

82. Reflections of American and Turkish Fulbright alumni: An International context in language teaching assistantship

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Abstract

With the increasing global change and as a consequence of internationalization, the prestige of international educational exchange programs has heightened with bilateral agreements among countries. In parallel, plenty of research in academia has resided on Fulbright language assistantship programs whereas most have been designed on pre-service teachers, and a limited number centred on in-service teachers only from one country context. However, almost no studies have been done on international alumni from two countries to compare the perceived impact of this program through their lenses. Hence, six Turkish FLTAs and six American ETAs were incorporated into this qualitative case study to determine the influence(s) of their personal background information on this cross-cultural experience, and the effects they sensed on their teaching profession with Fulbright. Having conducted semi-structured interviews and sifted data through content analysis, the researcher noted its effects on the personal, linguistic, cultural, social, and contextual understandings of scholars. Moreover, professional growth, student-oriented active learning, and dynamic perspectives were described as themes outlining its reflections on their teaching profession. ETAs felt they cultivated “pedagogical content knowledge”, “soft skills”, “enhancing student motivation” and “adjusting teaching to supply student needs” more, whereas FLTAs reported a higher sense of development in “critical thinking skills”.

Keywords: English Teaching Assistant (ETA), Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA), Fulbright, language teaching, teaching assistant

Amerikalı ve Türk Fulbright mezunlarının düşünceleri: Dil öğretimi asistanlığında uluslararası bir bağlam

Öz

Küresel deęişim ve uluslararasılaşmanın bir sonucu olarak, ülkeler arasındaki ikili anlaşmalarla uluslararası deęişim programlarının saygınlığı artmıştır. Buna paralel olarak, akademideki pek çok araştırma Fulbright dil asistanlığı programlarını mercek altına almasına rağmen çoęu ya öğretmen adaylarının deneyimleri üzerine tasarlanmış ya da sınırlı sayıda araştırma yalnızca bir ülke bağlamındaki öğretmenlere odaklanmıştır. Ancak, bu programın öğretmenlik mesleğine yönelik algılanan etkisini katılımcılar gözünden karşılaştırmak için iki ülkeden uluslararası mezun bursiyerler üzerinde neredeyse hiçbir çalışma yapılmamıştır. Bu nedenle, katılımcı bilgilerinin bu kültürler arası deneyim üzerindeki etkisini ve öğretmenlik mesleğinde Fulbright programının hissetmiş oldukları etkisini belirlemek için bu nitel vaka çalışmasına altı Türk dil asistanı ve altı Amerikalı dil asistanı dâhil edilmiştir. Araştırmacı, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yürüttüğü verileri

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içerik analizi yoluyla inceledikten sonra, programın, mezun bursiyerlerin kişisel, dilbilimsel, kültürel, sosyal ve bağlamsal anlayışları üzerindeki etkilerini kaydetmiştir. Ayrıca, mesleki gelişim, öğrenci odaklı aktif öğrenme ve dinamik bakış açıları, Fulbright'in öğretmenlik mesleğine yansımalarını özetleyen kategoriler olarak tanımlanmıştır. Amerikalı dil asistanları "pedagojik içerik bilgisi", "sosyal beceriler", "öğrenci motivasyonunu artırma" ve " öğretilimi öğrenci ihtiyaçlarını karşılayacak şekilde düzenleme"yi daha fazla geliştirdiklerini hissetmişlerdir. Türk bursiyerler ise "eleştirel düşünme becerilerinde" daha yoğun bir gelişim duygusu bildirmişlerdir.

Anahtar kelimeler: İngilizce öğretim asistanı, yabancı dil öğretim asistanı, Fulbright, dil öğretimi, öğretim asistanı

Introduction

Internationalization has gained noticeable prominence and turned out to be a buzzword in language education, particularly over the last two decades. Moreover, parallel to thriving globalization, educational institutions have accommodated deviant subcultures, unusual values, and a population belonging to transnational origins. That being the case, international language education addressing numerous nations of a global community is of utmost significance. To update the current system and ameliorate its practices, cross-national programs have been recognized as *game changer* in preparing global and multicultural teachers and students (Perreault & Dimitrova, 2022; Read, 2009). One of these programs is Fulbright immersing scholars in a cross-cultural experience by expanding their understanding of the target culture whilst teaching their home language. However, a bulk of the literature has mostly centred on the mobility of prospective teachers or students, their knowledge transfer, credentialing for the internationalization of the curricula, or overseas collaboration (He et al., 2017; Hudzik, 2015). There is still a paucity of research on international alumni drawing attention to their reflections on language teaching, global learning, outlooks, or (further) teaching practices after returning to their home countries (Staton & Jalil, 2017). The current study has aimed at bridging this gap by examining the Fulbright experiences of American English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) and Turkish Foreign Language Teaching Assistants (FLTAs) in addition to the perceived impact of this study abroad program on their teaching profession. Therefore, this research will provide American, Turkish, and other language teachers and academics with insights into Fulbright language assistantship, expectations to be set while undergoing this program, and reveal lived experiences and overall considerations of scholars from two distinct nationalities. As no studies subsist, to our best knowledge, investigating Fulbright language assistantship with scholars specifically from different country contexts and comparing their attainments from this experience along with its influences on their career, this study is hoped to trigger new research with a similar scope in language teacher education and professional development. That is, this case study will constitute a representative sample of scholars in distinct parts of the world illustrating their cross-cultural teaching experience.

Literature Review

Fulbright programs sponsored by the USA come forth as the flagship international educational exchange projects on the way to boosting educational collaboration, cross-cultural values, and mutual understanding between people of visited countries and Americans in a friendly manner (Perreault & Dimitrova, 2022). To date, non-native Americans have been awarded different types of Fulbright scholarships, such as language assistantship, master's, doctorate, post-doctoral studies, Scholar In Residence (SIR), academic research, or excellence and success in education, to name a few. The number

of these grants can also be increased depending on the policy, economy, and ideological relationships between countries. Yet, out of all, the first above-cited Fulbright program is worth being examined in-depth in light of the scope of the research.

Foreign Language Teaching Assistantship

The Fulbright Commission created a nine to ten-month language teaching assistantship program with bi-national agreements to undergird educational institutions, contribute to introducing other cultures in the USA, and thus enhance bilateral cooperation. Thereafter, a huge number of seniors at the undergraduate level, young academic staff with less than seven years of experience or teachers, and researchers have been appointed as FLTAs undertaking three significant roles: acting as cultural ambassadors, studying two courses on American studies per their fields of interest in each term, and teaching their mother tongue. They are included in one-week orientation workshops to get ready for these tasks after arriving in the USA. Before the term starts in September, scholars are necessitated to partake in the summer orientation program, as well. They are also required to participate in the mid-year conference so as to meet other Fulbrighters and attend workshops and community services (Luo & Gao, 2017). Nevertheless, as the lived experiences might be diverse from such kinds of mandatory processes, documenting the experiences of Fulbright graduates will help us better understand potential needs for conducting refinements in the program (Aperocho et al., 2023).

Staton and Jalil (2017) scrutinized the weight of six Pakistani international alumni's Fulbright experience on their teaching performance with a tracer study by utilizing a qualitative design. They were reported to alter teaching pedagogies from a lecture-based approach based on speculative knowledge to a practical and interactive teaching style. This overseas experience allowed them to communicate with counterparts belonging to diverse cultural and social backgrounds more deeply, and relay the gained abroad skills to classroom practices in their native lands. Likewise, as one of the first studies bringing the FLTA issue forward in the Turkish context, Demir et al. (2000) mentioned its positive impact on scholars' professional work style and their willingness to design new curricula besides broadening their worldviews. Finally, He et al. (2017) worked on 12 Chinese scholars to record the reflections of Fulbright on their intercultural competence development and potential changes in their teaching practices. They resolved that these programs provided unique opportunities for increasing the intercultural competency of scholars aside from stimulating them to be involved in a community with peers.

Maloney (2018) concentrated on the experience of five Fulbright FLTAs and its effects on their knowledge of technology for language education through fieldwork based on observations, reflective writings, and interviews. He denoted that each FLTA made headway in the knowledge of utilizing technology across multiple areas. More importantly, different outcomes of FLTAs were noted per various contextual factors and categorized as micro which comprises emotional and cognitive dimensions (e.g., student-teacher bond, or sense of appreciation), macro with the factors of educational authorities' demands and bureaucracy, and finally meso representing institutional structures or institutions. These three types were observed to play roles in providing opportunities for both their knowledge practice and its growth. Accordingly, even though the Fulbright assistantship enables scholars to renew their perspectives towards the profession, bureaucratic policies in the departments or units can be the last to decide on any changes in the homeland instead of personal and professional expertise. By the same token, bringing the issue to the point of addressing its pros and cons, Aperocho et al. (2023) clarified the rewarding and challenging aspects of this program with five Philippine scholars' reflective writing and journal entries. They emphasized positive professional and personal

embodied experiences on the one hand, but on the other, dwelled on linguistic complexities, and the strive against learner apathy. Furthermore, Luo and Gao (2017) explicated the positive attitudes of Chinese FLTAs in that they perceived to accomplish fulfilling roles and grown as a teacher. Yet, the discordance concerning the reported difficulties they faced (i.e., teaching Chinese, culture clash, and explicit linguistic knowledge), their satisfaction with training and perceived effective teaching practices led these researchers to question the effectiveness of training in the host country. The researchers also put it down that they must have relied on prior teaching techniques employed in China rather than discovering the utility of new methods, throughout the teaching process. In this respect, they also underscored the importance of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and revealed a majority of 25 FLTAs in the research were overwhelmed with a lack of PCK in their common practices in USA classes. Still, taken together, regarding the results of the foregoing research on diverse Fulbright experiences scholars had in different contexts; it can be in general considered an effective means to develop scholars from various aspects by equipping them with key skills and sub-skills.

English Teaching Assistantship

The Fulbright English teaching assistant program enduring from six months to a year sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs aims to place new graduates and early career professionals as scholars in different educational contexts overseas to hone the English skills of learners and knowledge of USA culture in the host country. They are also offered an opportunity to initiate personal studies and research plans aside from the task of giving English-speaking lessons. Applicant ETAs are required to hold at least their bachelor's degree by the start of the grant. Similar to the FLTAs, they are to attend some training or other educational practices organized by the host institutions. Nonetheless, as Jack (2017) highly stressed, actual executions of this program may disclose some discrepancies with the formal objectives of ETA. With this hypothesis in mind, he covered almost 400 English students from both co-teaching and non-co-teaching classes using their written and oral test scores and nearly 60 in-service teachers. He concluded with the improper implementation of the ETA program in a Malaysian school despite its positive influence on students' motivation and interest in the English language. Accordingly, the practices of ETAs would be worth investigating to explore their actual teaching experiences from distinct parts of the world.

Sorte (2018) examined the conceptions of two ETAs in Brazil about teaching, and learning to teach since how they learn to do their jobs and teach might vary. Dwelling on the prominence of the teacher cognition issue a lot, she expounded that the understanding of the two teachers was correlated and the foregoing two terms had importance to them despite not being the agent of their experiences. Ekmekçi (2015) also conducted qualitative research on two ETAs and 60 students to discover the contributions of this program to learners' and scholars' views through interviews. He pointed out different perspectives of each ETA concerning English teaching to non-native Turkish students. Yet, positive perceptions of learners were detected in terms of advancing their communicative skills, pronunciation, and intercultural competence thanks to this program. In addition, O'Brien (2006) explored that Fulbrighters managed to enrich the content of the courses for Kenyan and Tanzanian learners to gain a global vision of the topic by referring to this cross-national experience and showcasing their enhanced global awareness. Interestingly, Sun (2015) created a casebook congregating 33 cases and experiences of ETAs placed in different nations. She mostly addressed the hardships these scholars encountered (e.g., challenges of diversity, ethical dilemmas, and life and work relations with others) but also emphasized their attainments and how they managed to adjust to the culture and host country and co-teaching practices in courses and reconcile with foreign learners by creating class communities. Finally,

Trent (2014) worked on nine ETAs in Hong Kong, and their 18 students using in-depth interviews to explore what allows or limits them in this program. The study concluded with most ETAs regarding it as a step on the way to becoming a full teacher, whereas some hesitated about their future career in teaching after recognizing the mismatch between their personal and professional identities. In other saying, this program helped them shape their future career raising awareness of their pursuits and professional conceptions.

Considering the findings of the above-mentioned studies, teaching in a new educational context and foreign culture has its own complications for young scholars. Still, whereas an increasing number of studies on these programs integrate overseas opportunities for pre-service teachers, scarce designs have been carried out for international alumni of FLTAs and particularly of ETAs and practising teachers in the literature (Aperocho et al., 2023; Ekmekçi, 2015; He et al., 2017). Thus, the focus of this study addresses this chasm in the research paradigm and is navigated by three questions:

1. What are the influences of the personal background information (PBI) of scholars on their overall Fulbright experience?
2. How did FLTAs feel the impact of the Fulbright experience on their teaching profession?
3. Are there any similarities and differences between American ETAs and Turkish FLTAs on the reported effects of the Fulbright experience on their teaching?

Methodology

Participants and Setting

Through purposive sampling, six ETAs from the USA and another six FLTAs from Turkey were included in this qualitative study. The inclusion criteria were volunteering to participate in the research and to share information sincerely concerning both the Fulbright experience and PBI to explicate data in-depth according to the objectives of the current study. To that end, the researcher first asked for 11 Turkish colleagues affiliated with the same institution to partake in the interviews after clarifying the aims of the research through phone calls. Similarly, s/he contacted American ETAs recruited to teach the mother tongue therein either via e-mail or texting. However, only one ETA was willing in the USA context, and six FLTAs signed up for incorporation into the design. That being the case, the researcher appealed to the help of six ETAs with whom s/he had worked together before at one of the well-established universities in the country. Despite their volunteering, one of the FLTAs decided to withdraw from the study on the pretext that s/he would not feel at ease while sharing personal and other so-called confidential information about Fulbright. Then, the researcher had to request another colleague with FLTA experience to get involved in this research. Having gone through the abovementioned tough processes, the researcher gathered 12 Fulbright scholars in total for this design from two distinct university contexts.

As Table 1 in the appendix reads, seven female and five male scholars with different academic credentials and experiences from two countries were assigned as the participants. Though ETAs were recruited from two Turkish universities, FLTAs were all from different American institutions. Another distinction was that the majority of ETAs were not course-takers in Turkey, whereas FLTAs took a variety of courses in the host institution. As for their majors, FLTAs were graduates of language studies, but ETAs seem to

be more disposed to studying other disciplines than the language(s). Finally, in terms of their seniority, FLTAs were more seasoned in this line of profession than the other context scholars.

Data Collection

10-question individual semi-structured interviews were utilized as the data collection instrument. They were all held in the home languages of the attendees; that is, English was used for ETAs and Turkish was referred to in other study group's dialogues. The questions in the interviews were created after reviewing the literature meticulously in light of the research questions and getting the approval of a PhD candidate in the assessment and evaluation department for content validity. Finally, after an assistant professor in Western languages checked it in terms of the clarity of statements in Turkish translation, it turned out to be ready for implementation. The questions mostly centred on their overall expectations, the impact of Fulbright on their professional and personal lives, potential discrepancies both in their outlooks towards the job and performances in teaching, and the differences they experienced while teaching L1 and L2 overseas. A timetable was generated according to the schedule of each interviewee and the duration of the interviews changed from 10 minutes (44 seconds) to 28 minutes (15 seconds) depending on the length of the talks of scholars and they were all audio-recorded. At the end of the interviews, they were also asked to provide their personal information and some other data listed in Table 1. Ethical considerations were all upheld during the data collection.

Data Analysis

This qualitative case study was carried out by adopting the content analysis method. Accordingly, after the records of the two study groups were all transcribed, the data set of FLTAs was translated into English according to Larson's (1984) meaning-based translation method. In what follows, excerpts were retrieved mostly without altering the natural forms by minimal revisions. However, some reorganization was conducted on the excerpts at times to shy away from repetitions while self-corrections or pauses remained intact. With 3089 words from the transcripts of ETAs and 6514 words from FLTAs, an almost 10,000-word manuscript was formed to be examined in-depth. During this process, two counterparts helped the researcher to code the data. Initially, central ideas were skimmed to determine a full range of patterns from the data. The initial coding yielded a set of labels to be merged and sorted into fewer categories. Then, interpretations and analyses were all performed in a reflexive and recursive manner following the suggestions of Denzin and Lincoln (2003). To put it another way, these grounded items were all developed via data analysis but not pre-determined. In total, five categories were identified to be regarded as positive and negative aspects of Fulbright for the first question. Three themes entitled professional growth, student-oriented active learning, and dynamic perspectives along with 14 categories were created for the elucidation of other research questions (Table 3).

Results and Discussion

Fulbright experiences of FLTAs and ETAs

The first analysis of Fulbright scholars' responses was conducted to reveal the effects of PBI on this experience. To that end, a list of related information concerning the participants was initially formed (Table 1). Then, as Table 2 portrays, five distinct items were identified as linguistic, personal, social, contextual, and cultural understandings to answer the first research question. Accordingly, all of them seem to have gained linguistic awareness of their mother tongues apart from four American

Fulbrighters. This was similar to the replies to the other item in "linguistic" seeing that ETAs with academic credentials (i.e., A5 and A6) and the FLTAs who graduated all from language departments must have apprehended the differences between L1 and L2. Moreover, the table below displays nearly the same scholars experiencing the challenge of teaching the language they know the best in practice. To illustrate, A5 stated: "I think this experience gave me a greater appreciation for how challenging teaching English is". Additionally, T1, T2, and T6 expressed the complexity of teaching L1 due to operational linguistic elements, such as cases, blending words, and appositions. A4 and A6 also reported after encountering the difficulty of teaching L1, they were eager to delve more into this issue. This finding overlapped with the work by Aperocho et al. (2023), He et al. (2017), and Luo and Gao (2017). Finally, the last item explains how meticulous T5 was while delivering a speech to Turkish students after the Fulbright experience, which must be directly linked to his/her professional ethics, past experiences, and educational background.

Table 2. Fulbright experiences of scholars

Experience	Linguistic	Personal	Social	Contextual	Cultural
Positive	L1 linguistic awareness	Internalizing a flexible lifestyle	Life and study in Turkey and the USA	Interaction with course takers	Getting immersed in the target culture
Scholars	A5, A6, all FLTAs	A1, A3, A4, A5, A6	All scholars except T1	A1, A2, A4, A5, A6, T1, T2, T3, T5	All
	Cross-linguistic awareness	Personal growth	Rapport with other Fulbrighters	Interaction with institutional resources	Cultural exchange
Scholars	All FLTAs	All scholars except T6	A4, T2, T4, T5	A2, A4, A5, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6	A1, A2, A6 T1, T3, T4, T5
		Heightened self-awareness	Forming a social community	New bureaucracy	
Scholars		A2, A5, T3	A1, A2, A4, A6, T1, T2	A3, A6 T2, T3, T5	
		Sense of fulfilment	Learning or practising the Turkish/English language with local people		
Scholars		All scholars except T6	All		
		Establishing empathy			
Scholars		A3			
Negative	The failure in the interplay of L1 knowledge and teaching practice	Frustration	The problem of adaptation to a new environment	Intense course syllabus	Cultural distinctions
Scholars	A4, A5, A6, all FLTAs	T6	All	A1	A4, T2

	The problem of adjusting speech level	Learner differences in two contexts
Scholars	T5	A1, A2, A5, all FLTAs

As for the personal aspect, the first item was about the American ETAs' transition from a hectic and fast life to more settled living standards. As the majority of ETA participants spent their assistantship at Atatürk University, which is located in a slow city in Turkey, this must be correlated with the host institution. Additionally, almost all of them reported that they improved a lot in living alone, adopting and obeying the rules of a different country, gaining self-confidence, and broadening their horizon which was in parallel with their sense of fulfilment after this experience (Aperocho et al., 2023; Demir et al., 2000; Luo & Gao, 2017; Staton & Jalil, 2017; Trent, 2014). Furthermore, A2, A5, and T3 highly stressed their enhanced self-awareness following this study abroad program (He et al., 2017; O'Brien; 2006). That was in fact related to their lack of pedagogic knowledge given their majors (Table 1). Besides, as the only scholar referring to empathy, A3 mentioned that s/he empathized with students learning the target language in a different culture and country since s/he did not study languages as the major at university or teach before either. Different from the others, T6 exhibited a negative manner and shared disappointment that this experience fell short of his/her expectations. This is because education was not so prestigious and life in America cannot be called perfect. Considering the courses s/he took, academic credentials, and teaching experience, we can conclude that this must be all about the persona or expectations of this Fulbrighter.

All ETAs emphasized the value of teaching at universities overseas, and FLTAs (excluding T1) put it down to their desire to experience both the lifestyle of the other country and the work-life balance therein (Demir et al., 2000; Jack, 2017; Read, 2009; Staton & Jalil, 2017). Regarding the rapport with other Fulbrighters through regular meetings, and workshops all around the country, the reflections of A4, T2, T4, and T5 can be affiliated with their persona, the number of assistants in the host institution, its being fully-fledged, and the facilities on its campus according to their answers. However, excepting the strong bonds with other scholars, six Fulbrighters appeared to have built a social community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998) and positive collegiate experiences with school staff, or students in which ETAs were more active dissimilar to their affinity with colleagues. Still, learning a new language or practice of the known language seemed to be what the two contexts have in common. By the same token, they all experienced the challenge of adaptation to a new setting (He et al., 2017). Nevertheless, A5 stressed it to such an extent that:

...as one of three American Fulbrighters at the university, it was hard not to feel like I was in a fishbowl - like anything I did was being watched and would be representative of America as a whole. I think I was eager to go back home mostly so I could just feel like I could disappear and go somewhere where no one would care who I was.

This perception of being an outsider was owing to his/her personal history in that s/he grew up in Europe, only came back to the USA at around 10, and hence getting tired of changing *home country*. Another reason must pertain to this scholar's experience with different and constantly changing learner groups, such as high school-aged migrant students from India and Central and South America, and elementary-level Arabic refugee students.

With regard to the contextual items, interaction with students ranked first in this category in terms of scholars' positive experiences (Aperocho et al., 2023; Demir et al., 2000; Jack, 2017; He et al., 2017; Luo & Gao, 2017; Staton & Jalil, 2017). A3, T4, and T6 did not express strong interrelation with course takers, though. This must be on account of the educational background of A3 in that s/he did not hold degrees in education or language teaching while T4 was the least experienced among FLTAs. As for T6, s/he did not express gratitude towards nearly any of the benefits of this program, thus this must be the general discontentedness of him/her. However, ETAs were less satisfied with institutional resources due to little professional support from staff in addition to the lack of orientations, supervisors, and course books to be provided by the unit (Sun, 2015). That is, this must have stemmed from the approach of the host institution to such a program rather than their personal information. Similarly in the Turkish context, when T1 said social networking would not be possible between the two universities, the manner of his/her was related to foreseeing the Turkish institution's approach in that this cooperation would not be sustainable. As regards the next item, A3 dwelled on how s/he experienced bureaucracy in the new institution grounding it on its being the first language teaching experience. In contrast, A6 viewed the host university's education system differently by holding a systematic perspective due to educational background and other assistantship experience in a foreign country. Yet, as highlighted by Demir et al. (2000), T2, T3, and T5 commented on it given the non-hierarchical education system in the USA institutions based on their observations while receiving courses per their field of interest (Table 1). Notwithstanding, they furthered that after this experience, they ended up being appointed to material or testing units, and were given a maximum of five-hour lessons during the term as a punishment for being away from the school despite gaining critically-minded attitudes towards teaching and longing to share just learned life and content knowledge with Turkish learners. As Maloney (2018) detailed, this must be owing to the entrenched and *fossilized* practices grounded by the school bureaucracy contrary to the globalization in the education system.

As to their negative comments, potentially since his/her own expectations from oneself and students were not met along with the strict and systematic functioning of the school, A1 seems to have complained about the intensity of the program:

I had expected to have more time with each class I worked with, but instead, I only had one 50-minute with each class, once a week. This made my work especially challenging because it meant that I never got to know any of the students by name, and it is very difficult to make any sort of meaningful difference to English learning when you only see a student once a week for an hour in a 20-student class. The one upside was that I got to work with many, many different students with jam-packed course topics.

Another hotly-deputed issue was learner differences in the two country contexts (Sun, 2015). All FLTAs dwelled on how students in the USA were academically conscious, intrinsically motivated, and gained high readiness to learn Turkish as a critical language (this is how they title Turkish). They were also recorded to be adult learners mostly getting master's or PhD degrees in distinct fields dissimilar to Turkish students at preparation schools. As Turkish scholars were more experienced and pedagogically enriched, they must have better regarded its reflections on the flow of the course akin to their cross-linguistic awareness in the first category (Table 2). Of all ETAs, only A1, A2, and A5 declared this difference, which must be attributed to their Turkish learning experience and prior teaching (algebra and English), respectively.

Finally, all scholars reported experiencing and *living* the target culture by merging into it (Aperocho et al., 2023; Demir et al., Ekmekçi, 2015; 2000; He et al., 2017; Luo & Gao, 2017; Sorte, 2018; Sun, 2015; Staton & Jalil, 2017). A1, A2, and A6 must have felt cultural interaction deeply given the Turkish courses

and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) lessons they received in the host university, and academic credentials (i.e., A6's major in linguistics). Likewise, T1, T3, T4, and T5 must have experienced cultural interchange thanks to the lessons on American culture in the host institutions (Table 1), which they regarded as culturally responsive practices. Lastly, with regards to cultural diversity, T2 declared not to comprehend English clearly due to the population density of African descent in the region to which they put the influence of their culture, which was in fact counter-intuitive considering s/he studied translation. Dissimilarly, A4 expressed that this distinction helped him/her shape what to concentrate on while writing a master thesis. This result insinuates that A4 encountered cross-cultural experiential professional learning (Wilson, 1986) as a world language teacher by shaping his/her own understanding of language teaching. All things considered, the PBI of the participant scholars seems to have influenced their Fulbright experience from different aspects in general.

The effects of Fulbright on the teaching profession of scholars

As is seen in Table 3, scholars felt the impact of Fulbright on their teaching with respect to their professional growth and dynamic perspectives towards the profession besides student-centred active learning. To begin with the first theme, they reported most sensing the advance of "teacher learning" after engaging in various practices leading them to refinement in their knowledge and teaching (Demir et al., 2000; Luo & Gao, 2017). As a case in point, A6 shared:

I had some experience teaching English before starting but had never been the lead teacher in a classroom before. I was just 22, so I learned a LOT every single day. I think that teaching English well is hard, and while I improved over the course of the year, I think that I have learned a lot of techniques since that make me a better teacher.

Likewise, A4 detailed its reflections on oneself and its parallel impact on his/her teaching: "I learned how much teaching is performative, stepping into the role and persona of myself as a teacher, and doing that helped give me the confidence and skills to be able to step outside of myself when I needed to". T5 particularly referred to regular meetings organized by the language centre, supervisor, and other Fulbright scholars at Stanford while explaining its effects as: "We mostly focused on 5Cs-expanded (community, communication, culture, compilation, comparison), and based our teaching principles on these elements. I recognized that I reshaped my teaching conceptions after conducting different practices in line with the 5Cs and observing learner outputs". Congruent with Sorte (2018), this result signifies how their conceptions recovered in how they learned to teach after Fulbright thanks to the opportunities it enabled such as conferring with peers for co-planning the courses. This also demystified their cognition (Borg, 2003) in that the more they negotiated with foreign learners, supervisors, and colleagues, the more they sensed these changes in their thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs towards teaching (Yazan, 2018). Furthermore, as they were the *active agents of their learning process* (Vélez-Rendón, 2002, p. 463), they must have achieved self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2001) by directing and maintaining their proactive learning with the awareness and knowledge of their abilities.

Table 3. Teaching profession and Fulbright

Theme	Category	Fulbrighters											
		A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
Professional growth	PCK		✓		✓		✓						
	Teacher learning	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Teacher consciousness		✓			✓		✓					✓
	Intercultural competence	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Critical thinking skills								✓	✓			✓
	Soft skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
	Technical skills							✓	✓				
Student-oriented active learning	Language skills	✓					✓		✓				
	Enhancing student motivation	✓				✓	✓						
	Adjusting teaching to meet learner needs	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Dynamic perspectives	Applying transformational teaching					✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
	Teaching philosophy		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Teaching career		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
	“Teacher as a life-long learner” ideology		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	

Another most-cited category appeared to be intercultural competence with their sense of development in teaching effectively across cultures thanks to thinking, acting properly, and working with people from different cultural backgrounds (Aperocho et al., 2023; He et al., 2017). In this respect, A2 described: “It provided a strong resume builder both with the Fulbright name and the leadership, cross-cultural knowledge and teaching”. T1 also reported a similar detection with O’Brien (2006): “I was entangled with the American culture and managed to integrate it into the reading lessons with concrete examples. For instance, I could not probably adapt the text *Sheriff* with literary embellishments and supplementary materials without the Fulbright experience”. Finally, A3 regarded it through a broader scope and shared: “I was interested in spending time in a culture different from my own to expand my understanding of the world first, then achieve global competence, and thrive in an interconnected world”. Taken together, they sensed embodying a new cultural outlook and adapted their teaching exercises according to cultural norms to deal with potential difficulties as was already discussed in Table 2. Therefore, this professional growth must have had seeds from their sense of fulfilment, and personal growth as the same table displays.

They also highly reported their dynamic perspectives towards the profession (Demir et al., 2000; Ekmekçi, 2015; Sun, 2015). While commenting on their novel attitude to teaching, they seemed to put the spotlight on themselves and gave priority to scaffolding students in their learning journeys. Correlatively, T2 clarified:

Depending on my Fulbright experience and the attitudes of my lecturers there, I learned to be patient with students in addition to being slow in language teaching. Thus, I will apply to self-paced learning in language classes which provides them with learning at a pace commensurate with their skills.

A6 also supported T2: "My teaching philosophy has been crystallized that students can gain skills to become self-directed learners". Likewise, T3 explained that s/he would act like a facilitator and push students to take more responsibility for their own learning and T5 reported referring to a more cross-cultural perspective and involving related strategies in teaching. Moreover, T1 identified his/her teaching philosophy as more cultural exposure, more (in)formal communication, and more extracurricular practices but less grammar (Staton & Jalil, 2017). In the same vein, A2 shared: "I am not a professional teacher, but my experience teaching English in Turkey has certainly shaped my understanding of various ways in which culture affects learning and education". Finally, different from all the others, T6 surprisingly noted down his/her changing manner towards the use of L1 comparing the education systems through Arabic classes in which the instructor in the host institution lectured almost in English. In what follows, scholars highly mentioned the new meaning they took on the teaching career after this experience (Sun, 2015; Trent, 2014). To illustrate, A4, A5, and A6 asserted what they learned teaching English in Turkey helped them immeasurably teaching in their home countries. A2 even highlighted:

After I returned to the USA, I began teaching math. Then, I decided I only wanted to teach in a place more similar to Turkey than to the USA because the relationship between teachers and students here is not as warm as it is in Turkey.

Exhibiting a similar attitude, T1 referred to his/her enhanced enthusiasm for language teaching. T3 added: "Having witnessed the difference between teaching English as a foreign language and teaching Turkish as a foreign language, and thus gaining cross-linguistic awareness while transforming theoretical knowledge into practice, I can reflect on my attainments in my courses better". In parallel, T5 addressed the 5Cs as 21st-century skills s/he would implement in his/her further teaching within a multi-cultural framework. Finally, their reports on being continuous learners revealed they adopted this ideology after Fulbright. Initially, T1 decided to pursue a master's degree in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. In that vein, T4 denoted: "I did not have much desire or idea to progress my education forward. The courses there at the graduate level intrigued me, and I was determined to start an M.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) program". With the same sensibility as T5, T3 pointed out: "I was already a doctoral student; I shaped my dissertation topic after taking literature courses in America, and my plans, such as post-doctorate". Identical reflections were observed in the other context scholars; for instance, A2 declared volunteering to receive TESL courses after beginning the ETA career. A4 held an M.A. in international education after returning from Turkey, and A5 considered learning more in education and/or something in international relations. Lastly, A6 specified to what extent Fulbright strengthened the bonds with academia and pushed him/her to engage with educational practices in an ongoing manner:

I stayed in Turkey for another year, finished my Fulbright and learned Turkish. I was able to secure a very prestigious scholarship (Foreign Language and Area Studies) for my master's in international policy because of my focus on the Turkish language, and I am currently getting my PhD at Stanford and am focused on Turkish education.

Given their interpersonal skills, assertiveness, and growth mindsets, they reported the contributions of this experience to their soft skills, as well. Emphasizing the value of communication with learners at most (Jack, 2017; Read, 2009; Staton & Jalil, 2017; Trent, 2014), A1 and A2 addressed their attempts to optimize speaking and listening practices to make Turkish students take the floor (also see Table 2). Moreover, A5 and A6 referred to building rapport with learners to create an environment in which they did not feel trouble making mistakes. A6 even said: "I learned a lot about how to bridge learners who have been taught with mostly rote memorization in previous years, and about how to make them feel comfortable with speaking". Different from these scholars, while discussing their soft skills, T2, A4, and T5 dwelled on interpersonal relations with a great community of school staff, colleagues, and other Fulbrighters across the country. Finally, A3 expressed that the social skills s/he gained would pave the way for being a more effective communicator and team player in his/her professional career. Accordingly, this result also signifies the conclusion that ETAs felt the progress of soft skills more than FLTAs despite the inadequacy of support from the school and the lack of supervisors.

Another marked difference between the two contexts was detected in "student needs" in the second theme, which was also the most referred item in similar categories (Luo & Gao, 2017). A4 elucidated: "I had not first understood the level of preparation or skill needed to teach students English, especially given that there were various levels of students with different needs in the same classroom". Additionally, A1 detailed: "I feel like I have a better understanding of how to approach a differentiated classroom that has learners with variable needs from other backgrounds and countries now". This was just the contrary for FLTAs in America since students there were beyond their expectations as was already detailed in "learner differences in two contexts" in Table 2. Yet, some still sensed the need for specifying courses for some students with different needs. To exemplify, T2 and T5 lectured learners from the department of archaeology carrying out the excavations at Çatalhöyük, from anthropology examining the Ottoman archives on Cunda Island, and from history holding a master's degree on the Ottoman Empire. However, due to their educational background, and overall seniority in language teaching, it was reasonable to conclude that the sense of improvement in adjusting their teaching to meet learner needs would not be so much as the ETAs. The same reasons would be on the table while discussing the higher rates of categories "PCK" (Trent, 2014) and "learner motivation" (Jack, 2017) among ETAs, which was in contrast to Luo and Gao (2017), and Staton and Jalil (2017) in terms of contextual differences. To put it another way, Turkish FLTAs would not need to search for ways of boosting motivation given their highly engaged learners. In addition, they would not record the same improvement as ETAs in terms of PCK respecting their degrees from language departments. The last marked difference between the two was discovered at that point. As is seen in Table 3, three FLTAs (i.e., T2, T3, and T5) were confused by the posed questions owing to the high awareness of American students, and they automatically promoted their creativity and critical thinking skills (He et al., 2017). T5 noted: "Some questions were unpredictable at times, leading me to research or think more deeply about what we are teaching". From this aspect, these international alumni can be called informal ambassadors of new practices and ideas in American classes.

Conclusion

The research accounted for the experiences of FLTAs and ETAs as practising teachers with Fulbright as a global learning and educational exchange program. The themes and categories uncovered that Fulbright seems to impress the social, cultural, contextual, personal, and linguistic understanding of scholars considering the impact of their PBI on this experience. Furthermore, Fulbright had an instigating effect on scholars in terms of morphing points of view towards the teaching profession,

upskilling their professional values, and cultivating a student-oriented approach. Nevertheless, ETAs appeared to have improved more than FLTAs given their reports on PCK, learner needs and motivation, and soft skills, whereas critical thinking ranked as the only enhanced item for FLTAs than ETAs. Even though the success of this research lies in its painstaking design and the scope that handles in-service teachers from the two country contexts in the investigation of the Fulbright language assistantship, it has some limitations. To illustrate, the research can be strengthened with more attendees and their cases for the generalizability of the results. Moreover, quantitative data, such as scales or questionnaires can be adopted as another instrument to triangulate the data. As an alternative, field notes based on classroom observations can be counted as the other tool to be espoused. Finally, follow-up interviews can be held with just-arrived scholars in the home country rather than inviting assistants performing Fulbright in different years.

With respect to the implications, the school principal needs to be cognizant of the value of this program in that just-arrived scholars with the eagerness to relay their knowledge and experiences to local students should not be assigned to units with hectic schedules as if they are being punished for earning this scholarship. Instead, they are supposed to enhance the program by establishing strong ties with community members and opening the door for further coordination with the USA. Furthermore, systematic meetings, organizations, workshops, and especially orientations must be held regularly to make ETAs feel at home and in parallel upgrade their effectiveness in English teaching. In addition, periodical training on continuous development in this line of the profession should be provided for ETAs via a needs analysis at the beginning given their academic credentials. As for the suggestion for future research, weekly-based year-long reflective journals should be gathered from scholars to examine their understanding of the host country closer. Action research or other alternative classroom-based research should be also integrated into the design. Along with elucidating the reflections of the program, the potential challenges scholars faced and their coping strategies should be investigated again in the two contexts. Finally, the thoughts of students to the scholars who delivered courses should be integrated into the research to unearth their observations and compare their reports with the assistants'.

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Appendix**Table 1.** PBI of the scholars

Scholars	Information about the scholars					
	Gender	Host institution	Courses taken during Fulbright experience	Educational background	Teaching experience before this visit	Overall teaching experience
A1	F	Ankara University	Turkish language courses	B.A. in International relations and Middle East studies, joint M.A. in Journalism and Middle East studies	Volunteer English teaching to adults	Volunteer teaching and nine-month Fulbright experience
A2	F	Atatürk University	TESL	B.A. in Economics and Mathematics, M.A. in Middle East studies	Only tutoring experience	Teaching algebra (ongoing) and two-year Fulbright experience
A3	F	Atatürk University	None	B.A. in Law (Juris Doctor)	None	Only ten-month teaching as FLTA
A4	F	Atatürk University	None	B.A. in International relations, M.A. in International Education	Only tutoring experience	One-year teaching as FLTA and working with faculty after (ongoing)
A5	M	Atatürk University	None	B.A. in Global Studies, M.A. in Public Affairs	1-2 years of tutoring	2 years classroom teaching, 2-3 years tutoring and one-year Fulbright experience (English instructor now)
A6	F	Atatürk University	None	B.A. in History and linguistics, M.A. in International affairs, PhD in International-comparative education, ongoing	5 years of teaching assistance	10 years (ongoing)
T1	F	University of Washington (Seattle)	Drama, history of the Cinema, Colonial North America	B.A. in English Language Teaching (ELT)	7 years	15 years (ongoing)
T2	M	Mercy College-Pennsylvania	Business ethics, statistics,	B.A. in Translation and	6 years	19 years (ongoing)

			special education	interpreting, M.A. in ELT		
T3	M	University of New York	American and English literature	B.A. in English Language and Literature (ELL), M.A. in ELL, PhD in ELL, ongoing	5 years	14 years (ongoing)
T4	M	Michigan State University	Contemporary methods in language teaching, second language acquisition, American art, Spanish	B.A. in ELT, M.A. in TEFL	3 years	7 years (ongoing)
T5	F	Stanford University	Bilingualism, linguistics, Italian, understanding American humour	B.A. in ELT, M.A. in ELT	3,5 years	11 years (ongoing)
T6	M	California UCFT Santa Barbara	Arabic, poetry, statistics, methodology	B.A. in ELL, M.A. in TEFL	7 years	12 years (ongoing)

Note: The scholars were assigned numbers from 1-6 and were represented with letters of A or T according to their country ("A" symbolizes America, and "T" is for Turkish assistants).