

Available online at ijci.wcci-international.orgInternational Journal of Curriculum and Instruction 9(2)
(2017) 157–178

Intercultural Communicative Competence through the Eyes of Turkish University Students

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Abstract

With increased globalization over the last few decades, the status of English has been recognized as an international language. Thus, the need for an intercultural focus in foreign language teaching has become crucial. Many researchers, concerned with intercultural awareness, intercultural competence, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and the integration of intercultural competence into English language teaching, conducted studies in various parts of the world. This mixed-method study examined the ICC perceptions of 93 English language learners enrolled in the English Language Teaching Departments of three universities in Turkey. The study specifically searched into learners' perceptions of efficiency of English language courses about intercultural awareness and competence. Data were collected through a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview and focus-group interviews. Findings indicated that English language learners were aware of the importance of intercultural competence but that they expected to be exposed more to intercultural aspects of English in their English courses. The study revealed that in designing the curriculum and choosing the activities, intercultural aspects should be emphasized more and the teacher should have an active role in helping the learners become aware of intercultural competence. The study also implies that teachers should be involved in in-service teaching programs which aim to (1) provide necessary background on intercultural competence and (2) help teachers integrate their theoretical and practical knowledge on intercultural competence into in-class activities.

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Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, culture and language teaching, foreign language teaching, learner perception

1. Introduction

The importance of the integration of language and culture has long been emphasized by foreign language educators as foreign language teaching involves the integration of two cultures: the culture of the learners and the foreign culture. In addition, foreign language teaching takes place in a multilingual and multicultural context and foreign

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language learners – when compared to previous years – interact more with people from diverse cultures. This being the case, it is noteworthy to mention that “in a world in which national boundaries are being eroded and where cultural diversity is experienced within nations, the relevance of cultural awareness and intercultural dimension for education policy is beyond question” (Sola & Wilkinson, cited in İşışag, 2010, p. 252). As expected, the tendency towards teaching English spoken only by native speakers and expecting foreign language learners to become like a native speaker undoubtedly changed shift towards teaching English spoken both by native and non-native speakers. This change has also revealed itself in the integration of intercultural aspects in foreign language teaching programs, which “helps students to “acquire linguistic competence that is essential for communication and developing intercultural awareness” (Byram, 2002). As a result, such issues as intercultural awareness, intercultural communicative competence and the integration of intercultural competence into English language teaching have been regarded as essential components in effective foreign language teaching and raising learners’ awareness in becoming an interculturally competent speaker has started to occupy much of developing the intercultural dimension of foreign language teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Intercultural Communicative Competence

The concept of intercultural communicative competence has emerged as a combination of two terms: intercultural competence which is “the ability to change one’s knowledge, attitudes and behaviors to be open and flexible to other cultures” and communicative competence which is defined as “the ability to effectively and appropriately carry on communication behavior to elicit a desired response in a specific environment”. Based on this combination, intercultural communicative competence refers to “the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors that negotiate each other’s cultural identity or identities in a culturally diverse environment (Alred and Byram, 2002; Chen, 1990; Chen and Starosta, 1998 in Griffiths, 2011, p. 14). Since the interpretations of intercultural communicative competence seem to be numerous, “the academic debate on the definition of intercultural communicative competence seems still open after five decades mainly because an agreed definition of communicative competence has not been reached yet” (Arasaratham, 2009; Fantini, 1999; Han, 2012). From the perspective of Byram, intercultural communicative competence is the combination of learners’ intercultural competence, linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence (1997). Some other definitions of the term intercultural communicative competence refer to “the ability of individuals to develop a positive attitude towards the foreign culture” (Fritz, Möllenberg & Chen, 2002, p. 166), “the ability of an individual to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries”

(Byram, 1997, p. 7), “the ability to see relationships between different cultures critically” (Lazakidou- Kafetzi, 2006, p. 194), and “the ability to develop adaptive capacity to alter one’s perspective to understand and adapt to the demands of the target culture” (Taylor, 1994, p.154). Intercultural communicative competence is not an inborn ability; in contrast, it needs to be developed by the individual. As to develop this ability, one needs to possess some certain skills and attitudes which are described in the intercultural communicative competence model by Byram (1997). The model provided by Byram (1997) not only provides insights into the dimensions of the concept “intercultural communicative competence” but it is also “the first model to apply intercultural communication to foreign and second language classrooms” (Yılmaz, 2016). The main components of intercultural communicative competence are “knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Byram, 1997, p. 34). The first component, knowledge, includes (1) knowledge of social processes and individual interactions, and (2) knowledge of social groups and their practices in one’s own country. The second component is the skills that refer to (1) the skills of interpreting and relating which are defined as students’ ability to interpret a document or event in another culture and to relate it to their own culture and (2) the skills of discovery and interaction which refer to recognize “new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills” The third and the last component of the model is the attitudes which “require curiosity and openness for other cultures and readiness to question own values and to avoid prejudices about other cultures” (Byram, 1997, p. 61, Yılmaz, 2016).

2.2. Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Language Teaching

In a world of globalization, the need for individuals who have intercultural communicative competence cannot be denied as such an ability is the core of successful intercultural communication. It is assumed that individuals who are intercultural competent are “conscious of their own perspective and of the way in which their thinking is culturally determined, rather than believing that their understanding and perspective is natural” (Lazakidou- Kafetzi, 2006, in İşisağ, 2010, p. 254). Similarly, teaching and learning a foreign language underlies the need for language users who can interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The need for an intercultural focus and training learners who have intercultural communicative competence have also become one of the essential components in English Language Teaching. To perform “intercultural interactions effectively, foreign language learners must possess intercultural communicative competence to be able to understand and cope with the cultural differences as foreign language learning and intercultural communication cannot be separated” (Livermore, 1998, p. 10). An intercultural speaker should be aware of the fact that “there are other perspectives, skills, attitudes and values involved” in multilingual and multicultural context, in which foreign language teaching and learning takes place (İşisağ, 2010, p. 259). Bearing this in mind, one can conclude that foreign language

teaching including English Language Teaching requires equipping learners with a considerable amount of information on foreign cultures; however, the only way to help learners become intercultural competent speakers certainly involves making language learners become aware of foreign cultures, their own cultures and the link between the cultures. Byram (1997) and Fantini (2007) also mention the need for the integration of intercultural competence in teaching a language. From Leggett's perspective (2014, p. 1), "intercultural language learning should give the opportunity to the students to notice and reflect their own cultures and compare that with other cultures they are learning".

In a language teaching/learning process based on an intercultural approach learners should have the opportunity to

- Appreciate the similarities and differences between their own and the cultures of the communities/countries where the target language is spoken
- Identify with the experience and the perspective of the people in communities and countries where the target language is spoken
- Use this knowledge to develop a more objective view of their own customs and ways of thinking (DES, 1993, p.3 cited in Byram & Morgan (1994, p. 15).

As to provide an appropriate context for learners to gain intercultural aspect of language learner, language teachers should "have an intercultural perspective and open-mindedness", "mediate between the native language and target language culture", "gain additional knowledge, attitudes, competencies, and skills" (Sercu, 2006; Byram & Risager, 1999; Yilmaz, 2016).

2.3. Studies on Intercultural Communicative Competence

Many researchers have conducted studies on intercultural aspect of foreign language teaching including teaching of English because of high emphasis on the need to integrate intercultural elements into language teaching/learning context. Some of the studies searching into learners' preferences of accents and cultures that they would like to be exposed to have functioned as good indicators of learners' views towards intercultural communicative competence. In a study by Sung (2014), English language learners' perceptions of accent variety were explored. The findings of the study revealed that learners were in favor of learning native English speakers' accent as they thought it to be standard English. The tendency of learners towards learning native English accents and cultures of native English speakers was also stated in the findings of the studies by Kang (2014), Timmis (2002), and Coşkun, 2011, Yilmaz, 2016). In one of the studies which aimed to search into inclusion of intercultural framework in language teaching/learning, Sercu, Graciea, and Prieto (2005) analyzed 424 Spanish language teachers' beliefs about integrating intercultural competence into their actual teaching practices. The results of the study indicated that most of the teachers were interested in including intercultural aspects in their teaching yet they failed in promoting intercultural awareness in their

classes. In a similar study by Young and Sachdev (2011), language teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices were investigated and the results showed a disparity between teachers' beliefs about intercultural communicative competence and their current classroom priorities. In other words, teachers seemed to be in favor of integrating intercultural aspects in their teaching yet they seemed to fail in applying their beliefs in their actual classroom practices. As to search into pre-service teachers' beliefs about intercultural communicative competence, Lazar (2011) conducted a study on Hungarian pre-service English teachers' beliefs about their role in the development of intercultural communicative competence. The results of the study indicated that pre-service teachers seemed to lack necessary training needed to integrate intercultural elements in their classes. In another study by Czura (2016), student teachers' perceptions of intercultural communicative competence in an L2 classroom were investigated and the results of the study indicated that student teachers were able to provide right definitions of intercultural communicative competence; however, their perception of the role of culture seemed to be knowledge based and traditional. Perceptions of language learners on inclusion of intercultural elements, intercultural awareness, and intercultural communicative competence were also the focus of many studies. In one of these studies, Candel- Mora (2014), searched into perceptions and attitudes of ESP students towards intercultural competence. The findings of the study revealed that for some of the participants, intercultural communicative competence was a mean to learn languages. The findings also indicated that being exposed to the knowledge of language alone is not a key to success in an international environment. In another study by Hao and Zhang (2009), Chinese college students' intercultural communicative competence was surveyed. The results of their study showed that even though students had been learning English for 12 years, they did not succeed in responding appropriately in contexts where intercultural communication was involved. On a similar platform, Griffiths (2011) conducted a study to investigate Chinese students' intercultural communicative competence and the results indicated that most of the participants did not have a high intercultural communicative competence. In addition, Gulbinskiene and Lasauskiene (2014) conducted a study with the aim of revealing whether EFL students of English Philology have intercultural communicative competence. The students in their study emphasized a lack of intercultural communicative competence. In another study searching into learners' views about intercultural aspects of language teaching/learning, Chinh (2013) conducted a study on students' beliefs about cultural diversity in teaching English and the findings of the study revealed that for the learners in the study learning about diverse cultures was essential in learning English.

2.4. Studies on Intercultural Communicative Competence in Turkish Context

As to shed light onto how to promote intercultural language teaching in Turkey where English is spoken and taught mostly as a foreign language, some studies have been

conducted to search into teachers' and learners' perceptions of intercultural communicative competence. In one of the studies pertaining to teachers' and teacher educators' views, Atay, Kurt, Çamlıbel, Ersin, and Kaşlıoğlu (2009) investigated beliefs and attitudes of 503 teachers on teaching intercultural competence. The findings of the study indicated that teachers were aware of the importance of culture in language teaching; however, their actual performances seemed not to reflect their beliefs. In a recent study Sarıçoban and Öz (2014) explored pre-service English teachers' intercultural communicative competence and their findings revealed that participants achieved a prominent level of intercultural communicative competence particularly in the knowledge dimension. The findings of their study also indicated strong correlations between participants' experiences abroad and their level of intercultural communicative competence. Pre-service teachers' intercultural communicative competence was also studied by Harmandaoğlu (2013). In her study which focused on the effect of technology on promoting intercultural competence in teacher candidates, she concluded that twitter influenced increasing participants' intercultural competence. Perceptions of language learners on intercultural communicative competence were also analyzed by some researchers in Turkish context. In a study by Güven (2015), EFL learners' attitudes towards learning intercultural communicative competence were investigated and the findings revealed that participants generally had positive attitudes towards learning intercultural communicative competence. In another study, Kahraman (2008) searched into Turkish university students' views on culture learning and he concluded in his study that participants were not sure whether they were culturally competent and most of them agreed on the integration of cultural aspects in language teaching. Sebnem, Dicle and Guldem (2009) investigated the intercultural sensitivity levels of university students. The findings of their study revealed that the more students are involved in international interactions, the more respect they have for other cultures. In a study by Çalışkan (2009), English preparatory students' attitudes towards learning the target culture were explored. The findings indicated that majority of the participants had a positive attitude towards learning the target culture in their English language classes. In addition, Yılmaz (2016) searched into English language learners' perceptions towards intercultural awareness at a university prep school. The results of her study revealed that learners accepted the importance of intercultural awareness, yet they seemed to lack a deep understanding of the concept.

3. The purpose of the study

Due to the changes in the status of English in today's multicultural world and a great emphasis on English as an international language, it has become crucial for language learners to gain not only linguistic competence but intercultural communicative competence, as well. For this reason, studies considering the integration of intercultural components in English language teaching have become crucial in designing the

curriculum with a focus on promoting intercultural communicative competence and teaching world cultures. It is assumed that students' beliefs and attitudes effect their achievement and satisfaction (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000). Therefore, researching students' beliefs and attitudes towards learning intercultural communicative competence in the English language classroom seems to play a significant role in successfully implementing appropriate approaches. In Turkish context, numerous studies on teachers' perceptions of intercultural communicative competence have been conducted (Atay et al., 2009; Önalın, 2005; Demirbař, 2013; Yılmaz, 2016; Kılıç, 2005; Sert and Özkan, 2016; Cansever and Mede, 2016; Bayyurt, 2006). However, "the voice of the learners about the role of intercultural communicative competence in ELT has remained weak in Turkey" (Devrim & Bayyurt, 2010). This being the case, this study aims to contribute to the literature by exploring Turkish university students' attitudes and beliefs about intercultural communicative competence.

The current study aimed to examine the following research question:

1. What are English Language learners' perceptions of Intercultural Competence regarding:
 - a) ownership of English
 - b) integration of culture into English language education
 - c) efficiency of their program

4. Method

4.1. Research design

A mixed-method research approach was used in this study. In this research, the aim was to find out the attitudes of the learners towards intercultural awareness and in order to collect data both surveys and interviews were being conducted. Therefore, the data collected through a survey, which made the study quantitative and analyzed through descriptive statistics, and content analysis, which made the study qualitative together with the semi-structured interview which made the study quantitative also.

4.2. Setting

This study took place in one of the foundation universities in Istanbul-Turkey. This specific study took place in the intensive English program where students are being prepared for their undergraduate programs in which the medium of education is English, and the ELT department where students are trained to become teachers of English. In such a specific preparatory program, the aim is to first place the students in the right level of English class, and then teach them English with the purpose of getting them ready for their academic studies in their departments.

4.3. Participants

In this study, a total of 93 university level students participated: 67 of them were male and 26 of them were female; out of 93, 83 of them were between 20-30 years old, two of them were between 31-40 years old, one of them was over 41 years old. According to the survey results, 76 of them have been abroad for varied reasons before. These students were at their preparatory year of university education where they followed “The English Preparatory Program” which consists of four eight-week tracks. In each track, students study the four major skills: Reading, Speaking, Writing, and Listening in addition to Grammar and Vocabulary skills. The preparatory program aims to help students reach the English proficiency level required for their undergraduate studies. Students in the preparatory program have both native and non-native English teachers. Table 1 presents detailed information about the participants of the current study.

Table 1. Demographic Information about the Participants

		f	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Gender	Male	67	71.0	71.7	71.7
	Female	26	28.0	28.3	100.0
	Total	93	98.9	100.0	
Age	20-30	83	89.2	96.5	96.5
	31-40	2	2.2	2.3	98.8
	41-50	1	1.1	1.2	100.0
	Total	86	92.5	100.0	
Have you ever been abroad?	No	76	81.7	81.7	81.7
	Yes	17	18.3	18.3	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	

4.4. Data collection tools

In this study, two types of data collection tools were used: a questionnaire designed by Yilmaz (2016) and semi-structured interviews.

2.4.1. Questionnaire

For data collection purposes, the questionnaire by Yilmaz (2006) which was adapted from Sercu et al. (2005), Almawoda (2011), and Wang (2014) was conducted. The reason for using this questionnaire was that it was designed to be administered to Turkish students enrolled in a preparatory program at a university in Turkey. Cronbach’s alpha score of the questionnaire was 0.747 for the current study. The questionnaire administered to participants of this study included both semi-structured and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was in English; however, participants also had a chance to fill out the Turkish version of the questionnaire if they wished to. The reason for providing the learners with a choice of language was to avoid any misunderstanding of

the items stemming from learners' English language skills. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. In the first part of the questionnaire, demographic data such as gender, age, mother tongue were gathered. The second part of the questionnaire included four open-ended questions which were designed to offer insights into learners' objectives of learning English as well as the culture and the accent that they would like to be exposed to in their English language classrooms. In the third part of the questionnaire, there were 19 questions structured in the Likert scale format. The questions in this part were designed to search into learners' intercultural awareness, learners' opinions pertaining to classroom activities that were used for enhancing intercultural awareness in the English classes, and learners' individual experiences in the English language program.

2.4.2. Semi-structured interviews

As to gain better insights into learners' beliefs and attitudes towards intercultural communicative competence, semi-structured interviews with 20 participants were conducted on a voluntary basis. The interview questions were based on the questionnaire responses of the participants.

4.5. Data collection procedure

Before the questionnaire was administered to participants, the purpose of the study was explained by the researcher; the participants and the researcher read each item in the questionnaire to make sure there was not any miscomprehension of the items. The participants were offered both an English and a Turkish version of the questionnaire allowing them to choose the language in which they preferred to respond to the questions. Participants filled out the questionnaire in their regular classroom settings with their own instructors and there was no time limitation for the completion of the questionnaire. As the second part of the data collection, semi-structured interviews with 20 participants who were all volunteers were conducted. The researcher asked pre-determined questions to the participants yet participants had a chance to express their own ideas and the researcher also asked some follow up questions. The interviews lasted around 15 minutes and they were audio recorded. Interview data were also transcribed verbatim.

4.6. Data analysis

The data gathered for this study were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) software version 19.0. The reliability of the questionnaire was 0.747. The numerical data obtained through descriptive statistics were analyzed under the main categories outlined in the questionnaire. To analyze the semi-structured interviews, content analysis was utilized. Content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994;

Weber, 1990) was started by categorizing them from the codes for each set of data which was related to a specific question. All the categories and themes taken from the content analysis were double-checked by both researchers to have a significant degree of inter-rater reliability.

5. Results

In this part, findings obtained from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews will be presented under the categories outlined in the questionnaire.

As the first step of data analysis, the items in the second part of the questionnaire were analyzed. Table 2 presents a detailed account of the analysis.

Table 2. Learners' views about objectives of learning English and the culture and accent they want to be exposed to in their English classes.

		<i>f</i>	%	<i>Valid %</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>
What are your objectives of learning English?	to communicate with native speakers of English	45	48.4	48.4	48.4
	to communicate with people from different cultures (native and non-native)	40	43	43	91.4
	Other	8	8.6	8.6	100
	Total	93	100	100	
Which culture do you want to be exposed to in English language classrooms?	The cultures of native English speakers (British, American, Australian)	68	73.1	73.1	73.1
	Different native and non-native cultures around the world	22	23.7	23.7	96.8
	Other	3	3.2	3.2	100
	Total	93	100.0	100	
Which accent do you want to be exposed to in English language classroom?	Native speakers' accent	67	72.0	73.6	73.6
	As many as native and non-native speakers' accent around the world	15	16.1	16.5	90.1
	Other	9	9.7	9.9	100
	Total	91	97.8	100	
Do you want your culture to be included in English language classrooms?	Yes	54	58.1	58.7	58.7
	No	10	10.8	10.9	69.6
	Not Sure	28	30.1	30.4	100
	Total	92	98.9	100	

The first item in this part investigated learners' objectives of learning English. As illustrated in Table 2, more than half of the participants (*f*: 45) stated that they learn English to communicate with native speakers of English. This number decreases to 40 when the objective is stated to be communicating with people from diverse cultures including both native and non-native speakers of English. Other reasons for learning

English were (1) to get ready for the undergraduate studies, (2) to find a better job after graduating from the department and (3) to have a higher status in their society. Participants' preference of native speakers regarding culture and accent was significantly higher. That is, 73.1% of the participants stated that they wanted to learn about the cultures of native English speakers and 72 % of the participants preferred to be exposed to native speakers' accent (Table 2). The number of participants who preferred to be exposed to different native and non-native cultures was only 22 and the number of the participants who wished to be exposed to as many native and non-native speakers' accents as possible was only 15. The analysis of learners' views pertaining to the inclusion of their own culture in their English classes revealed that more than half of the participants (58.1%) were in favor of being exposed to their own culture in their English classes while 10.8 % of the learners rejected the idea of being exposed to their own culture in English classes and 30.1% of the participants stated that they were not sure. During the semi-structured interviews, participants' preference of native cultures and native accents over non-native varieties and cultures were analyzed. The following excerpts from the interviews with the participants provide a deeper insight into the popularity of native speakers among Turkish EFL students.

S1. I have always learnt the accents of American or British speakers so I am used to learning native speakers' accent. As for the cultures, I believe that we should learn the cultures of native English speakers because we will be dealing with them most of the time when we speak English or learn English.

S2. I prefer to learn native speakers' accent and culture because their accent is the original one and their culture is more popular as compared to cultures of non-native English speakers.

S3. Learning English requires learning native speakers' accent and culture. I feel more comfortable when I learn American or British culture and accent. For example, when watching a movie, I can easily understand speakers' accent because they use British or American accent and the movies include aspects of American, British or Irish cultures.

S4. I prefer to learn native speakers' accent because my teacher teaches these accents better than others.

Some of the participants stated in the questionnaire that they would like to be exposed to both native and non-native speakers' accent and cultures. During the semi-structured interviews, participants explained the reasons for their preferences as follows:

S1. English has become an international language and it is not only spoken by native speakers. For this reason, I also prefer to learn accents of non-native English speakers because I may have to speak with them and understand them.

S2. English does not belong only to native speakers anymore. Instead, it is used almost everywhere in the world so we should learn about different accents if we want to communicate with different people all over the world.

S3. It is interesting to learn about different cultures because I am fed up with learning about British and American culture.

In the questionnaire, there were 9 items designed to investigate participants' views regarding intercultural awareness and its place in their English language program. Table 3 presents the findings obtained through these items.

Table 3. Learners' views about intercultural awareness and its place in their English language program

		<i>f</i>	%	<i>Valid %</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>
In the language classroom, learning about cultures is important	Disagree	2	2.2	2.2	2.2
	Not Sure	9	9.7	9.7	11.8
	Agree	44	47.3	47.3	59.1
	Strongly Agree	38	40.9	40.9	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
The more I know about other cultures, the more tolerant I am	Disagree	6	6.5	6.5	6.5
	Not Sure	24	25.8	25.8	32.3
	Agree	41	44.1	44.1	76.3
	Strongly Agree	22	23.7	23.7	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
All students should acquire intercultural competence	Disagree	3	3.2	3.2	3.2
	Not Sure	27	29.0	29.0	32.3
	Agree	32	34.4	34.4	66.7
	Strongly Agree	31	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
Teaching English should focus on helping students to develop an open mind towards unfamiliar cultures	Disagree	4	4.3	4.3	4.3
	Not Sure	17	18.3	18.3	22.6
	Agree	42	45.2	45.2	67.7
	Strongly Agree	30	32.3	32.3	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
Learning about other cultures enhances my motivation to learn English	Strongly Disagree	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	Disagree	5	5.4	5.4	6.5
	Not Sure	20	21.5	21.5	28.0
	Agree	38	40.9	40.9	68.8
	Strongly Agree	29	31.2	31.2	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
Learning intercultural competence is important only if it is necessary (e.g. travelling)	Strongly Disagree	11	11.8	11.8	11.8
	Disagree	29	31.2	31.2	43.0
	Not Sure	26	28.0	28.0	71.0

	Agree	19	20.4	20.4	91.4
	Strongly Agree	8	8.6	8.6	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
Students should learn about intercultural competence only when there are international students in the classes	Strongly Disagree	19	20.4	20.4	20.4
	Disagree	34	36.6	36.6	57.0
	Not Sure	28	30.1	30.1	87.1
	Agree	8	8.6	8.6	95.7
	Strongly Agree	4	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
Language and culture cannot be taught in an integrated way. You have to separate the two	Strongly Disagree	16	17.2	17.2	17.2
	Disagree	30	32.3	32.3	49.5
	Not Sure	28	30.1	30.1	79.6
	Agree	16	17.2	17.2	96.8
	Strongly Agree	3	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
Culture teaching should be integrated into English language teaching	Disagree	10	10.8	10.8	10.8
	Not Sure	26	28.0	28.0	38.7
	Agree	44	47.3	47.3	86.0
	Strongly Agree	13	14.0	14.0	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	

As seen in Table 3, of the 9 items in this category, 3 were negative statements about intercultural awareness and its place in English language teaching. Through the items “Learning intercultural competence is important only if it is necessary (e.g. travelling)”, “Students should learn about intercultural competence only when there are international students in the classes” and “Language and culture cannot be taught in an integrated way. You have to separate the two”, students’ negative views were analyzed. It is seen in Table 3 that nearly half of the participants disagreed (31.2%) or strongly disagreed (11.8%) with the statement “Learning intercultural competence is important only if it is necessary (e.g. travelling) and the number of participants who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement was 19 and 8 respectively. Similarly, 36.6 % of the participants disagreed and 20.4 % of the participants strongly disagreed with the statement that “Students should learn about intercultural competence only when there are international students in the classes”. The number of participants who agreed or strongly agreed that students should learn about intercultural competence if there are international students in their classes was only 12.

As seen in Table 3, participants are in favor of integration of intercultural aspects into their English language program as majority of the participants (88.2%) stated that learning about cultures is important in the language classroom. In addition, for more than half of the participants (agree: 34.4%; strongly agree: 33.3%), all students should acquire intercultural competence. We also see in Table 3 that, participants believe

learning about other cultures (1) increases students' tolerance (agree: 44.1%; strongly agree: 23.7 %), (2) enhances students' motivation to learn English (agree:40.9%; strongly agree: 31.2%). It is also noteworthy to mention that for more than half of the participants of the current study, teaching English should focus on helping students to develop an open mind towards unfamiliar cultures (agree:45.2%; strongly agree:32.3 %), which implies the need and readiness for intercultural competence in the English language classes. Participants' positive views towards learning intercultural competence can also be seen in the number of participants who disagreed with the statements "in the language classroom, learning about cultures is important" (f:2), "all students should acquire intercultural competence" (f:3), and "culture teaching should be integrated into English language teaching" (f:10).

During the semi-structured interviews, participants' views about intercultural communicative competence and the advantages it offers in the language classroom were also discussed. Following excerpts from the interviews support the positive attitudes of the participants towards intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence.

S1. When I watch a movie in English, I can't understand some of the expressions because of cultural differences so learning about different cultures in English lessons certainly helps me to understand the movies, expressions and idioms better.

S2. Learning about different cultures is enjoyable. When I learn about different cultures I can talk about many things in English and my English improves.

S3. I like to learn more about different cultures because I always wonder what other people in different cultures would do in some situations.

S4. The more accents and cultures I know, the better I speak. In addition, when I go abroad, I will feel better.

S5. Knowledge is power and learning about different cultures makes me a better English speaker.

In the questionnaire, participants' views pertaining to classroom activities used to enhance intercultural awareness were explored through 7 items presented in Table 4. The analysis of the items reflected participants' opinions about their instructors' actual classroom practices in raising intercultural awareness.

Table 4: Learners' Views about the classroom activities used to enhance intercultural awareness

		f	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
My teachers tell us about what they heard (or read) about the English-speaking countries or their cultures	Strongly Disagree	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
	Disagree	5	5.4	5.4	6.5
	Not Sure	18	19.4	19.6	26.1
	Agree	41	44.1	44.6	70.7
	Strongly Agree	27	29.0	29.3	100.0
	Total	92	98.9	100.0	
My teachers ask us to think about what it would be like to live in the English-speaking countries	Strongly Disagree	2	2.2	2.2	2.2
	Disagree	5	5.4	5.4	7.5
	Not Sure	19	20.4	20.4	28.0
	Agree	46	49.5	49.5	77.4
	Strongly Agree	21	22.6	22.6	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
My teachers talk to us about their own experiences in the English-speaking countries	Strongly Disagree	2	2.2	2.2	2.2
	Disagree	5	5.4	5.4	7.5
	Not Sure	15	16.1	16.1	23.7
	Agree	37	39.8	39.8	63.4
	Strongly Agree	34	36.6	36.6	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
My teachers ask us about our experiences in English speaking countries	Strongly Disagree	6	6.5	6.5	6.5
	Disagree	15	16.1	16.1	22.6
	Not Sure	21	22.6	22.6	45.2
	Agree	31	33.3	33.3	78.5
	Strongly Agree	20	21.5	21.5	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
My teachers ask us to compare an aspect of our own culture with that aspect in the English-speaking cultures	Strongly Disagree	5	5.4	5.4	5.4
	Disagree	11	11.8	11.8	17.2
	Not Sure	26	28.0	28.0	45.2
	Agree	32	34.4	34.4	79.6
	Strongly Agree	19	20.4	20.4	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
My teachers use pictures, videos, etc. to introduce us other cultures	Strongly Disagree	13	14.0	14.0	14.0
	Disagree	18	19.4	19.4	33.3
	Not Sure	24	25.8	25.8	59.1
	Agree	24	25.8	25.8	84.9
	Strongly Agree	14	15.1	15.1	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	
My teachers decorate my classroom with posters illustrating particular aspects of different cultures around the world	Strongly Disagree	46	49.5	49.5	49.5
	Disagree	21	22.6	22.6	72.0
	Not Sure	14	15.1	15.1	87.1
	Agree	9	9.7	9.7	96.8
	Strongly Agree	3	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	93	100.0	100.0	

As seen in Table 4, the highest percentages of positive responses (including the choices agree and disagree) belong to the items “my teachers talk to us about their own

experiences in the English speaking countries” (76.4%), “my teachers tell us about what they heard (or read) about the English speaking countries or their cultures” (73.1%) and “my teachers ask us to think about what it would be like to live in the English speaking countries” (72.1%). That is, from the perspective of the participants, the most frequently used activities employed by their instructors to enhance intercultural awareness among learners were talking about teacher experiences in the English-speaking countries, sharing with learners the things they heard or read about English speaking countries, and asking learners to visualize what it would be like to live in an English-speaking country. The analysis of the items in this category revealed that the least frequently used activity stated by participants was “teacher’s decorating the classroom with posters illustrating particular aspects of diverse cultures around the world” as 49.5% of the participants strongly disagreed with the item and 22.6% of the participants disagreed with the item. The number of participants who chose “not sure” option for this item was 14, which indicates that English language classrooms of the participants are not equipped with visual aids to enhance intercultural awareness. Other 3 least frequently used activities were “My teachers use pictures, videos, etc. to introduce us other cultures” (33.4%), “My teachers ask us about our experiences in English speaking countries” (22.6%), and “My teachers ask us to compare an aspect of our own culture with that aspect in the English-speaking cultures” (17,2%). During semi-structured interviews, participants were requested to give a more detailed account of the activities and their opinions about them as to offer better insights into instructors’ actual classroom practices in enhancing intercultural awareness. Following excerpts from the semi-structured interviews present participants’ reflections on classroom activities.

S1. The teacher talks about her own experiences in English speaking countries sometimes. I wish she talked more about them because it is always interesting and enjoyable to listen to the teacher talking about such things. The teacher should talk about her experiences when the lesson becomes boring especially during the grammar parts.

S2. I love the feeling of thinking about how it would be like to live abroad. I imagine myself talking in English with native speakers and I love that feeling.

S3. Sometimes my teacher talks about her own experiences or asks us about our experiences in English speaking countries. However, she talks about the same countries. I wish we could talk about different countries and cultures.

S4. I wish we could decorate our classroom or even the school with posters representing different people around the world. Pictures always draw my attention. I would be a volunteer to decorate the school.

S5. I and my classmates enjoy watching videos, movies, or songs that belong to other cultures because we can always find something to talk about.

As in the responses given to the items in the questionnaire, responses given in the interviews indicate that from the eyes of the participants, instructors pay considerable amount of attention and display a considerable amount of effort to enhance intercultural awareness among English learners, yet they seem to be in need of improving themselves in emphasizing intercultural elements and making use of them in their actual classroom practices.

In the last part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to give responses to the questions designed to investigate their personal experiences in their English language program. Table 5 presents participants' responses.

Table 5. Learners responses to their personal experiences in their English language program

		f	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
My teachers usually teach us the cultures of _____	Native English speakers (British, American, Australian)	77	82.8	87.5	87.5
	Different countries (native and non-native)	9	9.7	10.2	97.7
	Other	2	2.2	2.3	100.0
	Total	88	94.6	100.0	
The English language program I have learnt deals with intercultural awareness adequately	Yes	35	37.6	38.0	38.0
	No	7	7.5	7.6	45.7
	Not Sure	50	53.8	54.3	100.0
	Total	92	98.9	100.0	
Do you want to learn more about other non-native cultures and accents?	Yes	63	67.7	68.5	68.5
	No	8	8.6	8.7	77.2
	Not Sure	21	22.6	22.8	100.0
	Total	92	98.9	100.0	

The first item in this category was designed to elicit participants' opinions about the preference of their teachers regarding culture(s) to be taught in the English classroom. As seen in Table 5, majority of the participants (82.8%) stated that their teachers usually teach them the cultures of Native English speakers while only 9.7% of the participants indicated that their teachers preferred to teach the cultures of different countries including both native and non-native English speakers' cultures, which implies teachers' tendency towards teaching native speakers' cultures. In the second item in this category, participants were asked to evaluate their English language program in terms of intercultural awareness. While only less than half of the participants (37.6%) stated that their program dealt with intercultural awareness adequately, 7.5% of the participants chose the option "no" and 53.8% of the participants stated that they were not sure whether the English language program they followed dealt with intercultural awareness adequately, which implies that teachers need to put more effort into raising intercultural

awareness in their classes. As for the item “do you want to learn more about other non-native cultures and accents?”, more than half of the participants (67.7) indicated that they would like to learn more about the accents and cultures of diverse cultures while only 8.6 % of the participants were against the idea and 22.6 % was not sure whether to learn about other non-native cultures and accents

6. Discussion

The present study aimed to consider Turkish university students’ perceptions of intercultural communicative competence including the evaluation of the preparatory program in relation to enhancing intercultural awareness of learners. The data were analyzed utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods under three main categories: ownership of English, integration of culture into English language education and efficiency of participants’ English language program in relation to enhancing intercultural communicative competence. The findings regarding learners’ views about objectives of learning English and the culture and accent they want to be exposed to in their English classes revealed that while nearly half of the participants (48.4%) stated that their aim in learning English was to communicate with native English speakers, 43 % of the participants indicated that they were learning English to communicate both with native and non-native English speakers. This finding which implies learners’ awareness of the need to become interculturally competent as they wish to communicate with non-native speakers is in line with the study by Yılmaz in which Turkish learners were found to be aware of intercultural competence. Participants’ preference of communication with native speakers over communication with non-native speakers in this study is also reflected in the studies by Kang (2014), Timmis (2002), Coşkun, 2011, Yılmaz, 2016. Turkish learners’ tendency towards native English speakers’ accent and culture might stem from their previous language education at high school which centers around a more native speaker based approach. In addition to their desire to be exposed to the different native and non-native cultures around the world, participants in the current study indicated that they would like their cultures to be included in their English language classroom as more than half of the participants (58.1%) were in favor of the inclusion of Turkish culture in addition to diverse cultures taught in their English language program. The study by Devrim and Bayyurt (2010) also revealed similar findings pertaining to learners’ views about the inclusion of their own culture in English classes. In their study, as in the current study, they found out that “learning about the similarities of and/or differences between English speaking countries and cultures in Turkey was the most interesting topic for the students” in their English classes. The findings also indicated that learners regarded learning about culture and acquiring intercultural communicative competence as an important part of their English language program. In addition, learners indicated that English teaching should help learners develop open mind towards unfamiliar cultures and teachers should integrate culture

into English classes as culture teaching enhances learners' motivation and tolerance. The findings of the present study are in line with the studies by Yılmaz, 2016, Devrim, 2006, Yılmaz and Özkan, 2015, Cansever and Mede, 2016, Candel-Mora, 2014, Güven, 2015, Kahraman, 2008, Çalışkan, 2009 in which the importance of culture and intercultural communicative competence in English language teaching were emphasized while they are contrary to findings of the study by Jabeen & Shah (2011) in which learners held negative attitudes towards learning about target culture in their English language program. The finding pertaining to the effect of target culture teaching on enhancing motivation and tolerance of language learners is also similar to the findings of the studies by Wang (2014) and Cansever and Mede (2016) in which learners stated that the more they learn about other cultures the more tolerant and motivated they become. Findings in relation to learners' views about the activities used in English classes to enhance intercultural communicative competence revealed that teachers (1) talk to learners about their own experiences in the English speaking countries (2) tell learners about what they heard (or read) about the English speaking countries or their cultures and ask learners to think about what it would be like to live in the English speaking countries quite frequently while they spend less time (1) using pictures, videos, etc. to introduce learners other cultures, (2) asking learners about their experiences in English speaking countries and (3) asking learners to compare an aspect of their own culture with that aspect in the English speaking culture

7. Conclusions

According to the results from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, quite a high number of learners are aware of the importance of culture, intercultural communicative competence and the benefits culture learning offers the learners of English. However, there still is much to be done as some learners tend to learn accents and cultures of native English speakers, which might act as a barrier for them to gain intercultural communicative competence. Since learners are equipped with intercultural aspects of English language learning mostly in the language classroom, teachers should first help learners become aware of intercultural competence and its contribution to becoming an international citizen, which is essential in today's globalized world. In addition, teachers should make use of every opportunity to introduce cultural elements in the classroom and to do this they need to design their curriculum and teaching materials accordingly. Involving students in extracurricular cultural activities might also contribute to enhancing learners' intercultural communicative competence essential for the multilingual and multicultural world we live in.

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