



## COURSEBOOK CULTURE: WHAT TURKISH STUDENTS THINK

### DERS KİTABI KÜLTÜRÜ: TÜRK ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN DÜŞÜNCELERİ

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#### Öz

Yabancı dil ders kitaplarının değerlendirilmesi üzerine birçok çalışma bulunmakla birlikte, bu kitaplarda işlenen kültürle ilgili olarak öğrencilerin duygu ve düşüncelerini araştıran çalışmalar oldukça sınırlıdır. Genellikle öğrenciler, düşünceleri ile toplumun eğitimine, kimlik ve kültürüne yön veren öğretmenler tarafından seçilen ders kitaplarını takip ederler. Öğretmen ve öğrencilerin yabancı dil eğitimine bakışlarını konu edinen çalışmaların azlığı, seçilen ders kitaplarının öğretmen ve öğrencilerde benzer duygu ve düşünceleri uyandırdığını varsaymayı güçleştirmektedir. Buradan yola çıkarak, bir üniversitede İngilizce hazırlık okulunda okuyan 117 Türk öğrenci ile yabancı dil ders kitaplarıyla ilgili duygu ve düşüncelerini araştıran mülakat yapılmıştır. Bu nitel araştırma sonuçları göstermektedir ki Türk öğrencilerin çoğunluğu yabancı dil ders kitaplarında kendi ülkelerine ait motif ve değerleri görmek istememektedirler.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Ders kitabı, kültür, Türkiye, yabancı dil eğitimi, öğrenci düşünceleri

#### Abstract

Despite the great number of studies on coursebook evaluation, few studies are reported on students' beliefs about course material, particularly coursebook culture. In general, students are exposed to coursebooks chosen by their teachers, whose beliefs play a significant role in shaping national education, identity and culture. Because of the scarcity of research on the relationship between teacher and student beliefs about foreign language learning, it is rather subjective to assume that the same coursebook evokes the same feelings, thoughts, and behavior for both teachers and students. This qualitative study, based on in-depth interviews with 117 Turkish university preparatory students, refutes the common belief that cultural elements in foreign language coursebooks should overwhelmingly consist of national motifs and styles.

**Key words:** Coursebook, culture, Turkey, foreign language learning, student beliefs

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is a bulk of research concerning English Language Teachers' opinions on different English language teaching (hereafter ELT) topics including the role of culture in foreign language teaching classrooms and materials (Fahmy and Bilton 1992; Hinkel 1999; Alptekin 2002; Byram and Grundy 2003; Bayyurt 2006). On the other hand, as pointed out by Devrim and Bayyurt (2010) foreign language learners' beliefs about the place of culture in language teaching materials and methodologies are not taken into consideration as much as foreign language teachers' opinions. Even though a great amount of research can be found on foreign language learners' perceptions of native and non-native English language teachers (Lasagabaster and Sierra 2005; Cheung and Braine 2007; Watson Todd and Pojanapunya 2009), there are only a few studies reporting on students' feelings and impressions on cultural motifs in either British, American or Turkish oriented coursebooks. Correspondingly, the present study aims to contribute to this scarce field research by sharing foreign language learners' beliefs regarding whether they would like to see Western (hereafter referred to British and American cultural elements) or local (Turkish) cultural motifs in foreign language materials, particularly in coursebooks. The literature review consists of four parts: In the first part, the necessity of coursebooks in foreign language teaching is mentioned. In the second part, the presence of cultural elements in foreign language (FL hereafter) coursebooks is discussed. In the third part, perception of Western culture in the Turkish context is described in order to provide the reader with some overview of Turkish history and culture. In the fourth part, readers will find information on the rationale behind this study. Flowingly, the methodology part includes participants, data collection procedure, data analysis, findings, and discussion of the study.

### **Usefulness of FL Coursebooks**

Almost all types of language programs, especially language preparatory schools at universities whose medium of language is English, benefit largely from using coursebooks. Doubtless to say, coursebooks constitute the backbone of most language curriculums; thus, without them learning or teaching a foreign language would become rather unmanageable for many learners, teachers, and coordinators. Along with comprehensive information regarding language skills, syllabus, well-organized content and extra-materials such as videos, CD-ROMS, Workbooks, and Teacher's books, coursebooks greatly contribute implicitly or explicitly to FL learning. From the perspective of proponents, a coursebook 'helps to achieve consistency and continuation, it gives learners a sense of system, cohesion, and progress, and it helps teachers prepare and learners to revise' (Tomlinson 2001). As for O'Neill (1982) there are four main reasons for the employment of coursebooks in foreign language classrooms: First, even though they are not able to meet every learner's particular expectations, to a great extent they are appropriate for foreign language learning and teaching. Second, coursebooks provide learners with an outline so that they can either prepare for the next

language unit or do a review. Third, they are affordable as a valuable source for learning a foreign language. Fourth, besides paving the way for spontaneous class interaction with learners, good quality coursebooks also enable improvisation and modification by the teacher.

### **Cultural Motifs in FL Coursebooks**

Research on the evaluation of FL coursebooks for their effectiveness includes cultural competence along with linguistic, pragmatic, and communicative competence. (Byram and Grundy 2003) firmly believes that providing learners with cultural knowledge of the target language (L2) increases language awareness, which in turn boosts FL success. In this sense, the examination of some past popular EFL coursebooks from Oxford University Press and Longman-Pearson Publishing such as *Headway*, *WOW*, *Lifelines*, *Streamline*, *Cutting Edge*, etc besides sparse multicultural content once amazingly contained a broad picture of Western culture and life-style. Recently, as an outcome of globalization more and more publishers have felt the necessity to adapt an intercultural syllabus in their coursebooks, such as Premium, English Files, Total English, Language Leader, Straightforward, etc, by including elements from diverse cultures so as to assist foreign language education on cultural basis and address or attract L2 teachers and learners from different cultural backgrounds. For example, in the introduction of the Intermediate Teacher's Book of Straightforward (published since 2006), which is produced by McMillan publishing, the following is mentioned as a cultural characteristic of the coursebook: "Many of the texts focus on aspects of culture in the English-speaking world and encourage intercultural comparison. This work is reinforced by regular 'Did you know?' sections that contain further cultural information (p.8)."

In the context of culture, coursebooks typically illustrate everyday interaction between people, popular places, customs and festivals, culturally specific clothing and accessories, and so on. They are considered to be both 'pedagogically and educationally sensible', for they are believed to present 'a multidimensional perspective or experience' for FL learners (Porto 1996). Similarly, cultural elements in FL teaching are in support of Wendt's (2003) view that 'language is learnt in context and any approach to research on language learning needs to take this fully into account' (p.93). He further points out that 'contexts and their interpretations are usually understood as being culturally determined' (p.95). Thus, coursebook authors or publishers include cultural content in their coursebooks so that FL learners have the opportunity to learn and inquire about the target culture. As coursebooks seem to be insufficient to promote the necessary cultural awareness due to their limited space, publishers widely support them with helpful course components like CD-ROMs or MULTI-ROMs that include videos of L2 lifestyles, traditions, history, and so on.

Although most language specialists agree on the importance of teaching culture along with L2, they considerably differ with respect to choice of which culture – for example British, American, or multi-cultural when the L2 is English – should be included in coursebooks (Byram and Grundy 2003).

For instance, in the case that American culture is chosen for presenting foreign language skills in English, still the question remains about what aspects of American culture to tap, for the United States of America consists of many integrated but unique subcultures. Relatedly, both language and cultural appropriateness become rather thought-provoking with respect to Kachru's (1986) three concentric circles – inner circle (e.g. England), outer circle (e.g. Nigeria), and expanding circle (e.g. Turkey) - which represent different cultural contexts in which the English language plays quite different roles. Therefore, Wandel (2003) recommends a multicultural approach by preserving the national culture; he writes:

EFL-teaching must enhance its geographical scope and include non-mainstream cultures. ... Thus areas / countries, so far neglected, will play an increasingly more relevant role. On the other hand, educating students to make use of English as a lingua franca also means to accustom them to being interculturally sensitive. In this context we have to decide whether we should focus on teaching national target cultures or whether an intercultural approach should be applied in which general cultural patterns and structures are introduced (p.72).

### **Perception of Western Culture in Turkey**

Predominantly under the influence of French revolution, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Ottoman State had changed direction to the technologically more developed West at the expense of losing connections with the East, since it was regarded as the foremost reason for failure in the military, scientific, and economic sphere (Gellner 1992; Mardin 2004). In order to catch up with the rising West and bring an end to military defeats against European armies, Ottoman Statesmen encouraged the establishment of modern schools with secular and scientific curriculums (Demirel 2003; Parlatur 2006). According to Mardin (2004), generations of graduates from these schools - who were chiefly expected to transfer science, technology, and information from the West - unavoidably were subject to Western ideologies which had deep impact on cultural, social, and religious system.

Atay and Ece (2009) point out that once with the formation of the new Turkish Republic in 1923 after the fall of the Ottoman State, along with westernization policies almost in all parts of social life – politics, economy, and education – Western motifs were once largely supported and popularized in a Muslim-populated Turkey. Along with these social changes, linguistic change was observed as well. For instance, Doğançay-Aktuna and Kızıltepe (2005) argue that various Western words, specifically English, were embedded into the Turkish language as such that shops (e.g. Showroom), restaurants (e.g. Grill), malls (e.g. Fox city), and cinemas (e.g. Cinepol) were named after their British or American counterparts. Even though the new language policy of the young Turkish Republic was to refine the Turkish language by removing foreign language words, firstly by removing the Arabic and Persian originated words which were overwhelmingly used during the Ottoman period, yet this time the language reformers were helpless to cope with countless Western words and terms that were quickly penetrating into the Turkish language. As a consequence of Westernization policies by both

the Ottoman State and its fledgling the new Turkish Republic, countless innumerable French and English words such as *detay* (*detail*), *avantaj* (*advantage*), *kriter* (*criteria*), *komünikasyon* (*communication*) and so on were adapted to the Turkish Language.

As a result of this rapid and immense social westernization Kushner (1997) claims that another identity crisis has emerged in Turkey, for Turkey not only has failed so far to become a member of the European Union (EU), but also isolated herself from the Islamic community. Particularly, Turkey's exclusion from the EU despite her great unification efforts for decades have produced inevitably a bulk of Turks who have completely lost their hopes in the EU membership (Hume, 2006). Turkish people have come to the belief that however hard they try to unite with the European Community, every time they will encounter new regulations to meet because of their Islamic identity. Hence, the number of those who object to EU membership has escalated and lead to the growing belief that integration with EU is beyond hope, and even unnecessary since it will further -influence Turkish and Islamic values (Önil 2003; Duran 2004; Dursun 2006).

Nevertheless, under the influence of Western norms and paradigms and English as an international medium of communication in the globalizing world, English language teaching has become a matter of deep concern within national Turkish education (Demircan 1988). The majority of Turkish students are pushed by their parents to learn English so that they can greatly benefit from the privileges of the advanced and modern European Community (Doğançay-Aktuna and Kızıltepe, 2005). However, a number of academics (Ekmekçi 1995; Alptekin 2002; Doğançay-Aktuna and Kızıltepe 2005) do not approve the excessive influence of Western identity on Turkish culture, education, and language. Among them Ekmekçi (1995) believes firmly that the Turkish language is subject to constant manipulation and degradation due to 'Anglicization of education' whose well-known by-products are nationwide English medium schools. As reported by Atay and Ece (2009) Turkish academics actually do not oppose English language education; rather, they substantially stand up to what they perceive as cultural and sociolinguistic intrusion by the Western world, including FL teaching materials.

According to Alptekin (2002), a great number of British and American stereotypes are today purposefully maintained in foreign language teaching materials for the sake of providing learners with communicative competence. Alptekin (2002) reasonably insists on ignoring idealized portrays of Anglo-Saxon culture by presenting diverse or multicultural learning materials to foreign language learners. With English as a lingua franca in mind, he points out that a significant number of native or nonnative (more than a half a billion) speakers use English only for instrumental reasons like pursuing academic goals, business interactions, and professional relationships. Similarly, Kızıltepe (2000), based on her research on attitudes and motivation of Turkish language learners, reported that students' main drive behind learning English was for educational and intellectual purposes. Correspondingly,

Alptekin (2002) writes: ‘How relevant, then, are the conventions of British politeness or American informality to the Japanese and Turks, say, when doing business in English’ (p.61)? Furthermore, he also underlies the fact FL learner’s own culture is greatly influenced from L2 learning processes which aim native speaker norms of use and usage.

### **Students’ Beliefs About Coursebook Culture**

Although there is considerable research on EFL teachers’ expectation and the evaluation of language course material including coursebooks (Hutchinson 1987; Sheldon 1988; Cunningsworth 1996; Tomlinson 1998; McGrath 2006), studies on students’ beliefs about coursebooks are rather scarce, especially those which focus on cultural aspects. Broadly speaking, neither the teacher’s nor the publisher’s personal opinion or judgment is satisfactory unless a great number of students’ point of view is included in the process of coursebook design or selection. Teachers unquestionably may know best which coursebook will work best in the classroom in relation to methodology and linguistic content (Hutchinson 1987); yet, they may be mistaken as far as socio-cultural norms are concerned, which may differ from person to person, from society to society, and from time to time. In this regard, a number of comprehensive evaluations of FL materials seems quite useful by teachers, students, and institutions to see how much their expectations converge or diverge.

### **The Study**

As for EFL coursebook selection in Turkey, similar to the situation in many European countries like Spain and Italy, there is full competition between various publishing houses, particularly in private and academic high schools. Also, in relation to the revision of foreign language curriculum at state schools in 2005, coursebook writing has been assigned by the Ministry of Education to be prepared by different groups of Turkish FL experts from various Turkish Universities. Owing to the specified nature of the curriculum, the coursebooks produced by local publishers such as ‘*New Bridge to Success, Unique*’ have the characteristic of uniformity; that is to say, unlike their Western counterparts, they teem with Turkish cultural motifs such as Turkish cuisine, folklore, clothing, dance, places, and so on. Primarily, more or less all state-run schools – primary, secondary, and high schools – use various coursebooks written by different Turkish authors and publishers whose contents and design basically resemble each other with very little variation.

The purpose of this study was to see what Turkish students think of British and American cultural motifs in their coursebooks, which they regularly use during class time. It was hypothesized in line with the common view among many Turkish academics, teachers, and parents (Akdeniz 1997; Tosun 2005; Özdemir 2006; Gürsu 2008) that Turkish students would disagree with the Western motifs - basically British or American life-styles, geography, clothing, and food – in their coursebooks which are alien to Turkish culture and society. In other words, do young Turkish adolescents perceive the Western motifs in their coursebooks as a threat to their culture, society and religion as a great

number of their parents, teachers, and officials do, or do they simply consider them as a source of cultural richness? In connection with this Hinkel, (1999:10) states “in interactions among members of different cultures, divergent concepts of appropriate behaviors and meaning interpretations can affect participants’ conduct in social context”. Therefore, oral student responses at the preparatory schools of a well-known university in Istanbul were collected in response to the following four questions:

- 1) What coursebooks have you been exposed to throughout your entire foreign language education?
- 2) Do Western cultural elements (particularly British and American) in coursebooks influence you in a positive or negative way?
- 3) What do you think of having only Turkish and Islamic motifs (characters, stories, place, videos, and so on) in foreign language coursebooks?
- 4) In your opinion what are the main sources (internet, TV, movies, radio, magazines, coursebook, travel, and so on) by which Western culture influences Turkish society?

The last question has been asked in order to identify the actual source of the impacts on culture, and if there is any, to see to what extent Western oriented coursebooks play a role in this. This fact is rather significant since an important amount of money and time are invested to produce and practice national L2 coursebooks which are mostly purposefully devoid of Western or non-Turkish motifs.

## **2. METHOD**

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were 117 Turkish students, 54 male and 63 female, whose age range was between 18-21 (n=19). They all had been exposed to English in primary and high school for 4 to 8 years before their enrollment in the university’s preparatory school. Also, the interviews with the participants showed that they had been subject to various British, American or Turkish culture oriented coursebooks during their foreign language education at primary and high school. Correspondingly, they had enough experience over the years to make comments and judgments about cultural motifs present in their present and previous coursebooks. They were required to study English language for one year along different modules and levels at the preparatory school, for English was the medium of instruction in their prospective faculties and departments. During the time of the study, the participants were in B1 module (intermediate level) and as a part of their course requirement they were studying the coursebook ‘*Success*’ from Pearson-Longman publishing. The participants were from inside and outside of Istanbul and mostly belonged to conservative families who have a high opinion of national and religious values. It was hypothesized that the approval of the cultural motifs in British or American produced coursebooks by learners from conservative families could assume their tolerance by the majority of Turkish society.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The participants all voluntarily participated in the study, which consisted of in-depth qualitative interviews for data collection which according to Best and Kahn (2006) are often superior to other data collection tools. The researcher interviewed the students in the English Preparatory School for 12 weeks. The semi-structured interviews with participants began with introductory questions, mostly biographical, and then moved to the actual research questions and sub-questions to examine their beliefs on coursebook culture in detail. Every interview was audio-taped, and took approximately twenty to thirty minutes in length. Because of their large size, the interviews in native language (L1) were analyzed and reduced into smaller analytic units and then translated and transcribed by three experienced teachers including the researcher himself in reference to Miles and Huberman's (1994) pattern coding scheme. Even though the researcher could have taken a group of participants out of the 117 informants and interviewed them in more detail; instead he decided on a large size of sample for triangulation purposes. As argued by Hall and Rist (1999) interviews may involve 'selective recall, self-delusion, perceptual distortions, memory loss from the respondent, and subjectivity in the researcher's recording and interpreting of the data" (pp.297-298). Thus, in line with recommendations by Mackey and Gass (2005) multiple interviews – that is interviewing many different subjects – were conducted in order to obtain rich data and avoid some weaknesses (such as shy and inarticulate interviewees) as well as strengthen the reliability and validity of the interviews.

### 3. FINDINGS

The first research question, 'What coursebooks have you been exposed to throughout your entire foreign language education?' was asked to obtain information about the name and number of the coursebooks the participants had covered so far, including the English Preparatory School, which was their current place of study. The analysis of the oral responses showed that the participants used an average of 20 coursebooks in their total foreign language education. The names of coursebooks were asked on purpose to see to what extent and what type of Western Culture the participants were subject to so far in their English learning efforts. It was almost impossible for them to remember the names of all of the coursebooks they encountered, particularly those from their primary and secondary school time. Therefore, without reference to the publisher, the most remembered and mentioned coursebooks in the interviews in order are: *Headway (Oxford University Press)*, *Horizons (Heinle)*, *Go (Longman)*, *Matrix (Oxford University Press)*, *Opportunities (Pearson-Longman)*, *Chatterbox (Oxford University Press)*, *English in Mind (Cambridge University Press)*, *Top-Notch (Pearson-Longman)*, *Success (Pearson-Longman)*, and so on. The names of participants below are shown with initials for confidential reasons. Sample participant responses to the first question are as follows:

A.S: ...Well, I really do not remember the names of all English coursebooks so far. Yet, I know that I have been exposed to more than twenty coursebooks. In the primary school, English

actually did not make any sense to me; therefore, I can merely recall some songs and games we repeated all the time. ...Why do think I am here, after so many English books and years of experience? However, as I can recollect the name of the coursebooks we covered in high school was Horizon...

N.O. ...As far as I can remember the coursebooks we were exposed to up until now were mostly American and British based. I think I have used more than fifteen coursebooks such as Let's Go, English in Mind, Matrix, Success, etc. With every new coursebook, I remember my father complaining about the price. I wish I had studied hard in the past and did not have to attend this Preparatory School....

When the participants were asked the second question, 'Do Western cultural elements (particularly British and American) in coursebooks influence you in a positive or negative way?' which is the main focus of the study, 81 participants out of 117 (Table 1) were reported in favor of Western culture from many aspects, as transcribed below. This finding is rather challenging and thought-provoking, for it was expected that the bulk of students would complain about the foreign cultural elements in their coursebooks. Furthermore, according to 20 students, the Western motifs and stereotypes offered both advantages and disadvantages to the participants; therefore, they were quite indecisive. The number of participants who were extremely in disfavor of foreign cultural elements, namely British and American culture, was limited to only 16 participants. The following transcripts respectively show four positive and three negative views of participants:

**Table 1:** 'Do Western cultural elements (particularly British and American) in coursebooks influence you in a positive or negative way?'

| YES  | NO   |
|------|------|
| % 31 | % 69 |

T.K. I think that the foreign culture in the coursebooks influences me in a positive way. Through them I have learnt very valuable information about the Western world. They help me understand foreigners and their values better. I have realized that we are not the only people who populate this world. Now, when I travel to the West or any other country I will be well-prepared in terms of food, clothing, business interactions, human relations, and so on. I sincerely found them very informative...

G.C. I must confess that I have learnt by means of coursebooks to be polite and tolerant in our relationships with all kinds of people. What I like most is the peaceful smile on the faces of the coursebook characters. I think I have adopted their beautiful smile. By the way, I did not notice any fundamental difference between them and us...

S.A. I truly admit that awareness of an alien culture, it does not matter British or American culture, has contributed to my own culture. I have become, so to say, more cultured and open minded. I personally find them very motivating as far as foreign language learning is concerned. I totally disagree with those who claim of deterioration of national culture. Rather than coursebooks, we are under the influence of other means of cultural dominance.

B.C. ... How can some pictures of western people and places or reading passages affect me and my culture? I come from a family with strong tradition, values and faith. I do not think that coursebooks will change me negatively. On the contrary, I enjoy learning the life style of unknown people and cultures. For example, I have benefited greatly from the relationships, entertainments, life style, and views of foreigners. I do not find them wrong. I sincerely have fun when I learn about them. They have enriched my personality and not corrupted as many believe.

G. B. ...Yes, I know for sure, Western culture cannot change me or my values. I can decide on what to accept and what to reject. Nevertheless, I see schoolmates who are influenced by American identity. It is a matter of choice and self-confidence. People who are immature and uneducated may be attracted by their clothing, life style, and entertainment. If we know our culture well and stick to it, nobody and no other culture can change us...

N.F. ...They can have few positive effects. But I think that our culture is more serious and reasonable for many reasons. I can say that foreign cultural examples have negative impact on my classmates, particularly young ones. For example, their clothing, fast-food habit, and entertainment means, I believe, degenerate our culture and tradition. Their bonds with their family and relatives are very loose which is unacceptable in my place.

S.Y. First of all, we are Muslims and that separates us from the West and their lifestyle including their clothing, language, relationships, entertainment, moral values, etc. We become more and more like them. Their ways of entertainment draws us away from our parents, friends, and relatives. Thus, I find them detrimental to our moral and religious values.

As for the third question ‘What do you think of having only Turkish cultural elements and motifs (characters, clothing, stories, place, videos, and so on) in foreign language coursebooks?’; surprisingly 72 students out of 117 (Table 2) did not want the coursebooks to contain material about neither Turkish nor Islamic identity. Furthermore, 20 students reported that they would be honored and pleased if a coursebook unit or some pages could be allocated to present information about Turkish culture, history, and geography. They explained that as they learn about other nations and their cultures, they expect others to learn about Turkish identity and culture as well. On the other hand, only 15 out of 117 participants insisted solely on national identity and culture in foreign language coursebooks. They mostly expressed that familiarity with topics, visuals, and culture would provide them with not only enhanced comprehension of a foreign language, but also awareness and

maintenance of their long tradition. Even a few of them reported that foreign cultural elements were redundant because they found them alien and challenging to their national identity. Some encouraging and discouraging participant responses from interviews are as follows:

**Table 2:** As for the third question ‘What do you think of having only Turkish cultural elements and motifs (characters, clothing, stories, place, videos, and so on) in foreign language coursebooks?’

| YES  | NO   |
|------|------|
| % 38 | % 62 |

R.B. I do not want to see only Turkish culture in coursebooks for many reasons. For example, I am already familiar with the Turkish Culture. Therefore, why should I spend time learning about something I already know? By the way, I have self-confidence and therefore Western culture cannot change me. As long as the presence of Western motifs do not humiliate or offend national values, I do not find them hazardous. On the contrary, differences are beautiful and a source of cultural richness...

D.Z. As for me, I disagree with coursebooks based only on Turkish and Islamic culture. It will not help us learn English better. I think that language and culture go together and cannot be separated. This is natural. Thus, it is acceptable and logical for them to teach English through British Culture. I am very hopeful that one day I will greatly benefit from my experience with English language and culture. ...

Z.C. I think that the presence of only Turkish and Islamic cultures in coursebooks is not appropriate at all. We learn English so that we can be successful in our interactions outside Turkey. If we concentrate only on Turkish culture; doubtless, we will have hard time abroad from many aspects such as greetings, food, clothing, and so on.,

Y.B. In my opinion, one unit in a coursebook could be assigned to the Turkish culture. I am sure that many of us would feel quite happy to know that other nations learn about Turkey, too. I do not know how to explain, it looks good to see pictures of Istanbul and Turkey along with other nations and countries in a coursebook.

L.F. ...To see some Turkish and Islamic elements in a foreign coursebook makes me feel that we are international and therefore I would love to see that Turkey is known all over the world. I want foreigners to see that we have a rich culture, wonderful places, and modern country; unlike the Muslim identity that is portrayed on the international news. Everyone should know that we look more like westerners, and almost no Turkish woman wears Burqa.

H.A. Yes, I would like to see more Turkish motifs in the coursebooks. The fact is that we are Muslims and therefore we have to act and live accordingly. Whatever we see, hear, or read in the coursebooks should remind us of our Turkish and Islam identity. We must remember that we are a

nation of long and strong tradition. I guess that English learning this way will be motivating and informative ....

F.G. Yes, of course I would. I am sure that familiarity with places, topics, people, and so on would simplify learning a foreign language. I believe that common values may attract attention and lead to success.

Finally, the participants were asked the following question: ‘In your opinion what are the main sources (internet, TV, movies, radio, magazines, coursebook, travel, and so on) by which Western culture influences Turkish society?’ This question was asked on purpose to see if Turkish students would mention coursebook among the main sources of erosion of Turkish identity and culture. It was thought that the students’ reaction would contribute to resolve the ongoing conflict and competition between domestic and foreign publishers, the former insisting on more national identity, motifs, and values in L2 coursebooks. Interestingly, among the 117 participants (Table 3), none of them reported the foreign language coursebook produced in the West (e.g. England or the U.S.A.) as a threat neither to the Turkish culture nor the Islamic identity. Instead, according to the participants, internet, foreign TV series, movies, and tourist travels much more influence the Turkish culture because of their unique features and content. The following responses by two participants are worth reading to realize that rather than coursebooks, Turkish teens and adolescents in the cultural sense are influenced by the popular media:

**Table 3:** ‘In your opinion what are the main sources (internet, TV, movies, radio, magazines, coursebook, travel, and so on) by which Western culture influences Turkish society?’

| <b>Against Western Culture in Media</b> | <b>For Western Culture in Media</b> |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| % 0                                     | % 100                               |

M.S. ...I guess that foreign TV programs and movies attract me most. For example, I have a favourite actress and I definitely pay attention to what she wears, uses, and eats. I never miss her programs on the TV. I also regularly follow her from the internet sites and download her videos. I guess I envy her because I find her life style very interesting and colourful....Yeah, I suppose that the contents of TV and internet really impose on us a cultural challenge and we have to be very selective and cautious...

R.D... I believe that TV, cinema, and internet are very influential in shaping one’s personality and culture. Especially, Hollywood movies are the most challenging ones. As for coursebooks, we see them only for a limited time during the school. However, once we are at home, we immediately turn on the internet and visit any website we are interested in. And in the evenings, we watch TV for hours

full of motifs from foreign culture. ..Instead, I would love to read, but it is so demanding and boring...I can tell the same things about my schoolmates.

#### **4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The main aim of this study was to see whether or not L2 learners, as the case here with Turkish students, comply with negative beliefs about the Western culture as exposed by many parents or teachers, particularly in the context of coursebook culture. According to the 117 interviews, the great majority of Turkish students do not consider Western culture in their coursebook a threat to their national identity, culture, and values. On the contrary, unlike their parents, teachers, and education officials, they view the target culture in the syllabus as a source of motivation, exploration and challenge for learning and practicing course material. Similar to Kramsch (1991) they point out that it is impossible to teach a language isolated from its culture, for example, teaching English through Turkish motifs and culture, for they believe that culture and language are as inseparable as flesh and bone. When we remember that the participants in this study belong mostly to conservative Turkish families who might impose their cultural, social, and religious values to their children, the outcomes of this study therefore are rather significant. That is to say, a similar study with participants from more moderate families would perhaps largely approve the prevailing Western motifs in Turkish L2 coursebooks.

The findings of this study are stimulating, with implications for education officials, publishers and teachers who generally think they know what is best for their students. Within this framework, Polat (2009), though, draws attention to similarities between student and teacher beliefs about language learning, he nevertheless cautions about possible discrepancies. Accordingly, the students in this study have an average age of 20 years, and we thus can assume that at this age they are conscious, mature and rational enough to decide on what is appropriate for their personal development and identity. They may outwardly seem to conform to imposition by their elders (parents, teachers, and officials) as it is the case here with western norms and values; however, in reality they may have completely a different view and approach. Thus, this study based on coursebook culture is valuable in that it contributes to the research exploring discrepancy of belief between adults - parent, teacher, and education officials - and students.

Moreover, apart from a sensitive belief in national identity, another aspect of this issue that needs to be taken into consideration is that, as Szymańska-Czaplak (2007) argues, an important number of non-native EFL teachers avoid teaching foreign cultural content in the coursebooks mostly because they lack the necessary experience, methodology, and time. According to Szymańska-Czaplak (2007), if target cultural content would highly required and emphasized in coursebooks as a part of the curriculum, correspondingly foreign language teachers would be expected to update their professional abilities. Therefore, a further study is necessary that aims to find out the actual reason for

why a large body of Turkish teachers' disfavor teaching or talking about Western motifs in the coursebooks; is it the worry related to the national values or is it more related to their lack of L2 cultural competence? It is also assumed that systematic exposure to cultures of not only the Western world but also other geographies may perhaps alleviate some teacher's concerns in this area.

Furthermore, Riley (1997) argues that L2 learners' attachments to specific beliefs about foreign language learning considerably influences the way they learn. Rather interestingly, this study contradicts the common Turkish concept that inclusion of local cultural elements in FL teaching materials, particularly coursebooks, largely encourages student success in second and foreign languages. Generally speaking, the necessity of including L2 cultural content is already visible, but rather than imposing ideologies and stereotypes on the learners, coursebooks that develop learners' feelings of cultural sensitivity, understanding and tolerance seem to be more promising and one step ahead of their equivalents. That is, raising learners' cultural awareness within coursebooks through exploration, comparison, analysis opportunities most probably will prevent them from forming stereotypes and help them to overcome certain biases that usually stem from intercultural ignorance.

In conclusion, in the design and preparation of any course material - this may be a coursebook, reader, interactive-software program, or video- we need to take into account a comprehensive analysis which includes students' belief. As this study suggests, it is unfortunately a common fallacy to believe without inquiry that we know what other people think and want.

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