

# Students' Understandings and Preferences of the Role and Place of 'Culture' in English Language Teaching: A Focus in an EFL context

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## Abstract

In this article, the authors investigate language learners' understandings of the role and place of 'culture' in foreign language classrooms, and non-native versus native English language teachers. The data collection procedures comprise the development and application of a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The participants of the study are three hundred and eighty five senior high school students from three provinces in Turkey. Both the quantitative and qualitative results of the study reveal that students want to see cultural elements from both target language culture and local culture in foreign language classrooms as well as in language learning materials. As a consequence, they almost equally value native and non-native English language teachers. These findings indicate that to fully understand and improve English as a foreign language and English as a second language curricula to its rightful place in today's world it is necessary to obtain students' opinions as well as the opinions of the decision makers (e.g., teachers, administrators) in relation to issues like what to teach in the English language classrooms, what the aims of learners and teachers for learning and teaching English are.

**Keywords:** Culture, student preferences, EFL context, teaching materials, NESTs and non-NESTs

## Introduction

Today, it is an undeniable fact that English has become a global lingua franca. It is the most commonly spoken foreign language, language of media, language of technology, and language of science. In a review article on history of research on non-native English teachers Moussu and Llorca (2008) come across an abundance of studies on non-native English language teachers in which researchers investigate non-native English language teachers' opinions of various issues related to English language teaching (ELT hereafter) such as involvement of culture in the foreign language classrooms, language teaching materials. However, language learners' opinions of similar issues are not questioned as much as nonnative teachers' opinions. The majority of studies focus on students' opinions of and attitudes towards non-native English speaking teachers

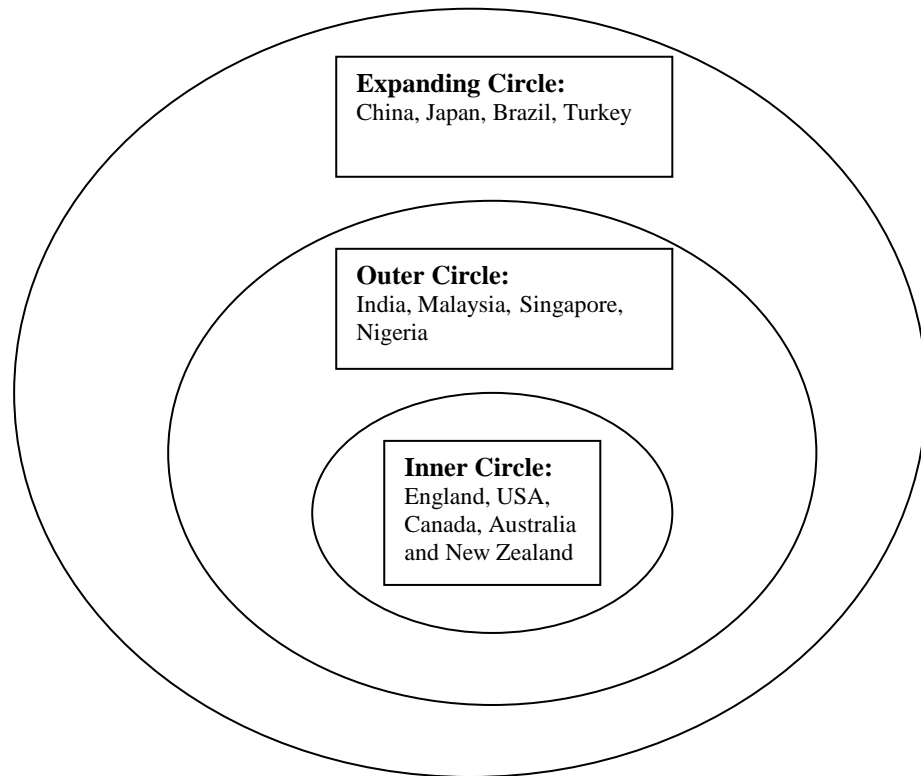
in both English as a foreign language (EFL hereafter) and English as a second language (ESL hereafter) contexts (Cheung, 2002; Cheung & Braine, 2007; Kelch & Santana-Williamson, 2002; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002, 2005; Liang, 2002; Mahboob, 2003; Moussu, 2002, 2006; Watson Todd & Pojanapunya, 2009). There is only a few studies questioning students' opinions of the role and place of 'culture' in language teaching methodologies and language teaching materials, and students' perceptions of their goals for learning English besides their opinions of native and non-native English language teachers (Fahmy & Bilton, 1992; Prodromou, 1992). In this respect, the present study is a contribution to the field in revealing students' understandings and preferences of the issues related not only to English language teachers but also to English language teaching (ELT hereafter) materials, content of English language instruction. However, since it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all these issues, we will only concentrate on the results concerning students' understandings of the role of 'culture' in ELT as well as their opinions and preferences regarding characteristics of non-native and native English language teachers in relation to the concept of 'culture'.

The article is divided into three major sections. In the first section, the theoretical basis of the study is introduced. In the second section, participants of the study, data collection procedures, data analysis and results of the study are presented. In the last section of the paper, the findings of the study are discussed in the relation to the related literature.

### **Spread of English around the World**

Starting with the colonization period and continuing with the economic and political power of the U.S.A., English has penetrated into the daily lives of people all over the world from an abundance of areas, ranging from politics to entertainment and has been used by many due to its spread and current situation. In 1985, Kachru presented the *Three Circles Model of World Englishes* - i.e. *inner*, *outer* and *expanding circles*. This model attempts to explain the use of English around the world in three concentric circles which represent the changing distribution and functions of the English language (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
**Kachru's (1985, 1992) Three Circles Model**



As can be seen in Figure 1, the *inner circle* includes the geographical location of the traditionally English speaking countries like England, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The *outer circle* encompasses countries with a colonial past where English is an institutional variety - i.e., India, Singapore, Nigeria, Malaysia. The *expanding circle* refers to the countries where English is mainly used for instrumental purposes - e.g., for international communication, and has no or limited official status. The countries that belong to *expanding circle* can be listed as Japan, China, Turkey, and Brazil. This model raises the awareness of scholars towards the wider use of English around the world in a more critical way. It also raises their awareness towards the fact that the use of English is not only confined to its native speakers. As Park and Wee (2009) state this critical model has brought about "...the ideological dimensions surrounding the global spread of English" (p. 1-2). Although this model is being questioned and criticized by scholars including Kachru himself in relation to the changing status of English in the world, the model serves as the theoretical basis for our study. We would like to state that Turkey falls in the *expanding circle* in the *Three Circles Model*, and English is taught as a foreign language in Turkey. As we will explain in the following section, English language does not solely belong to the *inner circle* countries anymore; therefore, they cannot be the only reference for learners of English while they are using English for communicative purposes with native and nonnative speakers of English.

## Definition of ‘Culture’

Before presenting information about the significance of ‘culture’ in ELT we need to clarify what we mean by ‘culture’ in this study. In her 2006 article on non-native English language teachers’ opinions of ‘culture’, Bayyurt highlights the significance of the dynamic nature of ‘culture’ and how difficult it is to give a simple definition of the term. Therefore, to be more specific it is better to adhere to a definition of ‘culture’ which is valid in ELT circles. In this respect, we find Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi’s (1990) characterization of ‘culture’ more applicable to our study. Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi (1990) define ‘culture’ as a multidimensional concept. According to their definition, the four senses of ‘culture’ can be listed as: (i) the aesthetic sense (media, cinema, music and literature); (ii) the sociological sense (family, education, work and leisure, traditions); (iii) the semantic sense (conceptions and thought processes); (iv) the pragmatic (or sociolinguistic) sense (‘appropriacy’ in language use). Henceforth, when we refer to ‘culture’ we will be referring to four senses of ‘culture’ as defined by Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi.

## The Involvement of ‘Culture’ in English Language Teaching

In an earlier study on non-native English language teachers’ perspectives of ‘culture’ in EFL context Bayyurt (2006) classifies the involvement of ‘culture’ in the language classrooms into two major categories. The first category involves no explicit reference to *inner circle* varieties of English language in ELT, that means no *inner circle* ‘culture’ involvement in ELT and giving significance to the local ‘cultures’ of English language learners (Bhatt, 2005; Canagarajah, 2005, 2007; Kachru, 1985, 1992, 1996, 1997; Kachru & Nelson, 1996). This view presupposes that the interactions will take place between people from mostly *outer circle* countries as well as people from *inner* and *expanding circle*. Similarly, McKay (2003) acknowledges that English has become an international language and the content of language teaching materials, the selection of teaching methodology and the concept of the ideal teacher are not based on native speaker based models. Adopting a similar orientation, Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) highlight the significance of an appropriate pedagogy, involving the consideration of global and local needs in the teaching of English as an international language (See Kramsch and Thorne, 2002).

The second view that Bayyurt’s (2006) categorization indicates is that language and ‘culture’ are interrelated so we should teach ‘target language culture’ together with the language we are teaching for a better understanding of the native speakers of the target language that we are teaching (Byram & Fleming, 1998). This view is applicable to *expanding circle* - *inner circle* interactions, *expanding circle* - *expanding circle* interactions as well as *expanding circle* - *outer circle* interactions.

In the present study, we question the influence of ‘target language culture’ in ELT and ELT materials from students’ point of view in relation to the local context of the students. In the next section, we will give a brief summary of studies investigating language learners opinions of issues related to ELT such as attitudes towards nonnative English teachers, language teaching materials as well as the role of ‘culture’ in ELT.

## A Brief History of Studies on English Language Learners/Students

As we already stated, there are a small number of studies carried out on the attitudes and opinions of English language learners in the field. Although majority of English language learners and English language teachers are in EFL contexts, most of the earlier studies on students attitudes and preferences towards native and non-native English language teachers at tertiary level are initiated in ESL contexts (Cheung, 2002; Cheung & Braine 2006; Kelch & Santana-Williamson, 2002; Liang, 2002; Mahboob, 2003; Moussu, 2002, 2006). However, there are also a number of studies in the EFL contexts like Spain, Turkey, Thailand (Bayyurt & Erçetin, 2009; Fahmy & Bilton, 1992; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002, 2005; Prodromou, 1992; Watson Todd & Pojanapunya, 2009). We will briefly summarize the methodology and findings of these studies in the following paragraphs.

In an earlier study, Prodromou's (1992) analyzed 300 young adult Greek language learners' preferences of British or American English as a model for English language learning. 75% of the students stated that they preferred to learn British English while 18% preferred American English. The results suggested that this preference was due to the overall popularity of British English in the world and students' negative attitudes towards American English due to their historical relations. As for the 'local culture', most of the students stated that language teachers teaching English in Greece should know Greek and be familiar with the Greek culture.

Another earlier study conducted by Fahmy and Bilton (1992) focuses on undergraduate TEFL students at Sultan Qaboos University in the Sultanate of Oman to gather information about their level of English, their reasons for studying English, their views about EFL language learning in Oman, and their perceptions about the miscellaneous issues in the TEFL program. The data were collected using a survey and a proficiency test. The results of the study revealed that most of the student teachers agreed on the advantages of learning and using English in Oman and did not seem to be afraid of becoming 'westernized'. In terms of the importance of various subjects in TEFL education, the student teachers further indicated that English language skills were the most important. However, 'target language culture' remained to be the least important factor. Thus, the researchers concluded the student teachers kept their cultural identity as Omani and they were not separated from their cultural heritage.

More recent studies by Moussu (2002), Liang (2002), and Mahboob (2003) investigate ESL students' reactions to non-native English speaking teachers at different university settings in the United States through the use of questionnaires. The findings of these studies show that the students usually have positive attitudes towards having non-native English language teachers in their ESL classrooms (Moussu, 2002), teachers level of professionalism is an important factor in determining the effectiveness of non-native English language teachers in ESL classrooms (Liang, 2002), both native and non-native English language teachers have their strengths and weaknesses in the eyes of the students (Mahboob, 2003). On the other hand, the results of Kelch and Santana-Williamson's study (2002) reveal that students' are able to detect native and non-native speakers of English easily, and that their perception towards the teachers' being a native or non-native speaker affect their attitudes towards the teachers. Although the students in Kelch and Santana-Williamson's study favor

native English speaker teachers for the development of their speaking/listening skills, they still mention the significance of having non-native English teachers as role models, source of motivation and previous language learners who could understand students' language learning difficulties.

The studies conducted in the Hong Kong context follow a similar pattern to the studies discussed previously in terms of their focus. Cheung's (2002) study includes the opinions of both the English language teachers and students towards non-native English language teachers at a university in Hong Kong. The findings of her study reveal that both teachers and students consider native English speaking teachers (NESTs hereafter) and non-native English speaking teachers (NON-NESTs hereafter) having their own strengths. Almost none of the participants think that there is discrimination against NON-NESTs in Hong Kong. In a follow up study, Cheung and Braine (2007) question the specific strengths and weaknesses of NON-NESTs in Hong Kong from the perspective of the students using a questionnaire and interviews. The overall results of the study show that in general the students have a positive attitude towards their NON-NESTs. However, the final year students seem to appreciate NON-NESTs more than the first year students. These findings are parallel to Moussu and Braine's (2006) study which is conducted in an intensive English program at a university in the USA - i.e., an ESL setting. Cheung & Braine (2007) conclude that many students who participate in their study become more conscious of their prejudices and they state that they are willing to discard these prejudices throughout their studies at the university.

In their study, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002, 2005) give a questionnaire including both closed (5 point likert scale) and open questions, and asking seventy-six undergraduate university students' views about NESTs and NON-NESTs on rating scales relating to language skills, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, learning strategies, 'culture' and civilization, attitudes and assessment. In Lasagabaster & Sierra's study, different from the other studies, the students are asked to indicate their views in relation to primary, secondary and tertiary education. The results of the study indicate that the students' general preference is towards NESTs, or a combination of NESTs and NON-NESTs. The students' earlier experiences of NESTs do not seem to have any effect on their judgments. Just like the participants of Cheung and Braine's (2007) study the participants of Lasagabaster and Sierra's study are studying different subjects as their major at the university. Therefore, Lasagabaster & Sierra relate the variation in students' judgments of NESTs and NON-NESTs and their orientations to learning English to the students' subject specialism.

When we move to the studies conducted in EFL settings, Watson Todd and Pojanapunya's (2009) study is one of the most recent ones. They investigate the attitudes of Thai students towards native and non-native English speaking teachers through an *implicit association test* to discard prejudices as a confounding factor in their research. They compare the results of the test with explicit attitudes elicited through a questionnaire. The results of their study yield that the attitudes of the students towards NESTs and NON-NESTs are 'complex with an explicit preference for native speaker teachers, but no implicit preference and warmer explicit feelings towards non-native speaker teachers' (p.23).

In Bayyurt and Erçetin's study (2009), the English as an International language model offered by McKay (2003) is examined to find out whether the teaching of English as an international language is applicable to contexts where

English is taught as a second or foreign language. Interviews, questionnaires and observations are conducted to get the opinions teachers, students and teacher trainers on the involvement of ‘culture’ in English language classrooms, and ELT materials. Results of the study indicate that teachers and students who participated in the study still think that there should be an ideal native speaker of English who is modeled by the learners. This model should be based on either British English or American English.

Having provided summaries of the relevant research studies, now we would like to present the context in which we conducted our study as well as our findings. The current study is designed in order to explore the opinions of EFL learners on the role of ‘culture’ in ELT methods and materials, content of English language lessons, characteristics of NS and NNS teachers, their aim for learning English in Turkey. In this respect, the present study contributes to ELT practices by revealing the opinions of English language learners about their language learning experiences, their English language teachers in an EFL setting. The results of this particular study are believed to suggest important implications for ELT in Turkey as well as in different EFL and ESL settings in terms of development of language teaching materials, classroom practices, and language teacher hiring practices from students’ perspectives.

### Methodology

The present study was conducted in two phases, consisting of developing a questionnaire through semi-structured interviews and applying it to high school students. The questionnaire we have developed consisted of six sections and it was applied to senior students in five selective high schools in Turkey. The total number of students who took part in the study was three hundred and eighty five. The specific questions we aimed to answer were as the following:

1. What are students’ opinions/understandings of the role of ‘culture’ in foreign language classrooms?
2. In what ways students’ opinions of the characteristics of non-native and native English speaking teachers are similar and/or different?

### Five Selective High Schools

We believe that providing detailed information regarding the characteristics of the research setting is of utmost importance before moving into the student characteristics who took part in the study. The study was conducted within the context of Anatolian high schools, which are considered as selective high schools due to the fact that admission to these schools depends on the high grades taken from a centralized test. The Ministry of Education prepares this test each year and the students take the test towards the end of the second semester in grade 8. The students enumerate the high schools of their choice in their application form. Based on their grades in the test, they are placed into these selective high schools by the Ministry of Education. Achievement in the test and admission to a selective high school is really important for the students and additionally for their parents. For the reason that the quality of education in these high schools is believed to be a determining factor in getting admitted to a better university.

Not only does the Ministry of Education prepare the content and administration of the selective high school entrance test, but also it determines the curricula in these high schools. The students are exposed to intensive English instruction during their first year, consisting of 24 hours of English language instruction per week. However, this number decreases in the following years as in the case of our subjects who were exposed to 4 hours of weekly English instruction. The textbooks that were used in the participating high schools were well-known series in the market written by British writers such as *Inside Out*, and *Opportunities*. The number of students in each high school was approximately seven hundred, and the maximum number of the students in each classroom was thirty. All the English language teachers in these high schools were non-native English speakers, except the Welsh teacher in High School A in Istanbul.

The high schools that were selected for the purposes of this study shared the same curriculum. They were selected from three different provinces, representing different ‘cultures’ in Turkey. One of the high schools is situated in Diyarbakir; the province is situated in the southeastern region in Turkey with a predominant Kurdish population. Other two high schools are located in the Edirne province. It is in northwestern Turkey, spreading along the borders with Greece and Bulgaria. Due to the province’s position in Thrace, it is a multicultural area with different peoples from the Balkans such as Albanians, Greeks, Romanians, Bulgarians, Pomaks and Gypsies along with Turks. The remaining two high schools stand in Istanbul. The province is the largest in the country with a population of approximately thirteen million according to the 2008 census. Istanbul is considered a melting pot, being home to different cultures and peoples throughout the history. For research purposes, we agreed on naming Diyarbakir as the *East*, Edirne as the *West*, and Istanbul as the *Center* and investigate these provinces as *parts* in our analyses. However, due to space limitations we will not be able to present the findings regarding the comparison of these *parts* on different components (see Yilmaz, 2006). We will only compare the three provinces based on the responses to the open-ended question.

We determined the participating high schools through convenience sampling. The questionnaire was given to those students who were present during the phase of data collection, and participation was determined on a voluntary basis. The total number of the senior high school students in all the schools was around 700. As we aimed at reaching the highest number of participants we prepared a total of 475 copies of the questionnaire and collected 385 (81%) of them back.

## Participants

We collected some demographic information regarding the students and their families, specifically about their gender, previous English learning practices, and mother tongues. Moreover, information related to the education level of parents as well as monthly income of families was accumulated to explore whether there were significant differences among the different *parts*, specifically, *East*, *West*, and *Center*.

There were a total of 197 (51.2%) female and 188 (48.8%) male students. Their ages ranged from 16 to 23 with a mean of 17.3. The number of years of English instruction they had been exposed to ranged from 4 to 13 years

with a mean of 8.4. 361 (93.7%) of the students stated that their mother tongue was Turkish and 24 (6.3%) indicated that their first/primary language was different from Turkish, i.e. Kurdish, Zazaish and Arabic.

As for the education level of the parents of the students, 2 (.5 %) of the fathers had no formal education, 47 (12.2%) of the fathers were primary school graduates, 30 (7.8%) of them were secondary school graduates, 124 (32.3%) of them were high school graduates, 161 (41.9%) of the fathers graduated from university and 20 (5.2%) of them held a Master's or a higher degree. A *chi-square analysis* suggests significant differences among the *parts*,  $\chi^2 = 62.83$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $N=384$ . On the other hand, 23 (6 %) of the mothers had no formal education, 79 (20.5%) of the mothers were primary school graduates, 22 (5.7%) of them were secondary school graduates, 148 (38.4%) of them were high school graduates, 101 (26.2%) of the mothers graduated from university, and 12 (3.1%) of them were graduates of Master's or higher programs. The differences among the *parts* were significant according to the *chi-square analysis*:  $\chi^2 = 76.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $N=385$ .

Finally, the questionnaire revealed information about the monthly income of the students' families. At the time of the data collection, 1 USD equaled 1.36 new Turkish Lira (Yeni Turk Lirasi-YTL) according to the rates of the Central Bank and the monthly tax inclusive minimum wage was 531 YTL, equaling 390 USD. According to the data we gathered, 1 (.3%) of the families had no regular income, 21 (5.5%) of the families had less than 500 YTL, 95 (24.7%) of the families earned between 500 and 1000 YTL, 73 (19%) of the families made between 1000-1500 YTL, 78 (20.3%) of the families earned between 1500-2000 YTL and 117 (30.4%) of the families earned more than 2000 YTL. A chi-square analysis again depicted significant differences among the *parts*,  $\chi^2 = 111.61$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $N=385$ .

The differences among the three *parts* in terms of education level of the parents and monthly income of the families suggest that there are socio-cultural and economic differences among participants' families from three different *parts* on which we based our study.

### Developing the Questionnaire and Analyzing the Data

In order to generate items for the questionnaire, we interviewed a group of students in Turkish based on semi-structured questions deducted from the related literature (McKay, 2003). The interviews were conducted with ten students from Anatolian High School A in Istanbul during May 2005 and ten students from Anatolian High School C in Edirne during July 2005. Seven students were in the foundation grade where they were exposed to intensive one-year English instruction, 6 students were in the ninth grade, 5 students were in the tenth grade and 2 students were senior students. Each interview took 30 minutes on average and was recorded via a digital sound recorder. Based on the responses from the students, five major categories appeared which formed the questionnaire sections.

Likert scale was used in the construction of the instrument. Eventually we sent the questionnaire to the experts on the field to obtain inter-rater reliability. The questionnaire was finalized according to the feedback received from the scholars and it consisted of six sections including the section on demographic information. Moreover, an open-ended question investigating students' opinions on whether 'target language culture' should be taught along

with English was also included. The questionnaire was in Turkish (See Appendix for questionnaire items in English). Following the consent of the head principals in each participating school, the questionnaires were applied to the students by the researchers.

We used SPSS version 11.5 to analyze the data and conducted four different statistical analyses to explore our research questions. The first one was a *frequency analysis* to obtain descriptive statistics to answer the first research question, specifically students' opinions/understanding of the role of 'culture'. The second was *principal component analyses* (PCA hereafter) in order to explore the internal structure of the instrument. Based on the interviews and expert opinions, we have decided on the sections in the questionnaire. However, we decided to reduce the data through PCA in order to keep our objectivity. Thus, we did not use the sections in the questionnaire as constructs to be analyzed rather we decided observe how constructs clustered together based on the analyses. We believe the application of this process help the research be free from bias on our part. Following PCAs, we conducted a *reliability analysis* to check the reliability of the reduced data before running the final analysis. Finally, to explore the differences across parts on each component factor scores were obtained and One-way mixed ANOVA using the General Linear Model was conducted using the factor scores. As for the open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire we conducted a content analysis to gather some qualitative data. However, we will not provide information about the differences among three provinces based on the ANOVA due to the purpose of this article (see Yilmaz, 2006).

### Findings

The findings of the current study will be presented in relation to the research questions. To be able to provide an answer to the first research question regarding students' perspectives, we will refer to the last section in the questionnaire, which is related to students' perception of 'culture'. Following this, we will highlight what the participants think about the teaching of English along with its 'culture' by focusing on the open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire. As for the second research question, we will refer to the descriptive statistics run for the section regarding English language teachers. The two research questions will be discussed under two sub-headings and the means for questionnaire items will be provided in brackets. The means in brackets represent students' replies to questionnaire items which are designed in five-point Likert Scale (1= 'strongly disagree' ,, 5='strongly agree').

#### The Role of 'Culture' in Foreign Language Classrooms

We analyzed students' replies to the last questionnaire section to see what they think about the role of 'culture' (reverse coding applied due to ranking). As for the origin of 'target language culture', the participants associate English with the British culture (M=1.44) the most followed by the American culture (M=2.19). Following the ranking section, they also indicate that learning about the similarities of and differences between English speaking countries and cultures in Turkey was the most interesting topic for the students (M=3.78). The responses reveal that the students need to get informed about the 'local culture' in relation to the 'target language culture'.

The participants were also asked to express their preferences on various topics to be included in English instruction. The participants were interested in learning about the similarities and differences between the ‘cultures’ of English speaking countries and cultures in Turkey (M=3.78), how the people behave in various circumstances in English speaking countries (M=3.70), learning the history of English speaking countries in relation to history of Turkey (M=3.62), and learning and understanding values of English speaking countries (M=3.59).

To collect more qualitative data on student’ understandings and opinions on the issue, the participants were asked an open ended question at the end of the questionnaire. They were asked whether the ‘target language culture’ should be taught together with English. The students were to answer the question by justifying their reasons. The responses collected from the students will be given in relation to the *parts*. The participants agreed, disagreed, and partially agreed on the question. Table 1 provides the responses from the students in relation to their *parts*.

**Table 1**  
*Students’ Responses to the Open-Ended Question*

<i>Parts</i>	Agree		Disagree		Partially agree		No answer		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>East</i>	37	50.7	10	13.7	3	4.1	23	31.5	73	100
<i>Center</i>	79	50.7	34	21.8	18	11.5	25	16	156	100
<i>West</i>	64	41	37	23.7	8	5.1	47	30.1	156	100
Total	180	46.8	81	21	29	7.5	95	24.7	385	100

Overall, the majority of the respondents showed agreement (46.8 %). However, more than a quarter of responses was either negative or partially positive (28.5 %).

The common reasons provided by the participants for their agreement on target language teaching along with English language teaching were as follows:

- a. language and culture cannot be separated from each other,
- b. learning about target language culture is essential to have enough information about native English speaking countries and compare it with cultures in Turkey, and
- c. interest and motivation towards learning English might increase by learning about the target language culture.

Some of the participants wrote:

- Yes, language represents culture. (Informant 38)  
 Learning a language means learning a culture. (Informant 95)  
 Yes, to compare and contrast the cultures of native English speaking countries with ours. (Informant 262)

Complementarily, a closer look at Table 1 will disclose a difference based on percentages among *parts* on negative responses to the open ended question. Only 13.7% of the students from the East disagree with the teaching of ‘target language culture’ along with English and this is the lowest rate. To provide more

insights into why the least percentage of students disagree, we would like to share ideas of two students.

The two of the students, who wanted to be English language teachers and agreed with the idea of English language instruction along with the ‘target language culture’, wrote the following regarding the difficulties they are experiencing in their province:

I know that I am luckier than other students in Diyarbakır, as I am a student in a Anatolian high school (selective high school). But I think we lack the opportunities that the students in other regions possess regarding foreign language. I suppose this place is a far corner in Turkey. Even if there are new developments in English language teaching and learning, Diyarbakır will remain passive and behind. (Informant 329)

The ideas of the second student are supporting the ideas of the first one:

I would like to thank you because you are conducting the survey here. Because, I will have a chance to spread my thoughts by answering the questionnaire even if my chances are low. It is advantageous to get education in Diyarbakır Anatolian High School. But we live in Turkey and we will be competing against other students at the university entrance examination or other areas. Every student will teach in different parts of the country as English language teachers in the future. Isn't it true that educating our future students with our limited knowledge and cultural insights regarding English language teaching will lead to a lack of awareness among them? This situation is not true for some schools, but what about others? (Informant 330)

As for the reasons why the participants disagreed on the teaching of the ‘target language culture’, the students stated ‘cultural imperialism’ and the importance of preserving their own identity and ‘culture’ as the major reasons for their disagreement. Some of the students wrote the following:

No. In order not to experience cultural corruption. (Informant 61)

No to cultural imperialism! (Informant 72)

No. They are corrupting our culture. (Informant 230)

Some of the participants partially agreed on the teaching of ‘target language culture’ along with English language teaching. Their common reasons were; ‘target language culture’ should be taught generally without going into details without imposing it and influencing the students’ own cultural values. Some of the participants stated:

Yes, but a little without imposing it. (Informant 5)

Yes, but without making the youth in Turkey admirers of Americans and the British. (Informant 35)

Yes, but without imposing it on us. Our identity is important. (Informant 148)

To sum up, majority of the students (46.8 %) state that they agree on the teaching of the 'target language culture' along with English, as they believe 'culture' and language complement each other. Moreover, *East* seems to be the strongest supporter of this particular idea due to some anticipated socio-cultural reasons. On the contrary, more than a quarter of the students disagree or partially agree with the idea of teaching 'target language culture' in English language classes (28.5 %), because they think that the direct teaching of 'culture' in English language classes could turn into cultural imposition and cause the loss of their own cultural identity.

### English Language Instruction

In order to answer the second research question, we need to have a look at what the students think about NESTs and NON-NESTs. About the nationality of English language teachers, the participants agreed that they would prefer English language teachers from the U.K. (M=4.11) or the U.S.A. (M=3.81) the most. The participants were also asked to rank their preferences of English language teachers. Native English teachers who can speak Turkish were ranked in the first place (M=1.90) by the students, English language teachers from Turkey who lived in countries where English is the native language were regarded in the second place (M=2.69),

As for the students' opinions on the characteristics of English language teachers in general, the participants agreed that English language teachers should be able to speak Turkish (M=4.09), be familiar with cultures in Turkey (M=4.06), be familiar with 'target language culture' (M=4.23). When asked about the characteristics of English teachers from Turkey, the participants agreed that they understand the difficulties the students face while learning English better than foreign teachers (M=3.89). The students were also asked to rate their agreement on three statements about the characteristics of NESTs. The participants agreed that they inform the students about 'target language culture' (M=4.08), teach the 'target language culture' better than English language teachers from Turkey (M=3.95).

In conclusion, the participants agreed that native English teachers teach English better than English language teachers from Turkey while the latter understands the difficulties they face better. In addition, they also emphasized that English language teachers should be able to speak Turkish, and be familiar with the cultures in Turkey.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study aims to investigate the understandings and preferences of high school students on the role of 'culture' in ELT. Most of the previous studies in the ELT field target English language teachers, and the voice of language learners remains to be weak in terms of their opinions and preferences

about 'culture' in English language learning/teaching as well as English language teachers. The purpose of this study was to listen to the voice of the language learners and amplify it by reporting in academia. In the following paragraphs, the findings of the study will be discussed in regard to the analyses conducted and the related literature.

The findings for the characteristics of English language teachers suggest that the participants prefer English language teachers from the U.K. in the first place followed by language teachers from the U.S.A. These findings were similar to the results of Prodromou's (1992) study, as the Greek English language learners prefer firstly British English followed by American English as a model for English. Moreover, the participants are asked to rank English language teachers according to their characteristics and nationality. NESTs who can also speak Turkish are ranked at the top, followed by English language teachers from Turkey who have lived in native English speaking countries. As for the characteristics of language teachers, the participants agree that English language teachers should be able to speak Turkish and be familiar with cultures in Turkey. These findings support the importance of the strengths possessed by non-native English speaking teachers (Moussu, 2002, 2006; Liang, 2002; Mahboob, 2003; Cheung, 2002; Cheung & Braine, 2007; Fahmy & Briton, 1992; Kelsh & Santana-Williamson, 2002) and the necessity of inclusion of the 'local culture' in English language learning process (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002; McKay, 2003).

As for the participants' preferences on which 'culture' should be included in textbooks, British culture was in the first place, then American culture followed by cultures in Turkey. They further state that they would like to learn about the similarities and differences between the cultures of native English speaking countries and cultures in Turkey.

The responses given to the open-ended question complement the quantitative findings regarding the section about cultural elements. The majority of the students (46.8%) agree that 'target language culture' should be taught along with English. However, 28.5% of the participants disagree or partially agree with the idea. These students who partially agree or disagree with the idea of teaching 'target language culture' along with English are aware of the importance of the 'local culture', and these findings support the necessity of the inclusion of the 'local culture' in English language teaching/learning process (Bhatt, 2005; Canagarajah, 2005, 2007; Kachru, 1985, 1992, 1996, 1997; Kachru & Nelson, 1996; Kramsch, 2002; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996; McKay, 2003). As for teaching the 'target language culture', the participants emphasize the necessity of 'target language culture', supporting the ideas of Byram and Flemming (1998) in terms of the inclusion of 'target language culture' in English language learning/teaching process. Furthermore, the finding regarding students' disagreement seem to reveal the socio-economic differences among the *parts* and an indicative of these students' eagerness towards language learning.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The current study suggests several implications for the field of ELT. The findings of the study underline the strengths possessed by NON-NESTs and the importance of the inclusion of 'local culture' in classroom activities. Thus, the implications are related to material development, classroom practices, and language teacher hiring practices.

The responses obtained from the participants suggest that elements or topics related to cultures in Turkey should be included in English language teaching/learning textbooks. In most of the educational institutions in Turkey, textbooks written by British writers are used. In other words, the English language teaching/learning materials are imported from the *inner circle*. The findings of the current study might suggest well-known textbook publishers to prepare textbooks related to the needs and demands of English language learners, and material development units of educational institutions to design 'local culture' related materials more frequently, which in turn will affect classroom practices to a great extent.

Furthermore, the findings of the present study might have two important implications for decision makers in language teaching institutions. The first one is related to the status of NON-NESTs. Administrators need to consider some significant characteristics possessed by NON-NESTs during teacher hiring process. The study reveals that NON-NESTs have several strengths such as familiarity with the 'local culture', knowledge about the native language as well as being familiar with the difficulties students are facing. These characteristics need to be taken into account prior to decision on hiring teachers. The second implication is pertaining to NESTs. Decision makers should aim to design short educational programs to raise NESTs' awareness towards languages and cultures of their students. In majority of language education institutions around the world, NESTs are preferred due to their powerful status over NON-NESTs. However, the participants of the study highlighted the ability to speak the native language of students and familiarity with their cultures as strengths of language teachers. Consequently, NESTs should be supported with some cultural insights, because being a native English speaking language teacher does not necessarily mean being an effective English language teacher.

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## Appendix 1

### The Questionnaire

#### Section I: Reasons for learning English

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- (Q1.1) Education in the U.K. or U.S.
- (Q1.2) Education in other countries where English is the native language
- (Q1.3) Education in countries where English is the official language
- (Q1.4) Education in countries where English is a foreign language
- (Q1.5) To communicate with Americans or the English
- (Q1.6) To communicate with people from other countries where English is the native language
- (Q1.7) To communicate with people from countries where English in the official language
- (Q1.8) To communicate with people from countries where English in a foreign language
- (Q1.9) To find work after graduation
- (Q1.10) To use the internet
- (Q1.11) To get informed about American or British culture
- (Q1.12) To get informed about the culture of other countries where English is the native language
- (Q1.13) To get informed about the culture of countries where English is the official language
- (Q1.14) To get informed about the culture of countries where English is spoken as a foreign language
- (Q1.15) To get informed about American or British literature
- (Q1.16) To get informed about the literatures of other countries where English is the native language
- (Q1.17) To get informed about the literatures of countries where English is the official language
- (Q1.18) To get informed about the literatures of countries where English is spoken as a foreign language
- 

#### Section 2: Content of English Language Lessons

Skills and aspects of language covered in English language classes

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#### Items

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- (Q2.1) Grammar
- (Q2.2) Reading
- (Q2.3) Listening

- (Q2.4) Writing
  - (Q2.5) Speaking
  - (Q2.6) Vocabulary
  - (Q2.7) Culture of the language
- 

Suggestions for more effective English language learning classes

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- (Q3.1) Grammar
  - (Q3.2) Speaking activities
  - (Q3.3) Listening activities
  - (Q3.4) Reading
  - (Q3.5) Vocabulary exercises
  - (Q3.6) Writing activities
  - (Q3.7) Information about target language culture
  - (Q3.8) Pair or group work
- 

**Section 3:** Characteristics of English Language Teachers

- Students' opinions about the nationality of English language teachers
- 

- (Q4.1) Turkey
  - (Q4.2) U.S.A.
  - (Q4.3) U.K.
  - (Q4.4) From other countries where English is the native language
  - (Q4.5) From countries where English is the official language
  - (Q4.6) From any foreign country
  - (Q4.7) From either Turkey or a foreign country
- 

- Students' opinions about English language teachers
- 

- (Q5.1) To be able to speak Turkish
  - (Q5.2) To be familiar with cultures in Turkey
  - (Q5.3) To be familiar with target language culture
  - (Q5.4) To be a native speaker of English
- 

- Students' opinions about English language teachers from Turkey
- 

- (Q6.1) They understand the difficulties we face while learning English better than native English teachers
  - (Q6.2) They teach English better than native English teachers
  - (Q6.3) They have enough information about target language culture
  - (Q6.4) They can teach target language culture with contrasting it with cultures in Turkey
  - (Q6.5) They inform us about target language culture
- 

- Students' opinions about native English speaking language teachers
- 

- (Q7.1) They teach English better than English language teachers from Turkey
  - (Q7.2) They teach target language culture better than English language teachers from Turkey
  - (Q7.3) They inform us about their own culture
- 

- Students' preferences about the nationality of English language teachers (Ranking)
- 

- (Q8.1) English language teachers whose native language is English
- (Q8.2) English language teachers from Turkey
- (Q8.3) English language teachers whose native language is English and who can speak Turkish
- (Q8.4) English language teachers from Turkey who lived in countries where English is the

native language

(Q8.5) English language teachers who are the graduates of English language teaching departments

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#### **Section 4: Content of English Language Textbooks**

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(Q9.1) Life and culture in Turkey

(Q9.2) Life and culture in the U.S.A. and U.K.

(Q9.3) Life and culture in other countries where English is the native language

(Q9.4) Life and culture in countries where English is an official language

(Q9.5) Life and culture in countries where English is a foreign language

(Q9.6) Issues related to science

(Q9.7) Issues related to technology

(Q9.8) Issues related to societies

(Q9.9) Issues related to politics

(Q9.10) Issues related to world history

(Q9.11) American and British literature

(Q9.12) Literatures of other countries where English is the native language

(Q9.13) Literatures of countries where English is the official language

(Q9.14) Literatures of countries where English is spoken as a foreign language

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#### **Section 5: Cultural Elements**

- Which culture the students associate English with (Ranking)

(Q10.1) American culture

(Q10.2) British culture

(Q10.3) Culture of countries where English is the native language

(Q10.4) Culture of countries where English is the official language

(Q10.5) Culture of countries where English is spoken as a foreign language

(Q10.6) No culture

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- Students' opinions about various topics

(Q11.1) To be able get geographic information about places where English is spoken

(Q11.2) To be able get historical information about places where English is spoken

(Q11.3) To learn the history of the countries where English is spoken as compared to history of Turkey

(Q11.4) To learn about the similarities and differences between the cultures of countries where English is spoken and cultures in Turkey

(Q11.5) To learn and understand values of countries where English is spoken

(Q11.6) To learn about how the people behave in various circumstances in countries where English is spoken

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#### **Open-ended question**

(Q12) Should target language culture be taught along with English? Please explain why/why not

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