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Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning: Teachers' Perspectives and Practices

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Thanks to technological advances, migration, and globalization, English has become the language of internationalization. Therefore, many schools prioritized learning English to ensure and sustain international communication. However, in order to communicate well with individuals all around the world, bestowing English language learners with intercultural competence is also required in the teaching and learning of English. In Türkiye, one of the countries that host many immigrants, the experiences of foreign language teachers regarding intercultural issues might provide many insights into intercultural language learning and teaching. Therefore, this study aimed to expose EFL state schoolteachers' perceptions and practices regarding intercultural language teaching and having foreign students in their classrooms. The methods that teachers adopted to promote intercultural competence in their classes were also explored. The semi-structured interviews were carried out with 30 English language teachers in middle and high schools in Türkiye. For data analysis, the computer program MAXQDA was benefited to categorize the codes and reveal the common themes. The findings revealed certain teacher practices that might contribute to students' intercultural competence development and challenges experienced during that process. It can be concluded that teachers are in need of professional guidance and resources to further develop their learners' intercultural competence.

Introduction

It is almost impervious to assume language learning without culture since language cannot be detached from the society and its speakers (Kramsch, 2009). Therefore, culture is a widely debated concept in language teaching, and learning research. However, defining culture is also a confusing matter as there are both observable (i.e., clothes, foods) and non-

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observable (i.e., values, viewpoints) aspects of culture. Liddicoat (2011) explains two orientations for culture in language teaching: cultural and intercultural. The former one does not entail any change in learners' assumptions, values or worldviews and it is the acquisition of knowledge of other cultures. Nonetheless, the intercultural orientation is transformative, and learners are expected to decentre from their worldviews and develop a new intercultural identity through the involvement with another culture.

Considering these two orientations to culture teaching, it is vital to note that English is an international language, and it is used by millions of people to get in contact with people from a variety of cultures. Therefore, English is viewed as 'the language of globalization and internalization and the prerequisite to effective communication in intercultural communities' (Baker & Feng, 2020, p.13). Consequently, the teaching of culture in language classes become much harder to explore because such questions as whose culture and which aspects of culture should be taught arise and the answers to these questions depend on the purposes of learning a language (Kramsch, 2009).

Considering the significance of English in the globalized world, one of the primary goals of English language learning and teaching is to bestow learners with intercultural skills so that they can manage to communicate well with the people around the world. Since intercultural dimensions are an important part of internalization (Baker & Feng, 2020), it should be promoted not only in English-medium of instruction universities where there are many international students. Urgent attention should also be given to the teaching of IC in high schools and middle schools due to the existence of immigrants and a variety of subcultures in such contexts, as well. Especially in Türkiye, one of the top refugee-hosting countries, the number of expatriates in schools is increasing in a gradual fashion. Middle and high school teachers encounter conflicts and challenges while helping their students to adapt. Teachers are the agents that can facilitate a language-learning environment to promote IC skills, therefore their experiences and practices can provide many insights into where to start intercultural language learning and teaching and how to equip learners and teachers to develop intercultural skills in language classrooms.

A review of relevant studies showed that there is scarcity of the research studies on teachers' views and experiences on intercultural language teaching in middle and high school contexts in Türkiye (Bayyurt, 2006; Demircioğlu & Çakır, 2015). Therefore, the current study is an honest attempt to shed light on state schoolteachers' beliefs and routines about intercultural learning in English language classes. By disclosing teachers' experiences and demands regarding having foreign students or expatriates in their classrooms and overall intercultural learning and teaching, we think this research will fill the research gap in state middle and high schools.

Literture Review

Perceptions and practices of EFL teachers in relation to intercultural competence in other contexts

In other contexts, the research studies on teachers' intercultural language teaching views and practices reached similar conclusions. Sercu (2005) conducted a research with teachers from seven nations, allowing for comparisons across diverse contexts. The study's findings showed that teachers still view culture and intercultural competency instruction as a means of transmitting cultural knowledge rather than improving learners' intercultural

competence as intercultural speakers. When it comes to the cultural components of language, language teachers are generally concerned with major 'C' culture, such as art, history, and literature (Fantini, 2012, p.270). In Larzen-Östermark's (2008) study, interviews with 13 Finnish-Swedish English teachers yielded comparable findings. Teachers thought that intercultural education was limited to providing cultural facts and only a few people expressed interest in helping students build their IC.

In the German setting, Brunsmeier (2017) performed interviews with 19 primary school teachers in her research study. According to the findings, teachers valued intercultural education as a goal of language teaching, but they did not apply it on a regular basis (p.152). According to Orange and Smith's (2018) research, there is a misalignment between teachers' attitudes and practices in New Zealand. The author speculated that the inconsistency could be due to teachers' lack of knowledge of intercultural language education theories and methods. Similarly, Han and Song (2011) found little evidence in the teaching of IC due to a lack of intercultural understanding among the teachers and a lack of intercultural content in the materials.

Perceptions and practices of EFL teachers in relation to intercultural competence in the Turkish context

In the Turkish context, even though the research on intercultural competence practices of teachers was carried out via a questionnaire, which is generally adapted from Sercu's (2005) study, the results were mixed based on various contexts. Some studies revealed that teachers believe language and culture cannot be separated and it is important to teach IC (Atay, Çamlıbel, Ersin, Kaşlıoğlu, & Kurt, 2009; Bayyurt, 2006; Cansever & Mede, 2016; Kahraman, 2016; Kuru-Gönen & Sağlam, 2012) even when students had lower English proficiency (Cansever & Mede, 2016). However, certain studies indicated that teachers did not see culture teaching as one of the primary goals of language education (Kılıç, 2013). Moreover, when their students were not motivated to learn about culture, teachers did not always feel compelled to do so (Bayyurt, 2006). According to Atay et al. (2009), even while teachers were aware of intercultural education and valued culture-integrated language teaching, they did not use it in their lessons. Similarly, Kahraman's (2016) study of Turkish EFL teachers and students at Hacettepe and Dumlupınar universities found that teachers spend less time on culture instruction, with probable causes including curricular difficulties, time constraints, and teachers' lack of knowledge with foreign cultures. The usage of textbooks when teaching English was regarded as one of the most prevalent approaches to impart culture, and teachers rarely preferred supplemental materials for culture education.

In Türkiye, the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Spain, Demircioğlu and Çakır (2015) investigated the attitudes and opinions of International Baccalaureate Schools English teachers on intercultural language education. Teachers carried out cultural duties about traditions and worldwide challenges because the college English curriculum was based on IC. The most significant aspects of culture in EFL education, according to Turkish English teachers, are conventions, traditions, and values. The researchers also stressed the importance of a follow-up study including teachers in the national curriculum.

As can be examined in the previous paragraphs, in the Turkish context, early research was primarily on the teachers' perceptions regarding intercultural language teaching especially in the university context (Cansever & Mede, 2016; Kılıç, 2013; Kuru-Gönen & Sağlam, 2012) and they primarily focused on the target cultures. However, English is used among non-native

speakers all around the world because of its international status. Therefore, IC is defined not as the knowledge and skills to be able to communicate with native speakers only, but it is defined as the primary dexterity to be able to live and work with individuals from different societies and cultures (Hammer, 2015). There are fewer studies conducted at middle and secondary schools in Türkiye (Bayyurt, 2006; Demircioğlu & Çakır, 2015) many of which were conducted with the teachers working in private schools and there is a need to reveal teachers' practices in the state schools.

Furthermore, as indicated in the figures on UNHCR website, Türkiye is one of the top refugee-hosting countries with 3.7 million refugees, so there are many non-native Turkish, and refugee students studying in middle and high schools in Türkiye. Therefore, intercultural competence should be viewed from a broader perspective, and experiences of EFL teachers within a multicultural context need to be examined to identify their professional needs. Despite the fact that such a context cannot be applied to the entire population, the present study is a worthy attempt that may provide insight into other situations in which English is considered as a foreign language. Consequently, this present research aimed to reveal Turkish state schoolteachers' views and practices regarding IC in middle and high schools. The research questions were:

- (1) What are the intercultural language teaching perspectives and practices of EFL teachers in Turkish public schools?
- (2) What are EFL teachers' attitudes and experiences with international students in their classrooms?
- (3) How do EFL teachers feel about the difficulty or ease of teaching IC in language classrooms?
- (4) What role do EFL teachers believe they play in the development of students' IC?

Methods

The primary purpose of the study was to expose teachers' experiences and explore intercultural learning and teaching from their perspectives. Therefore, a qualitative approach was adopted, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) was chosen as the method of the study. With this methodology, the researchers aimed to gain more in-depth insight into teachers' shared experiences and teaching practices concerning IC.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was preferred due to the design of the study, which is phenomenology. Only teachers who work in state middle and high schools were included as they had similar contexts, coursebooks, and materials compared to foundation schools. Besides, teachers' experiences abroad were taken into consideration as the criteria for selection since teachers who have been abroad more than six months, or a year might have totally different experiences. The teachers who have up to six-month experience (including the ones who have no overseas experience) participated in the study. Twelve teachers have never been abroad. Fourteen of them stayed abroad for less than a month. To reach the teachers, a preliminary survey was conducted via social networking sites. Teachers volunteering for the interviews were contacted.

There were teachers from different parts of Türkiye. Eleven teachers from Marmara Region, seven teachers from Central Anatolian, three from Mediterranean Region and Black Sea Region separately, and two teachers from Eastern Anatolia, South-eastern Anatolia, and

Aegean Region separately attended the study. In total, the number of participant teachers was 30. Five of the teachers were male whereas 25 of them were female. Information regarding participants' ages and teaching experiences can be examined in Figure 1.

Teaching Experience	N	Age	N
1-4 years	6	20-24	3
5-9 years	13	25-29	13
10-14 years	8	30-34	6
15-19 years	2	35-39	6
20-24 years	1	40-44	2
Total	30	Total	30

Figure 1. Demographics of the participants

The majority of the teachers (f=25) were graduates of the *Department of English Language Teaching*. Three of them graduated from *Linguistics*, and the other two graduated from *Translation and Interpretation* and the *Department of English Language and Literature* successively. Twelve teachers who had no overseas experience and 15 teachers had less than a month of experience abroad.

Some teachers (f=6) did not have any courses about IC or cultural aspects of language teaching. Many (f=16) expressed that these types of topics were covered in some of their courses like *Sociolinguistics*, *Language Transfer*, *Language Acquisition*, *Bilingualism*, *Language and Culture*, *American Culture and Literature*, and *English Language and Literature*.

Data collection and analysis

In-depth interviews are exclusive means for phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2007). Thus, the chosen data collection tool was interviewing. The interview schedule was piloted with three teachers prior to the study. During the interviews, the same major questions were asked to each teacher to maintain and facilitate the data analysis process. The questions were in accordance with the research questions. Nonetheless, impromptu queries were also done intrinsically as it was a semi-structured interview. After the pilot study, some interview questions were revised.

The interviews were done in Turkish, which is the first language of the participants, to avert the impact of limited language use on the teachers' revelations and to provide an unconstrained environment. Then, the quotes were translated into English and crosschecked by the language experts in the field. This study was a part of a more comprehensive project; therefore, the total duration of the interviews was 1015 and 34 minutes was the average duration for an interview. The researchers collected the whole data in five months in 2019. Regarding confidentiality, teachers' identities were kept confidential and they were renamed in the data as P3, P5, P7, etc. (i.e. P3= Participant 3). The ethics committee approvals from the university Human Subject Ethics Committee (No= 28620816/613) and Ministry of National Education (No=81576613-605.01-E.7723165) were received.

The data analysis process involved some stages based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), which was illustrated in Figure 2 below.



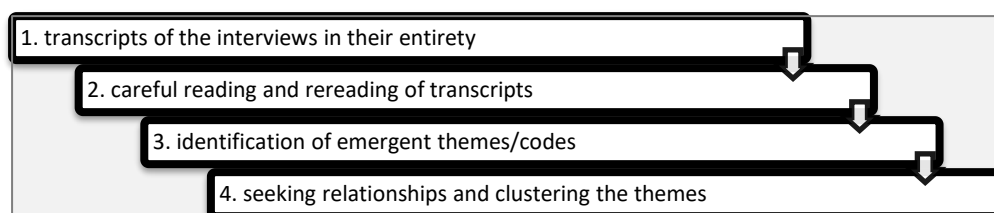


Figure 2. Data analysis

Half of the transcriptions were checked by another colleague for the accuracy of the data. Emergent themes were revealed through MAXQDA. These were clustered and the frequency of the codes was calculated in this program and another instructor working in the field of language teaching and had a publication on intercultural communicative competence was asked to code one of the interviews for the inter-coder reliability. The match between all the codes was observed though the codes revealed by researchers involved extra detailed codes.

To ensure trustworthiness member checking was done through insistent questioning during the interviews. When the expressions were too vague to decipher, respondent validation was used. The researcher was wary of leading the teachers astray. To limit the effect of phrasing and prevent alternative interpretations, the questions were phrased precisely. Throughout the research project, there were debriefing sessions with the thesis committee members.

Findings

Teachers explained their multifaceted experiences regarding IC and specifically explained the reasons why they find promoting IC easy or difficult. They also commented on how they contributed to the students' IC, and how they understand that their students developed in terms of IC, which helped to categorize the interview data as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Overall findings

Categories	Sub-categories	<i>F</i>
Teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding IC	Teachers' daily teaching practices	109
	Teachers' thoughts/perceptions	61
	Needs of students, teachers and curriculum	24
	Students' lack of IC	21
	Students' development of IC	18
Teachers' perceptions of having foreign students	Impact on teachers	32
	Impact on students	20
Challenges of teaching IC	Physical conditions/scarcity of facilities	26
	Learners' attitudes and views	20
	Learners' limited interaction with foreigners	11
	Society's presumptions	6
Easiness of teaching IC	Teachers' scanty knowledge/willingness	5
	Availability of sources and necessary conditions	11
	Students' enthusiasm for empathy, and use of technology	11
Teachers' contribution to the students' IC development	The ways teachers contribute	80
	The strategy teacher uses to check students' development of IC	50
	Not contributing much to students' IC & reasons	24

Perceptions and experiences of teachers in relation to intercultural competence

Teachers used a variety of tasks and activities in their language classrooms, including presenting different cultures, employing audio-visuais, bringing realia and scenery, creating projects, exchanging experiences, conversations, comparing cultures and countries, role-playing, and so on. Teachers introduced the target and other cultures in their everyday lessons by presenting knowledge about their foods, lifestyles, festivals, extreme sports, and so on. Some of the initiatives in which teachers were involved, such as Grundtvig, were also reported. P21 shared her first-hand accounts of hosting 20 European students for a first-aid project. She stated that foreigners participated in one-on-one extracurricular activities with students. She explained:

When I received feedback from the students later, (they said) 'My teacher, we learned a lot about their culture. They had some characteristics that were different from us, but they had also some traits that were similar to us'. You know, in terms of cultural understanding, learning from the book, hearing somehow, and research is not very effective, but these kinds of things, projects, including them one-to-one, going and staying there, being involved in their culture are very effective, I think. (P21).

There was also an effort by teachers to increase intercultural awareness, such as informing students that they must connive diversity and avoid misconceptions.

In some cases, there can be a misperception in society that teaching a language is like imposing a different culture. That's not how I see it. Learning the culture of a country and getting information about that culture does not mean the destruction of your own culture. That's what I'm trying to tell the kids, too (P19).

In relation to students' lack of IC, teachers mentioned students' prejudices toward studying English and a lack of enthusiasm to learn about other cultures. They noted stereotyping and a lack of openness to other cultures. In terms of the knowledge component, students lacked a wide understanding of the target, other, and home cultures, as well as a global perspective and international experience. Other teachers, on the other hand, mentioned kids' use of technology and acquisition of IC from social media, computer games, movies, and television. Pen pal activities and exchange of cultural information in class were used to foster interaction with other students.

The importance of the coursebook in the integration of intercultural themes in the EFL classrooms was underlined. Some teachers thought the texts covered all cultures, not simply their own or the target culture's. Five of these teachers worked at high schools, while the other two worked in middle schools. Other teachers, on the other hand, believed that the textbooks did not incorporate other cultures or intercultural dilemmas, and that they were generally written with a local perspective rather than an international perspective. Half of these teachers were in middle schools whereas the other half was working at secondary schools.

Some teachers further said that teaching culture or imparting information about other civilizations was frowned upon by society. There was concern that kids' sense of self and home culture would be lost. It was thought that teaching a language was the same as imposing another culture. There was apprehension about being different and promoting other cultures. Their colleagues were questioning teachers about teaching a foreign culture, and some parents were objecting to the use of 'pig' image in the coursebooks. One teacher addressed some of the biases against foreign cultures in the excerpt below:



We wanted to have a surprise for him (a foreign teacher). It was Halloween time. And students designed masks in visual arts. We thought we'd put them on and surprise him. Some parents were disturbed, 'Our teacher is nice, but does she want to celebrate Halloween?' They call the foreign teacher 'the man'. 'Why does she teach Halloween to our students when she is supposed to teach our holy nights Ramadan Festival and Sacrifice Festival to the man? Does she try to make our children 'giaour'?' We encounter such challenges. If we can break the chain of parents, we can see that different broader perspective in the students (P26).

Teachers' major demands and requirements in terms of IC development were getting training on how to incorporate IC in the classroom, and international experience for enhancing IC. P2 indicated the need for training:

If I evaluate myself as a teacher, I do not find my intercultural competence adequate, but I have overseas experience and I hear about things. However, as for me, teachers need professional training about how to integrate this. Now there are exercises that can introduce world cultures in our coursebooks in our lessons and all these were internalized well. Students are presented with not only the target culture but also the exercises that introduce different lifestyles of different countries from all over the world. That's fine, but it's important how the teacher reflects it. At this point, I think the teacher should be given certain training (P2).

A few teachers also noted students' needs, which included first learning about their own culture and then learning about other cultures. The necessity of having a good strategy towards foreign students, exchange programs not only with European countries, but also with other cultures, and endorsing the curriculum with more cultural and spoken activities were all mentioned in the curriculum and system prerequisites.

Teachers' perspectives on their experiences with foreign learners in the class

Sixteen teachers stated that they did not have any students who spoke a language other than Turkish as their first language, while fourteen teachers stated that they had pupils who spoke a language other than Turkish as their first language. Teachers were asked what new implementations or changes they would do in their classes if they had international students. Five of the teachers thought the effect would be very favourable, while one teacher thought the opposite. Teachers identified possible adjustments and new implementations as having an impact on their teaching techniques and students' learning processes. The former involved the use of icebreakers, cultural comparisons, increase in the use of target language, and developing strategies to manage foreign students in language classrooms. The latter included such codes as increase in the amount of use of English among learners, exchanging cultural knowledge, and awareness regarding the necessity of use of English as the common language.

To begin with, teachers commented that having foreign students in their language classrooms would help them demonstrate the value of English as an international language by boosting both teachers' and students' English usage (EIL).

That would be great. At least, I would show my students that I have to speak in English, and they have to speak English. I would say, 'because there is someone who does not understand me in the class.' and I would prevent them from speaking Turkish significantly... (P16).

A few teachers also acknowledged the benefit of having foreign students as a source. They felt that by allowing pupils to make cultural comparisons, they would be able to learn about various cultures. They also described some of the tactics they utilized to adjust to the foreign students, such as using icebreakers or body language to ensure that students did not feel alienated.

Secondly, regarding the impact on students' learning, teachers accredited that teaching to both Turkish and foreign students in the classroom could facilitate discussions on cultural issues and learners will exchange a great deal of cultural information. They also believed that these learners might also be role models for their Turkish friends who are learning English and that interaction might also contribute to the English proficiency level of Turkish learners.

Teachers with students whose first language was not Turkish (German, French, British, Syrian, Iraqi, Chilean, Kurdish, Somali, Afghan, Ecuadorian, and Libyan, and Azerbaijani) highlighted cultural differences, adaptation, and disputes. Depending on the students' original language, teachers' experiences with these non-native language learners differed. Teachers who had Syrian students struggled to communicate with them, therefore they relied on body language or translators from other Syrian students. Teachers with British, German, or French students, on the other hand, regarded this as a chance to relate cultures. Because of the attitudes of the students' parents, teachers with Kurdish students faced communication and discrimination issues.

Teaching intercultural competence: Challenges and opportunities

Regarding the challenges or the easiness of teaching IC in language classrooms, eight teachers believed it was not a strenuous job as opposed to fifteen teachers who found it quite difficult. Others thought the difficulty or ease with which IC can be taught is determined on the circumstances. Half of the teachers who thought IC teaching was challenging had no overseas experience. Among the other half, only one of them had 1-3 month experience abroad, and the others had less than one-month overseas experience. Eight of these teachers were teaching high school whereas six of them were teaching at middle school. One of them was teaching in both contexts.

Teachers considered IC teaching to be a difficult task due to physical factors, such as dearth of facilities, learners' perspectives and attitudes, students' lack of engagement with foreigners, society's expectations, and teachers' restricted knowledge and willingness. There were complaints about the scarcity of facilities, the pressure of a set curriculum, native components in coursebooks, having a restricted amount of time for IC teaching, and students' lack of willingness to study English. P28 stated that students were unmotivated since English was not examined in university exams, and that local content in coursebooks made it hard to encourage students to speak in English because it was like thinking in Turkish and attempting to speak in English.

Regarding the lack of interaction with foreigners, P27 said students interacted in English only with their teachers and the chance to go abroad and meet foreigners was limited. Some teachers (P8, P15, P17, P19, & P22) explained concerns regarding society's assumptions.

We always have a fear in our own culture. When we learn something or learn a language and so on, it's like we're going to lose something from ourselves. It's hard in that sense because suddenly something can turn into a state and the thought 'Is this culture being imposed on us?' (P17).



They believed that easiness or difficulty depends on the sociocultural background of the students and parents. Prejudices among students about learning a language and culture were also obstacles to culture-integrated instruction. Therefore, P19 suggested:

When you demonstrate cultural influences or disclose something about the culture, you notice that there is increased antipathy. I think that this kind of thing can be taught not explicitly but a little implicitly. Therefore, you can offer it to a student during a karaoke event in the classroom, while watching a movie, or while watching an event, a video event, or a theatrical event. (P19).

Eight teachers did not regard IC teaching difficult. Out of eight teachers, three of them had no overseas experience, three had less than a month and two had 1-3- and 4-6-months experience. Four of them were working at high school whereas three were teaching at middle school. One was teaching at both. Five teachers said it was simple to teach IC since students were open to all cultures and had no preconceptions about different societies. Few teachers noted that culture and language were intertwined, and that learners' regular use of new technology made their job easier in terms of IC development. The availability of materials, financial assistance, and eager students to learn about diverse cultures, according to the other seven teachers, would make teaching IC easier.

Contribution of teachers to the growth of learners' intercultural competence

Nine teachers reported that they were unable to appropriately contribute to their students' development of IC, whereas others directly detailed how they aided their students in acquiring IC. In the coursebooks, teachers primarily employed videos, images, and themes. Movies, TV shows, the global agenda, and things that enlarge the minds of teenagers were all highlighted.

Teachers engaged in activities and tasks such as presenting target or other cultures through class debates, visual materials, songs, and movies, requiring students to read literary works, discussing current issues with students, holding video conferences with foreign friends, and analysing the lives of famous or successful people. Students were also assigned activities such as conversations with relatives abroad, short film-video shooting, and role plays according to teacher interviews.

Teachers acknowledged their desire to instil critical cultural awareness in their students. They attempted to set an example for their students by emphasizing the importance of studying EIL. Even though they were mentioned only once, some teachers noted their efforts to help students overcome biases about other cultures, develop empathy, avoid marginalization, preserve ethnic identities, and widen their horizons.

Teachers also shared their experiences in relation to their foreign friends and travelling abroad. P28 referred to her experiences in the excerpt below:

I was doing some interviews with my foreign friends, and then I was bringing them and making my students watch them. At some time in the past, I had an interview about their experiences and what kind of challenges they had or what kind of a culture shock they experienced when they came to Türkiye since they did not have a chance to come to Maraş. Then, I asked my students to conduct interviews with their relatives abroad about what kind of a shock they had and how they adapted (P28).

Some teachers also commented about how they promoted and guided students to do more research, watch movies and TV shows, play computer games, and engage with social media, as well as literary works, books, and theatres. They listed programs such as peer teaching with an English native speaker, pen pal exchanges with individuals from Italy and Poland, and exposing students to literature and politics as part of their thesis. Another teacher discussed establishing an Erasmus project and inviting international university students into the classroom as part of her goals.

Teachers mentioned some checking mechanisms like asking questions, checking their fluency, motivation, and readiness while teaching language and culture to detect whether they develop IC. They noticed the change when the negative attitudes lessened over time. They mentioned signs including students' interest in learning about different cultures, their ambition to work and travel, and their interactions with visitors and foreigners at colleges. Students' reactions to information about various cultures and ability to express empathy for other cultures were also discussed.

Nine teachers who felt powerless to assist pupils improve their IC explained why, citing factors such as the setting, teachers, students, curriculum, and materials. Feeling unqualified to contribute to learners' IC, not aiming to educate about the culture, not undertaking any activity where students engage with international individuals and the need for supplementary resources and preparation were all teacher-related concerns. Limited content of coursebooks and absence of conditions for having supplemental resources were two materials-related concerns. Curriculum and testing requirements, as well as the lack of intercultural components in the curriculum, were other curricular problems. Learning simply how to convey grammar and vocabulary in academic contexts and working in a small town were two context-related challenges. Learners' scanty motivation in learning a language, as well as their preconceptions toward other cultures and language acquisition, were student-related difficulties. Participant 3 referred to some:

I don't think I can make a lot of intercultural contributions. I know perhaps one in a thousand or two in a thousand about their culture. I try to convey what I know, but I don't think students can recognize the target culture very well... It is because of the exams. In the curriculum, the program says, 'Cover that and ask that in the exam' and we have to do so. We are not able to teach kids how to talk. We are not able to teach anything about culture (P3).

To summarize, more than half of the teachers helped students build IC in a variety of ways, including through resources, activities, projects, guidance, and sharing their experiences. One-third, however, stated that they were unable to contribute to the process due to feelings of inadequacy, a lack of engagement with foreigners, curriculum, and material issues.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to uncover teachers' practices since the goal of teacher cognition is to acquire a knowledge of "teachers' professional acts, not what or how they think in isolation of what they do" (Borg, 2003, p. 105). Despite the fact that all of the participants were public school EFL teachers with similar approaches to teaching, their views of IC learning and instruction revealed a range of issues.

The findings were comparable to Bayyurt's (2006) study in terms of the students' poor interest in learning about different cultures. Students' lack of enthusiasm to learn about different



cultures could be due to their lack of interest in learning a new language. As a result, during small conferences, the importance of studying EIL might be emphasized and some cultural activities where learners are expected to interact with people from other cultures can be organised (Gedik Bal, 2020a) so that learners can feel the necessity of learning EIL and the possible benefits that learning about cultures will bring for them.

The data also demonstrated a disagreement among teachers' viewpoints on the content of the coursebooks. Some teachers argued that national education books had limited intercultural components, while others claimed that not just the target culture but cultures from other societies were represented. In this context, undertaking a textbook evaluation in public schools to investigate cultural integration could be a next step, with textbook changes integrating current topics as well as intercultural and global themes being explored if necessary.

Some teachers also recounted being grilled by their colleagues and parents, because some people assume that acquiring a language or culture entails the loss of one's cultural identity and the imposition of a new one. The dread of being different was also highlighted. This conclusion was unusual because previous research had not revealed such a concern among language teachers. The cause might be due to a difference in context. Previous research has predominantly been conducted at colleges, where instructors are used to dealing with students of various ethnic origins; however, this study focused on high school and middle school teachers, who might not have had the chance to interact with teachers from various backgrounds and must also deal with parents' demands in addition to their directors and students. More training opportunities for middle and high school teachers may be provided as a result of these findings. They might be offered sharing-caring sessions in which they explore such topics, which could help some teachers perceive language and culture connections from various perspectives.

Teachers introduced a variety of classroom activities and tasks, but actual practices were constrained since only a few teachers had intercultural projects or interactive practices. The majority of them saw IC training as conveying information about target cultures, and they were heavily reliant on coursebook contents such as modules and topics in textbooks. These findings were consistent with prior study in the Turkish setting (Atay et al., 2009; Kahraman, 2016; Kuru-Gönen, & Sağlam, 2012), which found that language instructors predominantly rely on textbooks to promote IC.

Knowledge dimension of IC was emphasized more than the other dimensions, which was similar to the findings of other studies (Bayyurt, 2006; Cansever & Mede, 2016; Kılıç, 2013; Kuru-Gönen & Sağlam, 2012). The study also revealed similar findings in terms of the intercultural topics that are covered in classrooms like festivals, cuisines, currency, other cities abroad, education, climates, lifestyles, ethics/manners, and historical artefacts (Bayyurt, 2006; Han & Song, 2011). Teachers, according to Gay (2013), focused on 'safe' intercultural topics such as traditions, cuisines, costumes, and festivities rather than crucial cultural concerns such as 'inequities, injustices, oppressions, and major contributions of ethnic groups to societal and human existence' (Gay, 2013, p.57). However, IC requires not only the knowledge of other cultures but openness and curiosity towards other cultures. Therefore, students might be provided with a positive atmosphere where they could critically reflect on sociocultural issues.

Teachers also stated that they benefited from class discussions, which may be utilized to raise

students' understanding of global and multicultural issues as well as assist learners in verbalizing ideas that differ from their own (OECD, 2018). Some teachers stated that they attempted to expose their students to cultural exchange by bringing foreigners into their classes to help them grow their IC, which was comparable to Demircioğlu and Çakır's findings (2015). Some festivals can also be organized where students meet international students and such interactions can provide more dynamic and personal cultural exposure (Davidson & Liu, 2020; Gedik Bal, 2020a).

Few teachers mentioned their efforts to promote students' critical cultural awareness by attempting to avoid marginalization and persuade pupils that learning about other languages and cultures does not mean they lose their culture. Correcting students' misconceptions and errors concerning cultural concerns, as well as teaching them to accept diversity, were also emphasized. The findings were consistent with earlier research in the Turkish setting. According to Kuru-Gönen and Sağlam's (2012) study, just ten percent of the teachers who took part in the study discussed stereotypes about other cultures, societies, or countries. According to Atay et al.'s (2009) survey, 301 out of 503 teachers, or 60 percent of all teachers, never discussed prejudices against foreign cultures with their students. It might be inferred that teachers' efforts to help their students acquire IC were restricted to providing culture-specific knowledge in their courses. Even the textbooks might intentionally refrain from such issues lest such topics may cause conflicts among the students. In order to encourage teachers and facilitate such discussions, textbooks should introduce a variety of tasks and activities that learners reflect on stereotyping, and the ways to overcome these (Gedik Bal, 2020b).

Because teachers and students may not come from the same cultural, social, or ethnic origins in such a globalized environment, intercultural conversations and cultural differences may pose certain obstacles, which may have an impact on language learning and teaching. Building bridges across cultures is a viable technique for instructors to mitigate these differences (Gay, 2013, p. 67).

Teachers with Syrian students in their classrooms found it hard to communicate with them and attempted to devise techniques to help them. Teachers with Kurdish children had communication issues as well as preconceptions from parents and students, so they sought to adapt to the situation and demonstrate learners' eagerness to learn about diverse cultures. In this respect, teachers need guidance in terms of dealing with such cultural conflicts as mediators. The world is getting more and more globalized, and the number of refugees is increasing day by day.

Half of the teachers stated unequivocally that integrating IC in language classroom was extremely arduous. The instructors' explanations were quite similar to the problems raised in Diaz's (2013) study, which included a dearth of time, curricular concerns, limited materials and evaluation tools, and the intercultural approach's long-term viability (p.15). It was underlined that there was a limited amount of time to teach English and integrate intercultural components (Demircioğlu, & Çakır, 2015; Kahraman, 2016; Kuru-Gönen, & Sağlam, 2012; Larzen-Östermark, 2008).

The restricted component of course texts used in language courses was one issue. Apart from the out-of-datedness of the issues in the coursebooks, Han and Song (2011) criticized the limited cultural content offered in them. Not every instructional resource is adequate in this regard, and they are not desperate, even though they are far from optimum (Gay, 2013, p.59).



As a result, teachers' critical examination of coursebooks and other instructional resources, as well as substituting for lacking features as needed, is crucial (Gay, 2013; OECD, 2018).

The present issue is that teachers rely on the coursebook as the primary (and sometimes only) source of information in the classroom. As a result, instructors' criticisms of coursebooks should be investigated more in order to learn how they exploit and view them as a part of the language classroom. A textbook can be seen of as a consultant in terms of leading teachers and students how to proceed, as Robatjazi (2008) argues. As a result, authors of language textbooks should be aware of not only cultural facts such as history, geography, customs, and traditions, but also cultural stereotypes, notable characters, and events in the target countries. Authors should present the cultures in an unbiased way.

In relation to curriculum, according to Demircioğlu and Çakır (2015), when the college English curriculum primarily focused on IC, teachers used cultural activities about customs and worldwide challenges. Their studies took place in a private school context, and the curriculum used was designed to emphasize intercultural abilities. However, though present research illustrated that teachers stressed the need of including intercultural components in the curriculum, teachers in national education or public schools may not be completely aware of the existence of IC in the curriculum. It could be due to a lack of emphasis in the curriculum or a lack of regular reference to the curriculum by the teachers. The curriculum for public schools can be evaluated, and additional intercultural aspects, particularly objectives, can be introduced to the curriculum of high and middle school students to motivate teachers to integrate more intercultural components.

Another issue mentioned was a lack of technical resources such as smart boards, projectors, and Internet access. In Atay et al.'s (2009) study, this was also noted as one probable reason why teachers did not practice IC to a large extent. As a result, when planning training for learners' intercultural development, the physical conditions, and amenities available in educational environments should be taken into account.

Another issue was a lack of possibilities to travel overseas and contact with people from other countries. As a result, they found IC teaching to be rather difficult. 'Traveling abroad and attending intercultural events were not prevalent among Turkish higher education students,' according to Aba (2016). When higher education is compared to high and middle schools, it is easy to expect that the lower levels of education will have a far lower rate. However, as Porto, Houghton, & Byram (2018) indicated study abroad experiences might not essentially equip them with positive attitudes to others, so there should be systematic training that accompanies such experiences in order to reap the benefits of overseas experiences.

Eight EFL teachers, on the other hand, did not believe teaching IC to be a hard process. They expressed students' eagerness to learn about various cultures, recognizing that language and culture were intertwined, and that they had the necessary equipment, such as smart boards and projectors. When the right circumstances arose, a few teachers stated that teaching IC was not arduous. Apart from having time and money, these were relevant to students' excitement and willingness to learn about foreign cultures. Robatzaji (2008) also thought that it was simple to raise learners' IC since opportunities such as instructional resources such as media eliminate the need to travel overseas. One major aspect influencing instructors' cognition in regard to ICC teaching is computer accessibility (Gong, Hu, & Lai, 2010).

As opposed to Han and Song' (2011), teachers reported that they shared intercultural

interaction experiences with their learners in this study. Students were eager to discuss what they had seen or heard in the classroom, even if they had not been exposed to another culture outside of the classroom, according to teachers. Intercultural learning can be achieved in a variety of methods, according to Busse and Krause (2016), including stimulating students' own intercultural experiences and reflecting on them. As a result, a variety of activities and objectives should be devised to encourage learners to discuss and learn about different cultures based on their own experiences or what they have read or heard about them (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). Brunsmeier (2017), on the other hand, agrees that answering learners' questions and encouraging them to share their experiences needs a collaborative effort. However, according to Brunsmeier (2017), managing the learners' questions and encouraging them to share their experiences requires a high level of task-in-process competence for the teacher, thus this should be addressed with caution.

Another outcome of the study was that available coursebooks mostly contributed to students' IC development since they gave subjects for teachers to use as discussion topics or to exhibit the culture of others. Teachers, according to Kuru-Gönen and Sağlam (2012), similarly covered cultural issues when they occurred in the coursebooks. Nugent and Catalano (2015) also proposed connecting critical cultural awareness to subjects that are currently being explored in traditional foreign language courses (p. 27). In order to improve students' IC, EFL teachers said they used audio-visuals such as videos about different countries and cultures, TV shows, and movies. Few teachers, on the other hand, mentioned their efforts to increase students' critical cultural awareness by dispelling biases about other societies, encouraging them to accept diversity, and assisting them in developing empathy, preventing marginalization, preserving ethnic identities, and broadening their horizons. As Marczak (2013) pointed out, de-stereotyping the image of others through the examination of students' biases toward different cultures can be a vital task for the instructor. Teachers made no mention of any tool or deliberate endeavour to assess IC. They posed questions during class discussions and observed how students' attitudes and interests in various cultures evolved. Portfolios, according to Schulz (2007), may be preferable for encouraging learners to do some self-evaluation and reflection on their experiences.

On the other hand, nine of the teachers stated that they were unable to adequately contribute to their students' IC development due to such factors as teachers' feelings of inadequacy or unfamiliarity with the target culture (Demircioğlu & Çakır, 2015; Han & Song, 2011), lack of interaction, curriculum, and material-related issues (Han & Song, 2011). Teachers, according to Demircioğlu and Çakır (2015), did not have sufficient knowledge about ICC, including how to practice it and measure it in language schools. As a result, it is an issue of 'how teachers can teach what they don't understand' (Elena, 2014, p.115). Teachers do not need extensive understanding of the target culture because it can be learned through student and teacher exploration rather than transmission of preconceived content (Orange & Smith, 2018). Marczak (2013) also stated that while it may be hard for a teacher to have impeccable intercultural understanding, she believes that a teacher can create scenarios in which students might engage in intercultural mediation. Furthermore, EFL curriculum and textbooks should include content that incorporates a variety of cultural settings and multicultural features in order to improve learners' intercultural awareness and, as a result, their ability to communicate effectively across cultures (Robatjazi, 2008).

As Gay (2013) suggested, some teachers may be avoiding culturally responsive teaching due to incompetence (i.e., "I would do if I knew how") rather than putting in the effort to improve key knowledge and abilities, others, on the other hand, may insist on certainty of success



before ever attempting it. However, as previously reported (Atay et. al., 2009; Demircioğlu, & Çakır, 2015; Kuru Gönen, & Sağlam, 2012; Kahraman, 2016), the majority of interviewees in this research were open to including cultural themes in their classes, though it is debatable to what extent they accomplished their goal. Finally, despite increased interest in the provision of intercultural learning resources, there remains a scarcity of materials to promote intercultural practices in language teaching (Kelly, 2012).

Conclusion

This qualitative study was conducted to expose English language teachers' shared experiences and practices regarding IC in a multicultural context where both Turkish and immigrant students study English as a foreign language. Although this study was limited to the interviews with thirty language teachers at state schools, it contributed to the relevant literature, and it implicated some concerns of state school teachers in regard to intercultural learning and teaching in English language classrooms and having students from a variety of backgrounds. Another implication is that the teachers obviously need more facilities for intercultural contact, materials, and professional development to promote IC in EFL classrooms. In addition, there is a need for critical cultural awareness among students, teachers, and even parents.

Further research might examine the match or mismatch between teachers' perceptions and their real classroom practices through observations. Even learners' views on teachers' intercultural practices might be consulted via focus group interviews. Furthermore, needs analysis studies might also be conducted to develop training programs for IC language teaching in the international context in addition to the local studies which aim to analyse curriculum and coursebooks in state schools.

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