

## KÜLTÜR ŞOKU VE EĞİTİM ÖĞRETİM ÜZERİNE GÖRÜŞLER

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### Öz

İngilizcenin ana dil olduğu ülkelerdeki dil okullarına her yıl sayıları artan öğrenciler kayıt yaptırmaktadır. Amaçları yabancı dilde yeterli hale gelmek olduğundan, yabancı dil kültürünün içine dalmanın ve ana dili İngilizce olanlarla konuşma pratiği yapmanın paha biçilemez bir deneyim olduğuna inanmaktadırlar. Ancak, yabancı kültürle doğrudan temas zorluklar getirebilir ve öğrencilerin uyum problemleri yaşamalarına neden olabilir. Bu tür zorluklar kendilerini İngilizce konuşulan bir ülkede İngilizce öğrenmeye adanmış uluslararası öğrencilere daha etkili bir biçimde yardım etmek ve hem yurt içinde hem de yurt dışında öğretmenlerin dil öğretim pratiklerini geliştirmek için yakından incelenmelidir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmada kültür şokunun ne olduğu, nasıl başladığı ve ilerlediği ve yabancı ülkedeki bir öğrencinin hayatını nasıl etkilediği incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın birinci bölümünde kültür şokunun aşamalarının (nasıl başladığı ve ilerlediği) katılımcının gözünden ortaya konulmasına odaklanılmıştır. İkinci bölümde kültürlerin boyutları incelenmiş ve iki kültür arasındaki farklar kültürel temalarla belirlenmiştir. Üçüncü bölümde eğitim ve öğretim perspektifleri üzerine yoğunlaşmıştır. Son bölümde ise bulgular tartışılmış ve yurt içinde ve yurt dışındaki öğretmenlere öneriler sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kültür Şoku, Zorluklar, Dil Öğrenimi, Eğitim, Öğretim.

### **Culture Shock and Perspectives on Education and Schooling**

#### **Abstract**

Each year an increasing number of students register to English language schools in countries where English is the native language. As their goal is to become proficient in the foreign language, they believe that being immersed into the foreign language culture and practice speaking with native speakers are invaluable opportunities. However, direct contact with the foreign culture may bring challenges and cause adaptation problems for the students. Such challenges should be closely examined in order to help more efficiently to international students who devote themselves to learn English in an English-speaking country and to improve language teaching practices of teachers both at home and abroad. Therefore, in this paper it is examined what culture shock is, how it starts and progresses, and how it affects a student's life in a foreign country. The first part of the paper is focused on to reveal the steps of culture shock (how it starts and progresses) through the eyes of the participant. The second part of the paper examines the dimensions of cultures and determines differences between both cultures through cultural themes. The third part of the paper concentrates on the perspectives on education and schooling. The last part discusses some findings and offers some suggestions for teachers both at home and abroad.

**Keywords:** Culture Shock, Challenges, Language Learning, Education, Schooling.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) define culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others”. Culture is learned, it is not innate. It consists of learned values (e.g. notions of modesty, concept of friendship, etc.), patterns of behavior (e.g. gestures, facial expressions, etc.), and meanings (e.g. concept of beauty, religious rituals, etc.) which are shared by members of one group and used as a guide to organize lives.

The culture that one individual represents is influenced by a number of factors like family background, environment (the area or the city he was born in and raised), friendships, education, and so forth; that is, all the relationships (with people, places, institutions, etc.) s/he has gone through and had throughout her/his life. These differences may make the individual stand out in her/his own culture but from the outer perspective s/he is still a member of that specific culture who, without doubt, represents its values through her/his actions.

In today’s world, international communication is massive and carried out not only for the purposes of politics or trade but also to realize educational and/or academic goals or just to meet personal needs. Therefore, it is no doubt that knowing English (that is, being able to communicate in English successfully both in written or spoken form) is crucial as such communication is performed extensively in English because English is the new lingua franca.

Each year an increasing number of students register to English language schools in countries where English is the native language. As their goal is to become proficient in the foreign language, they believe that being immersed into the foreign language culture and practice speaking with native speakers are invaluable opportunities. However, direct contact with the foreign culture may bring challenges and cause adaptation problems for the students. Such challenges should be closely examined in order to help more efficiently to international students who devote themselves to learn English in an English-speaking country and to improve language teaching practices of teachers both at home and abroad.

The first part of the paper is focused on to reveal the steps of culture shock (how it starts and progresses) through the eyes of the participant. The second part of the paper examines the dimensions of cultures and determines differences between both cultures through cultural themes. The third part of the paper concentrates on the perspectives on education and schooling. The last part discusses some findings and offers some suggestions for teachers both at home and abroad.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Ethnographic Interview

Ethnography can be defined as “the work of describing a culture” which aims to understand it from the native perspective (Spradley, 1979, p. 3). As Spradley (1979) points out that the ethnographer should start with a complete ignorance. He should abandon any

assumptions about the native culture and be ready to see the world through the eyes of the native people. He should not take anything for granted while seeking the meaning behind the words or actions; that is, cultural practices.

I enjoyed the advantages of coming from the same culture with the participant of this study as we succeeded to form a strong ground, which is very important to conduct such a study as trust and feeling comfortable form the crucial basis for a successful ethnographic study.

## **2.2. The Participant**

My informant, who wanted to be named Eda, was a 25 years old Turkish female. She was born in Ankara (the capital), Türkiye. She spent most of her life in Ankara until she moved to a small neighboring city to study at college. She was about to finish her Ph.D. in Türkiye at the time of the study. She came to the US to study English as it is very important for her future career. When I started interviewing her, she had been in the US for about two weeks. I was very fortunate to be able to observe her closely right from the beginning of her process of adaptation to a new culture.

## **2.3. Data Collection**

I conducted interviews once a week for about two hours or more for each meeting in addition to casual meetings during the weekends. We spent a great deal of time together during those interviews and activities we did together which helped me a lot to create rapport, trust, and comfort.

All the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed in their entirety on the same day of the interview. What was said by the participant was transcribed word by word including the pauses, hesitations, coughs, or laughs. Nothing was excluded or changed (e.g., grammatical inaccuracies).

## **2.4. Data Analysis**

Interview transcripts were read several times over and over again to cluster challenges and strategies under common headings. The process resembles a spiral model (Creswell, 2007, p. 151). Excerpts from interviews were underlined, highlighted, annotated, cross-checked, and categorized according to those clusters. Each category and subcategory was given a code.

In order to ensure credibility of the findings of this study, I applied member-checking technique (Ely, 1991). I asked my participant to go through my annotated notes on the data collected and to confirm or reject the findings.

## **3. FINDINGS**

Based on data analysis, the findings are presented under three headings which are culture shock, dimensions of culture, and perspectives on education and schooling.

### 3.1. Culture Shock

Bock (1970, p. ix) defines culture shock as a “disturbing feeling of disorientation and helplessness” when one is directly exposed “to an alien society”. He also asserts that “the more ‘exotic’ the alien society and the deeper one’s immersion in its social life, the greater the shock” (p. ix). It is clear that culture shock is an emotional process where one experiences negative feelings (like being isolated, stress, anxiety, etc.) while trying to make sense of the new culture. It is a process which has varying degrees for everyone as personality, length of stay, pre-exposure or knowledge/training about the new culture, language proficiency, and the like play crucial roles in the process.

Barna (1998) defines six stumbling blocks one encounters in intercultural communication. They are assumption of similarities (between patterns of behavior), language differences (assigning different meanings to the same concepts), nonverbal misinterpretations, preconceptions and stereotypes, tendency to evaluate, and high anxiety. These may also be considered as the basis for the culture shock. Eda says:

Respect means ‘SAYGI’ in Turkish but ‘SAYGI’ means something different in American culture. Its meaning is totally different in Turkish culture because behaviors are different, actions are different.

Eda’s cultural shock process started when she first encountered a different culture than her own. It was dominantly the American culture which caused her shocks. She has had various culture shock stories which give clues about her process of culture shock and adaptation. Eda evaluates the behaviors of a group of students who did not stop talking when the professor walked into the room:

The professor sat down and waited for them. Some of them were talking, some of them were eating something, some of them were laughing. They didn’t show any respect for the professor!

This was one of the huge culture shock moments Eda had so far. She shared her story with great disappointment as she said she did not expect “*graduate students*” to be this disrespectful. She evaluates the actions of American students through the lenses of her own cultural values. When she tries to understand these “inappropriate” behaviors and “awkward” situations, she comes to realize that her accustomed experiences do not work in the new culture as Marx (1999, p.5) puts as “expectations do not coincide with reality”.

Bennett, Bennett and Allen (1999) identify six stages of developing intercultural sensitivity: denial, defense, minimization (ethnocentric stages), acceptance, adaptation, and integration (ethnorelative stages). These are basically grounded within the frame of culture shock stages defined by psychologists as:

- 1) Honeymoon stage
- 2) Rejection stage

- 3) Regression stage
- 4) Recovery stage
- 5) Reverse culture shock

During “*honeymoon stage*”, the newcomer feels excited about being in a new place which offers new sights to see, new food to taste, new people to meet, etc. He notices only the good things and positive side of everything. When the newcomer encounters more problems (problems of language, miscommunication, even shopping and transportation), he starts to feel disorientated and stressed. He starts to notice only the bad things or negative side of everything and complains a lot. It results in the “*rejection*” of the new culture which is the second stage. During the third stage, which is called the *regression* stage, the newcomer moves back in the process of adaptation and finds himself among the people of his own culture/country, speaking his own language, listening to music from his own country, etc. He starts to see his own country and culture as the best and values them more than ever. The more the newcomer interacts with new people, the more he gets used to his new life in the new country/culture. He starts to develop a multi-cultural understanding and realizes that no culture is better than the other, they are just different. This stage is called the “*recovery*” stage. When the newcomer turns back to his own country, he may experience a *reverse culture shock* especially if the period he has spent away from his country is very long. He may find out some differences in his own culture and may struggle when he goes through a new adaptation process once again but this time in his own country.

It is important to bear in mind that not everyone goes through the same exact stages with the same exact experiences. Some may skip one stage. Some may struggle to pass one stage and spend a lot of time to overcome the negative feelings, while some others may go through it relatively easy.

When we go back to the interviews I conducted with Eda, we can see the stages she has been going through. She was enjoying every little thing when she first came to the US as she was traveling around the town and experiencing new things:

I felt like I was in a Hollywood movie when I was talking down the street. It is amazing to be here. I still can't believe [that] I am here!

She obviously was in the honeymoon stage, enjoying everything. She seemed she was not bothered by anything. Everything was exciting, interesting and enjoyable.

Why do these people talk this fast? I don't understand anything!

I am very tired of trying to explain myself in English. I miss my country, I miss my people, I miss speaking in my own language...

How can I call him by his first name? It's disrespectful. He's a professor...

The above quotations represent the rejection stage she went through. She started to struggle using the foreign language to express herself. She could not eat because of the “strange smell” and she could not do any sightseeing because of heavy snow. She started to miss her country where simple things in daily life were never a problem.

She used her own way of evaluating people’s behaviors through the lenses of her own culture which did not work all the time.

He was sitting like.. like half sitting half laying.. in front of the professor!

They don’t share food.. Whenever I bring something, I share it with everyone. I can’t eat otherwise. But they don’t share food. That’s very rude!

Her feeling of disorientation grew stronger and she started to seek for opportunities to meet other Turkish students at the university. During one gathering with Turkish GSA, she said:

You know [what] friends... I feel so comfortable and happy right now. At last I can speak in my own language with my own people

She was determined not to talk in Turkish, listen to Turkish music or watch anything in Turkish because she wanted to improve her English. However, the more she moved towards the regression stage the more she was into doing anything in Turkish. She started to question why she ever wanted to learn English:

I could do quite well in my own country. Why did I come here? Why do I need to learn English? I hate it!

Her country, her culture, and her people turned out to be the best for her. She started to value them more than ever. She was moving back in the process of adaptation to the new culture (the regression process).

The more she interacted with different people and the closer she got to her classmates whom are also international students, the more she felt comfortable. She started to realize the “good stuff” in the new culture:

Actually there are some good stuff that I admire. For example, people are very nice. They always smile and say ‘hi’...

They value people with disabilities. They think about them everywhere. You can see the signs in bathrooms, doors, elevators... that is a very nice thing

When we try to figure out at which stage of culture shock Eda is, it is not easy to identify. As mentioned before, stages do not have clear-cut boundaries and Eda goes back and forth between the regression stage and recovery stage. However, it is very nice to hear her saying:

They don't have to accept your values. If you accept that, you don't get shocked. People are different, they live in different places in different styles. Even in Türkiye there are various life styles which are very different from each other.

She realizes that there is no good and bad in cultures, they are just different.

### 3.2. Dimensions of Culture

Cultures are identified by and examined under different dimensions which can be put into table as follows:

**Table 1:** Culture Dimensions

Dimension	One Extreme	The Other Extreme
Context (The degree to which communication is explicit and verbal or implicit and nonverbal)	Low Context Directness and freedom of speech are core values.	High Context Indirectness and silence are core values.
Identity (The degree the society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships)	Individualism Individual freedom is the core value.	Collectivism Group harmony is the core value.
Power Distance (The degree of equality or inequality between people in the country or society)	Low Power Distance People's equality is the core value.	High Power Distance Respect for the status is the core value.
Gender (The degree of traditional gender role of achievement, control, and power)	Femininity Caring for others is the core value.	Masculinity Material success is the core value.
Uncertainty (The degree of avoidance or tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity within the society)	Uncertainty Avoidance Core value is the certainty: what is different is dangerous.	Uncertainty Tolerance Core value is exploration: what is different causes curiosity
Immediacy (The degree of closeness, intimacy, and availability for communication)	Low Contact Core value is that public and body contacts are not comfortable	High Contact Core value is that body contacts are signals for friendliness and communication.

Adopted and modified from: Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel (2006, p. 250-266)

According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), Turkish culture is a collectivist (1) and feminine culture (2) which has high power distance (3) and strong uncertainty avoidance (4) angles. Compared and contrasted with the descriptions of “context” and “immediacy” dimensions, it can be affirmed that Turkish culture is also high-context and high contact culture.

(1) We are always in close connection with our relatives. It is like a web... you know... it is like... life is like a web of relations...

I am not Eda as an individual. I am Ahmet’s daughter. You know what I mean? When people look at me, they see my family. I am another branch of the same tree

(2) Well... I think they both make decisions. I mean my father does not do anything without getting my mother’s approval

(3) We stand up when someone older enters the room

We use kinship terms to show our respect to older people... we never call them by their first names!

(4) If you asked me this question when I was in high school, I would say... I would say [that] I would expect the teacher to know everything but now I know that it is not possible. Now I expect the professors to be experts in their fields but you know... it is different. I don’t expect them to know ‘everything’... just the stuff about their fields [laughs]

If we look where the USA falls within these dimensions, we see that US culture is highly individualistic and masculine which has low power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance angles. US culture is also falls into the category of low context cultures where direct communication is preferred and valued.

When these two cultures are compared, we see that they are on very different angles. It is almost logical to distinguish them as “black” and “white” as they contrast each other a lot. Taking these into consideration, it is expected for someone from one culture to suffer from culture shock when he moves into the other. In the next section, the perspectives on education and schooling in Turkish culture and how differences between the American and Turkish cultures may affect a student studying at US schools are examined.

### **3.3. Perspectives on Education and Schooling**

Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2006) state that “Culture provides the tools to pursue the search for meaning and to convey our understanding to others”. Consequently, communication cannot exist without culture, culture cannot be known without communication, and teaching and learning cannot occur without communication or culture” (p. 326).

The culture distance between one’s own culture and the new culture (for example, degree of individualism and/or collectivism, religious beliefs, structure of relations

within family, relatives, friends, at work, at school, etc.) plays a very important role to determine the degree of suffering in the adaptation process. In their review of literature on the relation between the mental health and academic success of foreign students, Kim and Gudykunst (1987, p. 47-52) reveals some striking data as a support how deep culture shock can affect students studying in foreign countries.

As we have seen in the previous section that Turkish culture and American culture is quite different from each other. These dimensional differences should be reflected in education as well. When I asked Eda about Turkish way of schooling and education, she pointed out some important differences which may be crucial for the success of the Turkish students studying at the US schools.

Teacher is the authority in the classroom. That is one thing [which] never changes in any classroom; either it is a classroom at the primary school or high school or college... or a graduate course. Teacher or the professor is the absolute authority in the classroom and ... and he must be respected... he must be respected because he knows much better than anyone in the classroom...

Teachers are holders of the truth who must be respected. In other words, as Turkish culture is a high power distance culture, “teachers are never publicly contradicted or criticized” and “the educational process is teacher-centered... with the teacher initiating all communication” (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p. 53).

This also may be a problem for the students who study at US schools as they move from a culture where remaining silent is valued into a culture where one is expected to speak up and thus where quiet students are considered as “problematic” (Cazden, 2001, p. 86). Teacher’s wait time after he/she poses a question is also problematic for such students as teachers generally wait for “one second or less for the student to start a reply” (Cazden, 2001, p. 94).

Of course students are more involved in graduate courses... there are more discussions rather than lectures but you know [what]... it is hard to adopt [yourself] to this new classroom style...

If it is hard for graduate students to adopt themselves into this kind of new classroom style in their own country with native professors, how could they manage to adopt themselves in American classrooms where there is more competition and much more discussion?

Eda also points out the difference between discussion styles in two cultures. She says:

When we discuss something, it is always an energetic and hot conversation we have. We interrupt each other and take quick turns with questions, criticisms, provoking comments... but here... someone

takes a turn, starts talking, everybody listens until he finishes... and the other takes the turn and she talks... that's it! It is like... this is my point and it is yours. That's it! It's not a discussion!

Coming from a collectivist culture where the truth and meaning are co-constructed, Eda has a hard time to understand the new kind of communication style. She also had a hard time to get used to calling her language teachers by their first names:

How can I possibly call a teacher by her first name? I can't do it. It is very disrespectful!

However, through time and after observing her classmates, she got used to do that. It is clear that the amount and kind of interaction affects the behavior and adaptation process of the foreign students in the US.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Through the data from the interviews I conducted with Eda, I tried to explain culture shock stages, dimensions of culture and perspectives on education and schooling with direct quotations from the interviews.

The differences between the American and Turkish culture are reflected on the practices of education and schooling. Turkish students may find it hard to adopt themselves to the new system in American schools because of such differences. They may need more structure in classroom activities, more guidance from the teachers, more information on what they are expected to do in the classrooms, so forth. For example, a Turkish student in a US classroom may remain silent even if he knows the answer due to his previous schooling practices in Türkiye where he is not supposed to stand out unless called by the teacher. He may also find hard to adopt into the new classroom where everybody competes and stand for himself, where a sense of community is not necessarily created by the teacher. He may not be able to take part in discussions or successfully engage in small group activities.

It is a clear fact that the amount of social interaction is the key for the foreign student to understand the new culture and adopt himself/herself to the new way of life. The more Eda interacted with native speakers, her teachers, other international students in her classroom and dormitory, the more she developed an understanding towards the new culture and/or cultures.

Understanding a new culture broadens the horizons of our minds, helps us to overcome the stereotypes we used to hold and become bi- or, even better, multi-cultural. That, in turn, helps us to view our own culture more critically as well:

While I am questioning others, I also question my own values as well... I can't help thinking "why"... there is always a "why"... "why..."... I learnt a lot here...

Adaptation to a new culture does not mean that one needs to abandon his/her identity or own cultural values but that he/she needs to create a “thirdspace” where he/she can create new meanings and understandings towards the new culture (Hall, Vitanova & Marchenkova, 2005). It is crucial for the foreign students who also seek academic success in the US as they need to be mentally stress-free in order to succeed. The basis for the creation of a “third space” may be founded by language teachers in both home and host countries for the students to overcome the negative effects of culture shock. Teachers should value the importance of dialog and developing an understanding of differences.

Eda’s was a personal effort. She struggled hard to overcome the differences and difficulties. International students who travel to English-speaking countries for educational purposes bring cultural values with them most of which are quite different than American ones. These cultural values might be very problematic for them and cause them to fail at school. Dialog is the best way that teachers may stimulate to help their students at US schools.

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