

## **An Exploration of English Language Teachers' Perceptions of Culture Teaching and Its Effects on Students' Motivation**

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### **Abstract**

As the seamless connection between language and culture is commensurate with related research carried on language and culture; language is greatly affected and structured by cultural values, attitudes and beliefs. The goal of the present study is to investigate and analyse English language teachers' perceptions and opinions about the integration of target culture into the foreign language courses. In the same vein, this research aims at finding out the connection between the instructors' thoughts about the integration of the target culture elements and students' motivation in English classes. Having been randomly selected on a voluntary basis, the participants of the study included 7 English language instructors, working at a Turkish state university. Semi-structured interviews were implemented as the instrument to elicit data. The results were analysed qualitatively and indicated that the instructors espouse the incorporation of target language culture into the courses; however they cannot allocate enough time to have culturally embedded courses. They claim that these two inextricably connected fields are to be evaluated concurrently in L2 courses. As for the effects of target culture teaching on students' academic achievement and motivation, they unanimously agree that it has a positive and motivating impact on their proficiency level of English.

**Keywords:** EFL Learners, Target Language Culture, Cultural Differences, Teachers' Perceptions, Cultural Awareness

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## Introduction

At the outset, describing the culture phenomenon appropriately is of great importance on the grounds that this study focuses on the inherent connection between language and culture. Trinovitch (1980) describes culture as: "... an all-inclusive system which incorporates the biological and technical behaviour of human beings with their verbal and non-verbal systems of expressive behaviour starting from birth" (p. 550). In other words, culture is summed in behaviours, thoughts of people living in a certain area and cultural support can help in resolving the differences between communities. Accordingly, it is known that language functions as one of the most significant ways of transmitting cultural knowledge in today's globalized world.

As the seamless connection between language and culture is commensurate with related literature, it is not wrong to state that culture and language also crisscross with each other through cumulative human experience. Additionally, some progress has been made towards understanding that a scrupulous investigation into the learners' idiosyncrasies would help them explore the means for embracing a new language and culture concurrently. Bearing these facts in mind, the incorporation of target culture elements into the foreign language courses is of great importance. When the needs of the foreign language learners are taken into account, English language and its indigenous milieus would form the basis for building cultural competency and carry out acculturation process gradually and appropriately.

At this point, the key role of language teachers in terms of their effectiveness in incorporating cultural elements into their courses ensues, the result of which is that teachers' perceptions and classroom practices determine the extent of culture integrated courses in EFL classes. The extant literature on the relation between target language and its cultural features shows that language educators prioritized the integration of cultural issues into their teaching practice (Eryaman, 2008). The majority of studies have focused on the positive impact of integrating target culture elements into the courses in terms of student's success and motivation (Byram, & Morgan, 1994; Kramsch, 1998; Mitchell & Myles, 2004). In this vein, a comparative and contrastive analysis of two cultures would function as a pedagogical means of motivation. In spite of these prominent studies in this field, there exist a great need for additional studies touching upon the intertwined connection between language and culture. Therefore, this current study is of great importance in terms of providing up to date data with regard to the acquisition of a foreign language and its culture concurrently.

## Literature Review

### The Definition of Culture

The concept of culture is one of the prominent issues in foreign and second language teaching. Defining the term 'culture' in a comprehensive way is a really daunting task and accordingly there exist lots of different opinions and viewpoints on the definition of the term. Tang (2006) postulated that there is no single definition for that general word 'culture' in spite of efforts and studies to realize the matter comprehensively. For Brown, "culture" includes tangible and intangible aspects of the society, it binds the members of that community and functions as a 'glue' (2007, p. 188).

From these definitions, it is clear that culture includes many different entities and it consists of a great number of individual components. Similarly, most of the scholars in this field expound on the significance of analysing culture and its components. Kramsch defines culture as "membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings" (1998, p. 10).

### **The Relationship between Culture and Language Learning**

To start with some important terms about culture teaching, cross-cultural awareness is a related term discussed in that field and regarded as a prerequisite in forming an understanding towards other communities. As Damen postulated, “cross-cultural awareness is the force that moves a culture learner across the acculturation continuum from a state of no understanding of, or even hostility to, a new culture to near total understanding, from monoculturalism, to bi- or multi-culturalism” (1987, p. 141).

Intercultural competence is again one of the most significant terms in that field and it refers to the ability to communicate with various people from other national and geographical groups. As it is widely recognized by ELT practitioners and instructors, foreign language education is the most versatile tool in order to help the learners’ development of intercultural competence. Actually foreign language education is not the sole way to have intercultural competence, but it is regarded as the major source of having knowledge and skills to communicate better by integrating discourse elements to your daily speech patterns. As İşısağ (2010) described in his study about intercultural competence, this ability can be defined as turning intercultural encounters into intercultural relationships. In other words, readiness for relativizing the specialties and features of another person from a different social group will make it possible to form a mutual understanding and respect between the cultures.

In a similar vein, Alptekin (2002) draws attention to the students’ intercultural communicative competence rather than native-like competence. The use of English as a world language removes the boundaries and for that reason focusing on the cultural features of English people is meaningless in that sense. The teachers aim at promoting a dynamic view of cultures which holds the belief that culture as a phenomenon cannot be evaluated in a territorialized way, limiting that comprehensive term to the boundaries of countries.

### **The Place of Culture in EFL Classes**

In the 1920’s, Sapir (1921) stipulated that language and culture of a certain community could not be analysed as separate entities on the grounds that language is the most significant way of describing human experiences and features of a people. Members of a language community eminently provide information about their way of life and assumptions about communicative purposes underlining the construction of the world. At that point, the rudiments of the matter had already been studied (Gumperz, & Hymes, 1972; Kaplan, 1966).

As an undeniable fact, language and culture have an interdependent relationship and this relation is described with different terms in some studies such as *linguaculture* (Friedrich, 1989) and *languaculture* (Risager, 2005). Given the fact that the culture exerts considerable influence on language patterns and pragmatic use of it in a certain community, it is of great importance for a language learner to make great effort to develop his/her cultural awareness in that process. On the face of this fact, Lessard-Clouston (1997) contended that foreign language teachers teach and their students acquire the cultural elements of that community regardless of the fact that whether culture is overtly included in the curriculum or not. Pulverness (2003) asserts that ‘due to the undeniable growth of English as an international language, cultural content as anything other than contextual background began to be included in language teaching programmes’.

There has been a great concern for the dialectical relation between language and culture in the last a few decades and the pendulum has swung back to the other extreme. In this vein, Mitchell and Myles (2004) express that “language and culture are not separate, but are acquired together, with each providing support for the development of the other” (p. 235). Researchers and foreign language instructors have begun to realize the seamless connection between target language culture (TLC) and target language (TL) with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching in the late 1970s. This approach endeavours to provide the students with the necessary qualifications that would help them communicate in an intercultural setting.

Especially over the last decades, with the writings of some scholars such as Byram (1989; 1991), Byram and Morgan (1994) and Kramsch (1988; 1991; 1998), most of the foreign language instructors espouse a view based on the fact that there exist an intertwined relation between language and culture. Without adding the cultural and contextual differences of a language during the course, the teacher would be insufficient in presenting the pragmatic aspects of everyday language. For that reason, culture is considered 'as a fifth skill' apart from the other skills in language learning process (Savignon, 1997). If the focus is only on the syntactic and lexical features of the foreign language, then the learners of that language would be candidates of becoming a 'fluent fool.' According to Bennett, "A fluent fool is someone who speaks a foreign language well, but does not understand the social or philosophical content of that language" (1993, p. 9).

Brown (2007) succinctly indicated that acquiring a second language is acquiring a second culture. A language consists of culturally loaded rudiments (Alptekin, 1996, Pennycook, 1989) and in that sense the learners of foreign language would need these elements in order to fully comprehend societal and contextual differences during communication process. If this is not the case, they become culture-bound individuals who are likely to make inappropriate and inaccurate value judgements about others' cultural characteristics (Izadpanah, 2011).

Additionally, the learners would have a chance of forming a world view by being familiar with some other cultures and their some other features apart from language (Eryaman, 2007). Language would play a role in reflecting these features as Kramsch asserts "Common attitudes, beliefs and values are reflected in the way members of the group use language, for example, what they choose to say or not to say and how they say it" (2001, p. 6). In other words, the beliefs and background values are manifested in the way a society live or communicate with other people.

### **Teachers' Perceptions**

As one of the most important topics in ELT, the relation between target language culture and language itself has been discussed throughout the decades. Similarly, language teachers adopt the bandwagon of language and culture teaching approach in their courses and try to integrate related elements to their teaching practice. While doing this, they try to develop some innovative methods and atmosphere that are conducive for the integration and development of intercultural competence. Pedagogical documents and the application of suitable teaching practices would enable the instructor to facilitate the inclusion of the term 'culture' in their courses.

The materials used to address cultural issues in their teaching practices are to be selected after a detailed analysis of the classroom atmosphere and student profiles. If this is not the case, the students would feel distinctly indisposed to participate in the courses. On the other hand, another group of language teachers often treat culture as supplemental or incidental to the 'real task' (Fantini, 1997) because they generally focus on the everyday speech patterns and practical side of communication. Also Reid showed that only one third of language teaching programs offer a course in culture (1995/1996, p. 3). Even though the importance of incorporating cultural aspects of the foreign language is a well-known fact for language teachers, there exist some problems appearing in the application of this knowledge.

Given the fact that the previous knowledge of a language instructor directly affect the subject matter materials and methods used during the course, it is crucial that teacher educators in ELT programs are knowledgeable in target language culture. Current national English projects are not adequate to provide the learners with necessary skills of communication in a cultural setting. New programs and curricula are to be developed in order to place a greater emphasis on the integration of cultural facets in the teaching practices. On the other hand, to what extent do the teachers include these issues depends on their personal viewpoint as Holme (2003) indicated.

Bayyurt contends that 'the background of individual teachers influences their attitude towards the incorporation of culture into their language teaching' (2006, p. 243). Faas (2008) also expressed that having less access to the opportunities related with European life style such as travelling and

sightseeing, social attitudes result in developing nationalistic identities which inevitably lead them to take part in various ethnic divisions. In order to eradicate the hostile feelings towards TLC, the learners of that foreign language should be exposed to the cultural components of the language while experiencing it by direct contact. When they have enough knowledge about their native tongue and target language together with their cultural sides, it would be easier to form a mutual understanding between these two cultures and communities.

On the other hand, neither the instructor of the course nor the foreign language learner can be knowledgeable about all the cultural aspects of the target language community. The instructors' task is to guide students to generate positive attitudes and approaches towards TLC to form a bridge between two cultures by explaining and relating it to events of his own. If the learner is successful enough to integrate the new forms with what they already know by making a comparison with their own cultural forms, it means that the student is really conscious in evaluating the perspectives and implicit elements of the society.

Language and culture are inseparably linked and most of the researchers in that field are of the same opinion about this fact (Kramersch, 1988; Seelye, 1984). Some language teachers are well aware of the fact that there exists a continuous interplay between the linguistic and cultural elements of a foreign language. On the other hand, some researchers uphold that English as a lingua-franca should be taught in a culture-free context. Undoubtedly, the language instructors' perceptions about TLC permeate in every part and phase of their teaching processes. The personal view of the instructor also affects the way in describing and determining the techniques to teach cultural awareness and other related terms in foreign and second language classrooms. To do this, the language teacher should be well aware of some commonly used terms in language teaching if s/he is to foresee the difficulties that students may face during that process.

Undoubtedly, the linguistic competence of the foreign language learners is regarded as a prerequisite for the formation of an intercultural understanding. However, some instructors are not of the same opinion about that matter because they prefer to allow the students to make mistakes from the very beginning before being linguistically competent in that foreign language. In a study by Ho (2009), the researcher questions the teachers' challenge of having a traditional or intercultural understanding in language courses. The results of the study show that adopting an intercultural understanding is necessary if the aim is to help the learners internalize the inextricable relation between language and culture. This relation may be regarded as an abstract phenomenon; however cultural variables embodied by the referred foreign language are the concrete part of this process.

Kramersch (1993) contends that EFL learners have to gain insight into their own culture if they want to have an intercultural understanding. The use of the term 'intercultural' refers to the fact that the learner has to mediate between these two cultures if the aim is to form a mutual understanding. At that point, it is meaningful to describe the term intercultural communicative competence with other words and it is defined as "the ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and the ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality" (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002, p. 10).

### **The Role of Teachers in Preparing Students for Meaningful Culture Learning**

Most of the studies in this area confirm the common-sense notion that the instructors should guide students insofar as possible to use the target language in a culturally appropriate manner (Riedler & Eryaman, 2016). In line with the facts above, Brown (2007) clarifies the teachers' role in the culture learning process: "Teachers can play a therapeutic role in helping learners to move through stages of acculturation. If the learner is aided in this process by sensitive and perceptive teachers, he can perhaps more smoothly pass through the second stage and into the third stage of culture learning, and thereby increase his chances for succeeding in both second language learning and second-culture learning" (p. 33-46). If this is not the case, the students run the risk of experiencing miscommunication and misunderstanding or they might use the wrong addressing style or writing

system when faced with a cultural setting. Damen (1987, p. 5) affirms that there exist certain reasons for the limitations of teachers' efficiency as cultural guides:

1. Teachers do not know what 'culture' to teach
2. Until recently only a few textbooks of methodologists have been available to assist teachers in the direction of culture learning.

### **The Importance of Culture Integrated Courses on Students' Motivation**

In a qualitative study, Önalın (2004) showed that teachers' main aim in giving cultural information in their classes is to "develop a global understanding of other cultures and people." This point is really significant in motivating students because students would feel themselves inclined to learn the language just out of curiosity. While incorporating the cultural components of the language during the classes, the teachers use this aspect in order to evoke students' attention.

Once the students and the instructors achieve their objective of acquiring the pluricultural nature of the foreign language, the pupils would definitely feel more motivated towards other constituents of culture. The students may occasionally feel that the two cultures are utterly disparate, hence they could find it difficult to adapt from one to the other. At times like these, the instructors are in charge of steering them to the right direction by indicating the common aspects of these two cultures.

The influence of motivation in the field of FLE has been indicated by scholars like Gardner and Lambert (1965; 1972). In order to motivate and encourage students in that process, culture classes and such kind of activities have a great role in their understanding of cultural background. Such types of activities not only encourage them to learn more about the target language culture but also increase students' interest in that field.

### **Research Questions**

Without interfering in the emergent nature of qualitative analysis, the questions listed below were posed:

1. How do the instructors of English define culture?
2. What is the place of target culture in English as a Foreign Language classes?
3. What role does the incorporation of target culture play in students' motivation during EFL courses?
4. How much time is distributed to integrate cultural elements of the language in EFL classes?

## **Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The current study was conducted to elicit teachers' perceptions about the integration of target language culture into foreign language classes through qualitative methodology. The detailed information about the participants, and the data collection and analysis processes will be explained in separate titles.

### **Participants**

Data were gathered from seven English Language instructors, working at a School of Foreign languages at a Turkish state university. The participants of the study were chosen randomly and the participation to this study was utterly voluntary. Before the implementation of interview questions, a written consent was received from the participants of the research. One of the respondents was male and six of them were females.

The teaching experiences of the instructors ranged from 4 to 20 years. The educational level of the teachers was as follows: 4 of the participants had MA degrees while 2 of them had only BA degrees. One of them was pursuing MA degree and additionally the last participant was a PhD candidate. Three of the teachers were graduates of English Language and Literature departments of several universities. One of the participants is a graduate of Western Languages and Literatures

Department. The rest of the participants were graduates of English Language Teaching Department. Additionally, the teachers were inquired about their visits to the countries where English is spoken as the native language. The vast majority of the participants (5 of them) stated that they had been abroad before; however only three of these five participants have been in a country where English is spoken as a mother tongue. According to the responses taken from the participants, the most popular one visited by them is England. 3 of them visited some different countries including Italy, France and Czech Republic. Additionally, they were on a visit to these countries for just a few weeks. The ages of the participants ranged between 31 and 49 years and that's why the implementation of an interview is the best avenue to obtain the necessary results related with the research.

### **Data Collection**

The purpose of this research was to understand the teachers' perception of the factors that are effective in promoting an understanding between the students' own culture and target language culture. To this end, qualitative research techniques were employed as interviews suit the objective of this study. Qualitative method is substantially creative and subject to emerging themes at the core (Creswell, 2012). To a great extent, it is contingent upon the strenuous efforts and conceptual capabilities of the researchers along with their insights. In addition to these points, it is a matter of forming a balance between the amount of evidence and data while seeking the best fit for the analysis of antithetical viewpoints.

To eliminate the barriers of using quantitative techniques in a social context, the instrument of the study was chosen as interviews on the grounds that interviews give the researcher the opportunity to gain verbal insight into ELT teachers' perceptions about the integration of cultural elements into their classes. Given the chance of reflecting on their experience, the participants select some significant points of their experience from their stream of consciousness. As individuals' consciousness ensures access to social and educational issues, every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987).

The aim of in-depth interviewing is neither to form theses nor to get answers to certain questions. As the individuals' stories are worth listening to and having an interest in, it is not possible to convey the core meaning of educational issues only with numbers. That is why people whom we interview are hard to code with numbers, and why finding pseudonyms for participants are a complex and sensitive task (Kvale, 1996). Interviewing can be regarded as the best avenue of inquiry in making sense of the participants' experiences and evaluating their 'subjective understanding', thereby yielding results for researchers to conceive new ideas in the field.

As for the questions in interviews, Dörnyei (2003) postulates that some external feedback is indispensable in the process of writing questions especially when an initial item pool is prepared. Before directing these questions to the participants, the items in the interview went through different processes in order that the researcher could be sure the questions are clear enough for the subjects to respond correctly. After the theme and scope of the study were introduced and presented to the participants, the interviews were conducted with one participant at a time between 10-15 minutes. With the aim of deriving the results of the survey and exploring teachers' perceptions about the integration of target culture in EFL classes, a semi-structured interview was conducted by the researcher. As the interviews are implemented so as to learn about the complexities and unknown sides of the phenomenon, the design and even the focus of study have to be seen as 'emergent' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 208-211). However, an overemphasis of the 'emergent nature' can be construed and interpreted as a sign of being nonchalant or looseness.

The interviews were conducted in Turkish, in the participants' mother tongue, in order for them to carry out better verbal communication. Using the mother tongue during the interviews allows the respondents to feel freer in expressing their opinions and elaborate more clearly on their viewpoints. These interviews lasted for approximately 2 hours. The data emerged from the interviews which were transcribed verbatim (Poland, 1995) after being audio-taped. As the interviewer should have a neutral standpoint throughout the process, the aim of the researchers is to direct the questions

with ‘a certain sense of naiveté, innocence and absence of prejudgements’ (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). In the same way, the transcription of the interviews was fulfilled without adding any personal comments or ideas.

### Data Analysis Procedure

One of the widely decried features of the quantitative research method is its turning human beings into numbers, for that reason the aim of the researcher espousing qualitative research technique is to attract attention to the significance of human experiences. Without denigrating the possibility of collaboration, the goal of this study is to gain insight into the experiences of individuals about social and educational issues. In order to channel the facts, terms and significant points appropriately, the researcher must have some passion about the subject of the research and sustain the process with the inclusion of new aspects, typical indicators of qualitative research’s emergent nature. In addition to the role of the instrument to gather reliable and valid data, human interviewer can be a marvellously smart, adaptable, flexible instrument who can respond to situations with skill, tact, and understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 107). Data collection procedure was implemented with these facts in mind and this enabled the researcher to have reliable data and facilitated the process of data analysis.

Throughout the study, the researcher tried to explore teachers’ perceptions about the integration of cultural elements and analysed the data accordingly. The interview was designed for the realization of this aim and tried to answer certain questions.

## Results

### Introduction

At the outset, the study of compendia and other works are absolutely fundamental to gain an insight into the core of the study. Hyman (1954) stated that without a certain and pre-determined structure for their work, the researchers may increase the chance of distorting what they learn from their participants. Such pre-reading is a must in order to respond correspondingly to what emerges as the research proceeds.

Taking into account these basic characteristics of qualitative method, the analyst aims to explore the direction that makes the most sense after the data were read in an iterative manner to grasp all constituents at the core of the interviews. To capture all variations in participants’ teaching practices that are on line with their perceptions, the researcher kept the flexible mindset while allowing for evolving and emerging themes in due course time.

### Data Analysis

Having been selected randomly, the teachers were directed a pre-determined sets of questions related with the purpose of the study. Interviews were made individually with the participants in order to let them feel comfortable during the interview and were only interjected to make the gist of their ideas clear. Before the implementation of the interviews, the teachers taking part in the study were informed succinctly to acquaint them with the theme and purpose of the study. Additionally, all of the names in this research are pseudonyms and quotations are given by using these pseudonyms instead of participants’ real names.

**Table 1.** Background Knowledge about Interviewees

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>Pedagogical Education</b>
1) Ayşe	29	Female	Six years	Boğaziçi University
2) Mehmet	31	Male	Seven years	Cumhuriyet University
3) Ece	40	Female	Seventeen years	Cumhuriyet University
4) Sevgi	39	Female	Sixteen years	Cumhuriyet University
5) Ahsen	49	Female	Twenty-six years	Ondokuz Mayıs University
6) Zeynep	37	Female	Fourteen years	Dokuz Eylül University
7) Ece	31	Female	Eight years	Hacettepe University



The instructors were given the chance to emphasize any pertinent point without constraining time. The analyst should be astute observer of the participants' gestures and body language in order to exploit these details in the pattern recognition and analysis process. Some instant questions arose during the interviews and this gave rise to modification in the order of some questions. After the completion of the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and read in an iterative way. Thereafter, the teachers' perceptions, beliefs and ideas about the integration of target language culture were categorized under certain headings.

## Results

### The Definition of Culture

In this current study, the aim was to elicit the teachers' perceptions, beliefs and practices about the place of culture in English language courses. Their practices in relation are pre-eminently significant in terms of motivating students who are on track or presenting the positive aspects of target culture incorporation for the participation of indisposed pupils in language courses. First and foremost, the teachers should recognize the fact that cultural attitudes play a paramount role in forming an understanding of another country and related culture.

It is perfectly plain that teachers cannot only utilize the traditional definition of culture in the process of determining the elements of curriculum. Teachers should avail themselves of the opportunity to keep track of technological developments and developing cultural features of peoples. Almost all of the instructors defined culture by adding a list of features related with the term 'culture.' Observable aspects of culture (eating habits, arts, customs and behaviours) and invisible parts (values, attitudes) of the phenomenon were included in these broad definitions. Some instructors expressed their viewpoints with a holistic approach. Interestingly yet not surprisingly, the teachers emphasized the difficulty of defining the term in one concrete way. Of seven instructors having been interviewed, five teachers converged in the sociological sense of culture.

### The Place of Culture in EFL Context

As for the place and importance of culture in foreign language classes, the vast majority of the participants stated that culture is an indispensable part of language and communication. They also expressed that the teachers should adopt an eclectic approach while focusing on the cultural matters in their courses. It is not wrong to state that modernist definition and conception of culture persevere in their minds. Additionally, the participants stated that target language culture should be addressed in a systematic way without overshadowing the locus of native culture. Upon being directed the question whether teaching the target language culture is subordinated to teaching the language itself, they stated these two broad concepts should be inserted in foreign language classes concurrently.

Taking into account the focus and purpose of the study, the integration of cultural elements is momentous and vital in terms of students' success in the field. As teachers' main purpose in giving cultural information in foreign language classes is to help them develop a global understanding of other cultures, the course curriculum and activities should be determined and designed accordingly. Despite consensus and mounting evidence about the importance of cultural knowledge, most of the teachers feel that they have to focus on grammatical and lexical points and skip the cultural elements due to time constraints.

In conjunction with the assumption that cultural knowledge is decisive in students' continuum of development in learning English, *Ayşe* stated that she tries to teach target language culture; however, she sometimes fails to do so due to time constraints in English courses. She also added perception level of students along with the existence of low achievers in English courses limits the incorporation of cultural features into the courses. According to her, English should be evaluated in the global world context because you cannot refer to a 'pure English culture' in your courses. She claimed there was a distinctive English culture in 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries; however, in today's world you can only teach and share the usage of certain expressions in communicative settings.

The possibility of assimilation in the event that teachers try to impose target language cultural values on students is a contentious issue. As the structure and cultural background of a foreign language have a significant role in predisposing the learners towards a certain way of thinking, the process of foreign language acquisition should be evaluated meticulously. Furthermore, cultural attitudes play a paramount role in restructuring the students' cultural conceptions, accordingly the instructors should attach great importance to the incorporation of cultural elements while trying to form a balance between native culture and target culture.

The students' culture-bound behaviours must be observed non-judgmentally in order to encourage them insofar as possible to endorse the target language community features as an alternate way of behaving. The students may sometimes feel perplexed or uncommunicative in the presence of different themes and cultural features related with the target language. The teachers' role here is to help them form a positive understanding about the foreign language and the community in which it is spoken without denigrating the importance of native culture.

On the basis of the findings above, it would make sense to claim the teachers unanimously agree and advocate the incorporation of target culture into the courses while trying to allocate enough time for the sake of students' cultural competence. The concerted efforts of language teachers have a paramount importance in that continuum. The students may sometimes be reticent about responding to culturally embedded questions or activities; nevertheless the teachers would have great impact on the process by integrating miscellaneous communicative activities into the courses.

In addition to the perceptions mentioned above, the participants stated they did not adhere to course books as a reliable source of cultural information. The reference to cultural elements in course curriculum and subject materials should be beneficial to some extent; however they regard native speakers of English as the best source of learning the target language culture. Since they do not have that opportunity all the time, they try to use realia and appropriate materials as a source of cultural information. In conclusion, foreign language course curriculum should cover linguistic and cultural information on equal terms on the grounds that cultural background information is crucial in establishing appropriate communication.

### **The Contribution of Cultural Information to Students' Motivation**

The integration of cultural information into the foreign language courses has some benefits and it runs the gamut from readiness to communicate with native speakers to understand the culturally embedded units in a text. The participants stipulated that the inclusion of cultural elements in English courses makes a great contribution to students' proficiency level by motivating them to learn more about the language itself and the related cultural background. The participants of the study unanimously agree that the students' communicative skills can be honed to perfection with the contribution of target language cultural elements.

The vast majority of the participants stated that the teachers of English language should systematically deal with the questions directed by students about the 'culture' phenomenon. In other words, they are in favour of teaching culture in the lessons. On the other hand, some interviewees articulated that contrastive analysis should be made between the target culture and native culture of students in order not to allow for the possibilities of assimilation. Apart from this aspect, some participants claimed that it is required to attach equal importance to different cultures and nationalities. They also preferred to prioritize the subjects that would appeal to the interests of the students and accommodate the needs of these learners.

Analysing the enunciations and statements of the interviewees, it can be asserted that a great majority of the participants advocates the incorporation of cultural components into the courses. The prevailing idea about that topic was the emphasis that should be put on the pragmatic sense of culture as the background knowledge. As pragmatic sense of culture has a significant role as a mediator between people, the function of the culture in this direction should not be underestimated in English

courses. *Begüm*, a female English instructor, expressed that in reading courses they had to include cultural features of the language as these items enable the students to comprehend the gist of the texts. Through her statements, it is explicit that the students having an interest in English courses are far more knowledgeable in target language culture and try to direct related questions during the courses.

The teachers participating in the study unanimously agree that there exist an inseparable connection between culture learning and language acquisition. When they were asked to clarify the gist of discourse in a more elaborate way, they added that meticulous care should be provided so that the students can gain the cultural and linguistic patterns contemporaneously, albeit challenging. Another observation shared by the interviewees was the fact that the students having an enormous amount of cultural knowledge about the target language community surpass others in terms of language capacity and lexical knowledge.

### **The Role of Textbooks in Teaching the Culture of the Target Language Community**

Most of the participants gathered around the common idea that the use of English language course books written abroad is critical in transmitting the correct discourse patterns and language dynamics together with the general cultural characteristics of the community. Using an English coursebook written in Turkey by some Turkish authors can yield advantageous results to some extent, especially in conveying the grammatical use of the language. On the other hand, these books are inadequate in presenting the cultural features with the help of authentic materials. As expressed clearly in a saying, “You cannot see the forest from a tree.” Although textbooks are not enough to reflect the cultural side of the language, almost all the participants are of the same mind in using English textbooks written abroad by native speakers of that language.

From cultural facet, a dilemmatic problem arises because *Zeynep* and *Begüm* have different ideas and viewpoints. They stated in their interviews that cultural elements of our own culture should be enshrined to transmit them to the next generations. When the students are exposed to foreign language culture to a great extent, this may result in their assimilation. If this is not the case, the students should learn the culture of at least a few countries in order to make a comparison between them.

Regarding the reflection of the teachers with whom we made an interview, we noticed that they complain about students’ being indifferent to cultural issues and linguistic elements of English language. Despite the fact that the teachers strive to instil the cultural elements and speech patterns of the language, they sometimes fail to attract the attention of the students. Undoubtedly, this fact cannot be generalized for all the students and departments at this university because the participants added that the students being successful, curious and involved in the courses helped us to form an exuberant classroom atmosphere in terms of culture integrated activities.

Ahsen also noted that the students should be aware of cultural differences between the two cultures, whence the teachers should make a comparison of the two communities in order to make the course more enjoyable. When we probed into this statement, she held that she followed the socio-cultural trends both domestically and globally. She elucidated that if the activities included in the course books are totally unfamiliar to students, they feel unsympathetic towards foreign language culture. As English courses are two hours per week in almost all of the departments at this university, it is generally not possible to listen to text book CDs or incorporate other different communicative activities.

*Ayşe* expounded on the employment of course books in foreign language courses, specifically in English courses. Through her statements, it is understood that she favours the use of these coursebooks inasmuch as the students, at least more enthusiastic ones, learnt lots of items that can be used to express themselves in certain instances. Furthermore, she tends to advocate the utilization of these books in the name of appealing to students’ interests and motivation. It is obvious that the students taking interest in English courses endorse the employment of books written abroad because these books arouse interest and make contribution to students’ academic achievement.

*Zeynep* overtly stated that this kind of books just exhibit the available facade of popular culture. Therefore, the cultural values are presented stereotypically. She added that she tried to form a balance by including our own cultural values during these courses. To exemplify, she asked some questions to her students about national holidays of Turkey if the text books mention the Independence Day of America. In this way, they learn which words to use in expressing their ideas about a certain topic. She stated “When they asked to express their own cultural values in English, it immediately caught their attention because they had not been given the chance to mention themselves and had never stood out.” It is plain that the students appreciate these kinds of activities and regard them as enjoyable tasks to implement for the sake of language acquisition.

### **The Role of English Language Instructors in Teaching Target Language Culture**

ELT teachers should be equipped with the cultural background information about the communicative patterns of the target language. The overwhelming majority of the participants stressed that monumental aspects of the culture should be incorporated into the courses together with the everyday life speech patterns in order to accommodate the needs of the learners. The participants believe in their own need to acquire the cultural knowledge about the way native speakers use the language in communicative ways.

On the other hand, some of the participants stated that the internalization of target language culture would have harmful effects on Turkish culture. When the instructor has this attitude towards the integration of target language culture, it would not make sense to mention the advantages of culturally embedded courses. Conversely, the aim of educating the learners to have intercultural competence in the world arena would be attained when the instructor do not regard target culture as a threat to the native culture. This obviously reveals that there is a distinct connection between the teacher’s attitude and the degree to which culture is incorporated.

In conclusion, the teachers emphasized the significance of incorporating target culture elements in order to help students achieve a native-like proficiency. On the other hand, they focused on the constraints of this approach and the impact of student profile on the determination period of the curricula. Although they regard the term ‘culture’ itself as a confusing phenomenon, they added that they try to analyse and interpret it by keeping up-to-date on recent developments. The dynamic side of culture necessitates studious efforts of English instructors in order that they can enable the learners to acquire the components in the latest trend and speech patterns. Another issue focused by the participants was the necessity of cultural courses so as to prepare the learners for the linguistically and non-linguistically patterns of the target language speech community. As language is accepted as the main medium through which cultural meanings are conveyed, the successful command of language is dependent on the extent of cultural knowledge.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

As it is imperative to address to the interwoven relationship between culture and language, the teachers feel the need to develop students’ communicative abilities to be agents of world peace in today’s multicultural world. It was frequently recognized that culture contributes a great deal to the language proficiency level of students. As culture and language are not two separate entities, the teachers preferred to include these two at the same time. They are all aware of the fact that culture teaching raises acceptance and appreciation of other societies. In sum, integrating culture into the language teaching syllabi and curricula has a motivating role on language acquisition process.

As Hofstede (2005) contends, “Studying a language without being exposed to its culture is like practicing swimming without water.” (p. 11). As it is easily recognized from this statement, most of the educators in the field gather around the idea that the students should be presented cultural knowledge in order that they can acquire better communication and comprehension skills. In the same vein, the instructors strive to enact and incorporate academic tasks and make the cultural input comprehensible and applicable for the students.

Most of the participants united in the common idea that the teachers should help the learners form tolerance towards target language culture and dispel the prejudices against the stereotypes in certain communities. As affective barriers bring about many problems in exchanging information in target language culture, the first objective should be to overcome these barriers in order not to inhibit development of cultural awareness.

The participants also claimed that they do not know how to handle the culture phenomenon on the grounds that it is a broad and general term. As some teachers are not well-equipped with the cultural, paralinguistic and discourse elements of the language, they refrain from incorporating cultural sides and skip these elements. However, they observed the rise in the motivation level of students when the subjects appeal to them and they find a relation or similarity with their own cultural elements. That's why the instructors should present discourse elements of both languages in the courses.

As parallel with the findings elicited from a great number of studies in the field, teachers are of the same mind about the culturally embedded courses and its place in ELT curricula. Byram, Esarte-Saries, and Taylor (1991, p. 111) stated that learning about other cultures promoted personal improvement. By the same token, the teachers aim at enabling learners to develop a knack for English learning and communicating appropriately in cultural settings. They should be quick to distinguish prodigies from other students or low achievers. Culture teaching curricula is determined and organized according to the qualities or learning styles of the different student profiles when the multiple intelligence theory is taken into account. The learners should also be exposed to culture-rich content and rich sources of acculturation to internalize the communicative side of the language. This may help students to immerse in cultural components of the language and make most of the courses.

### **Teachers' Role in the Process**

Teachers are regarded as the main agent in helping the learners to develop cross-cultural awareness in foreign language courses. Liddicoat (1997) claim that "The teacher, who has to deal with the learners own cultural expectations and understandings and at the same time to introduce them to the new cultural viewpoints enshrined in the target language, is the cultural mediator between cultures" (p. 4). Acknowledging the inevitability of cultural information in teaching methodology would have an impact on instructors' teaching practices, hence the activities incorporating communicative side of the language would make up for the deficiency of cultural knowledge about the target language community.

As it is a precarious situation to be caged in a mono-cultural milieu, the teachers have the role of broadening students' horizon by making them acquainted with different cultures and societies. That is to say, the teachers believe that they should incorporate the cultural features of the language for the sake of the learners' language proficiency and education as a human being. The results of this study are in line with one implemented by Robinson (1981) as his participants elaborated that foreign language study would give a person the key to another cultural milieu, which would lead to an understanding of other people and life styles.

The upshot is that the participants of the study reflected the importance of cultural perception and intercultural training. They also drew attention to the influence of cultural knowledge exerted over the individuals' thoughts and ways of interpreting the world. Linguistic and extra linguistic aspects of the language should be presented in a way that motivates students to explore the language with an inquisitive mind.

### **Students' Motivation and Achievement**

Cultural knowledge associated with target language instils the learners with an innate impetus to internalize the features of the language. At that point, it would not be wrong to state the necessity of culturally orientated activities and courses in foreign language classroom curricula. When the learner virtually settle himself to cultural environment of the class, it will be possible to respond to statements

effectively and speak the language fluently in terms of discourse elements. Interlocutory situations in which participatory interactions take place have a contributing role in enhancing students' communicative competence.

Only when the students internalize the cultural elements of the speech community can they master the linguistic and lexical components of language. In other words, the teachers all agree that manipulation of syntax and lexicon is not enough to respond to certain statements in cultural settings. Sometimes, local and national reservations inhibit the development of cross-cultural awareness; at that point the teacher would take part in as a mediator in English classes and help them incorporate their home culture into the courses.

### **Limitations of the Study**

At the heart of much controversy about qualitative research lies the opinions pertinent to the limited number of subjects participating in the study. The participants of the study included 7 English language instructors working at a Turkish state university. For that reason, the findings and results of the study cannot be generalized to other foreign language instructors; however the results of the findings are significant in reflecting the teachers' practices in classroom environments when their viewpoints about the components of target culture are taken into account. On the other hand, quantitative analysis has some advantages in that aspect inasmuch as the researcher has the chance of directing the related questions to a great number of respondents. Besides, the analysis phase of qualitative research depends on the preconceptions or insights of the researcher. In quantitative research, the results are more objective in a way because they are interpreted with the help of numerical findings.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The following recommendations for the integration of cultural knowledge in English courses can be suggested:

1. Teachers should incorporate cultural activities personalizing the linguistic content of the language. Discussion activities and role plays should be employed to help them discover the differences and similarities between their own culture and TLC while enabling them to internalize the culturally embedded behaviour patterns of the language.
2. The activities should invoke identification with students' native culture. This can be achieved by simulating them to talk about themselves while drawing the differences between two different peoples. Embedded within this claim is that a contrastive approach will reinforce the students socio-cultural awareness.
3. Selecting appealing aspects of TC is crucial in engaging learners in English courses and it would be conducive to help them form tolerance towards other nations. The courses including the distinctive features of the community and the language would be effective in accelerating language acquisition process.
4. The classroom atmosphere should create opportunities for students to advance their knowledge of target language culture and the instructors should incorporate interesting facets of culture such as food, eating habits or traditional celebrations etc. The inclusion of different activities will function as a pedagogical means of motivation by activating their interests in English study.

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