

## The Role of The Teacher in Building Intercultural Communication Skills in Foreign Language Teaching: Teachers' Views with Examples from France and Turkey\*

Yabancı Dil Öğretiminde Kültürlerarası İletişim Becerisi Kazandırmada Öğretmenin Rolü: Fransa-Türkiye Örnekleriyle Öğretmen Görüşleri

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### To site of this article/Atf için:

Köşker, G., & Gülmez, G. (2018). The role of the teacher in building intercultural communication skills in foreign language teaching: Teachers' views with examples from France and Turkey. *Eğitimde Nitel Araştırmalar Dergisi- Journal of Qualitative Research in Education*, 6(1), 157-171.  
DOI:10.14689/issn.2148-2624.1.6c1s7m

**Abstract:** Globalization and communication technologies are making intercultural communication necessary in international platform. Individuals need some skills to communicate effectively. Current foreign language teaching programs need to be prepared with the practices aimed at building intercultural communication skills. As in every educational process, the teacher is the most responsible person in teaching these skills. To identify and compare views of foreign language teachers on the teacher's role in building intercultural communication skills in foreign language teaching, and to collect data, twenty teachers from two universities of France and Turkey were asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire and followed one by one interview. The ethnic and cultural diversity enabled us to make comparisons among different perspectives. The analysis revealed that all participants developed awareness about importance of intercultural communication, yet experienced difficulties in planning intercultural activities and covering them in actual lessons. It was revealed that none of the participants had received any special training on intercultural communication. Some different views of participants that emerged, as a result of this study, are attributed to their cultural codes.

**Key Words:** Foreign language teaching, intercultural communication skills, the role of the teacher  
**Öz:** Küreselleşme ve gelişen iletişim teknolojileri, uluslararası platformda kültürlerarası iletişimi ihtiyaç haline getirmektedir. Doğru ve etkili iletişim kurabilmenin yolu bireylerin bazı becerilere sahip olmasından geçmektedir. Günümüz yabancı dil öğretimi programlarının, bu becerileri kazandırmaya yönelik hazırlanması gerekmektedir. Bu becerilerin kazandırılmasında en büyük sorumluluk, her eğitim sürecinde olduğu gibi, öğretmenindir. Bu araştırmada yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin, kültürlerarası iletişim becerisi kazandırmada, öğretmenin rolü konusundaki görüşlerini belirlemek ve karşılaştırmak için, Fransa ve Türkiye'deki iki üniversitede toplam yirmi öğretmenden, açık uçlu soru formu ve yüz yüze görüşme aracılığıyla veri toplanmıştır. Katılımcıların etnik ve kültürel açıdan çeşitlilik göstermesi farklı bakış açılarını karşılaştırabilme imkânı sağlamıştır. Verilerin analizi tüm katılımcıların kültürlerarası iletişimin yabancı dil öğretimindeki yeri ve önemi konusunda hemfikir olduklarını, ancak kültürlerarası iletişime yönelik etkinlikleri planlama ve derslere dâhil etmede sıkıntılar yaşadıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Hiçbir katılımcının kültürlerarası iletişim becerisine yönelik özel bir eğitim almadığı belirlenmiştir. Çalışma sonunda ortaya çıkan bazı görüşlerin, katılımcıların kendi kültürel kodlarıyla ilişkili olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Yabancı dil öğretimi, kültürlerarası iletişim becerisi, öğretmenin rolü

### Article Info

Received Date: 14.02.2018

Revised Date: 28.02.2018

Accepted Date: 13.03.2018

\* This paper is based on Gizem Köşker's PhD thesis titled "Intercultural Communication in Foreign Language Teaching: Analysis of the Opinions of Teachers through the Examples of France and Turkey" ("Communication Interculturelle dans l'enseignement de Langue Etrangère: Analyse des Opinions des Enseignants à travers les Exemples de la France et de la Turquie"), supervised by Gülnihal Gülmez. The thesis was funded by TÜBİTAK within the scope of 2214 International Research Fellowship Program for PhD Students.

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## Introduction

The existence of cultural and ethnic diversity dates back to ancient societies in history. Nevertheless, with the effect of globalization, in the era when the capital is rapidly circulating in the economic platform and information transfer is accelerating day by day via communication technologies, interpersonal and international communication has become a necessity to keep up with the modern world, and even with everyday life.

Interpersonal and international communication occurs especially in linguistic and cultural dimensions (De Carlo, 1998). During communication, people belonging to different languages and cultures interact not only with each other but also with their language and culture at the same time. In communication, establishing a correct and effective relationship with the other side is made possible primarily by having an open view towards differences. Cultural codes play a decisive role in shaping a person's values, norms, beliefs and worldview; in other words, their life style. These codes, verbally or non-verbally, come into play spontaneously during communication and affect people's perception, comprehension and interpretation processes. This is why language, the main culture bearer and transmitter in verbal communication, is closely related to culture.

The key to proper and effective communication is developing a positive and unbiased perspective towards all differences by avoiding labelling the individuals belonging to different languages and cultures as "the other". At this point, the aim of intercultural communication is to protect the language and cultural diversity through the sense of "otherness" (altérité), by promoting the development of the sense of identity and self-awareness in the individual.

Diversity is defined as "cultural differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors learned and shared by groups of interacting people defined by nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, physical characteristics, sexual orientation, economic status, education, profession, religion, organizational affiliation, and any other grouping that generates identifiable patterns" (Bennett, 2004). In this context, education has an undeniable importance in acquiring intercultural communication skills, which are based on developing universal and human values.

### The School's Role in Values Development

The school is "the place where different values and norms are brought together, and where the worldviews and attitude towards the other are originated and shaped" (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2013). The concepts formed in this educational institution have influence on the individual's thinking, perception and interaction processes through life.

It is inadequate to define the school, which has a unifying and integrative mission in society, only as the place where information is transferred. The school has an important position with its public and private structure. In this institution, where the system of ideas and values is established, the concepts of "identity" and "otherness" begin to be shaped both individually and universally (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2013).

In a multicultural context, contributing to social harmony, this educational institution is also responsible for maintaining unity and integrity while balancing the relationship between students from different cultures (Carpentier and Riard, 2010).

## The Teacher's Role in Foreign Language Teaching

Teachers usually have a strategic position in every educational process because of standing at a point in the classroom where they can build a bridge between the similar and the different, between the inside and the outside, and between the far and the near. In this sense, teachers are responsible for taking all variables (differences) into consideration during the educational process (Zarate, 1993).

The professional competence of a teacher who will work in an educational environment targeted at developing intercultural communication skills requires knowledge on not only linguistics, but also social sciences. For this reason, an education on only literature and linguistics may not be sufficient for the teacher. This education should also be supported by non-linguistic disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, etc. (Windmüller, 2011)

Another responsibility of the teacher is to protect students from a possible culture shock that can result from the cultural differences in the classroom. Under the guidance of the teacher, the students can learn to listen to their peers respectfully and express themselves appropriately on various topics. These positive attitudes can help the students develop an open perspective over time (Collès, 2013). The important thing in the interaction between students is the teacher's responsibility of preventing hurtful or provocative situations on sensitive subjects by maintaining mutual respect within the class or group.

Especially in language classes, the teacher has an important role in removing prejudices and building up tolerance towards cultural differences. The teacher also needs to enable students to see and recognize the background of the language and culture being taught. For this reason, first of all, the teacher is expected to be equipped in the field of intercultural communication. In order to be able to do this, first, the teacher should analyze his or her own language and culture, and then develop a perspective to explore and understand other languages and cultures (Byram, 1992).

On the other hand, in the literature, it is also possible to encounter teachers (especially foreign language teachers) who have prejudices arising from the traditional point of view towards different values. In this case, it is important that teachers make a personal effort and develop an independent and objective approach to have an understanding of the society whose language is being taught (Baumgratz-Gangl, 1993).

## Action-Oriented Approach

In the late '90s, action-oriented approach emerged and replaced the communicative method. The primary feature of this approach is the importance it places upon the cultural dimension in foreign language teaching (Puren, 2006).

The approach "*views users and learners of a language primarily as 'social agents', i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action.*" (CECR, 2000).

To support this approach Girardet (2011) states, "*the user of the language is considered as a social actor who will act in the major areas of social life (personal, educational, professional, public, etc.). For example, attending a wedding means responding to an invitation, making a gift, getting dressed appropriately, and congratulating the married couple.*" Girardet reminds that these situations sometimes lead to tasks on a linguistic level such as "congratulating a married couple", "phoning to say

thanks for the invitation" or "writing a word to confirm the attendance", and sometimes a task like "finding your place among the tables" on a non-linguistic level.

In this context, there are four kinds of knowledge for general and communicative skills that the intercultural approach will provide in foreign language education (CECR, 2000):

**Knowledge (savoir):** Declarative knowledge, knowledge from experience (empirical knowledge) and from formal education (academic knowledge). All human communication depends on a shared knowledge of the world.

**Existential competence (savoir-être):** The sum of the individual characteristics and attitudes like self-image and one's view of others and willingness to engage in social interaction with others.

**Skills and know-how (savoir-faire):** Although this skill may be facilitated by the acquisition of "forgettable" knowledge, it depends more on the ability to carry out procedures than on declarative knowledge.

**Ability to learn (savoir-apprendre):** It mobilises existential competence, declarative knowledge and skills, and draws on various types of competence.

In the action-oriented approach, where the learners are regarded as social actors, the pragmatic aspect of the language in foreign language teaching and learning comes out. Accordingly, in communication and social life, the student's interaction with the target language and culture is to be supported with both linguistic (verbal expressions) and non-linguistic (behaviors) dimensions.

### **Intercultural Communication**

Intercultural communication is a field of study that aims to preserve the variety of languages and cultures. For this purpose, it focuses on communication and interaction among individuals and societies from different cultures. The starting point of this field is multicomponent phenomena such as human, society, language and culture; therefore, it encompasses other disciplines like sociology and anthropology.

It is necessary to have some qualities in order to communicate correctly and effectively among people belonging to different cultures. By developing these qualities, intercultural communication skills provide the ability to establish a healthy and effective communication on the intercultural platform.

*"The ability to understand the unique aspects of an intercultural interaction, and to generate a behavior that will adapt to this specific situation and allow the given message to be interpreted in the desired way."* (Bartel-Radic, 2009).

There are some factors to be taken into account in an intercultural communication (Windmüller, 2011):

- Position and social status of the speakers: relationship style, subject of communication, linguistic choices (rules of politeness, ordinary expressions etc.)
- Interactions or word games under the forms of expressions: expressions, connotations etc. that indicate which group the speaker belongs to in the social context

- Elements that accompany oral communication: gestures, mimics, attitudes, posture, distance between speakers etc.
- Kinesic and proxemic factors: the time and place in which communication takes place.
- Dysfunctions stemming from paralinguistic factors: behaviors.

All these components in a communication are shaped by social factors. Therefore, every society has different referents that bear traces of their members. A linguistic sign may be misunderstood or misinterpreted during communication between people belonging to different cultures, which may lead to disruptions in communication. Intercultural communication skills enable the referents to be made comprehensible by correcting the errors in communication.

### **Aim of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify, examine and compare the views of the foreign language teachers from two selected universities in Turkey and France on the teacher's role in building intercultural communication skills in foreign language teaching. In this regard, the questions to be answered are as follows:

1. What is the role of the teacher in building intercultural communication skills in foreign language teaching?
2. What are the similarities and differences between the views of the teachers that participated in the study from different contexts?

The contextual, ethnic and cultural diversity of the teachers sampled from the two different countries enabled us to reach different perspectives on the subject as a result of the data analysis. Therefore, this diversity became effective in reaching some conclusions at the end of the study.

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

This study was designed as a case study to identify, examine and compare the views of the English and French language teachers from two selected universities in France and Turkey on the teacher's role in building intercultural communication skills in foreign language teaching. Because a case study enables to identify one situation or more and describe them in detail. To be able to get satisfying answers from the participants, to properly identify the existing situation, and to describe it in detail, the questions focused on were “what is the existing situation?”, “what is happening?”, “how?” and “why?” (Cresswell, 2007).

Within this framework, the purpose of this study is not to reach universally valid and generalizable results, but to examine and describe the participants' views qualitatively, regardless of the quantitative dimension. In brief, the participants' personal perspectives on the research questions were the basis of this study (Dumez, 2013).

## Instruments

At the first stage, to obtain foreign language teachers' opinions about intercultural communication competence acquisition in foreign language teaching, a questionnaire composing of open-ended questions was distributed to the participants. First part of this questionnaire contained questions asking for personal information such as professional experience, field of study, any education the participant has had in intercultural communication, etc. The second part included the questions focusing on the intercultural communication competence of the participants. The participants were given a week to fill in the questionnaire. The questionnaires were then collected and the data were analysed. Thereafter, with the reference of the notions obtained by the responses of the questionnaires, semi-structured individual interviews were made with the teachers to get their views in detail. The participants were asked some extra questions according to the interviews' context, which is one of the advantages of semi-structured interview technic. These extra questions provided us to achieve more details. We were also able to obtain detailed data from the participants having different ethnic and cultural background related to their experiences and contexts. It also ensured us to compare the opinions of the participants.

## Participants

In this study, the data were collected via a questionnaire and face-to-face interviews conducted with twenty foreign language teachers. The features of the participants are given below:

**Table 1.**

Features of the Teachers Participating in the Study

Participant	Nationality	Branch	Professional experience	Level of education	City	Country	Gender
Ceren	Turkish	French	4 years	master's	Eskişehir	Turkey	female
Hakan	Turkish	French	2 years	master's	Eskişehir	Turkey	male
Onur	Turkish	French	2 years	bachelor's	Eskişehir	Turkey	male
Derya	Turkish	French	4 years	bachelor's	Eskişehir	Turkey	female
Serkan	Turkish	French	1 years	bachelor's	Eskişehir	Turkey	male
Nilay	Turkish	French	4 years	master's	Eskişehir	Turkey	female
Céline	French	French	10 years	master's	Toulouse	France	female
Simon	French	French	3 years	master's	Toulouse	France	male
Cécile	French	French	6 years	doctorate	Toulouse	France	female
Juliette	French	French	30 years	doctorate	Toulouse	France	female
Catherine	French	French	27 years	doctorate	Toulouse	France	female
Rosa	French	French	25 years	bachelor's	Toulouse	France	female
Sophie	French	French	18 years	master's	Toulouse	France	female
Sarah	Canadian	English	2 years	master's	Toulouse	France	female
David	American	English	2 years	master's	Toulouse	France	male
Marion	French	English	16 years	master's	Toulouse	France	female
Audrey	French	English	8 years	doctorate	Toulouse	France	female
Richard	American	English	2 years	master's	Toulouse	France	male
Elsa	German	English	3 years	master's	Toulouse	France	female
Jacques	French	English	10 years	master's	Toulouse	France	male

The first group consists of French language teachers who taught students from different countries at the summer school of Toulouse 2-Jean-Jaurès University Faculty of Foreign Languages, Literatures and

Civilizations, in France. In this group, all the participants who answered the questionnaire and attended the individual semi-structured interviews are French citizens.

The second group is made up of English language teachers at the same university in France. The participants who answered the questionnaire and attended the individual semi-structured interviews in this group are from different nationalities: three of them are French; two of them are American; one of them is Canadian; and one of them is German.

The participants of the third group are the French language teachers at Eskişehir Anadolu University School of Foreign Languages. In this group, all the participants who answered the questionnaire and attended the individual semi-structured interviews are Turkish citizens.

The features of the participants are given in the table below. As it is seen, the data were collected from a total of twenty teachers of Turkish (6), French (10), American (2), Canadian (1) and German (1) origins. Among the participants, the most experienced teacher has worked for thirty years, and the least experienced teacher has worked for one year.

### Data Analysis

In this study, the data were analysed by the content analysis method which provides us to analyse data by coding. The concepts were determined by combining the similar data that came out of the analysis, and the themes and sub-themes were formed with these concepts (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005).

The flexibility of this method also helped us in data collection process. In the coding process, the data were analysed, were separated into chunks and then notional categories from each part were obtained. The coding was made by the researcher and two field experts separately. Thereafter, these codes were compared and the interpretation of the data was made on the common categories determined. It also enabled us to check the consistency and reliability of the coders (Cresswell, 2007).

After this process was completed, the views of the teachers who participated in the three different contexts were examined in their own context and compared within their own group. At the same time, the similarities and differences were identified by the comparisons made among the groups. Pseudonyms, which were assigned according to sex and nationality of the participants, were used while reporting the findings.

### Findings and Comments

As a result of the data analysis, the views on the teacher's role in building intercultural communication skills in foreign language education were combined under four main themes:

1. The teacher's intercultural communication skills
2. The teacher's acquisition of intercultural communication skills
3. The teacher's responsibilities
4. Intercultural education

However, it was found that while sharing similar views on the main themes, the participants sometimes had differing opinions on the sub-themes.

### **The Teacher's Intercultural Communication Skills**

Acknowledging the necessity of intercultural communication skills for foreign language teachers, the participants expressed that the teacher should first internalize basic and universal values in order to acquire this skill. It was concluded that these values are necessary not only for foreign language teachers, but also for all teachers who take the leading role in education; in fact, for all individuals who wish to adapt to the modern world that is shaped by today's conditions.

#### ***Avoiding self-centeredness***

Within the framework of the teacher's intercultural communication skills, most of the participants expressed that the teacher should primarily have the ability to approach his or her own culture with an objective and critical perspective. In other words, avoiding positive discrimination against the teacher's own ethnic background has turned out to be the first step necessary to develop intercultural communication skills.

(Marion) *“The French are incomprehensible. Generally, they have always been bad at languages. Actually, about language, they have more or less the same perception as the English: Their language is the language of politics. Their language is the global language. Even if this situation is gradually losing its validity, French is still spoken in some countries like Africa. So, they are not very eager to speak a different language because, although it is not right, they have this opinion that they can go everywhere and be understood by speaking French, and that they are not the ones who should adapt, but the others are. It is a shameful thought by the French people on other languages.”*

The quote above belongs to a French teacher who previously gave foreign language courses in England but is now teaching English language in France. He stated that the experience in a different country (especially where his language is taught) enabled him to look at his own culture from outside and to develop a critical perspective. Through this example, the teacher emphasized that he did not discriminate in favor of the target group of students mostly from his own nation (French) and that he was far from looking down on other cultures with an ethnocentric view. It turns out that teachers with such a perspective have the ability to provide their students, as well, with an objective and critical perspective that is not self-centered.

On the other hand, three teachers (two of them are American and one of them is Canadian) who came from different countries to teach English in France and their Turkish colleagues who did teaching internships in France worked in different contexts, so they had the opportunity to make comparisons between the language teaching processes in France and in their own countries.

Attending the study in three different contexts, the participants generally stated that they were against the situation in which teachers show a more positive attitude towards the students from the same nation as they are.

#### ***Being objective and impartial towards cultural differences***

Although the opinions of the participants about objectivity and impartiality in the classroom are generally similar, there are differences in opinion at some points. Some participants (no comparison



could be made among the groups because there were teachers who had the same view in each group) stated that they never express their personal views about the sensitive subjects like politics, religion and sexual orientation etc. for they worry about not being able to remain totally impartial. They think that when the teacher shares his or her personal views on a sensitive subject, it can cause disputes among students. The quote below is taken from the statements of a French participant who teaches French language:

(Céline) *“When I have to do lessons that include controversial topics, my position is to remain certainly in the background. However, if there are erroneous statements during the discussion, at that point, it is inevitable for me, as a teacher, to step in to say ‘attention, this information is wrong’. Therefore, I correct the information, but not the person.”*

Some of the participants (no comparison could be made among the groups because there were teachers who had the same view in each group) stated that everyone is free to express their opinions. Thus, even if the topics are sensitive, they do not abstain from sharing their own views in the classroom. According to them, the fact that the teacher shares his or her personal views with the class does not mean imposing those views or abusing the students. On the other hand, being a teacher does not mean remaining silent. Teachers, like everyone else, have their own views. If they want to express these views, then it is nothing more than an exchange of ideas in the classroom. The important thing here is to avoid imposing views on the students and to create an environment in which they can freely express their own personal opinions while respecting others in the class. The quote below belongs to a Turkish participant who teaches French language:

(Onur) *“The worst thing that a teacher might do to students is to manipulate them instead of leading the way and telling them to think and speak the way they want. Then there is obviously a problem here.”*

Regarding the freedom of expression in the classroom, there were no overlaps between the views and the groups of the foreign language teachers who participated in the study from three different contexts (French and English language teachers in France, and French language teachers in Turkey). It was observed that each group had participants with different views on this topic.

The data analysis revealed a variety among the participants’ views about teachers’ sharing their thoughts on sensitive issues, which can be regarded as taboos, in the classroom. The French teachers generally expressed that they avoid sharing their views on sensitive issues in the classroom because they find it inappropriate to do so. For them, salary is a taboo subject that should never be talked about in the class, even in public. While sharing the same opinion on that point, their American colleagues listed the subjects they avoid as politics, religion and sexuality.

Turkish teachers, on the other hand, were observed to support the freedom of expression on every subject. Especially, considering that university students are the target group, it was stated that sharing opinions is useful for learning to discuss by respecting others’ views. It was argued that the teacher could join the exchange of ideas between students, as well.

Nevertheless, some of the participants stated that they do not directly express their views on taboo subjects, but convey them indirectly and implicitly via non-verbal communication, so that the students could understand their views on the subject. This approach takes place in the pragmatic dimension of language. As it is known, expressing oneself in various ways is possible via verbal and non-verbal elements in communication, a message transfer between speakers.

Under this theme, the cultural structure of the classes taught by foreign language teachers participating in the study was also seen as an important factor in shaping the attitudes of the teachers towards taboo subjects and sharing their personal views. Apart from exceptional circumstances (students from Cyprus or African countries, occasionally), the Turkish teachers who teach French in classes with a monocultural structure are more comfortable with the familiarity in addressing the students who were raised in the same culture (Turkish culture), and with foreseeing the possible reactions on sensitive issues. In addition, subcultural differences (exemplified by students from different geographical regions) among the students, though seemingly raised in the Turkish culture, were found to enrich the classes by creating diversities at such points as habits and ways of thinking.

Participating in the study from France, the teachers who work with culturally diverse classes expressed that in some cases in the classroom, they encountered approaches that they were not accustomed to. The most noteworthy of them was with one Canadian and two American teachers who taught English in France. The points stated by them are that some of the students raised in the French culture were reluctant to talk about some topics and that they kept the distance between themselves and the teacher. Similarly, these teachers expressed the difficulty they had in understanding the distant behavior between people (between their peers who were at around the same age and at similar levels in terms of profession) in everyday communication, as well.

It was found out that the French teachers who had classes with a great variety of cultures and students from all around the world are aware of the cultural differences among the students, and generally adopt a more distant attitude under the influence of their own cultural codes. These participants stated that they adopt a much more sensitive and conciliatory approach towards the subjects that can cause serious arguments among students from countries that do not have good political relations with each other.

### ***Following the agenda of the target language and culture***

As mentioned in the introduction, language and culture are dynamic systems that can evolve, change, and be reshaped with the influence of active interpersonal and international interactions, and technological developments.

Following the agenda of the target language and culture is a theme put forward by the participants in general. During a dialogue with students, a French participant who was teaching his mother tongue used a word (Hélas) that is not used today anymore, and explained that in such a case, he would be treated like he was from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and he would not be understood at all. By doing this, he emphasized the importance of the everyday use of language. Most of the teachers have agreed that a foreign language teacher needs to be in constant contact with the society whose language and culture he or she is teaching. It has been stated that, by following the agenda of the target language and culture, the teacher gets the opportunity to be informed about the changes and novelties.

### **The Teacher's Acquisition of Intercultural Communication Skills: Experience Abroad**

#### ***Learning cultural and sociolinguistic codes on-the-spot***

All the Turkish participants and most of the teachers from France who participated in the study accepted the undeniable necessity of having actual experience in the country whose language is taught. According to them, seeing that country and living in there provide a better understanding of the foreign culture. A Turkish teacher who teaches French pointed out that the knowledge received from different

sources or from school is not a healthy way to perceive a foreign culture because it reflects the perspective of the person who has transferred it. The teacher also emphasized that the forms of perception and interpretation might vary from one person to another. For this reason, the majority of the participants have been found to agree that gaining experience in the society whose language is taught is the best way for a teacher to experience and interpret what is there according to his or her own system of values.

There are also some participants who approached this matter in a completely different way:

(Simone) “... teachers whose mother tongue is not the one they teach may as well have the ability to teach the cultural aspect, I think. What is needed here is curiosity and interest for the culture whose language they are teaching.”

The quote above belongs to a French participant who teaches French language. Unlike most of his colleagues, according to him, it is not a must for every language teacher to have experience abroad because it is the teacher’s personal effort and interest that makes it possible to recognize and discover the target culture. The participant believes that if the teacher is really interested in the cultural aspect of language teaching, this can be mastered through personal endeavors. The following quote belongs to a Turkish teacher approaching this view with a different perspective:

(Ceren) “I do not believe that those who have lived in France for a long time but have only interacted with the Turkish there can convey the French culture. For this to happen, they need to interact with French people and the French culture. Direct contact and communication are needed. It also depends a bit on the teacher’s being open-minded.”

This perspective here has led us to the conclusion that the key words are openness to and aptitude for communicating with different cultures. Otherwise, the on-the-spot experience will serve no purpose in terms of acquiring intercultural communication skills. On the other hand, it has been mentioned that the experience will have no benefits if the target language and culture of is not followed. It has been stated that a teacher who has had such experience in another country a long time ago will not be able to carry out the target language and culture transfer in a correct and effective manner if he or she does not update the observations and the knowledge to today’s conditions.

### **Comparing the received knowledge with the experienced reality**

Comparing the received knowledge with the reality and exploring the various aspects of a foreign culture stand out as the other advantages of experience abroad. Some of the participants (no comparison could be made among the groups because there were teachers who had the same view in each group) have stated that on-the-spot experience enables a teacher to directly observe the culture and learn how to live with its codes; therefore, the teacher can get to know the most natural and pure aspects of life there, and can compare the received knowledge with the actual experience. As a result of this, it was suggested that the experience gained in the society whose language is being taught contributes to the development of intercultural communication skills.

### **Developing awareness towards one’s own identity and culture**

The quotes below belong to two French teachers. That the first quote is by the most experienced teacher among the participants points out the importance of this issue:

(Juliette) *“It was the foreigners, not the French, who taught me the issue of interculturality. I have always been guided by listening to the foreigners’ reactions to the French culture.”*

(Jacques) *“... On my return to France, I had learned many things about my country and myself with the effect of the necessity to explain them (to people there).”*

As it is seen, these participants pointed out that they learned how to look at their own culture from outside thanks to those who came from different cultures, and that they developed awareness on some issues that they had not questioned before.

Only the French participants expressed that interaction with foreigners stimulated thinking for a better understanding of themselves by raising awareness. In other words, they understood their own cultural features through the impressions of others.

### **The Teacher’s Responsibilities**

All participants mentioned the duty of the teacher as a mediator between different cultures. The participants presented similar views on the teacher’s responsibility for respecting cultural differences, avoiding guidance in favor of his or her own culture, and developing an open mind to differences. At this point, it was pointed out that the teacher should consider all variables in the classroom, and that he or she should form a bridge between all the different cultures in the classroom, not just the target and source culture.

#### ***Raising the sense of “otherness” in students***

Another concept that came out of the analysis is raising the sense of “otherness” in students. In the case of intercultural communication skills in foreign language education, trying to raise this awareness is another responsibility of the teacher.

It has been argued that the teacher has a strategic position on enabling every student to adopt a critical perspective by embracing cultural differences, and leading them to an attitude open to understand the other.

### **Intercultural Education**

The data analysis put forward that all the participants are aware of the importance of intercultural communication skills in foreign language teaching. However, the majority of the participants stated that they did not receive a special training on building these skills. One Turkish participant among them had the opportunity to perform activities on building intercultural communication skills in students during the pedagogical internship he attended in France. On the other hand, a French teacher (with the most experience) gave courses on building these skills for a long time at an institution where students from different nationalities came together.

It was found out that although the participants generally agree on the importance of intercultural communication skills in foreign language teaching, they do not know how to combine the practices for building these skills with the language courses in a systematic and effective way. At this point, only one French teacher (teaching French language) underlined the necessity for teachers to have intercultural education. The other participants, although stating that they were unhappy with the current situation, did not mention a specific need for intercultural education for teachers. Besides, it was

emphasized that professional experiences in the country whose language is being taught contribute to the acquisition of intercultural communication skills.

## Results and Discussion

At the end of the study, it was found that all of the participants, teaching French and English languages at two selected universities in France and Turkey, and participating in the study from three different contexts, are aware of the place and importance of intercultural communication skills in foreign language teaching; however, they do not have enough knowledge on planning the practices on building these skills and integrating them into courses. It was found that none of the participants received a special training on building intercultural communication skills. Only one French teacher mentioned the need for such training, which might be related to the fact that this teacher gave language courses in classes with a multicultural structure and with students from different countries. It was concluded that other teachers who teach in multicultural classes are more experienced and have a more flexible perspective on cultural differences than French language teachers of Turkish origin who teach in monocultural classes.

On the other hand, it is known that teachers' own cultural codes are effective in forming their attitudes towards cultural differences. From the statements of some of the French teachers who teach foreign language to students from different nations, it was observed that they had difficulty in recognizing cultural features that are far from their own culture but adopted the principle that the teacher should be impartial and objective; thus, they tried to avoid reflecting their personal views in such situations. It was revealed that, for the American and Canadian teachers of English participating in the study from France, there were aspects of the student profile in France that they were not accustomed to. The main issue among them was that the students kept the distance between themselves and the teacher, and that they were not very open to talk about some topics like politics and sexual orientations.

There were differences in opinion about the need for foreign language teachers to have experience in the country whose language they teach. At this point, the participants were found to have differing views. Among the foreign language teachers who participated in the study from three different contexts (French teachers who teach French language in France, English language teachers from different nations in France, and French language teachers of Turkish origin in Turkey), there were no overlaps between their views and contexts. Each group had participants with differing views on this topic, so no comparison could be made among the groups. Some of the teachers perceived this kind of experience as a necessity for the profession because it allows them to compare the knowledge they received from the school or various sources with the reality they personally discovered by living in that society. The others argued that it is not a necessity and that the teacher's characteristics and efforts are what matters. According to them, teachers who try to follow the changes in the culture whose language they teach, and, most importantly, who are open to communication with different cultures can become equipped with the target culture via today's advanced communication and information technologies, and they can transfer intercultural communication skills to students. It was concluded that if teachers adopt a closed attitude and resistance to communication with others and if they are unwilling to observe and understand their surroundings, although they interact with people from different cultures, this experience does not contribute to the development of intercultural communication skills.

Embracing what is different from them, and bearing feelings of tolerance and empathy by raising the sense of "otherness" in students have become the primary duties of teachers in intercultural

communication-oriented foreign language teaching. On the other hand, obviously, the role of the teacher in developing intercultural communication skills is not only forming a bridge between the source and the target cultures, but also creating a positive communication environment among students from different cultures.

In conclusion, embracing and trying to understand differences enable people to adopt an attitude aiming self-knowledge and self-discovery. The awareness gained during this questioning process leads people to respect and try to understand others, and to have tolerance. Such perspective on intercultural communication can help to protect linguistic and cultural diversity. It is necessary to acknowledge the fact that every person has values, norms, beliefs and perspectives shaped by their own cultural codes individually or socially, and that all situations and events that he or she has experienced find meaning and are interpreted spontaneously through the filter of this pre-formed system. The importance of relativity in every subject related to human beings comes into view at this point, as well. The teacher's role as a bridge between differences has an undeniable importance in the development of intercultural communication skills. For this reason, it is the teacher who should acquire these skills in the first place. If the teacher is responsible for teaching a foreign language and culture, then it is obvious that he or she should be competent at intercultural communication skills and at building these skills in students.

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