



# Culture and language instruction: Does Turkey's EFL curriculum do enough to support intercultural awareness?

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## Abstract

The need to address culture in the language learning process has been emphasized as a means to promote both intercultural awareness and communicative language curricula. In countries such as Turkey, this has been an ongoing concern in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) education. Thus, attempts have been made to enhance the cultural aspect of EFL learning in Turkey with the current English language curricula for elementary and high schools. To determine whether these curricula truly address culture in ways that support intercultural awareness, the researcher conducted a content analysis of the learning outcomes and objectives for each grade level, focusing on the curricula developed in 2013 and 2014 respectively for elementary and high school, as well as the program updates introduced in 2017 and 2018. The culture-related objectives and outcomes including products, practices, perspectives and persons relating to native English-speaking and international cultures were identified, and the total numbers of culture-oriented outcomes and objectives were recorded and analyzed. The findings indicate that culture-related outcomes and objectives were highly limited in number; and they mainly addressed superficial aspects of culture such as names of countries/languages, foods and traditional costumes. Abstract and complex topics such as pragmatics, beliefs, and worldviews were largely ignored. Moreover, while the updated programs of 2017 and 2018 were intended to improve on the 2013 and 2014 versions, little was accomplished in this regard. As such, the findings suggest that current EFL curricula are unlikely to support the development of intercultural awareness in language learners. Some recommendations for addressing this issue are offered.

**Keywords:** Communicative competence; culture; English curriculum; EFL curriculum; intercultural awareness; teaching about culture

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## 1. Introduction

### *1.1. The importance of culture in foreign language learning*

The importance of addressing culture within the framework of foreign language learning has long been recognized by many researchers (e.g., Alptekin, 2002; Baker, 2012; Buttjes, 1991; Byram, 1991; Byram & Feng, 2005; Halliday, 2007; Hymes, 1972; Kramsch, 1993) and has been discussed from numerous perspectives. For instance, Hymes (1972) and Kramsch (1993) stress that culture provides the context within which linguistic interactions occur. It is this context that forms the perspectives and assumptions of the individuals engaged in an interaction, thereby providing relevance to the communicative process. As such, Kramsch (1993) emphasizes that awareness of the cultural context relating to the language being spoken is necessary for meaningful communication to take place. This view has given rise to the notion of *intercultural communicative competence*, which generally refers to the ability of an individual “to behave adequately and in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures” (Meyer, 1991, p. 137).

Furthermore, Buttjes (1991) points out that knowledge of other cultures opens learners to differing worldviews, which is not only enriching on an individual level, but also necessary for promoting tolerance and respect for people of diverse backgrounds. Such attitudes are supported by Banks (2010) and Fowers and Davidov (2006) as a first step in the journey toward a global society that is characterized by unity, equality and social justice for all. Moreover, aside from its personal and societal benefits, it has often been argued that intercultural communicative competence plays a significant role in the economic and political advancement of nation-states, particularly when it comes to world languages such as English (Baker, 2012; Houghton, 2009; Jenkins, 2009; Rajagopalan, 2004; Seidlhofer, 2005; Sowden, 2012).

### *1.2. Issues and challenges in promoting cultural awareness through foreign language education*

With the emphasis placed on intercultural awareness in recent years, modern education systems worldwide have taken an increasingly proactive stance toward the inclusion of culture in foreign language education (Tongal, 2015). Foreign language teaching programs often incorporate cultural outcomes and objectives such as awareness of fundamental values, belief systems, history, communicative norms, signs and symbols, recognizable artifacts, and so on in their curricula (Byram, 1997; Çelik, 2014; Kramsch, 1993, 2003; Liu, 2016). The Turkish Republic, where the development of proficiency in English as a foreign language (EFL) is one of the primary goals of public education, is no exception in this respect, and it is expected—at least from a policy standpoint—that native English-speaking cultures be addressed in depth in the language learning process. With this in

mind, cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence have been stressed as important objectives of English language education since the late 1990s (Kırkgöz, Çelik, & Arikan, 2016).

However, as Tongal (2015) points out, policy does not always match reality when it comes to educational objectives, and in the Turkish context, there is a variety of challenges in terms of developing learners' intercultural awareness. For instance, as noted by Çelik (2014), Turkish teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) frequently lack more than rudimentary knowledge of native English-speaking cultures themselves and are underprepared for introducing topics relating to culture with their students. As a result, teachers typically rely on the cultural material provided in coursebooks. This tendency is problematic, as the standardized EFL coursebooks that are approved for use in Turkey's public schools do not always handle culture effectively. This issue is highlighted by Çelik and Erbay (2013) in their study concerning the ways that culture is addressed in the authorized materials used in Turkish EFL classrooms. According to their findings, culture-related issues are treated in a wholly superficial fashion, offering decontextualized content relating to holidays, traditional dress, and foods; but with no attempt to connect these visible aspects of culture with deeper issues such as worldviews and belief systems. The authors stress that such content is unlikely to support real awareness of either native English-speaking or world cultures.

Aside from the limitations of standardized teaching texts, as well as classroom teachers' lack of skills relating to cultural awareness, the English language curriculum followed by all public elementary and high schools has also exhibited deficiencies in this regard. Çelik (2013) highlights this issue, noting in a study carried out in 2012 that English language teachers in Turkey did not believe that the national EFL curriculum in use at the time effectively supported the development of intercultural objectives.

## **2. Purpose of the Study**

In 2013, in accordance with a wide-ranging effort to modernize and improve Turkey's public education system, which included changing the onset of EFL instruction from the fourth grade to the second, the English language curriculum for elementary school (Grades 2-8) was given a complete overhaul. Subsequently, in 2014, a new EFL curriculum was introduced at the high school level to accommodate and carry forward the improvements made at the elementary level (Kırkgöz, Çelik, & Arikan, 2016). These curricula included explicit recommendations for the inclusion of culture-related outcomes, taking into account the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) descriptors and targeting intercultural competence. The designers of the elementary curriculum, for instance, stated in the introductory remarks that both native English-speaking and international cultures should be introduced to learners in a positive manner, while at the same time maintaining value and respect for the home culture (Ministry of National

Education [MoNE, hereafter], 2013). Furthermore, the curriculum for Grades 9-12 emphasized the nature of English as lingua franca and as the language of science, technology and international communication; therefore, culture was also upheld as a crucial aspect of English learning at the high school level (MoNE, 2014).

Following the implementation of the new EFL curricula in 2013 and 2014, the MoNE obtained feedback from teachers, administrators and other educational stakeholders concerning their strengths and weaknesses. Taking this feedback into account, the curricula were further revised, and updated versions were published in 2017, and again in 2018, at both the elementary and the high school level. While some minor changes were made to the content, the general structure and linguistic features were maintained; and in terms of culture, the theoretical underpinnings of the curricula continued to stress intercultural awareness as an important aspect of language learning in accordance with the CEFR (Mirici, 2014; MoNE, 2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2018b).

However, in spite of the stated intentions of the curriculum designers, a preliminary glance at the learning outcomes and objectives—including content such as skills, functions, recommended language and lexis—in both the 2013/2014 and 2017/2018 iterations of the elementary and the high school curricula reveals only a handful of culture-related outcomes and objectives. Therefore, with the previously mentioned concerns in mind, the researcher felt that it was important to determine, first, the exact extent to which culture is addressed in both programs, not only in terms of how often culture-related outcomes and objectives (including skills, functions, language use, lexical items and other relevant content) are introduced, but also with respect to their ability to promote true intercultural understanding; and second, to compare the 2013/2014 curricula with the 2017/2018 updates in order to determine whether improvements were made in terms of culture-related content. Accordingly, this study was carried out to answer the following questions:

1. Do the culture-related outcomes and objectives in the curriculum present target and international cultural elements?
2. How frequently are outcomes and objectives relating to native or international cultures introduced in Turkey's elementary and high school EFL curricula in 2013/2014 and 2017/2018?
3. Do the updated 2017 and 2018 elementary and high school curricula demonstrate an improvement over the related 2013/2014 curricula in terms of addressing intercultural awareness?

### **3. Methodology**

Because the primary aim of the study was to identify the culture-related learning outcomes and objectives addressed in Turkey's elementary and high school English

curricula, the researcher carried out the investigation via qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2016). This approach was believed to provide a straightforward, objective and reliable means of quantifying the various cultural outcomes and objectives. Content analysis should be understood as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Among three approaches to qualitative content analysis, namely conventional, directional, and summative analysis, the current study employed a *directional approach* for the analysis of the curriculum. The content was analyzed via a structured process according to the framework of Yuen (2011), which was used to identify predetermined coding categories; i.e., operational definitions of cultural elements. As the aim of the researcher was “to identify and categorize all instances of a particular phenomenon” (p. 1281), namely, the cultural elements in the teaching programs, the researcher read the documents carefully and coded the texts using this framework. To ensure reliability of the findings, the cultural elements were independently coded and verified by an expert in the field not associated with this study (Neuendorf, 2016). Lastly, the researcher interpreted the results and compared them with the findings of related previous studies.

### *3.1. Context of the study: Turkey’s English language curricula*

Turkey’s national English language curriculum consists of two separate, but related curricula; the elementary-level curriculum for Grades 2-8, and the high school level curriculum for Grades 9-12. To clarify how culture is treated at both levels, it is useful to describe their general structure and content.

#### *3.1.1. The elementary EFL curriculum*

The English language curriculum for elementary students is designed for beginner-level learners corresponding to the CEFR level A1 in the second through the sixth grades, and to CEFR level A2 in the seventh and eighth grades. Each grade level consists of 10 thematic units reflecting themes and topics that are relevant and interesting to young learners, such as school, family life, holidays, sports, friendships, leisure activities, and so on (MONE, 2013, 2017a, 2018a). Throughout the curriculum, units are interrelated and follow a spiral format, revisiting previously-covered topics and recycling material in order to enhance retention and to support learners as they move from the familiar to the unfamiliar, and from simple to more complex.

In the 2013 version, each unit included a series of *communicative functions* (e.g., “asking someone’s name”) and *skills* (e.g., listening: “students will understand when someone introduces him/herself” and speaking: “students will introduce themselves”) (MONE, 2013). In addition to listening and speaking skills, an “intercultural awareness” skills category is included in some units (e.g., “students will greet people in languages other than

English or Turkish.”). In order to support these skills, each unit offered suggestions for lexis/language use to be covered, as well as recommended materials, activities and assessment types. On the other hand, in the updated 2017 and 2018 curricula, the format was altered slightly to encompass a series of language skills and learning outcomes for each unit, supported by a list of “functions and useful language. Rather than including “intercultural awareness” skills as a separate category, cultural objectives and objectives are now implicitly addressed within the overall learning outcomes.

### *3.1.2. The high school EFL curriculum*

The high school level curricula authorized by the MoNE in 2014 and 2018 closely followed the structure of the elementary curricula in 2013 and 2017, building on the skills covered in Grades 2-8. In the ninth grade, skills at the A1 and A2 CEFR levels were reviewed and emphasized, while in Grade 10, learners were expected to advance from the A2 to the B1 level. Students in 11<sup>th</sup> grade progressed from B1 to B2, and in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, learners were expected to achieve a proficiency level of CEFR B2+ (MoNE, 2014, 2018b). As with the elementary EFL curriculum for 2013, the high school curriculum for 2014 followed a spiral format through a series of thematic units; integrated skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing were addressed, along with skills relating to intercultural awareness. Likewise, suggested lexis/language use was provided, along with recommended materials, activities and assessment measures. On the other hand, the 2018 version of the high school English curriculum, following the structure of the 2017 elementary curriculum, comprises a series of language skills and learning outcomes, supported by “functions and useful language,” and the “intercultural awareness” outcomes are eliminated as separate items and integrated as implicit objectives within the overall learning outcomes.

### *3.2. Data collection and analysis*

As a means to collect data on the culture-related features of the elementary and high school EFL curricula for 2013/2017/2018 and 2014/2017/2018 respectively, the researcher obtained copies from the MoNE website (<http://mufredat.meb.gov.tr/Programlar.aspx>), where the official curricula for all subject areas can be found. To identify the cultural outcomes and objectives of the curriculum, the data analysis model proposed by Yuen (2011) was applied. According to this model, cultural aspects can be classified according to four categories: products, practices, perspectives, and persons. A description of these categories, as well as samples from each that were identified in the EFL curricula, is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Categorization and examples of cultural aspects

Category	Description	Examples from the EFL curricula
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<i>Products</i>	Tangible and intangible products of a culture such as food, crafts, artwork, laws, education, religions, clothing, and dwellings (Yuen, 2011).	“Students will be able to identify popular food across cultures” (e.g., pizza, kebab, fish and chips, sushi, Turkish delight) (MoNE, 2013, Grade 4, Unit 10).
<i>Practices</i>	Behavior patterns of a culture, such as customs, lifestyles, forms of address, and personal space (Yuen, 2011).	“Learners will be able to identify traditional dances from other countries” (MoNE, 2013, Grade 6, Unit 1).
<i>Perspectives</i>	Values, beliefs and worldviews, as well as myths and superstitions, of a culture (Yuen, 2011).	“Students will become familiar with superstitious beliefs from different countries: e.g., In Britain and Japan, black cats bring good luck, but in Turkey, they bring bad luck.” (MoNE, 2013, Grade 7, Unit 7)
<i>Persons</i>	Famous, unknown, and fictitious persons who are representative members of a given culture (Yuen, 2011).	Recommended language usage involving names of famous scientists, e.g., Archimedes (MoNE, 2013, Grade 8, Unit 9)

With these categories in mind, a systematic review of each unit was undertaken to index the culture-related outcomes that were addressed; this was carried out via content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2016). The researcher analyzed the learning outcomes of each unit and recorded those relating to intercultural awareness, as well as the recommended language skills, functions, language use and other relevant content. In this regard, references to native English-speaking or world cities or countries that did not contain any cultural import (e.g., “It is ... usually warm and sunny in Rome,” [MoNE, 2013, p. 74] or “She grew up in London” [MoNE, 2014, p. 83]) were not counted, as they related strictly to the names or physical features of geographical locations and did not reflect Yuen’s (2011) cultural elements of *products*, *practices*, *perspectives* or *persons*. Similarly, proper names (e.g., Susan, Mehmet) that did not refer to any specific person, real or fictional, and were not presented with any surrounding cultural context were not counted. While the names may have been typical of a particular culture, without any other context to anchor them to that culture, they did not meet the criterion of a cultural representative according to Yuen’s (2011) framework.

Following a similar rationale, mentions of the names of languages (e.g., “How many languages do you speak?” “One. I speak Chinese.” [MoNE, 2017, p. 58]) were not counted. While a language is considered as a *product* of a culture (Yuen, 2011), such statements do not identify the name of a language with a related culture and do not convey any cultural import. On the other hand, outcomes such as identifying the language spoken in a given country (e.g., German/Germany, found in Grade 9, Unit 1 of the 2014 high school curriculum [MoNE, 2014]) could be viewed as addressing the *products* skill, as they support awareness – albeit superficial – of the connection between the language and the nationality. Thus, such occurrences were considered.

Moreover if a unit presented more than one outcome related to the identical cultural objective (e.g., with reference to understanding Turkish history, (1) preparing a presentation and (2) reading a passage about historical sites in Turkey), these were counted once, as they involved only a single aspect of culture. Similarly, if multiple lexical items

were given related to a single culture-related skill, they were counted as one instance. For example, in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade program for 2013, the intercultural awareness skill “Students will be able to say thank you in different languages” was presented with the suggested lexical items “Shukran, Merci, Gracias, Grazie, Danke, Efharisto, Arigato” (MoNE, 2013, p. 24). This constituted a single instance, because learning the individual terms for “thank you” in the different languages would not involve separate culture-related skills. The cultural outcomes and objectives identified in this process were then categorized as relating to the *products*, *practices*, *perspectives* and *persons* categories of culture, and their relationships to home, target (native English-speaking) and world cultures were also noted.

As a means to ensure the reliability of the findings, the researcher asked an expert colleague in the field to conduct an independent analysis of the content of all four of the EFL curricula (the elementary levels from 2013, 2017 and 2018 and the high school levels from 2014, 2017 and 2018), taking into account the criteria outlined above. No discrepancies were found between the separate analyses.

#### 4. Results

The results of the content analysis of the 2013, 2017 and 2018 versions of the elementary curriculum and the 2014 and 2017 and 2018 versions of the high school curriculum are discussed concurrently in order to compare the status of the cultural outcomes and objectives for each. In all cases, the total numbers of cultural outcomes and objectives identified for each grade level are tabulated according to the units in which they were presented. Following the numerical data, the culture-related items found in each unit are described in terms of their characteristics relating to *products*, *practices*, *perspectives* and *persons*, as well as to home, target or world cultures; and whether these supported a surface-level view or deeper cultural insights. The differences in the degree and quality of the cultural references in the updated versus the earlier versions of the curricula are also discussed.

##### 4.1. Cultural outcomes and objectives included in the 2013 elementary EFL curriculum

The results of the content analysis for the 2013 elementary-level English curriculum indicated a limited number of culture-related learning outcomes and skills. The totals for each grade level are presented in Table 2 according to the respective units.



Table 2. Total number of cultural outcomes and objectives identified in the 2013 elementary EFL curriculum

Grade	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9	Unit 10	Total
Two:	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Three:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Four:	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Five:	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Six:	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Seven:	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Eight:	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
Total:											16

For Grade 2 of the 2013 curriculum, only a single outcome relating to cultural awareness, “Students will be able to greet others in languages other than Turkish and English,” was identified. This outcome, found in Unit 2 on “Friends,” falls under the category of *practices*, in line with Kramsch’s (1993) communicative pragmatics (“what to say when”) in terms of world cultures. Grade 3 contained no cultural outcomes or objectives.

On the other hand, Grade 4 included a total of three culture-related skills; for instance, Unit 1 presented the outcome, “Students will be able to say ‘thank you’ in different languages,” relating again to *practices* in terms of pragmatics. In addition, Unit 2 listed “identifying the flags of foreign countries and national dress of different countries,” while Unit 10 involved identifying popular foods across cultures, both representing the *products* category relating to world cultures.

Grade 5 likewise offered three cultural outcomes and objectives, such as developing an awareness of world languages in Unit 3, as well as identifying commonalities in children’s games across different cultures in Unit 4, both under the *products* category and relating to world cultures. Units 6 through 8 in the fifth grade contained no culture-related skills; but in Unit 10, “Different festivals around the world and different ways of celebrating festivals” were addressed, representing *practices* of world cultures.

In Grade 6, a total of four cultural outcomes and objectives were introduced. Unit 1 asked students to identify traditional dances from other countries; and in Unit 2, the outcomes “students will become familiar with breakfast habits of different cultures” (i.e., cultural preferences for certain breakfast foods) and “students will become familiar with expressions used at the beginning or end of meals in different languages” were addressed. All three of these skills addressed the *practices* aspects of world cultures. The fourth cultural outcome that was listed in Grade 6, Unit 10, stated that “Students will increase their awareness of the principles of democracy;” however, while terms relating to democratic processes (e.g., ballot, election, president) were introduced, no references were made to native English-speaking or international cultures with respect to their expressions of democracy.

[illegible]



The analysis of the 2018 curriculum revealed it to be identical to the 2017 curriculum: no substantive changes were identified in the teaching units in terms of themes, function and useful language, or in the language skills and learning outcomes addressed. Likewise, there were no changes to the cultural content described in section 4.2.

#### 4.4. Cultural outcomes and objectives included in the 2014 high school EFL curriculum

As with the elementary curricula introduced in 2013 and 2017, the results of the content analysis for the high school English curriculum from 2014 indicate only a small proportion of culture-related learning outcomes and skills. The totals for 2014 high school EFL curriculum are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Total number of cultural outcomes and objectives identified in the 2014 high school EFL curriculum

Grade	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9	Unit 10	Total
Nine:	1	1	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	7
Ten:	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	6
Eleven:	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	5
Twelve:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total:											16

Grade 9 of the 2014 high school curriculum provided a total of seven culture-related skills. In Unit 1, students were asked to identify various foreign languages and the countries they belong to (i.e., German/Germany); while Unit 2 included the outcome of comparing prices in different countries. Both of these skills relate to the *products* aspect of culture as described by Yuen (2011). Units 3-5 contained no cultural content. On the other hand, Unit 6 comprised four culture-related skills, such as Turkish attitudes toward hospitality (relating to the *perspective* aspect of culture); understanding non-verbal cues (pertaining to “practices”); and comparing foods and describing world cities, both drawing from the “products” categorization of cultural objectives and outcomes. Finally, Unit 7 suggested a single culture-related skill, describing world events concerning the Seven Wonders.

Moving on to Grade 10, six learning outcomes relating to culture were identified. Units 1 and 2 did not provide any cultural topics, but Unit 3 included an outcome that entailed reading stories about famous detectives (representing the *persons* aspect of culture). In Unit 4, outcomes requiring discussion of ancient civilizations and reading texts about clothing from various world cultures were included, drawing from the *products* category. One outcome in Unit 7 to identifying the traditional dress of various cultures (also relating to *products*); and in Unit 8, students were expected to describe Turkish culture to others, an outcome relating to *perspectives*. Unit 9 included the speaking outcome of talking about

favorite superheroes, exemplifying the *persons* category; no cultural outcomes or objectives were presented in Unit 10.

In Grade 11, a total of five aspects of intercultural awareness were introduced. Unit 1 touched on biographical information of famous people (e.g., Charles Dickens), in line with the *persons* cultural category of target culture. Unit 2 delved into the *practices* category of home culture with the topic of describing how people lived in the past in Turkey; while Unit 5 again touched on *practices* of people in various countries in terms of their daily habits (e.g., “most people in Eastern countries drink tea for breakfast.”). Moreover, Unit 7 included one objective relating to knowledge of historical sites in Turkey pertaining to *products* of home culture; and last, the objective “students will be able to recognize and analyze a passage about the lives of people from different cultures” was addressed in Unit 10. Because there was no specific information about the expected content of such passages, a single category (e.g., *persons* or *practices*) cannot be identified in this case. The 12<sup>th</sup> grade did not introduce any culture-related outcomes.

Grades 9-12 of the 2014 high school EFL curriculum comprised a total of forty units: ten for each grade. Among these, a total of only sixteen culture-oriented outcomes were found. Four of these concerned Turkish (home) culture and addressed the *perspectives* and *practices* aspects. The remaining culture-related outcomes all referred to largely unspecified world cultures, apart from one mention of *persons* of target (native English-speaking) cultures.

#### 4.5. Cultural outcomes and objectives included in the 2017 high school EFL curriculum

Only sixteen cultural outcomes and objectives were included in the 2014 version of the high school EFL curriculum; however, the results of the content analysis for the 2017 version indicated a small improvement in terms of culture-related learning outcomes and skills. The totals for each grade level are presented in Table 6 according to the respective thematic units.

Table 6. Total number of cultural outcomes and objectives identified in the 2017 high school EFL curriculum

Grade	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9	Unit 10	Total
Nine:	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	6
Ten:	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	1	1	6
Eleven:	0	2	1	2	0	0	2	0	1	1	9
Twelve:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total:											22

Starting with Unit 1 of the ninth grade, one cultural objective was identified with respect to recognizing information in spoken or written form about different countries/nationalities. However, no examples were provided with respect to the type of

information students are expected to recognize. In Unit 2, students are asked to complete a chart comparing cities in Turkey to those in world countries, relating to the *products* aspect of culture. Units 3 and 4 contain no outcomes or objectives in terms of cultural awareness; however, in Unit 5, one language example asks students to discuss who inspires them most in Turkish history, a topic related to *persons* of home culture. Next, in Unit 6, students are expected to recognize intercultural differences and to scan short texts to detect information on famous world cities. A specific supporting context is not given as to the nature of the intercultural differences or to the types of information to be included in the texts. One cultural objective is provided in Unit 7 concerning *products* of antique civilizations, such as the Great Pyramids of Egypt and the buildings of ancient Greece: both aspects of world heritage cultures. No further cultural outcomes or objectives are addressed in Grade 9.

For the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, no culture-related outcomes or objectives were noted in Units 1 or 2. However, in Unit 3, students are asked to act out/talk about a legendary figure from Turkish history, representing the *persons* aspect of home culture. Furthermore, Unit 4 involved one intercultural aspect concerning identifying and talking about life in the past versus the 21<sup>st</sup> century around the world, evoking *practices* of world cultures. On the other hand, while Unit 5 focused on the theme of world travel, no references to cultural issues were identified, and Unit 6 did not provide any outcomes or objectives pertaining to intercultural awareness. Next, in Unit 7, two cultural outcomes and objectives relating to international festivals and international cuisines were found, addressing the *practices* and *products* aspects of world cultures. Unit 8 contained no material concerning intercultural awareness; but in Unit 9, attention was given to Turkish heroes/heroines, in support of the *persons* aspect of home culture. Finally, Unit 10 included a single outcome relating to clothing in different cultures, drawing on the *products* aspect of world cultures.

Grade 11 contained the highest frequency of outcomes and objectives relating to intercultural awareness in the 2017 high school program. Unit 1 did not address cultural issues, but Unit 2 offered two references: to Turkish calligraphy art (i.e., *products* of home culture) and to the scientist Stephen Hawking, representing *persons* of target culture. Unit 3 touched on daily lives of people living in the past in Turkey, evoking *practices* of home culture; and in Unit 4, one objective involving famous figures from Turkish history (*persons* of home culture) and one pertaining to life in the past (*practices* of culture in general) were addressed. Units 5 and 6 again did not include any cultural aspects, but Unit 7 focused on two features: *products* of home culture involving Turkish historical places and the *practice* of Ramadan in Turkey. While no cultural outcomes or objectives were noted in Unit 8, Unit 9 included a focus on describing/identifying information about well-known people, drawing on the *persons* aspect of culture without reference to a specific culture. At the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, Unit 10 raised the topic of morals and values in different societies, taking the most in-depth look at the *perspectives* aspect of world cultures to be found across all of the

material examined. Last, in Grade 12, no outcomes or objectives relating to cultural awareness were found, with the exception of Unit 10, which addressed the topic of manners in different cultures (i.e., the *practices* aspect of world cultures).

On the surface, with 22 culture-related outcomes and objectives, the 2017 high school curriculum demonstrated an improvement over the 2014 version, which had only 16. Furthermore, in a small number of instances (in Grade 11, in particular), the focus in 2018 went below the surface level to consider issues such as cultural values and societal norms. On the other hand, while Turkish culture of past and present received attention in both the 2014 curriculum and the 2017 update, little focus was placed on native English-speaking cultures. In both instances, the primary means of addressing intercultural awareness was to refer to “different cultures,” or world cultures, in a general way.

#### 4.6. Cultural outcomes and objectives included in the 2018 high school EFL curriculum

The 2018 version of the EFL curriculum for high school students included no substantive changes from the 2017 version, as with the 2018 update to the 2017 elementary curriculum. The teaching units were individually analyzed to determine whether there were any differences in terms of cultural content; the results are illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7. Total number of cultural outcomes and objectives identified in the 2018 high school EFL curriculum

Grade	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9	Unit 10	Total
<b>Nine:</b>	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	6
<b>Ten:</b>	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	1	1	6
<b>Eleven:</b>	0	2	1	2	0	0	2	0	1	1	9
<b>Twelve:</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Total:</b>											<b>22</b>

The analysis of the 2018 curriculum revealed it to be identical to the 2017 version, as was the case with the elementary curriculum. As such, no substantive changes were found in the teaching units in terms of language skills and learning outcomes, including those relating to culture, as illustrated in Tables 6 and 7.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

As the analysis revealed, in the 2013 EFL curriculum for elementary students, a total of sixteen learning outcomes related to culture and intercultural awareness were addressed across seventy teaching units; and while the revised 2017 curriculum was intended as an improvement on the 2013 version, this number actually dropped to four. The 2018 revision to the elementary curriculum did not include any changes to the cultural content from the

2017 version. Furthermore, in the 2014 high-school level curriculum, sixteen culture-related outcomes were specified throughout Grades 9-11, with no attempt to incorporate intercultural items in Grade 12. In the 2018 revision, this number increased slightly, to a total of twenty-two culture-related outcomes and objectives; however, this number reflects a small proportion of the overall recommended teaching content. As such, it can be argued that, while the curriculum designers point to intercultural awareness as a critical aspect of English language learning (MoNE, 2013, 2014, 2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2018b), the curriculum content reflects this emphasis to a very limited extent.

In reviewing the characteristics of the outcomes and objectives relating to intercultural awareness, three main issues stand out. First, with only a few exceptions, most of the culture-related learning outcomes throughout all of the curricula refer to international culture. Home culture was featured to a small extent, particularly in the high school curricula for both 2014 and 2017/2018, with reflections on Turkish culture of past and present. References to native English-speaking cultures were mainly absent, aside from a few mentions of prominent figures such as Stephen Hawking and Charles Dickens.

On one hand, the lack of exposure to native English-speaking cultural outcomes and objectives may be considered as an omission, because under these circumstances, learners are unlikely to be exposed to the attitudes, perspectives and communicative norms of these cultures. This limitation may prevent students from developing the ability to interact effectively with native speakers of English – a concern that has been stressed by scholars such as Byram (1991, 1997) and Kramsch (1993). On the other hand, because the English language holds significant status as a world language (Baker, 2012; Houghton, 2009; Jenkins, 2009; Rajagopalan, 2004; Seidlhofer, 2005; Sowden, 2012), and Turkish learners of English may be more likely to use the language to interact with other non-native speakers of English than with members of native English-speaking cultures, the focus on world cultures may be appropriate in the Turkish educational context.

Aside from the limited number of culture-related outcomes and objectives distributed among the EFL curricula, another issue that stands out is the depth at which culture is addressed across all of the curricula examined. In this sense, the majority of the intercultural awareness outcomes and objectives specified at both the elementary and the high school levels provide only surface-level glimpses of the *products* (Yuen, 2011) of targeted cultures, such as naming countries/languages, identifying traditional costumes and dances, and discussing the features of international touristic places. In only a few instances are cultural *practices* relating to communicative pragmatics (e.g., “what to say when”) (Kramsch, 1993) introduced, such as the language function concerning what people say at the beginning of a meal (i.e., “bon appétit,” “buon appetito,” etc.). In terms of *perspectives*, at the seventh-grade level, superstitions of international cultures are discussed in both the original and updated curricula; and in the eighth grade, learners are invited to consider the similarities and differences between home and international teen



cultures and to understand science as a universal human pursuit; while in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade of the 2017 and 2018 curriculum, students explore the values and norms of world societies. *Persons* (Yuen, 2011) appear only briefly, as with references to the British author Charles Dickens and the renowned scientist Stephen Hawking.

Because the culture-related outcomes and objectives addressed throughout the Turkish EFL curricula are so limited, both in their number and their scope, it can be concluded that they do little to provide the context suggested by Hymes (1972), Kramsch (1993) and Meyer (1991) as necessary for developing intercultural communicative competence. Therefore, although the curricula introduced in 2013 and 2014, as well as the updates of 2017 and 2018, purport to emphasize culture as a key aspect of language learning, this role does not appear to be upheld through their content. This reflects the concerns raised by researchers such as Çelik (2013, 2014) and Tongal (2015) about the disconnect between educational policy and practice.

Furthermore, while the updated curricula for elementary and high school students from 2017 and 2018 were intended as improvements over the respective 2013 and 2014 versions, the revised 2017 and 2018 elementary curricula in fact include far fewer outcomes and objectives relating to intercultural awareness; and while the number of cultural references in the 2017 and 2018 high school curricula slightly outweigh those of the 2014 version, the increase was minimal and lacked substance. Overall, it was observed that the updated 2017 and 2018 elementary and high school curricula, in particular, tended to include cultural elements in a decontextualized manner, presenting them more frequently as a means to represent a linguistic structure (e.g., “Stephen Hawking could walk when he was young,” in reference to the outcome of “talking about abilities”) than as a discussion about culture per se. As such, it can be concluded that the updated elementary and high school curricula, as well as the original 2013 and 2014 versions, are not effective in supporting intercultural awareness in Turkish learners of English.

## **6. Limitations and Pedagogical Implications**

This study is limited to the EFL curricula that serve as the foundation for English language teaching in Turkish public schools; as such, it does not address the content of the teaching materials that have been prepared in accordance with their guidelines, nor does it consider the individual efforts that may be put forth by classroom teachers to provide enriching cultural experiences. However, the findings in this case suggest that the shortcomings identified by Çelik (2013, 2014) and Çelik and Erbay (2013) concerning the handling of culture in Turkish EFL classrooms may be expected to continue under the current circumstance.

In order to address this issue, a variety of approaches may be taken. First, classroom teachers may be encouraged, through measures such as training workshops that stress the importance of intercultural awareness for successful language learning, to supplement the

cultural outcomes and objectives provided in the EFL curricula with additional activities and experiences. For instance, cooperative partnerships between Turkish and international schools may be encouraged through curricula such as the British Council's eTwinning program. Second, materials designers may take the initiative to expand on the recommendations given in the EFL curricula, and while still following the curricular guidelines, they may provide content that examines the specified culture-related issues in greater depth. Finally, in updating and revising the existing curricula, curriculum designers may take the existing shortcomings into account and provide for more meaningful and enriching exposure. For instance, a "focus on culture" may be introduced in each unit, or in several units in each grade; and learners may be invited to explore native English-speaking and international cultures through individual and group projects, exposure to authentic materials, and critical reflection on home, target and international cultures at an age-appropriate level.

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