

RE-CULTURING OR DE-CULTURING OUR CLASSES?: THE INTEGRATION OF THE TARGET CULTURE INTO EFL CLASSROOMS

SINIFLARIMIZI MI, KÜLTÜRDEN ARINDIRMAK MI?: HEDEF KÜLTÜRÜN EFL SINIFLARINA ENTEGRASYONU

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Abstract: *The link between language and culture, and the incorporation of culture into language teaching has recently gained attention in the area of EFL. In this regard, the present study explores the views of a group of Turkish EFL instructors at a higher education context, concerning the integration of the target culture into English classes. The study also examines instructors' practices in classrooms with regard to their handling of the cultural content, and to what extent their views and practices align. Data were collected through interviews, observations and post-observation interviews from 24 instructors. Findings revealed that EFL teachers find teaching culture in their classrooms valuable, for reasons such as facilitating engagement, communication and broadening learners' perspectives. However, a number of teacher and institution related hindering factors of culture teaching was noted. Although it is hard to tell that there is a mismatch between teachers views and practices, many of their views and practices were not found to be correlated.*

Keywords: *EFL, culture teaching, culture, language teachers, intercultural communication*

Öz: *Dil ve kültür arasındaki bağlantı ve kültürün dil öğretimine dâhil edilmesi son zamanlarda İngilizce öğretimi alanında dikkat çekmiştir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, hedef kültürün İngilizce derslerine entegrasyonu ile ilgili olarak, bir yüksek öğretim bağlamında bir grup Türk İngilizce öğretmeninin görüşlerini araştırmaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca, kültürel içeriği nasıl ele aldıklarına ve görüş ve uygulamalarının ne ölçüde örtüştüğüne ilişkin olarak eğitimcilerin sınıflardaki uygulamalarını incelemektedir. Veriler, 24 öğretim elemanından görüşme, gözlem ve gözlem sonrası görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır. Bulgular, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin katılımı, iletişimi kolaylaştırmak ve öğrencilerin bakış açılarını genişletmek gibi nedenlerle sınıflarında öğretme kültürünü değerli bulduklarını ortaya koymuştur. Bununla birlikte, kültür öğretimini engelleyen bir takım*

öğretmen ve kurumla ilgili faktörlere dikkat çekilmiştir. Öğretmenlerin görüşleri ile uygulamaları arasında bir uyumsuzluk olduğunu söylemek zor olsa da, pek çok görüş ve uygulamaları arasında bir ilişki bulunamamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *EFL, kültür öğretimi, kültür, dil öğretmenliği, kültürler arası iletişim*

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, there has been a spreading agreement among educators that language teachers, particularly foreign language teachers, are “cultural workers” (Giroux, 1992). This cultural work has been viewed as carrying the task of socialising students through linguistic practices within the dimensions of cognitive, affective and social aspects, with the aim of developing their intercultural competence (Bayyurt, 2006; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Nault, 2006; Wei, 2005). In Wei’s words, language has been used as a means of communication as well as a carrier of culture, and “ language without culture relevance is unthinkable, so is human culture without language” (p. 55). Such connection between language and culture, and the incorporation of culture into second language (L2) teaching has been the recent focus of research in the area of L2 teaching, and recently gained attention in the area of foreign language teaching (Castro, Sercu, & Garcia, 2004; Luk, 2012).

In the traditional view of foreign language teaching, language was considered as a set of grammatical rules and a good language learner was described as a person who has a good command of these formulatic structures. However, this approach was viewed as having flaws in the sense that “linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language” (Krasner, 1999: 79). The modern view of foreign language teaching, however, has pointed out the issues such as teaching learners culturally appropriate ways to address people, disagree with someone, express gratitude and making requests (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003), which denies the sole dominance of the linguistic competence. As Liu & Laohawiriyanon (2013) point out, with the advent of English as an international language (EIL), intercultural language learning has become central to modern language education, thus directing English language teachers to prepare their students for intercultural communication in an increasingly multicultural world. Some researchers even go further in suggesting teaching of culture as a fifth language skill (e.g., Hong, 2008). This change in the conceptualization of foreign language teaching entails a change in the attitudes and the classroom practices of foreign language teachers as well. They are now expected not only to teach the foreign language linguistics code but also to “contextualize that code against the socio-cultural background associated with the foreign language and to promote the acquisitions of intercultural communicative competence” (Castro, 1999: 92). This idea is also supported with the view that “the need for cultural literacy in ELT arises mainly from the fact that most language learners, who have not been exposed to cultural elements of the society in question, seem to encounter significant hardship in communicating meaning to native speakers” (Bada & Genç, 2005: 73). Hence, to make learners aware of cultural differences and help them communicate properly, language teachers should pay

attention to including cultural elements in their lessons has been the recent popular idea.

Despite the dilemma on part of the teachers in adapting the new conceptual shift in integrating foreign language teaching and culture, and culture still being an overlooked issue in EFL teaching (Lazaraton, 2003; Tsou, 2005; Warford & White, 2012), the recent reports by *the Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR; Council of Europea 2001); and *Modern Language Association (MLA) Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Language Learning* (2007), entitled “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World” (Brynes, 2010) are clear on the reshaped approach of teaching culture as a major focus of language learning and teaching. In this regard, the present study seeks to explore the views of a group of Turkish non-native English instructors at a higher education context, concerning the integration of the target culture into English classes. The study also aims to examine instructors’ practices in classrooms with regard to their handling of the cultural content, and how and for what purposes they use such content. What is more, exploration of whether there is a match between these instructors’ views and actual practices in terms of the inclusion of cultural dimension in EFL classes, are also of interest. The study is expected to provide valuable insight for the promotion of cultural awareness among non-native English language teachers. As this study investigates both the views and practices of the instructors, it may prove useful for the EFL instructors to see whether and how their views and practices correlate in general, and may provide valuable insights on an international basis for EFL teaching and culture relationship in various contexts.

1. THE SCOPE OF CULTURE AND ITS CONCEPTUALIZATION

It is widely argued that culture determines “what we perceive, how we react to situations, and how we relate to other people” (Hofstede, 1984: 31), and that it would not be wrong to assume that “without cultural insight and skills, even fluent speakers can seriously misinterpret the messages they hear or read, and the messages they intend to communicate can be misunderstood” (Pesola 1991: 331). For this reason, culture is often described as containing ideas, traditions, and social behaviour of a particular society.

Recently, researchers have incorporated the concepts of big “C” and little “c” in their studies to indicate the types of culture. Big “C” culture refers to such themes as history, geography, literature, architecture, music, political issues, core values, cognitive processes, society’s norms and legal foundation (Peterson, 2004), whereas little “c” culture is defined as “the routine aspects of life together with beliefs and attitudes” (Peterson, 2004: 45). A more comprehensive theory developed by Adaskou, Britten, & Fahsi (1990: 3-4) offers four categories to define culture: “the aesthetic sense (the cinema, music, and literature); the sociological sense (the organisation and nature of family, home life, interpersonal relations, customs, institutions, work and leisure, and material conditions of a society); the semantic sense (the conceptual system embodied in language) which conditions perceptions and thought processes); and pragmatic sense (the social and functional appropriateness of language use, and rhetorical conventions in different genres).” Findings of the many studies reported in the literature (i.e. Bayyurt, 2006; Larzen-

Ostermark, 2008), however, reflect that sociological and aesthetic aspects (or what is often so called little “c” culture) were the most popular emerging in these studies (Adamowski, 1991; Bayyurt, 1996). This issue, however, is often viewed as not fully involving the cultural dimension of language teaching and developing cultural competence on part of the learners, as language teaching is viewed as addressing the target culture with all of its aspects (Han, 2010).

2. CULTURE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING: PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

There is a wide perception that learners who are learning the target language through exposure to its culture are actually engaging themselves in the authentic and functional use of the language (Luk, 2012). It is further discussed that this engagement would yield to a more meaningful language learning process (Devrim & Bayyurt, 2010). It is perhaps for this reason that recent studies show foreign language teachers’ awareness on the importance of culture (Atay, Kurt, Çamlıbel, Ersin, & Kaslıoğlu, 2009; Bayyurt, 2000; Larzén-Östermark, 2008; Stapleton, 2000). These studies, however, revealed other concerns which perhaps need further investigation. Bayyurt’s (2000) study, for example, pointed out that although EFL teachers paid attention to raise cultural awareness in their students, they had worries about their own awareness of the values of the target culture. A similar finding was also noted by Larzén-Östermark (2008) in which while most teachers found culture necessary, they felt that they lacked the sufficient and appropriate skills and knowledge to successfully teach culture from an intercultural perspective because they had not spent much time in English speaking countries. What is more, they limited cultural instruction to transmitting factual knowledge about culture and viewed linguistic features as the core objective of EFL teaching. Atay *et al.*’s (2009) study on EFL teachers’ attitudes towards and practices of intercultural competence also revealed that teachers were aware of the importance and the role of the culture in EFL classrooms with varying degrees. However, they did not seem to integrate culture-related classroom practices in their own classes frequently. Another study by Sercu *et al.*, (2005) investigated the characteristics of a foreign language teacher regarding attitudes towards intercultural competence teaching and in-class teaching practices. Although there were both supporters and non-supporters of culture integration into EFL classes in the study, it was found no clear distinction among them regarding their in-class practices. A survey employed by Stapleton (2009) also revealed that although EFL teachers felt culture has a crucial role in their classes, only a little part of the culture was introduced in their classrooms, playing a “secondary, supportive role to language” (Stapleton, 2000: 301).

With the aim of explaining such mismatch between teachers’ thoughts and practices, some studies focused on the factors limiting teachers to act in the way they think in classrooms. Some of these are noted to be organizational barriers (Izadpanah, 2011), curriculum and textbook limitations, as well as lack of technology issues (Ajayi, 2008). Such findings these days seem to give a new direction to the research in the area in terms of primarily understanding: (a) teachers’ views on integrating culture into their lessons (Izadpanah, 2001; Larzen-Östermark, 2008;

Luk, 2012), and (b) what limits their provision of cultural elements (Adaskou *et al.*, 1990; Ajayi, 2008). Our study investigates both the EFL teachers' views and their classroom practices in a more holistic manner, and aims to contribute to the literature on culture teaching specifically in Turkish context, and to the area of EFL in a wider picture. With this in mind, the following research questions were posed to pursue the study:

- (a) What are the non-native English language instructors' views of incorporating cultural information into their teaching?
- (b) To what extent do the non-native English language instructors' views on the integration of cultural information into their teaching match or mismatch with their classroom practices?

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative research design was adopted, as the purpose of the present study required an in-depth understanding of the views of the non-native teachers. Moreover, the study aimed to determine to what extent the views and the classroom practices of the participants match or mismatch in terms of the inclusion of culture in EFL classes. Therefore, it was important to observe the participants in their natural setting, and interpret their thoughts and practices within the contextual reality. It was believed that this would allow the researchers to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon.

3.1. Context

The study was carried out in an English Preparatory School of a long-established Turkish university. The university may be perceived as a large one, embodying more than 15,000 national and international students. The medium of instruction of the university is English; therefore, it provides a compulsory one-year intensive English programme for those students who are not proficient enough to study at the programmes they have been accepted. Students are grouped in different levels such as beginner (A1), elementary (A2), pre-intermediate (B1) and intermediate (B2). The training that these students receive range between 21-25 hours per week, and lasts for approximately 34 weeks.

The aim of the English Preparatory School is to provide students with basic language skills so that they can pursue their undergraduate programs. Four macro skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) as well as grammar and vocabulary are included in the program. The curriculum is formed considering the principles of the Communicative Approach. EPS has about forty full-time instructors in total, a majority of whom are Turkish non-native speakers of English. They are graduates of ELT department or related departments such as Linguistics, English Literature and Translation Studies.

The data for the study were collected from 24 Turkish non-native speakers of English who are working at EPS as English instructors. These instructors were interviewed and twelve of them were observed in a language lesson. Purposive sampling strategy was adopted while selecting these instructors, and particular attention was given to select those who were non-native and who volunteered to take part in the study. Each participant was provided with an informed consent form,

which included the aim of the study and the procedures of the interview, and they were informed about the confidentiality of the data and their anonymity, as well as their right to withdraw from the study without providing a reason.

The participants had different educational backgrounds. 20 of them were ELT graduates while the remaining four were graduates of the department of English Language and Literature. 17 of the instructors hold an MA degree in ELT. Their teaching experiences varied between two and fifteen years. Live-abroad experiences of the teachers were also considered, and it was noted that all the participants have spent some time abroad with varying periods of time. Their ages ranged between 24 and 41.

3.2. Data collection instruments and procedures

In line with the philosophy of qualitative research, interviews, observations and post-observation interviews were used to collect qualitative data.

3.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

Among the commonly known interview types, semi-structured interviews were chosen for data collection. With this in mind, the semi-structured interview questions were developed first by determining a set of themes to be asked for by looking at the themes explored in previous studies. These themes were then eliminated and adapted along with the research questions of the present study (see Appendix A). The interviews were carried out at participants' institution and were all audio-recorded. Each interview ranged 20-28 mins.

3.2.2. Classroom observations

To understand participants' classroom practices with regard to handling the cultural content, and to see whether there was a match between their views and actual practices, each instructor was observed five times in a row (five lessons – 50 minutes each). Observation participants were selected based on their responses to the interview questions, their educational backgrounds, and their live-abroad experiences, in order to obtain a heterogeneous and representative sampling, which would reflect the general characteristics of the institution.

The observed lessons showed differences in terms of their focus. However, attention was given to observe each instructor at times when they dealt with different skills of the language. A classroom observation sheet (see Appendix B) prepared by the researchers was used to collect data. This form included sections related to the references to a cultural element, aspects of culture (big C or little c) and the teachers' ways of handling with the cultural element such as ignoring and comparing.

3.2.3. Post-observation interviews

After the analysis of the interview and observation data, discrepancies in six instructors' thoughts and actual classroom practices were noted. These instructors were then invited for a post-interview, to ask further what limited them to put their thoughts into practice, as well as to understand whether they were aware of such issues, by asking them specific questions developed based on their responses in the first round of the interviews (see Appendix C).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings with regards to teachers' preferences of cultural content in EFL classrooms, their overall attitude towards incorporating cultural elements into their classes as well as the translation of their related views into practice.

4.1. Teachers' preferences of cultural subject-matter in EFL classrooms

When the teachers were asked to comment on the cultural aspects they teach or need to be taught in EFL classrooms, many referred to cultural elements that fall into Peterson's (2004) big C category, and no reference was made to the elements that fall into little c category (see Table 1 for the references made). This perhaps indicate the importance they attach to such elements, and the elements that they are likely to adapt in their classrooms. It may also point out the fact that by disregarding some components of culture, the participants might not be fully involved in the integration of cultural dimension into the language classes (Han, 2010). In a similiar vein, as argued by Wintergerst and McVeigh (2010), this limited repertoire of cultural content in language classes may not help learners take part in intercultural communication effectively.

Table 1: Teachers' preferences of cultural subject matter in EFL classrooms

Reference to	No reference to
• Food	• Beliefs
• Festivals/holidays	• Attitudes
• Traditions	• Core values
• Music	• Political issues
• Cinema	• Legal foundation
• Clothes	
• Geography	
• History	

As for the rationale behind the participants' preferences of cultural content, the most suggested reason was their own interests. In other words, the majority of the participants put forward that their interests determine the content of the cultural subject matter in their classes. T17, for example (similar to T2, T5, T6, T9, T12), asserted that since she is keen on geography, history and literature, she tries to pass such knowledge on to her students. She goes further and even claims:

...it attracts some students' attention and some look uninterested, but in the end my interests become my students' interest. And at the end of the day, they learn the target culture from my perspective (T17, I1).

To this end, participants' own interests being the biggest predictor of cultural subject matter in language classes might bring about a limited cultural repertoire in

EFL classrooms since it could hinder the variety individual students' interests might possibly bring to the class.

The findings in this category indicate that the participating teachers seemed to be, consciously or unconsciously, incorporating a limited repertoire of cultural subject matter in EFL classrooms. This reduced cultural dimension mostly driven by the interests of the teachers may result in poor intercultural communication development in learners.

4.2. Attitudes towards incorporation of culture into EFL classes

This main category is presented under two sub-categories, as the participants' responses possessed both positive and negative attitudes towards the integration of culture in their classes.

Positive approach to cultural dimension in language classes

Language teachers' attitudes towards the integration of cultural elements into language teaching was another focus of the interviews. Although few participants had some negative comments regarding the issue, the great majority of the teachers displayed positive attitudes. The participating teachers associated incorporating cultural dimension into language learning with improving communicative skills, enhancing motivation towards learning English, broadening learners' horizons, making them embrace diversity by diminishing biases, helping them develop tolerance towards differences and creating rapport and unity in class as seen in the Figure 1.

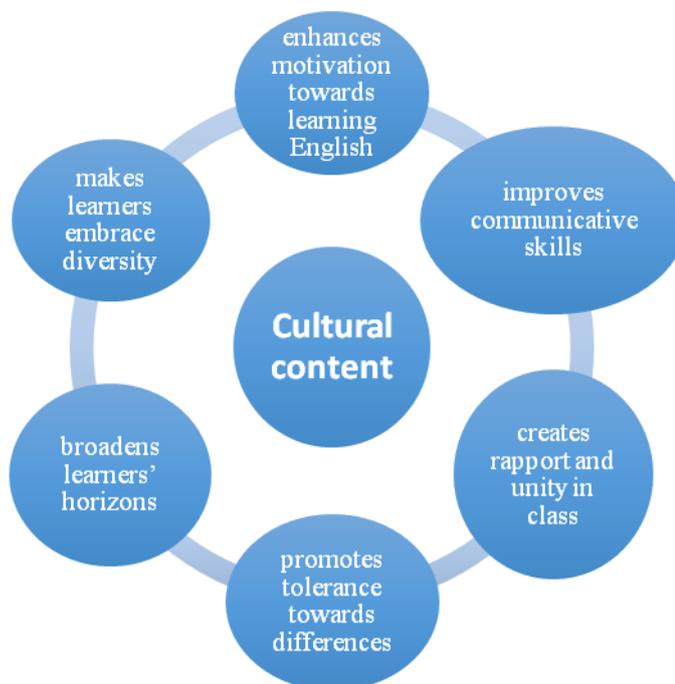


Figure 1: The attitudes of participating teachers towards cultural content in language classes

The most frequently mentioned reason for bringing culture into the class was attributed to improving better communication skills. This is well exemplified by T5:

In today's world, learning about other cultures is a need because norms of politeness or modes of behaviour change from country to country. Knowing the perceptions of others, especially the ones whose language we are learning, helps us to understand them properly (I1).

Another popular area where the participants related culture was about the social ties of language teaching. This was justified by a participant in that “*language teaching becomes authentic only when we teach culture since it is something outside and real*” (T2, I1). Referring to the fact that language is not something in isolation, many participants argued that “*it should not be taught without any references to culture*”, which would otherwise “*turn into memorization not learning*” (T11, I1).

Incorporation of culture was viewed not only as a tool for effective intercultural communication but also as a way of increasing learner engagement and motivation. In T11's experience, “*throwing out a funny and catchy cultural reference when the students seem bored and not interested usually draw their attention*” (I1). Furthermore, feeling closer to the language and enhanced motivation about was other highlighted reasons for making cultural references by the participating teachers.

In addition to these pragmatic approaches to learning culture of the target language, building tolerance and empathy as well as broadening learners' horizons were among other frequently associated concepts with cultural content in EFL classes. However, they did not attract as much attention as communicative purposes and the issue of motivation among the participants. This may be due to the fact that the participants view culture as a useful tool to facilitate communication and motivation, not as a way of having a different worldview by delving into it.

Negative attitudes of participants towards cultural content

Despite the dominant positive attitude towards the issue of culture in EFL classes, nearly a quarter of the participants took a negative stand towards cultural content. These comments revolved around the same concern suggesting that such content is not relevant in an exam-driven learning environment. Drawing attention to the main purpose of her students' learning English as passing the proficiency exam, T3, for instance, emphasized that her students “*are not interested in using language in real life to communicate other people*” (I1). Since the learners consider the English education they are taking as a pre-requisite to be able to study in their departments, they do not seem to care about the culture of the target language. For this reason, some participants argued that the integration of culture does not hold a pragmatic and valid reason in their cases. As for the classroom content, in spite of their negative attitude, some participants mentioned covering cultural content only when the coursebook they are following refer to it. However, they clearly stated that they are doing it “*to learn the language, not to learn about culture*” (T17, I1).

Another negative attitude towards the inclusion of cultural dimension stemmed from the nature of teaching culture in the classroom environment. Three participants regarded deliberate cultural instruction in the classroom as unnatural since they viewed culture as “*something real and one should experience*” (T13, I1). Arguing the fact that it is therefore not teachable and learnable, they did not favor teaching culture in language classes. Instead, they suggested natural incidents bringing culture

to the class such as the references made by the international students as in the case of T16. Because he considered those students as “*the real source of culture in class*”, he put forward that “*those references might naturally trigger other students’ interest in learning other cultures*” (I1).

4.3. Teachers’ actual classroom practices regarding culture teaching

Among the twenty four participants who were observed to find out the ways of handling with the cultural content in class, a considerably small number of teachers made cultural references in their observed classes. The rest of the participants covered various language skills without any cultural dimension in their instruction.

When the culture-integrated classes were thoroughly analyzed in terms of their focus, the source materials and the attitude of the teachers towards cultural dimension in EFL classrooms, they displayed some parallelism along with one difference among themselves. To begin with, their main focus was the same in that the participants made some cultural references during a reading lesson from their coursebooks. Since the reading texts which were to be covered in the allocated class were readily available in terms of cultural content, the participants covering them somehow integrated cultural content in their class. As for the justification for this inclusion, the post-observation interviews revealed that although they have a positive attitude towards bringing culture to the EFL classrooms, their main purpose was “*not to teach culture, but cover the reading text in the program*” (T2 & T11, I2). Seemingly, none of the participants referred to the cultural content in their instruction for the sake of broadening learners’ horizons or facilitating intercultural communication. This suggests that the cultural content in the observed classes was not driven by the participants’ urge to teach culture. In fact, the participants aimed to fulfill the necessities of the language focused syllabus by bringing the culture into their classes.

Another characteristic these classes have in common was in terms of the source of cultural reference. The participants focusing on some cultural traits in their classes mainly covered the coursebook in the observed classes. For instance, in her third observed lesson, T6 made students read a text from their coursebooks about some Korean eating habits. She made a very brief introduction to the topic without showing any real interest in it and directly asked the students to answer the comprehension check questions. The students did not seem to genuinely deal with the cultural aspect of the topic. Rather, they handled the cultural content on their own while doing the related tasks about the text. During the post observation interviews, when asked her to reflect on her way of dealing with cultural content in class, she shared her concerns about and dissatisfaction with her practices. Complaining about the loaded program, she put forward that she would talk about these eating habits more, compare them with the ones in the culture of the students and ask their likes and dislikes about them if she did not have to catch up with the hectic course schedule. Despite the positive attitude towards the cultural content, the participants suggested the translation of their approach into practice might be hindered by some outside factors such as the loaded program.

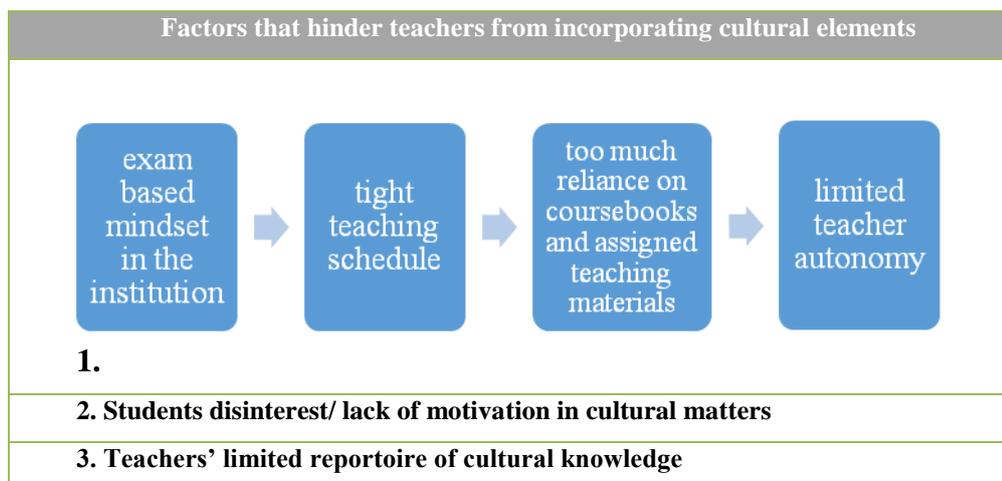
In spite of the abovementioned similarities among the culture-loaded observed lessons, these classes differed in the participants’ approach to the integration of culture into language teaching. Not only the ones who have positive attitudes towards

cultural instruction but also the ones who did not favor cultural dimension in language classes were observed to touch upon some cultural issues in their classes. Upon asking T10 about her talk about the life of Abraham Lincoln, she clarified that it was necessary to mention him briefly in order for the students to understand the content in the given material. Emphasizing the fact that she did not mention him for the sake of teaching history or culture, she justified her handling with the cultural content by facilitating students' understanding of a reading text. This nondeliberate and unwilling integration of culture can be attributed to fulfilling syllabus related aims rather than widening students' cultural repertoire.

4.4 Hindering factors to the integration of cultural content

The post observation interviews conducted to dwell on the discrepancies between participants' views and practices of cultural content in language classes revealed some hindering factors to the integration of culture into EFL classrooms. In the light of the data obtained from observations and the post observation interviews, the participants who supported the inclusion of culture but failed to do so suggested exam oriented program in their institution, tight teaching schedule, too much reliance on course materials, limited teacher autonomy, students' disinterest in such matters and teachers' own limited repertoire of culture as the most significant hinderances (see Table 2).

Table 2: Hindering factors to the cultural content in EFL classrooms



Exam oriented mindset in the institution where this study was carried out was highlighted as the root cause of some other suggested hinderances by all the interviewees. This understanding was said to impose a “*very strict course schedule*” (T11, 14, 15, 19, 23; I2) on the instructors along with prescribed course materials. This was assumed to result in poor teacher autonomy, which somehow made teachers closely follow what the course schedule and syllabus required. As a consequence of this, the participating teachers put forward that under such strict circumstances they do not feel free to talk about cultural matters in class. Since they generally work on “*controlled and exam type activities in class*”, they think that “*there is little or even no time for culture and other stuff*” in their classes (T21, I2).

Additionally, using coursebooks and assigned teaching materials as the main point of reference seemed to limit participants in terms of the content of the class. In

order to cover the target material in the allocated time, they seemed to sacrifice the time when they would otherwise be talking about cultural matters. To illustrate, T4 complained about the fact that she spends “*too much time on grammar*” although the book they follow is “*full of cultural references*” (I2). She underlined that in order to fulfill the syllabus related aims, they generally “*skip the parts about reacting to the content, speaking, doing a mini project or research about the topic*” (I2). As clearly noticed in her observed lesson, she skipped a part about researching the consequences of low birth rates in England and sharing the findings with the class. She attributed her choice to the limited time to cover the vocabulary items in the text and grammar points in the unit. Although she seemed dissatisfied with the translation of her positive views of culture into practice, she felt that she made the right decision in terms of teaching English in an exam based institution.

The second mostly agreed hinderance was regarding the students’ lack of motivation and disinterest in learning cultural matters. Even if the teachers took some initiatives to talk about some cultural content in class despite their hectic teaching program, the students were suggested not to show genuine interest in them. For instance, in one of the observed classes of T23, upon his students’ lack of interest in the film industry in America, the teacher stated that “*the learners seem to be forgetting that language is communication. They are obsessed with grammar and other language related stuff*” (I2). Needless to say, after the negative attitudes of his students towards the topic, the teacher seemed to give up on talking about it. As for the drive behind this lack of interest, similar to the altered attitude of the participants towards culture due to the exam based instruction in the institution, the students seemed to have the same concerns as their teachers. Although this looks like a student related cause of removing culture from the language classes, it can easily be related to the dominant testing focused mentality in the research setting.

The last highly argued factor which prevented teachers from bringing a cultural dimension into their classes was on account of their own repertoire of culture. Despite their positive views, a few participants did not feel competent enough to make references to the cultural issues. For instance, in one of T15’s observed classes, the teacher avoided talking about Henry the fifth as a historical figure even though the pre-reading task in the coursebook required doing so. The post observation interview revealed that she neither knew enough about him nor did some research related to his life and reign. Moreover, she stated that “*the students are not supposed to know about him in order to do the tasks in the lesson*” (I2). Therefore, she directly moved on to answering the comprehension check questions about the text and treated the text as a reference point for vocabulary and grammar, but not as a cultural source. This teacher related factor shows that teachers’ own cultural schemata can work as a hinderance to the incorporation of culture into EFL classrooms together with aforementioned institution and student related ones.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The vast majority of the teachers found teaching culture significant in EFL classrooms and provided several reasons for this, such as facilitating intercultural communication, widening learners’ perspectives and enhancing learner engagement. This study, therefore, has yielded similar results with the previously conducted ones

in this field (Atay, 2009; Bayyurt, 2000; Larzén-Östermark, 2008; Sercu, 2005), which indicates that language teachers have a heightened awareness of the significance of cultural content in improving intercultural understanding. However, regarding culture substantially as a facilitative tool to increase motivation does not seem to be supported by the common attitude towards the cultural content in language classes (Devrim & Bayyurt, 2010; Hong, 2008; Peterson, 2004). Furthermore, unlike existing studies in this field, it was uncovered that culture might not be valued in language instruction in learning environments where the ultimate purpose of learning English is to pass the proficiency exam.

While a great number of teachers supported the significance of cultural knowledge in language education, they did not seem to reflect their views in their classroom practices. They were not able to deal with cultural matters as much as they would like to because of institution, learner and teacher related hindering factors, which were in line with the previously conducted studies (Atay *et al.*, 2009; Luk, 2012; Sercu *et al.*, 2005; Stapleton, 2009). The dominant exam oriented mindset in the research setting appeared to be the most striking hindering factor to the incorporation of cultural dimension into the language teaching. The reflection of the policy of the institution, whether purposeful or not, seemed to be restricted in terms of autonomy and agency, a great amount of stress and less job satisfaction on the part of the instructors. Consequently, the participants who are supposed to fulfill the syllabus related goals in the allocated time felt the need to spend their classroom time on exam driven materials and matters rather than mentioning a non exam issue such as culture. What can be deduced from these findings is that linguistic goals seemed to be prioritized by all the participants and cultural subject matter was sacrificed for the sake of covering properties of language.

Although the attitudes and the related practices of the participants may not be in line as a result of the findings, it is hard to tell that there is a mismatch between views and practices. This so-called “mismatch” can be associated with the language teachers’ low level of autonomy to reflect their ideas in their actions. In other words, translating views into practice seems to be restricted by a variety of reasons such as curricular constrains, institutional policies along with teacher and learner related factors as suggested in some prior studies (Ajayi, 2008; Atay *et al.*, 2009; Izadpanah, 2011). This striking disparity between practice and perception seems to require more research attention since it was appeared to be the biggest predictor of the aforementioned mismatch. Moreover, the factors causing the lack of correspondence reveal the importance of this study and several important implications for the policy makers, school administrators and practitioners in terms of the incorporation of cultural content in language classes and translation of teachers’ views into practice.

Limitations

Since this was a small scale research study, a limited number of EFL instructors in a setting limited to one higher education context participated. Collecting data from a higher number of language teachers in more than one context might have yielded more comprehensive results regarding the issue. Furthermore, spending more time on classroom observations and observing classess focusing on teaching a variety of language skills might have provided more practical data and implications concerning EFL teachers’ actual practices of cultural content in language classrooms.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Sample interview questions

1. How can you define ‘‘culture’’?
2. What do you understand from ‘‘culture teaching’’ in a foreign language teaching context? What may be the objectives in teaching culture?
3. What do you think about the role of culture in teaching and learning a foreign language? Do you think it is important? If yes, in what ways is it important?
4. What aspects of culture and what types of cultural information do you think language teaching should include?
5. Do you integrate culture into your own classes? What are your experiences of integrating culture into your classrooms?
6. If you use cultural information/knowledge in your classes, for what specific purposes do you use it in the classroom? (E.g. drawing attention or increasing motivation and so on)
7. In your classes, how extensively do you deal with particular cultural aspects? Do you think you can spare enough time to teaching culture? If not, why not?
8. How do you make your decisions in term of choosing the cultural content in the text/book/lesson in general to cover or not?
9. Do you think that integration of culture into English language classes would enhance students’ learning?

Appendix B Classroom Observation Sheet

Observed teacher: _____
Focus of the lesson: _____
Topic of the lesson: _____
Date of the observation: _____

Details about the teaching material(s)	Any references to a cultural element	Aspect of culture (big/little C)	Way of handling with the cultural element (ignoring, comparing, highlighting, explaining, supplementing, modifying etc)	Notes

Appendix C

Sample post-observation interview questions

Observed teacher: _____

Focus of the lesson: _____

Topic of the lesson: _____

1. During the pre-reading part of the book, there was a task about reseaching the life of Henry the fifth. However, you skipped it. What was the reason behind this?
2. During the pre-reading part, you did not provide some historical knowledge about Henry the fifth to the students. Was there a reason behind it?
3. Do you think the cultural content in this lesson was suitable for your students? Why/ Why not?
4. If you had the chance to teach this lesson again, would you make any changes? In what ways