

**EFL Teachers' Perceptions of The Place of Culture in ELT: A Survey Study at
Four Universities in Ankara/Turkey**

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate Turkish teachers' opinions and beliefs on the place of target cultural information in English language teaching, as well as their related practices and applications in EFL classrooms in Turkish higher education context. Particularly, it tries to explore three research questions: (a) How do Turkish teachers of English define culture? (b) What are the EFL teachers' attitudes towards incorporating cultural information into their teaching? and (c) What role do they allocate to the culture of the target language in their classrooms? The study shows that teachers mostly define culture in the sociological sense, such as values and beliefs. Their definition of culture in the framework of ELT slightly shifts towards more visible culture, such as food and clothing. The study also reveals teachers' positive attitudes towards incorporating cultural information in their instruction.

Key words: Culture, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), teachers' perceptions, Turkish universities, preparation classes, academic English.

Özet:

Bu çalışmanın amacı, üniversitelerde çalışan Türk İngilizce öğretmenlerinin İngiliz dili öğretiminde hedef kültür bilgilerinin yeri hakkındaki görüşlerini ve bu doğrultudaki sınıf içi uygulamalarını incelemektir. Bu araştırma şu üç soruya cevap aramaktadır: (a) Türk İngilizce öğretmenleri kültürü nasıl tanımlamaktadır? (b) Bu öğretmenlerin kültürel bilgilerin derslerde kullanılmasına karşı tutumları nelerdir? ve (c) Hedef dilin kültürüne derslerinde nasıl bir rol yüklemektedirler? Araştırma sonuçlarına göre, öğretmenler kültürü en çok sosyolojik açıdan tanımlamışlardır. İngiliz dili öğretimi bağlamındaki tanımları ise, yemekler ve giysiler gibi daha somut bir kültür kavramına doğru yönelmektedir. Ayrıca araştırma, kültürel öğeleri derslerinde kullanma konusunda, öğretmenlerin olumlu tutumlarını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kültür, Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce, öğretmen görüşleri, Türk üniversiteleri, Hazırlık Sınıfı, akademik İngilizce.

1. Introduction

As long as languages have existed, there have also been cultures. Culture is a vital part of the communication process. Learning a language without its culture is a recipe for becoming a “fluent fool. A fluent fool is someone who speaks a foreign language well, but does not understand the social or philosophical content of that language” (Bennett 1993: 9). This is to say that even though one may know the language, they may not be successful in the target language because of their lack in cultural knowledge. As an example, an American foreign service team was initially unable to be successful when negotiating in a situation in Latin America regardless of the fact that one member of the team was fluent in Spanish. However, when one member of the team showed interest in the culture the negotiations were saved (Gannon 2001: 7).

A language consists of culturally loaded rudiments (Pennycook, 1989; Phillipson, 1992; Alptekin, 1996). While learning a foreign language, it is likely for its learners to need cultural information for better communication. However, in the language-learning process, some of those cultural elements might affect its learners. Even further, they may be naturally imposed on them. Similarly, meaningful language learning requires context. Byram (1988) asserts that language has no function independent of the context in which it is used, thus language always refers to something beyond itself: the cultural context. This cultural context defines the language patterns being used when particular people come together under particular circumstances at a particular time and place. This combination of elements always has a cultural meaning, which influences language use. The context entails not only the way of life, but also the codes of the community in which that language is used. Therefore, when learning a language, the learners are influenced by the values –or the value system- of another culture, and some of those values may be passed on to them (Işık, 2003; Işık, 2004). That is to say, apart from being a crucial component of language teaching and learning, transferring cultural information may encompass various changes in the language learners’ modes of thinking.

In this sense, culture and language learning have a multi-dimensional relationship. Cultural knowledge embedded in a language is important for its speakers, on one hand; and on the other, this knowledge has an impact on the philosophy of its learners. Correspondingly, foreign language learning is a window opening to new horizons by building up connections to other cultures, but may also be a form of assimilation promoted by the domination of its culture – especially when the language itself is dominant in the world arena. Thus, foreign language teachers may sometimes find themselves in the dilemma of trying to avoid creating fluent fools,

but at the same time trying to avoid becoming a tool of “linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson, 1992).

1.1. The importance of incorporating culture in language teaching

Although the importance of incorporating culture into language teaching and learning may appear to be obvious, not everyone in the field acknowledges this importance. In fact, “only one third of [language teaching] programs offer a course in culture” (Reid, 1995/1996: 3). Historically, one reason for this oversight has been that language teachers are more interested in the practical aspects of communication. Language teachers often treat culture as supplemental or incidental to “the real task” (Fantini, 1997: x).

Within the past decade, this problems resulting from not teaching culture with language have started to be recognized. Language teachers try to avoid turning out fluent fools by deliberately helping students learn to experience reality in a new way through culture. Many international and national foreign language associations have begun to address this problem by incorporating culture in their standards. In 1996, TESOL published as its third goal in *ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students* “to use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways” (p.17). Additionally, the national standards for foreign language education developed in part with American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), were based on “knowing how, when and why to say what to whom.” The national standards were created with the ultimate goal of foreign language teaching being “the ability to communicate in meaningful and appropriate ways with users of other languages.” With this in mind, they developed a framework based on the explicit and the implicit forms of culture (culture with a “C” and culture with a “c”).

Even though there has been an increase in the amount of attention given to the lack of culture incorporated in language teaching, there is still a dearth in the extent of information about how, when and why to incorporate culture in the language classroom. Many linguists and interculturalists have started to address this problem with series such as *New Ways in Teaching Culture* (Fantini, 1997). However, the need to understand this issue and its solutions more still exists.

1.2. The place of English language in Turkey

After Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923, European foreign languages gained significance as a means of the westernization policy in the new Republic. As a result of the modernization and westernization efforts, the Turkish Republic built

stronger ties with Europe, and with the French language. In March 1924, the national curriculum included a Western foreign language as a compulsory subject for all. Despite the growing influence of the US, German and French were more influential than English because of the sociopolitical movements between the 1930s and 1940s.

European influence on Turkey started to weaken by the first half of the 1950s, and Turkey began to turn her face towards the US. English gradually began to compete with French as an international language. Moreover, expanding relations with the United States in economic and military areas fostered the demand for English speaking professionals, which was a natural consequence of America's development in those fields. Consequently, this sudden, if not surprising, increase in the motivation to learn English in developing Turkey has shown its reflection in the Turkish educational system, as well.

English became an important part of the Turkish educational system after the second half of the 1950s. As Doğançay-Aktuna (1998) asserts, there was a "planned" policy in the spread of English through schooling. This state-planned and more-controlled stage of the spread, which is referred to as the "first phase" by the same writer (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998), lasted until the late 1970s. Yet, the real impact came on the scene after the early 1980s, when Turkish society was further exposed to free market economies and to popular American lifestyle (media, cinema, etc.). Doğançay-Aktuna (1998) calls this period "the second phase," during which an "unplanned" spread of English into Turkish life took place through borrowed words, beliefs, values, and perceptions. Now, both kinds of spread can still be observed in Turkey although English seems to widen its influence more rapidly in an unplanned manner.

A similar situation exists in most Turkish universities, especially in major cities such as Ankara, İstanbul and İzmir. Public English-medium universities like Middle East Technical University (Ankara) and Boğaziçi University (Istanbul), offer preparatory English classes in the first year of attendance. During this 'preparatory year', students who do not have the necessary proficiency to comprehend their departmental courses in English, –or the ones who cannot pass the proficiency exam– take intensive English courses. Recently, some newly-founded private universities have also adopted English as their medium of instruction (Bilkent University/Ankara, Başkent University/Ankara, Koç University/Istanbul). In other state universities such as Hacettepe University (Ankara), Ankara University/Ankara, and Istanbul Technical

University/Istanbul, students from particular departments are obliged to spend a preparatory year, although English is not the medium of education in the majority of the departments.

In fact, the graduates of these schools find better jobs, or at least, they are offered better job opportunities just for the sake of their proficiency in English. In addition, graduation from an English-medium university provides additional prestige. English brings socially high status to individuals in Turkey. Every day, more Turkish people feel that some familiarity with English is required for improved advancement in life. Consequently, there arise different views on the present sociolinguistic framework of English in Turkey.

As stated before, English is learned primarily for occupational and educational reasons to attain better opportunities. It is mostly practiced in a formal classroom environment and there are not many chances, other than in school, to use it for daily communication purposes. Although some foreign-based TV channels with Turkish-subtitled programs (e.g. famous the American channel CNBC-E broadcasts various sitcoms and soap operas in English) have recently popped out in Turkish television, English is not an official language in Turkey. Nor is it a second language despite the fact that many enterprises tend to give fashionable English names, titles, and brands to their products and offices. Though English has a high market value, Turkish people *still* shop in their own language. That is why English is a foreign language in Turkey. It is not a tool for intra-communication among Turks in their everyday lives: rather, it is the basic tool for international communication. As commercial and cultural relations between Turkey and other countries in the world have been accelerating, English appears to be the key communication tool that cements the links between Turkey and the rest of the world.

1.3. Culture and teaching English in Turkey

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, culture constitutes an essential part of language teaching. Similarly, as stated above, English plays a relatively important role in Turkey. However, the relentless intrusion of English into Turkish life has led to uneasiness about the degeneration it may bring about. Naturally, this is not a situation that only Turkey may face; in many other countries, where English was used for national improvement and as a tool of international communication, its effects on the native culture have been questioned. Fishman (1977) described such cases nearly three decades ago explaining that the spread of English had not always been recognized with “unmitigated pleasure” (330). As he (Fishman, 1977) further

clarifies, many unwanted results may occur as a reaction to such a spread and many nations took action against it at policy level.

Particularly, the increasing number of English-medium educational institutions has been one of the focal points of discussions in education. A number of scholars and researchers (Ayvazoğlu, 2002; Falay, 2002; Sinanoğlu, 2002; Şen, 2002) believe that such an intensive process of language teaching, which is naturally full of foreign cultural elements, will have a negative impact on Turkish language, and consequently on cultural consciousness. They emphasize the significance of using the mother tongue in education. For them, one's own language is the primary means for creativity; therefore, the necessity to learn English for better scientific production in schools is a misconception. Sinanoğlu (2002) goes even further and claims that such deliberate policies, which can be collectively referred as "cultural and linguistic imperialism," may harm cultural consciousness seriously and may result in a total devastation in the society.

Animated discussions have been continuing between the supporters and opponents of the English-medium instruction. The articles, which were published in different newspapers, magazines and journals as answers to each other, were gathered and edited by Kilimci (1998) in a book titled "Anadilinde Çocuk Olmak: Yabancı Dilde Eğitim (Being a Child in One's Mother Tongue: Education in a Foreign Language)". As the name of the book suggests, the articles written by various scholars firstly focus on how foreign language affects the Turkish language. Some researchers (Alakuş, 1989; Alptekin, 1989; Doltaş, 1989; Karasu, 1989) believe that learning a foreign language does not have negative influences on the mother tongue. They even claim that it will foster the awareness of the first language. Alptekin (1989), for instance, refers to the studies carried out in the 1940s on bilingualism and relates them to the Turkish context claiming that a foreign language will not only improve the Turkish learners' cognitive abilities, but also enhance their L1 capabilities (40). Similarly, Karasu (1989) carries the subject to a more international ground by giving Turkish workers living in Germany as an example and maintains that a foreign language enriches social interaction among people living together. The opposing group of academics (Özel, 1989; Kocaman, 1989; Sarıtosun, 1989), on the other hand, holds the view that national education has to be carried out in the mother tongue for this would also foster the development of Turkish as the language of science and education in Turkey. They disagree with the argument that university education should be in English by claiming that it may deprive

the national language of growing into the language of science and technology, and even of being the language of national higher education. For them, foreign language education is not bilingual education. The title of Özel's (1989) article well summarizes this view: *Yes to foreign language teaching; no to education through a foreign language* (Yabancı dilde eğitime hayır, yabancı dil öğretimine evet!). Yet, the debate does not seem to settle.

These contradictory arguments raise the important question of how culture should be addressed while teaching English in Turkey. This has led some writers such as Alptekin and Alptekin (1984) to suggest that English should not be taught with reference to English-speaking countries' cultures. Rather they (Alptekin and Alptekin, 1984) suggest that English should be taught independently of this cultural content referring only to the "international attitudes" of international English (16). What is especially interestingly is their suggestion that English can somehow be taught without culture. In his more recent article, Alptekin (2002) seems to have kept his stance about intercultural competence and international English culture, if not his views on foreign language teaching excluding the cultural elements. As it will be discussed in detail while reviewing the literature, however, numerous authors (Valdes, 1986 & 1990; Byram, 1991; Byram and Fleming, 1998, Kramsch, 1993) have discussed the impossibility of teaching English without reference to its culture. For them, whether culture is consciously or unconsciously part of teaching, the transmission of cultural components is unavoidable. As Valdes (1990: 20) points out, every lesson is about something and that something is cultural. Nevertheless, the central questions of whether to, in what degree to, and how to incorporate cultural elements in ELT remains.

Turkish teachers of English find themselves caught between these contradictory arguments. They are the actual figures that shape the possible positive/negative outcomes of including cultural information in their teaching. What do they really think? Why do they believe so? How do they do it? Alternatively, can they even deal with it? Further empirical study is needed in order to find answers to these questions, or even to some very basic questions like how Turkish teachers of English define culture; what role they allocate to culture in their classroom practices; what they think of incorporating cultural elements in lessons.

2. The problem

This study aims to investigate Turkish teachers' opinions and beliefs on the place of target cultural information in English language teaching, as well as their related practices and

applications in EFL classrooms in Turkish higher education context. Particularly, it tries to explore three research questions: (a) How do Turkish teachers of English define culture? (b) What are the EFL teachers' attitudes towards incorporating cultural information into their teaching? and (c) What role do they allocate to the culture of the target language in their classrooms?

3. Method

Participants, Means of Data Collection, and Evaluation Procedures

In this study, two methods were used in order to collect data: a written survey questionnaire and an interview. By using surveys, precise information from large number of subjects can be obtained. Among the purposes of survey use are learning about people's attitudes, values, behavior, opinions, habits, desires, ideas, and beliefs. Moreover, surveys lend themselves to purposes of revealing demographic facts and policymaking. From a more general perspective, surveys are applied for three basic purposes: description, explanation, and exploration (McMillan & Schumacher 1989). In this study, the goal was to describe the EFL teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the place of culture in the EFL classroom and their practices in relation.

In survey research, the most widespread data collection tools are questionnaires and interviews. Both instruments are used in this thesis with the intension of eliciting as accurate information as possible. This is also thought to increase the validity and reliability of the research. Not only the questionnaire, but also the interview was structured by the researcher. The questionnaire was designed to extract mainly three types of information: how ELT teachers define culture, what role they allocate to culture in ELT, and finally whether or not they integrate target language culture into their own lessons. The interview, although not as detailed and structured as the questionnaire, intended to crosscheck the written information given by the participants as well as to gain verbal insight into ELT teachers' attitudes towards the place of culture in their own practices. In other words, the interview was created to elaborate on the data retrieved from the questionnaires.

In order to collect information about the clarity of the items and to find out whether they extract the information that this study aims to elicit, the questionnaire was piloted with 20 EFL instructors from Başkent University, Foreign Language School, English Preparatory Department. The twenty instructors that participated in the pilot study did not part take in the actual study. All

the questionnaires in the pilot study were hard copies and the researcher was present as the pilot subjects responded to the survey. It took an average of 30-35 minutes for the teachers to finish, and they said the questions, except one, were comprehensible and clear. In one of the questions, the instruction whether to check “only one” or “all appropriate” was missing. The participants acknowledged that they did not have any problems in finding the answer choices that best reflected their views. However, during the analysis of the surveys, it was noticed that some participants had made minor additional comments like “sometimes” and “not all the time” when their comments were not asked for. The researcher made the necessary corrections and additions to increase the comprehensibility and directness of the questionnaire according to the pilot study.

Part B of the second section (the Likert scale items) of the pilot study was statistically analyzed for reliability. The reliability analysis ($\text{Alpha} = .8207$) showed a relatively high consistency. However, the result that is drawn out of twenty participants may not be that suggestive. Finally, the questionnaire was given to two different native speakers to be proofread as an additional control measure even before it was given to the actual participants.

200 copies of the survey (40 to each university) were made and distributed to Preparatory Schools (Hazırlık) of five universities in Ankara (Ankara University, Başkent University, Bilkent University, Hacettepe University, and Middle East Technical University). The surveys were handed out at the end of the Fall semester 2003-2004, thinking that teachers would have better understanding of their students and their attitudes at the end of the semester. Consent for this project to be carried out was obtained by official application to the Foreign Language Schools of each university. Although four of the universities agreed to participate in the study, Bilkent University declined the request.

The return rate of the surveys for the schools that agreed to participate was 61.2%. This may be a relatively good return rate with 98 out of 160 teachers completing their surveys within three weeks. The survey questionnaires were returned by 29 (29.6%) teachers teaching at HU, 28 (28.6%) teachers teaching at METU, 31 (31.6%) teachers teaching at AU, and 10 (10.2%) teachers teaching at BU.

To supplement the surveys, 40 randomly chosen instructors, 10 from each of the universities, were selected to participate in a follow-up interview. However, out of the 40 chosen instructors only 24 were available to answer the interview questions. 8 interviews were conducted on the phone due to time constraints.

Data analyses were handled mainly in three parts: Questionnaire Part 2 A; Questionnaire Part 2 B; and the interviews. Since there were no open-ended items in the questionnaire, analyses were carried out by frequency counts of the items. For the 16 questions in Part 2 A of the questionnaire, frequency counts of the predetermined choices were done in order to see teachers' preferences. The rank-ordering item was analyzed by calculating the percentages of teachers who put culture in one of the ranks between 1 and 10. Moreover, frequency counts of each item according to their allocations between those ranks were calculated. In the items (1st, 4th, and 11th) that required the teachers to choose only one option, the rates of markings were simply counted. The same type of calculations were applied to Yes-No items (6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 12th, 13th, and 16th questions). However, these items also required some more exploration with regard to Yes and/or No responses by checking any suitable reasons for saying so; therefore, the percentages of how many times each reason was marked were also counted. Finally, for 3rd, 5th, 14th, and 15th items show the percentage of how many times each alternative was marked out of entire participants.

In the attitude scale, which is Questionnaire Part 2 B, totals scores for each statement and for each participant were calculated. Total scores of the teachers were presented in order to see their general tendencies towards culture in ELT. Total numbers and arithmetical means for each statement were also used to contribute to the results of teachers' attitudes. Data was further compared with teachers' experiences abroad in order to find any possible relationship between positive attitudes towards cultural elements and having been in the US and/or the UK.

Finally, the open ended information obtained from the interviews was codified with the help of a code-book developed particularly for this study. Categories in the code-book were formed in accordance with the alternatives of the questionnaire items, which are directly related to the interview questions and the three research questions. Basically, frequency counts of the answers given by the teachers were made. The percentages of the responses from the questionnaire and the interviews were compared.

4. Findings

4.1. How do the participants define culture?

Interestingly, yet not surprisingly, while addressing the this question, all of the teachers, some way or another, pointed out the difficulty of giving one concrete definition of culture. When asked to be specific, of the 24 participants having been interviewed, however, the general

definitions of 19 (79.2%) teachers gathered around the sociological sense of culture, emphasizing “the traditions or rules that govern the interpersonal relations, familial relations, and social relations in a community.” 3 (12.5%) participants defined culture as “the artistic features of a community such as literature, music, and folklore”. A teacher from this group also included the “legends” into her definition. Finally, calling attention to what most of the scholars call “the big/capital C,” 2 (8.3%) teachers defined culture stating that “culture included *everything* we see around us.” One expressed this view saying: “bits and pieces from every choice you put in the same question of the questionnaire.” The responses were in consistency with the results of the questionnaire (see Table 1) in that majority of the teachers viewed culture as a sociological entity.

(Table 1), Teachers’ Definition of Culture from a General Perspective

Alternatives	n	Percentage (%)
Media, cinema, music, literature and art of a community	17	17,3
Home life, family nature and interpersonal relations in a community	31	31,6
The customs, traditions and institutions of a country	31	31,6
What people do at work, at home, in their free time and while they entertain	6	6,1
Social and paralinguistic skills that make communication successful	9	9,2
The conceptual system covering semantic areas such as food and clothes	3	3,1
Other	1	1,0
Total	98	100,0

To the 3rd interview question, which asked the teachers to specify the cultural information they give in their lessons, 18 (75%) interviewees indicated that they mostly talked about “British/American people’s specific customs, traditions and beliefs that differ from those of ours.” “I think learning about the differences between our everyday life features and those of theirs appeals the students most, and I do what interests them” stated one teacher. 4 (16.7%) teachers declared that they “clarified idioms and vocabulary that lead the students to misconceptions.” The remaining 2 (8.3%) teachers said that they usually give specific information on “holidays and festivals such as Easter and Halloween.”

When the first research question is concerned, the results of the follow-up interviews reveal that most of the participants tend to define culture in the sociological sense (Adaskou et al, 1990); i.e. being made up of customs, traditions, beliefs, and interpersonal dynamics of a

community. This definition seems to apply not only to participants' general views, but also to their beliefs with regard to language teaching in particular because they mostly indicated that culture in their classrooms entailed giving information on the sociological differences between the Turkish and British/American people.

4.2. What are the subjects' attitudes towards including cultural information into their teaching?

15 (62.5%) teachers indicated that they incorporated cultural information in their classes because they believed in the benefits of doing so. "As I stated in the questionnaire, culture and language are inseparable. They (*students*) have to learn about culture to learn the language better (*italics added*)." "Learning about British or American culture helps them to understand the rationale behind English language." "If they learn about the cultural differences, they will be better English speakers. They will understand it especially when they meet a native speaker." 8 (33.3%) participants stated that they gave cultural information because they had to. "I sometimes cannot explain a sentence to the students without clarifying the cultural content embedded in the sentence." "When my students come across a cultural detail, they urge me to explain it." Lastly, 1 (4.2%) teacher said she skips cultural elements due to time constraints. "Discussing cultural features takes long time, and I have a schedule to catch. I do not have that much of time."

Concerning the same research question, the interviewees were asked to express their ideas on whether or not Turkish learners of English in particular should be presented British/American culture. 11 (43.8%) teachers indicated that learning about those cultures would be useful for Turkish learners of English in terms of their English proficiency. 2 (8.3%) teachers explicitly highlighted the benefits of learning about not only these two cultures, but also other ones. 10 (41.6%) subjects also approved, but at the same time limited the issue in the framework of differences and similarities. "I believe too much emphasis is not necessary. We should give them the major differences and similarities." "Yes they should ... however, general comparisons of Turkish, British and American culture are enough for our students." 1 (4.2%) teacher responded negatively to the question suggesting that the students already know about British/American culture to the necessary extent.

95.8% of the teachers indicated that they incorporated cultural information in their teaching. The same percentage of subjects (95.8%) responded positively as to the necessity of giving cultural information to Turkish learners of English. These results seem to show the

interviewees' positive attitudes towards the inclusion of cultural information into their instruction.

4.3. What do they think is the role of culture of the target language in their teaching?

12 (50%) teachers believed that their main aim in giving cultural information in their classes is to “develop a global understanding of other cultures and people.” “I think being aware of other cultures and recognizing the differences among people are the best motivation to learn a language. Just out of curiosity, one can learn a language.” “In classes, we talk about the issues in Africa, best cheese in Italy, and bull fights in Spain. We compare features of our culture with those of British and American cultures. While focusing on the English language, this is making them aware of the beauties of other languages and cultures, too.” “I do not like focusing too much on popular American culture, for example. I express them that American culture is a part the language they learn, but just one culture among tens of others.” 11 (45.8%) teachers' major goal in giving cultural information to their students was to “make them acquire better communication and comprehension skills.” “These students will be doing lots of reading. They need to understand what they read as fully as possible and the texts are full of cultural knowledge.” “We want to increase their language proficiency. Cultural knowledge is a part of that (*proficiency*) and successful communication requires it (*italics added*).” Finally, 1 (4.2%) teacher stated that target language culture had a very minor role in teaching a foreign language, if any. Hence, the answers to this final interview questions were also in harmony with the questionnaire results in that half of the subject thought developing an awareness of other cultures is the most important role of cultural information in the EFL classrooms, while the second most important role was perceived to foster better communication.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

For most of the participants, culture meant the traditions, customs, family and home life, and institutions of a community as well as social relations in it. The aesthetic definition of culture, which emphasized the art, music and literature etc. of a community, was the second most favored one among the participants. Contrary to expectations resulting from the subjects' being language teachers, they did not mention the definitions associated with language and communication (semantic and pragmatic senses) that frequently. This may be due to nature of the question, which wanted the teachers to define culture from a general point of view, rather than a

teaching perspective. Still, this indicates that teachers perceive “culture” in general to be composed of sociological facets rather than elements related with language.

Although teachers tend to focus on sociological aspects of culture (e.g. values, beliefs, traditions) from the general perspective, the culture which they emphasize in ELT classes is made up of more concrete and observable facts such as clothing, food, and body language. This may be due to the fact that they find the latter surface-level cultural knowledge easier to present to the students in the classroom environment compared to the formerly mentioned conceptual aspects of the target culture. It may be easy to show a picture of an American couple wearing traditional or daily clothes, but more burdensome to explain when and why they wear them. In other words, teachers’ priorities in the overall concept of culture might change when it comes to teaching, due to instructional concerns such as practicality and reliability.

Most of the teachers emphasized the feasibility of presenting cultural information at any level of proficiency as well as the probability of its being presented at the early stages. They thought that their students had mostly positive reactions to cultural information. They also pointed out that Turkish learners of English in particular should be given information about English/American culture. However, when they were asked to rank-order their priorities in lessons, culture could generally not stand as one of the first three. That is, transmission of cultural information was necessary, but not of primary concern in comparison to other aspects of EFL such as reading, vocabulary and grammar.

Additionally, findings indicate that teachers found it advantageous to inform the students about target language culture. They also specified it to the Turkish context, mostly suggesting that Turkish learners of English should be taught English/American culture. In fact, they called attention to many advantages in a spectrum from improving general background knowledge to adding interest to teaching and learning, as well as respecting other cultures.

However, some teachers were also concerned about the disadvantages of including cultural information in their lessons. They seemed to be uncomfortable with inclusion of too much cultural information in that this might create a boring atmosphere or could lead to linguistic/cultural imperialism. They expressed concerns about students’ possibility of being overly sympathetic to US/UK culture.

Moreover, teachers perceived that their students mostly had positive attitudes towards the target language culture. They mostly noted the students’ interest in the target culture. According

to the teachers, their students are keen on analyzing the target cultural knowledge and comparing it with native culture. This may reflect a perceived positive attitude towards the target language culture in EFL classrooms. This might also imply that students in the preparatory schools of universities in Ankara are not ethnocentric. They do not resist learning about other cultures and people, which may indicate their self-awareness and confidence in own culture. However, as stated before, the subjects' responses reflect only their opinions. Teachers' perceptions here may partially be a sign of their positive attitudes; nevertheless, in order to be able to make generalization about students' attitudes towards culture, what we need is empirical research based on student perceptions.

A significant finding of this study was that although teachers thought that "culture" was necessary for their students, it generally was not their primary concern compared to other subject matter in ELT. Reading and vocabulary were regarded as being considerably far more important than "culture." In fact, the majority of the teachers ranked culture in the ninth place among their top ten priorities.

There may be several reasons behind such a stance on the part of the teachers. First of all, teachers may not be attaching special importance to culture, but teaching culture implicitly because they think that culture and language cannot be separated. As Fantini (1997: x) suggests, language teachers often treat culture as supplemental or incidental to "the real task." Similarly they might not be seeing culture as a separate objective to achieve, but as an additional motivational tool that fosters language learning. They may be using culture as a pedagogic tool for attracting student interest, or for contextualizing language teaching (Byram et al., 1991). Finally, it is also likely that teachers did not seriously think about the intensive presence and importance of cultural elements –or even how much they used it– in their lessons until they were explicitly asked about it in this study. Whatever the reason might be, it was clear that EFL teachers' positive attitudes towards culture did not necessarily bring about its prioritization in their instruction.

Although EFL teachers regard more successful communication and intellectual development as important goals, developing an awareness of other cultures precede the other aims in their classrooms. This may be attributed to the teachers' general tendency to see culture mainly from a sociological perspective. Furthermore, this may indicate that teachers tend to perceive foreign language education as a part of students' development as human beings. This

perception reveals that teachers associate foreign language education with social and intellectual development, as well.

A majority of the teachers also designated the ELT teacher as the presenter of the differences and similarities between the native and the English/American culture. The results significantly affirm the previous findings about teachers' perception of the role of culture in ELT classes. Nonetheless, the teachers' opinions on their role were far from meeting the expectations of the researchers. In terms of the teacher roles, Hughes (1986) stated that a teacher should be a philosopher, geographer, historian, philologist, and literary critic. To Altman (1981), the teacher functions as a "skillful developer of communicative competence in the classroom," "dialectologist," "value clarifier," and "communications analyst" (pp. 11-13). According to Kleinsasser (1993), the teacher role is to be an educational sociologist, anthropologist, ethnographer, intercultural educator, and, of course, comparative sociolinguist mastering the ins and outs of culturally determined linguistic variation. This discrepancy between what is hypothesized and what actually takes place may be either due to teachers' underestimation of their role as educators, or owing to overstated expectations posed by the researchers. In either way, there is certainly an inconsistency between the theory and the application.

Teachers' opinions on the assessment of cultural knowledge were also used to answer the last research question. As in the case of ranking the priorities, teachers' positive attitudes seemed to have shifted when assessing cultural information was concerned. Most of the teachers said culture should not be assessed, as well as some of them stating that it could not be. In other words, linguistic objectives were prioritized by the teachers in terms of assessment. It was evident that when teachers were led to give a serious thought to the role of culture by such an assessment based question, they came to realize once more that culture, for them, is either a pedagogic "device that is helpful to learn language" or "to gain new insights." This may also reveal that culture might not be viewed by the teachers as something to be presented in a totally free manner, but rather an aspect to be given in accordance with the learners needs.

The study showed that teachers' definition of culture in general slightly differs from their description of culture in the framework of ELT. This difference seems to affect their instructional decisions and the nature of cultural information they present to their students. The study also revealed teachers' positive attitudes towards incorporating cultural information. Yet, this positive attitude appeared to be a kind of contribution to better teaching and learning of English, rather

than a requirement which is perceived to be more important than the linguistic objectives. Teachers tend to incorporate cultural knowledge for personal development of students and for improved motivation to learn. Teachers do not aim at any change in the students' behavior in respect to the target language culture, but they intend to increase the learners' awareness of other cultures and people for intellectual development.

5.1. Implications for teaching

In addition to the conclusions reached and interpretation made according to the results of the study, the following implications for foreign language teaching can be suggested:

1. As seen in the current study, cultural information is generally dominated by the course books. Such kinds of materials are usually based on British/American culture in Turkey. However, materials with necessary cultural information should be prepared in accordance with the learners' particular needs, concentrating more on global cultural awareness than on solely English/American cultural information.

2. Culture and language are intertwined and teaching culture should be in the form of increasing awareness and giving information for better communication, rather than imposing target cultural values or urging students to change their own values and beliefs.

3. Too much inclusion of cultural information in the EFL classes may lead to a boring atmosphere and negative attitudes by the learners. Therefore, the quantity of such instruction should be well adjusted by the teachers.

4. Quality is as important as the quantity. The cultural information and knowledge to be presented to the learners should be in accordance with their language proficiency levels as well as being appropriate to their ages.

5. Cultural information about English/American culture should neither be presented nor be used as another language rule that Turkish students should know, but rather as a motivating device which will increase interest in the learners and create productive English language teaching/learning environments.

The research raises more questions than it answers and many gaps remain. How do teachers translate their objectives for cultural learning into practice? In what ways do teachers' knowledge and beliefs actually inform their practice? What is the nature of the relationship between teachers' teaching of culture in the foreign language classroom and students' development of intercultural competence? Additionally, considering how challenging the goal of

teaching for intercultural awareness is perceived to be, studies that will shed light on how to do it should be conducted. If the goal is perceived to be so important, why isn't there more effort put into helping teachers learn ways to achieve it? Given the limited number of cultural studies in Turkey, there is an urgent need for similar future research in the Turkish context. This study was one effort to find answers specifically in a Turkish context; however, in accordance with the nature of the research, it triggered more questions than it answered.

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Biography

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