

# Cultural Transfer and Creating Cultural Awareness in Teaching Turkish as A Foreign Language: A Sample from Gaziosmanpaşa University Tömer

Adem İşcan\* Beytullah Karagöz Merve Konyar

Faculty of Education, Gaziosmanpaşa University, Taşlıçiftlik Campus, 60150 Tokat, Turkey

## Abstract

Culture and language are two phenomena that have existed by influencing each other for centuries. It is impossible to think independently of the culture on which the language is cultivated, nor on the language, which influences culture. One of the best signs of mastering a language is the ability to understand the cultural elements and the cultural codes that a language carries. There is a need for transferring of cultural elements in order to achieve foreign language learning in the best possible way. In this way, it is aimed to teach the target language in the most natural way and to ensure that the language competencies of the students are at the highest level. In the globalizing world, that the language teaching has gained different dimensions and new developments on cultural transfer have been seen. The most important of these are intercultural communication and cultural awareness. During language teaching, awareness of the target culture positively affects intercultural communication. In this study, 19 students who are learning Turkish at Gaziosmanpaşa University TÖMER -Center for Teaching Turkish- were given a questionnaire in order to learn their ideas about cultural transfer while learning a foreign language and the obtained data were examined in accordance with the possibilities provided by qualitative research and the findings were interpreted. Among the results obtained, it has been seen that the majority of the students in the general framework have a positive attitude towards cultural learning. The reasons behind the students' attitudes on approaching culture learning kind of a negative way are also investigated. The findings of the students on how and at what level the culture transfer should happen were interpreted and all the findings were synthesized in the conclusion. At the end of the research, some suggestions on teaching Turkish as a foreign language were presented.

**Keywords:** Foreign Language Teaching, Cultural Transmission, Teaching Turkish

## 1. Culture

The Turkish Language Institution refers to the concept of culture in the Great Turkish Dictionary as "*the whole of material and spiritual values created in the process of historical social development and the means of measuring the dominance of man in its natural and social environment used to create the to transmit them to the next generations*" (TDK, 2016 ) When we look at the different definitions of the culture, the Oxford online dictionary defines culture as "*the social behavior, traditions and ideas of a community or a group of people*" (Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2016) The concept of culture in the general framework can be defined as a set of behaviors, beliefs and ideas that are formed by the collective human society that has come together for a specific purpose, which have agreed norms, common interests, traces from the past that shape the future.

The culture has a lot of definitions in various sources. However, there is a general definition of culture, as it has been pointed out as a group of cultures or a clan, some nations and communities with cross-border international partnerships and human communities within a certain geographical region, symbols and complex reference systems. (Fox, 1999, p. 89)

Culture is the sum of the accumulations. Mehmet Kaplan defines culture as "*manipulating and developing everything which is material and spiritual*". (Kaplan, 1983, p.38) Culture is transferred to the next generation by influencing generations for centuries and being washed by the age of that generation. Again, as expressed by Kaplan (1983, p. 39), culture can interact with the culture of other countries. Therefore, it would not wrong to say that the culture is alive. Because the culture of a society can lose some of its features over time, or it can incorporate new features into its own.

In short, we can define culture as common values, norms, and rules as a whole, which are passed on from generation to generation that hold people together. In this sense, culture is a crucial means of understanding the characteristics, values, and sensitivities of a society.

## 2. The Relationship between Culture and Language

The distinction between human beings and other living things is the ability to express thought and think in a logical framework and to understand communication. People think in the context of the language they are in, understand the output they receive from their environment, and engage in communication with other people. In this context, language is an important tool for people to communicate, think and produce meaning, and to understand messages.

When language is regarded as a means of communication and transmission, it is a fact that culture is transmitted through generations and intercultural languages. Everything expressed in language, verbally or written, falls within the scope of culture. (Kaplan, 1983, p. 186) It would not be wrong to say that thought and speech cannot be considered independently of each other, as Vygotsky claimed, who advocates that they are intertwined, cultures and languages develop together and influence each other. (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 211). "*Every nation has its language and cultures for centuries. At that moment, it takes some elements from every soil it passes through, like a flowing river.*" (Kaplan, 1983) Since the early ages they have started, they have influenced or been influenced by different languages and cultures, by increasing or decreasing its features, and have reached their current non-stable conditions. Language and culture are also alive and open to interaction that they cannot be expected to be fixed and strict. In short, culture is a phenomenon that nourishes language and language is a means of carrying culture.

Language and culture are the basic building blocks that hold a nation together. If the language or culture disappears, it is not possible to talk about the continuation of a nation or community. Throughout the history of the world, hundreds of languages are destroyed on the earth, which is the result of the disappearance of their culture. When the relation between language and culture is taken into consideration, culture is the most important guardian and the main keeper for the transfer, development and transport of language (Demir and Açıık, 2011, p.54) Language is like a mirror reflecting a society's customs, traditions and cultural elements, and language is the most significant matter of fact that helps individuals to understand a society in a cultural context.

### **3. The Relationship between Foreign Language and Culture**

Knowing a foreign language is not only being aware of the linguistic characteristics of the language. Learning or teaching a foreign language cannot be restricted to mastering the phonological, morphological or syntactic properties of that language. (Chlopek, 2008, p.10) At the same time, it is necessary to be aware of the culture it carries. As long as the learned information does not go beyond memorization, the individual will not have the pleasure of using that language and will not have the ability to express a strong language usage. (Yiğit & Arslan, 2014, p.2) Knowing the culture of the target language, rather than merely enriching the general culture, will benefit the analysis of the semantic differences that occur between individuals in that language, that is, the natural flow of that language.

The purpose of learning a foreign language is to know what, where, when, and how to talk with cultural competence. (Demir and Açıık, 2011, p. 55) An individual with all this can be called competent in the exact sense of the target language.

Individuals shape their own viewpoints according to the language they use and the culture that the language carries. For that reason, foreign language learning endeavor also includes an effort to learn the culture that the target language carries. Teaching a language independently of the culture it carries makes it difficult to learn the target language. What's more, it does not only make it harder, but it also limits the proficiency of learners. In short, in order to know a language literally, individuals need to learn the language of that language. (Yiğit and Arslan, 2014, p.3)

### **4. Cultural Awareness**

In the globalizing world, communication between individuals keeps becoming easier and people from all over the world are able to communicate with each other instantly. This development has led to the demarcation of the borders between countries and to the interaction of distant cultures with each other. Now, individuals can easily communicate in and interact with a foreign language. But this has led to the recognition of the concept of "*cultural awareness*". Cultural awareness can be defined as understanding culture and being aware of the different beliefs and ideas.

Cultural awareness is an important concept that we need to consider when we communicate with people from different cultures. For that reason, it requires to think about what exactly the person to whom we are communicating means or to think about what other people give the meaning to what we actually express. People evaluate and comment on situations in different ways. Sometimes, a situation that can be very sensitive in some cultures may be expressed humorously in another culture. Due to the lack of cultural awareness, there may be misunderstandings between individuals. Misunderstandings often happen at times when people suppose that their own rules are applicable to others. For example, the Japanese consider it disrespectful to look directly at their eyes. (Quappe and Cantatore, 2005, p.1)

Individuals need to have cross-cultural awareness as well as linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence. If an individual does not have enough knowledge about what some behaviors mean in a foreign culture, it can drag the individual into funny situations and even misunderstandings (Chlopek, 2008, p.10)

Cultural awareness allows individuals to explore different worlds and allows them to break stereotypical beliefs and prejudices and to look at the world from a broader and richer framework. (İşisağ, 2010, p.252)

## 5. Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication means that different cultures communicate with each other. In the Common European Framework of Reference, the intercultural awareness is expressed as the meaning of the relationship between "*the world of the source society*" and the "*world of the target society*". (Europe, 2001, p. 99) Cultural awareness requires that both sides are in contact with each other by being aware of their regional, social and cultural diversity. This awareness enriches the perspective of language-learning individuals towards other cultures and languages.

It is possible to establish interpersonal communication and meet common pavers, to have intercultural awareness and to make intercultural associations. (Günday, 2013, p.317) Cross-cultural communication is an authority that should be vaccinated to learners. At this point, individuals can communicate in a framework of tolerance and understanding being away from prejudices. (Saritaş and Akkaya, 2015, p.1301) In the big frame, the ability of intercultural communication is an important phenomenon that can be a pioneer for more healthy people, society and world relations.

Individuals with cultural awareness and intercultural communication exhibit a two-dimensional view of the culture while learning the language. In the first place, the individual evaluates other cultures based on their own cultures. Sometimes, individuals view their culture as superior and exhibit a negative critical attitude towards other cultures. In the second, it compares culture with other cultures and evaluates them by synthesis. Individuals exhibiting an approach in this way have different perspectives on intercultural communication. (Demir and Açıık, 2011, page 56)

## 6. Cultural assimilation

Cultural assimilation occurs when individuals interact with people from different cultures for a long time. Cultural assimilation means that the majority of the remaining group in the minority is in harmony with the remaining group, and in this respect, it is moving away from their own culture. (Marks, Sonis, Richardson, & Collins, 1987, p. 1315) Cultural assimilation is fundamentally related to language use and language preferences. An individual who has been exposed to a different language and culture for a long time may be subjected to assimilation if he is not as careful or sensitive as his language and culture.

## 7. Purpose of the research

The aim of this research is to learn the ideas of Turkish language learners about learning culture and to offer suggestions to enrich the course content and used materials and to develop teaching methodology according to the findings acquired from ideas of the students.

## 8. Method of Research

This research is a descriptive study in the screening model. The purpose of a research in the screening model is to identify situations that existed in the past or still exist, and to describe them as they are. (Karasar, 1999, p.72) In this study, a questionnaire was applied to the individuals and the obtained data were analyzed and interpreted.

The required permission for the questionnaire used was taken by e-mail and some items were not used in terms of target sampling suitability. In the demographic information section of the questionnaire, the question "Which language do you graduate from?" was eliminated because the students were from different nations so this information is not meaningful for the aim of the study. The item that led to the question "Have you ever been abroad?" was eliminated because of the fact that the students are now out of their own countries. In addition, one item included to determine which skills are important to the learners when learning a foreign language was also removed from the questionnaire because it was observed that students did not answer independently because the questionnaire was focusing on culture.

SPSS, a statistical analysis program, was used in the analysis of the study. The analysis of this study was made by means of percentage and frequency analysis from descriptive statistical methods.

## 9. Study Group

19 foreign students in the Turkish preparatory class participated in this research in the Gaziosmanpaşa TÖMER. The distribution of students participating in the survey according to gender and country of origin is as follows:

| Female | Male | Turkmenistan | Syria | Afghanistan | Egypt |
|--------|------|--------------|-------|-------------|-------|
| 10     | 9    | 7            | 6     | 5           | 1     |

## Limitations of the Study

The Turkish level of the students participated in this research was mostly at the A1 level. Taking into consideration the validity of the survey, the questionnaire applied to the students was given in English as well as in Turkish.

## 10. Findings and Commentaries

In this section, the answers given by the students to the questions in the questionnaire will primarily be handled independently. Then, more general judgments will be expressed.

**Table 1: Should Turkish culture be taught in Turkish lessons?**

| Options   | <i>f</i>  | %          |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Yes   | 15        | 78,9       |
| No  | 4         | 21,1       |
| Some issues can negatively affect our culture.  | 2         | 20         |
| Some cultural issues are not suitable for the classroom environment.                    | 1         | 10         |
| Personally, I do not feel comfortable talking about some cultural issues.               | 3         | 30         |
| I'm having a hard time understanding some cultural issues.                              | 2         | 20         |
| It is difficult to reach a common view because some cultural issues are open to debate. | 2         | 20         |
| Other   | 0         | 0          |
| <b>No, in total</b>   | <b>10</b> | <b>100</b> |

When Table 1 is examined, 78.9% of the students answered "yes" to learn Turkish culture in Turkish lessons and 21.1% of the students answered "no" to learn Turkish culture in Turkish lessons.

The students who do not want to learn Turkish culture in Turkish lessons chose the option of "I do not feel comfortable while talking about some cultural issues personally" at the rate of 30%, "Some subjects may negatively affect our culture" at the rate of 20%, "They are not suitable for the environment" at the rate of 10%. It is possible to say that there is a lack of culture concept and culture function, sensitivity to their culture, and factors affecting their learning processes and motivations in the classroom environment.

It can be interpreted from the data that students should be informed about what kind of benefits cultural learning will provide before they are exposed to cultural knowledge. It is assumed that learners will be more positive about cultural learning in foreign language classes if they understand the importance and necessity of cultural learning.

**Table 2: In terms of culture, which is the most distinctive feature that comes to mind?**

| Options   | <i>f</i>  | %          |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Mass media, cinema, music, literature and community art   | 13        | 68,4       |
| Life style, family structure, interpersonal relationships | 3         | 15,7       |
| Traditions and customs, institutions                      | 1         | 5,2        |
| What people do at work, at home and in their free time    | 1         | 5,2        |
| Social and language knowledge providing communication     | 2         | 10,5       |
| Other   | 0         | 0          |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>20</b> | <b>100</b> |

When Table 2 is examined, it is observed that what students understand in the concept of culture affects their attitudes towards cultural learning. This article shows that according to the 68.4% of the students, culture means mass media, cinema, music, literature and society. According to 15.7% of the students, culture means life style, family structure, interpersonal relations and social and language knowledge providing cultural communication according to 10.5%. As the data show, what students mostly understand from the concept of culture are mass media, various arts branches and the society itself.

From the data, it is possible to say that the cultural understandings of the students are different and diverse. Therefore, a cultural perspective will enable them to become richer in cultural terms. In classrooms in which Turkish is taught as a foreign language, it is beneficial for the students to deliver the different dimensions of the culture to the class via the content of the course and the supplementary materials to convey the wealth and richness of these dimensions to the students and to develop their cultural thinking and global thinking skills.

**Table 3: What kind of cultural information should be taught in language classes?**

| Options  | f         | %          |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Regional differences in Turkey                                     | 8         | 18         |
| Traditions and customs in Turkey                                   | 5         | 11,2       |
| Turkish institutions   | 3         | 6,7        |
| Daily life style, food and dress culture                           | 7         | 15,7       |
| Leisure activities, amusement style                                | 4         | 9          |
| Architectural structures, music, literature and art                | 6         | 13,5       |
| Communicative features such as body language and idioms            | 6         | 13,5       |
| Social and historical as national celebrations and national heroes | 1         | 2,2        |
| Political problems in Turkey                                       | 1         | 2,2        |
| Religious structures in Turkey                                     | 4         | 9          |
| Other  | 0         | 0          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>45</b> | <b>100</b> |

When Table 3 is examined, a question is asked to the students about what kinds of cultural knowledge should be taught in Turkish classes. Of the students, 18% chose regional differences in Turkey, 15.7% chose daily life style, food and dressing culture, 13.5% chose architecture, music and literature in arts, 13.5% chose body language 9, 09% chose the religious structures and religions in Turkey, 9% chose the entertainment concepts and entertainment types of the Turks, 6,7% chose Turkish institutions and 2,2% wanted to learn political problems in Turkey and Turkish political life. Students have flagged all options outside of an option at varying rates.

Moving from the data, it would be correct to say that the expectations of the students from the cultural content of the course are quite different. When we consider that each individual in the class has different ways of perceiving different concepts, it would be correct to say that cultural elements should not be given in a single dimension in the classes in which Turkish is taught as a foreign language. When we think that students are learning culture with cultural enrichment, it can be said that their needs vary from diverse dimensions and diverse amounts. Therefore, it is recommended that the course content and the content of the material should contain equal amounts of different cultures.

**Table 4: Which level is most suitable for providing students with cultural knowledge?**

| Options                 | f         | %          |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| A1                      | 10        | 50         |
| A2                      | 3         | 15         |
| B1                      | 1         | 5          |
| B2                      | 2         | 10         |
| C1 and C2               | 1         | 5          |
| Level is not important. | 3         | 15         |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>20</b> | <b>100</b> |

Considering that the average age of the students is 20, it would be correct to say that they have gone through almost the same cognitive processes. That is why the cognitive processes of the students did not affect their will to answer Item 4. In this article, the students were asked what level of cultural knowledge is better at learning, and at what level they wanted to learn culture. It is stated that it is more appropriate for students to acquire cultural knowledge in the beginning so 50% of them chose in the A1 level, 15% chose the A2 level, 10% chose the B1 level, 5% chose the B2 and 5% chose the C1 and C2 level. 15% of the students stated that the level is not an important criterion to acquire cultural knowledge.

From the data, it can be assumed from the findings that 50% of the students thought that cultural items should be taught in A1 level, because, according to them, learning culture is not a difficult and a complicated process. Again, it would not be unrealistic to assume that 15% of the students say that level is not a pre-requisite to learn a culture, so, in total, 75% of the students support vice versa. In fact, cultural knowledge should be given at every level, but it has to be expressed and explained with the students' understanding and comprehension ability.



**Table 5: What could be your reaction to the cultural transmission during the class?**

| Options  | <i>f</i>  | %          |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Interested / Concerned                         | 7         | 35         |
| Critical / I do comparison with my own culture | 8         | 40         |
| Skeptical                                      | 1         | 5          |
| Opposite                                       | 1         | 5          |
| Indifferent                                    | 2         | 10         |
| Other  | 0         | 0          |
| <b>Total</b>                                   | <b>19</b> | <b>100</b> |

When Table 5 was examined, students were asked about how their attitudes would be when they were given cultural information. 40% of the students stated that they will have a critical attitude towards the transfer of the target culture. 35% of the students stated that they will show a positive attitude towards cultural transfer. The remaining 25% stated that the student would be skeptical, indifferent or opposed.

When all the data are taken into consideration, it will be correct to say that the vast majority of the students will have a positive attitude towards cultural learning. The fact that 40% of the students will have a critical attitude will help to improve intercultural communication skills. Because, in order to develop intercultural communication and global understanding, it is expected that students will be able to critically criticize the target culture and their own culture and to develop their own intercultural competence by synthesizing from these cultures. It is quite possible that 25% of the students will have a negative attitude towards the culture transfer due to the instructors of the Turkish as foreign language and academicians working on this area should consider the reasons. In Table 1, 32.7% of the students think that learning target language's culture will negatively affect their own cultures, which may be a reason for this attitude of the students. In this respect, as mentioned above, students must be informed about the necessity of cultural learning before the transfer of culture and it should be perceived as cultural transfer not as cultural imposition.

**Table 6: In your opinion, should cultural elements be integrated in language teaching?**

| Options  | <i>f</i> | %          |
|--|----------|------------|
| Yes  | 13       | 68,4       |
| No   | 6        | 31,6       |
| My department does not require it                      | 2        | 25         |
| I think, I do not need it.                             | 3        | 37,5       |
| I do not have enough knowledge about culture.          | 1        | 12,5       |
| I think, Turkish culture gives harm to my own culture. | 1        | 12,5       |
| Other  | 1        | 12,5       |
| <b>No, in total</b>                                    | <b>8</b> | <b>100</b> |

In Table 6, 68.4% of the students stated that cultural elements should be included in the language teaching and 31.6% of them stated the opposite. 37.5% of the students who answered "no" think that learning cultural elements is not necessary for them. 25% of the students said that learning cultural items is not necessary for their departments. 12.5% of the students stated that they did not have enough knowledge in the cultural area, 12.5% said that Turkish culture would harm their cultures, and 12.5% gave no answer based on a reason apart from the options mentioned here.

In Table 1, 78.9% of the students think that they want to learn Turkish culture in their Turkish lessons and 68.4% of the students have a positive view of learning cultural elements, indicating a meaningful consistency between these two items. However, it is possible to say that a difference of 10% is due to the fact that the students do not want to learn culture at the universities that they enroll for academic purposes, and again, as mentioned before, they are sensitive about their own cultures.

As mentioned earlier, the fact that students do not have knowledge about culture affects their approach to cultural learning. In addition, the fact that they regard cultural learning as cultural assimilation and they are sensitivity to their own cultures also influence their approach to cultural learning.

**Table 7: Through which way (which materials and activities) should cultural topics be taught?**

| Options  | f         | %          |
|--|-----------|------------|
| It should be included in the course book content.                            | 3         | 2,5        |
| With novels and stories  | 9         | 22,5       |
| By discussing cultural experiences   | 5         | 12,5       |
| With pictures and posters  | 5         | 12,5       |
| With videos and documentaries  | 10        | 25         |
| With newspapers and magazines  | 2         | 5          |
| With the materials like menus and tickets which are being used in daily life | 4         | 10         |
| Other  | 2         | 5          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>40</b> | <b>100</b> |

In Table 7, 25% of the students stated that cultural subjects should be taught with videos and documentaries, 22.5% with novels and stories, 12.5% with cultural experiences, 12.5% with pictures and posters, 10% with materials such as tickets and menus used in everyday life, 7.5% with the contents of the textbook, 5% with newspapers and magazines and 5% with other means apart from the options given.

By taking this data into consideration, it can be assumed that students mark the options according to their own learning pathways. For example, individuals who learn by visual means choose images and posters, or select videos and documents from individuals who learn the audio-visual path. Students prefer to learn cultural subjects in a very different way, which can give academicians working on the field of teaching Turkish as a foreign language an idea to enrich the course content and materials. Using different and unique materials that appeal to different senses and different forms of learning will both increase the students' sense of learning culture and develop their perspectives on learning culture positively.

**Table 8: Is there any negative aspect of learning culture in language classrooms?**

| Options  | f        | %          |
|--|----------|------------|
| No   | 5        | 26,3       |
| Yes  | 14       | 73,7       |
| I may be alienated to my own culture.                                  | 2        | 28,5       |
| I may be too attached to the Turkish culture.                          | 0        | 0          |
| It causes language and culture imperialism.                            | 2        | 28,5       |
| It can be cultural assimilation.                                       | 2        | 28,5       |
| Dealing with too much cultural elements makes language lessons boring. | 1        | 14,2       |
| Other  | 0        | 0          |
| <b>Yes, in total</b>   | <b>7</b> | <b>100</b> |

26.3% of the students stated that culture learning had a negative side and 73.7% stated that cultural learning had no negative side.

In Table 8, according to the students who gave the answer "yes" 28,5% of them stated that they would be alienated to their own culture, 28,5% of them stated that it would be linguistic and cultural imperialism, 28,5% of them stated state that learning culture is a kind of cultural assimilation and 1,2% of them stated that a course that too much focuses on cultural elements would be boring.

It can be said that 85.8% of the students who said "yes" have prejudices against learning culture. It would be meaningful to say that these students think that cultural learning has a negative side because they might be sensitive to their own culture and / or due to the fact that they may not have enough knowledge about culture for learning culture. In general, it could be said that the reason behind their viewpoints is due to their concern about cultural assimilation.

**Table 9: Is there any positive side of learning culture in language classes?**

| Options   | f         | %          |
|---|-----------|------------|
| No  | 0         | 0          |
| Yes   | 19        | 100        |
| We reach global culture understanding.                          | 8         | 25,8       |
| We learn to have respect to other cultures.                     | 7         | 22,5       |
| Our world knowledge increases.                                  | 5         | 16,1       |
| Our communication skills develop.                               | 8         | 25,8       |
| It makes language learning more appealing and more interesting. | 3         | 9,6        |
| Other   | 0         | 0          |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>31</b> | <b>100</b> |

In Table 9, 100% of the students stated that culture learning has a positive aspect while learning Turkish.

When we look at the reasons why the respondents who gave the yes response, it is obvious that 25.8% of them think that they will have a global cultural understanding, 25.8% of them think that they will develop their communication skills, 22.5% of them think that they will learn to respect other cultures, 16.1% of them think that they will increase their world knowledge, and 9.6% of them think that language learning will be more attractive and interesting that is why they have come to the conclusion that culture learning has a positive aspect.

**Table 10: Do you have difficulty learning cultural issues in your books?**

| Options   | f        | %          |
|---|----------|------------|
| No  | 16       | 84,2       |
| Yes   | 3        | 15,8       |
| I have difficulty in understanding some elements in Turkish culture | 3        | 50         |
| There is no leading knowledge related to culture in the coursebooks | 1        | 16,6       |
| I do not have much information about Turkish culture.               | 2        | 33         |
| There is many too detailed information about Turkish culture.       | 0        | 0          |
| Other   | 0        | 0          |
| <b>Yes, in total</b>  | <b>6</b> | <b>100</b> |

When the data in Table 10 are examined, it is seen that 84.2% of the students do not have difficulty in learning cultural subjects in textbooks; but, 15.8% said they had difficulty in it. When we look at the reasons of the students who stated that they have difficulties, 50% of the students stated that they had difficulties in understanding some items in Turkish culture, 33% of the students had difficulties because they did not have knowledge about Turkish culture and 16.6% of the students stated that books were lacking in the guidance information about culture.

On the basis of the data, it can be considered that the cultural issues in the textbooks are not given appropriate for the levels of the students, and that this information is not expressed as clear as possible when considering the justifications of 15.8% of the students who has difficulty in learning cultural elements. In such a case, it is recommended that the cultural issues in the books be revised, the students are expressed in accordance with their level, the topics are explained, and the instructions related to the subject are given more clearly. Also, when these justifications are considered, book authors can enrich materials about cultural subjects and include a variety of activities in books.

**Table 11: Do you think you need supplementary materials about learning culture?**

| Options                       | f         | %          |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| No                            | 9         | 47,4       |
| Yes (With what?)              | 10        | 52,6       |
| Authentic materials           | 1         | 7,7        |
| Realia                        | 4         | 30,7       |
| Pictures and cultural objects | 7         | 53,8       |
| Other                         | 1         | 7,7        |
| <b>Yes, in total</b>          | <b>13</b> | <b>100</b> |

When the data in Table 11 were examined, the students were asked whether they needed supplementary materials related to cultural learning and 52.6% stated that they need extra materials and 47.4% stated that they did not need them. 53.8% of the students who needed supplementary material indicated that they need pictures and cultural objects, 30.7% need realia, 7.7% need authentic materials and 7.7% need materials apart from the options given.

On the basis of the data, it can be said that the students who need supplementary material decided on the materials according to their own learning styles. From this point of view, it is recommended that the course materials be enriched and developed in this direction, taking into account the learning styles and needs of the students.

**Table 12: What should be the main objective of teaching culture in language classes?**

| Options  | f         | %          |
|--|-----------|------------|
| To create awareness about other cultures and people            | 9         | 40,9       |
| To develop our own cultural understanding                      | 3         | 13,6       |
| To develop our thinking skills                                 | 2         | 9          |
| To gain skill on comparing our culture with the other cultures | 2         | 9          |
| To provide more successful communication network               | 5         | 22,7       |
| Other  | 1         | 4,5        |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>22</b> | <b>100</b> |

Table 12 shows that when students were asked what the main purpose of cultural education should be, 40.9% of the students stated to help them be aware of other cultures and people, 22.7% stated to provide with more successful communication, 13.6% stated to develop their own cultural understanding, 9% stated to improve



their intellectual skills, 9% stated to gain the ability to compare their own cultures with other cultures, and 4.5% had a justification other than the options given.

On the basis of the data, it can be said that 63.3% of the students regard culture learning as a way to improve their intercultural communication skills. It could be assumed that lessons and textbooks should be enriched with materials that support intercultural communication, which will increase students' curiosity and desire to learn culture.

**Table 13: What role should the teacher play in creating cultural awareness?**

| Options   | f         | %          |
|---|-----------|------------|
| It should present cultural differences and similarities.        | 4         | 14,2       |
| It should encourage students to have respect to other cultures. | 6         | 21,4       |
| It should increase our interest in other cultures.              | 7         | 25         |
| It should combine cultural knowledge and personal experience.   | 6         | 21,4       |
| It should introduce cultural element when I need them.          | 2         | 7,1        |
| Other   | 3         | 10,7       |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>28</b> | <b>100</b> |

An important step in cultural learning is to create cultural awareness. In this regard, teachers have a great responsibility in the classrooms where Turkish is taught as a foreign language. When students were asked about what should be the role of the teacher in creating cultural awareness, 25% of the students answered as to increase their interest towards culture, 21.4% as to encourage respect for other cultures, 21.4% as to combine their personal experiences with cultural knowledge, 14.2% as to provide intercultural differences and similarities, and 7.1% as to introduce only needed cultural items.

Moving from the data in Table 13, it is possible to say that teachers should support students to approach to the target culture, should be pioneers in having a global understanding of culture, should share their cultural experiences in accordance with the classroom context, and should encourage learners to express their own experiences and culture-related ideas freely.

**Table 14: Should cultural knowledge be tested?**

| Options  | f        | %        |
|--|----------|----------|
| No, because...   | 14       | 73,7     |
| The main purpose of learning a language is learning language elements.                                 | 4        | 28,6     |
| I want to develop my listening, reading, speaking, and writing abilities instead of cultural elements. | 10       | 71,4     |
| Other  | 0        | 0        |
| Yes, because...  | 5        | 26,3     |
| Everything taught must be tested.  | 4        | 57,1     |
| It is not possible to separate culture and language from each other.                                   | 3        | 42,9     |
| <b>Other</b>   | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> |

In Table 14, students were asked about their opinions on whether to test the cultural knowledge taught, 73.7% of the students stated that it should not be tested and 26.3% of the students stated vice versa.

The students who did not support testing cultural knowledge stated that they wanted to improve their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills rather than learning cultural items by 71.4%. It can be said that these students think cultural knowledge as an additional sub-skill of other skills and therefore do not want to be tested for cultural knowledge. 28.6% of the students indicated that the purpose of the language learning is to learn the linguistic elements and therefore it can be said that testing the cultural knowledge would not be suitable for the purpose of the course.

57,1% of the students who support testing the cultural knowledge ground their justification on the idea of everything taught must be tested, on the contrary, %32,9 of the students stated that it is not possible to separate culture and language from each other and for that reason testing cultural knowledge is not possible.

## 11. Discussion and Conclusion

When all the materials and the data obtained are taken into account, it has seen that the majority of the students approach positively to the cultural learning, as stated by Saritaş and Akkaya (2015, p.1.27). It is possible to say that this positive approach is aimed at improving their intercultural communication and global perspectives. The suggestions that the students offered are also important for those working in the field both to enrich the content of the course and to prepare a textbook.

The diversity of supplementary materials brought to class with the aim of cultural transfer will be useful for students to gain different dimensions of cultural perceptions. Duman (2013, p. 9) warned that materials used in cultural instruction should not contain excessive amounts of items in the target culture, and emphasized that

the materials should not be presented as cultural bombings. In short, as a result of this research it would be a good idea to say that the materials should contribute to the cultural learning process of the students, address their learning styles, and influence cultural perceptions positively.

It can be argued that students who adversely approach cultural learning have such an attitude because they do not fully understand the concept of culture and what culture learning means, they regard cultural learning as cultural assimilation as a whole, and because of their loyalty and sensitivity to their own culture in general. As Alyılmaz and Er (2016, p.1412) stated, when the cultural learning process operates as a recognition of the student's own culture, it means that the student's approach to cultural learning will be positive. The result of this research is that the student is far from learning the target culture in situations where the student does not feel safe about his own culture and cultural identity. Cultural teaching should not only teach the target culture but also create cultural awareness and strengthen intercultural communication.

Okur and Keskin (2013, p. 1639) emphasized that the level of B1 and B2 is the most appropriate level and especially that cultural elements at the beginning level should be given less. Contrary to this research, it is concluded that students want to learn cultural items beginning from the A1 level.

Finally, it has been concluded that most of the students do not support testing cultural knowledge. Contrary to this finding, cultural information should be tested as stated by Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002), but cultural knowledge should be tested more functionally than it is to test a linguistic knowledge. For example, it is reasonable to test what should be said in a particular situation, for which students may be asked about issues related to the topic or about the implications of a topic.

In the following, some suggestions are presented for those who are working on the field of teaching Turkish as a foreign language, and instructors who are teaching Turkish to the foreigners.

1. Cultural instruction should be given at each level as long as it fits the cognitive levels of the individual.
2. Students should be informed in advance about learning a culture.
3. Students should be informed that cultural learning will not cause cultural assimilation; on the contrary, it will help to improve cross-cultural communication skills.
4. As students have different perspectives on the concept of culture, diverse dimensions of the culture must be added to textbooks and course content.
5. As the learning styles of learners are different from each other, the course content should be enriched with materials that appeal to different senses.
6. Cultural issues in which students have difficulty in understanding should be conveyed with supporting materials and clearer directions.
7. Cultural education should be carried out at all levels of Turkish language teaching and the guidelines for cultural transfer must be clear and in accordance with the proficiency level of students.
8. Cultural education should not be limited to transferring Turkish cultures and students should be able to synthesize and interpret Turkish cultures with their own cultures.

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