



Foreign language teachers' perspectives on intercultural communication skills in Turkey

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Abstract

This study examined the perceptions of foreign language teachers in Turkey regarding their role as conveyers of culture in foreign language teaching. To that end, I utilised a descriptive model, one of the quantitative research designs, in the research. The study group consisted of 441 English teachers working in the English preparatory programs of various universities in Turkey in 2020-2021 academic year. The survey focused on teachers' perceptions of their purposes in foreign language teaching, their views on culture teaching in the context of foreign language teaching, their cultural teaching practices, their familiarity with the country, culture, and individuals in which the language they teach, the time they allocate to culture and language teaching in their practices, and their views on the cultural content of the materials they use. The answers of the participants are summarized as arithmetic mean and standard deviation, frequency and percentage. I used one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) so as to determine whether the data on the participants differed significantly according to the variables and preferred Tukey, one of the post-hoc multiple comparison technique, to verify the source of the significant difference as a result of the ANOVA analysis. The results of the study showed that the teachers are aware of the importance of integrating the target culture in foreign language teaching. The majority of the participants pay attention to conveying the culture of the target language within the framework of the curriculum and materials they use. However, it was concluded that foreign language teachers in Turkey needed support programs and travels in order to increase their level of familiarity with the culture of the language they teach.

Keywords: First keyword; second keyword; third keyword; fourth keyword; fourth keyword

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1. Introduction

The developments in communication and new technologies have had impacts on the field of education as well as every other area of our lives. In this context, foreign language teaching, too, has had its share of these effects. Over the last four decades, there has been an exponential growth of research interest in the cultural aspect of foreign language

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teaching. This comes from the idea that in foreign language teaching, the focus should not be merely on the language, but it should also include the cultural aspect of the target language.

As societies internationalize, being able to communicate appropriately in intercultural settings and understanding the value of cultural diversity emerges as one of the most required skills of the 21st century (Atay, 2005; Byram, 1989; Deardorff, 2006; Holliday, 2013; Kramsch, 1998; Sercu, 2002). In this regard, what we, foreign language teachers, understand from foreign language teaching has changed due to increasing multicultural communities that we live in.

As the world gets smaller, the grammar-oriented teaching methods used for many years and de-contextualised classroom activities have become insufficient to provide the traits learners should have in the modern age. Because of this cultural turn in foreign language teaching the skills learners should acquire change, and foreign language teachers educate students to be interculturally competent individuals. As what is appropriate in one's own culture may not be appropriate in another's (Precht & Lund, 2007), lack of intercultural communication competence may affect learners' foreign language learning experience adversely, and these misunderstandings lead to any kind of conflicts (Seelye, 1976; Spitzber, 1989; Thin & Chung, 2005). In the light of this new teaching perspective, this study seeks to explore Turkish foreign language teachers' take on the subject matter. It aims to find out the perceptions of their roles as conveyers of language and culture in their professional practice.

2. Method

In the study, I followed a descriptive model, which is one of the quantitative research designs. Descriptive models include comparing, analysing, and interpreting the situations of individuals, institutions, groups, or resources as they are (Cohen et al. 2007). In this study, the teaching practices of foreign language teachers as regards the culture they teach are examined in their current situation.

2.1. Study group

The study group of the research consisted of 441 English language teachers working at the preparatory programs of various universities in Turkey. While determining the participants in the research, the convenience sampling method, which is included in the purposeful sampling method, was used. This method adds practicality to research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). With this sampling method, the researcher works with a sufficient

number of people within the existing items (Singleton & Straits, 2005). The characteristics of the study group are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Study Group

Variables	Education Degree	N	%
Education	BA	111	25.2
	MA	246	55.8
	PhD	84	19.0
	Total	441	100
Year of working experience	1-3 years	6	1.4
	3-10 years	119	27.0
	11-15 years	130	29.5
	16 years and above	186	42.2
	Total	441	100
Weekly teaching hours	1-10 hours	36	8.2
	11-20 hours	241	54.6
	21 and over	116	26.3
	Total	393	89.1

25.2 % of the teachers in the study group hold a Bachelor's Degree, 55.8% master, and 19% doctorate. When examined in terms of working experience, the majority of the participants (42.2 %) have working experience of 16 years or more. When the weekly course hours are examined, it can be seen that 48 teachers did not answer this question; however, most of the teachers (54.6 %) in the study group teach between 11-20 hours per week.

2.2. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data of the research were collected in the spring semester of the 2020-2021 academic year via the convenience sampling method. Personal information form and scale questions prepared for this purpose were generated in Google Form and sent via e-mail. The researcher sent e-mails to English teachers working at the school of foreign languages of universities in Turkey. 441 out of 1100 teachers who were sent the questionnaire responded. The data were then put in a certain order and transferred to the computer environment. Each of the answers given by the foreign language teachers to the questions about culture teaching practices is summarized as arithmetic mean and standard deviation, frequency (f) distribution, and percentage (%). One-way analysis of variance was used in order to determine whether the levels of foreign language teachers' cultural teaching practices differed significantly according to the variables of education level, working experience, weekly teaching hours, being familiar with the target culture, and frequency of travelling abroad. ANOVA) was used. Tukey, one of the post- hoc multiple

comparison technique, was preferred to determine the source of the significant difference as a result of the ANOVA analysis. The significance level of $p < .05$ was considered in the analysis of the data. Obtained findings were interpreted in tables.

The personal information form was created by the researcher to find answers to the problems of the research with the aim to gather data on the demographic characteristics of the participants. The data for the study were gathered by utilising an English-medium web-based questionnaire developed by Sercu et al (2005). Sercu et al. (2005) conducted an international research that comprised questionnaire answers from foreign language teachers in seven countries (Spain, Sweden, Mexico, Bulgaria, Greece, Belgium, and Poland). This study focused on the Turkish foreign language teachers' practices in the context of culture. Also, the author confirms that the questionnaire was used with the permission and Ethical Approval was obtained from Bilecik Şeyh Edebali University on September 3, 2021.

3. Results

Foreign Language Teachers' Perceptions of Foreign Language Teaching Objectives

Within the scope of the first sub-problem of the study, it was determined what the main purposes of foreign language teachers were in foreign language teaching. For this purpose, foreign language teachers were asked the main objective of their teaching practice. The distribution of the answers given by the foreign language teachers to the options related to this question is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Opinions of Teachers on Basic Instructional Goals

Options	Frequency (f)	percentile (%)
I would like to have a good rapport with the learners. I aim to fulfil the syllabus necessities.	169	38.3
I aim to teach my students the skills, knowledge, and attitudes they will need in their lives. I try to motivate my students about my subject.	93	21.1
I try to convey to my students the skills, knowledge, and attitudes they will need to further their English proficiency. I try to promote the improvement of my students.	154	34.9
I would like to pass on expert knowledge as regards to my subject to my students. I would like to be there for my students when they have private troubles.	25	5.7
Total	441	100

As seen in the table, most of the foreign language teachers (38.3 %) want to establish good relations with the students, but they want to carry out the instructional processes in accordance with the curriculum. However, 21.1 % of teachers think that their main purpose is to convey the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students will need in their lives and to increase students' interest in the lesson. While 34.9 % of the teachers aim to improve

students' English proficiency, 5.7% consider transferring their expertise on the subject as their main objective.

Foreign Language Teachers' Views on Culture Teaching

Within the scope of the second sub-problem of the research, the perceptions of foreign language teachers about teaching the culture of the target language in their lessons and instructional processes were investigated. In this context, the teachers were asked "What does culture teaching mean to you in the context of foreign language teaching?" Within the scope of this question, nine options including the objectives of culture teaching were presented and the teachers were asked to mark the most appropriate option for them. The distribution of the answers given by the teachers to the related question is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Views of Teachers on Culture Teaching in the Context of Foreign Language Teaching

Options	Frequency (f)	percentile (%)
Information about the history, geography, and political conditions of foreign culture(s).	13	2.9
Information about daily life and routines	41	9.3
Information about shared values and beliefs	19	4.3
Experiences with a rich variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theatre, film, etc.)	114	25.9
Attitudes of openness and tolerance towards other peoples and cultures	124	28.1
Reflection on cultural differences	25	5.7
Increased understanding of students' own culture	7	1.6
Ability to empathize with people living in other cultures	40	9.1
Ability to handle intercultural contact situations	58	13.2
Total	441	100

When Table 3 is examined, foreign language teachers (28.1 %) mostly stated that they aim to develop openness and tolerance attitudes towards other peoples and cultures in culture teaching. 13.2 % of foreign language teachers aim to encourage students to better understand their own culture.

Culture Teaching Practices of Foreign Language Teachers

Another problem for which an answer is sought in the research determines the cultural teaching practices of foreign language teachers in the context of foreign language teaching. With this aim, ten different categories of cultural elements in the target language were presented to the teachers, and it was determined to what extent teachers included these elements in their instructional processes. The average values of the answers given by the teachers to each item related to the culture teaching practices are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Views of Teachers on Cultural Teaching Practices in the Context of Foreign Language Teaching

Options	\bar{X}	SS
History, geography, political system, religion	2.40	.72
Different ethnic and social groups	2.34	.76
Daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink etc.	1.41	.57
Youth culture	1.90	.72
Professional life-education	1.96	.72
Traditions, folklore, tourist attractions	1.84	.70
Literature	2.30	.88
Other cultural expressions (music, drama, art)	2.04	.79
Values and beliefs	2.05	.73
International relations (political, economic and cultural) with students' home country and other countries	2.41	.85

When Table 4 is examined, foreign language teachers give different degrees of place to various cultural subjects in their instructional practices. While foreign language teachers mostly touch upon cultural issues, such as daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink in their instructional practices, the subjects they mention least are history, geography, political system and religion. In addition, it was determined that while teachers touched on youth culture and professional life-education more, they also touched less on literature.

Familiarity of Foreign Language Teachers with the Country, Culture and Individuals in which the Language Taught is Spoken

Within the scope of the fourth sub-problem of the study, it was determined how familiar the foreign language teachers are with the country, culture, and people living there where the language they teach is spoken. To be able to venture an answer, the question "How much do you think you are familiar with the country where the language you teach is spoken, its culture, and the people living in that country?" was asked to foreign language teachers. The sharing of the answers given by the teachers is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Familiarity of Foreign Language Teachers with the Country, Culture, and Individuals in which the Language Taught is Spoken

Options	Frequency (f)	percentile (%)
Very familiar	126	28.6
Sufficiently familiar	264	59.9
Not sufficiently familiar	47	10.7
Not familiar at all	4	.9

59.9 % of the foreign language teachers thought that they were familiar enough with the country, culture, and individuals of the language they taught, while 0.9% stated that they were not. Information on the level of familiarity of foreign language teachers is given in Table 6.

Table 6.

Options	\bar{X}	SS
Levels of Familiarity	1.84	.63

In Table 6, it is seen that the level of familiarity with the country, culture, and individuals where the language taught by foreign language teachers is $\bar{X} = 1.84$. In addition, in order to better understand and deepen the knowledge of foreign language teachers regarding the level of familiarity with the stated situations, the questions were asked to find out how often they travel to the country where the language they teach is spoken and how often they communicate with individuals living in that country. The distribution of the answers given by the foreign language teachers to the related questions is given in Table 7.

Table 7: Frequency of Foreign Language Teachers Travelling to the Country Where the Target Language is Spoken and Communicating with People

Variables	How often?	N	%
Frequency of Travel	Often	69	15.6
	Once in a while	115	26.1
	Rarely	172	39.0
	Never	85	19.3
	Total	441	100
Frequency of Communicating with People	Often	224	50.8
	Once in a while	117	26.5
	Rarely	92	20.9
	Never	8	1.8
	Total	441	100

39% of foreign language teachers reported that they rarely travel to a country where the language they teach is spoken; 15.6 % report that they travel frequently. 50.8 % of foreign language teachers stated that they frequently communicate with people in the country where the language they teach is spoken, while only 1.8% stated that they never communicate.

The Time Foreign Language Teachers Allocate to Culture and Language Teaching in Their Practice

Within the scope of the fifth sub-problem of the research, it is investigated how foreign language teachers dedicate time to the culture and language of the target language in their instructional practices. Table 8 presents the results obtained from this question.

Table 8: Distribution of Culture and Language Teaching in Instructional Practices of Foreign Language Teachers

Variables	Language-Culture Distribution	N	%
Language-Culture Distribution	100% L.T-0% C.T	15	3.4
	80% L.T -20% C.T	259	58.7
	60% L.T -40% C.T	112	25.4
	40% L.T -60% C.T	10	2.3
	20% L.T -80% C.T	2	.5
	100% L.T and C.T	43	9.8
	Total	441	100

Most of the foreign language teachers (58.7 %) in the study stated that they focused on 80% language teaching-20% culture teaching in their instructional practices. On the other hand, only 2 of the foreign language teachers emphasize 20% language teaching-80% culture teaching. However, 43 teachers stated that they carry out their instructional processes based on 100% language and culture integration.

Foreign Language Teachers' Perceptions of the Cultural Contents in the Instructional Materials They Use

Another aim of the research was to probe the perceptions of foreign language teachers about the cultural content in the course materials they use in their instructional processes. Teachers were first asked whether they used any textbooks and/or additional materials. They were then asked whether these materials met their expectations. Table 9 shows the answers given by the foreign language teachers to the related questions.

Table 9: Foreign Language Teachers' Perceptions of the Cultural Contents in the Instructional Materials They Use

Variables	Material Use	N	%
Using Textbook/Material	I do not utilize textbooks. I make use of other materials.	314	71.2
	I use textbooks. I use generally one book per class.	49	11.1
	I use textbooks. I use materials from different textbooks.	64	14.5
	I use textbooks. I use additional materials alongside textbook materials.	14	3.2
	Total	441	100
State of Meeting Expectations	Yes, very much so	45	10.2
	Yes, up to a certain extent	304	68.9
	No, not really	85	19.3
	No, not at all	7	1.6
	Total	441	100

Most of the foreign language teachers (71.2 %) stated that they use textbooks, and they also use other materials. On the other hand, 14 teachers stated that they use additional materials as well as textbooks. When the level of meeting the expectations of the course materials used by the teachers was examined, 7 teachers stated that these materials did not meet their expectations at all. However, 304 teachers were of the opinion that these materials met their expectations to a certain extent.

Examination of Foreign Language Teachers' Cultural Teaching Practices in Terms of Various Variables

The last sub-problem of the study was to determine whether the level of foreign language teachers' inclusion of the culture of the language they teach in their instructional practices showed significant differences in terms of education level, working experience, weekly teaching hours, familiarity with the culture, and frequency of travelling abroad. For this purpose, ANOVA analysis was carried out and the findings are in tables below.

Table 10. One-Way ANOVA Analysis Results in Terms of Education Degree Variable

Variable	E.D	N	X	SD	S. V.	Sum S.	of DF	Me an S.	F	p
Level of education	Bachelor's	111	2.16	.49	Between g.	1.491	2	.74	3.275	.03
	Master's	246	2.03	.47	Within g.	99,697	438	.22		
	Doctorate	84	2.02	.44	Total	101,188	440			
	Total	441	2.06	.47						

As seen in Table 10, the level of foreign language teachers' inclusion in cultural practices differs significantly according to their education level [$F(2-438) = 3.275$, $p < .05$]. When the source of the relevant difference is examined, it has been determined that this difference is in favour of the teachers who have a bachelor's and master's degree.

Table 11. One-Way ANOVA Analysis Results in Terms of Working experience Variable

Variable	W.E	N	X	SD	S.V.	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean S.	F	p
Year of working experience	1-3 years	6	1.90	.37	Between g.	1.051	3	.35	1,529	.20
	4-10 years	119	2.11	.50	Within g.	100.137	437	.22		
	11-15 years	130	2.09	.50	Total	101,188	440			
	16 and over	186	2.01	.44						
	Total	441	2.06	.47						

As can be seen in Table 11, foreign language teachers' cultural teaching practices do not differ significantly according to the variable of working experience [$p > .05$]. The results of the analysis regarding whether the cultural education practices of the teachers differ in terms of the weekly teaching hours variable are given in Table 12.

Table 12. One-Way ANOVA Analysis Results in terms of Weekly Teaching Hours

Variable	W.T.H	N	X	SD	S.V.	Sum of S.	DF	Mean S.	F	p
Weekly teaching hours	1-10 hours	36	2.11	.46	Between g.	.997	2	.49	2,163	.16
	11-20 hours	241	2.11	.46	Within g.	89,882	390	.23		
	21 and over	116	2.00	.50	Total	90,879	392			
	Total	393	2.08	.48						

The cultural teaching practices of foreign language teachers do not differ significantly according to the weekly teaching hours variable [$p > .05$]. The results of the analysis on whether the cultural education practices of the teachers differ in terms of their level of familiarity with the culture of the language they teach are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. One-Way ANOVA Analysis Results in Terms of Culture Familiarity

Variable	Familiarity	N	X	SD	S.V.	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean S.	F	p
Familiarity	Very familiar	126	1.80	.41	Between g.	13,011	3	4.33	21,494	.00
	Sufficiently familiar	264	2.06	.45	Within g.	88,177	437	.20		
	Not sufficiently familiar	47	2.50	.50	Total	101,188	440			
	Not familiar at all	4	2.12	.28						
	Total	441	2.06	.47						

We can see in the table that the level of foreign language teachers' inclusion in cultural practices differs according to their familiarity with the culture of the language they teach [$F(3-437) = 21.494$, $p < .05$]. When the source of the relevant difference is examined, it is seen that the difference between the group of teachers who are very familiar with the culture and the group of teachers who are familiar enough is in favour of the group of teachers who are familiar enough; it was determined that there was a difference between the teachers who were very familiar with the culture and the teachers who were not familiar enough in favour of the group that was not familiar enough. In addition, there were differences between the teachers who were not familiar with the culture enough and the teachers who were familiar enough in favour of the group that was not familiar enough. The results of the analysis regarding whether the cultural education practices of the teachers differ in terms of the frequency of their travel abroad are given in Table 14.

Table 14. One-Way ANOVA Analysis Results in terms of Frequency of Travelling Abroad

Variable	How often?	N	X	SD	S.V.	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean S.	F	p
Frequency Travel	Often	69	1.83	.44	Between g.	8,716	3	2.90	13,731	.00
	Once in a while	115	1.96	.41	Within g.	92,472	437	.21		
	Rarely	172	2.12	.43	Total	101,188	440			
	Never	85	2.25	.59						
	Total	441	2.06	.47						

The level of foreign language teachers' inclusion in cultural practices differs according to the frequency of travelling abroad [$F(3-437) = 13,731, p < .05$]. When the source of the relevant difference is examined, between the group that travels frequently and the group that rarely travels, in favour of the group that rarely travels; significant differences were found between the group that travels frequently and the group that never travels, in favour of the group that never travels.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This present study inquired into foreign language teachers' perceptions of their role as conveyers of language-and-culture in Turkey. In the study, we can see a clear preference on the question by which teachers were asked about their perception of the objectives of foreign language education. Majority of the respondents expressed that they wanted to build good relationships with students, and they aim to fulfil the curricular requirements for their subject. The fact that teachers would like to build good relationships with their students will positively affect students' learning experiences; however, as to the findings on the curriculum, it can be concluded that foreign language teachers experience pacing problems, and thus focus mostly on the curriculum. This can adversely affect flexibility in education.

Teachers were also asked about their views of culture teaching in foreign language teaching contexts. Foreign language teachers mostly touch on daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink in their instructional practices, and the subjects they mention least are history, geography, political system, and religion. The findings of the study are corroborated by Atay et al. (2009) and Sercu et al. (2005). These findings may be due to the possibility that teachers find touching upon those subjects easier and more achievable.

In addition, the study delved into foreign language teachers' comprehension of culture teaching. 28.1 % of the respondents support the development of attitudes of openness and tolerance towards other peoples and cultures. In line with this study, Sercu et al. (2005) showed in their study that teachers feel highly supportive of encouraging tolerance towards other cultures as well. By contrast, in Atay et al.'s study (2009), teachers expressed strong support to help students know their own cultures better. Teachers can be hesitant or unwilling to teach the target culture due to the possibility that they do not feel comfortable because they experience incompetence in the area. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that foreign language teachers need supporting programs abroad to feel more comfortable in classroom settings regarding culture teaching.

Moreover, the study aimed to shed light on participants' teaching time distributed over language teaching and culture teaching. The findings of the study suggest that 58.7 % of teachers give more time to language teaching than culture teaching. Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that foreign language practices in Turkey are linguistically oriented. This might be because the teachers do not have the training or the effective

learning environment to do so. Majority of teachers in all participating countries in Sercu et al.'s study (2005) seem to be in agreement with this option when it comes to devoting time to language teaching.

Regarding teachers' familiarity and contacts with the foreign culture, 39 % of them rarely travel to the countries where the target language is spoken. 85 out of 441 respondents stated that they never travelled. Based on this finding, it would be safe to claim that this will bring about inadequate familiarity with the target language community. Interestingly, 50.8 % of the teachers indicated that they often communicate with the people who speak the target language. In Sercu et al.'s study (2005), Mexican, Polish, Bulgarian, and Spanish teachers indicated that they have frequent contacts with the foreign culture, while Swedish, Belgian, and Greek teachers only communicate with the foreign culture every now and then. Also, consistent with this study, majority of teachers in their study do not appear to travel frequently.

The more foreign language teachers are in authentic intercultural settings, the more positively affected foreign language education in Turkey will be. In addition, learning occurs more effectively when the classroom settings, tasks, and activities are a simulation of real-life situations. Therefore, it will not be groundless to claim that Turkey needs to provide foreign language teachers with more travelling programs.

As to foreign language teaching materials, 71.2 % of the teachers use textbooks. 68.9 % of them believe that textbooks meet their expectations up to a certain degree in terms of their cultural contents. In Sercu et al.'s study (2005), 84.62 % of the respondents from Greece indicated that they mainly utilized one course book. This percentage appears to be higher than other countries in their investigation. Furthermore, the lowest percentages of teachers who use merely one textbook are from Mexico (33.33 %) and Bulgaria (36.67 %). When it comes to using one main course book in the class, it is obvious that teachers from different countries of the world need and use one. However, foreign language teachers who also consider themselves to be the teacher of the target culture as well seem to be needing additional materials.

5. Recommendations

The aim of this study was to investigate language-culture teaching from foreign language teachers' point of view in their teaching practices. To achieve this aim, I utilised a questionnaire. Therefore, the findings of the present study rely on a single source. Further studies can be done to verify the findings through other resources.

Furthermore, the present study did not include learners' perspectives and experiences in teaching culture in foreign language education. Further studies need to be conducted so as to include learners' take on the subject matter and to get the full picture. They may have

valuable insights and provide helpful feedback as learners to develop foreign language teaching programs in Turkey.

Regarding the materials used in foreign language teaching, it can be concluded on the findings of the studies that they lack cultural elements of the target culture. This brings up another research topic in the field. What can be done to include more cultural elements in the textbooks and how can it be done? How does this affect the learning experiences? Further studies can shed light to these questions.

Last but not least, in order to generalizability, more studies can be done in different countries of the world. This would also provide valuable insights as to how teaching differs in different cultures.

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