



AN INVESTIGATION OF TURKISH EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the EFL teachers' perceptions of the cultural diversity in Turkey, and to put forward some practical suggestions in order to eradicate some possible problems related to developing intercultural competence, which is one of the target competences in language classes. In the study, survey method was used based on quantitative data. The data were collected via "The Questionnaire of Perception about Cultural Diversity", adopted from Bandura and Sercu (2005), and administered as a Google document in distance. The participants were composed of randomly accessed 7 EFL teachers (2 males, and 5 females). In the data analysis of the data descriptive statistics was used. The results showed that the participant EFL teachers agreed on the importance of teaching cultural diversity in their classes.

Keywords: EFL teachers, teacher perceptions, cultural diversity, EFL classes

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1. Introduction

Culture is a wide concept that includes ideals, values, customs, attitudes, and can be seen as a way of being. If we examine the society, we can see that people with different cultures and lifestyles will be brought into interaction with each other. Cultural diversity is the synonymous of multiculturalism. It is explained as such; "Multiculturalism, the view that cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, deserve special acknowledgment of their differences within a dominant political culture" (Eagen, 2020). To have students from around the world or around different regions from the same country, to embrace all religious beliefs and customs, to allow people to share their cultures, etc. are some

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of the aspects that cultural diversity can be seen in a school setting. With a diverse community of students, students get a better sense of people and experiences from around the country and other parts of the world. This also adds to a range of thinking and experiences that make teaching and learning more complex and interesting

In the EFL classrooms, teaching about cultures and aware of our own students' cultural backgrounds are very important. "While learning a foreign language, it is likely for its learners to need cultural information for better communication" (Önalın, 2005). Hence, a teacher should be aware of his/her own divert classroom in terms of culture since ones' own culture plays a big role on understanding, interpreting and engaging while learning a second language in a non-English country. Also, in order to teach a second language to his/her students by associating with the culture of the target language, a teacher should be aware of the cultural differences of his/her class and should teach by considering these differences. "That is to say, apart from being a crucial component of language teaching and learning, transferring cultural information may encompass various changes in the language learners' modes of thinking" (Önalın, 2005). Culture and language learning have a multilingual relation in this context. Each student has distinctive personal and cultural encounters. Hence, school types, interests, backgrounds, and desired learning methods for each student differs from eachother. Therefore, another aspect that can be considered important in relation with teaching and culture is that since some of the diversity sources that are mentioned before affect the learning of students. All of these diversity sources affect the learning of students. That is why accountable educators should seek to apply difference in their classrooms so that all their students are accepted and valued in an open community.

Not only different cultures from different parts of the world included in the definition of cultural diversity but also different socio-economical, socio-cultural, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religious differences are also part of the cultural diversity. Turkey is a country that has true cultural heritage. There seem to be sub-definitions integrated with the categories of ethnicity, religion and language in Turkey (Polat and Kılıç, 2013). We can give examples for some of those sub-definitions that Turkey has. Those can be people of the same ethnic origin with different languages, people from different ethnic backgrounds who have the same beliefs, people who speak the same language but have different ethnicity, etc. Having such a feature of cultural diversity, in the EFL classes in Turkey, teaching about different cultures may be neglected due to lack of time and overloaded curriculum with linguistic components. However, learners of English will be in need of using that language with someone who represent another cultural identity other than the Turkish culture.

When considered from the aspect of multiculturalism, the teacher education in Turkey and throughout the world seem to have a serious deficiency. For example, although Turkey is one of the countries that hosts many cultures, the absence of teacher training or a course in the context of multiculturalism is an important deficiency (Polat and Kılıç, 2013). In a

multicultural society, teachers also should have multicultural competencies and this can only be achieved via "multicultural teacher education". The EFL teachers' attitudes in our country towards cultural differences and their tendencies in this direction are very important. As a consequence, the research question of this study is; "What are the EFL teachers' perceptions of cultural diversity in Turkey?"

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

In the study, the survey method was used based on the quantitative data which were collected via the questionnaire titled; "The Questionnaire of Perception about Cultural Diversity".

2.2. Participants

The participants of the study were randomly accessed 7 EFL teachers (2 males, and 5 females) in different schools in Turkey. There were no criteria about the school types or grades they were teaching. The participants were selected randomly on voluntary basis.

2.3. Data Collection Instrument

The data of the study were collected using "The Questionnaire of Perception about Cultural Diversity", developed via adopting from Bandura and Sercu (2005). The questionnaire comprised 5 Likert type answers (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree). In the developmental process of the questionnaire, firstly, a review of literature was conducted, and the questionnaire developed by Bandura and Sercu (2005) was accessed. Later, after some modifications and changes, a draft of the data collection instrument was created. Then, that draft was sent to two field experts in order to obtain their opinions. Based on the experts' opinions, it was finalized as a five point Likert type questionnaire containing two main parts and nineteen questions (See Appendix). The first part was composed of four questions about the participants' demographic information, such as their gender, school type they teach, their experience of being abroad, and the year of their teaching experience. The second part included 15 items about the participant teachers' perception of cultural diversity. The link of the questionnaire was shared via LinkedIn for the access of volunteer teachers.

3. Findings

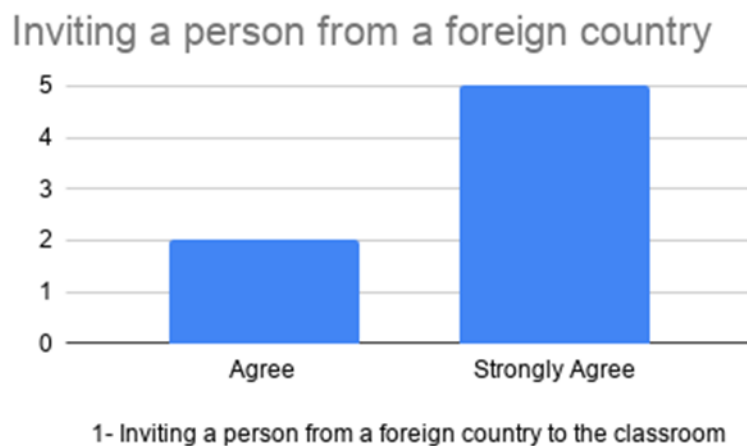
3.1. Findings based on the demographic information of the participants:

In the study, two of the participants were male and five of them were female. One of the male participants was working at a public school and the other one was a teacher at a private school. Three of the five female participants were teaching at public schools, and the others were teachers at private schools. Four participants had the experience of being abroad whereas three of them didn't. The ones who had been in a foreign country stated that; "I have worked in England in 2019 for 5 months", "I have been in Spain in 2015 for 5 months", "I have been in Italy, Australia, Canada as a tourist for 15 days each". One male participant's year of teaching experience was fifteen years and the other male participant's was five years. Female participants' years of teaching experience were; five years, four years, three years, twelve years and nine years.

3.2. Findings based on the questions about the participants' perception of cultural diversity:

The participant teachers' responses to the questionnaire is given in the following:

- 1- Their responses to the statement; "I believe that inviting a person from a foreign country to the classroom is helpful for teaching cultural diversity" are given below.

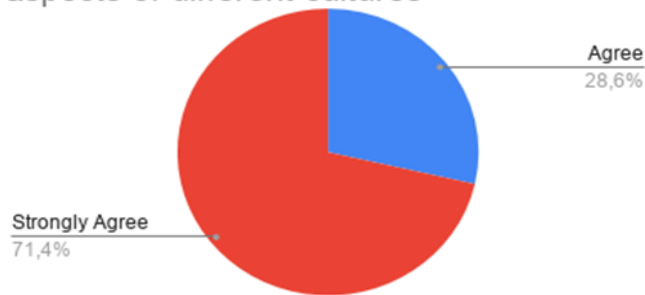


As it is seen in chart 1; 5 of the participant teachers strongly agreed and one participant teacher agreed that inviting a person from a foreign country in class is helpful for teaching cultural diversity.

2- All of the participant teachers’ responded to the statement; “I believe that providing students with role-play activities in different cultural contexts is helpful for teaching cultural diversity” as strongly agree.

3- The teachers’ reflections to the statement; “I believe that assigning students to explore cultural aspects of different cultures is helpful for teaching cultural diversity” are given below.

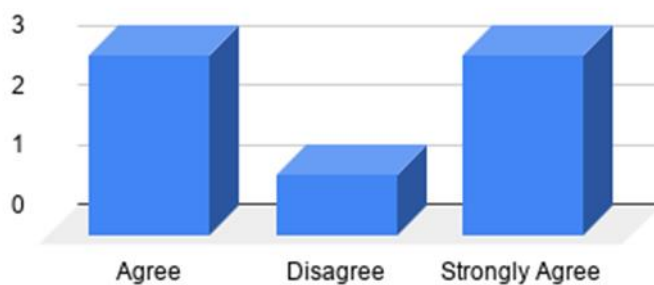
Assigning students to explore cultural aspects of different cultures



In this chart, it is understood that all 5 of the participant teachers strongly agreed and 2 of them agreed on that assigning students to explore cultural aspects of different cultures is helpful for teaching cultural diversity.

4- The answers of the teachers to the statement; “I believe that bringing objects representing different cultures to the classroom is helpful for teaching cultural diversity” can be seen below.

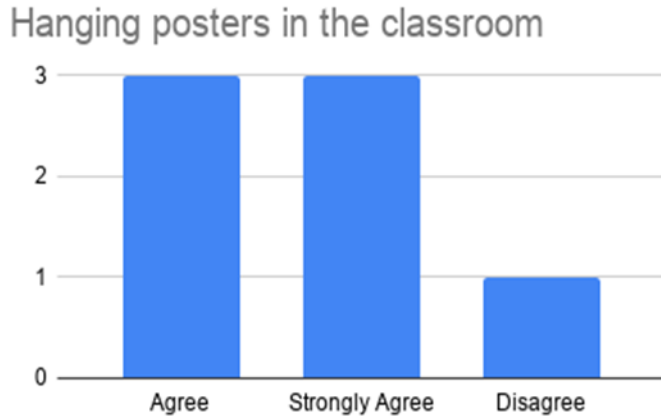
Bringing objects representing different



4- Bringing objects representing different cultures to the

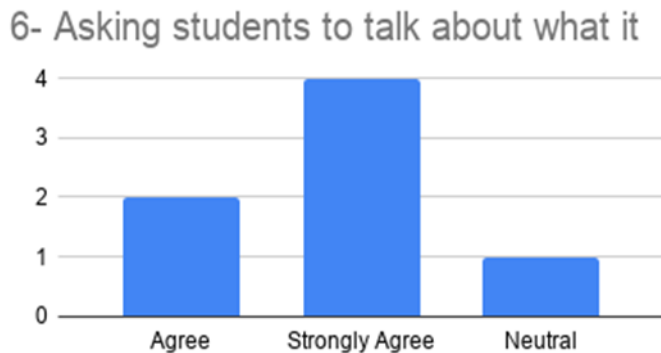
As it is seen in the chart, 3 of the participant teachers agreed, one teacher disagreed and the other 3 strongly agreed that bringing objects representing different cultures to the classroom is helpful for teaching cultural diversity.

- 5- The participant teachers' responses to the statement; "I believe that hanging posters in the classroom illustrating particular aspects of different cultures is helpful for teaching cultural diversity" is as follows.



By looking at this chart, we can say that the majority of the participant teachers agreed and strongly agreed that hanging posters in the classroom illustrating particular aspects of different cultures is helpful for teaching cultural diversity. However, only one teacher does not agree on this statement.

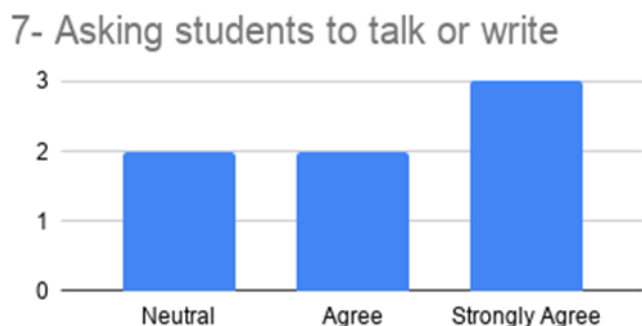
- 6- The responses of the teachers to the statement; "I believe that asking students to talk about what it would be like to live in a foreign culture is helpful for teaching cultural diversity" can be seen below.



6- Asking students to talk about what it would be like to live in

In this chart, it is understood that 4 of the participant teachers strongly agreed, 2 of them agreed and one teacher neutral about the helpfulness of asking students to talk about what it would be like to live in a foreign culture to cultural diversity.

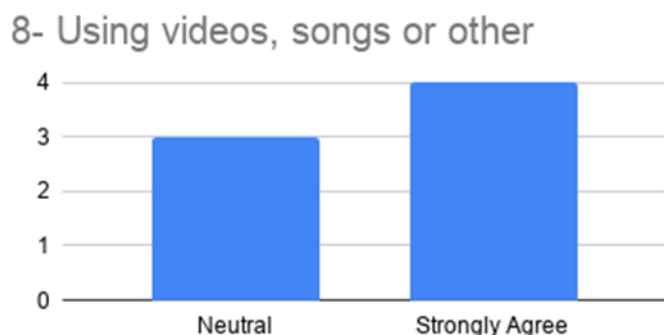
- 7- The teachers' reflections to the statement; "I believe asking students to talk or write about their image of a foreign country is helpful for teaching cultural diversity" are given below.



7- Asking students to talk or write about their image of a

As it is seen in the chart, most of the participant teachers strongly agreed and agreed that asking students to talk or write about their image of a foreign country is helpful for teaching cultural diversity. However, 2 teachers stated that they are neutral about it.

8- The participant teachers’ responses to the statement; “I believe that using videos, songs or other sources from the internet to illustrate different aspects of a foreign culture is helpful for teaching cultural diversity” is as follows.

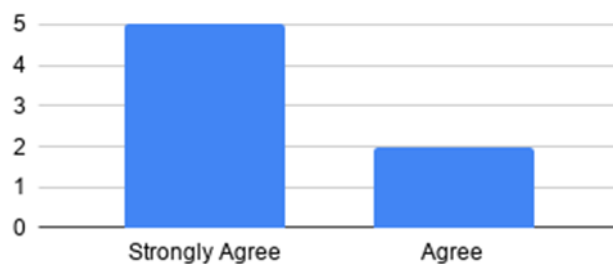


8- Using videos, songs or other sources from the internet to

By looking at this chart, we can say that 4 participant teachers strongly agreed and 3 of the participant teachers are neutral about this statement.

9- The teachers’ reflections to the statement; “I believe that asking students to describe some aspects of their culture is helpful for teaching cultural diversity” can be seen below.

9- Asking students to describe some

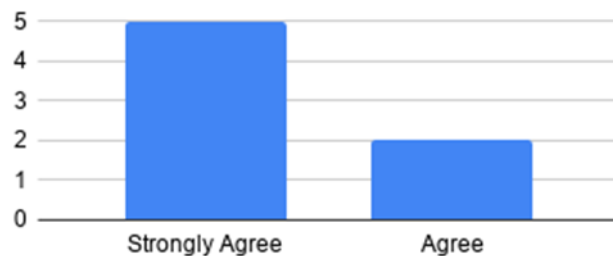


9- Asking students to describe some aspects of their

In this chart, we can see that 5 of the participant teachers strongly agreed and 2 teachers agreed that asking students to describe some aspects of their culture is helpful for teaching cultural diversity.

- 10- The reflections of the teachers to the statement; “I believe that asking students to talk or write about their past experiences in a foreign country is helpful for teaching cultural diversity” is as follows.

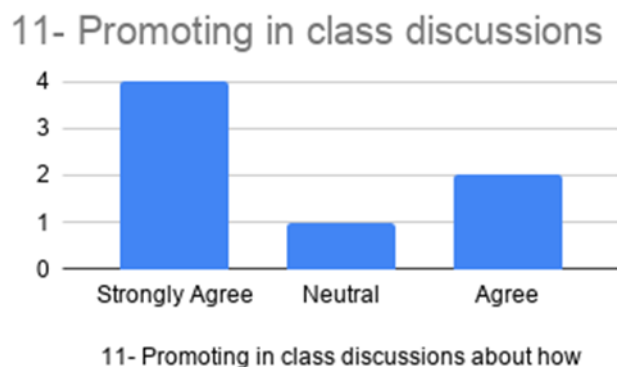
10- Asking students to talk or write



10- Asking students to talk or write about their past

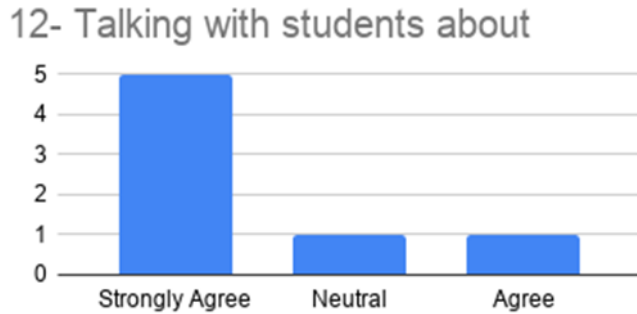
As it is seen in this chart, 5 of the participant teachers strongly agreed and 2 of them agreed that asking students to talk or write about their past experiences in a foreign country is helpful for teaching cultural diversity.

11- Their responses to the statement; “I believe promoting in class discussions about how foreign cultures are represented in their language learning materials is helpful for teaching cultural diversity” can be seen below.



In this chart, it is understood that 4 of the participant teachers strongly agreed and 2 of the teachers agreed that promoting in class discussions about how foreign cultures are represented in their language learning materials is helpful for teaching cultural diversity. Only one teacher neutral about this statement.

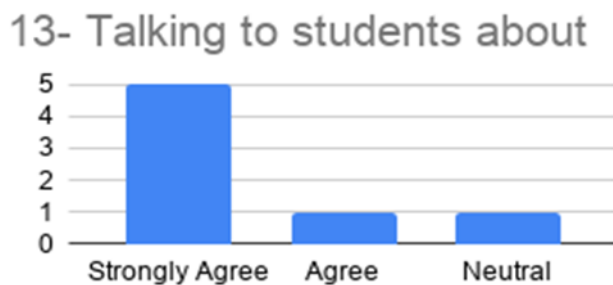
- 12- The participant teachers' responses to the statement; "I believe that talking with students about stereotypes pertaining to particular cultures, countries, and the people is helpful for teaching cultural diversity" are given below.



12- Talking with students about stereotypes pertaining to

By looking at this chart, we can see that 5 of the participant teachers strongly agreed and 1 teacher agreed that talking with students about stereotypes pertaining to particular cultures, countries, and the people is helpful for teaching cultural diversity. One teacher is neutral.

- 13- Their responses to the statement; "I believe talking to students about my own experiences in a foreign country is helpful for teaching cultural diversity" is as follows.

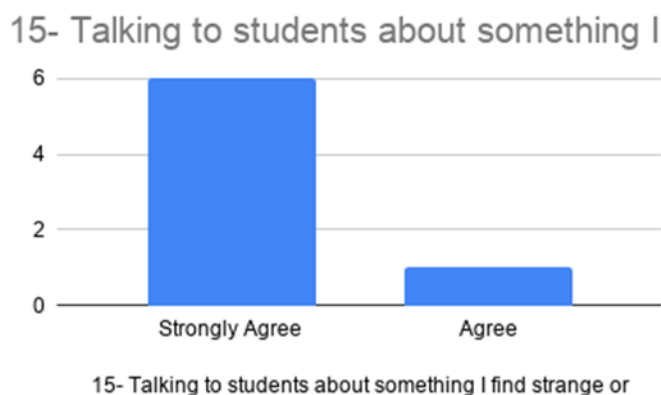


13- Talking to students about my own

By looking at this chart, we can see that 5 of the participant teachers strongly agreed, one teacher agreed and one teacher was neutral about talking to students about their own experiences in a foreign country is helpful for teaching cultural diversity.

- 14- All of the participant teachers strongly agreed about the statement; "I believe that asking students to compare and contrast an aspect of their culture with that of a foreign culture is helpful for teaching cultural diversity".

15- The participant teachers’ responses to the statement; “I believe that talking to students about something I find strange or fascinating about foreign cultures is helpful for teaching cultural diversity” are given below.



In this chart, it can be seen that 6 teachers strongly agreed and one teacher agreed about the statement “I believe that talking to students about something I find strange or fascinating about foreign cultures is helpful for teaching cultural diversity”.

4. Conclusions

The study focuses on the EFL teachers’ understanding of cultural diversity in Turkey. Culture is an indispensable part of a language. One of the components in a foreign/second language program should be developing intercultural competence of the learners along with other competences, such as linguistic competence and communicative competence because the learners will use that language to communicate with someone who represents other cultures. Therefore, in class activities and extracurricular materials should include various cultural elements other than the learners’ own culture. In the EFL context in Turkey, most teachers neglect teaching about other cultures, and they mostly teach linguistic aspects of the target language.

The findings of this study shows that majority of the EFL teachers who participated in the study believe that teaching cultural diversity in their classes is important. This is a significant finding because in the curriculum development process for teaching English as a foreign language in Turkey, including cultural diversity plays an important role. While planning course activities and selecting course materials, besides linguistic and communicative aspects, cultural diversity is also seen the third most important component of the curriculum.

5. Implications

The results of this investigation provide an awareness about how EFL teachers perceive cultural diversity and multiculturalism, which can be beneficial for a culturally diverse classroom. This study also describes the perceptions of EFL teachers' in Turkey about cultural diversity through a variety of statements referring to different aspects of cultural components. However, most of these examples have been limited to small-scale applications that have yet to affect mainstream assessment practice. In the study, some data were collected about the demographic information about the participants but these variables have not been compared or contrasted due to time limitations and the limitations of the scope of the study. Further researches can be conducted with larger number of participants considering demographic features of participants.

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PART II. Perception About Cultural Diversity

Please mark the best answer for you.

	<i>I believe the following ideas are helpful for teaching cultural diversity.</i>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Inviting a person from a foreign country to the classroom	5	4	3	2	1
2	Providing students with role-play activities in different cultural contexts	5	4	3	2	1
3	Assigning students to explore cultural aspects of different cultures	5	4	3	2	1
4	Bringing objects representing different cultures to the classroom	5	4	3	2	1
5	Hanging posters in the classroom illustrating particular aspects of different cultures	5	4	3	2	1
6	Asking students to talk about what it would be like to live in a foreign culture	5	4	3	2	1
7	Asking students to talk or write about their image of a foreign country	5	4	3	2	1
8	Using videos, songs or other sources from the internet to illustrate different aspects of a foreign culture	5	4	3	2	1
9	Asking students to describe some aspects of their culture	5	4	3	2	1
10	Asking students to talk or write about their past experiences in a foreign country	5	4	3	2	1
11	Promoting in class discussions about how foreign cultures are represented in their language learning materials	5	4	3	2	1
12	Talking with students about stereotypes pertaining to particular cultures, countries, and the people	5	4	3	2	1
13	Talking to students about my own experiences in a foreign country	5	4	3	2	1
14	Asking students to compare and contrast an aspect of their culture with that of a foreign culture	5	4	3	2	1
15	Talking to students about something I find strange or fascinating about foreign cultures	5	4	3	2	1

Adapted from Bandura & Sercu (2005).

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