

## EFL INSTRUCTORS' APPROACHES AND PRACTICES OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE\*

 Büşra ONURSOY<sup>a</sup>

 Senem ZAIMOĞLU<sup>b</sup>

### Abstract

This study investigated the perceptions and practices of Foreign Language (EFL) instructors within English language classes related to intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach and encompassed a study population of 129 EFL instructors working in both state and private universities across Turkey. The data were gathered meticulously through a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The data analysis from both the questionnaire and the interview indicated that Turkish EFL instructors have moderate and generally positive perceptions regarding the importance of ICC in second language (L2) education. Despite encountering time constraints and curriculum-related challenges, which often necessitate prioritizing linguistic aspects, the instructors emphasized the significance of incorporating cultural components into English language teaching and learning. This study sheds light on the pedagogical perspective held by EFL instructors, underscoring the intrinsic belief that the process of language acquisition should incorporate a cultural dimension of significance.

**Keywords:** Intercultural communicative competence, ICC perceptions, Culture teaching, Foreign language education.



### YABANCI DİL ÖĞRETİM ELEMANLARININ KÜLTÜRLERARASI İLETİŞİM YETERLİLİĞİNE İLİŞKİN YAKLAŞIMLARI VE UYGULAMALARI

#### Abstract

Bu çalışma, üniversite ortamındaki dil sınıflarında, yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin kültürlerarası iletişimsel yeterlilik algılarını ve uygulamalarını araştırmıştır. Araştırma, karma yöntem yaklaşımı kullanılarak yürütülmüştür ve Türkiye genelinde hem devlet hem de özel üniversitelerde çalışan 129 yabancı dil öğretmeninden oluşan bir çalışma grubunu kapsamaktadır. Veriler anket ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yoluyla titizlikle toplanmıştır. Hem anketten hem de görüşmeden elde edilen veri analizi, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin kültürlerarası iletişim yeterliliğine ilişkin orta düzeyde ve genel olarak olumlu algılara sahip olduğunu göstermiştir. Çoğu zaman dilsel yönlerin önceliklendirilmesini gerektiren zaman kısıtlamaları ve müfredatla ilgili zorluklarla karşılaşılmasına rağmen, araştırmaya katılan öğretmenler kültürel bileşenleri

\* Bu makale, birinci yazarın ikinci yazar danışmanlığında yürüttüğü 'EFL instructors' perceptions and practices towards intercultural communicative competence in a university context' başlıklı yüksek lisans tezinden üretilmiştir.

<sup>a</sup> Ücr. Öğr. Gör., Erciyes Üniversitesi, Turizm Fakültesi, busraonursoy@gmail.com

<sup>b</sup> Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Çag Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, senemdag@çag.edu.tr

Makale Geliş Tarihi: 07.02.2024, Makale Kabul Tarihi: 20.03.2024

İngilizce eğitim-öğretimine dahil etmenin önemini vurguladılar. Bu çalışma, öğretmenlerin dil ediniminin göz ardı edilemeyecek bir kültürel boyutu kapsamaya gerektiğine olan inançlarına ışık tutmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kültürlerarası iletişim yeterliliği, ICC algıları, Kültür öğretimi, Yabancı dil eğitimi.



## Introduction

In the context of globalization, English language learners should develop open-mindedness and cultural awareness while learning a foreign language (Wujiabudula, 2019). Understanding and respecting cultural differences is essential for establishing effective and harmonious communication with people from various cultural backgrounds (Lai & Gu, 2011). Learners need to understand that words and gestures can have divergent meanings in different cultures, and being aware of these differences can prevent unintentional offense. In other words, Learners should cultivate attributes of open-mindedness and cultural awareness, recognizing their pivotal role in nurturing effective and harmonious communication within an increasingly interconnected world.

Building upon this foundation İnce (2020) and Akyüz (2019) bring attention to the significance of ICC. They underscore the pivotal role played by ICC in mitigating the proliferation of misconceptions, generalizations, biases, and misinterpretations, thereby enhancing our collective understanding of individuals who share our global space. The goal of intercultural communication is not only to avoid misunderstandings but also to foster efficient and meaningful human communication across cultural boundaries. It promotes the idea that successful communication is about more than just language; it is about building bridges between people from diverse backgrounds.

Within the domain of language pedagogy, particularly in the field of English teaching, the prominence of intercultural competence has burgeoned (Gu, 2016; Sundaravalli, 2012). This evolution aligns with the growing recognition of culture's pivotal role in both the process of learning and teaching a foreign language. As a consequence, new terms such as intercultural competence (IC) and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) have emerged in the literature. Byram (2000) offers a comprehensive definition of ICC, characterizing it as the capacity to establish influential dialogues with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Complementarily, Beamer (1992) underscores the importance of ICC in encoding and decoding hidden meanings or messages within the target language. Language, as they contend, is a complex output inextricably intertwined with various cultural components, encompassing religion, traditions, and customs.

Regarding the development of ICC, it emerges as a paramount issue in the realm of second language (L2) education, playing a significant role in enriching L2 language acquisition. Notably, ICC is not an innate ability; it is a trait that requires cultivation through education, practice, and experiential learning (Wiseman, 2002). Recognizing that ICC is a learned attribute, foreign language education assumes a pivotal role in nurturing open-mindedness and moderation towards diverse cultures, thereby benefiting both non-native and native learners. The integration of ICC into the L2 classroom setting has, accordingly, risen to the forefront of concerns within the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) (Tseng, 2002). These concerns generally result from teachers' ignoring the dynamics of cross-cultural

relationships in their teaching. To make it clear, a pedagogical approach focused solely on linguistic structures, while isolating culture from language, falls short in terms of effective foreign language instruction (Sercu et al., 2005).

In light of the aforementioned setting, the study plans to offer insight into the behaviours and perspectives of EFL teachers about ICC within the educational framework of Turkey. The study accomplished its aims via the use of the research questions listed below.

**Q1.**What kinds of intercultural visits have Turkish EFL instructors experienced?

**Q2.**What perceptions do Turkish EFL instructors have of ICC?

**Q3.**What do Turkish EFL instructors think about the place of ICC in their current professional teaching process?

## **A. DEFINING OF CULTURE**

Culture is a nuanced and comprehensive concept that encompasses various fundamental aspects of individuals' communities, encompassing their social norms and legal frameworks. In essence, it is deeply rooted in economic, historical, and social contexts, exerting a significant influence (Nieto, 2010). The distinctive identities associated with cultures are carried by people, shaping their social interactions, and this cultural inheritance is passed down from one generation to the next (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Suchankova, 2014).

Scholars have long attempted to elucidate different dimensions of culture to illuminate cultural issues (Robinson, 1988; Sapir, 2002; William, 1983). Porter and Samovar (1991) emphasize that culture's core lies in the history, traditions, customs, and routines shared among family members and ancestors. These components collectively sustain culture within a community, molding individuals' personalities and distinguishing one human civilization from another (Hofstede, 1984; Kramsch, 1993; Yamada & Guardiola-Saenz, 2009).

In summary, the various definitions and insights into culture underscore that nearly every civilization worldwide possesses distinct ethnicities and traditional principles, each exhibiting unique characteristics. Culture serves as a complementary element in life, expanding our understanding of the environment. Consistent with these conceptualizations, culture is the outcome of a social artifact, encompassing multiple facets.

## **B. CULTURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING**

Language and culture are integral components that cannot be separated (Kramsch, 2000). The arrangement of words, chosen expressions, structural nuances, and even the tone of voice all constitute elements of people's cultural identity. Culture holds significant influence in shaping individuals' perspectives, decision-making processes, interpretations, and expressions (Alptekin, 1993). Moreover, our cultural dimensions impact not only our social interactions and relationships but also our linguistic choices. Therefore, languages are inherently intertwined with culture. Everyday life is replete with

instances where cultural elements are intricately connected with language. Even though our thought processes and actions are rooted in our own culture, we articulate them through the medium of our language. Hence, Araya and González (2008) advocate for the integration of foreign language learning with the culture of the target language to enhance language competence.

In the realm of English language education, it is paramount to underscore how the English language encapsulates a wealth of cultural backgrounds, given its status as one of the most widely used and taught languages globally. The acknowledgment of cultural diversity has given rise to a new dimension in ELT and English language learning. Cunningsworth (1995) asserts that studying language as a mere abstract system is insufficient in preparing students to effectively navigate the real world. Additionally, Fantini (2000) emphasizes that individuals can enrich their worldview by enhancing proficiency in foreign languages and gaining cultural competence. Thus, it is crucial to highlight the role of English language education in fostering cultural awareness among second language learners. This awareness not only enables personal growth by expanding horizons but also facilitates an understanding of cultural diversity within the global context.

## **C. METHODOLOGY**

### **1. Research Design**

The research was carried out through a mixed- method research design, aiming to determine Turkish EFL lecturers' perceptions of ICC and how they engaged ICC in English language classes. Among the mixed-methods research designs, the explanatory sequential design was used in this research. The order of priority of this research was as follows: First, researchers gathered quantitative data from participants of the study. Then, qualitative data was collected in an attempt to further clarify or expand on the quantitative findings. The idea behind this explanatory sequential design was that while quantitative data and findings offered a broad framework for the research question, qualitative data served audiences more in-depth analysis to clarify, and broaden the broad framework (Creswell, 2012). This means the quantitative data gathered from a specific population was thoroughly elaborated with the assistance of a qualitative study (Şen, 2020).

### **2. Participants and Settings**

The present research was undertaken during the spring term of 2020-2021 at both private and state universities located within the Türkiye territory. The choice of universities as the research setting was of paramount significance, primarily due to the diverse composition of instructors and students hailing from various cities, regions, and international backgrounds. This diverse and multicultural milieu inherent to university settings served as a compelling rationale for the investigation of ICC. Consequently, the chosen setting aligned harmoniously with the overarching research objective, making it highly suitable for the intended purpose of this study.

In this mixed-method research, the target population was Turkish EFL instructors who were employed at both private and state universities in Turkey. The web-based questionnaire was administered to EFL instructors who volunteered to participate in the study after receiving approval for

its implementation. The participants of the questionnaire were randomly selected. There was a total of 129 participants in this study: 72 participants from state universities and 57 instructors from private universities in Turkey contributed to the questionnaire. It was expected that selecting an approximate number of participants would minimize discrepancies in the results. For the qualitative part of the research, 10 participants were selected on a voluntary basis among the survey participants.

### 3. Instruments

The research design of this study was mixed-method. Two different instruments, which are a web-based survey questionnaire and an online semi-structured interview were conducted in order to examine EFL instructors' practices and perceptions of ICC within the Turkey context. Among quantitative tools, questionnaires were most instrumental as they provided the means to collect a large amount of multifaceted data (Dörnyei 2010).

### 4. Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative analysis was employed for the first two questions, and qualitative analysis was used for the last question. To address the research questions, the data were evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively.

First of all, the data of the web-based questionnaire was computer coded using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analyses of the quantitative data obtained from the survey were done using inferential statistics. The aim of inferential statistics is to make assumptions or inferences about a population based on observations and comparisons of a sample that is representative of the demographic of which it is being generalized (Crossman, 2012). Out-of-range values and missing values were determined to avoid misinterpretation of the results. Additionally, descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviation, frequencies and percentages were presented to highlight participants' perceived level of intercultural communicative competence.

The recordings of the interviews were transcribed and translated from Turkish into English for qualitative data analysis. One of the colleagues who was an expert translator assisted in translating the data from Turkish to English. Afterwards, content analysis was applied to explore participants' perceptions on ICC and their implementation of ICC into the L2 lessons. The content analysis included data coding and it strengthened the reliability and validity of the analysis (Friedman, 2012). Some methods such as coding, categorizing and identifying were used to specifically analyse the data.

Data coding was handled in a standardized manner according to the steps. During the initial coding process, the researcher perused each piece of data one by one, assigning codes that corresponded to specific topics. Constant comparison was used to find similarities and variations in the results. The researcher used axial coding to discover patterns by comparing coding groups that elicit within categories. There were proven links between the various categories. In selective coding, the researcher created the selected codes by applying them to the remaining results.

## **D. RESULTS**

### **1. Cross-cultural Experiences of Turkish EFL Instructors**

The first part of the questionnaire addresses the first research question. The first set of questions concentrated on three dimensions of cross-cultural experiences: what countries the participants have recently visited in the inner circle countries where English is the predominant language include the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, the purpose of their visits, the length of stay of their visits, and where they get information about English-speaking countries. 34.7% of the participants visited the USA (n=25) and 30.6 % visited England (n=22). However, Canada and Ireland were the least visited inner-circle countries by participants (n=5). The results show that the USA was the most visited inner circle country among participants, and England was the second most visited. Also, the participants were requested to choose their reasons for travelling to certain countries.

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of eight options and one open-ended question. Participants were asked to answer by selecting the suitable choices. The results showed that the main reason participants visited inner-circle countries was tourist visits (n=49, 37.1%). Moreover, results revealed that visits to friends (n=21, 15.9%), attending a course or conference, and other works in the country were higher up on the table than other visit types. Furthermore, teacher exchange was the least opted reason by the participants for travelling to the inner-circle countries.

Another focus was created to indicate what sources the participants use to gather information about English speaking countries. In the questionnaire, seven sources were listed and the participants could check more than one options. Additionally, there was an open-ended option at the end of the items. Thus, multiple response analysis was carried out to learn where participants get information about English speaking countries. According to results, The Internet had the highest frequency where participants get information about English speaking countries (N=111, 19.0%). The lowest frequency besides other was cultural institutes which are selected only 25 times (4.3%).

The final question in the first part of the questionnaire related to frequency of the participants' visits. The questionnaire included choices ranging from "more than twice a year" to "never." Answers revealed that almost 46% of the participants (n=59) never visit countries where L1 is English. Moreover, 37% of the participants stated that they visited less frequently compared to other participants. Thus, results illustrated that almost half of the participants visited countries, whereas almost half of them never visited countries where L1 was English.

## 2. Descriptive Statistics of Turkish EFL Instructors' Responses

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Perceptions of Culture Teaching Objectives and Activities

Subsection	Statements	Mean (m)	Standard Deviation (SD)
1	1. Promote the acquisition of an open mind and a positive disposition towards unfamiliar cultures	2.76	0.46
	4. Promote the acquisition of a level of proficiency in the foreign language that will allow the learners to use the foreign language for practical purposes	2.81	0.45
	6. Assist my students to acquire a level of proficiency in the foreign language that will allow them to read literary works in the foreign language	2.46	0.62
2	1. I tell my pupils what I heard (or read) about the foreign country or culture	2.58	0.54
	8. I invite a person originating from the foreign country to my classroom	1.45	0.65
3	<i>Participants' Time Allocation for Language and Culture Teaching</i>		
	<i>Distribution of time:</i>		
	- 80% language teaching – 20% culture teaching	38.8%	(n=50)
	- Fully integrated language and culture teaching	24%	(n=31)
4	<i>Perspectives on Intercultural Foreign Language Teaching</i>		
	4. All students should acquire intercultural competence, not only pupils in classrooms with ethnic minority communities	4.30	0.89
	11. Foreign language teaching should deepen pupils' understanding of their own culture, not just foreign cultures	4.30	0.79
	2. Intercultural education has no effect on students' attitudes	1.85	1.22

The first subsection, consisting of eight statements, sought to answer the question of how Turkish EFL instructors considered the objectives of culture teaching. This part was measured by a three-point Likert-scale (1= not important, 2= somewhat important and 3= very important). It was composed of eight statements and included cultural teaching, language teaching and teaching objectives for general skills. A three Likert scale measured these items. According to the results, Item 4 "Promote the acquisition of a level of proficiency in the foreign language that will allow the learners to use the foreign language for practical purposes" (M=2.81, sd=0.45) had the highest mean score compared to other items. Also, Item 1 "Promote the acquisition of an open mind and a positive disposition towards unfamiliar cultures" (m=2.76, sd=0.46) had higher mean score compared to others. Moreover, Item 6 "Assist my students to acquire a level of proficiency in the foreign language that will allow them to read literary works in the foreign language" (m=2.46, sd=0.62), had the lowest mean score compared to others. All items in this part

of the questionnaire had a mean score of 2.00 or higher out of 3.00. Thus, the results demonstrated that the participants had a high tendency towards culture teaching objectives. One additional subsection within the study examines the proclivities of participants with regard to cultural teaching practices and the frequency of their implementation in their educational settings. This subsection encompasses a total of 16 distinct statements, which have been categorized into three primary groups: teacher-centred, teacher and student-centred, and student-centred activities. These divisions provide a structured framework for exploring the extent to which educators incorporate culturally relevant pedagogical strategies within their classrooms. A three Likert scale measured these items. According to the results, Item 1 "I tell my pupils what I heard (or read) about the foreign country or culture" ( $m=2.58$ ,  $sd=0.54$ ), had the highest mean score compared to other items. Besides, Item 8, "I invite a person originating from the foreign country to my classroom" ( $M=1.45$ ,  $SD=0.65$ ), had the lowest mean score compared to others. The results showed that the participants employ culture teaching activities often. The findings also indicated that teachers preferred teacher and student-centred activities and students centred activities compared to teacher-centred activities. In the further subsection, participants were requested to choose the best option to illustrate that how they allocate their teaching time over 'language teaching' and 'culture teaching'. Results showed the time allocation for all of the participants ( $N = 129$ ) in percentages. Eventually, 38,8% of the participants reported that ( $n=50$ ), they distribute their time over 80% language teaching–20% culture teaching. Moreover, 24% of the participants ( $n=31$ ) reported that they fully integrate the language and culture teaching. The findings of the study revealed that a substantial majority of the participants did not exhibit a comprehensive integration of cultural elements within the context of language instruction. In the final section of the study, attention was directed towards assessing the participants' perspectives on intercultural foreign language teaching. The outcomes of the investigation indicate noteworthy variations in the respondents' attitudes and beliefs. Specifically, two items, Item 4, "All students should acquire intercultural competence, not only pupils in classrooms with ethnic minority communities," ( $m= 4.30$ ,  $sd = 0.89$ ), and Item 11, "Foreign language teaching should not only touch upon foreign cultures. It should also deepen pupils' understanding of their own culture" ( $m= 4.30$ ,  $sd= 0.79$ ), garnered the highest mean scores within the dataset. Conversely, Item 2, "Intercultural education has no effect whatsoever on students' attitudes" ( $m=1.85$ ,  $sd= 1.22$ ), which is a negatively framed statement, garnered the lowest mean score among the items. It is noteworthy that the majority of participants did not align with Item 2, indicating their disagreement with the negative assertion. Consequently, the results suggested a moderate inclination among participants towards embracing intercultural foreign language teaching as a pedagogical approach.

### 3. Turkish EFL Instructors' Perceptions and Classroom Implementation of ICC

To address the final research question, interviews were conducted with Turkish EFL instructors to explore their views on culture teaching, the integration of language and culture, perceived limitations, and classroom practices related to ICC. The interview encompassed five open-ended questions, and participants' responses on ICC were analyzed, leading to the identification of themes, codes, and their respective frequencies ( $f$ ), as summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** General Responses about Foreign Language and Culture Teaching

Themes	Codes	F
General Opinions	Significance	6
	Inadequacy	3
	Necessary	3
Positive Opinions	World Language	1
	Effective Communication	2
	Taught	1
Negative Opinions	Weak	2
	Limited Time	2

The importance of teaching culture, the necessity of teaching culture, and the inadequacy of teaching culture were some of the general ideas about cultural teaching. One of the concerns was the significance of ICC on foreign language classrooms ( $f=6$ ). The importance of teaching culture was explained by Mrs. Leyli as follows:

“As an English teacher, I totally support teaching culture in foreign language classrooms. Especially for English. I mean, English education must include ICC because it is spoken by everyone. That’s why, it is not enough having advance grammar input to interact and use the language effectively. It may be enough to pass exams but real world is so different. There is no way to use English without cultural knowledge”.

Furthermore, Mr. Sayın emphasized the requisite role of ICC in the domain of foreign language education as follows:

“We should prepare our students for the active use of a foreign language and the environments where that language is actively used... We cannot ignore the importance of culture in social life. We should also prepare our students for misunderstandings caused by cultural differences, especially in the use of foreign languages”.

Three of the participants underscored the indispensability of ICC for mitigating culture shock and averting intercultural challenges when engaging with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, two participants highlighted the significance of ICC in ameliorating the potential misunderstandings that can arise due to disparities in both culture and language during international interactions.

To be able to clarify the second question of the interview focusing on the ideas related to the integration of ICC in EFL classrooms, three of the participants emphasized the importance of incorporating culture into foreign language education. They mentioned that even within Turkey when a person moves from one region to another, their culture changes, and their language changes as well. They put forward that L2 learners struggle to understand a word, phrase or an idiom as a result of localism while learning a language. Therefore, they can learn more deeply by learning the culture of that language, rather than just learning linguistic items of the language. In order to shed light on the third

question of the interview concentrating on how to integrate culture teaching into the L2 lessons, all of the participants stated that technology is the easiest and the most significant tool to reach and visualize different cultures without wasting time. They demonstrated how they would promote their students' ICC through technology. Table 3 summarizes these findings.

**Table 3.** Implementation of ICC into Foreign Language Classrooms

Themes	Codes	F
<b>Materials</b>	Films – TV series	6
	Songs	2
	Videos	4
	Images	4
	Cartoons	1
<b>Implementation</b>	Pair Works	5
	Games	2
	Group tasks	3
	Comparing and contrasting	3
	Social media	1
	Talking about experiences	3

The provided table offers a comprehensive summary of various educational materials and classroom strategies that were reported by the participants as instrumental in enhancing students' ICC. Notably, the material most frequently mentioned, with a frequency of 6, was films and TV series. According to the participants, these visual media are deemed pivotal for cultural instruction due to their capacity to portray the daily lives of ordinary individuals within a societal context. Moreover, aside from TV series and movies, participants also highlighted the incorporation of videos and images in their lessons ( $f = 4$ ). These multimedia tools were perceived as effective means to captivate and inspire student engagement during instructional sessions, with the added advantage of providing visual depictions of the daily routines and cultural aspects of individuals from diverse backgrounds.

In contrast, participants expressed concerns regarding the inadequacy of coursebooks in teaching culture, with 6 participants strongly emphasizing this limitation. Two participants articulated their desire to enhance students' cultural awareness by utilizing technology, such as viewing episodes of foreign TV series and employing relevant videos and visuals, specifically focusing on occasions like Christmas, Halloween, or Thanksgiving.

Besides the use of technology, three of the participants pointed out that some activities were carried out with the school administration to enhance cultural awareness. For instance, one of them stated that in order to introduce the tradition of English tea time to the students and organized a special booth in the afternoon and conducted an English tea time event. Another participant remarked:

“Sometimes, I invite colleagues from different cultures to my classes and ask them to share their unforgettable memories with my students. Unfortunately, I cannot invite somebody very often. You know ,... Time pressure. But I think, it definitely contributes to cultural teaching. They

communicate with each other; they have a chance to interact with a person from somewhere else...”

When asked about the place of ICC in English language teaching as an English teacher, the participants stated various opinion. Firstly, all of the participants indicated that cultural education is an integral part of foreign language education. However, they also mentioned that they were stressed as an English teacher and the subject of teaching culture was seen as a waste of time. 4 of the participants expressed that foreign language education in Turkey is completely exam-oriented and far from reality. One of the participants remarked as follows:

“I do not believe that ICC is adequately addressed in our educational system. Nowadays, we, educators, have become aware of these issues. Thanks to the internet and the widespread use of social media, we learned to respect others’ lives and cultures. I believe that teachers and their efforts increase the awareness of students on this issue”.

Similarly, another participant reflected:

“Although English education has been given in Turkey for many years, we could not reach an effective foreign education level. We have always measured the success of our students with exams. That is why, our students rated getting high marks in exams superior to using and learning the language deeply. Cultural teaching is seen as a waste of time by some teachers and the school administration as well as by our students. Since our students are not used to this kind of teaching, they sometimes find it strange, weird. When I give extra information to highlight some cultural differences, they sometimes ask why we learn this because they are not interested in information that will not be included in exams.”

In addition to the aforementioned viewpoints, a distinct perspective emerged from one of the participants. While acknowledging the importance of integrating culture and language instruction, this participant contended that the responsibility for this integration should not be solely attributed to foreign language instructors. The participant articulated skepticism about the effectiveness of individual teachers' efforts in addressing this matter and instead posited that the integration of culture into language education is a collective responsibility encompassing the entire Turkish educational system, involving stakeholders responsible for curriculum development and policymaking.

Regarding the recurring themes in response to the final interview question regarding limitations and impediments to the integration of culture teaching in the classroom, the issue of adhering to the curriculum was frequently raised, with a frequency of 7. Additionally, the constraint of limited time was a frequently cited challenge, with a frequency of 5. Two of the participants touched on their own students as a limitation. One of them expressed this situation as follows:

“... Actually, I do not know how can I teach ICC to my students, how can I enhance their awareness towards other cultures and how can I be helpful for them. My students are so used to the exam-oriented system that whenever I devote time to a different subject, such as culture, I see at least 2 eyes that question why I am doing it, what the purpose of it”.

Another limitation emphasized by the three participants was the popularity of English culture. They advocated that every culture should be taught. According to them, cultural teaching has no order of importance. Every culture deserves to be introduced.

Apart from these, two of the participants emphasized cultural perceptions limited to literature, however, they claimed that culture does not consist of only literature and it has a lot of other dimensions. One of them exemplified:

“For example, I think greetings differ in every country and it has an incredible importance. How to greet, how to address, these are very important issues... such as, I am trying to show routines of others to my students. Let's say before, during or after breakfast or dinner. These are all fundamental principles of cultural teaching. Literary texts are of course a kind of treasure that give us information about culture and society in particular, but culture is not limited to literature, no way, never.”

### **Discussion**

Byram (1991) emphasized the value of instructors' intercultural experiences in influencing the quality of their culture teaching process. Therefore, the first research question focused on instructors' cross-cultural experiences. First of all, the participants were asked a multiple-choice question about the English-speaking countries or nations they had lived in or visited. The responses showed that the majority of the participants had visited the USA. Also, the second most opted country was England. The findings revealed that when the culture of the English language was considered, people thought of either British or American culture. This could be because most of the textbooks used in Turkey are based on British and American culture. In addition, movies and TV series mostly reflect these two countries. Both second language learners and teachers are exposed to cultural knowledge about the UK and the USA. Namely, it is possible to say that the content of English educational materials and overexposure influenced their dispositions about the culture of English language. When participants were questioned about the nature of their vacations, the primary objective of their travels was found to be tourist visits. This finding is consistent with existing literature, as reported by Sercu et al. (2005) and Yildiz (2016), which emphasizes the prevalence of cross-cultural experiences for touristic purposes, even though such visits were relatively infrequent. Furthermore, the study revealed that a significant majority of the participants had never visited countries where English serves as the first language (L1). This might be attributed to financial constraints and institutional regulations, which restrict opportunities for such visits. Consequently, providing financial resources, such as work allowances, teaching abroad opportunities, and participation in teacher exchange programs, could facilitate greater engagement in cross-cultural experiences.

In contrast, very few participants reported engagement in work-related visits, such as attending courses, conferences, or teacher exchange programs. This may be attributed to the fact that these visits are primarily intended for professional development but are optional for foreign language teachers. Therefore, educators must take personal initiatives to participate in such programs, as noted by Sercu et al. (2005).

Regarding the resources employed for obtaining information about English-speaking countries, the internet emerged as the most frequently used source. This observation aligns with expectations for the 21st century, where the utilization of technology for information retrieval is a natural practice, primarily due to the ease and cost-effectiveness of internet access. These findings bear resemblance to outcomes from previous research in the literature conducted by Aleksandrowicz-Pędich et al. (2003), Devrim (2006), and Sercu et al. (2005).

When it comes to the primary objective of this study was to illuminate the dispositions of Turkish EFL instructors concerning ICC. This investigation sought to elucidate their perspectives on culture teaching objectives and practices, the allocation of classroom time between linguistic and intercultural facets of language instruction, and their perceptions of the intercultural components inherent in second language (L2) teaching. The teaching objectives with respect to culture were categorized into three distinct dimensions: culture, language, and general skill learning objectives. The findings of this study unveiled a prevailing inclination among Turkish EFL educators towards culture teaching objectives. This proclivity aligns with the conclusions of previous studies by Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018) and Saricoban and Oz (2014), which similarly reported positive and elevated perceptions of ICC among EFL teachers. Consequently, the educators in this study expressed support for the notion that foreign language instruction should incorporate cultural dimensions rather than adhering to rote-based pedagogical approaches. This perspective may have been informed by their own pedagogical experiences and observations, leading them to recognize the inherent benefits of including intercultural elements within L2 education, thereby acknowledging the detriment of neglecting these sub-themes in the overall process of L2 instruction. Following that, most of the participants encourage their students to use the target language for practical purposes such as memorization, summarizing, putting into words, formulating accurately. Therefore, we may deduce that instructors want to raise students' language competence levels so that they can utilize the foreign language in real-life situations. They may also want to assist students in acquiring the language skills required to continue their academic careers. The participants noted that their initial purpose is to assist their pupils achieve a practical level of competency in the foreign language. When it comes to the results of the study focused on cultural teaching activities and the frequency in the classrooms revealed that participants frequently use cultural teaching activities in their current L2 classrooms. Moreover, the EFL instructors prefer teacher and student-centered activities, as well as student-centered activities, rather than teacher-centred activities. For these, teachers prefer sharing what they have heard or read about foreign countries and utilizing videos, CD-ROMs and the internet. Sharing information with the students may raise awareness of cultural diversity of the students. Furthermore, the participants also favour asking students to imagine what it would be like to live in a different cultural environment and to compare a feature of their culture with a feature of another culture. These activities contain not only teachers' perspectives but also students' thoughts about cultural differences. They may facilitate the deepening of L2 learners' ideas about both the target and their culture. Thus, an opportunity may have been created for students to express their own perspectives on foreign cultures in classrooms. Additionally, utilizing technological devices and the internet surely facilitates educator's responsibility to depict the target culture's dimensions. The most possible reason for the use of the internet, CD-ROMs and videos might be because most institutions have free internet connection

and projectors in almost every classroom. Also, another reason may be that supporting cultural differences with visuals is more interesting and memorable for students. Therefore, it is important to mention that technological devices are one of the best assistants of English instructors to introduce cultural aspects.

The outcomes of another facet of the study, which examined how Turkish EFL instructors allocate their classroom time between linguistic and intercultural dimensions of foreign language teaching, revealed a notable insufficiency in the inclusion of culture teaching within L2 classrooms. This deficiency might be attributable to restrictive policies implemented by educational institutions and departments, which may manifest in constraints associated with the curriculum and weekly schedules. This observation corresponds with the findings of Young and Sachdev (2011), whose participants similarly expressed an unwillingness and perceived incapacity to effectively translate the objectives of ICC into instructional practice.

An additional plausible explanation for this phenomenon could be the participants' potential lack of adequate knowledge or skills pertaining to culture teaching, resulting in an uncertainty about how to effectively integrate cultural components into their lessons.

The participants' attitudes and general view of intercultural communicative competence were investigated in order to gain an understanding of how Turkish EFL instructors consider intercultural aspects of foreign language education. The results indicated that a large majority of the participants agreed that intercultural competence should be a requirement for all students, not just those in classes with ethnic minorities. The reason behind this idea may be to prepare and raise all students for the global world. That is, to prevent misunderstandings arising from cultural differences, to be tolerant towards people from different cultural backgrounds and to be able to communicate effectively with them. Subsequently, the participants said foreign language education should not simply educate students about various cultures. It should assist pupils in gaining a thorough understanding of their own culture as well. It is possible to say that the participants consider foreign culture teaching as an opportunity for L2 learners to comprehend their own culture more deeply. This may be because being aware of ambiguities arising from home and other cultures during a conversation gives an opportunity for effective interaction. Besides, these findings showed that the participants perceive cultural teaching as important as foreign language education in terms of having sufficient interaction. In the same vein, Han and Song (2011) and Yıldız (2016) reported that both language and cultural teaching are equally important. Also, the majority of participants agreed that one of the duties of EFL instructors is to create and raise cultural awareness among L2 students. Outside of school, it may be difficult to draw attention to cultural diversity, particularly in some countries. Therefore, they might believe that teachers are the most important and effective resource in this regard, and it is the duty of L2 teachers to gain perspective from their students about cultural differences. In addition, this finding can be anticipated as previous experiences the participants have had. In other words, the foreign language education they received by ignoring cultural differences during their student years may have pressured them because of a lack of knowledge of the cultural background. These concord with Kılıç's (2013) and Sercu et al.'s (2005) findings.

The findings pertaining to the last research question, which focused on the general perceptions of Turkish EFL instructors concerning ICC, language and culture teaching in a broader context, and their ICC instructional practices, were addressed within this section. In sum, the study's participants exhibited a discernible enthusiasm for the inclusion of culture teaching within foreign language classes.

A large majority of the participants agreed that culture and foreign language education are inextricably linked. This may be due to the involvement of the ICC in the participants' developmental training. Another possible interpretation might be that the participants have been exposed to different cultures and they might have experienced the importance of ICC in foreign language education. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous research that has addressed the significance of teaching culture (Estaji & Rahimi, 2018; Kahraman, 2016; Şen, 2020; Yeşil & Demiröz, 2017).

Certainly, there were a few participants who thought that cultural education was not vital in L2 classrooms. They argued that the fundamental goal of foreign language education is to educate L2 learners on the use of the language. According to them, teaching the correct and appropriate use of English is the primary duty of English teachers. The reason behind these may be teachers' lack of knowledge about the importance and place of ICC in terms of L2 education. In line with this, Atay et al., (2009) advocate that cultural education should be included in teacher training programs to raise awareness of the importance of culture teaching. Another point worth mentioning is the lack of cultural dimensions in course books. The participants stated that it is not possible to reach a sufficient level of culture teaching without the personal effort of the teacher. The participating instructors suggested that the curriculum should be designed with an emphasis on cultural teaching. The reason behind this recommendation may be to underline how challenging making an extra effort on cultural teaching for EFL teachers. As suggested by Köroğlu (2016), if course books provide adequate activities to contribute to the development of ICC, students can unconsciously reach sufficient cultural awareness.

The minority of the participants mentioned that they organize special events and invite people from different cultural backgrounds to their classes. These findings confirm Demircioğlu and Çakır's (2015) study regarding special ways of promoting L2 learners' levels of ICC. These implementations may demonstrate to pupils that cultural teaching is more than just an issue discussed in the classroom environment. In other words, they may also want to provide opportunities for their students to experience cultural diversity by living in a real context.

Among the limitations and constraints that hinder the effective integration of ICC in classrooms, the most frequently cited impediment by EFL instructors was the issue of curriculum follow-up. This observation is likely a reflection of the prevailing examination-oriented foreign language education system in Turkey. As Çetin (2013) has emphasized, foreign language education is a compulsory component of Turkey's educational curriculum, and this emphasis on examinations may lead to the neglect of other essential aspects of foreign language education.

Consequently, the most common requests made by the participants revolve around the inclusion of ICC in the curriculum and its enhanced prominence in course materials. This finding is consistent with

the conclusions drawn from Gu's (2016) research, which underscores the pressing need for the integration of ICC into the curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

This empirical investigation delved into how Turkish EFL instructors view and integrate ICC in a university setting. An additional focal point of inquiry involved an exploration into the nature of their cross-cultural encounters. The results divulged that these instructors mostly engaged in cross-cultural experiences for leisure purposes. A semi-structured interview was conducted to further support these findings. Despite teachers acknowledging the challenges of incorporating cultural aspects into their teaching, they expressed a positive attitude towards ICC. These insights shed light on the dynamic relationship between cultural exposure and the teaching environment in English language instruction at Turkish universities.

The findings of this study yield noteworthy implications for the field of foreign language education. Foremost among these is the imperative prioritization of exchange programs across diverse educational tiers. It is recommended that the number of participants in these programs be increased, with an emphasis on Turkish EFL teachers in particular. It is posited that cross-cultural experiences and participation in exchange programs should be strategically designed to cultivate the instructors' ICC awareness. The significance of this lies in the recognition that an instructor's openness to diverse cultures is pivotal for the cultivation of cross-cultural understanding among L2 students.

The necessity to encourage and facilitate cross-cultural visits for Turkish EFL instructors is underscored, emphasizing the provision of adequate financial resources to support such initiatives. A positive correlation is posited between instructors' exposure to diverse cultural contexts and their ability to effectively impart cross-cultural understanding to L2 students. This, in turn, substantiates the proposition that fostering instructors' ICC is a requisite precursor to enhancing the cross-cultural proficiency of their students.

A complementary implication pertains to the role of material designers in foreign language education. It is asserted that educational materials should incorporate exercises specifically tailored to augment students' ICC perceptions within intercultural environments. Furthermore, the strategic integration of culture education within instructional materials is advocated to familiarize pupils with diverse cultural contexts. This strategic incorporation not only serves to enrich the educational experience but also alleviates the burden and constraints on teachers, particularly in the realm of cultural teaching. Consequently, a symbiotic relationship is envisioned between the intentional design of educational materials, the cultivation of ICC, and the broader objective of enhancing cross-cultural understanding within foreign language education.

Regarding limitations of the research, data were gathered through a web-based survey, characterized by its comprehensive nature and duration of approximately 15 minutes. The survey instrument employed in this study was designed to elicit detailed responses from participants, thereby contributing to the thoroughness and granularity of the data obtained. The inherent constraints of their professional responsibilities, notably limited time availability, may have influenced the responses elicited

through a questionnaire. Concurrently, the qualitative data collection phase involved online interviews facilitated by the Zoom platform. The virtual modality introduced certain limitations, precluding the seamless exchange of non-verbal cues, including eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions. These constraints, arising from the confined virtual space, potentially impacted the authenticity and depth of the qualitative insights garnered through this medium.

This study possesses the potential to serve as a guiding framework, imparting valuable insights and contributing to the elucidation of themes and considerations for further research endeavors. Initially, it is imperative to acknowledge the delimited scope of this study, confined exclusively to the university context. To enhance the comprehensiveness and applicability of the findings, future research initiatives could consider extending invitations to English teachers operating across diverse educational levels. The inclusion of participants from varied teaching environments would afford a more expansive and nuanced perspective, thereby enriching the discourse on instructors' perceptions of ICC. Moreover, for the purpose of enhancing the qualitative data richness, the integration of varied data collection instruments, notably the inclusion of a classroom journal, is recommended. The employment of such instruments is anticipated to yield comprehensive and perspicuous insights into the nuanced dimensions of EFL teachers' perceptions concerning ICC.

#### **Ethics Committee Permission**

The ethics committee permission document required for the collection of research data was obtained from the Çağ University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee with decision number 2100002996 and dated 21/04/2021.

#### **Contribution Rate Declaration**

The authors declare that they have contributed equally to the article.

#### **Conflict of Interest Declaration**

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.



## References

- Akyüz, A. (2019). Integrating global citizenship education into English teacher education pedagogy: With reference to the united nations' sustainable development goals (Unpublished Master's thesis). Bahçeşehir University.
- Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, Draghicescu, J., Issaiass, D., & Šabec, N. (2003). The views of teachers of English and French on intercultural communicative competence in language teaching. In I. Lázár (Ed.), *Incorporating intercultural communicative competence in language teacher education*. (pp. 7-37). Council of European Publishing.
- Alptekin, C. (1993). Target-language culture in EFL materials. *ELT Journal*, 47(2), 136- 143.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/47.2.136>
- Atay, D., Kurt, G., Çamlıbel, Z., Ersin, P., & Kaslıoğlu, Ö. (2009). The role of intercultural competence in foreign language teaching. *Inonu University Journal of the Faculty of Education*, 10(3), 123-135.
- Byram, M. (1991). *Teaching culture and language: Towards an integrated model*. Multilingual Matters.
- Crossman, A. (2012). *Descriptive vs. Inferential Statistics*.  
<http://sociology.about.com/od/Statistics/a/Descriptive-inferential-statistics.htm>
- Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing your coursebook*. Heinemann.
- Çetin, M. (2013). An interpretive study into elementary school English teachers' beliefs and practices in Turkey. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 4(1), 203-216].  
<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/tQjqi/issue/21398/229385>
- Demircioğlu, Ş., & Çakır, C. (2015). Intercultural competence of English language teachers in International Baccalaureate World Schools in Turkey and abroad. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 11(1), 15-32.
- Devrim, D. Y. (2006). Students' opinions of the role of "culture" in learning English as a foreign language (Unpublished master's thesis). Bogazici University, Istanbul.
- Estaji, M., & Rahimi, A. (2018). Exploring Teachers' Perception of Intercultural Communicative Competence and their Practices for Teaching Culture in EFL Classrooms. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 6(2), 1- 18.
- Fantini, A. E. (2000). A central concern: Developing intercultural competence. *SIT occasional papers series*, 1, 25-42.
- Friedman, D. A. (2012). How to Collect and Analyze Qualitative Data. In A. Mackey & S. M. Gass (Eds.), *Research methods in second language acquisition: A practical guide* (180-200). Blackwell Publishing.

- Han, X., & Song, L. (2011). Teacher cognition of intercultural communicative competence in the Chinese ELT context. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 20(1), 175-192.
- Kahraman, A. (2016). Teachers' and learners' attitudes towards culture and culture learning in a Turkish context. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 12(2), 1-12.
- Kılıç, S. (2013). English lecturers' beliefs regarding intercultural competence. *Hasan Yücel Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 20, 47-59.
- Köroğlu, Z. Ç. (2016). An investigation on intercultural communicative competence's integration into textbooks; language instructors' perspectives. *Kastamonu Education Journal*, 24(2).
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Kramsch, C. (2002). Intercultural communication. In R. Carter & D. Nunan. (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages* (pp. 201-206). Cambridge University Press
- Lai, C., & Gu, M. (2011). Self-regulated out-of-class language learning with technology. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 24(4): 317-335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2011.568417>
- Liddicoat, A. J., & Scarino, A. (2013). *Intercultural language teaching and learning*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Mostafaei Alaei, M., & Nosrati, F. (2018). Research into EFL Teachers' Intercultural Communicative Competence and Intercultural Sensitivity. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 47(2), 73-86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2018.1424020>
- Nieto, S. (2010). *Language, culture and teaching: Critical perspectives* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Porter, R. E., & Samovar, L. A. (1991). Basic principles of intercultural communication. In L. A. Samovar, & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader*, (pp. 5-21). Wadsworth Publishing
- Robinson, G. L. N. (1988). *Crosscultural Understanding*. Hertfordshire, Prentice Hall International Ltd.
- Sapir, E. (2002). *The psychology of culture: A course of lectures*. Walter de Gruyter.65.
- Saricoban, A., & Oz, H. (2014). Research into pre-service English teachers' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in Turkish context. *The Anthropologist*, 18(2), 523-531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09720073.2014.11891570>
- Sercu, L., Bandura, E., Castro, P., Davcheva, L., Laskaridou, C., Lundgren, U., Mendez Garcia, M., & Ryan, P. (2005). *Foreign language teachers and intercultural competence: An international investigation* 10. Multilingual Matters.
- Suchankova, H. (2014). Developing Intercultural Competences during the Language Tuition. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, 1439-1443. <http://doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.412>

- Sundaravalli, J. (2012). *Tips for teaching culture: Practical approaches to Intercultural communication*. Longman.
- Şen, M. (2020). Pre-service English Teachers' perceived levels of and perceptions on intercultural communicative competence (Unpublished Master's thesis). Hacettepe University.
- Williams, R. (1983). *Keywords - a vocabulary of culture and society*. Fontana.
- Wujiabudula, A. (2019). A comparative study on university students' intercultural communicative competence at state and private universities (Unpublished Master's thesis). Uludağ University.
- Yamada, F. M., & Guardiola-Saenz, L. A. (2009). Culture and Identity. *The Peoples' Bible" NRSV with the Apocrypha*, 3-12.
- Yeşil, Ş., & Demiröz, H. (2017). An Exploration of English Language Teachers' Perceptions of Culture Teaching and Its Effects on Students' Motivation. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 13(1), 79-95.
- Yildiz, I. M. (2016). Tertiary level EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of ICC (Unpublished master's thesis). Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey.
- Young, T. J., & Sachdev, I. (2011). Intercultural communicative competence: Exploring English language teachers' beliefs and practices. *Language Awareness*, 20(2), 81-98.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2010.540328>.

