

ACTFL Standards in Action: English Language Teachers' Views on Integrating Target Culture into the Language Instruction

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Abstract

This study aims to examine language teachers' views on integrating target culture into language instruction. The study was conducted as a cross-sectional survey design on 116 English teachers. The participants were administered Target Culture Integration Survey (TCIS) developed by researchers based on *ACTFL*. The study was limited to only the standards concerning the cultural dimension of *ACTFL*. The reliability coefficient of the survey was 0.77. The data of the study were analyzed through descriptive statistics (means, standard deviation etc.), independent t test and one-way analysis of variance. The results showed that the views of teachers about the culture integration were moderately high regardless of gender or school districts. On the other hand, the results showed that 6-10 years experienced teachers have higher positive views than the other teachers. Also, the findings manifested that the high school teachers had higher positive views than the middle school teachers.

Keywords: ACTFL, culture, culture integration, cross-sectional evaluations

1. Introduction

Language and culture have been the most important factors that keep a community together. On the other hand, those are language and culture that create differences among different communities. In this sense, it can be said that if one has a language and a culture, he/she belongs to somewhere and he/she is different from some others. According to Sapir (1921):

“Language has a setting. The people that speak it belongs to a race (or a number of races), that is, to a group which is set off by physical characteristics from other groups. Again, language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives. Anthropologists have been in the habit of studying man under the three rubrics of race, language, and culture”(p.15).

Now that the people are born, they have innumerable activities in their lives and die and even after their death the anthropological studies are all around their race, culture and language, then it is possible to define culture and language as the most important dimensions of a man could ever reflect in his life. Thus, besides being important for each other, it is clear that communities either exist or not in present keep culture and language together and they tend to transfer them to the next generations in the hope of surviving.

While the culture keeps the community alive, it is impossible to convey a particular culture without communication and most communicational activities are based on language (Wei,2005). Thus, language is the way that people carry their culture. Aside from daily life, people can read, listen or even watch about their culture through a number of media(Brown, 2007). Rather than leading a very simple life form, through languages people have their own perspective of life and they are able to express different views about the life. According to Sapir (1985)“....*language is not an instinctual function, but acquired and cultural*”. By looking at a community’s language, one can say many things about its culture. Also as a result of social, political or military reasons different cultures have close relations with each other. Thus, we can say that language is the way the culture is perceived. Thereby, it is necessary to go beyond simple definitions and say that language is not only the process of naming the things, rather it provides people perceive the life and culture makes it permanent and then language keeps the culture awake, they support each other.

Aside from this strong chain of culture, communication and language in a particular community, interactions among different communities have always been interest of the human being. In this sense, the easiest and the fastest way to learn other cultures is, of course, language. Thus, foreign language learning and teaching have always been important within the communities. Governments have provided courses in their curricula. Also, there are language courses giving many languages in every part of the world.

In Turkey, language education has been important since 19th century. In those days, besides Arabic, people showed interest in French, English and the other European languages. Nowadays, English is dominating almost all foreign language courses given in schools or other courses. Most of the students have English courses starting from the 4th grade and they are taught English for 10 years average. Nevertheless, the outcomes of this long and exhausting English teaching are not satisfying enough (Öner&Gedikoğlu, 2007). Some learners are really willing to learn English but there is still a majority of learners reluctant to learn it. Although, some learners can differentiate the basic sentence structures, most of them still cannot use the language as a means of communication(Aydın &Zengin, 2008). In order to eliminate this problem, sometimes educational

policies have been changed. For example, students used to have English lesson starting from the 6th grade and they changed it to start from the 4th grade few years ago and these days they are changing it to start from the 2nd grade. Although the new approaches try to increase the communicative aspect of the language, cultural side of the language is still being ignored (Can, 2009). Students still cannot integrate the language and culture in their minds (Genç & Bada, 2005).

Whatever the policy is, the English teachers are the key factors here. They should promote a cultural awareness within language teaching. Besides target culture awareness, the teachers also need to promote the feeling that the language is really a language which has many connections to the life itself (Razı, 2012; Zehir Topkaya & Demir, 2011). According to University of South Australia Teaching and Learning Languages Guide (2012);

“In developing a professional stance to language teaching, it is important to consider how language as code and language as social practice are balanced in the curriculum. In developing language capabilities, students need to develop their knowledge and understanding of the code and also to come to see language as a way of communicating between people. Both of these goals need to be present in language teaching and learning from the beginning.”

Fortunately, most of the EFL teachers have the potential to make some cultural addition which is needed to make teaching more meaningful and permanent. They have that potential because digging out the EFL teachers' training in undergraduate degrees, it is seen that the candidates are given methodology, literature and linguistics courses. In all of these courses there are cultural implications. Especially in literature courses, the candidates are given a large portion of target culture. Also some of the students have chance to take courses from instructors who are the native speakers of the target language, so they have even bigger chance of discovering the target culture.

ELT studies have always been an important part of the educational issues. The studies are about the students, teachers, methods, materials etc. When it comes to the studies on culture, one can see that it is also a popular topic within the social sciences. The term “culture” is connected to the numerous subjects and to the “language” as well. Although the term “culture” is attached to “language” itself most of time, surprisingly it is less common to see it attached to the studies in “language teaching”.

Recently, cultural awareness has been focused by some researchers (Baker, 2012; Burger, 2011; Byram, 2012; Cotter, 2011; Furlong & Wight 2011). These researches are mostly about the importance of the culture teaching, the goals of teaching it, how to teach it and some miscellaneous points. Concerning to the importance of culture teaching, two important views are remarkable. While the culture teaching is gaining importance, on the other hand, there arise some controversial issues on the culture. For example Saniei, (2012) suggests that culture is the underlying dimension of all one knows and does however Larsen-Freeman (2001) suggests culture as the fifth skill in addition to reading, writing, speaking and listening in ELT. It seems meaningless to race them in their ascribing importance to the culture but it is obvious that language teaching is not complete without the culture teaching in either perspective (Schulz, 2007). Secondly, we come across with the studies revealing the goals of culture teaching. Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) try to make it clear that the goals of culture teaching as follow (7);

- To help students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally conditioned behaviors.

- To help students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave.
- To help students to become more aware of conventional behavior in common situations in the target culture.
- To help students to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language.
- To help students to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence.
- To help students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture.
- To stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and encourage empathy towards its people.

This is a very important guide for the teachers, students, material developers, parents and whoever involved in language teaching process. Only if the teachers, for example, know why they should teach culture, it will be easier to deal with the entire process. The same is valid for the other contributors of the process (students, parents etc.). Thirdly, although a teacher is assured and motivated for the importance and goals of the culture teaching, they might still have questions in their minds about how to do it. When it comes to the ways for teaching culture, one can see that the studies' major focus is the authenticity. Likewise, in their study, Sarigül and Ashton (2006) suggest some instructional strategies for teaching culture. They propose several strategies like culture capsules, proverbs, authentic materials, role play, native speakers as cultural resources and body language. When one look at these strategies, he/she feels that everything is native or native-like. This is the key in all culture teaching activities.

There are also some other studies mostly suggesting ideas about which cultural elements should be taught and one of the common lists belongs to Brooks (1986). According to Brooks (1986) there are so many items to teach ranging from greetings to the careers in the target language. He depicts 62 topics which of them is really useful matter for gaining a cultural awareness in the target language.

There are several studies reflecting the English teachers' linguistic or methodological competency (Andernovics, 2009; Bai, 2006; Bartram, 2012; Beck et al.,2012; Monopoli& Kingston,2012; Snow et al.,2012; Young &Sachdev, 2011).Also, there are some other studies evaluating the cultural elements of the English course books (Botsoglou&Kakana, 2003; Cakır, 2010; Hong-lin, 2010;Kelly, 2010; Soureshjani, 2011). However, studies showing teachers' cultural understanding and their ability of promoting cultural awareness in the classes are scarce. This study aims to examinelanguage teachers' views on target culture and its integration to the English courses. Within this framework, the research questions are as follows:

There were two main questions in this study;

- What are the teachers' views on the integration of the target culture into the English courses?
- Do their views differ in terms of their gender, length of service, work placeand school districts?

2. Methodology

In this descriptive study the cross-sectional survey design was used to determine language teachers' views on integration of target culture into the language instruction. In the study, teachers' views were compared according to their gender, length of service, work place and school districts.

2.1 Participants

The participants were 116 English teachers from Uşak (27), İstanbul (38), Siirt (15), Şırnak (14) and Diyarbakir (22). The selected cities have regional diversities in terms of cultural heritage, location and socio-economic conditions. The distributions are given Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Distribution of Language Teachers

Variable		f	%
Gender	Male	43	39%
	Female	73	66%
Length of Service	0-5 years	50	45%
	6-10 years	46	42%
	10 year & above	20	18%
Work Place	Primary	61	55%
	High School	55	50%
School District	Uşak	27	25%
	İstanbul	38	35%
	Siirt	15	14%
	Şırnak	14	13%
	Diyarbakir	22	20%
Total		116	

Table1 indicates that participants mainly are female, have 0-5 seniority, work at primary schools and from Istanbul.

2.2 Instrumentation

The data were collected via Target Culture Integration Survey (TCIS). The survey was developed by researchers based on *ACTFL Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers – 2002*. The standards were developed for training of teacher candidates and required components of foreign language teacher preparation. The six content standards describe the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of foreign language teacher candidates. The standard domains are as follows:

Standard 1: Language, Linguistics, Comparisons

Standard 2: Cultures, Literatures, Cross-Disciplinary Concepts

Standard 3: Language Acquisition Theories and Instructional Practices

Standard 4: Integration of Standards into Curriculum and Instruction

Standard 5: Assessment of Languages and Cultures

Standard 6: Professionalism

Of all the standard domains, the second one (cultures, literatures, cross-disciplinary concepts) was focused in this study. The standards regarding cultural understandings, understanding of literary and cultural texts and integrating other disciplines in instruction were converted into the survey questions (appendix-1). TCIS consisted of 16 five point Likert type items. The 16 items of the Target Culture Integration Survey (TCIS) were subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using

SPSS 15. Before performing EFA the suitability of the data for this analysis was assessed. The Kaiser-Mayer Olkin value was 0.73, exceeding the suggested value of .60 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance ($p < 0.05$). The result supported the factorability of the correlation matrix (Pallant, 2011). EFA revealed the presence of three components with eigenvalues exceeding 1. However, the scree plot revealed a clear break after the second component and since the eigenvalue of the first component was four times bigger than the second component's eigenvalue (Buyukozturk, 2010), it was decided to retain one component for further investigation. This was also supported by results of parallel analysis conducted via Monte Carlo PCA for Parallel Analysis, which indicated only one component (16 variables x 116 participants). The one factor solution explained 44.01% of the variance. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the survey was calculated as 0.77. The maximum and minimum scores for TCIS are 80 and 16 respectively. The items and factor loads in TCIS were given in Appendix.

2.3 Data Analysis

In the study to make comparison between groups, independent *t*-test and one way analysis of variance statistical techniques were used. On the purpose of determining and comparing the views of language teachers on integration of culture into the instruction descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations), Independent Sample T-Test and One - Way ANOVA were used. Post-hoc comparison test (Tukey HSD Test) was used to indicate where the differences occur. Significance level was set to be .05.

3. Findings

This study investigated teachers' perceptions on integrating culture into instruction. The findings were given in line with the research questions. The first concern of the study was to show the general perspectives of teachers' views on integration of culture into instruction. The results were given in Table 1. The descriptive analysis indicated that teachers had positive views on integrating culture to instruction ($M = 65,64$; $SD = 7,24$). This showed that the integration of target language is indispensable for teachers. The results also manifested that female teachers ($M = 66,72$; $SD = 6,43$) had more positive attitude toward integration than the male teachers ($M = 63,79$, $SD: 8,18$).

Table 1
Comparison of Teachers' views on integrating Target Culture into Instruction

gender	N	Mean	Sd	t	df	P
Male	43	63,7907	8,18	-2,141	114	,034
Female	73	66,7260	6,43			
Total	116	65,64	7,24			

An independent *t* test was conducted to compare teachers' views according to gender. The results indicated that there was significant difference in scores of attitudes towards the integration of the target culture into instruction [$t_{(114)} = -2,14$; $p = .034$]. This result indicated that gender make difference in teachers' attitude toward integrating culture into instruction. These scores indicated that female teachers adopt integration of the target culture into instruction more than male teachers did.

The second concern of the study was to examine the effect of length of service on teachers' attitude toward integrating target culture. The findings indicated that teachers who had 6-10 years length of service showed more positive feelings than did the others (see Table 2).

Table 2
Comparison of Teachers' views on integrating Target Culture into Instruction according to their Length of service

	N	Mean	sd		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
0-5 years	50	64,00	7,73	Between Groups	342,517	2	171,259	3,401	,037
6-10 years	46	67,72	6,40	Within Groups	5690,276	113	50,356		
10 year & above	20	64,95	6,97	Total	6032,793	115			
Total	116	65,64	7,24						

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of length of service on teachers' attitude toward integration of target culture into instruction. Subjects were divided into three groups according to their length of service. There was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in TCIS scores for the three age groups: $F_{(2, 115)} = 3,401$; $p < .05$. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for teachers with 6-10 years seniority ($M = 67, 72$; $SD = 6.40$) was significantly different from teachers with 0-5 years seniority ($M = 64.00$; $SD = 7.73$) and teachers with 10 year & above seniority ($M = 64.95$; $SD = 7.24$). These results manifested that teachers with 6-10 years' experience had more positive feelings toward using target cultural in instruction.

Another variable that might affect the attitude of the teachers was the level they were teaching. The teachers were teaching English to either Primary school (4th to 8th grade) or High School (9th to 12th grade) students. The results revealed that teachers in high schools had more positive views on using cultural elements in instruction (see table 3).

Table 3
Comparison of Teachers' views on integrating Target Culture into Instruction according to their Work Place

Grade Level	N	M	sd	t	df	p
Primary	61	64,2623	8,36840	-2,190	114	,031
High School	55	67,1636	5,42205			

In order to compare their views according to their work place independent t test was conducted. The results showed that there was no significant difference in scores for primary level English teachers ($M = 64, 26$; $SD = 8, 36$) and high school level English teachers, ($M = 67, 16$; $SD = 5, 42$), $t_{(114)} = -2,190$; $p < .05$.

The last concern of the study was to investigate the effect of school district of teachers. The participants of the study were participated from four different cities of Turkey (Uşak, İstanbul, Siirt and Şırnak). Uşak and İstanbul are on the west part of Turkey and the socio-economic structures are similar in that sense. Siirt and Şırnak are the cities from the East part of Turkey and the socio-economic structures are similar to each other while they are differing from that of Uşak and

Istanbul. The findings indicated that teachers who work in USAK school district showed higher positive views in TCIS than did the teachers in other school districts (see Table 4).

Table 4
Comparison of Teachers' views on integrating Target Culture into Instruction according to their School Districts

	N	Mean	sd		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Uşak	27	70,26	6,58	Between Groups	1364,267	4	341,067	8,109	,000
İstanbul	38	66,71	6,96	Within Groups	4668,527	111	42,059		
Siirt	15	59,47	4,72	Total	6032,793	115			
Şırnak	14	62,57	6,87						
Diyarbakir	22	64,27	6,27						

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of school district on teachers' views, as measured by the Target Culture Integration Survey (TCIS). There was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in TCIS scores for the three groups: $F_{(4, 115)} = 8,109$; $p < .05$. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Uşak ($M = 70.26$, $SD = 6.58$) was significantly different from Siirt ($M = 59.47$; $SD = 4.72$) and Şırnak ($M = 62, 57$; $SD = 6, 87$). Istanbul ($M = 66, 71$; $SD = 6.96$) did not differ significantly from either Uşak or Diyarbakir.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The study aimed to present the views of the English teachers towards to the integration of culture. In order to figure out the views, the ACTFL Standards were reviewed and it was seen that the criteria of the second standard which is about the culture was parallel with the study questions. Then, the written criteria were converted into Likert type survey questions. 116 teachers were selected from different cities of Turkey (Uşak, Ankara, Siirt, Şırnak, Diyarbakır). The question forms were distributed and they were asked to fill in their forms. The forms were collected back and analyzed to find answers to the study questions.

The first concern of this study was to find out whether the teachers had positive views on the integration of culture. The results presented general positive views of English teachers on the integration of target culture into the English courses. It can be said that the teachers are aware of the importance of the cultural awareness in language teaching. This finding of the current study is consistent with Güler's (2011) finding. She revealed the majority of the instructors believe the positive contribution of the integration of the culture to raise cultural awareness in language teaching.

The other concern of the study was to find out whether the teachers' views vary according to the variables such as gender, years of teaching experience, teaching grade level and school districts. In the study the variables like gender and school districts were seen to have no effect on the teachers' views. On the other hand, the results showed that of all the three groups of teachers -according to their length of experience- 6-10 years experienced teachers had a more positive views than the other two groups (0-5 years and more than 10 years). This finding conflicts with Şen's (2010) study. In his study, he found no correlation between the experience and incorporation of the culture (Şen, 2010). Another significant difference was between the middle school and high school teachers. The

study showed that the high school teachers have higher positive views towards to the integration of the culture into the English courses. This might be explained by the age and increasing intellectuality of the high school students. As they grow older, they become more integrated to the society and technology and so on. This integration needs them to be equipped with more global knowledge and having a cultural awareness might be a good start for them. This may make teachers think that the cultural integration is an essential part of language teaching.

This study reports on an attempt to investigate the views of English teachers towards the integration of target culture into the English courses. The study showed that the teachers have positive attitudes towards the integration of the target culture into the English courses and gender or school districts is not changing their views. Although there are problems in the practice of cultural integration in English classes, it is still important to know that the teachers have positive views about the issue.

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Appendix**Target Culture Integration Survey (TCIS)**

Items	Factor Loads
1. The students should be advised the useful sources which might help them in the development of target cultural proficiency and perception (web sites, newspaper, magazine etc..)	0,746
2. Foreign language teachers should refer to the target culture in language classes	0,731
3. Foreign language teachers should use the target culture as the main content in language teaching.	0,720
4. Foreign language teachers should use authentic materials related to culture in instruction	0,666
5. Foreign language teachers should reflect the differences and similarities between the target culture and domestic culture in the lessons.	0,654
6. Foreign language teachers should regularly use literal or cultural texts to enhance the students' cultural perspectives.	0,634
7. Foreign language teachers should follow the magazines, blogs etc. which are informing about the living, working or studying in the target culture.	0,633
8. Foreign language teachers should use technology in the target culture teaching	0,613
9. Foreign language teachers should go abroad occasionally to have a perspective/perception of target culture	0,605
10. Independent from the course content, foreign language teachers should conduct self-studies about the target culture	0,591
11. Foreign language teachers should assign students for projects with cultural themes.	0,582
12. Foreign language teachers should regularly use literal or cultural texts to enhance the students' cultural perspectives.	0,568
13. Foreign language teachers should give cultural research assignments	0,558
14. Foreign language teachers should measure the students' proficiency development in target culture within the exams.	0,501
15. Foreign language teachers should employ target cultural elements (folk rituals) in instruction.	0,473
16. Foreign language teachers should be always in touch with the native speakers of the target culture	0,436