

## **A writing skills activity in language education: A comparative application of the in-class activity known as “If I were you” \***

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of language education is ensuring that an individual becomes fully proficient in a given language. To this end, the individual must equally develop all basic skills relating to that language. In the teaching of both foreign and native languages, the skills that are the most difficult to develop and master are those specific to writing. The ability of individuals to express their emotions and thoughts in writing (namely, their writing skills) should be developed not through traditional methods, but instead through a modern teaching technique involving educational games and activities. This study seeks to demonstrate how writing skills can be activated and developed during the teaching of Turkish both as a native and foreign language by using a writing activity called “If I Were You”. In addition, by evaluating data related to the implementation of this activity in two different study groups, we also aimed to identify the individual and cultural differences between these two groups. The study method was based on a screening model. Data was analysed using the descriptive analysis technique, which is typically employed for describing an existing case or situation.*

**Key words:** Writing skills; foreign language; native language; cultural and individual characteristics

### **1. Introduction**

The proficiency of a person in any given language is assessed by his/her ability to effectively apply the basic skills relating to the understanding and use of that language (Karatay, 2011, p.21). Among these skills, those specific to writing are the most difficult to develop. According to B. Kroll, writing is a difficult skill to master during the learning of a language, whether the language is native or foreign, and it becomes an even more complex skill for advanced level students (1990, p.140). For students, the most difficult aspect of acquiring writing skills during language education is learning how to organize and order their own thoughts according to certain rules. According to A. Raimes, this process involves the following stages: content,

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organization, grammar, syntax, selection of words, purpose, and drawing the attention of the reader (1995, p.45). However, according to T. Hedge, the writing process consists of three stages, which are the pre-writing, writing, and control stages. In the pre-writing stage, the author plans in his/her mind the sentence or text that he/she will write (1988, p.20). Following the writing stage, the author completes the writing process by controlling the sentence or text he/she has written.

The fact that writing requires various stages involving the “mental organization of thoughts” (Güneş, 2007, p.160) illustrates that writing skills require a level of mental effort. Therefore, ensuring that individuals develop their writing skills (or acquire the ability to express their emotions and thoughts in writing) is fairly difficult using traditional methods. Teaching writing skills using modern techniques such as educational games and activities not only facilitates the acquisition of these skills, but also tangibly shows teachers and students how these skills can be developed. In this context, any gains made regarding writing skills will also contribute to the general learning of the language. Some of the contributions associated with learning writing skills can be listed as follows:

- Allows the students to learn about different learning styles
  - Allows the students to learn about context
  - Allows the students to see and realize the extent to which they have been able to learn a language
  - Allows the diversification of in-class activities
  - Allows the students to understand the meaning of daily and official/formal language, as well as their respective areas of use
- (Byrne, 1988, p.8)

Thus, writing skills not only contribute to the development of language competencies among students, they also contribute to the development of their creative thinking and their ability to implement their competencies. The activity called “If I were you” that was applied within the scope of this study further supports the abovementioned contributions associated with the learning of writing skills.

In activities employed for the development of writing skills, greater importance should be placed on the qualitative features of these activities than their quantitative features. The content of such activities must:

- Draw the attention of students
- Encourage students to acquire writing skills
- Encourage students to make use of their writing skills
- Increase the motivation of students
- Use a comprehensive and global approach for relevant subjects

The activities will thus contribute to the development of writing skills among students, while also allowing teachers to make inferences regarding the cultural and individual characteristics of students based on the written texts that they prepare. “Learning and using a language also means learning a culture. Every word and sentence represents an element belonging to a culture” (Özbay, 2002, p.11).

Implementing activities related to writing skills while teaching Turkish as a native or foreign language will also contribute to increasing the level of communication between the teacher and students within the class. The more knowledgeable a teacher is regarding the individual and cultural characteristics of students,

the better he/she will be able to communicate with them. Writing activities should be viewed as instruments that allow students to be examined from different angles. Such communicative processes form a prerequisite for encouraging students to write, and for increasing their motivation (Gökdemir Erkan, 1999). In language education, in-class activities have the effect of increasing teacher-student and student-student communication.

Demirel (2011) stated that games are an effective means for “providing students the opportunity to make use of a language within a comfortable class atmosphere” (p. 86). Gürsoy and Arslan (2011) emphasized the importance of games, especially for increasing the communication of foreign students with their environment, friends, and classmates. Göçer and Tabak (2014) evaluated the use of games in language education from a conceptual perspective. Kalfa (2013), on the other hand, evaluated the use of games for the development of writing skills among basic language level groups. Kara (2010) described games and activities not only as a way to facilitate the learning of Turkish, but also as a way to increase students’ motivation in class. Due to the games and activities performed in class, students “will unwittingly learn the language”, and “acquire the ability to make effective use of the language” (Batdı, 2012, p. 318). At the same time, games and activities also provide students the opportunity to implement the new things they have learned (Gökdemir Erkan, 1999).

The aim of this study was to demonstrate, using tangible examples, the development of writing skills during the teaching of Turkish as a native and foreign language by using a writing activity called “If I were you” in which the product based approach is used. As Tangpermpoon (2008, p.2) stated: “There are a variety of activities in product-based writing which can raise students’ awareness in second language writing from the lower level of language proficiency to advance like English major students such as the use of model paragraphs, sentence-combining, and rhetorical pattern exercises.” In product based approach, according to Pincas, there are four stages of learning to write: familiarization; controlled writing; guided writing; and free writing, (Badger R, White G.; 2000, p.153) two of which are utilized in this activity. During the activity, firstly guided writing and then free writing are used respectively.

In addition, based on the elements with which the two study groups empathized (namely, the written texts they chose to read) during the activities, we also sought to identify and compare the individual and cultural differences between these two groups. This study is also important because it has the potential to increase the number of individuals capable of showing empathy within the context of their social relationships. Moreover, the findings of this study have the potential to contribute to the written expression classes provided in departments teaching Turkish as a native language, and to Turkish teaching programs for foreign students. The study may also show teachers that writing skills represent learnable skills.

The first study group taking part in the activity called “If I Were You” consisted of first-year students attending Turkish education classes at Mersin University. The second study group consisted of B1–B2 level students attending Turkish education classes for foreign students at the Mersin University Turkish Application and Research Centre.

The study activity, which involved active participation, was performed by requiring the students to visualize and think of themselves as an object during the first stage of the writing process (or the pre-writing stage). The students were thus asked to empathize with a given object, and to make use of their knowledge while closing their eyes and imagining themselves as the object. The students then thought of a particular

feature of the object or non-human entity that they selected, thereby performing and completing the pre-writing stage. Next, the students wrote down their thoughts. After completing the writing stage, students were asked to review the text that they wrote. The phase of the activity that involved student participation ended with the completion of the post-writing or control stage. The teacher then identified the errors and mistakes of the text written by students, and also interpreted the written data in order to obtain detailed information about the students and to establish stronger communication with them in class. Through his/her interpretation of the data, the teacher identified individual and cultural characteristics, life priorities, and values of the students. At this point, the teacher also compared the cultural and individual differences of the two study groups by using language as a common ground. Thus, the activity known as “If I were you” not only contributed to the development of the students’ writing skills, but also provided teachers an instrument for acquiring more and in-depth information about the students.

## **2. Methods**

In this study, an activity called “If I were you” was used to assess writing skills within the context of teaching Turkish as a native and foreign language. During the activity, students were first asked to visualize and think of themselves as objects or non-human entities. They were then asked to imagine what would happen to them as these objects or non-human entities, and to write these ideas down on paper. The first study group consisted of first-year students attending Turkish education classes at Mersin University. The second study group consisted of B1–B2 level students attending Turkish education classes for foreign students at the Mersin University Turkish Application and Research Centre.

The study, which involved the development and implementation of writing skills in a classroom setting, was performed with 15 randomly selected students learning Turkish as a native language, and 15 randomly selected students learning Turkish as foreign language. The total sample size for this study was 30 students.

The study method was based on a screening model, while the study data was analysed using the descriptive analysis technique. Descriptive analysis involves the presentation of data using a descriptive approach, without modifying the original data obtained from qualitative analyses, and by using direct citations from the statements of individuals and the content of documents. Descriptive analysis can also be defined as an analysis approach that is performed based on the words, expressions, tone, symbolic descriptions, and comparisons used in qualitative analyses. The objects or entities with which students from both groups empathized during the writing activity were added to data lists; the study data was then used to identify the individual and cultural characteristics of the study groups, and differences between the groups were compared and interpreted.

Within the scope of the study activity, answers were sought to the following questions:

- Is it possible to develop and improve writing skills while teaching Turkish as a native language through writing activities?
- Is it possible to develop and improve writing skills while teaching Turkish as a foreign language through writing activities?
- Can the texts written by students learning Turkish as a native language and by students learning Turkish as a foreign language be evaluated and assessed with respect to their cultural and individual characteristics?

### 3. Results

The first study group consisted of B1–B2 level students attending Turkish education classes for foreign students. The 15 students in the second study group that participated in the activity called “If I were you” were students learning Turkish as a foreign language. The students reviewed the written text, and then visualized themselves as (or empathized with) the items that are listed below. In this group, every object/entity was described from many different perspectives and standpoints. To allow a better understanding of the different student perspectives, direct citations from the written texts of the foreign students are provided below.

Based on the study method, a total of 15 different objects/entities were described.

#### *3.1. Findings and results for students learning Turkish as a foreign language*

##### The Market:

The student thought of himself as a market in which healthy food products are sold at bargain prices, and which serves as a social meeting point for people.

- Communication (socialization)
- Healthy living
- Nutrition
- Money (bargain prices)

It is possible to state that, by describing only the sale of food products at the market, the student prioritized the sale of basic necessities. From an individual and cultural standpoint, the student also placed emphasis on the role of markets in socialization. “I am a market. I am always crowded, and people come here to shop. In fact, I am even a meeting point for certain people. I provide both healthy and safe products to people” (Student 1).

##### Love:

The student chose to empathize with the notion of love, which harbours the two opposite feelings of happiness and sadness. On one hand, the student described families which experienced separation and sadness due to love; while on the other hand, the student also described families that did not know one another being brought together and united by love. The student described love as both happiness and sadness. The student thus attempted to describe cultural differences based on experiences.

- Emotional: Sadness, happiness

The student thus chose to empathize with a feeling that, although universal, varies significantly from person to person. “Love can both decrease and increase the distance between persons” (Student 2).

##### Paper:

The student chose to empathize with paper, which is essential for all types of educational materials, including books, notebooks, novels, and dictionaries. For this student, the most important characteristic of paper was education.

- Education: Stating that “education continues from birth to death” (Student 3), the student expressed his happiness in taking part in educational processes. Culturally, the student attached considerable importance to education.

#### Notebook:

The student described the importance of notebooks, emphasizing the importance of education by empathizing with books, stating that, if used correctly, education could lead to the development of civilizations.

- Education: By describing notebooks solely from an educational perspective, the student draws a comparison between scholars and the ignorant. “Notebooks are: a pool to be filled with knowledge for scholars; a tool for drawing and painting for children; a memory tool for historians; a friend for knowledge; and enemies for ignorant people” (Student 4).

#### Whiteboard:

The student described that whiteboards are an instrument for both teachers and language instructors. The student also stated that he was bothered by noisy environments, which indicated another individual characteristic regarding this student.

- Education: The student described that he was bothered by noisy environments, but that he could tolerate this within the context of educational activities (Student 5).

#### School Bag:

The student imagined himself as a school bag, describing its use for carrying books and stationery. Thus, this student emphasized that a school bag is associated with educational purposes.

- Education: The school bag is, indirectly, an important tool for educational activities.
- Indifference: By stating, “Some people throw me on the ground during winter, leaving me out in the open. I hate these children” (Student 6), the student showed that, as a personal trait, he was bothered by the indifference of children and other people.

#### Dictionary:

The student described dictionaries as an indispensable source for people learning a language. The student thus saw himself as a source harbouring a wealth of information and the meaning of all words.

- Education: This student thought of the difficulties experienced by students when learning a foreign language. He stated that “students learn a language through words” (Student 7), thus emphasizing the importance of dictionaries.

#### Water:

The student imagined himself as water—an indispensable source of life. The student thus considered water (the entity with which he empathized) as the basis of all life.

- Nutrition/Drink: The student described water as an important drink that is “always required by people” (Student 8). He thus exhibited the thought of water being a source of life.

Salt:

The student chose to empathize with salt, which is used in cuisines all across the world (even desserts). He thus described himself (i.e. salt) as an indispensable component of all dining tables.

- Nutrition/Food: A universal foodstuff

The World:

The student imagined himself as the world. By empathizing with the world, the student thought of himself as an entity that protected good persons, punished evil persons, and maintained balance.

- Nutrition: Maintains balance to allow people to sustain themselves and cover their basic necessities
- Education: Provides a good education for people
- Emotional: Endeavours to ensure that all people are happy (Student 10)

Dog:

The student empathized with an unclean street dog without shelter who dreams of becoming a police dog. Based on this empathy model, the priorities of the dog were shelter, food, and safety. Emotionally, the dog hoped for respect from others.

- Shelter: The dog felt unhappy because he did not live in his natural environment.
- Difficult Life: The student described that the dog faced a difficult life due to its lack of a home and the difficulties in finding food.
- Respect: The dog is subject to cruel behaviours from humans (Student 11).

Monkey:

The student empathized with a monkey and described it as a free animal that lives as it wills. The student stated that the monkey makes “crazy pranks to others” (Student 12), expressing that the monkey finds happiness in freedom.

- Freedom: A person has the opportunity to live as he/she wills without any pressures or limitations.
- Emotional: Happiness stems from freedom.

Bird:

The student imagined himself as a bird. According to the student, the animal lives in its natural environment: “If people and birds live together, this will be detrimental for humans” (Student 12).

- Freedom: If caged, the bird is not free, and is therefore unhappy.
- Difficult life: Birds living in the wild must struggle and fight to find food.

Deer:

The student imagined himself as a deer, saying that the deer’s beauty makes all other animals jealous, and that its main enemy is the lion.

- Physical characteristics: “Very beautiful, with eyes like the north star” (Student 14). Thus, external appearance and beauty was very important for this student.

### Hair:

The student imagined himself as hair, thus emphasizing at a cultural level the importance of cleanliness and self-care. “People do not pay enough attention to me (hair), having me cut once a month, and using bad shampoo” (Student 15).

- External appearance: In the student’s view, hair changes the appearance of the face and adds beauty to it.
- Self-care: By imagining himself as hair, the student emphasized the importance of self-care and cleanliness for humans.

### *3.2. Findings and results for students learning Turkish as a native language*

The second study group consisted of 15 students who attended classes for learning Turkish as a native language. The objects and entities with which each student empathized are listed and described below.

### Book:

The student imagined himself as a book, namely a reading book. According to the student, books are read for a variety of reasons:

- To serve as a “companion”
- To serve as an instrument of vanity and showiness

The description of books and reading as an instrument of vanity and showiness may, at first, appear to have negative connotations. A person reading books may be perceived as doing so just to appear cultured. However, such perceptions also indicate that people who read books are appreciated in Turkish culture. Books are also viewed as a “companion” that can remedy unhappiness, thus reflecting the culturally-accepted view that “the book is a man’s best friend”.

### Pen:

The student imagined himself as a pen used by a daughter who had lost her mother when writing in her diary, or by a poet expressing his feelings.

- Individual/Emotional: The student described the pen as a tool for expressing emotions, or inner grief and troubles.
- Artistic: The student described the pen as a tool for expressing sadness or happiness with words, and as a means for poets to express their feelings in writing. Mentioning the proverb that “the pen is sharper than the sword,” the student expressed the value accorded to knowledge in Turkish culture, and that it represents a greater force than brute strength.

### Paper:

The student imagined himself as a piece of paper on which poets wrote their feelings, or on which artists drew their pictures. The student also conceived himself as a letter in which essential and important thoughts were written.

- Artistic: Paper is an important tool for poets, writers and painters.
- Toys: Paper can also serve as a toy for making planes, boats, etc. through origami.

Culturally, paper is viewed as an object that, although sometimes used as a toy by children, is generally employed for writing down emotions and thoughts. It is thus a culturally important object.

#### Traffic Lights:

The student imagined himself as a traffic light that watches individuals, and especially children, cross the road. The student thus thought that traffic lights, and by extension traffic rules, help people in their daily lives.

- Traffic rules: The student criticized people for not adhering to traffic rules.
- Education: The student described the ignorance of people who fail to respect traffic rules.

#### Affection:

The student imagined himself as affection—a universal emotion. The student emphasized the importance of affection for humanity by describing that, without affection, children would not get the attention they deserve, and people would begin to kill each other remorselessly and out of hate.

- Emotional: Affection is seen as the means for happiness that prevents all ills and evils.

The student thus noted that all ills and evil stem from a lack of affection between humans.

#### Star:

The student thought of himself as a star, which humans watch and behold dreamily across the sky. The idea that a shooting star will make your wish come true is a widespread cultural belief. The student expressed this belief within the context of the study.

- Emotional: Stars are viewed as an object for sharing love and happiness, and for holding wishes.
- Directional finding: Stars were also described as a reference for finding your direction and path.

#### Coffin:

The student imagined himself as a coffin—a tool used in funeral services following a person's death. The words and activities of people during funeral services reflect their cultural values.

- Funeral service: The notion that “men do not cry” is a cultural trait that is associated with the expectation that men must be strong even when experiencing sadness.

#### A Rummikub Piece:

The student imagined himself as a rummikub piece—rummikub is a game played by students and by people experiencing difficulties and poverty to distract themselves from everyday life.

- Entertainment: Rummikub is a source of entertainment

The rummikub piece thus reflects people who, despite hardships, are able to find a measure of entertainment and happiness in life.

### Train:

The student imagined himself as a train, one of the many different vehicles used for land transportation. The student stated that trains allow people who missed each other to be reunited.

- Emotional: The student spoke about travels and of “journeys where we yearn for those we miss”.
- Transportation: The student did not describe the physical aspects and conditions of train transportation.

The student described mass transportation with trains based on emotional aspects. The emotional aspects described in this context had positive connotations. Train travel was not described in terms of “travels which separate people from one another”, but rather as “travels which bring people together”.

### Rain:

The student imagined himself as rain, which is a symbol of fertility in Turkish culture.

- Religious belief: It is religious belief that rain drops are “droplets of God’s grace.” Rain reflects the presence and existence of God. When it does not rain for long periods of time, prayers are made to God for rain. In this respect, rain possesses a sacred aspect.

### Sun:

The student imagined himself as the sun, which illuminates every part of the world with sunlight.

- Emotional: The sun was described as a source of morale and joy.

Culturally, objects and entities in the sky are always accorded important or significant roles.

### Wish Tree:

The student imagined himself not as an ordinary tree, but instead as a wish tree.

- Cultural belief: There is a belief that attaching ribbons to a tree while making a wish will allow your wish to become true. Such trees are called wish trees.

### Dreams:

The student imagined himself as the dreams which people strive to achieve.

- Emotional: A person chases his/her dreams, hoping one day that he/she will reach them.

### Television Remote:

The student imagined himself as a remote control that is often the cause of dispute between members of a family, who are unable to share it and decide which channel to watch.

- Family Structure: In a typical family, men prefer to watch football matches and news, while women prefer to quiz shows and television series. These different preferences may lead to conflict if there is only one television at home, often resulting in disputes about who gets to use the remote control. However, as Turkish society is traditionally male-dominated, it can be assumed that the remote is generally under the

control of men. In this context, the student described and reflected the traditional family structure that is characteristic to Turkish culture.

#### Cell Phone/Smart Phone:

The student imagined himself as a cell phone/smart phone—communication devices that, in today's society, are constantly used by almost everyone. However, the student also emphasized that, in addition to their original function of ensuring communication, these phones also serve as alarm clocks; as cameras to take pictures; as computers that access the internet; as notebooks on which people take notes; and as objects which allow people to write letters, send messages, and establish communication with their friends all across the world through digital media. The student also described that these phones lead can to dependence among persons.

**Table 1: Findings and results for students learning Turkish as a foreign language**

Chosen Object	Significance
The World	Nutrition/Educational/ Emotional
Love	Emotional
Whiteboard	Educational
Paper	Educational
School Bag	Educational
Notebook	Educational
Dictionary	Educational
Market	Nutrition/Health/Money/Communication
Water	The Source of Life
Salt	Nutrition
Dog	Shelter/Difficult Life (Removed from its natural environment)
Monkey	Freedom/Emotional
Bird	Freedom/Difficult Life (Removed from its natural environment)
Deer	Physical/Individual Characteristic
Hair	Physical/Individual Characteristic

**Table 2: Findings and results for students learning Turkish as a native language**

Chosen Object	Significance
Affection	Emotional
Dreams	Emotional
Wish Tree	Cultural Beliefs/ Emotional
Paper	Artistic/Emotional
Pen	Artistic/Emotional
Book	Social/Emotional
Traffic Lights	Following Rules
Star	Cultural Beliefs/Emotional
Water (Rain)	Religious Belief
Sun	Emotional
Train	Transportation/Emotional
Coffin	Cultural Belief/Emotional
Rummikub Piece	Difficult Life/Entertainment/Emotional
Television Remote	Technology/Dependency
Smart Phones	Technology/Dependency

#### 4. Discussion

Writing is one of the most important steps in learning a language. During language teaching (both native and foreign languages), various activities and games should be employed to allow the writing skills of students to reach a certain level. Within the context of this study, an activity was implemented for two study groups, each consisting of 15 individuals. Students were asked to “think of themselves and empathize as if they were an object, a notion/feeling, or a non-human entity”. During the pre-writing stage, the students were asked to close their eyes and given the time to think and image themselves as another object/entity. During the writing and post-writing stages, the written texts were evaluated using the screening method, and the thoughts, ideas, and elements expressed by students during the empathy activity were recorded and tabulated.

An evaluation of Table 1 and Table 2 indicates that although the students learning Turkish as a native language (LTNL students) differed from students learning Turkish as a foreign language (LTFL students) with respect to cultural aspects, the two groups nevertheless had common grounds with respect to universal values. Most of the objects selected in both groups within the education category were similar, although the descriptions provided in each group were different. The LTFL students preferred to describe these elements based on their primary purpose, and evaluated them based on their educational aspects. These students argued that these objects (pens, whiteboards, notebooks, dictionaries, and school bags) should be valued by people for their contribution to education. It was thus determined that, at a cultural level, the LTFL students accorded considerable importance to education. On the other hand, the LTNL students viewed objects within the education category more as tools or instruments for artistic and emotional purposes, describing some of the objects as also used by artists in addition to students. They also stated that the poet expresses his feelings through his/her pen, while the painter used the pen to illustrate his/her thoughts and imagination with a picture drawn on paper. In addition, some of the students stated that people use books as “companions” with

which they can share their grief and difficulties in life. Thus, the LTNL students not only accorded a cultural importance to educational objects, they also described an emotional link or bond with educational objects.

While several of the LTFL students described and listed animals, no such animals were mentioned by the LTNL students. The LTFL students empathized with animals, especially the importance of freedom (the freedom of the monkey, the bird being in a cage, etc.). In addition, these students also mentioned that animals had, when held within a man-made environment, difficulties meeting their basic necessities, noting that they were not given the opportunity to live in their natural environments. These students reflected the view that only free individuals could be fully happy. In this respect, the notions and problems with which the students empathized actually represented the thoughts they held in real life. Some of the students taking part in this study as LTFL students were Arab students who had left Syria due to war.

An evaluation of the objects included in the categories in Table 1 shows that the first priority of the LTFL students was food and shelter, followed by education, and then by emotions. The commonly mentioned emotions included “sadness”, “joy”, and “happiness”. Based on the text written by the students, “happiness” was understood as an emotional state that can be achieved by meeting basic needs and necessities. “Sadness” and “joy” were, on the other hand, described as part of feelings associated with “love”. One of the important objects/entities that was chosen by an LTFL student was “the world”. The student had the aspiration of seeing a more liveable world. For this reason, they did not distinguish people based on skin colour, race, or country. Instead, they only distinguished people as good or evil, and stated that they would do everything that is possible to ensure that the world is cleansed of evil, and that the good can live better lives. When all these observations are evaluated, it was determined that “the world” and “love” were the most comprehensive notions described by the LTFL students.

The LTNL students, on the other hand, described many objects and entities associated with various emotions such as “affection, dreams, hope, love, happiness, longing, and sadness.” As shown in Table 2, the objects/entities written by the students included the “wish tree”, “love”, “dreams”, “stars”, “sun”, “rummikub piece”, “train”, and “coffin”. An evaluation of the written text shows that the objects/entities/notions with which the LTNL students empathized were always associated with their wishes, dreams, and hopes. These students thus reflected a culture that, even in its most difficult times, could continue to imagine, be happy, and live life with the full range of emotions. Among the objects/entities mentioned by the LTNL students, the most comprehensive ones were emotions. This demonstrates that all emotions are universal and characteristic of all humanity; what differs is the way that they are experienced in different cultures.

In conclusion, the activity known as “If I were you” not only contributed to the development of writing skills among students, but also provided an opportunity for evaluating the written texts of the students, for demonstrating the cultural and individual differences between students, and for reinforcing communication between teachers and students. The teacher-student communication that was reinforced through this writing skills activity will contribute to all other skills being taught in class as part of language education.

## 5. Conclusions

To contribute to the development of writing skills during the teaching of Turkish as either a native or foreign language, it is necessary to include and conduct activities in which students actively participate. When selecting such an activity, it is important for the activity to have features that: promote individuals to empathize within the scope of their social relationships, allow students to demonstrate their cultural and individual characteristics, and that would further motivate them to learn the language. The activity known as “If I were you” possesses all of these features.

During language education, ensuring the development of writing skills requires that the teacher has good knowledge of the student, and also that he/she establishes strong communication with the student. Strong communication can be ensured by allowing the teacher to access information about the students through writing activities performed in class, and through the written materials produced by the students during these activities.

In Turkish education departments, there is an increasing need for studies similar to the current study that illustrate the contribution of writing activities to the teaching of Turkish written expression writing skills, even in Turkish teaching programs for foreigners. In addition, such studies will also assist in illustrating to teachers that writing skills are easy to be acquired.

As such activities contribute to the development of writing skills during the teaching of native or foreign languages, and since these activities allow teachers to see and realize that writing skills are readily learnable, further studies should be conducted regarding in-class activities and games on language skills. Teacher books should be prepared to guide teachers regarding the application of such activities and games.

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