Tertiary level EFL teachers' opinions and preferences about cultural instruction in foreign language education

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to explore a group of English language teachers' opinions and preferences about cultural instruction at the tertiary level. This study, which adopted a qualitative research design, was carried out with 10 English language teachers in the English Preparatory Programme at a state university in Turkey. In order to collect data, an open-ended questionnaire was designed and administered to the participants. The data were analysed qualitatively, and some patterns were discovered from the respondents' answers. The analysis of the data indicated that all the participants have positive opinions about culture teaching because they believe culture and language are inseparable. It was also found out that most of the participants support the instruction of cultural products like food, family, music, holiday and so forth, but they did not mention other dimensions of culture such as practices and perspectives in culture teaching. Another finding of the study was that participants mostly focus on British culture in their teaching; however, only a few of them have a multicultural approach to the teaching of culture. Finally, all the participants reported that they need training on cultural instruction. In light of these findings, this study offers some suggestions for further research and points to some important implications for both in-service and pre-service foreign language education.

Keywords: Cultural instruction, foreign language education, tertiary level EFL teachers

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Introduction

We live in an increasingly globalised and internationalised world where diverse cultures inevitably come into contact, which requires individuals to become more aware of and sensitive about cultural differences so that they could be successful in cross-cultural communication. Raising cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity is also essential for establishing world peace and cross-cultural dialogue through educating individuals about overcoming their negative attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices against the members of other cultures which usually stem from their own culture-bound worldviews (Brown, 1987). In this respect, foreign language education (henceforth FLE) comes to the fore as a valuable means for achieving this aim whereby learners have the opportunity of becoming aware of and sensitive about the target culture(s) through a range of activities and tasks since it is a prevalent view that language and culture are two inseparable phenomena (Jiang, 2000). The main aim of this paper, therefore, is to discuss and present key points about culture and culture teaching, how it could be enhanced through FLE and report on the findings and implications of a research study on English language teachers' opinions about cultural instruction at tertiary level.

Literature review

The concept of culture: Definition and key terms

Culture is a rather elusive concept which involves a range of aspects of human life; thus, its definition also varies considerably in the relevant literature. Brown (1987, p. 122), for example, defines culture as "a way of life; the context within which we exist, think, feel, and relate to others; the 'glue' that binds a group of people together; and the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools which characterize a given group of people in a given period of time." For Kramsch (1998, p. 10), culture is a "membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings", which places emphasis on social, historical, and communicative aspects of culture. Furthermore, Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler (2003, cited in Ho, 2004, p. 64) define culture as "a complex system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviours, practices, rituals and lifestyles of the people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artefacts they produce and the institutions they create". As revealed by the diversity of these definitions, culture involves a variety of aspects of human life; therefore, conceptions of culture show considerable variation.

Having presented a variety of conceptions of culture, it also seems essential to state different aspects of culture. Culture has a dynamic and ever-changing nature which can be difficult to be generalized. Cook (2003), for instance, maintains that cultures are not stable, but they are apt to change continuously which can be due to the effects of other traditions or the time. As a result, the difficulty lies in making generalizations or offering precise definitions. He also points to the fact that variables such as social class, ethnicity, age, education, individual preference, or individuals with dual or multiple identities prove variation within the same culture. Similarly, Kanno (2003, p. 121) asserts that "a culture or society is not a single coherent system but consists of numerous small and large communities with their own shared practices, norms, and expectations", which implies the fact that a variety of intracultures exist within a specific culture. In sum, one needs to be cautious in attempting to define and conceptualize the term culture as it has a constantly changing nature because of the influences of other cultures or traditions and time-related factors and also a number of social, educational, and individual factors.

The previous discussions might have implications for the terms stereotyping and prejudices in relation to culture. Brown (1987, p. 125) defines a stereotype as "a category that singles out an individual as sharing assumed characteristics on the basis of his or her group membership." Negative or false stereotyping entails the risk of describing individuals or groups on the basis of membership of the culture they belong to, which can be inaccurate because of the diversity of individuals composing a particular culture as stated above. It is also indicated by most studies that positive attitudes towards self and the target culture promote proficiency in the target language. Negative attitudes, on the other hand, stemming from false stereotyping or from excessive ethnocentrism, have proven to lead to failure in L2 (henceforth foreign/second language) learning process (see Brown, 1987).

However, for Brown (1987), careful observation of cultural stereotypes can be helpful in understanding other cultures in general and the differences between one's own culture and the others. What all these discussions imply is that being cautious about cultural stereotypes and prejudices is a precondition for promoting intercultural communication skills. After all, individuals can learn to perceive the differences between groups and cultures, appreciate, respect, and value them.

Culture has been categorised into three interrelated dimensions by National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1990), which might lead to an improved understanding of the concept and can also be useful in planning and designing a curriculum including the teaching of culture.

- **Products** account for all artefacts such as food, animals generated or developed by the members of a particular society who share the same culture. Products can vary from concrete objects such as clothing, building; to abstract ones as written or spoken language, music, religion, education, family life.

- **Practices** compose of the actions and the interactions that occur among the people of the same culture either by themselves or with others. Communication forms to express oneself such as mother language, use of body language, gestures, being both verbal and non-verbal also involve functions and appropriateness, including taboos.

- **Perspectives** represent the sum total of attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and they guide people of the same community to behave in a common way. In other words, perspectives are ways of practising the products of the same culture. They are mostly implicit and reflect the worldview.

Apparently, this classification could be helpful in understanding what culture entails and determining curricular issues related to the cultural instruction in FLE. Specifically, a more balanced cultural representation could be achieved by making sure that a variety of dimensions of culture related to products (e.g. food, clothing, music, education, family life, etc.), practices (e.g. mother tongue, body language and gestures, taboos, etc.), and perspectives (e.g. attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, etc.) are covered.

Language and culture

The relevant literature consistently points to an interdependent relationship between language and culture. In Genç and Erdoğan's (2005) review, for instance, it is stated that teaching a second language would be inaccurate and incomplete without the inclusion of cultural instruction as learning a new language does not only involve the study of syntax and lexicon but also the cultural elements of the target language. Similarly, Brown (1987, p. 123) argues that "a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language, the two are intricately interwoven such that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture". Jiang (2000) also emphasizes the fact that culture and language are inseparable. In addition, Kramsch (1998, p. 3) asserts that "language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways". This interdependent relationship between language and culture is reflected in terms such as lingua-culture, langua-culture,

language-and-culture or culture language (see Ho, 2009). Consequently, these views have the implication of integrating cultural instruction with L2 teaching.

Having discussed that language and culture are two inextricable phenomena, FLE undertakes a significant mission in integrating culture teaching with language instruction for a number of reasons. For Cook (2003), applied linguistics is mainly responsible for raising language learners' consciousness about how behaviour might be related to culture and in this way, overcoming prejudices and developing relationships across cultures. Byram and Fleming (1998) stress the importance of culture teaching which involves both the native and target culture. They suggest that language teaching is supposed to have a 'reflexive impact' which has to do with placing focus both on learners' own culture and culture of the target language(s). This view leads to the notion of raising cultural awareness which could be achieved through the comparison of the native and the target culture(s). The authors also lay special emphasis on the notion of 'intercultural speaker' that could be defined as a person "who has a knowledge of one or, preferably more cultures and social identities and has a capacity to discover and relate to new people from other contexts for which they have not been prepared directly" (ibid., p. 9). Considering the interdependent relationship between culture and language, FLE appears to be a highly convenient educational discipline to perform the role of educating this intercultural speaker.

The views presented above provide a sound rationale for integrating culture and language teaching with the purpose of contributing to the development of general humanistic values, awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity, intercultural speaker, conflict resolution, and eventually effective cross-cultural communication. However, there are some points that need to be considered cautiously in planning and implementing cultural instruction within FLE, which will be discussed in the following parts.

Problems in the teaching of culture

Since culture is a delicate issue, some problems appear to be inevitable when it is intended to be integrated into FLE. For Hadley (1993), one of the most common problems regarding the study or teaching of culture is the time concern as teachers feel that they have to deliver their syllabus on time; thereby they cannot include the instruction of culture in their classrooms. Secondly, many teachers feel that they are not competent enough to teach culture as they do not have sufficient knowledge about it. Another concern he mentions is that some teachers are not willing to teach culture because it involves learners' attitudes towards the target culture and this may carry some ideological overtones.

One more important issue arises in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language with regard to cultural instruction. According to Cook (2003), as English has the role of a global lingua franca, and therefore reflects the culture of more than one country or community, some doubts appear about the delivery of cultural elements in EFL (henceforth English as a Foreign Language) materials and classrooms, which makes the situation more complicated. In relation to this view, Tekir, Güner and Topkaya (2010) suggest that English language teachers should adopt a multicultural stance in their teaching of culture instead of being bound to the dominant mainstream culture, specifically British and American; thus, representing various cultures where English is used as a global language could be a tool for enhancing learners' multicultural awareness. As a last remark, the issue which target culture should be taught could be resolved through considering the needs of the learner group and learning setting in question and customising the cultural instruction appropriately.

Main considerations in developing a cultural syllabus and strategies for teaching culture

While developing a syllabus for integrating cultural elements in L2 instruction, there are several issues that need to be taken into account. First of all, a balance should be achieved in designing a cultural syllabus (Hadley, 1993). First, both 'high' and 'popular' culture should be included in cultural instruction. In other words, the elements of the three dimensions of culture, namely products, practices and perspectives, need to be involved in the cultural syllabus. Secondly, there should also be a balance on representing issues related to gender, socio-economic class and both rural and urban lifestyles (ibid.). In addition, dangers of ethnocentrism and bias should be taken into account with caution. Furthermore, in order to nurture interaction, both cultural and linguistic learning should be combined, and reflection on and critical questioning of the target culture through making comparisons needs to be involved in a cultural syllabus (Byram & Fleming, 1998). All these considerations and framework for planning the cultural syllabus could be a practical reference for programme/curriculum developers and foreign/second language teachers.

After having mentioned general considerations for devising a cultural syllabus, a set of strategies could function as specific guidelines to pursue in cultural instruction. A summary of such strategies is listed below.

- Careful plan and integration of cultural activities and lessons
- Presentation of cultural topics in conjunction with related thematic units
- Using cultural contexts for language practice activities

- Using a variety of techniques for teaching culture (speaking, listening, reading, writing)
- Making good use of textbook illustrations and photos
- Using cultural information when teaching vocabulary
- Small group techniques; discussions, brainstorming, role-plays, etc.
- Avoiding "facts only", including experiential and process learning
- Using cultural understanding and target language to teach cultural content

(Summary based on Lafayette, 1975)

While a variety of the strategies or the practices summarised above could be adapted and carried out in the classroom, Hadley (1993) also points out that when designing activities for cultural instruction both the purpose and usefulness of the activity should be taken into account in teaching language and culture in an integrative fashion. Hence, she suggests that a range of activities such as the following could be carried out in the class: the lecture, native informants, audiotaped and videotaped interviews, observational dialogues, and using readings. Byram and Fleming (1998) also suggest that ethnography and drama are two important tools in approaching language learning in intercultural perspective.

In conclusion, for the purpose promoting the integration of cultural instruction with language teaching, ultimately aiming at fostering intercultural communicative competence, the curriculum for culture and language teaching should be planned in an integrative manner, and it is important to design activities and tasks in line with the common strategies as discussed in the preceding paragraphs.

Studies on culture teaching

When the studies on culture teaching are reviewed, it may be noticed that the participants (who are mainly EFL teachers at different levels, institutions, or countries) mostly have positive attitudes to the teaching of culture and its integration with the teaching of the target language. However, different results might be obtained with respect to their practices and preferences about its teaching. The results of several studies will be summarised in the following part.

In Aydemir and Mede's study (2014), the participants were the instructors working at the preparatory programs at the state and private universities in Turkey, and they perceived the target culture as an important element of language teaching. Furthermore, the prevalent target cultures were not British or American culture. Instead, they perceived them to be the

culture of all English-speaking countries. Finally, for the participants, the cultural components to be included in the courses are elements like life, family, nature and interpersonal relations.

Kahraman (2016) also found that Turkish EFL teachers and students had a great deal of interest in culture teaching along with positive attitudes towards culture in FLE. In addition, they were in favour of providing and experiencing a wide variety of cultural topics. Another finding showed that textbooks were the most common way to teach culture, and additional materials were rarely provided.

Kuru Gönen and Sağlam (2012) studied culture and culture teaching in a Turkish EFL context. The results showed that despite the variations among the participants with different backgrounds, they mostly had an awareness of the value of culture teaching and its integration with L2 instruction. Another finding of the study was that all the participants were knowledgeable about the aspects of the target culture to some degree, but the way they handled the target culture was generally influenced by the curricular issues and limitations.

Önalan (2005) also explored a group of Turkish university EFL instructors' opinions and beliefs about the role of the target culture and their related practices. The findings revealed that the participants generally defined culture from the sociological perspective like values and beliefs. Their definition also reflected more visible cultural products such as food and clothing. Finally, the participants had mostly positive attitudes towards the integration of cultural information in their instruction.

Tekir et al. (2010) conducted a study about a group of EFL instructors' opinions and beliefs about culture and culture teaching in Turkish higher education. The results indicated that the instructors' definition of culture mainly included a sociological stance. The majority of them believed in the necessity of integrating culture into their instructional practices. Furthermore, the participants mostly had a perception that the British and American cultures are prevalent cultures in EFL instruction.

Tran and Dang (2014) investigated EFL teachers' beliefs about culture teaching in ELT and their classroom practices in Vietnam. The results showed that the teachers adopted positive attitudes toward culture teaching and suggested that it has a crucial role in ELT.

What the results of these studies might show that in general EFL teachers believe that culture is an important part of FLE; therefore, they take a positive stance to the teaching of the target culture(s) along with the language. On the other hand, there seem to be variations in their preferences about what cultures to teach, what components of culture to include, and what strategies or materials to use in their instructional practices.

Aim and significance of the study

It is clearly the teacher who plays the most important role in the teaching of culture in FLE since whether to teach culture along with the language, what strategies and materials to adopt in teaching it, how to assess cultural knowledge and all depend on the teacher's initiative. For Brown (1987), teachers can help learners gain increased self-awareness and cultural awareness, and appreciation of the target culture. According to Hadley (1993), teachers first become aware of their own biases and help students to recognize theirs to enhance cultural understanding; moreover, they should remind their learners that each culture includes a variety of intracultural variants and warn them against making oversimplified generalisations. Last but not least, teachers must decide on what to include in culture lessons and how to balance the various viewpoints considering the realities of their own instructional situation.

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to explore a group of English language teachers' opinions and preferences about culture teaching and identify their needs for learning how to incorporate culture with language teaching at tertiary level in a Turkish context. With these purposes in mind, the following research questions are addressed:

1) What are the tertiary level English language teachers' opinions about the role of culture in FLE?

2) What are the tertiary level English language teachers' perceptions of the components of culture teaching?

3) Which country do the tertiary level English language teachers' mostly focus on while teaching culture in their classrooms?

4) Do the tertiary level English language teachers' need any training on culture teaching?

Methodology

Method

The philosophical framework that this research study is based on is phenomenology which intends to investigate the mental capacities of the individuals such as perceptions, understandings, feelings, values and so forth. The ontological aspect of this tradition is relativism which has to do with multiple subjective realities. As for the epistemological aspect, the research carried out within this tradition falls into the subjectivist and constructivist category (Allison & Pomeroy, 2002). Researchers in this tradition employ a qualitative approach to research based on the constructive paradigm and aim to investigate

individuals' inner thoughts. Therefore, there is an effort to avoid making generalisations as the results cannot be applied to all the settings or participants (Pring, 2000). This study also intended to explore individuals' perceptions, understandings and opinions about a specific phenomenon; hence a qualitative research approach and techniques were employed in search of the answers to the research questions.

Setting and the participants

The study was carried out in the English Preparatory Programme at the School of Foreign Languages of a Turkish state university. 18 English language teachers out of 20 working at English Preparatory programme were sent the questionnaire through e-mail. Only 10 of them completed the questionnaire. This indicates that half of the total population took part in this study voluntarily. Other details of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of the participants

Category	Level	Frequency
Gender	Female	7
	Male	3
Years of experience in teaching English	1-3	3
	4-8	6
	9 and over	1
Highest qualification	B.A.	3
	M.A.	7
	PhD.	-
	Other	-
Has lived abroad	Yes	1
	No	9
Has had some cultural training	Yes	5
	No	5
Total		10

As Table 1 indicates, although the gender distribution of the participants is not equal, it can be said to represent the distribution of the total population which is composed of 11 females and 9 males. In terms of experience in teaching English, 6 of the participants are considered master teachers (4-8 years), 3 are novice (1-3 years), and only one is expert (9 and over). In terms of the highest qualification that the participants have received, 3 of them have a B.A. degree and 7 a have M.A. degree, which shows that most of the participants have continued their post-graduate education. As for the experience of living abroad, only one

participant stated that she lived in Norway for 5 months and in Italy for 4 months. Finally, with respect to their prior training on culture teaching, half of the participants stated that they had not taken any training, but other half had taken various courses, seminars or workshops on cultural training. To give some examples, one participant attended 'Effective English Language Teaching in Europe: Language, Education and Culture for Teachers of EFL', which was a Grundtvig course for in-service teachers. Another participant took 'British Culture', 'British Cultural History' and 'Multiculturalism' during her BA education in English Language and Literature Department. One participant also did a course on 'Intercultural Communication' during his ongoing PhD education. This finding might be related to the fact a course related to cross-cultural or intercultural communication is not compulsory in most ELT departments in Turkey.

Instrument and data collection

To gather data to answer the research questions, a questionnaire on culture teaching was adopted. The questionnaire consists of two sections. The first section includes close-ended questions about personal information such as gender, highest qualification and years of experience in teaching English. It also involves two questions about whether they have ever lived abroad and they have had any cultural training. The second section composes of 5 open-ended questions aiming to find out the participants' opinions about culture teaching, their perceptions of what culture teaching involves, which country they mostly focus on in their cultural instruction, and also whether they need any training on culture teaching. The open-ended questions were adapted from Alexsandrowicz-Pedich and Lazar (2002), and Tekir et al. (2010). In terms of face and content validity, wording and the clarity of the items were checked and evaluated by two experts from the ELT Department. After the necessary editing, the questionnaires were distributed to the participants through e-mail.

Data analysis

Since this study adopted the qualitative approach, the data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire were analysed through inductive content analysis and the recurring themes were identified and presented in tables. In addition, some extracts from the participants' responses were included as examples to answers to a particular research question.

Findings

The findings of the study and discussions are presented for each research question in turn in the following parts.

English language teachers' opinions about the role of culture in foreign language education

In order to find out answers to this question, the participants' responses were analysed through inductive content analysis and the recurring themes were identified and presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Participants' opinions about the role of culture in FLE

Themes	Participant Codes
Interdependent relationship between language and culture	P2-P4-P5-P6-P7-P9-P10
Improvement of language skills and increased motivation in learning the target language	P1-P8
Becoming aware of other cultures and overcoming prejudices	P3-P8

When the responses were analysed, the most dominant theme that emerged was the *interdependent relationship between language and culture* as reflected in seven participants' responses. Several extracts from the participants' responses are quoted below:

"They are complementary to each other. Teaching language without culture is meaningless and not down-to-earth. As language teachers, we need to be open to new cultures. We can present our student's interesting information about different cultures by comparing or explaining some similarities with our culture." (P2)

"Since language and culture cannot be separated, it would be unwise to teach language without any culture teaching." (P4)

"I think culture has a crucial role in foreign language education because language is a part of the culture. So I think it is not possible to teach and learn a language without its culture." (P6)

"I believe that culture and language cannot be separated. As a foreign language teacher, I think we should begin with bridging the gap between language and culture and addressing the culture of the society in which the language is used." (P9)

"As culture and language are closely related, we should also teach some cultural features of the target language as well as other cultures in order to increase students' awareness." (P10)

The second theme that is reflected in the responses is the contribution of culture teaching to the *improvement of language skills and increased motivation in learning the target language*. This theme is reflected in the following responses.

"Being familiar to the culture of the target language provides an immense advantage especially for the teaching of skills such as reading and speaking." (P1)

"First of all, it helps students have broader horizons about the world itself. As they will learn about other cultures, they may get rid of some of their prejudices if they have any. This may help them increase their motivation and interest in the target language as they may start to question some of their ideas and/or points of view and want to learn more about that language or culture etc., …" (P8)

Another theme which was revealed is that the teaching of culture is a way to make learners *become aware of other cultures and get rid of their prejudices*. Two participants reported that integration of culture teaching might have a role in raising learners' awareness of other cultures and overcoming their prejudices, which could be inferred in the following quotations.

"Culture is significant in foreign language education in terms of giving examples from the lifestyles of people who are from different nationalities. It may attract the attention of students learning a foreign language by facing basic roles in different cultures." (P3)

"…(Secondly), they may learn why and how the target language works as opposed to their own and/or as compared to their own, which will help them analyse, compare and contrast the two languages. "(P8)

The analysis of all the responses signifies that all the participants of this study had positive opinions about the integration of culture and language teaching in FLE, and they also believe that teaching culture plays a role in the development of language skills and increased

motivation in learning the target language. Moreover, teaching culture might help awareness raising about other cultures and eliminating prejudices against them.

English language teachers' perceptions of the components of culture teaching

In order to find out answers to this research question, the participants were asked the question 'What do you think culture teaching involves?' When the participants' answers were analysed, a great deal of variation about what culture teaching involves was seen. Thus, some patterns emerging from the data were attempted to be indicated based on the categorisation of culture by the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1990) in Table 3.

Table 3

Patterns about the components of culture teaching

Components of culture teaching	N	%
Products (e.g. food, clothing, building, written or spoken language, music, religion, education, family life)	8	66
Practices (e.g. mother language, use of body language, gestures, appropriateness, taboos)	2	17
Perspectives (e.g. the sum total of attitudes, beliefs, perceptions)	2	17

As the patterns presented above indicate, most of the responses (%66) support the inclusion of cultural products such as food, clothing, music, religion and so forth in L2 classes. Only %17 of the participants notes that cultural practices such as the use of body language, appropriateness and so on should be involved in culture teaching. Finally, %17 of the participants again believes that cultural perspectives such as attitudes, beliefs and perceptions need to be included in cultural instruction. These findings reveal that the majority of the participants are mostly aware of 'products' dimension, and about one-third of them are knowledgeable about 'practices' and 'perspective's dimensions of culture.

The countries the participants mostly focus on while teaching culture

The participants were asked to specify the top three countries that they focus on while teaching culture. In the analysis of this question, only the proportion of the first country included in cultural instruction by the respondents is shown in the diagram below.

Table 4

Countries that the participants focus on most in their cultural instruction

Country	N	%
Britain	7	70
No specific country	2	20
The USA	1	10
Total	10	100

As it is apparent in Table 4, the majority of the participants appeared to focus on British culture which is one of the dominant mainstream English cultures. However, two of the participants had a multicultural approach to the teaching of culture in their instructional practices. For example, one participant (P2) stated that a*s* English is a global language, she tries to include a variety of countries' cultures, not especially British or American. As can be understood from this comment, an emphasis is made on English as a lingua franca. Another participant (P4) suggested that she wouldn't focus on any country to teach culture, but she would provide as many cultures as possible.

The participants' needs for training on culture teaching

In order to identify the participants' needs for culture teaching, they were asked whether they would like to receive cultural training and what they would like to learn about most if they had training. All of the participants reported that they need training on culture teaching although there are some differences among their needs. The summary of their responses is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Participants' specific needs for training on culture teaching

Participants' needs for training on culture teaching	N	%
To have general training on culture teaching	4	40
To be trained on different cultures	2	20
To learn about literature and gestures	1	10
To learn about idioms and their usage in specific contexts	1	10
To learn about the underlying processes of evolution of a culture	1	10
To learn about the target culture and how to teach it	1	10
Total	10	100

As Table 5 indicates, all of the participants need training on culture teaching although there are several differences in terms of their specific needs. For example, four of the participants would like to receive general training on culture teaching, which might imply that they need training about the content of cultures and also how to teach them. Two of

participants want to be trained in different cultures, which indicates a need for adopting a multicultural stance. One participant (P1) needs to learn about literature and gestures. Another participant (P5) wants to learn about idioms and how they are used in specific contexts. One participant (P7) wants to learn about the underlying processes of the evolution of a culture, which might imply historical, societal and psychological underpinnings of a culture. P8 reported that training on culture might be helpful for many reasons ranging from personal development to increase the motivation and interest of the students, to career development. Finally, one participant particularly needs to learn about the target culture and how to teach it.

Discussion

Concerning the role of culture in FLE, most of the participants think that there is an interdependent relationship between language and culture, and consequently, culture should be incorporated with the teaching of L2. In addition, some participants (P1&P8) believe that culture teaching contributes to the improvement of language skills and increased motivation in learning the target language. Some of them (P3&P8) also perceive culture teaching as a way for making learners become aware of other cultures and getting rid of their prejudices against them. These findings reveal that all the participants in this context have positive opinions about the integration of culture and language in FLE, which actually shows their readiness for cultural instruction and openness to cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity. This finding is line with several studies which also found that the participants had mostly positive attitudes towards teaching culture and its integration with L2 instruction (e.g. Aydemir & Mede, 2014; Kahraman, 2016; Kuru Gönen & Sağlam, 2012; Önalan, 2005; Tekir et al.; 2010; Tran & Dang, 2014).

The findings of the second research question indicate that most of the participants are aware of 'products' dimension of culture and support the inclusion of cultural products such as food, clothing, music, religion and so forth in L2 classes. Only 4 of them believe that cultural practices and cultural perspectives need to be included in culture teaching. In other words, they include two other dimensions of the culture, practices and perspectives, as suggested by the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1990). Of the other studies reviewed, Önalan (2005) found that the participants included products and perspectives elements in defining culture. In Aydemir and Mede (2014), the participants preferred products dimension such as life, family, nature, and practices dimension including interpersonal relations to include in their teaching. The diverse results among these studies

might be stemming from the differences among the learners' proficiency level, age, specific needs or materials used in different settings.

With respect to the findings of the third research question, the majority of the participants perceive British culture as one of the most dominant mainstream English cultures to focus on in their instruction. There is a congruence between this finding and the findings of several other studies in that they found out that Britain is the most dominant country whose culture is mostly involved in cultural instruction in FLE (Alexsandrowicz-Pedich & Lazar, 2002; Tekir et al. 2010). One reason to account for this result could be that most coursebooks are designed adopting British English, and accordingly cultural elements involved in them represent mostly the features of British culture. Since most EFL teachers, especially in preparatory classes, have to deliver a common coursebook and usually adhere to it, they generally focus on the culture presented by the book. It is interesting to note that the two participants who stated that they do not focus on just one country, but as many different countries as possible have taken training on culture teaching. This could imply that they have adopted a multicultural approach to teaching culture as a result of the training during their BA education in ELL (henceforth English Language and Literature) departments.

The findings of the fourth research question are noticeable as all of the participants stated that they would like to receive training on culture teaching, which points to the necessity of in-service teacher training again. They have different training needs such as training about the content of cultures and also how to teach them, different cultures, and literature, idioms, and gestures. The fact that most of them did not do a compulsory course like intercultural or cross-cultural communication during their BA education in ELT departments might account for this result.

Conclusions

This study investigated a small group of English language teachers' opinions about culture teaching in higher education in a Turkish context. Particularly, it was aimed to explore the participants' opinions about the role of culture in FLE, perceptions of what culture teaching involves, which cultures they mostly focus on in their teaching and whether they need training on culture teaching.

The findings indicated that the participants mostly are in favour of incorporating culture into L2 teaching as they believe there is an interdependent relationship between language and culture. This finding actually shows their readiness for cultural instruction and openness to cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity. However, it is not possible to conclude

that most EFL teachers at tertiary level have similar opinions about the role of culture in FLE since this is a small-scale study and of which results are, therefore, difficult to generalise. This fact leads to the necessity of conducting more research studies addressing different participant groups and various settings to contribute to deeper insights about the current applications and perceptions concerning cultural instruction in FLE.

From the findings, it was also seen that the participants mostly prefer to include the products dimension and partly practices and perspectives dimensions of the target culture(s). It appears from these findings that participants need to gain more knowledge about what culture involves so that they can implement a more balanced cultural syllabus. This result has implications for arranging regular in-service teacher training courses for teachers at tertiary level institutions in order to improve their knowledge about what culture and culture teaching include, and how to plan and implement a balanced cultural syllabus.

The findings also showed that the majority of the participants focus on British culture as one of the dominant mainstream English cultures in their courses. One reason for this finding might result from the use of coursebooks adopting British English and British culture in general. What EFL teachers need to do, then, is to adapt the cultural elements in the books so that a more multicultural stance should be taken in language courses. In this respect, it is essential to help EFL teachers gain a multicultural awareness so that their learners' cross-cultural awareness and intercultural communicative skills will improve as well since it is now widely accepted that English has the role of lingua franca; and therefore, it is a common language which is used by millions of people from all over the world. In other words, it is a language used for communication among non-native speakers of English. Hence, it is important to remember to represent a variety of cultures where English is used as a global language in L2 instruction.

Another result of the study revealed that the participants require receiving an intensive and comprehensive training on teaching culture. This result has implications for implementing training on culture teaching which would include instruction on all three dimensions of culture (products, practices and perspectives) as the content of culture; information about various cultures; strategies, techniques and activities for implementing culture teaching; and last but not least, awareness raising activities to enhance teachers' cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity.

This study aimed to explore in-service EFL teachers' opinions and preferences about culture teaching in higher education. Further research might investigate pre-service English teachers' attitudes to and perceptions of the culture teaching. The fact that there is not a

compulsory course on culture or culture teaching especially in ELT departments in our country might have some implications for a reconsideration of curriculum planning with a focus on the inclusion of such a course. Therefore, the results of this study carry some important implications in terms of both pre-service and in-service EFL teacher education as discussed above.

Following the discussions above, it might be concluded that FLE and teacher education take on an important responsibility since the teaching of language and culture could be reasonably integrated through language teaching. Teachers have an indispensable role in this process. They are supposed to gain awareness of their own cultural biases first and then attempt to raise their learners' awareness of their own culture and the others' so that they can become sensitive about and appreciate cultural differences that they encounter through the language learning process. In conclusion, a carefully planned integration of culture and language teaching could enable success in cross-cultural communication through FLE.

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