

## **An Investigation into the Cultural Dimension in EFL Classes: Turkish Instructors' Views and Practices**

Hanife Taşdemir and Nurdan Gürbüz

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## **An Investigation into the Cultural Dimension in EFL Classes: Turkish Instructors' Views and Practices**

Hanife Taşdemir

*Istanbul University-Cerrahpaşa*

Nurdan Gürbüz

*Middle East Technical University*

### **Abstract**

The current study aims to investigate how Turkish English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers understand the cultural component in language classes and the extent to which they feel to have opportunities to raise cultural awareness. The views on and approaches to cultural issues of ten English language instructors teaching at the tertiary level across state and private universities in Turkey have been examined in this regard. A qualitative-quantitative mixed-method design using a questionnaire and semi-structured individual interviews has been adopted. The findings revealed that the teachers' opportunities to raise their students' cultural awareness were not satisfactory, and there was a mismatch between their wishes and practices. They felt ill-prepared to include culture and tackle cultural controversies in class. Their conceptualization of culture in English language classes was predominantly modern from a received view of culture yet included elements from which interculturality may develop.

### **Résumé**

La présente étude vise à étudier comment les enseignants turcs d'Anglais Langue Étrangère (ALE) comprennent la composante culturelle des cours de langue et dans quelle mesure ils se sentent capables de sensibiliser à la culture. Dans cette perspective, les points de vue et les approches des questions culturelles de dix professeurs d'anglais enseignant au niveau supérieur dans les universités publiques et privées de Turquie ont été examinés. Une conception de méthodologie mixte qualitative-quantitative à travers un questionnaire et un entretien individuel semi-structuré a été adoptée. Les résultats ont révélé que les possibilités offertes aux enseignants de sensibiliser leurs élèves à la culture n'étaient pas satisfaisantes et qu'il y avait un décalage entre leurs souhaits et leurs pratiques. Ils se sentaient mal préparés à inclure la culture et à s'attaquer aux controverses culturelles en classe. Leur conceptualisation de la culture dans les cours de langue anglaise était principalement moderne à partir d'une vision reçue de la culture, mais comprenait des éléments à partir desquels l'interculturalité pouvait se développer.

## **An Investigation into the Cultural Dimension in EFL Classes: Turkish Instructors' Views and Practices**

The place of culture in language classes has been a highly debated area for researchers. The vagueness and complexity of the notion of culture have clearly ignited an interest and led to much investigation of the issue in a variety of contexts including second or foreign language classes. There is a broad range of issues to consider such as which cultural information to teach or how to teach it as well as the influence of these on classroom practices. English being a lingua franca of the current era has given it the luxury to dominate the field with a close look at the target countries' cultures, namely, the cultures of the United Kingdom and the United States. However, recent paradigms and views on English as an international language have brought new insights both on the definition of culture in English language teaching, and how it should be addressed in classroom practices.

Language and culture are two sides of a coin (Nault, 2006). There are several definitions of culture: "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 2011, p.3), "a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting" (Kramsch, 1998, p.10), "a subjective, portable, entity, linked to an individual's history and his/her variable subject position in variable context of language use" (Kramsch, (2010, p.281). All these views focus on the different aspects of the concept of culture, agreeing that it is not possible to reach a concise definition of the term. Such a concept is difficult to define (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018); culture can be seen as a shared body of norms, values, and beliefs that affect interactions and behaviours (Deardorff, 2010) and further encompasses symbolic sources of fashion, knowledge, images, ideologies, and language, and the ways people interpret and apprehend these assets collectively or individually (Singh & Doherty, 2004). In this study, we align with the definition of culture as "the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action" (Geertz, 1973, p.83).

Culture, a commonly visited concept in English language teaching research, has been integral to language classes and research focusing on the cultural aspects in actual teaching becomes essential in the language class serving as the de facto venue of fostering cultural competency for language learners. There is much to explore about intercultural awareness in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) settings such as the beliefs and practices of language teachers (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018) on culture. The current study, thus, focuses on the understandings and views of Turkish English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers at tertiary level intensive preparatory programs on the culture component in language teaching classes through a mixed-method design to see whether Turkish EFL classes would approach culture mostly from a modernist, received view and teachers feel sufficient both in including culture and tackling with cultural controversies. We begin with a review of the literature on culture and its place in a language class that fosters communicative and intercultural competences. We follow with a discussion of previous studies, then outline the methodology of the study and finally move to the findings, revealing teachers' perceptions from a received view of culture, yet hinting elements from which interculturality may develop. We conclude with implications of this study for teaching English in higher education and language learning contexts.

## Literature Review

Language is inseparable from the community and the speakers themselves and culture are no longer explanatory for communities as they have become much more diverse compared to the past (Kramersch, 2009a). It is possible to see culture manifesting itself in many areas one of which is certainly language education. Incorporating cultural elements into a foreign language class aids learners in learning new concepts in a meaningful context. The goal of foreign language education is to make learners acquire language knowledge and skills with the aim to raise their cultural awareness at the same time. The aspects and kinds of culture to be taught and whether other semiotic aspects of culture should be taught are discussed (Kramersch, 2009a). The aims in teaching culture and the materials to do so are also raised (Nault, 2006). It is of little doubt that the answers to such questions will vary for different language teachers, depending on learner needs and goals for learning a language, and also on the priorities of educational institutions. The importance of culture is hence pertinent; it is not whether we should be teaching it or not but how we should be doing this.

There are various approaches to culture. Culture or cultures may be theorized in the “received view” as “geographically (and quite often nationally) distinct entities, as relatively unchanging and homogeneous, and as all-encompassing systems of rules or norms that substantially determine personal behaviour” (Atkinson, 1999, p.626). In addition to this fixed view, there are two other standpoints: one which cautiously approaches the received view but still accepts cultures as shared, normative values and thus relapses into it, another that questions the very notion of culture and suggests looking for an alternative concept. Amidst these views, Atkinson advocates a “middle-ground approach to culture” (p. 636) which acknowledges a dialogic relationship between people’s behaviours, experiences, and the schemas in their minds and further alleges that there are no two people sharing the same culture. For Bennett (1998), there are two types of culture: upper-case Culture and lower-case culture, similar to the modernist view of culture with big C and little c.

Kramersch (2009a) differentiates between modernist and late modernist perspectives. From a modernist point of view, culture emerges as either a humanistic or a sociolinguistic concept and takes the form of intercultural education as a part of its history. A modernist view grounds culture in the national context with a national language spoken by a supposedly homogenous society. Under the modernist view, culture as a humanistic concept referred to “canonical print literacy” so-called “big C” culture (p. 221) that is “taught with standard national languages” (Kramersch, 2010, p.276). Culture as a sociolinguistic concept, on the other hand, underscored everyday life and ways of behaving in interaction, also called ‘little c’ culture. Overall, culture was seen nationalized, necessitating a membership in the community, and stable, having a social entity free from its speakers. From a late modernist perspective, culture has started to be seen denationalized, deterritorialized, dehistoricized, more fragmented, and as a discourse. Culture has been examined as discourse, identity, and the moral right to be heard and listened to (Kramersch, 2009a, 2010). It is apparent that these two perspectives will require different practices in the teaching of culture, and mainstream foreign language teaching tends to follow the modernist tradition.

There is also a “third culture” of the foreign language learner, which is not “unitary, stable, permanent and homogenous” (Kramsch, 2009b, p.238). This ‘third culture’ is actually a popular, critical, and an ecological one allowing contact and encounter between people of two different cultures. Likewise, Liddicoat (2011) explores the ‘intercultural’ in language learning and focuses on cultural orientation, intercultural orientation, and cultural knowledge. Cultural orientation foresees the acquisition of some knowledge about a certain culture like Kramsch’s modernist view. Intercultural orientation, however, does not equate knowledge with intercultural capability, informs engaging learners with another culture. Cultural knowledge does not simply imply a body of information, but rather knowing how to interact and communicate with diverse others.

### **Culture in Language Class**

Language classes have not been impervious to culture discussions which surfaced the need for intercultural education focusing more on the process of learning not only another language but also another culture and identity such as second, foreign, or heritage languages. Ideally, language classes should function as platforms to foster intercultural competence and communicative competence. First of all, language learners need to have communicative competence including linguistic, discourse, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic dimensions (Canale & Swain, 1980, Canale, 1983) along with sociocultural competence which is the cultural awareness that influences the negotiation of meaning and lack of which may cause misunderstandings in intercultural interactions (Littlewood, 2011). Intercultural competence is theorized in Deardorff (2010) as comprising of attitudes, knowledge, skills, internal and external outcomes. Attitudes of respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery are prerequisites to developing knowledge with different subsets: cultural self-awareness, culture-specific and deep cultural knowledge, and sociolinguistics awareness. To process and acquire such knowledge, one needs to have certain skills such as observation, analyzing, or relating. This would lead to both internal and external outcomes. The first refers to flexibility and developing an ethno-relative perspective, the latter implies the demonstration of the above attitudes, knowledge, and skills in behaviours. Developing intercultural competence — “the effective and appropriate behaviour and communication in intercultural situations” (Deardorff, 2010) — is a lifelong process requiring critical reflection. These two sets of competencies are intricately linked as understanding an interlocutor’s social and cultural body of reference is critical for powerful and meaningful communication (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018) with an awareness of cultural relativity aiming at considering events in their cultural contexts and how they are probably evaluated in these (Bennett, 1998).

Similarly, Alptekin (2002) revisits the notion of communicative competence and argues that language teaching should aim at fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC). His argument of foreign language learning as enculturation supposes that such competence based on target language means learners’ full participation in the target language culture taking native speakers as the model. Hence, foreign language education becomes a process of enculturation “where one requires new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers” (p.58). Only by underscoring diversity in the local and the global, English language education serves an attainable goal. Learners’ own culture should not be

discarded as both nonnative teachers and learners have a wide repertoire of experiences in their own cultures. The proponents of the idea that language cannot be taught separately from its culture fall short, according to him, as English currently holds an international status giving it the privilege of “whose culture becomes the world itself” rather than a foreign one (p.62). Thus, educating learners functioning well across a variety of cultures is the very reason why we should be teaching English.

Acknowledging the multiple ownership of the English language (Alptekin, 2002; Kramersch, 2009a), the culture of the English language is not fixed and stable. Thus, adopting a global approach is a must and it ensures effective communication with people of various backgrounds. However, it does not mean the United Kingdom and the United States cultures should be removed from English language teaching, but there should be room for international and home cultures too (Nault, 2006). It is no longer sufficient to be culturally and linguistically more aware and this requires an international and multicultural curriculum. Culture is not addressed as an explicit subject in English language classrooms and the link between language and culture is ignored, which is manifested by the lack of course books written from a global perspective with multicultural themes. Instead, teachers need to compensate for this deficiency by utilizing learner-designed materials, movies, non-native literature, English language newspapers, the Internet, TV programs, and radio broadcasts. We need a more cosmopolitan perspective aware of all the world cultures (Alptekin, 2002; Nault, 2006) including local ones. The aim is to develop “a bilingual and intercultural identity” (Alptekin & Alptekin, 1984, p.19) of cultural pluralism. A similar perspective could also be seen in Byram et al. (2002) stating the aims of foreign language teaching as to develop learners’ intercultural competence, to prepare them to interact with people from other cultures, to make them understand and appreciate other cultures and their values, and finally to make them see such experiences are enriching.

Intercultural language teaching and learning is not a method on its own, yet is “a set of shared assumptions about the nature of language, culture, and learning that shapes an overall understanding of what it means to teach language and to do this in an intercultural way” (Liddicoat, 2011, p.840). Language class is a cultural context where teachers and learners bring their experiences and expectations shaped by their linguistic and cultural histories (Liddicoat, 2011). Culture in language classes needs a new interpretation that takes it as a process rather than a set of facts, and it should be echoed in different activities allowing learners to recognize their own cultures as well. The culture component of second/foreign language class is born out of the interaction among individual, social, and target language cultures (Tseng, 2002).

### **Previous Studies**

There are both international and local perspectives on the treatment of culture in language teaching practices. Ilieva (2012), taking up a critical stance, considers culture as a site of identification and explores how the normalization of a cultural tool might occur based on adult ESL students’ and her own earlier engagement with the Canadian culture. Cultural tools, either physical or theoretical, are means to perform in a certain cultural context, and using a cultural tool skillfully without being aware of it indicates that it is normalized. According to Ilieva, cultural tool normalization might allow teachers to consider identities to invest in for the students and help them in their cultural integration

processes. The findings show that culture as a site of identification is complex and cultural tool normalization process might result in conflicting identifications, making this process unique and shifting for each individual.

Another study, examining teachers' understandings of culture and cultural identity, and how these might inform moral and ethical decision making in Australian higher education language classroom interactions, reveals that teachers practices in these programs range from avoidance of controversial topics, compromising tensions to deliberate attempts to generate cultural discussions (Sigh & Doherty, 2004). The teachers in the study were placed on three positions on a continuum with pluralistic respect, gradual staging, and abrupt staging. Sigh and Doherty (2004) argue that ESL, EAP, and Foundation preparatory programs could be defined as global education contact zones where people of contrasting cultural backgrounds meet and where teachers may have to be negotiators or conflict resolutionists or to internationalize curricula. Likewise, Dytynshyn and Collins (2012) look at the treatment of culture and intercultural development in an adult ESL course. The findings report that the participant teacher underlined cultural adaptation and shared experiences across cultures, yet it was not sufficient to promote interculturality. Still, there were instances of critical components from which interculturality might flourish.

In a study on intercultural competence, Vogt (2016) analyzes intercultural competence development of pre-service EFL teachers who have completed a three-month practice teaching in Ireland and the United Kingdom and reports that cultural awareness raises in general though to different extents for each participant. Building on their increased knowledge about the target culture, participants developed skills of interpreting and relating — though on a descriptive level — and attitudes to change their perspectives. In terms of their cultural awareness, they focused on school-related differences, in a way instrumentalizing culture for their professions. The intensity of the contact and their personal willingness to initiate a connection with locals contributed to their cultural awareness. The ways they dealt with otherness in various forms of naivety, ignorance, awareness or the way they act as ambassadors of their own cultures also instanced their intercultural learning. These might inform us about how teachers could track intercultural perspectives in language learners.

A review of the literature over a 20-year period on ICC and EAP programs outlines major themes in the related research: miscommunication, ethnocentrism, acculturation, awareness, ethno-relativism, identity, teaching and learning, and academic success. The ways EAP instructors move away from ethnocentric orientations toward ethno-relative understandings differ and EAP classes, including preparatory programs as in the context of this study, could foster intercultural awareness for teachers and learners alike (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018).

Several studies have been carried out to explore the culture element in English language classes in the Turkish context. In a study investigating pre-service teachers' ideas and practices related to the teaching of culture, Atay (2005) found that opportunities to enhance prospective teachers' knowledge about target cultures were not enough, and there was a mismatch between what they did and what they wanted to do related to the cultural component in their teaching. This mismatch was mainly attributed to their lack of chances to visit and reside abroad. The participants acknowledged the importance of culture in language teaching, yet at the same time indicated their deficiency in addressing cultural

issues in class. Önalın (2005) conducted a study with a similar focus on in-service English language teachers in Turkey and the results showed that teachers' positive attitudes did not necessarily mean that culture was included in language classes. Even when teachers did so, it was limited to British or American cultures and was seen as a contribution to the language class rather than a requirement. In terms of the attitudes towards the inclusion of culture in class, Damar (2013) and Kahraman (2016) noted that both teachers and learners had favourable attitudes towards the learning and teaching of culture. In Kahraman's study teachers and learners differed: the latter preferred to wait until high proficiency levels whereas teachers suggested teaching of culture in an integrated way.

### **Methodology**

The current study adopts a qualitative-quantitative mixed-method design (Dörnyei, 2003) utilizing a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The quantitative data is complementary to the qualitative data. This study is a single instrumental (Stake, 1995) and an exploratory (Yin, 2009) case study focusing on one concern: the culture element in English language classes within a bounded case chosen; ten EFL instructors at Turkish universities.

### **Participants**

This study was conducted with voluntary participation of ten EFL instructors (9 female and 1 male) teaching at either preparatory schools or vocational schools at state and private universities in Turkey. It is a mixed group of teachers both from private and state universities (5 of each). The age of the participants ranges between 26 and 36 with a mean of 28.8 of age, having at least 5 years of experience in teaching with a mean of 6.9 years. It is a representative group in terms of the levels the instructors teach: all levels but C1 and C2 according to the Council of Europe (2001). Most of the participants have their Bachelor of Arts degrees in English language teaching (ELT), two in translation and interpreting studies (TI), and one in English literature (ELIT). For their Master of Arts, a similar trend is seen with six in ELT, one in ELIT, one in Turkish Literature, and two in Cultural Studies (CS). Two instructors continue their doctoral degrees in ELT and TI. Two instructors also hold Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA) certificates. The participants were decided upon typical and convenience sampling strategies since they were representative of the general profile of English language instructors in Turkey in relation to the varying years of experience they had, the class levels they taught, their educational backgrounds and any other certifications through a balanced number of them both from state and private universities, and they were easily accessible to the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Research Questions**

The present study aims to investigate EFL instructors' opinions and beliefs regarding the culture element in English language classes, and their practices in Turkish higher education context by focusing on the following research questions:



1. To what extent do the participant EFL instructors have opportunities to raise their knowledge about the target language cultures?
2. How do they view the place of culture in EFL classes?
3. What are their opinions and practices on the teaching of culture?

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data were collected through two tools: a questionnaire adapted from Byram and Risager (1999) and a semi-structured interview asking about personal experience (Josselson, 2013). The items in the questionnaire aimed to explore EFL instructors' opportunities to interact with target cultures, their opinions on the place of culture in language classes, understanding of cultural awareness, and their relevant practices in class. The questionnaire was composed of a rating scale (frequency) and rank order items along with two open-ended items, which were on the definition of cultural awareness for the participants and the changing role of the language teacher, for content analysis.

The interviews lasted approximately an hour and were transcribed verbatim. The interviews served to crosscheck the questionnaire findings and delve deeper into the teachers' beliefs and practices regarding culture in language classes. The two open-ended items in the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview formed the qualitative part of the study. Qualitative data were analyzed by assigning descriptive codes, summative words or short phrases, to the data (Saldaña, 2009). The data were also studied to assign codes into the categories to group the similar codes. As qualitative research requires in-depth analysis of the data, the constant comparative method was utilized for the qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2013).

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### **EFL instructors' opportunities to raise their cultural knowledge and the place of culture in class**

The answers to the first question on the questionnaire showed that half of the participants have been to countries where English is spoken: mainly England followed by the United States and Canada. The participants also noted that they did not include other European countries in this listing as English was not those countries' native language. As can be seen from Table 1 the participants' sources of information about English language cultures were various.

**Table 1***Sources of information about English language culture(s)*

<b>Information from</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
contact with native speakers living here	8
courses and conferences	7
own contacts abroad	5
British newspapers or magazines	4
British TV or radio	4
international newspapers or magazines	4
international radio or TV	3
US radio or TV	3
professional visits	3
Turkish newspapers or magazines	2
US newspapers or magazines	2
Turkish radio or TV	1
other	Twitter, Facebook, e-mail subscriptions

The teachers were also asked if they had sufficient opportunities for keeping in touch with English language countries. Half of them agreed that they had sufficient opportunities ‘to a certain extent’ (5), and half of them believed that opportunities for keeping in touch with English language cultures were not satisfactorily signalled by “not particularly” (4) and “not at all” (1) options. The subsequent question investigating EFL instructors’ amount of reading professional literature about language and culture teaching revealed that the instructors were engaged in reading related literature to different extents with the majority choosing “less frequently” (6) option, and the rest selecting “every week” (2) or “every month” (2) options. They stated their highest preferences for in-service training for “teaching cultural awareness” (8). Oral proficiency was selected by half of them, and “mixed ability teaching” and “knowledge of daily life” were two other topics that were preferred by the participants. The areas that they were interested in special training could be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2***In-service training preferences*

<b>Training focus</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
teaching cultural awareness	8
oral proficiency	5
mixed ability teaching	4
knowledge of daily life	4
written proficiency	3
knowledge of societal issues	3
language teaching methods	3

The seventh question asked the EFL instructors to rank the aims of modern foreign language teaching in order of importance. “To develop the ability to use the language effectively for purposes of practical communication” was found to be the most important goal for the participants. “To develop an awareness of the nature of language and language

learning” was the next most important item. It was also found that “to encourage positive attitudes to foreign language learning and to speakers of foreign languages, to other cultures” was among the instructors’ top priorities in terms of modern foreign language teaching goals.

**Table 3**

*Educational purposes of foreign language teaching*

<b>Purposes</b>	<b>Mean</b>
to develop the ability to use the language effectively for purposes of practical communication	2.2
to develop an awareness of the nature of language and language learning	2.9
to encourage positive attitudes to foreign language learning and to speakers of foreign languages, to other cultures	3.4
to develop language skills and cultural knowledge for further study, work, and leisure	4.2
to promote learning of skills of more general application (e.g.: analysis, memorizing, drawing of inferences)	4.8
to provide enjoyment and intellectual stimulation	5.3
to develop learners’ understanding of their own culture	6.1
to offer insights into the culture and civilization of English-speaking countries	6.8

Interestingly, another culture-related statement “to offer insights into the culture and civilization of English-speaking countries” was ranked as the least important with a mean of 6.8. It could be argued that the instructors favoured a more multi-cultural approach in their teaching rather than monolithic, target culture orientations. This was actually observed in the participants’ putting aims of teaching cultural dimension in order of importance. “Developing learners’ ability to see similarities and differences between cultures” (9) was found to be the most significant aim of culture teaching. It could be alleged that the instructors found “breaking down prejudices and developing tolerance” (6) and “helping learners to acquire an interested and critical attitude to cultural issues” (6) vital in English classes. Adding cultural elements into teaching for “making language learning more motivating” (6) was also underscored by the participants. Although the answers to the last two questions cannot be interpreted as the development of interculturality, it gives a foundational ground from which interculturality may develop as it requires “respect of difference, as well as the socio-affective capacity to see oneself through the eyes of others” (Kramsch, 2005, p. 553).

**Table 4***The most important aims of cultural dimension*

<b>Aims</b>	<b>n</b>
developing learners' ability to see similarities and differences between cultures	9
breaking down prejudices and developing tolerance	6
helping learners to acquire an interested and critical attitude to cultural issues	6
making language learning more motivating	6
giving learners knowledge and understanding of British or US culture	1
giving learners understanding of their own cultures	1
helping learners to get personal contacts abroad	1

The last two close-ended items investigated if there was a mismatch between what the instructors “would like to do” versus “could do” regarding culture in their classes. “Learners’ lack of motivation and interest” (7) and “learners’ opportunities for visits abroad” (6) were the main reasons why the EFL instructors felt a lack of alignment. Half of them also agreed that they also lacked ‘opportunities to improve language competence and cultural awareness’ as teachers, which was predominantly mentioned in the interviews. The opportunities to raise their cultural knowledge were not satisfactory, and there was a mismatch between their wishes and practices. However, this mismatch was associated with learners’ lack of motivation/interest and their opportunities for visits abroad whereas in Atay (2005) the main reason was teachers’ own lack of chances to visit and reside abroad.

**Table 5***The sources of mismatch between what teachers do and would like to do regarding culture*

<b>Sources of mismatch</b>	<b>n</b>
learners' lack of motivation/ interest	7
learners' opportunities for visits abroad	6
your opportunities to improve your language competence /cultural awareness	5
available teaching materials	3
learners' lack of knowledge of the country/ies	3
your opportunities for residence/visits abroad	3
your knowledge of the country/ies	2

The two open-ended questions asked what the participants understood by the term “cultural awareness” and whether the role of English language teachers changed in Turkey. For the EFL instructors, cultural awareness encompassed adopting an intercultural orientation, tolerance, and comparison of cultures, intellectuality, and context-appropriateness. In this vein, P2 stated that cultural awareness meant “understanding that different cultures exist and people from different cultures have different world views and perspectives regarding life, it is tolerance”. In P1’s words, cultural awareness was being able to understand “cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions and enjoying diversity along with other cultures”. For P4; it meant to “be aware of the differences in the traditions and way of life in different cultures and societies and to acknowledge them without prejudice or bias”, which was similar to P6 who described it as “one’s understanding or sensitivity to other cultures, which, at least to me, requires having a high level of tolerance”. However, for P10, there were limited opportunities for students to reach “authentic materials about

the foreign language they studied, but now, with the help of the Internet and other means, they can easily reach an abundance of materials and input in English". This was grounded on more interest both "in the culture and people of other countries compared to past, because of the power of the Internet and social media" (P10). Increasing mobility was another factor influencing English language teachers' roles in the sense that it is now "much easier to interact with people from other cultures, travel to other countries, and even receive education abroad through exchange programs, and this makes it even more essential for teachers to develop their students' cultural awareness and incorporate culture in language teaching" (P8).

### **EFL instructors' opinions and practices on the teaching of culture**

First, the instructors were asked about what culture meant to them in language classes. Many of them stated that it was a really broad and sometimes "fuzzy term" (P4), which generated several subsets in a culture. P1 saw language as the biggest part of cultural differences relating it to literal translations in literature, which constituted a remarkable portion of a culture according to her. Their definitions included so many aspects such as "the way of living in a society- their daily lives, religious practices, customs, traditions, beliefs and socially constructed" (P2), "literature, arts, cinema, theatre" (P4), and "a combination of living styles, habits, preferences, routines" what makes people feel that they belong to a specific group" (P5). Culture was certainly multi-faceted as it is "what a group of people consider to be their own, how they try to portray themselves... something that we construct" (P4). For P3 and P10, "to know about the norms of a society" and "a set of rules that regulate our daily life" were parts of culture. P9 summarized culture as people's perception of life, rules that both implicitly or explicitly telling us how to behave and influencing each and every decision that we make. The participants' definitions of culture were parallel to the literature in the sense that it was a very broad, fuzzy term and it is not quite possible to come up with one straightforward definition (Kramsch 2009a, 2010). Their conceptualization of cultures was mostly from a "received view" (Atkinson, 1999). They saw cultures as distinct entities, yet it is apparent that this view is flawed especially for those who teach at preparatory programs of higher education (Singh & Doherty, 2004). Cultures are "constantly recombining in new and unpredictable ways" (Atkinson, 1999, p. 633) instead of being homogenous and unified entities.

Additionally, the interviews examined whether culture was perceived as a requirement of or contribution to English language classes. The majority of the instructors (7) regarded culture as a requirement in class and three of them evaluated it as more of a contribution, which aligns with the fact that language and culture are mostly seen as intertwined, and the focus is on how to teach it (Nault, 2006). From P1's point of view, culture acted as a contribution depending on the context and objectives of the program, in a way to complement the language class as in Önalın (2005). P1 gave specific examples of classes where the focus was on a literary piece such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or documentaries on controversial topics like "Falklands Islands". For P1, in such cases, cultural content was a tool "to trigger some curiosity". P1 acted similarly to one of the teachers in Singh's and Doherty's (2014) study who confronted challenges that evoked cultural sensitivities. Others who regarded culture as a requirement based their arguments on the propositions that "language itself is a part of culture" (P2), culture "acts as a fifth

skill” (P7), and “is integrated into the course of the lesson rather than specifically taught” (P4). P2 stated that raising one’s cultural awareness was essential in order to internalize the language that is being learnt and to be able to identify with it. P9’s comments gave an overall look into culture in the English language class: “without culture, you may not understand how language functions, how written forms of sentences become the ways to communicate thoughts. We cannot understand how that language conveys our ideas”. These varieties echo Atkinson’s (1999) principle underlying the complexity and multiplicity of culture in the middle-ground approach even though culture and language mutually implied.

As for the sources they have used to teach about culture, all participants said that the textbook was their primary source and sometimes they included movies, trailers, songs, their own experiences and so on. EFL instructors compensated for their course books through the use of various materials like teachers in Nault’s (2006) study, specifically through movies, international literature, and other multimedia and documents. There was room for a variety of cultures in the classes: “Scottish kilt” (P1), “Indian food” (P7), and “British dramas” (P2) — clothes, food, movies: mainly following the book though. Language learning was viewed as a way of learning about different cultures (Tseng, 2002). These references to Indian, British or Scottish culture, and P1’s reference to literary work *The Picture of Dorian Gray* demonstrate that the EFL instructors’ conceptualization of culture in English language classes was predominantly modern under Kramsch’s (2009a) classification of culture under modern and late-modernist perspectives, either as a humanistic (big C) or sociolinguistic (little c) paradigm. Their approach was dominant of upper-case Culture (Bennett, 1998): institutionalized, canonical, national cultures. Intercultural perspectives were also acknowledged, though not quite like what Alptekin (2002) had proposed; acknowledging local cultures in order to build an intercultural identity. They thought the United Kingdom and the United States cultures still have their say in language classes along with home and international cultures like Nault (2006). A summary of materials and sources used in English language classes could actually be found in P4’s comments:

Like I said, usually, the book goes according to topics. If we are talking about holidays, we look at examples from other cultures. (...) I usually make them listen to songs also, and I really like poems. So sometimes if I know one related to a word that we learnt, I tell them to read the poem, or I show them the poem. So, it can be a piece of literature, or sometimes we also watch videos. Also, as I have travelled a lot I try to bring in, it can be useful for my students, like a brochure, a theatre play, and brochures for tourists.

These examples demonstrate a high level of abstraction (Bennett, 1998) based on the unifying power of culture that allows identifying things as “British or Scottish” with deductive stereotyping. P8 alleged that they did not have much more than what course books or movies offered to them and added: “in order to learn about, understand a culture, you should live in that context. So, I don’t feel secure while talking about culture”. There is a tendency for most of the participants to include cultural events such as Thanksgiving, New Year’s Eve, or Christmas. In P9’s classes, there were instances when students discovered similar festivals in their hometowns or read about various ways of cures for illnesses around the world. She further included: “more controversial issues like women’s

issues” as she wanted “to give students a perspective together with the new language”. It could be seen that teachers should provide additional materials and devote more time for culture in class (Kahraman, 2016).

The instructors mostly reported positive impacts of the inclusion of culture claiming that students find cultural information “exciting and interesting” (P1), “more motivating, catchy” (P3) and “giving them a positive attitude towards the language” (P4). Culture was found to increase students’ participation and to make them comment more on topics covered in class (P3). It was also useful for students “to improve their ability to understand other people, and how they can react” (P9). As teachers, they felt more motivated and enjoyed teaching about culture. P10 said: “I feel more motivated as I see my students getting into the language. When they use a phrase from a movie or a song, I feel they are not only learning grammar but also understanding the language wholly”. P6 indicated she felt more satisfied with her teaching as culture is inseparable from language. P3 suggested culture as a means of making language learning easier whereas P7 saw it as a chance “to make language more relevant”. However, P2 felt some pressure as a teacher:

Since I am not a native speaker, I am also not the native of that culture. ... I just see it in movies, TV series, or I just read it in the books. But in a limited way, if I introduce cultural elements to the students, I feel like real learning takes place because I cannot separate language and culture. This satisfies me as a teacher. ... Most of them have never travelled to different countries, but in time you see that as you share new things about different cultures, they like it and I think their perspective regarding the world also changes.

When asked about their main aim while teaching culture, “to make students interested in the language” (P10), “to get students to think about a different language and culture” (P9), “to make the language more relevant” (P7) or “to show the real usage of the language” (P5) were some of the reasons. Several participants (P1, P4, P6, P8, P9) reported their main goal as raising students’ cultural awareness. Their main aim was “to make students aware of the world around them and get to know cultures” (P1), and “to be less prejudiced towards different cultures” (P2).

I want the students to find out what’s different, that there is also a world out there that they can explore especially when they learn a language, they can use to communicate with almost everyone around the world. Culture is actually a common point where everybody can have a say, a part of our life. I want to show to them that with culture, different varieties that they see, they can also reflect upon themselves and this is something that they can use to better themselves. (P4)

This emphasis on the interaction with other cultures is in line with the fact that intercultural/ sociocultural competence is a major constituent of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia, 2007). The participant teachers were aware that language learning classrooms were “much more than sites for acquiring a linguistic code” (Ilieva, 2012, p.99), and in higher education not only they commodify pedagogy, learning styles, learning and language skills for further academic study but also encourage cultural composites and fluctuations by also being aware and respectful of learners’ own cultural

diversity (Singh & Doherty, 2004). However, while vaguely aiming at this, their comments were descriptive rather than analytic similar to Vogt's (2016) findings. The teachers' approach constituted mostly of cultural information and comparison like Dytynshyn and Collins (2012). To be knowledgeable about other cultures and discover the similarities or differences in comparison to their own were the main goals in these teachers' classes.

All of the EFL instructors but one agreed that cultural information could be integrated into their classes at all levels like Kahraman's (2016) participants. As they were teaching at the tertiary level, they only had some suppositions about the actual practice with different age groups. Still, there was an inclination in their comments that culture might be suitable for all ages. P5 argued that there was no best proficiency level or age that culture could be taught and added "the earlier, the better" as the university level could be late "to break prejudices". It was the same for P2 regarding the language proficiency level of students in her following comment: "we don't have to wait for them to be more proficient, learning culture is something else. It is a process and it takes a long time to internalize characteristics of that language". For P3, teachers should address cultural issues "when students need it"; for P6 it was "all about the interest of the students". It was without doubt that different proficiency levels and age groups needed different teaching methods. For lower levels, P10 gave an example and said: "for example while teaching about food, we can also talk about eating habits of different societies". For young learners, P9 thought: "children are already exposed to culture, for example, via some cartoon characters. Their names are not Turkish. They just know it. We could teach young learners about culture, too". The overarching aim for such an inclusion of culture was the fact that:

The more we include different cultures in our curricula, the more our students will be aware that they are not alone in this world. They may be even more humanistic. I don't think age or language would matter. At all levels, we should be able to incorporate it. Yet, the ways we do this, of course, will matter. We should think on how it could be incorporated, not whether it should be or not. (P4)

Only one participant, P1, thought the teaching of culture should be dealt with in "upper level or freshmen English courses". The reason for this was that "in lower levels, students are already struggling with language. For such students who can barely express themselves in English, teaching cultural information would be a burden". Moreover, the EFL instructors were asked if cultural knowledge should be assessed or not. It was clear that they had their doubts regarding the issue. Half of them rejected the idea of assessment in the teaching of culture and pinpointed the fact that "culture is not something measurable as it is not concrete, everything goes under it" (P2) and they wouldn't prefer to assess it (P3). For P6, although cultural knowledge could be integrated via certain tasks, films and so on, "culture shouldn't be assessed with grades" similar to P9 who didn't see any reasons for assessment and underlined that "cultural elements only give us the context to learn the language". From P1's point of view:

Our main aim is to teach them English, to make them speak English. In either of the skills, receptive or productive, we shouldn't assess cultural information. Let's say a listening text is on a cultural fact, again the question should be on language patterns. This is against the objectives of the program.



However, the rest of the participants were not quite certain about this point. Both P7 and P10 said they did not know how to evaluate cultural knowledge. P4 came up with some ideas and said: “we don’t do it, but it seems like a good idea. Maybe we can ask them to do projects, to compare with their own culture. Maybe even like ask simple questions in the exam”. There was one issue that the participants agreed upon, which was, if culture is taught explicitly then there should also be room for assessment either by integrating it with other skills and activities or in the form of portfolio-based assessment. The issue of the assessment of intercultural competence in language learning programs remains to be solved (Deardorff, 2010; Liddicoat, 2011). It is expected as standardized curricula and testing don’t suit alternative methods and ambiguities (Walsh-Marr, 2011) which culture is abundant with.

Lastly, the interviews investigated if there were any challenges or drawbacks of including culture in English language teaching. Teachers’ lack of knowledge of target culture or international cultures, students’ resistance and dominance of native culture were the most common challenges for the instructors. Other than these, some contextual constraints such as timing and appropriate materials were mentioned. P2 said: “I’m not an expert when it comes to culture”. This and some earlier examples justify the fact that many foreign language teachers don’t feel adequate in terms of handling cultural issues in class (Dytynshyn & Collins, 2012). P2 remembered one of her classes when they watched a video on Indian food and stated:

I don’t know much about different cultures. So, I don’t feel very competent when I teach culture. This also puts me under pressure in class. If they ask a specific question, how am I supposed to answer it? Like I have never tried Indian food, nor have I been there.

It was certainly not an easy task to successfully incorporate culture, as the teacher should also have the necessary knowledge (P7). P9 thought teachers may not feel safe while talking about culture as they may not be knowledgeable about it. P1’s comments below gave a summary of how she felt:

As the teacher you may not be aware of the culture, I grew up in Turkey and I have never lived abroad or in an English-speaking country. That’s why I think I am not masterful at teaching the culture of the language. If I were teaching about it, I would be doing a lot of research, preparing discussion questions in advance. But if I lived in an English-speaking country or if I were a native speaker of English, things would be easier.

It could be seen that teachers had such an understanding of what Sauv  (1996) refers to as a “delivery mode” of education (p. 18), in which cultural information is transmitted to the learner and given to the teacher to do this. However, “the process curricula” (Sauv , p.19) that cultivate critical engagement of teachers and students considering the certain contexts that cultural behaviours occur (Walsh-Marr, 2011) is needed. It is not about the cultural content to be digested but developing skills that serve the process of learning cultures. There is, thus, a need for materials that guide teachers and learners to co-explore culture (Walsh-Marr, 2011).

The biggest challenge for some teachers was students' resistance (P2, P3, P7, P8). In P2's case, some students could feel threatened if the teacher taught them about other cultures and P2 added: "they feel that I'm doing it on purpose to make them lose their identity and they feel that learning a language itself is losing identity". Similarly, P7 indicated: "some learners may think that we are exposing them to a hegemonic culture they don't want to be a part of. They may think they only need to learn the language, not the culture". The questionnaire findings similarly revealed learners' lack of interest as the main source of mismatch related to culture teaching. The dominance of Turkish native culture was also seen as a challenge as students may "regard Turkey as the best in the world, reject cultural elements, and are inclined to criticize rather than to internalize" (P1) due to the fact that "we grow up with a culture of our own, to us it seems like the best" (P4). It was also reported by P2 that some students may be influenced by their native cultures to a higher degree and exemplified this over an argument related to Black Friday — the day after Thanksgiving when retailers offer highly promoted sales attracting massive crowds — in her class resulting in a dispute and tension between students on whether Black Friday would clash with their values. In that case, P2 simply ignored it. P2's deference could be interpreted as a divergence from the main aim of teaching language or unwillingness to argue like the teacher in Dytynshyn and Collins (2012). Maybe, it was the "received view" they were holding onto that made them focus on information and comparison rather than cultural change, adaptation or values. P1 experienced some difficulties when cultural topics could easily be linked to some sensitive issues such as politics especially if she were integrating Middle Eastern cultures in her documentary sessions. In such cases, she tried to compromise a solution by trying to negotiate cultural tensions similar to one ESL teacher in another study (Singh & Doherty, 2004). However, critically observing and reflecting on cultural behaviours benefits students in any future situation and fits well to the professional practice of teachers (Walsh-Marr, 2011). Such moments of conflict might be missed opportunities in these classes. Intercultural competence goes beyond knowledge to skills of interpreting, relating, discovering and interacting all boiling into critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997). Some of the EFL instructors also mentioned some contextual constraints such as available materials (P5), limited time for culture (P10), and strict adherence to the textbook (P7).

### Conclusion

The current study aimed to explore the extent to which the EFL instructors have opportunities to raise their knowledge about the target language cultures, the place of culture in EFL classes, and their opinions and practices on the teaching of culture. It is no doubt that culture in English language classes is a vital component, and there should be room for raising cultural awareness of the students both in English language and international cultures. The findings revealed that culture-teaching practices mostly fell under modernist interpretations of it, which is typical of mainstream EFL classes. The findings suggest that language classes should aim: (i) to raise intercultural competence as well as linguistic, to develop the ability (ii) to interact with people from other cultures, and (iii) to accept people the way they are (Byram et al., 2002). It is possible to observe that "cultural discussions are often regarded from the perspective of a particular dominant culture" (Galante, 2014, p.53) in Turkish EFL classrooms too. In addition, there were

several challenges experienced by the participants lacking opportunities to raise their intercultural competence.

Under the light of these, language learning classes could and should serve as venues to foster intercultural awareness and various opportunities such as participatory digital literacy projects (Galante, 2014), service learning opportunities like in a multicultural café setting (Riley & Douglas, 2016) could be utilized to promote learners' intercultural competence. Cultural discussions in English language classes should go beyond stereotypes exemplifying diverse usages of the language in different cultural contexts (Galante, 2015). Other practical concerns such as limited time to devote to culture in class and lack of materials other than course books need to be solved. Intercultural competence should be intentionally addressed, teachers evaluating their efforts to develop students' intercultural competence and reflecting on the ways to integrate intercultural competence into their programs are needed (Deardorff, 2010). Holistic, strict notions of culture could no longer sufficiently inform pedagogical practices in higher education contact zones (Singh & Doherty, 2004). Teachers could help students realize the representations of narrow understandings of culture that might arise in class and guide them towards an intercultural, ethno-relative perspective. Such efforts would acknowledge “the individual in the cultural, the cultural in the individual” (Atkinson, 1999, p.648) — a call for TESOL.

Intercultural competence is a crucial skill for teachers to develop. In this regard, Sauv e's (1996) call for the inclusion of social, historical, economic and critical components in teacher education programs stays pertinent. Teachers should be prepared to teach language competently “especially in ways that trigger intercultural learning processes in their learners on the basis of teachers' own intercultural awareness” (Vogt, 2016, p.101). In Sauv e's (1996) terms, this necessitates the move from delivery to process modes of sharing and creating knowledge and there are many equally valid ways of actualizing the process curricula. Teachers should learn how to develop and adapt such curricula. Professional development sessions to help teachers address ICC in class, teacher education programs preparing teachers for intercultural classes, and instructional strategies and materials to integrate ICC into curricula should be considered (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018). Regardless to say, in all these attempts teachers' full participation is required.

It is hoped that the current study will contribute to the related literature by sampling the place of culture in English language classes of a local case. Yet, this study is not without its limitations; the limited number of participants and the lack of class observations are the first two that come to mind. Other studies could be carried out with different participants and in different contexts by employing observations to identify the effects of the inclusion of cultural content in language classes on instructors, students and classroom atmosphere, and to multiply data collection methods for triangulation. Further research could also incorporate students' voices to find out how they evaluate and comment on the teaching of culture in English language classes. Critical perspectives also need to be explored.

Correspondence should be addressed to Hanife Taşdemir.  
Email: hanife.tasdemir@metu.edu.tr

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