists (Edasawa & Kabata, 2007; Erkan, 2004; Greenfield, 2003; Ockert, 2015; Shin, 2009; Stockwell, 2003) emphasized the positive impacts of using key-pal in the process of foreign language learning, for example, Kirkpatrick, Brown and Atkins's (1998) study discussed an effective teaching strategy by using cross-cultural e-mail communication to enhance global awareness and cultural diversity, Brandi, Lockhart and Hara (2003) showed that key-pal method can be a creative, cost-effective and significant learning instrument to aid language learning and international understanding. Maas-Garcia (2009) claimed to be key-pal as an inexpensive and effective teaching strategy. With the help of technology and the benefits of key-pal, this method gained its popularity. In the literature, many contributions on the use of key-pal has been made (see Section 2.3 for details) particularly the extent to which learners' motivation, attitude, self-perception, self confidence, communicative and intercultural competence, autonomy, language learning skills and knowledge of cultures are affected by its use.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

In the literature, there have been a lot of key-pal studies conducted in different parts of the world. In Turkey, key-pal (pen-pal) is generally used on English courses from primary school to university students but there is limited research about the contributions of key-pal to the language learning process in Turkey. Furthermore, according to the relevant literature (Harrison & Kitao, 2005; Liaw, 2003), in general, key-pals interacted with each other via sending and receiving e-mails using their e-mail addresses. Blake (2008) states that e-mail and discussion forums are first generation tools while blogs and wikis are second generation tools. Moreover, he claims that social networking sites are considered as a new set of web 2.0 tools. A social media platform like Facebook generally has not been used for interaction between key-pals in the history. In this study, through its popularity and accessibility, Facebook is selected as a platform to convey the messages of key-pals.

## **1.3. The Aim and Research Questions of the Study**

This study aims to investigate the influence of using key-pal with Turkish secondary school EFL students and have an understanding about the students'

reflections on having a key-pal at a Turkish secondary school. Research questions to be considered are therefore:

1. What are the contributions of key-pal in the process of learning English as a foreign language with 7<sup>th</sup> grade learners in a Turkish secondary school?
2. What are the students' opinions about having a key-pal?



## CHAPTER 2

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature and background information about the issues related to the present study. Therefore, social media will be defined and its effects on language learning will be presented. Next, the definition of key-pal and its role in language learning will be clarified. Finally, the contributions of key-pal in the process of language learning will be investigated throughout the relevant literature.

#### 2.1. Social Media

Social media is “a variety of new sources of online information that are created, circulated, and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues” (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 357). It is now seen as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.68). The rapid spreading of technology is making individuals or students from approximately all over the world spend considerable amounts of time in social media applications. Through this media people build relationships, socialize and share interest. Today, more than half of the population of the world is internet users and there is a significant increase in the number of social media users through its popularity and technology. In brief, social media is a worldwide information and communication platform at our fingertips today.

##### 2.1.1. Social media in Language Learning

Vygotsky (1978) believed that learning is a social process and what is needed for learning is society or culture. Thus, according to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, social interaction plays a significant role in learning. The theory suggests that, at first, a person interacts with others and then integrates what she or he has learnt into her or his mental structure or cognition. The main notion is that people learn from their culture or society. The theory also gives the idea that people have a zone of proximal development (ZPD) which presents the limit of potential for an individual’s cognitive development. In order



to reach this zone which learners naturally have but require help in attaining from their teachers or more experienced peers, individuals need scaffolding. Scaffolding is used to define the necessary help for learners to be able to learn or achieve using their full potential. Vygotsky (1978, p. 37) stated “what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone”. So, people need others to progress further. Moreover, according to the theory of social learning, people learn from the society in which where they live. Since the environment affects people, Bandura (1986) claimed that people acquire attitudes, values, thinking styles, emotions and behaviors from the activities exemplified by models. In addition, the media influence causes behavior change (Bandura, 2004; 2009). The results of a study conducted by Singhal and Rogers (1999) showed that the media effects on learning were considerable.

In general, social interaction is essential for learning according to the aforementioned theories. There may be limited conversational opportunity for some people to have face to face interaction but thanks to today’s technology, on social media people have a platform for communicating concurrently with others from around the world. With the technology and innovation generation of today’s youth, the media has become an important characteristic of society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Gardner, 2013).

“Technology lies at the heart of the globalization process, affecting work, education and culture”(Graddol, 2012, p. 18). Technology is reshaping every facet of people’s lives. Over the past years, the internet has had a significant impact on the private and professional lives of people. Offering them a growing number and diverse range of opportunities, it provides the opportunity to reach information, gain and exchange knowledge and realize personal learning goals. Communication is one of the key factors in any learning process. It changes according to place and time. Developments in technology have facilitated communication in the virtual domain where the physical limits of time and place can be ignored during the interaction. Duensing, Stickler, Batstone and Heins (2006, p. 1) refer to the contribution of social interaction, stating “Social interaction, that is the active and productive communication between different speakers, is beneficial to language learners”.

Social media platforms are commonly used for interaction, communication, leisure time, searching and sharing of information. Further, these communication tools provide significant learning opportunities. The literature suggests that social networking sites are predominantly used for educational purposes, as instruments supporting

existing social relations and enabling the maintenance of social funds (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2011). Anderson and Dron (2011, p. 87) pointed out that social networking sites backed up “the process of building networks of information, contacts and resources that are applied to real problems”. Social networking sites have received attention among teenagers and also university students (Salaway and Caruso, 2008). Greenhow and Burton (2011) considered social media as “a key role in students’ lives”. More recently, Ekoc (2014, p. 24) claimed that “social media interactions are more flexible in generating discussion on language learning, social issues and gives further opportunity to use the language interactively”. Technology offers modern educational tools for learning English as a foreign language.

Research conducted by Vadhiya (2015) on the effectiveness of WhatsApp for educational purposes especially to develop language skills proved that application to be a considerably effective tool for learning and teaching as well as developing language skills of the learners. According to Shah’s (2015) study, social networking sites should be used to make teaching English language skills easy, effective and practice-oriented. In addition, the results of the study indicated that social networking sites are a significant, innovative, inseparable and influential tool for improving English language skills.

### **2.1.2. Use of Facebook in Language Learning**

Facebook is one of the most popular internet applications bringing together millions of people throughout the world on a daily basis. Established by Zuckerberg in 2004, Facebook and initially aimed at the high-school and college students, rapidly spread globally and continues to rise in popularity among people of all ages today (Tufekci, 2008). It provides a platform for reading news, sharing personal information, sending and receiving messages and thus, exchange information. On the Facebook internet site, incoming messages are stored with messages, generally in text form, comprising audio materials as voice-mails, visual materials such as photos and also audio-visual materials like videos. To communicate with others through Facebook, an account is essential for both sender and receiver. It is possible to have millions of friends on Facebook.

Needless to say, Facebook has received significant attention of many studies and has been at the core of many research areas ranging from social-behavioral sciences,

law, economics, business, marketing and education (Wilson, 2012). It is transformational ability in the learning process has been well documented: “Facebook is a powerful learning tool that is not only built off of the synchronous and asynchronous technologies that has transformed learning but has also extended the reach of those communicative tools” (Blattner & Fiori, 2009, p. 2). The internet has significant potential as a resource for knowledge and as a medium for communication between people. As Thurairaj, Hoon, Roy and Fong (2015, p. 314) discussed “The usage of SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter and mobile phones enhances English proficiency as these SNSs can be accessed worldwide and thus allow people all over the world to post and share their thoughts, feelings, news and articles”. As English is generally the medium of communication Facebook users tend to learn English.

Many reviews have tried to demonstrate the educational uses of Facebook (Aydin 2012; Espinosa, 2015; Hew, 2011; Manca & Ranieri 2014). Via Facebook, people can use an online messaging application. Online messaging where a user can write, send and receive messages by computer, is one of the most famous internet programs bringing millions of people together throughout the world. People can use both instant communication and read and compose messages which are stored on the server at their convenience.

### **2.1.3. Social Media in Turkey**

In Turkey Facebook is the most frequently visited social media site with a rate of 32%, followed by WhatsApp at 24%, Facebook messenger rate at 20%, 17% of people preferring twitter, 16% using Instagram and finally Google+, Skype, LinkedIn, Viber and Vine (Tuik, 2016). Thanks to the increasing demand for internet and the trend for the smart mobile device, young people lead the way on social networking engagement, using Facebook and other sites, such as, Snapchat and Instagram. They also enjoy sending text messages and using text messaging applications such as WhatsApp.

According to We Are Social internet site (2016), statistically, based on an estimated world population approximately 7.5 billion. 46% of people are internet users. While 2.3 billion people worldwide (31%) are active social media users, 82.4% of Turkish internet users are also users of social media (Tuik, 2016). The number of reported social media users has increased by 10%, a rise of 219 million, a significant escalation on previous years. Moreover, 77% of the internet users in Turkey go online

every day while 16% of them do so at least once a week. The majority of adolescents across the globe (51%) are unique mobile users, while in Turkey this number is 71 million (90%) for smart phone users. Where previously, the computer represented the only internet-connected device, a plethora of devices are currently available offering immediate, high-speed on-line connection, symbolic of today's modern, fast-paced lifestyle. 59 million Turkish teenagers report going online on a daily basis with an average of 60 billion people worldwide sending and receiving online messages on social networking sites.

Educationalists in Turkey have done much to encourage Information Technology skills. All schools are now linked via Educational Informatics Network (EBA, 2017), an online social educational platform led by the General Directorate of Innovation and Educational Technologies. This offers students and teachers a gateway to future online learning and facilitates the integration of technology into education by using specialist information technology tools and supporting effective material use. In addition, FATİH (Movement of Enhancing Opportunities and Improving Technology, 2017) projects were designed to help every student access the best education in Turkey. These internet sites are fostering learning in general but more specifically for language learning ERASMUS+ and eTwinning projects are used. ERASMUS+ is developed to promote education, training, sport and youth. ETwinning is a platform for staff (teachers, students, librarians and so on.) to communicate, collaborate, share knowledge and be a part of a European learning community. These communities and platforms are working with education and technology.

As aforementioned, some research has focused on examining language learning via social media in Turkey. Erkan (2004) for example, investigated the effectiveness of key-pals for EFL writing. Further, Aydın (2012) used Facebook as an educational environment. Following on from this, Erkan (2013) examined the effects of cross-cultural mailing on the internet on self-efficacy in EFL writing. Ekoc (2014) studied about using Facebook groups as a supporting tool for language classrooms. Finally, Özdemir (2017) focused on Facebook for promoting EFL learners' intercultural communication effectiveness. Social media effect on language learning has been investigating by some researchers in Turkey.

## 2.2. Key-Pal

Before explaining the definition of key-pal, it is necessary to examine its history. Before the arrival of the internet became a popular communication tool, a simple exchange of letters between pen-friends was the norm. A pen-friend is a friend from another part of the world with whom one keeps in touch through letters. In this context, letter writing is used as a way of getting to know a new person using written communication. These so-called pen-pals are friends generally who have not met before but may meet in the future. Guth (2002, p. 234) explains further “pen-pals can be local or from very far away, and exchanges can include group letters, individual letters, photos, and videotapes. In addition to writing traditional letters, e-mail exchanges can provide incentives for writing due to their rapid response time”.

With the advance in technology, the traditional pen and papers has naturally been replaced by keyboard and monitor screen. It could be said that the arrival and development of new technologies are the cause somewhat of the demise of letter writing. Communication technology affords easier and faster communications. Thanks to this, people’s preference for different ways of communication has changed with the terms key-pal (keyboard friend) and e-pal (electronic friend) preferred in EFL for cross-cultural (read intercultural) communication. Consequently, it appears that people prefer being key-pals more than being pen-pals now. The general meaning of key-pal is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as “a person with whom one becomes friendly by exchanging e-mails; an e-mail pen friend”. Key-pal is also known as students’ electronic communication with other students from around the world. Computer-mediated interaction (CMI or CMC) or Computer-based communications (CBC) between learners of foreign languages and target language speakers or other foreign language learners are regarded as key-friends. “Keyboard-based friend” (Erkan, 2004, p. 2) is a further definition of the word key-pal. ‘Having a key-pal’ requires students’ reading and writing for English communication and provides them with opportunities to learn about different cultures with virtual classmates, in classrooms without boundaries (Warschauer, 1998). Connecting students with native or non-native speakers of the target language, cross-cultural key-pal can be easily implemented if individuals have the necessary access, equipment and foreign contacts (Knight, 1994). In a key-pal activity, a group of learners at one school is paired with a group of native speakers or foreign

language learners of the target language facilitating communication between the key-pal learners through electronic messaging.

Currently, foreign language teachers throughout the world select key-pal activity to enable learners to “use the target language to negotiate meaning and form in a social context, which is now thought of as essential for acquisition of a language” (Lee, 2001 cited in Stockwell, 2003). It is possible to find many friends online because there are so many web pages for searching, meeting, making new friends and communicating with pen-friends. These sites can also help find language partners and enhance travel opportunities.

### **2.2.1. Key-pal in Language Learning**

Cross-cultural language learning via e-mailing has been useful for foreign language teachers as a means of interaction with real people using the target language. Stockwell (2003) suggests the idea that second language learners need opportunities for using the target language and furthermore, this can be achieved both in and outside of classroom practice with key-pal activity offering one-way language learners can engage in such opportunities. Finding key-pals and communicating with them may just be the easiest and most successful internet communication activity.

Key-pal, also known as keyboard based friendship, is a method of language learning which captures learners’ attention by delivering real-life experiences while learning a new language. Language learning becomes more authentic and meaningful and therefore, more effective with cross-cultural e-mail exchanges (Tella, 1992). Online mail exchanges between groups of language learners have been very much the focus in many EFL classrooms (O’Dowd, 2003). Currently language teachers from elementary through to tertiary level tend to encourage their learners to use long distance messaging with foreign students using the target language. Since students generally start conversations with their key-pals whenever they want to, without their teachers’ influence or aid and at their own pace, they can recognize language deficiencies and increase their language efficiency. While having an online conversation, the learners can make use of a variety of information sources example such as online dictionaries, check search engines and ask questions to their friends, teachers and also key-pals. Thus, they develop their knowledge of language and recognize a range of language resources available to them.

### 2.2.2. Key-Pal in Turkey

Foreign language teachers in Turkey adopted the pen-friend method many years ago to support their learners' acquisition of English. Thanks to technological advances and specifically, the appearance of social networking sites, people started instant communication and like the foreign language teachers global counterparts EFL teachers in Turkey began to prefer key-pals instead of pen-friends.

The internet site 'polyglotclub' is a helpful site for learners and the teachers to find friends around the world. Members on the site represent over 50 countries including Turkey. These members can select their key friends according to their language proficiency. Now, it is possible to have friends around the world literally at their fingertips and there are many online groups dedicated to finding foreign friends there, including finding key-pal on Facebook in Turkey. Giving the opportunity to visit each other via the program, in Turkey, ERASMUS+ also supports the location of key-pals and maintaining of friendships.

Researches into key-pal researches conducted in Turkey were generally based upon analyzing the effects of cross-cultural e-mailing on EFL students' writing skills and self-efficacy. Erkan (2004, p.64) summarizes the various contributions using the key-pal method has on the language learning process, including the opportunity cross-cultural message exchanges providing authentic and real-life communication contexts. Real purposes for writing enhance writing skills and thus increase students' motivation towards writing. Key-pal method develops collaboration and participation in the class and extends language learning time. The learner-centered environment was set up with cross-cultural messaging in mind. Electronic mailing with foreign students in the target language naturally advances the grammar, vocabulary, reading skills and quality of writing in the target language. Aydın (2007) states that chatting on the net creates close relationships among societies, enhances exchange of cultural knowledge and results in friendship. The findings of research on key-pal method from different parts of the world were similar to conducted in Turkey. As aforementioned, pen-pal (later called key-pal) is a method which teachers of foreign languages prefer from primary to tertiary level of the students in Turkey.

### **2.3. Key-Pal and Its Contributions**

Key-pal projects can offer many positive benefits to foreign language learners. Vygotsky (1981) suggested the idea that if a teacher gives her/his learners meaningful and worthy experiences, it will trigger effective learning outcomes. Lemkuhl (2002) claimed that educational gains through the use of key-pal are generally high with benefits often extending across almost the entire school curriculum. Many kinds of research (Stockwell, 2003; Liaw, 2003; Erkan, 2004; Ndemanu, 2012; Wach, 2015) indicate that key-pal has many benefits, some of which are presented in the following sections.

#### **2.3.1. Contribution to Language Proficiency**

Using the target language with real people impacts positively on language proficiency. Larrotta and Serrano (2012) stated that pen-friend letter exchanges give real opportunities for authentic and meaningful writing, which in turn can increase ESL literacy development. Further, Shin (2009, p. 106) claimed that “the key-pal activity is not limited to making friends but also facilitates learning English from native speakers of English and understanding different cultures through authentic communication with people around the world”. Robb (2006) supported that key-pal exchanges broaden the learners’ linguistic horizons, exposing them to vocabulary, idioms and grammar that they would not normally encounter in the school syllabus.

There are some studies (Tella, 1992; Warschauer, 1998; Erkan, 2004) which show that key-pal significantly increases the quality and quantity of students’ writing by enabling a meaningful context in which to practice the language skills that students learnt when they were in the class. For example, Florez-Estrada (1995) researched the influence of cross-cultural messaging on language learning. The study was a comparison between message exchanging students and those who were not exposed to messaging with foreigners. The findings of the study indicated that the experimental group who were exchanging messages with foreign students had improvements in grammatical accuracy in comparison with the other group who did not exchange messages. Furthermore, Edasawa and Kabata (2007) showed that students increased their vocabulary and syntactic level considerably a great deal through the exchanges. In addition, Stockwell’s study in 2003 highlighted that students who used key-pal method made important gains in grammar, syntax and vocabulary. In their research Harrison



and Kitao (2005) further revealed positive learner reactions to key-pal projects and showed improvements in language and vocabulary skills. Key-pal exchanges have also been shown to promote successful language acquisition (Donaghy, 2008). Finally, Harrison (2006) found asynchronous communication via e-mail offered an important opportunity for developing reading, writing and vocabulary skills.

### **2.3.2. Cultural Effect**

Culture is both a vehicle for carrying communities' values such as lifestyles, traditions, languages, songs, legends and an accumulation of these values. Hall suggests "For anthropologists, culture has long stood for the way of life of a people, for the sum of their learned behavior patterns, attitudes, and material things" (1959, p. 48). Language is one of the ways to maintain and transfer culture.

Ndemanu (2012, p. 1) touches upon the issue of contributions of key-pal suggesting that "e-mail exchange is a way of building genuine understanding between those of different cultures, while at the same time learning a new language" and his research showed that participants not only learned their key-pals' culture but also things about their own culture that they had not known before. Kern (1995) also used key-pal method for the learners of the foreign language. After having his students write three essays discussing what happened after interaction between key-pals, he declared that not only cultural and historical awareness of the participants were raised but also significant language learning benefits for the participants were realized. With the help of key-pal exchanges, students develop social, economic and cultural skills (Charron, 2007). Communicating about everyday life such as weather, family size, working parents and common topics, learners became more familiar with their own cultures (Ndemanu, 2012). According to Shin's (2009) research, the participants had greater insight into the life and culture of different people. In addition a group of Taiwanese trainees used key-pal with a peer group from U.S. University in Liaw's study (2003) and participants noted that their notions about the other culture were challenged, their knowledge deepened and reconstructed and in general, reflective thinking skills of the participants were fostered. Harrison (2006, p.146) stated that "e-mail exchange activities may be ideal for both introducing and sensitizing students to international communication and foreign cultures". Also, Aydın (2007) claimed that the internet is a universal library and a valuable tool for cultural exchange.

### 2.3.3. Motivational Effect

“Motivation is an inner state that arouses individual’s desire for a goal and maintains their efforts in a certain direction and time”(Kong, 2009, p. 145-146). Dörnyei (2001) describes motivation using a whole range of subsuming terms including financial fancies such as earning more or idealistic beliefs such as the desire for freedom. These incentives have very little in common, except that they all influence behavior. This proves that motivation almost completely affects behavior. Wlodkowski’s earlier research (1986) suggests that motivation is the combination of the processes that arouse a desire to investigate behavior, give direction and purpose to behavior, continue to allow behavior to persist and lead on to choosing or preferring a particular behavior. Therefore, motivation is significant in almost every aspect of life and especially so in learning. According to Gardner,

motivation is also an important contributor to language achievement in terms of linguistic outcomes, which traditionally embrace the knowledge structure of the language, i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation and the four basic skills of the language, including listening, understanding, reading and writing (1985, p. 10).

In his words Gardner emphasized the influence of key-pal on language learning. According to the theory, motivation is the central ‘engine’ or ‘energy centre’ comprising of having effort, will or want inside (cognition) and enjoying the task (affect). Gardner (1985, p. 82-83) describes the concept of integrative motive as “motivation to learn a second language because of positive feelings towards the community that speaks the language”. To clarify the components of the theory: Integrativeness means the learner has interest in the foreign language, positive attitudes towards the foreign or second language community and integrative orientation or in other word ‘a goal’. Generally they are about the interest in interacting with members of the other group and the willingness to learn for the purpose of communication. Attitudes towards the learning situation contain within the attitudes towards the teacher and the course. Motivation is established when there is a necessary amount of desire, effort and positive attitudes.

One meaningful experience which can trigger motivation can be key-pal. Wollman-Bonilla (2003) discovered that key-pal which focuses on language acquisition is particularly effective for beginning writers. King and Orton (1999) also stated that

cross-cultural e-mail exchange motivates students to learn English. Tella (1992) was a researcher conducting a study on e-mailing and the effects of e-mail use on language learning to find out how electronic messaging could be used to support foreign language teaching in Finland. According to the findings, there were many positive effects of using key-pal method. Because the participants' key-pals were British and American, the Finnish participants were seen to be more motivated to write in English; the method was learner-centered so the participants used their intrinsic motivation to interact and they became active learners. The authentic communication between key-pals made the participants think more like native English people, thanks to the natural communication. Furthermore, the writing skills of the participants were observed improving positively and they also appeared to be more motivated to achieve good grades. Belisle (1996) agreed that computer-mediated communications are more motivating for learners by less threatening means. In support of this Harmston, Strong and Evans (2001) revealed that authentic writing experiences enhance students' motivation in learning. So key-pal which helps language acquisition is particularly effective in foreign languages acquisition (LeVine, 2002). Additionally, Fedderholdt (2001) proved that learners show a high level of interest and increased motivation towards developing language skills with key-pal. Similarly, Ndemanu's (2012) study concluded that students developed a greater desire to learn English in order to communicate with their key pals. In Ockert's (2015) research at an elementary school in Japan, students were equally engaged in a computer mediated communication exchange with native speaker students in Australia through Skype application. The self-report measure of experimental and control group before and after Skype exchange indicated that the participants increased their desire to engage in foreign language activities, developed their international posture, fostered their motivation and increased their desire to visit foreign countries.

Many studies (Tella, 1992, Fedderholdt, 2001; Ndemanu, 2012; Ockert, 2015) have shown that cross-cultural messaging between language learners and native or other language learners can raise learners' motivation. In her research Bourques (2006) found that the e-pal method increases learners' motivation towards the English lesson but the research also demonstrated that learners who exchange messages regularly with their pals have higher motivation in comparison with those who do not exchange messages regularly.

### **2.3.4. Contribution for Intercultural Competence**

The term intercultural communication was first mentioned by Hall (1959) to draw attention to the need for better understanding among cultures. Adding that “when it becomes apparent to people of different countries that they are not understanding one another, each tends to blame it on ‘those foreigners,’ on their stupidity, deceit, or craziness” (1959, p. 15) further stressing that communication should be take both cultural and national issues into consideration. In sum, intercultural competence is an ability to communicate and behave in appropriate ways with people who are culturally different.

To gain intercultural competence, individuals should behave and communicate effectively, appropriately (desired external outcome), have adaptability, flexibility, an ethnorelative view and empathy (desired internal outcome) are required (Deardorff, 2006; 2009). Deardorff (2006) also determined three components as constituent elements of intercultural competence: knowledge, skills and attitudes. These components are significant for both the desired external and internal outcome. In this respect knowledge stands for cultural self-awareness, deep understanding and knowledge of culture, culture-specific information and sociolinguistic awareness. Skills required listening, observing, interpreting, analyzing, evaluating and relating to the new culture. Attitudes represent respecting cultures, openness for learning other cultures, curiosity and discovery with tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty (Deardorff, 2006).

Via key-pal process, learners can gain respect for differences, start and maintain successful communication with people of different cultures. To build a relationship this competence is needed, and, as interactional practices grow, pedagogical tools contribute to development of intercultural competence. As Ndemanu suggests “e-mail- (or pen-) pal partnership with schools across the African continent remains one of the best ways to promote transnational understanding and a cosmopolitan education”(2012, p. 9). It would be fair to assume therefore that the closer people get to other cultures, the better they know whom they are dealing with and can empathize with them.

Computer-mediated communication is considered to have many features to aid the development of learning, such as more linguistic competence and intercultural awareness (Ho, 2000). The learners’ personal understanding of the world is extending beyond the classroom through key-pal and intercultural awareness of the learners is

affected by the method. Since key-pal exchange is between foreign cultures, its effectiveness for intercultural competence and contributions cannot be ignored.

### **2.3.5. Contribution to Communicative Competence**

It is obvious that communication requires students' performing dialogues like inviting, promising, refusing invitations and so on, in a social context (Wilkins, 1976). Real communication in EFL classes raises learners' ability to use language to communicate successfully. Hymes (1971) argued that linguistic competence is not enough; to be able to communicate it requires communicative competence as well.

Cross-cultural online messaging introduces learners to communication methods using modern technology and the target language. Knight (1994) found that messaging with foreign students in target language provides an authentic way of developing communicative competence. In support of this, Kern (1995) added that computer-mediated communication is able to foster communication while reducing anxiety. Further, Leh (1997) confirmed that cross-cultural writing improved foreign language learning and communication, its other contributions were discussed and the qualitative findings of Leh's research indicated that cross-cultural messaging can enhance distance learning and provide the students with a good language-learning environment which motivated the participants, improved language learning and encouraged communication. In a similar vein, Edasawa and Kabata (2007, p. 189) declared that key-pal affected "understanding of the language level, strength of communication skills, and shared interest affected their communication and the success of this kind of Project". Exposing real reasons for using target language, this method was useful for communicative competence. With the help of authentic communication, it has been shown that students' communicative competence improves (Vinagre, 2005).

### **2.3.6. Contributions to Attitudes**

Attitude is generally qualified as a tendency to respond positively and negatively towards something such as an idea, person or situation (Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013). Learners perform positive or negative attitudes towards foreign language learning. "Positive attitude may lead to much more language learning than hours of exercises"(Phinney cited in Pennington, 1991, p. 269). Gardner (1985) claimed that attitude is one of the factors which is as important as ability for language achievement.

Malallaha (2000) supported this idea that positive attitudes also better enhance students' performing on the tests. Students having positive attitudes towards learning have a tendency to pursue learning in the future (Popham, 2011).

Attitude is another factor influenced by key-pal. Erkan (2004) found that cross-cultural e-mail exchange is a tool that may improve EFL students' attitudes toward language skills. The participants of her study answered questions about learning difficulty, levels of enjoyment, usefulness for academic work and likes-dislikes. The results indicated that key-pal is a valuable way to improve EFL learners' attitudes. In their study Choi and Nesi (1998) teachers of the participants agreed that it had been a positive experience and their learners obviously enjoyed the process. Additionally, the teachers planned to set up a key-pal activity for themselves and the participants. Key-pal method fosters students' increased enthusiasm and develops positive attitudes in the class since the classroom activities could help them improve their communication skills with their key-pals. According to Robb (2006, p.1), key-pal improves specific areas such as friendship but it can also "have a profound impact on students' attitudes towards the target language and culture and provide them with the chance to really use the language outside the classroom setting". Since the key-pal offers the opportunity of exploring the world through cyberspace with enthusiasm and autonomy, it helps the participants gain positive attitudes toward EFL lessons, method and the language itself (Shin, 2009). Wach (2015, p.41) also revealed that the results of the study showed that the key-pal process both educates the participants and offers a fun process as she stated "Their key-pals were found to create a form of support community, and the interactions were evaluated as both informative and enjoyable". Key-pal activity also reduces apprehension about EFL courses and fosters better attitudes toward this activity (Warschauer, 1998; Erkan, 2004; Shin, 2009).

### **2.3.7. Contributions for Self**

Besides the other contributions, key-pal has contribution for the self. Self-confidence (Greenfield, 2003), self-development and advanced thinking skills (Arnold & Ducate, 2006) can be gained by using key-pal.

Alias and Hussin (2004) assessed the efficacy of using the Internet and having key-pals. After investigating the questionnaire which was applied after a key-pal period the researchers found that the messaging program with foreign students in the target

language boosted the participants' self-confidence and thanks to the key-pal period, the participants' self-perceptions faded away. Greenfield's (2003) research pointed out that key-pal helped the participants enjoy and gain self-confidence and language learning perception during the e-mailing process. Shin (2009) found out that key-pal affects students' thinking skills and shy students who do not have the courage and do not like expressing themselves in a group may become more open to conversations with less anxiety. Therefore, this activity can also enhance self-confidence. Ho (2000) claimed that cultural and cross-curricular projects enhance students' self-confidence and awareness. Raising awareness about foreign languages, socializing and using the internet for learning may have an effect on learner self-confidence. Arnold and Ducate (2006) created a learning environment for their research using a discussion board on which participants could exchange information, opinions and views about foreign language teaching and learning. As a result, the experience showed its beneficial side for the participants' professional training for social, cognitive skills and self-confidence.

### **2.3.8. Contribution to Learner Autonomy**

An autonomous learner is "one who solves problems or develops new ideas through a combination of divergent and convergent thinking and functions with minimal external guidance in selected areas of endeavour" (Betts and Knapp, 1981, p. 27). Taking responsibility for their learning, starting conversations with foreigners and maintaining the communication according to their choices, key-pal method can help learners become more autonomous.

According to Harrison and Kitao (2005), key-pal encourages foreign language learners autonomy. Lee (1999, p. 1-2) pointed out one of the advantages of key-pal given the learners' obligation to think about, create and respond to messages which helps students' to take responsibility for their learning and further added that "CMC makes it possible to provide individualized learning. Students can have time to read, understand and respond to the written message in text-based mode, thus having a chance to monitor and edit their or other participants' text-based dialogue structures". Learners determine topics to be discussed and practiced. Harrison and Kitao (2005, p.1) suggested that "e-mail exchange can offer students opportunities to examine how and what they learn so that the process of evaluating ability becomes a responsibility of the

student”. Shin (2009) also points out that if teachers encourage learners, the key-pal method can be inspiring and offers learners opportunities for autonomous learning.





## CHAPTER 3

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents information about the methodology part of this thesis study including research design, participants, instruments, data collection, data analysis techniques and the overall process. Therefore, detailed information about the study and how this study was conducted is presented in this section.

#### 3.1. Research Design

The present study was conducted with the purpose of demonstrating the contributions of key-pal in the process of learning English as a foreign language and Turkish secondary school students' reflections on having a key-pal. The research is based on a qualitative approach to get an in depth understanding of Turkish secondary school students' conceptions of having a key-pal and the advantages of key-pal in the process of learning English. The qualitative design was employed in this study, since this design affords the opportunity for rich and more detailed information about the topic (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Numerical data may not be capable of determining such detailed and complex answers. Moreover, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) the qualitative method helps to develop an overview of the "human" side of an issue which demonstrates behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions and relationships. In the study, interviews and notes were used to examine the views of the participants and the researcher. For all these reasons, qualitative research methods were used in this study for all data collection.

#### 3.2. Participants

The study was carried out during 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 education year in a state school "Makbule Orman Secondary School" in Karaman. The average number of the students is 600; there are 31 teachers in total and three of them are teachers of English. Fifth and sixth graders have three hours of English courses in a week while seventh and eighth graders have four hours of English courses per week. In addition, each grade has two hours of elective English course in the school.

The school is located in a rural part of the city. Although the families of the students do not have high incomes, the students push the limits of socializing both in person attending sports activities and on the internet. The school also has partnerships on ERASMUS+ projects so the students have the chance to travel abroad, see the partner schools, participate in the activities, use English and experience real communication in English. The school has ERASMUS+ partnerships with different schools which are located in Italy, Spain, Finland, Estonia, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Poland in total. The students of the partner schools are not native speakers of English. They are learning English as a foreign language likewise the Turkish students. Two of the English language teachers are coordinating these projects in the school. The school has an ERASMUS+ group including some volunteer teachers and volunteer students who have tasks for these projects. For example, these students draw picture, write poems or essays and attend competitions about topic of the ERASMUS+ project. The average number of the students in this group is 30. Fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grade students are included in the group. The participants of this study are selected from this group because some of these students went abroad through the ERASMUS+ project of the school and have met some of the foreign students. Through being a part of the group and fulfilling the tasks which are necessary for the project, the students of the group are more likely to attend international meetings of the projects.

The researcher is the English language teacher of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students. Therefore, the researcher preferred 7<sup>th</sup> grade students to be the participants of the study with the intention of guiding the participants during the key-pal interaction process both inside and outside of English courses. The total number of 7<sup>th</sup> grade was 135. After presenting the research plan, 7<sup>th</sup> grade participants from the ERASMUS+ project group were selected. While selecting 7<sup>th</sup> grade participants, the main concern was the students' being volunteers to be a part of the key-pal interaction process. Next, the researcher cared about whether the volunteer students were able to represent Turkish culture well, express themselves in English and be respectful to differences among nations. Accordingly, the researcher selected the participants. Then, the research was mainly carried out with ten 7<sup>th</sup> graders whose average ages approximately range between 12 and 13. Ten students who are four girls and six boys were selected as the participants for the present study.

### **3.3. Data Collection Instruments**

In this study, three types of instruments were used to collect data which is Turkish secondary school students' reflections on having a key-pal and the contributions of key-pal. First of all, a semi-structured interview was prepared for collecting the data and after participants' interaction period with their key-pals, the participants were interviewed individually in Turkish and interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. Secondly, another interview with the English teacher of the participants was conducted to get more evidence. The EFL teacher was interviewed after participants' key-pal period. The interview was applied in English and also audio recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. Moreover, the notes of the researcher during the process also contributed to gathering extra data.

#### **3.3.1. Semi-Structured Interview**

This study examining contributions of key-pal and students' opinions about having a key-pal was conducted by using semi-structured interview based on qualitative design in the first phase. Allowing people to describe situations and put words to their feelings, thoughts and experiences which cannot be observable directly by researcher, interview provides a special kind of information (Sensing, 2011). The semi-structured interviews are main data collection instruments in this study as they give the chance of getting useful data and adding some questions to clarify the ambiguities and have more detailed answers. The interview questions (See Appendix A) were designed by the researcher with the help of the supervisor. It contains eight items and one item has two sub-questions which are probing for further details from their main question. The interviews were conducted in Turkish in order to take the participants' reflections in detail. First, the interview process with the participants was recorded. Then, the participant's answers were transcribed from the first item to the last item. Participants were interviewed one by one. After all the interviews were complete, the replies of the participants were translated in English.

The first question of the semi-structured interview asked if and why they wanted to learn English. This item was designed to find out the participants' enthusiasm for the English language since motivation is regarded as a byproduct of free will and an internal drive for self. The second item (with two sub-items) was developed to investigate what happened during their key-pal interaction. The replies to these

questions enlightened me as the researcher, about the content of the messages. The third item was to get ideas of the students about contributions of key-pal interaction. The participants' comments helped the researcher to understand whether there were benefits, and if so, what the benefits of this process might be. The fourth item aimed to find out whether they enjoyed being part of the key-pal communication. The fifth item was created to inquire the effects of the process. Next question was concerned with ascertaining their future plans about messaging with foreign friends. The seventh item was intended to discover the contributions of key-pal to other aspects of their lives, beyond those of English learning. The final question was to clarify whether and why they continued writing to their key-pals after the study.

### **3.3.2. Interview with Participants' Language Teacher**

According to Turkish National Ministry of Education, besides the basic English course, secondary school and high school students have the chance to choose optional courses for example Elective English, Intelligence Games or Mathematics courses two hours in a week. The participants of the study had opted for an Elective English course when they were seventh and eighth graders. At the end of the interaction period of participants with their key-pals, a semi-structured interview was carried out by the researcher (See Appendix B) with the participants' Elective English language teacher to get further data on the participants' key-pal process. The teacher was selected to be interviewed since he knew the participants before and after the process and thus, he could add more comments about key-pal and its effects on the students. The interview was semi-structured in form, so the researcher had the chance to apply additional questions for better understanding regarding the answers. The questions were prepared by the researcher and the supervisor. The interview includes four questions. The interview period lasted 10 minutes and it was conducted in English. The process was audio recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. The questions were generally about the teacher's thoughts about the changes on the participants before and after the interaction period and his reflections on key-pal process. The data gathered from this interview was used for further analysis to be able to support the previous findings or create new themes for findings.

### **3.3.3. The Teacher-Researcher's Notes**

The research period commenced after selection of students. The researcher wrote down notes during seven months from May to November simultaneously with the participants' key-pal interaction period. During this period, as the researcher, I took notes related to the effects of key-pal on participants' attitudes, motivations and opinions. I also added the participant students' remarks about having a key-pal and the advantages of key-pal. Moreover, since I was the participants' English language teacher at those times, my opinions have also been included in the notes. I had a great deal of time to understand what was going on during the key-pal interaction period of the students. Accordingly, I wrote down some notes about the process. At school, during break times, I interacted with participants and asked them some questions about how they liked this process, what they were writing about and what they learned so far from their key-pals. I also tried to encourage them to continue to communicate with their pals. Before the key-pal process, during the process and after the research process, notes were put down for all the participants. I tried to write down my ideas objectively about all the participants of the study.

The first phase of note-taking was obtained in May just before the participants were about to make foreign online friends. The notes also comprised participants' feelings after starting communication on social media with foreign students. In Turkey, summer holidays for students last three months which are June, July and August. Because there was a very limited chance to speak face to face with the participants in this period, Facebook was used as a communication platform between me and the participants. Attempts were made to collect the necessary data from the participants during summer vacation via Facebook. In September, October and November the researcher continued to write notes through her interactions with participants. In the light of the notes, the researcher could add more comments on the advantages of key-pal on the students and their perceptions about having a key-pal. Consequently, data were collected from different sources and researcher's notes contributed to the data.

### **3.4. Data Collection Procedure**

In today's world, the pupils and the young people in general have more chance of communication in comparison with their ancestors. Technology has had a significant impact on the development of communication. Many of the teenagers connect to social

networking sites to socialize on the internet. Similarly, the participants of this research generally use social networking sites to communicate with each other. Besides, ERASMUS+ partnership of the school of the participants contributes the students to the opportunity of having many foreign friends. When the transnational meeting of the ERASMUS+ project was in Karaman, Turkey, the Turkish students had the chance to meet with twenty-four students from different parts of the world. It did not take much time for Turkish students and foreign students to be friends on social media. As the researcher, I realized Turkish students' significant efforts to maintain their friendship with their ERASMUS+ friends as key-pals after the meeting in Turkey.

When the research plan was set, the students due to take part in this study were selected. For the participants' interaction, I asked permission from Makbule Orman Secondary School's ERASMUS+ partner schools' principals to help me find key-pals for the participants to communicate on social media in English. I kept in touch with the school's ERASMUS+ partners' coordinators with the aim that they could suggest some of their students as key-pals for the participants. I gave information about the aim and the process of the research to six schools from Estonia, Finland, Romania, Spain, Italy and Poland all of which represented partner schools. Four coordinators supported requests for permission to participate from families and some students who were considered by their partner school teachers to be respectful, skillful in their use of English language and available for interaction. Consequently, 12 students from four different countries aged 12-13 were determined for interaction with the present participants. The foreign students and the Turkish participants became online friends and interacted with each other on Facebook during the process. The participants added the foreign students as friends on Facebook. Then, the communication and interaction period began. In this study, my roles as a researcher are coordinating the key-pal interaction process and encouraging the participants to communicate with their pals during this period. Since I expected the frequency of communication and communication topics to happen naturally, I did not intervene the process by giving the participants some tasks to be done during the key-pal period.

From May to November, the interaction process continued. During those times I asked some questions about how the process was going on, whether they liked the process and their friends, how often they interacted with each other and what they learned from their key-pals. So, I gathered data and also ascertained the participants' thoughts. In November the period was completed and a semi-structured interview

designed to determine participants' thoughts about key-pal was conducted. Also, another semi-structured interview was applied to the elective English language teacher of the participants. After conducting semi-structured interviews, data analysis part was commenced.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

Data analysis is thought “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you can accumulate to increase your own understanding of them” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.153). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) also claimed that analyzing the data is “working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them”. In brief, data analysis is specifying the findings of a study. In the study, all the results were carefully evaluated. To make the findings triangulate two semi-structured interviews and also the teacher-researcher's notes were used. The qualitative data in this research was inferred from the content of the data. Emergent coding was used while analyzing the data. The headings were formed by the collected data for the purpose of the present study.

#### **3.5.1. Semi-Structured Interviews**

The process of analyzing qualitative data from semi-structured interviews started with partial transcription of results of interviews. Then, the data was coded, clustered and the interrelationships between categories was checked (Bas Collins, 2000) because “qualitative analysis is a relatively systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to provide explanations” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). The data was analyzed deductively. Content analysis was used to identify and present the data of the semi-structured interviews. The researcher did not depend on the pre-existing categories and used emergent coding since another set of codes would emerge from reading and analyzing the data (Gibbs, 2007). The findings of the interviews were analyzed on the basis of their content. The data was interpreted by the researcher and the supervisor. While categorizing the themes the supervisor guided the researcher in the content analysis process.

### **3.5.2. The Teacher-Researcher's Notes**

As the teacher-researcher of the present study, some notes of worth were undertaken during the key-pal interaction. The data of this instrument was inferred from the written notes taken by the researcher. The data was analyzed by the content. The findings were clustered and coded. Then, the data gathered from the notes were used to support the findings that were discovered by the other instruments.



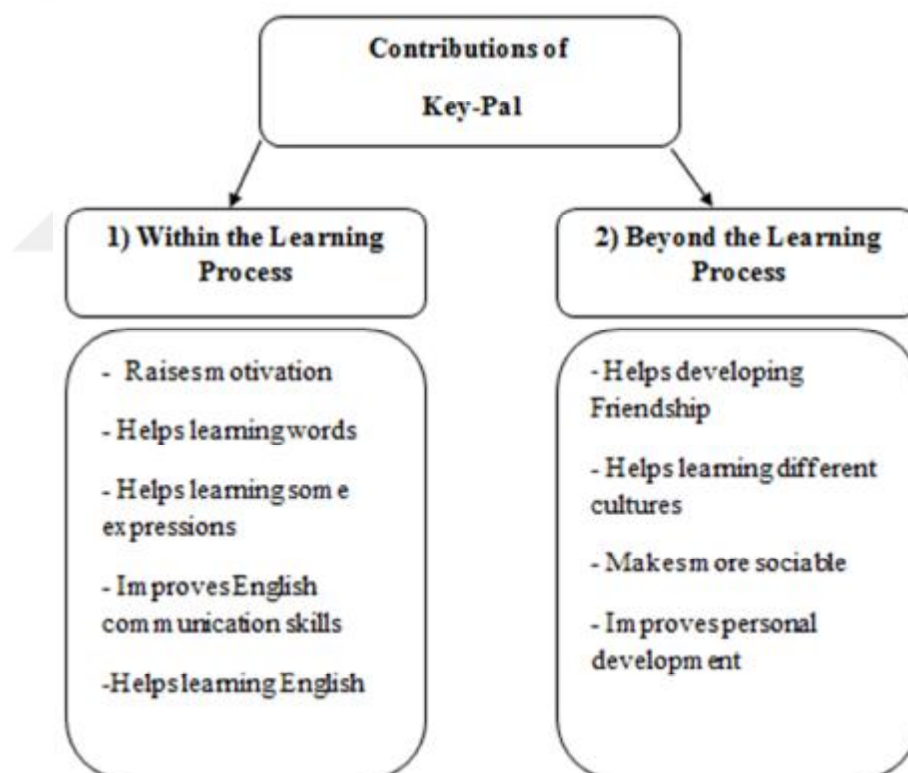


## CHAPTER 4

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This section presents the analysis of the data to determine the contributions of key-pal in the process of learning English as a foreign language with Turkish 7<sup>th</sup> grade learners and the students' opinions about having a key-pal. The findings of this study present the analysis of data gathered through semi-structured interviews and researcher's notes. In this study, instead of analyzing the instruments one by one, the analysis of data will be presented together with the answers to the research questions.

#### 4.1. Contributions of the Key-pal Process



**Figure 1.** Contributions of the key-pal process.

In order to answer the research questions, a semi-structured interview was conducted with ten 7<sup>th</sup> grade EFL students who study at a state secondary school in Turkey. Additionally, the findings of a semi-structured interview which was applied to the participants' EFL teacher (T) were included into the findings. Finally, teacher-

researcher's notes (RN) about the key-pal process and the participants' reflections contributed to Figure 1. The findings from these instruments revealed the necessary data to give an answer to the first research question. Therefore, Figure 1 demonstrates the contributions of key-pal in the process of learning English as a foreign language with 7<sup>th</sup> grade learners in a Turkish secondary school. As a result of the analysis of the gathered data, two categories emerged. Therefore, the first research question is represented in two sections: (1) contributions within the learning process, (2) contributions beyond the learning process.

#### **4.1.1. Contributions within the Learning Process**

As regards the semi-structured interview with participants, data of relevance to the contributions for English language and lessons was gathered. The first question of the research was developed in order to see the advantages of key-pal. The advantages of key-pal in the learning process are determined as: raising motivation, learning new words, learning new expressions, developing communication skills and learning English.

##### **4.1.1.1. Motivation**

Motivation eases learning as it contributes to learning voluntarily. Many factors affect the motivation level of learners, such as, parents, teachers, the learner himself/herself or learning methods. These factors play a major role in encouraging motivation in language teaching and learning. The extent to which motivation impacts on learners and when they are motivated differ from learner to learner.

Key-pal as learning activity that is used both inside and outside classroom can help raise learners' motivation. As English is the tool for communication during the key-pal process, according to the results, some of the participants stated that key-pal increased their motivation on the English courses.

*P4: I feel more motivated in English courses.*

*P8: I made progress on English courses.*

*P9: I joined English lessons more.*

*P10: I improved myself in English lesson, I feel more eager to learn.*

In related literature (Ndemanu, 2012; Ockert, 2015), key-pal is found to be effective for raising learner motivation. The participants claiming key-pal raised their motivation, further added that this motivational change impacted on their English lessons and it may be assumed that key-pal helped with their achievement in these courses. Furthermore, in support of those participants who claimed that key-pal raised their motivation in English, the EFL teacher of the participants suggested that he did in fact observe an increase in the participants' motivation after key-pal.

*T: I observe differences in motivation. while only a few students had higher motivation, many students had lower motivation on the previous courses before the key-pal. I see that P6 and P7 keep their unwillingness after the process but the rest raised their motivation*

In addition to the observation of EFL teacher of the participants, eight out of ten students, who participated in the process, experienced a clear increase in motivation as a result and the teacher's acknowledgement of the usefulness of the process, it was also noted that this may have been a new source of motivation for learners.

*T: For sure they show more enthusiasm after the research process. I think that this process is very useful. It is the motivation that produces effective language learning. In our region, students don't have many different motivation sources. So the process made our students need to learn more.*

Since the students used English in key-pal process, it helped them be more motivated to contribute in class and show more enthusiasm for the subject during the process itself, students were able to use and learn English and that may have impacted on their motivation to attend the courses more than before. According to the teacher-researcher's notes, it was found that the key-pal process has a motivational contribution effect both directly within and indirectly outside the classroom.

*RN: Some of the participants showed so much enthusiasm toward using the language that they started to speak English with me not only in English courses but also during break times. I also became their key-pal because they were writing to me in English on social media.*

If a learner is aware that s/he can communicate in a foreign language, s/he may feel more motivated to learn that language. Motivation is one of the preconditions of

learning and according to the findings of the present study, key-pal may affect learners' English motivation.

#### 4.1.1.2. Learning New Words

To understand each other, the organisms should be in a social context. In this context humans use words in spoken and written interaction. Like a baby learns her/his mother tongue, a foreign language can be learned through communication. In key-pal the learners are exposed to target language through which they encounter new words. Therefore, key-pal affects the learners' word capacity. Learning more English words through the key-pal method is perceived as another contribution to the process of learning English, as the participants' answers showed that they improved their English word capacity.

*P2: I learned more words to communicate and tried to learn new vocabularies to speak better and meaningful.*

*P4: I developed my word capacity.*

*P8: Even if it was little, students could learn English with pen-friends. I will continue to write because I'd really like to learn English. It helps to learn new words.*

*P9: I learned many words.*

Four of the participants emphasized that key-pal helped them learn English. In key-pal where learners write, send and receive messages in English, the learners can make use of online dictionaries and other sources of information to facilitate their communication. Thus, they can expand their vocabulary significantly. The EFL supported this contribution.

*T: Some of the participants joined the lessons much more when verbal activities were done in the classroom.*

The teacher also claimed that in addition to the increase in new vocabulary as a result of their involvement in the key-pal process, their enthusiasm for learning new vocabulary and their motivation to use it, generally also increased.

*T: The key-pal made them become more eager to learn and memorize English words and use more English in the classroom.*

Communicating with foreign people in English may have given the participants belief in their ability to learn and use new words. Moreover, the EFL teacher also added that key-pal helped the participants to construct more complex English sentences.

*T: Two of the participants made more complicated sentences easily on the contrary to their classmates who found making basic sentences difficult.*

The teacher-researcher's notes about the contributions in this aspect of vocabulary learning were comparable to these ideas.

*RN: They added dictionary sites and Google translate to favorites and they expanded their word capacity.*

Not only the teacher, but also one of the participants stated that she had begun to formulate English sentences easier in comparison with her previous conversations in English lessons.

*P4: I can make sentences easily.*

Thanks to cross-cultural interaction, the participants started to adapt to using English in a different context and learning many new words through this medium. Communication through key-pal contributed to the participants' vocabulary.

#### **4.1.1.3. Learning New Expressions**

Turkish EFL students generally use direct translation to communicate in English but the direct translation of words or expressions from English to Turkish or Turkish to English may not have the same meaning across these languages. Therefore, the learners should know how to use the expressions. Communicating in the target language facilitated learning the structures, skills, words and expressions of that language.

In this category of contributions of key-pal to English the data determined that key-pal provided knowledge about daily expressions in English. According to the findings, the participants learned English expressions from each other.

*P3: I learned some expressions in English and practice.*

*P8: She told me some expressions I do not know.*

The notes of the researcher demonstrated that key-pal offers students an opportunity to learn the words and expressions of the target language. Both the participants can search the net for new vocabularies and learn new words from their key-pals.

*RN: The key-pal created an opportunity for the learners to use every day speech and expressions.*

Since the conversation during the key-pal process is real, the learners also seemed to improve their speaking of everyday English. This showed that the method also evidenced peer-assisted learning through using English as a foreign language.

#### **4.1.1.4. Communication Skills**

Communication is one of the best most authentic ways to learn and use the target language. Real communication can raise the learners' ability to use the language and communicate more effectively. Key-pal is a social interaction method which allows students to learn a foreign language whilst communicating and interacting with their friends. Since, this is a social method key-pal makes contribution to the communication skills of learners.

Key-pals communicated in English in the present study. They grew accustomed to the use English for communication in comparison with their previous times. Therefore, the participants shared that the key-pal interaction process contributed to their English communication skills.

*P1: The process definitely contributed English because I don't believe that translators are not good for interaction but our knowledge is good, so if one improves her English she can easily and sincerely communicate with foreign people in social media. Pen-friend helps this.*

The Participant emphasized that the key-pal communication helped to developing English skills and in doing so, enabled her to have more meaningful and sincere communication. Two further of the participants reinforced the claim that key-pal make a contribution to communication.

*P2: I learned more words to communicate.*

*P10: I know that English has a great role in communicating and being friends with foreign people.*

Learning more words is an advantage of key-pal which is the communication tool of the participants. Key-pal offers language learners the opportunity to develop and use communication skills. This claim supported by the English language teacher.

*T: They need to learn English to communicate better and key-pal provides this.*

The teacher also added that:

*T: Using English actively in communicating, I observed that vocabulary, speaking and writing and communication skills of the students developed.*

Communicating via messages in a foreign language has been found to have a benefit on learners' linguistic skills. The EFL teacher agreed this finding but he also added a remark on communication skills of the participants stating that active English communication affected the learners positively. Moreover, according to the teacher-researcher's notes, key-pal plays a role in advancing English communication skills.

*RN: They started to use English more inside and outside of the class which fostered the learners' communication skills.*

The participants were using English at school in language courses and at their homes to interact with their foreign friends. Using the language more than before the students could develop their communication skills. The English communication skills are positively affected from key-pal method according to the results of the present study.

#### **4.1.1.5. Learning English**

A language is better learned when it is used. Key-pal plays significant role in language learning (see section 2). Furthermore, restricting English language learning solely to the classroom will undoubtedly limit both the usage of the language and the

learning of that language. For that reason, the target language should be not only inside but also outside of the classroom. Key-pal is both an inside and outside classroom activity. The EFL learners can either use key-pal method at school or in their personal lives. So, key-pal has contributions for learners' English within and well beyond the classroom.

In this study, key-pal is an outside classroom activity. The participants interacted with their pals when they were at home. Learners asked, answered and expressed themselves in English, therefore, key-pal made them use and learn English more in comparison with their previous lives. In the light of the interview, it can be seen that two participants claimed that key-pal affected their English.

*P2: Key-pal helped me learn English.*

*P5: While we were writing we used English so I improved my English.*

Only one participant stated that the process did not support English language learning.

*P6: The process was not effective because I wrote what I know.*

Contrary to other participants, one of the participants expressed that key-pal did not contribute to English. However, the EFL teacher further supported the claim that the participants improved their English skills both inside and outside of the class.

*T: Some of the participants were quite enthusiastic about using the language that one of them even tried to write a story book in English.*

Some of the participants were observed enthusiastic about using English for their daily lives. In accordance with the data from the researcher's notes, this contribution was supported. Some of the participants improved their English in their real life.

*RN: They seem very happy about using English outside of the class. They use English for real purposes.*

Communicating in target language gives real opportunities for meaningful experiences which can help learners raise their English literacy development. Key-pal



can provide a good language learning environment which motivates the learners to use English in the lessons and in their real lives.

#### **4.1.2. Contributions of Key-Pal beyond the Learning Process**

The data from the instruments indicated that the contributions of key-pal are not only for English language and lessons but that the process offers further significant contributions outside the classroom and beyond. As a result of the analysis of different data sources, four categories were emerged. Figure 1 also illustrates the advantages of key-pal outside of learning process that contain making friends, learning cultures, being sociable and self-development.

##### **4.1.2.1. Making Friends**

A key-pal is a friend from different part of the world with whom a person keeps in touch through electronic messages. Therefore, the key-pals have the chance to participate in virtual friendships. They can identify similarities and differences in their daily lives and this helps them to relate to each other. Besides, in virtual environments, the learners can add a lot of friends to their internet accounts and have the advantage of communicating in foreign languages.

In this study, the data revealed that the participants assumed one of the contributions of key-pal was making friends.

*P1: I know that English has a great role in communicating and being friends with foreign people. I have foreign friends now.*

*P2: Now I have many friends. I have a lot of unforgettable memories. Somehow I go there, I will have a home.*

*P4: I'm so happy to have friends like them, I'm glad about the process. They are like my classmates.*

According to the participants, they were aware of the significance of using English while building foreign friendships. The key-pals of the participants offer opportunities for them to use and learn English and thus, development of numerous friendships and broadening of friendship groups were positive outcomes. The students' claims on this point indicate that they are planning to turn their virtual friendship into an actual one. According to researcher's notes:

RN: *Many of the participants enjoy continuing their friendship with their key-pal. Some of them seem that they like having key-pal more than using English.*

The researcher also noted that:

RN: *They added many people as friends to their Facebook account, such as the students and also teachers from Erasmus + partner schools and their key-pals' friends as well.*

As the researcher I witnessed that the participants of the study seemed to like having different friends more than using English. Nevertheless, they improved their English thanks to the affection they feel for their friends. According to them, key-pal means making more friends and having interesting friendships. Therefore, as a result of the data gathered from the instruments, making friends category was emerged as one of the advantages of key-pal beyond the learning process.

#### **4.1.2.2. Different Cultures**

Language and culture are interconnected that depend on each other. Language carries the communities' values and it represents one of the most important elements of the culture. A peoples' language(s) and the culture are inseparable. Thus, the language learning procedure incorporates the culture of that language.

Virtual technologies and other online sources encourage interactions. Through these interactions learners are able to use foreign languages and learn other peoples' lifestyles and cultures. Key-pal as a language learning method provides a cultural contribution. This contribution was evidenced in some of the participants' comments in this study.

P1: *The thing that I like most while communicating is comparing a foreign person's culture, traditions, style and seeing differences with us.*

P2: *I like learning different languages and cultures.*

According to the data from the interview, the interactions with key-pals provided the participant with insights about the lifestyles of their key-pals and thus raised their awareness of different cultures.

P3: *I learned their lifestyles. I have learned where they live and told them mine.*

P4: *It's very good for me because I'm learning where they live and telling them mine. To get information about their countries is very good. I will go on interacting with them to improve my English. To communicate with them increases my knowledge about different countries.*

Witnessing other people's different lifestyles, the participants felt motivated to learn different cultures. Further, two participants claimed that they liked learning differences among nations.

P5: *I have learned different people's lifestyles, dishes and cultures*

P8: *I like learning differences.*

Some of the participants claimed that they like exploring the differences of people and their culture. Besides, as understood from the comments of the students, most of them regarded learning different cultures as one of the contributions of key-pal.

#### **4.1.2.3. Being Sociable**

Having friends bring popularity among young people but teenagers who have foreign friends can easily gain more popularity. Key-pal which is a language learning method through communication with foreign people in a virtual environment serves this popularity. The students having key-pals can become more open to conversations and communication in their personal lives. Key-pal is also accepted to have a positive effect on shy students who generally prefer to be alone.

In this study, being more sociable also was accepted as a benefit of the key-pal process. Followings are the excerpts indicating the participants' reflections on this contribution:

P3: *I become more sociable and learned how to talk with them. At first, it was hard to talk but it is very easy now. I raised my awareness about abroad.*

P4: *I improved my communication skills and learned how to talk with them. At first, it was hard to talk but it is very easy now. I raised my awareness about abroad.*

The participants underwent significant change and development and whatsmore, gained knowledge about foreign peoples' lifestyles, thus, the forming a social group in

themselves. This aspect was affirmed by the English language teacher through his answers to the interview questions.

*T: Two of the participants were not such social students who even did not like communicating in Turkish. But after participating in the key-pal study, I observed that their enthusiasm for English language and communication increased that made them more outgoing.*

According to the teacher, the learners started to socialize both while going online and in person. Additionally, the students started to join school teams and language courses which led to them becoming generally more personable both via the use of the internet when accessing their key-pals and in real life.

#### **4.1.2.4. Self-Development**

The last contribution of key-pal beyond the learning process according to the participants' is the contribution to self. Self improvement is thought to be another factor affected by key-pal. The key-pal process facilitates self-development and self-awareness creating an experience which assists a learner to see things from different perspectives. The students can discover links between their ideas and these of their key-pals. An awareness of different thoughts and ideas creates greater awareness of self. Self-confidence of the students having key-pals was shown to be positively and significantly affected by this process.

*P1: I can easily be a friend with someone I don't know so I improved myself.*

*P2: This is the best thing we have done for our lives and I'm sure if you do this you will not stop writing to your friends.*

*P7: Learning a foreign language improves people.*

*P9: The process entertained and developed me.*

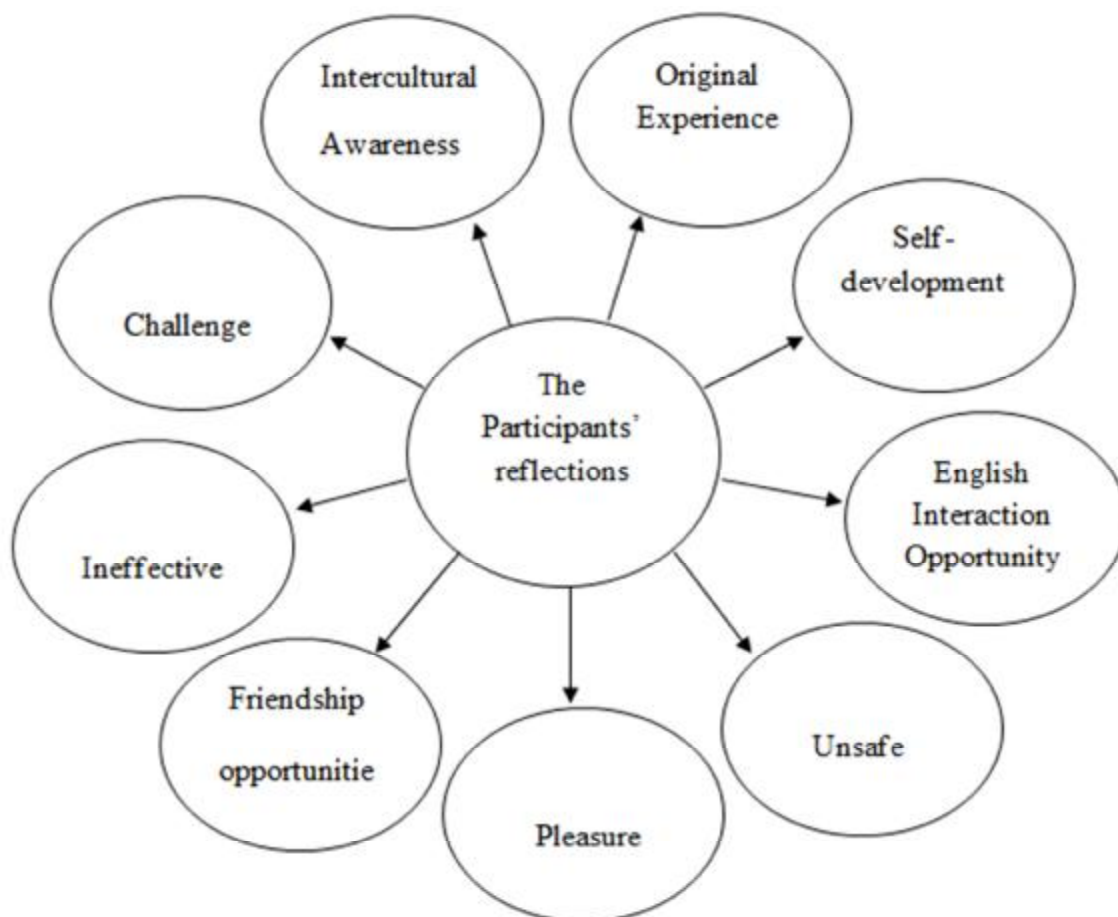
After participation in the key-pal process, it could be observed that the participants felt themselves more important. They gained friends who spoke other languages and had different cultures than them. They were chosen as participants for a study. These factors served to help them grow in confidence and to improve themselves. Similar thoughts belonged to the English language teacher of the participants, who stated that:

*T: Learning a new language takes time and dedication. I think that this process is very useful. As far as I observe, it helps students gain self-confidence.*

Key-pal both teaches languages and educates people. According to the results of the study, besides all of aforementioned contribution of key-pal, self-development is also thought to be a significant contribution of key-pal in the process of learning English as a foreign language with 7<sup>th</sup> grade learners in a Turkish secondary school.

#### **4.2. The Participants' Reflections about Having a Key-Pal**

The second research question of the present study was investigating the reflections of the students about having a key-pal in the process of learning English. Therefore, the fourth, fifth and sixth questions of interview conducted with the participants were in line with the second research question. The findings from the interview questions, which was investigating participants' thoughts about having a key-pal indicated that the participants have various opinions. In addition, analysis of the semi-structured interview with EFL teacher contributed to Figure 2. And finally, researcher's notes were added into the findings. Figure 2 was designed in accordance with the data gathered from these instruments.



**Figure 2.** Participants' reflections about having a key-pal after the process

As seen in the Figure 2, the reflections of the students about having a key-pal were demonstrated. Nine categories were found out as a result of the analysis of different data sources. The analysis of the second research question is presented in nine sections which are pleasure, friendship opportunities, ineffective, challenge, intercultural awareness, original experience, self-development, English interaction opportunity and unsafe.

#### **4.2.1. Pleasure**

The reflections of the participants about having a key-pal revealed that the participants enjoyed the process. As they determined the key-pal communication period was pleasurable and fun, one of the categories about having a key-pal is a pleasure. According to some of the participants, this method created opportunities which were both informative and joyful.

P1: *It is a pleasure to have a foreign friend.*

P2: *The social media key-pal communication makes me feel good. I have the pleasure.*

P3: *Interacting makes me feel good.*

P8: *I liked the process. It was good.*

P10: *I advise pen-friend everyone, because it is fun.*

The key-pal has many effects on language learning, communicating and self-development. It became also a leisure time activity which the participants used the internet, had online chat, communicate with their friends and used a foreign language. All of these contributed them to have fun during key-pal process. So, five of the participants supported that the process was a pleasure for them. According to the participants' perspective they enjoyed the process and wanted to suggest their friends to have key-pals

#### **4.2.2. Friendship Opportunities**

Key-pal, once known as pen-friend is popular among teenagers given that they have opportunities to interact with their foreign friends. Key-pal represents starting and maintaining friendships for the learners. The general reason why the participants liked having a key-pal is because they loved having good online friends and continuing the interaction with their friends. According to the data of the interview with the participants, having a key-pal equates to have nice friends.

P2: *My pen-friends are close to me and I like talking with them.*

P3: *I'm so happy to have friends like them, I'm glad about the process. They are like my classmates.*

P4: *Everyone should have friends like them.*

P8: *I like pen-friends because we get on well.*

P10: *I like my pen-friends.*

Friendships are more significant than family relationships for teenage students. Thus, they give importance their friends. In the present study, the participants ideas about having a key-pal showed that in their opinion key-pal equates to having friends. Even they found their virtual friends like their close friends.

### 4.2.3. Ineffective

Many of the participants suggested that key-pals and key-pal process are fun. However, the data from the interview with participants, it should be noted that two of the participants remarked that they found having a key-pal boring.

*P7: I started to get bored. I will stop writing because I'm bored.*

*P6: I don't recommend the process because it was boring.*

On further investigation one participant claimed that the reason why he got bored is that he was unable to develop his English further.

*P6: The process was not effective because I wrote what I know. Sometimes I got bored.*

One of the participants regarded key-pal process is boring because of having difficulty in using English while the other participant who claimed the same did not give any reasons. Although key-pal has great contribution within and beyond the learning process, some of the participants of the study stated their reflections on key-pal as boring.

### 4.2.4. Challenge

Key-pal interaction requires some linguistic levels. For communication there must be a common language for each side. In the study, overcoming comprehension difficulties is a further element which the participants considered a challenge in the key-pal process. Two participants commented on this aspect:

*P7: I didn't like the process a little because it was difficult.*

*P6: The process didn't work for me it was hard.*

One of the participants stated that he loved his key-pals but he found the process difficult.

*P9: I get on well with my pen-friends but it was difficult to understand.*



According to the data from the semi-structured interview, it is apparent that the difficulty experienced by two of the participants reflected the extent to which they found using English language a challenge.

#### 4.2.5. Intercultural Awareness

As the communication took place between different students with different nationalities, personalities, habits, languages and cultures, some of the participants' reflections about the key-pal interaction process focused on identifying, learning and appreciating these similarities and differences, key-pals share different life-styles. According to the data from semi-structured interview of participants, one of the results of this study is an improvement in learners' intercultural competences.

*P1: The thing that I like most is comparing a foreign person's culture, traditions, style and seeing differences with us.*

*P3: Meeting with different people and interacting with them is really fun especially if you are using English.*

*P4: It's very good for me because I'm learning where they live and telling them mine. To get information about their countries is very good. I will go on interacting with them to improve my English. To communicate with them increases my knowledge about different countries.*

*P5: I have learned different people's lifestyles, dishes and cultures.*

Supportively, according to the notes of teacher/researcher, the participants broadened their knowledge of other cultures and languages through their key-pals.

*RN: In addition to English language some of the participants were learning Romanian, Estonian and Italian languages from their pals.*

Besides learning cultures and understanding differences, the participants and their key-pals also shared their interests and made suggestions and recommendations to each other. Some of the participants stated that:

*P5: I will be a footballer, I talked about football and Stefan suggested me table tennis and chess.*

*P8: We send each other pictures and music files. I liked the kinds of songs which my key-pals sent me.*

Whilst learning different cultures, languages and life-styles, the participants also shared their own interests and in doing so tried to find similarities while learning about each other's differences.

#### 4.2.6. Original Experience

In a state school which is located in a rural part of Turkey, it is not common for a student to have key-pal. Internet is available everywhere now and social networking sites are very popular among teenagers. Nevertheless, many of the students in Turkey do not have opportunities for key-pals. According to the data of the present study, for some of the participants the key-pal interaction process represented a very different experience in their lives. They experienced communicating with foreign people for the first time.

*P2: This is the best thing we have done for our lives and I'm sure if you do this you will not stop writing.*

*P7: It was a chance for me and I liked.*

Offering the participants a very unique and potentially perspective changing experience through this process gave them much enjoyment and motivation. One of their opinions about key-pal is that it is a unique experience for them.

#### 4.2.7. Self-Development

Learning new information, using the internet, searching for more information, communicating with people, interacting with foreign people may create personal development. Key-pal provides all these experiences. The participants perceived having a key-pal as personal development.

*P1: The process entertained and developed me.*

*P3: The social media interaction helped me raise my self-confidence.*

*P8: I became cooler through key-pal.*

The EFL teacher of the participants also had a similar perception about how a key-pal develops students.

*T: I observe that some of the participants of the key-pal study developed themselves and gained self-confidence.*

According to the teacher-researcher's notes through key-pal they contributed in many ways to development of themselves.

*RN: With the help of key-pal they found new sources of information. They learned to use internet to search for information. They developed themselves on using computer*

Some of the participants considered having a key-pal as a self-development. Raising self-confidence was also regarded as a result of having a key-pal. The English language teacher and the researcher of the study revealed that key-pal serves personal development.

#### **4.2.8. English Interaction Opportunity**

In the present study, the target language has been selected as English and the participants of this study are learning English as a foreign language. So the messages between the participants and their key-pals were in English. Since the communication language between the participants and their key-pals was English, some of the participants indicated that that having a key-pal offers opportunities for using English.

*P2: It is very important for me to communicate with foreign languages.*

*P5: It really helps us to learn English. English is everything. I wish we could communicate until we achieve speaking English.*

*P8: Even if it was little, they could learn English with pen-friends. I will continue to write because I'd really like to learn English. It helps to learn new words.*

*P9: I recommend being pen-friends to advance in English and meet new people.*

Either intentionally or unintentionally the students use target language during key-pal communications that contributes their English language skills. They learn new words, expressions and also English communication. According to them, having a key-pal is using, learning, advancing and communicating in English. English proficiency of the participants is affected positively by key-pal.

#### **4.2.9. Unsafe**

Finally, through the results of the data gathered from the interview, some of the participants stated that the process may not be safe without guidance. Using key-pal

may not be safe. If the key-pal method is used with guidance of a teacher, this method is safe. However, it may be that learners can find online friends too easily and this may lead to some safety problems. So, some of the participants claimed that:

*P4: I could find wrong people without my teacher's guide.*

*P9: The pen-friend process is not safe without the teacher.*

One participant claimed that safety should be for both sides of the communication. She also claimed that people should have necessary characteristics qualifications for example kindness and the target language through these may be difficult to assess.

*P1: The friends whom I recommend being a pen-friend should know English and Turkish culture well be kind-hearted, express us correctly and what's more become a volunteer for interaction process.*

Since almost everyone who has internet access can easily use e-mails and social media, to reach educational goals, the key-pal method should be with the guidance of teachers. Therefore, the participants considered key-pal to be at time unsafe. However, none of the participants in this study encountered with any problem about safety during the interaction process.

## CHAPTER 5

### 5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter the conclusions drawn from the current study will be discussed. First, a summary of the study will be presented, followed by a discussion of the major findings. Thereafter limitations and suggestions for further study will be presented. Finally, there will be a summary of the significance of the study.

#### 5.1. Summary of the Study

The study was conducted at Makhbule Orman Secondary School in Karaman. This study was designed as a qualitative study. The participants of the study were ten secondary school students who have four hours English lessons a week. The data collection instruments were two semi-structured interviews and teacher-researcher notes. The participants from Turkey were selected voluntarily and the key-pals of the participants were selected after the permission of the administration of their school. After participant selections, the process of key-pals' social media communication began. Thereafter, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the participants. Finally, a semi-structured interview with the elective English language teacher of the students was conducted and teacher-researcher wrote notes were used when necessary. Content analysis was used whilst analyzing the data gathered from these sources.

The main purpose of the study was to determine the contributions of key-pal for secondary school students. For this purpose, the researcher attempted to answer these research questions.

1) What are the contributions of key-pal in the process of learning English as a foreign language with 7<sup>th</sup> grade learners in a Turkish secondary school?

With the help of our findings, it is revealed that to interact with their key-pals, the participants relied initially upon familiar vocabulary but when this was not enough they made use of and so learned new vocabularies. According to the findings, the participants started to make sentences easily, learn some of the new expressions and improve English communication skills in real life so this led to an increase in contribution in English lessons and in their motivation. Improving relationships, learning cultures and having fun also helped their motivation in learning English. In general, all findings predominantly showed that the process increased their English

capacity to communicate in English and in general, this situation positively affected the participants both within and beyond the learning process.

2) What are the students' opinions about having a key-pal?

The findings led to the conclusion that the participants both developed close relationships with their pen-friends and facilitated a love of the process. Participants claimed that the process was pleasurable, they enjoyed this different experience, learning different cultures, learning English, meeting with new people and developing themselves. A small number of participants stated that the process was boring, difficult and unsafe. The general perspective was that it would help them to socialize, develop English language and communication skills and learn different cultures which would in turn impact positively on their confidence and self-esteem.

## **5.2. Discussion and Implications of the Study**

In the light of the data from the findings off the current research, there are a number of implications to be considered. Key-pal is found to have a lot of contributions. First of all, key-pal has contributions within and beyond the learning process. Keyboard-based friend activity is easy and fast communication of exchanging letters with pen-friends using target language.

Based on the findings from the present study, five categories emerged and these categories in which the use of key-pal has contributed to the learning process have been identified. In the light of the data, key-pal has significant contributions within the learning process. Firstly, the data showed that key-pal raises English motivation of the students. Creating a high level of interest and an increase in the learners' eagerness to learn key-pal increases students' motivation (Fedderholdt, 2001). Additionally, King and Orton (1999), Harmston, Strong and Evans (2001), Ndemanu (2012) and Ockert (2015) emphasized the motivational effect of key-pal in their studies. Secondly, the participants of this study claimed that key-pal helped them learn more English words. Similarly, according to the study of Stockwell (2003) the learners made significant progress on using grammar, syntax and learning vocabularies through key-pal. Besides, Edasawa and Kabata (2007) determined that key-pal raised learners' vocabulary and syntactic level in their study. The key-pal interaction also contributed to participants' ability to learn more vocabulary and expressions. The results indicated that the participants learned some expressions besides learning many English words. Real

conversations resulted in learning target language. Next, key-pal contributed to English communication skills of the participants. As “language is for communication” (Freeman, 2000, p. 130) real life conversations helped learning English language for real life situations and raising motivation for English language learning. The process created the opportunity for genuine communication, with real people for real purposes. If what they will learn does not make sense for the learners they see little purposes in studying sentences (Holderness 1991). Using English for real life situations like communicating creates a purpose for learners. As Vinagre (2005) put emphasis on the communicative effect of key-pal, the findings of this study demonstrated a raise on learners’ communication skills after key-pal interaction. Through key-pal English communication skills of the participants were improved. They had the chance to use English outside of the class. Finally, the findings evidenced that the participants improved their English skills both in-class and in their personal life and they started to use English outside of the class. Tella (1992) found out that key-pal which is an authentic and meaningful method is effective for language learning. In the school syllabus the learners may not encounter some of the structures of a language so key-pal broadens their linguistic horizons (Robb, 2006). Similarly, Larrotta & Serrano (2012) discovered that key-pal gives opportunities for ESL literacy development.

Another implication for the current study is that key-pal contributes to learner development beyond the learning process. The data created four categories for the contributions of learners’ lives. At first, key-pal affects making more friends. The participants claimed that key-pal helped them to find and develop many friendships. Also, according to Shin (2009) key-pal activity both facilitates learning English and developing friendship opportunities. Interaction with foreign people is inseparable from learning languages and cultures. Larotta and Serrano (2012) also claimed that the pen-pal participants may not meet in person but, they can establish a friendship through the correspondence. According to the data from the current study, key-pal contributes to learning different cultures. When a student is curious about the target language culture, their motivation and interest to that language is tend to increase (Alshenqeeti, 2016). Furthermore, Kern (1995) stated that both cultural and historical awareness of the learners are deepened by key-pal. Another category which was shaped by the participants was the contribution of being sociable through key-pal. Shin (2009) also stated that learners became more open to conversation thanks to key-pal since key-pal is socializing on virtual environment. Finally, the participants stated that key-pal enhances

personal development. Using key-pal improves oneself according to the data of the study. Familiar results from Arnold and Ducate's (2006) study presented that key-pal is beneficial for personal and professional training. Besides, according to Greenfield (2003), e-mailing process is helpful for self.

The learners' perspectives about key-pal in this study formed nine categories. The semi-structured interview disclosed the ideas of the participants. First of all, the learners thought that key-pal activity is a pleasure. The process is both informative and enjoyable as the learners seemed very happy during the project (Choi & Nesi, 1998). Wu, Yen, and Marek (2011) also noted that entertainment is the best predictor for long-term change in the learning process.

According to the learners' ideas about the process, key-pal is learning differences between nations, cultures, languages and people. Cross-cultural interaction opens doors to unknown traditions and cultures, sharing interests and familiarization with different countries, cities and schools. Ndemanu (2012) asserted that key-pal is the understanding between different cultures.

Another conclusion from this study presents that having a key-pal is developing oneself. Similarly, Roberts, Rice and Thorsheim (1994) concluded that key-palling develops students for example their general study skills and critical thinking. Both developing confidence in using the English language and in the self represent another implication of the present study.

Key-pal activity in this study demonstrated that having a key-pal is a different experience for the participants. Key-pal is a different opportunity of exploring the world through cyberspace (Shin, 2009). Choi and Nesi (1998) also claimed key-pal is a positive experience for the learners.

The participants noted that having a key-pal is the opportunity for English interaction. This process triggered the desire to learn foreign languages. According to the findings the contributions not only reflected a positive impact on the participants' English language capacity but also on that of their general communication skills. According to Biesenbach-Lucas (2005) virtual communication enhances a number of features to develop learning for example linguistic competence.

Based on the findings, key-pal is improving friendships and making new friends. Moreover, the social media interaction process with foreign students in English offers the opportunity to meet new people. This process helped develop lasting friendships in much the same way as having 'a home' in another country. Finding each other's



common points of interest, the key-pals sustain their friendships and interactions (Stockwell & Levi (2001).

For a minority of participants' perspectives, having a key-pal is boring and difficult. As Stockwell & Levi (2001) suggested, the students should find something in common to continue their interaction. Lack of sharing interests, the participants may have felt bored. Moreover, Blatt (2000) claimed that students can write carelessly repeating the same mistakes and make no progress in learning throughout key-pal exchanges. The key-pal requires to read and write in English to communicate, knowing limited English is claimed to be difficult for key-pal interaction in this study.

Finally, it has been suggested in the present study that having a key-pal may be unsafe. However, none of the participants were exposed to any safety problems during key-pal period, when explored more closely, some of the participants determined that having a key-pal is dangerous or unsafe without guidance of a teacher.

### **5.3. Limitations of the Study**

Since the results of the participant group reflect ten secondary school students' thoughts about interacting with foreign students on social media, to generalize their ideas for other students may not demonstrate the same results. The present study was conducted on the ten secondary school students in the same school and their key-friends were limited to those students whom the researcher deemed as suitable for the participants, so a similar research with more participants from different parts of the world could provide broader data. The small sample size employed in this research, restricted extrapolation of the findings.

Although the data collection tools in this research, namely two interviews and field notes were triangulated in order to improve the reliability of the findings, the results may not show completely objective data as the data is dependent on what the participants and the language teacher reported to the researcher subjectively. Moreover, the validity of key-pal interaction of secondary school students is hard to evaluate with a single study. It is difficult to distinguish the relationships in the studies without longitudinal research (Nahl, 1996).

The key-pal can be viewed as a leisure time activity therefore, the parents and students could think that they are engaged only in the activity for fun. This can have both positive and negative impact on the students' motivation. From a positive

viewpoint, they have the opportunity to use English outside of the class for fun, however, the parents and student may find using key-pal a significant barrier to learning and during exams.

#### **5.4. Suggestions for Future Research**

Given the limited scope of this research, conducted on only ten students studying at the same school, further wider studies should be conducted to investigate the key-pal interaction effects using wider range of sources and method in order to improve the reliability and validity. This study can be carried out with a greater number of participants which would lead to a greater range of motivational thoughts of more students be investigated.

Another suggestion can be in terms of longer time. The longitudinal approach could offer better understanding of whether the results are constant or reveal significant variations in participants' interactions and subsequent impact on their thoughts and perceptions about having a key-pal.

#### **5.5. Significance of the study**

The present research is significant since the data has been collected by triangulated instruments and supportively present the contributions of key-pal in the process of learning English as a foreign language with 7<sup>th</sup> grade learners in a Turkish secondary school and the students' thoughts and ideas about having a key-pal clearly from a personal perspective of the participants and two of their English teachers. Another significance of the study is that in Turkey key-pal research is limited and generally conducted at universities but this research included secondary school English learners.

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## 7. APPENDICES

### 7.1. APPENDIX 1: Semi-Structured Interview

- 1) Do you want to learn English? Why?
- 2) What did you do in the process of being pen friend?
  - a) How often did you interact with your pen friends?
  - b) Who was the starter of the conversation?
- 3) Does pen friend process have any contributions on your learning English? How?
- 4) Did you like pen friend process? Why?
- 5) Do you advice pen friend communication to your other friends? Why?
- 6) Even if the teacher did not guide you, would you continue to write your pen friends? Explain.
- 7) Does pen friend process have any other contributions except English?
- 8) Did you give up writing to your pen friends? Why?

## **7.2. APPENDIX 2: Interview with Participants' Language Teacher**

- 1) Do you observe any difference between students towards English lesson when you compare their previous courses? How?
- 2) Do you observe any difference between the participant students and the other students in the class? How?
- 3) Do the students show more enthusiasm after the research process? How?
- 4) Do you think this process is useful? Why?



