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Exploring the position of target culture awareness in the EFL classroom of the Greek state school

Διερεύνηση της πολιτισμικής επίγνωσης της γλώσσας-στόχου στην αίθουσα διδασκαλίας της αγγλικής ως ξένης γλώσσας του ελληνικού δημόσιου σχολείου

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Language reflects culture and it is influenced and shaped by culture. Consequently, teaching English is inseparable from teaching its culture and cultural awareness is of great importance in EFL learning. It contributes to the effectiveness and appropriateness of English discourse. Only with the communication of language competence and cultural awareness can a language learner be successful in communication. In this respect, the intent of this paper is to examine to what extent target culture awareness is a neglected component or not in the EFL classroom at the Greek state school. Findings reveal how often teachers integrate culture into EFL learning, to what extent school textbooks and curriculum help to enhance learners' target culture awareness and which school factors may be constraints. Teachers are challenged to consciously reflect on their own target culture awareness—possible former training and immersion in the target culture—and to express their attitude towards language and culture integration by specific reference to its learning benefits. It also discusses implications for enhancing both teachers' and learners' target culture and intercultural awareness, and finally provides suggestions for future action.

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Η γλώσσα αντανακλά τον πολιτισμό καθώς επίσης επηρεάζεται και διαμορφώνεται από τον πολιτισμό. Επομένως, η διδασκαλία της αγγλικής γλώσσας δεν πρέπει να διαχωρίζεται από τη διδασκαλία του πολιτισμού της. Η πολιτισμική επίγνωση έχει καθοριστική σημασία για την εκμάθηση της αγγλικής ως ξένης γλώσσας γιατί συμβάλλει στην αποτελεσματικότητα και καταλληλότητα του παραγόμενου λόγου. Μόνο μέσω της διασύνδεσης της γλωσσικής ικανότητας με την πολιτισμική επίγνωση μπορεί ο μαθητής να αναπτύξει επιτυχώς την επικοινωνιακή του δεξιότητα. Σκοπός αυτής της μελέτης είναι να διερευνήσει το βαθμό στον οποίο η πολιτισμική επίγνωση της γλώσσας-στόχου αποτελεί παραμελημένη συνιστώσα ή όχι στην αίθουσα διδασκαλίας της αγγλικής ως ξένης γλώσσας στο ελληνικό δημόσιο σχολείο. Τα αποτελέσματα της παρούσας έρευνας αποτυπώνουν τη συχνότητα με την οποία οι εκπαιδευτικοί ενσωματώνουν πολιτισμικά στοιχεία στην εκμάθηση της

αγγλικής, το βαθμό στον οποίο τα σχολικά εγχειρίδια και το αναλυτικό πρόγραμμα σπουδών ενισχύουν την πολιτισμική επίγνωση των μαθητών καθώς επίσης τους σχολικούς παράγοντες που θέτουν περιορισμούς. Οι εκπαιδευτικοί της έρευνας καλούνται να αναστοχαστούν ενσυνείδητα τη δική τους πολιτισμική επίγνωση – είτε μέσω πιθανής προηγούμενης επιμόρφωσης είτε μέσω προσωπικής ενασχόλησης με τον πολιτισμό της γλώσσας-στόχου – και να εκφράσουν τη στάση και τις αντιλήψεις τους για τη διασύνδεση γλώσσας και πολιτισμού με ειδική αναφορά στα μαθησιακά οφέλη που απορρέουν από αυτή. Επιπλέον, εκφράζονται απόψεις που αφορούν την ενδυνάμωση της πολιτισμικής επίγνωσης της γλώσσας-στόχου τόσο των εκπαιδευτικών όσο και των μαθητών και διατυπώνονται προτάσεις για μελλοντική δράση.

Key words: target culture, cultural awareness, intercultural awareness, school factors, constraints, communicative competence, curriculum, textbooks

1. Introduction

The need to integrate culture into teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) is not a new debate and has long been highlighted in countless studies (Byram, 1989; Cakir, 2006; Kramsch, 1983). Societal values, attitudes and cultural elements are integrated with the communicative approach to enhance the effectiveness of foreign language (FL) learning. On the one hand, language is the keystone of culture and some social scientists and philosophers maintain that culture would not be possible without language (Adorno, 1993; Chomsky, 1968; Davidson, 1999; Foucault, 1994; Wittgenstein, 1999). On the other hand, language is influenced and shaped by culture (Brown, 2007). In the broad sense, language is the symbolic representation of a people, and it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds as well as their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking in a way that they can interact with each other (Brown, 2007; Sapir, 1985). A popular theory – the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (SWH) – has explained the interrelations between language and culture by assuming that language influences and determines our thinking and cognition, and that the relative distinctions in one language may not be available in another language (Sapir, 1985; Whorf, 1956).

Therefore, FL teaching and learning cannot be reduced to the direct teaching of linguistic skills like phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and syntax. The contemporary models of communicative competence show that there is much more to learning a language, and they include the vital component of cultural knowledge and awareness (Bachman 1990; Council of Europe 2001). Communication that lacks appropriate cultural content often results in humorous incidents, or worse, is the source of serious communication breakdowns and misunderstandings. In a similar vein, Abolghasem (2010) points out that cultural awareness and understanding of a FL is enhanced through culture teaching in FL classes. Some language theorists have maintained that teaching a FL without teaching its culture is quite impossible (Byram, 1997; Byram & Fleming 1998; Valdes 1995). In light of the above, it is certainly challenging and pedagogically interesting to explore the position of target culture awareness in the EFL classroom in the Greek state school by simply seeking to answer the question: 'Is it a neglected component or not?'

2. Definition of key terms

2.1. What is 'culture'?

Culture is a very broad concept. In particular, it seems useful to make a distinction between the so-called "big-C culture" and "small-c culture" (Atkinson, 2004). The big-C part of a given culture constitutes factual knowledge about the fine arts such as literature, music, dance, painting, sculpture, theatre, and film. Small-c culture, on the other hand, comprises a wide variety of aspects, many of which are inter-connected, including attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, perceptions, norms and values, social relationships, customs, celebrations, rituals, politeness conventions, patterns of interaction and discourse organization, and the use of physical space and body language.

Language is part of what we call culture, and it also reflects and interprets culture. Some of the small-c cultural aspects are directly observable and hence easy to grasp and learn (e.g., celebrations and rituals). However, many aspects of a given culture are hidden from the eye as is the case with the small-c cultural elements that are deeply internalized or subconscious and are often noticed only in contrast with another culture. It is mainly these non-tangible cultural aspects which determine the expectations and interpretations of other people's linguistic/non-linguistic behaviour. A person who encounters an unfamiliar culture will lack knowledge of such behaviours, which may lead to humorous situations, and even conflict, due to miscommunication. This happens because these aspects of culture constitute unspoken rules created by a community. On the grounds that these cultural rules are full of meaning, they often acquire a moral rigidity and righteousness that may engender stereotypes and even prejudices (Kramsch, 1995).

2.2. What is 'cultural awareness'?

Tomlinson (2001) holds that cultural awareness involves a gradually developing inner sense of the equality of cultures, an increased understanding of your own and other people's cultures, and a positive interest in how cultures both connect and differ (cited in Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004). Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004) claim that an increased cultural awareness helps learners broaden the mind, increase tolerance and achieve cultural empathy and sensitivity. According to Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), cultural awareness encompasses three qualities: awareness of one's own culturally-induced behaviour, awareness of the culturally-induced behaviour of others and ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint.

3. Rationale of the current study

3.1. Theoretical review

Target culture awareness has become an important focus of FL education since the 1980s, which reflects a greater awareness of the inseparability of language and culture (Byram, Morgan & Colleagues, 1994) and the need to prepare learners for intercultural communication. Pulverness (2000) asserts that due to the undeniable growth of English as an international language, cultural content as anything other than contextual background began to be included in language teaching programs. Hadley (1993) holds that cultural understanding must be promoted in various ways so that learners are sensitive to other cultures and live more harmoniously in the target language community. That is to say, the distinction of language and culture may be harmful and culture teaching should familiarize

learners with the target culture (Kramersch, 1998). This is why Damen (1987, cited in Graves, 1996) calls culture the fifth dimension of language teaching.

This attempt to familiarize learners with the target culture should be implemented from very early stages in order to ensure that learners go through the cultural information again each year. Therefore, cultural information provided in a classroom should consist of various content and materials related to the target culture, such as newspapers, electronic media, magazines, literature and advertisements. Moreover, a language curriculum should be organized 'around the notion of cultural literacy' so that learners can learn structures with the aim of placing them in the cultural context (Kramersch, 1983). In light of the above, the present study seeks to explore the position of target culture awareness in the Greek state school context by taking into consideration a number of parameters such as the teacher's role, Greek school learners' profile, culture-related materials and activities which are essentially associated with culture and language integration in the EFL classroom.

3.2. Teachers' role

Duff and Uchida (1997) maintain that language teachers are very much involved in the transmission of culture, and each selection of videos, activities and so on has social, cultural, and educational significance. As Graves (1996) points out, a teacher who views culture as an integral part of a syllabus should incorporate into the instructional materials two more elements in addition to the target culture knowledge: the development of awareness of the role culture plays in human interaction and the development of skills in behaving and responding in culturally appropriate ways. Moreover, as Cakir (2006) notes, teachers should be sensitive to the learners' attitudes and values so as not to cause them to lose their motivation. Kılıçkaya (2004) states that teachers' role is to teach learners the target culture and the reasons why particular events take place in different cultures. The aim is not to make the learners adopt the habit of thinking or acting like a foreigner or think that one culture is superior to the other. The main objective is to make them realize that there exist different cultures. On the whole, teachers should include target culture awareness activities in a FL course because in this way, according to Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004), they not only increase the educational value of the course but also facilitate FL acquisition.

3.3. Greek school learners' profile

In the Greek state school, learners are usually monolingual and they learn English while living in their own country. They have little access to the target culture and therefore limited ability to become culturally competent. Importantly, their aim for learning English is not only to communicate with native speakers of English but also with non-native speakers of English, which is why Greek learners are typically learners of English as an International Language (EIL). By learning English, Greek learners are enabling themselves to become users of international, or rather intercultural, communication. In other words, the target language becomes a tool to be used in interaction with people from all over the world, where communication in English takes place in fields such as science, technology, business, entertainment and tourism. It is obvious then, that in order to successfully function in a culturally diverse environment, Greek learners need to develop target culture awareness first and intercultural communicative competence as well (Alptekin 2002). The true complexity of what it means to know a FL is also revealed in the useful list of learner competencies produced by the Council of Europe (2001) according to which, besides the grammatical competence, a culturally competent learner must possess sociolinguistic

competence, pragmatic competence, sociocultural knowledge in the FL, and consequently intercultural awareness as well.

3.4. Culture-related materials

According to Cullen & Sato (2000), there is a variety of possible sources of information for teaching culture: video, CDs, readings, internet, stories, songs, newspapers, realia, literature etc. Smith (1997) recommends the use of Virtual Realia, which he defines as digitized items from the target culture, which are brought into the classroom to stimulate oral or written language production. Textbooks are tools that can also aid culture teaching. Textbooks are important resources, which students can easily and frequently access. Risager (1991), as cited in Cunningsworth (1995), points out that FL textbooks no longer just develop concurrently with the development of FL pedagogy in a narrow sense, but they increasingly participate in the general cultural transmission with the educational system and in the rest of society. Music is also crucial in terms of reflecting culture and can serve pedagogical purposes. Cultural values such as Christmas, Santa Claus and Easter can be enhanced through the teaching of children's songs such as Christmas songs and Easter songs.

3.5. School factors

Ho (2009) maintains that the development of the cultural awareness in EFL classes may be influenced by a number of constraints, namely the teacher's cultural knowledge, the availability of native English speakers, time allowance for culture teaching in each lesson or even the system of education itself. The teacher has been considered the "expert knower of the language" (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996) and his/her own cultural knowledge thus seems to be the main source for learners to learn about it. With the booming of information technology and the effects of globalization that make many countries dependent on each other, Greek learners are now able to have access to many cultural resources and explore the target culture themselves under their teachers' guidance. The availability of native English speakers as a rich cultural resource is also an important issue for consideration. Time allowance for culture teaching is also a serious issue for teachers as lessons are already overloaded. However, if teachers know how to skillfully incorporate language and culture in language teaching in a flexible way, they will solve the problem easily and make their lessons even more interesting and effective (Ho, 2009).

4. Methodology

4.1. Aim and research questions

The aim of this quantitative study was to find out the position of target culture awareness in the EFL classroom in the Greek state school by examining teachers' views, teaching options and attitudes towards language and culture integration, and by investigating school factors that may be constraints. To this end, the following four research questions were formulated:

1. To what extent are EFL teachers aware of the target culture?
2. How often do teachers use materials and activities related to the target culture in their EFL classes?
3. What school factors affect the frequency of culture-related activities or may be constraints, which hinder language and culture integration?
4. What do EFL teachers think about the importance of integrating culture into FL learning and its benefits?

4.2. The research tool: a questionnaire

The questionnaire was written in English, developed upon the main aim and the four research questions of this study and divided into four main sections accordingly (see the appendix).

Section A consisted of three questions, asking teachers to rate the extent to which they have developed their own target culture awareness so far and whether they think they need to develop it further. The degree was measured by the adjective phrases 'not at all aware', 'slightly aware', 'somewhat aware', 'moderately aware' and 'extremely aware', and by the adverbial phrases 'not at all', 'slightly', 'moderately', 'much' and 'to a great extent'.

Section B consisted of five questions to explore the extent to which culture is integrated into the EFL classroom by the school teachers, the curriculum and textbooks or hindered by any school factors. The respondents were asked to rate the frequency of their teaching options related to the target culture by choosing from the adverbs 'never', 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'often' and 'always'. They were also asked to rate the degree to which school factors enhance or hinder language and culture integration. The adverbial phrases used were 'not at all', 'slightly', 'moderately', 'much' and 'to a great extent'. In this section, there was also a straightforward 'key' question to the topic of the present study by asking the participating teachers directly whether culture is a neglected component in the EFL classroom at school. It was measured by the adjective phrases 'not at all neglected', 'slightly neglected', 'somewhat neglected', 'very neglected' and 'extremely neglected'.

Section C included three questions investigating teachers' attitude towards the importance and benefits of language and culture integration by asking them a 'yes-no' question, a question of degree measured by the adjective phrases 'not at all important', 'slightly important', 'somewhat important', 'very important' and 'extremely important' and another question of degree measuring culture and language integration benefits. Finally, in section D there were background questions about the respondents' gender, age, professional qualifications, current teaching situation and years of teaching experience.

4.3. Participants of the study

The respondents were in-service teachers of English in public education at primary and secondary level. Altogether 100 questionnaires were collected either by e-mail or by contact, in seminars organized by the school advisor. In this sense, it was convenience sampling. At the same time, even if it was beyond the scope of this project to survey what is officially called a representative sample of the population mainly for practical reasons, it seems that a varied sample in terms of age, qualifications, years of teaching experience and current teaching situation eventually contributed to the research.

More specifically, the sample consisted of 90 female and 10 male teachers of English reflecting more or less the percentage of in-service school English teachers regarding gender. Concerning age, there were 32 teachers aged between 22-30 years old, 47 aged between 31-40, 14 respondents 41-50 years old and only 7 participants over 50 years old. Only 13 out of 100 hold a Master's in TESOL/TEFL/Applied Linguistics, while 7 out of 100 hold other Master's degrees (in translation, literature, etc). As for their current teaching situation, 61 participants work in Primary Education and 39 in Secondary Education. The respondents' years of teaching experience vary significantly as 28 out of 100 have taught

English for 0-5 years, 35 for 6-10 years, 16 for 11-15 years and 21 out of 100 for over 16 years.

5. Findings

5.1. *EFL teachers' cultural awareness*

79 out of 100 teachers have got specific cultural experiences of the target culture, either by travelling or studying abroad, joining Erasmus exchange programs or communicating with native English speakers, reading books, etc. The most popular answer to the relevant question was tourism/travelling (69 references) and studies abroad (19 references). However, 21 teachers state that they lack any target culture experience. Moreover, only 13 teachers feel extremely aware of the target culture whereas 53 out of 100 feel moderately aware, 27 somewhat aware and 7 slightly aware of the target culture. When asked if they think they need to develop further awareness of the target culture, 16 participants answer to a great extent, 33 out of 100 much, 40 moderately and 11 slightly.

5.2. *Integrating culture into the EFL classroom at school*

According to the survey findings (Table 1), 47 out of 100 participating teachers claim that they sometimes use authentic reading texts related to British literature/poetry/magazines and about 40% of the respondents sometimes use authentic audiovisual material or projects on target culture topics (traditions, art, food, habits, etc). 94% of the respondents have never organized any cultural trip to Britain, 87% have never joined intercultural exchanges with schools abroad through European programs, 88% have never invited native speakers and only 26% have rarely encouraged learners' e-mail correspondence with native English speakers. 39% often use culture-related activities in their classroom such as watching foreign films, role play, simulation tasks, etc and only 15% often use internet technology to collect target culture information. Finally, only 13% of the participating teachers *always* decorate their classrooms with culture- related posters, photos, maps, etc.

In addition, according to the findings (see questions 5 & 6), 52 out of 100 teachers answer that the EFL curriculum moderately helps to enhance learners' target culture awareness and 23 participants answer slightly. Similarly, 55 respondents answer that school EFL textbooks moderately help enhance learners' target culture awareness but 24 teachers answer much.

Regarding constraints due to specific school factors which may hinder language and culture integration (Table 2), the majority of respondents (35%) consider that time allowance for culture teaching in the EFL classroom is a constraint to a great extent, 33% consider that the existing audiovisual material at schools is another constraint to a great extent and 72% consider that the system of EFL education at state schools itself restricts much-to a great extent language and culture integration, while 36% choose much regarding the factor of teachers' target culture knowledge.

Finally, 41 teachers consider that culture is very neglected and 50 out of 100 answer that culture is somewhat neglected in the EFL classroom (question 8).

5.3. EFL teachers' attitude towards language and culture integration

53% of the respondents consider that culture and language integration is very important and 37% answer that it is extremely important to integrate culture into EFL learning. Moreover, almost all respondents (96%) believe that target culture awareness can enhance EFL learning. In particular, as regards language and culture integration benefits (Table 3), 52% of the respondents think that language and culture integration can help promote intercultural awareness, understanding, respect and tolerance to a great extent. 39% consider that another benefit is that it can help improve learners' communication skills to a great extent while at the same time 36% believe that it can also increase learners' EFL learning motivation to a great extent.

<i>Teaching options</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Authentic audiovisual material (e.g. British music / songs / dancing / films)	1	12	41	35	11
Authentic reading texts (e.g. British literature / poetry / newspaper / magazine articles / tourist guide leaflets)	4	27	47	18	4
Projects on target culture topics (e.g. British traditions / lifestyle / geography / history / art / food / clothing / climate / festivals / family life / leisure activities)	11	15	40	27	7
Organizing cultural excursions / trips to the target country (e.g. Comenius program)	94	3	2	1	0
Culture-based activities (e.g. extensive reading, listening to foreign music, watching foreign films, role-play/simulation tasks, games / story telling)	4	12	39	39	6
Decorating classrooms with cultural images of the target culture (e.g. posters, photos, maps, cards, etc)	8	25	32	22	13
Intercultural exchanges with schools abroad (e.g. e-twinning, comenius program)	87	9	4	0	0
Inviting guest native speakers of English to your school	88	8	4	0	0
Using Internet technology in the classroom (e.g. surfing into target cultural sites to collect information)	22	36	24	15	3
Learners' e-mail correspondence with native English speakers	66	26	3	5	0
TOTAL NUMBER	100 Respondents				

Table 1: "How often do you use the following teaching options in order to integrate culture into your ELT practice?"

<i>School factors</i>	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Slightly</i>	<i>Moderately</i>	<i>Much</i>	<i>To a great extent</i>
Time allowance for culture teaching in each lesson	5	12	16	32	35
The existent audiovisual material at your school (e.g. available DVDs, CDs, etc)	5	14	11	37	33
School equipment (e.g. CD/DVD players, computers, library, internet access, labs)	2	19	19	32	28
The system of EFL education itself at state schools	5	8	15	42	30
The availability of native English speakers	11	21	17	29	22
EFL teachers' target culture knowledge	5	23	28	36	8
TOTAL NUMBER	100 Respondents				

Table 2: To what extent do you think the following school factors may be constraints which hinder language and culture integration in the EFL classroom?

<i>Culture & Language Integration Benefits</i>	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Slightly</i>	<i>Moderately</i>	<i>Much</i>	<i>To a great extent</i>
Understanding the linguistic patterns of the target culture at a more conscious level	0	4	23	44	29
Understanding the behavioural patterns of the native culture at a more conscious level	1	6	27	48	18
Improving learners' EFL communication skills	0	4	12	45	39
Increasing learners' EFL learning motivation	0	3	14	47	36
Developing awareness of the potential mistakes that might come up in comprehension and communication	0	8	26	37	29
Promoting intercultural awareness, understanding, respect and tolerance	0	4	7	37	52
TOTAL NUMBER	100 Respondents				

Table 3: "To what extent do you think culture and language integration in the EFL classroom can produce the following benefits?"

6. Discussion and implications

Although culture constitutes an integrative part of language and teaching culture is clearly stressed as significant by the majority of participating teachers, EFL teachers seem to be inadequately aware of the target culture, that is why a considerable number of them feel that they need to further develop their target culture awareness. In other words, clearly, teachers view themselves as cultural mediators who need to pay attention to intercultural awareness by developing in their learners unbiased attitudes towards their own culture and the target culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

Additionally, it seems that target culture teaching remains insubstantial and sporadic in the Greek state school according to the survey findings above. This is also the case in other countries as recorded in prior researches carried out in China, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Mao (2009) argues that the fifth skill of intercultural awareness is not at all mentioned at any EFL classes in Chinese schools. Culture is taught purposefully only at places of higher education like Chinese colleges and universities (Mao, 2009). Mohammad's study (2004) reveals that the place of culture in the Iranian EFL high school levels is limited not only in depth of cultural information, but also in the range of the culture depicted. While Mekheimer (2011) underlines the fact that the current state of EFL learning practices promote the subjective resistance to the target language culture in Saudi Arabia by refusing to teach many of the interconnected socio-cultural features of English'.

More specifically, the present study shows that the majority of teachers rarely incorporate activities with a cultural focus (cultural excursions, intercultural exchanges, role-play, etc) or use culture-related materials (authentic readings, music, literature, etc) in their classroom in the Greek state school. School factors which seem to be constraints are invariably the lack of time, the inadequate audiovisual material or equipment, the imperfect target culture knowledge of EFL teachers and the system of EFL education itself in state schools as well (Mao, 2009; Mekheimer, 2011). Moreover, it seems that the school curriculum and textbooks overlook the conclusions drawn in relevant studies and neglect the essential information about the target culture that could help learners reach a cultural understanding to accompany and expand their linguistic knowledge (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Similar deficiencies are also reported by Reimann (2009) in his survey about the cultural content of EFL learning in Japanese schools where there is a tendency to focus primarily on language structures and avoid the inclusion of any target culture context or cultural information.

However, it can be stated that there was explicit agreement among the participants as to the usefulness and general educational value of target culture awareness through culture and language integration in EFL learning. The majority of them recognize a great deal of benefits associated with language and culture integration such as understanding the linguistic and behavioural patterns of the target culture at a more conscious level, improving learners' communication skills, increasing learners' learning motivation, promoting intercultural awareness, etc. Referring to the Turkish context, Önalán (2005) also reports teachers' positive attitudes towards incorporating cultural information in their instruction by highlighting that in FL learning learners need cultural information for better communication.

As becomes apparent, a major implication here is that it is essential to provide Greek learners with a thorough and systematic intercultural training starting from the culture of the main English-speaking countries first (United Kingdom, United States of America). EFL learners will benefit by gaining solid knowledge of the different world cultures. They will also develop the ability to compare Greek culture to the target culture or other cultures, to

evaluate critically and interpret the results of such comparisons, and to apply this knowledge successfully in both verbal and non-verbal communication, for both transactional and interactional purposes (Citron, 1995; Hadley, 1993). In other words, as Byram (1989) puts forward, it is essential to create in the Greek learners' empathy toward the culture of the target language community, which will help an appreciation of other cultures as well. Robinson (1985) was also one of the first in the field of FL education to argue that target culture should be viewed as a process, a way of perceiving, interpreting, feeling, understanding. This perspective views culture as part of the process of living and being in the world, the part that is necessary for making and understanding meaning.

Moreover, as Ho (2009) maintains, systematic intercultural training is a pre-condition for educating a new generation of young people who will not only tolerate, but also understand, accept, and respect people from different world cultures, will communicate with them successfully, and will learn from them through that communication. Intercultural training is emphatically stated in both the Unified Curriculum for the Foreign Languages (EPS-XG Curriculum) and the Cross-thematic Curriculum Framework for Modern Foreign Languages which aim to develop Greek learners' awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity/pluralism (multilingualism and multiculturalism). Therefore, the impact of Byram's model of the intercultural communication theory on the development of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which serves as the basis for FL education today, is non-negligible (Byram, 2009).

7. Suggestions for future action

Survey findings show that despite the growing emphasis on EFL learning in Greece over the last two decades, there is still a long way to go into the very core of teaching cultural knowledge in the Greek state schools.

In particular, despite the fact that culture is widely accepted to be such an important element for EFL classrooms by the respondents, most language teachers have never received any formal input or education as to how to teach culture and how to increase their learners' awareness of the target culture in their lessons. This fact obviously reveals a weakness of the English language university departments that could be eliminated by offering compulsory or elective target culture courses to the EFL teacher candidates. In other words, language teachers' awareness of how to be culturally responsive must be increased during their university education. Without the knowledge of the target language culture, one cannot fully make use of that particular language for communicative purposes. In order to teach foreign cultures, as Dai (2011) points out, FL teachers should use a variety of methods, activities and materials (stories, pictures, films and songs) after being appropriately and adequately educated first. To this end, additionally, EFL teachers' in-service training could include seminars about how to use different methods to help learners to overcome the difficulties in language learning as well as culture learning. In order to educate interculturally-competent EFL teachers provided with sufficient amount of cultural knowledge, culture should be addressed much more extensively in in-service teacher education programs (Karabinar & Guler, 2012). This is also supported by Richards, Tung and Ng's (1992) study, according to which language teachers mostly benefit from attending seminars and best teachers are believed to be the ones who attend professional training on a regular basis. Therefore, teachers' professional confidence and empowerment need to be fostered as it is not easy to teach culture knowledge.

A future survey could also elicit ways or suggestions focusing on how to apply culture in an EFL classroom in the Greek state school. For instance, the use of culture-reflecting technology in EFL classes and other effective teaching materials and practices related to the target language culture through appropriate in-class activities and outside class assignments could help towards creating a beneficial language and culture integration context (Chisholm & Wetzel, 1997; Collis, Vingerhoets & Moonen, 1997). For example, web-based instruction through e-mail correspondence, WWW links and resources related to the cultural themes taught in class can prove to be useful pedagogical tools towards raising learners' target culture awareness. Similarly, Berwald (1986) points out that the use of mass-media in classroom environment is advantageous in terms of creating cultural awareness and a wide range of available topics and vocabulary.

In addition, a systematic evaluation of the existing textbooks towards a more target culture-related curriculum development by syllabus designers could also lead to a more culture-oriented decision-making approach regarding FL education in order to strengthen the input and guidance of cultural awareness (Zhao, 2010). According to Ur (1996), learners should be able to cope with the same kinds of reading that are encountered by native speakers of the target language. Therefore, the cultural impact and pedagogical use of authentic materials is considered to be of paramount importance and should be included in the materials taught or recommended by the Ministry of Education.

Last but not least, joining European programs and intercultural exchanges should be further encouraged and emphasized as it could help induce positive attitudes towards the FL and its native speakers. For example, in Turkey, language teachers' main strategy is to integrate culture teaching into their language classes by encouraging their learners to attend international exchange programs, such as Erasmus (Karabinar & Guler, 2012). To this effect, more opportunities for teachers to travel and study abroad such as teacher mobility programs should also be regularly provided and further promoted.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the position of target culture awareness in the EFL classroom in the Greek state school based on the assumption that teaching English well means more than merely teaching Greek learners its vocabulary, structures and grammar. It also means teaching them how to slip into the English culture without their foreignness exposed. Learners should be informed about how native speakers of English see the world and how the English language reflects the ideas, customs, and behaviour of their society. In other words, only with the combination of language competence and cultural awareness can language achieve its communicative function. Findings show that the participating teachers have realized the great impact target culture has on language and the inevitability of culture in teaching methodology. Thus, it is necessary that target culture awareness should be given more attention in the Greek state school in order to help Greek learners communicate with target language speakers and other foreigners efficiently. Last but not least, a shift from a traditional to intercultural stance in EFL learning can enhance learners' awareness of the inextricable and interdependent relationship between language and culture. It can also help to develop teachers' intercultural perspectives that may have an impact on their language teaching methodology and course design. This shift is a challenge that EFL teachers and Greek learners have to deal with to meet the goals of FL education in our modern and globalized world.

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Appendix

The questionnaire: The position of target culture awareness in the EFL classroom

A) EFL Teachers' Cultural Awareness:

1. Have you got any specific cultural experiences of the target culture?				
Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>				
If yes, put a X to those of the following experiences which are true for you:				
Studies abroad <input type="checkbox"/>	Tourism/Travelling <input type="checkbox"/>	Erasmus Programs <input type="checkbox"/>	Exchange <input type="checkbox"/>	Other. Please, specify: <input type="checkbox"/>
2. To what extent do you think you have developed awareness of the target culture?				
Not at all aware <input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly aware <input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat aware <input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately aware <input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely aware <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do you think you need to develop further awareness of the target culture?				
Not at all <input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly <input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately <input type="checkbox"/>	Much <input type="checkbox"/>	To a great extent <input type="checkbox"/>

B) Integrating Culture into EFL Classroom at School:

4. How often do you use the following teaching options in order to integrate culture into your ELT practice? Put the appropriate number which is true for you in the degree column according to the relevant scale:

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----
 Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

	TEACHING OPTIONS	Degree		
1	Authentic audiovisual material (e.g. British music / songs / dancing / films)			
2	Authentic reading texts (e.g. British literature / poetry / newspaper / magazine articles / tourist guide leaflets)			
3	Projects on target culture issues (e.g. British traditions / lifestyle / geography / history / art / food / clothing / climate / festivals / family life / leisure activities)			
4	Organizing cultural excursions / trips to the target country (e.g. Comenius program)			
5	Culture-based activities (e.g. extensive reading, listening to foreign music, watching foreign films, role-play /simulation tasks, games / story telling)			
6	Decorating classrooms with cultural images of the target culture (e.g. posters, maps, photos, cards, etc)			
7	Intercultural exchanges with schools abroad (e.g. e-twinning, Comenius)			
8	Inviting guest native speakers of English to your school			
9	Using Internet technology in the classroom (e.g. surfing into target cultural sites to collect information)			
10	Learners' e-mail correspondence with native English speakers			
5. To what extent does EFL curriculum help to enhance learners' target culture awareness at school?				
Not at all <input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly <input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately <input type="checkbox"/>	Much <input type="checkbox"/>	To a great extent <input type="checkbox"/>

				<input type="checkbox"/>
6. To what extent do school EFL textbooks help to enhance learners' target culture awareness?				
Not at all <input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly <input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately <input type="checkbox"/>	Much <input type="checkbox"/>	To a great extent <input type="checkbox"/>

7. To what extent do you think the following school factors may be constraints which hinder language and culture integration in the EFL classroom? Put the appropriate number which is true for you in the degree column according to the relevant scale:

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----
 Not at all Slightly Moderately Much To a great extent

	SCHOOL FACTORS	Degree
1	Time allowance for culture teaching in each lesson	
2	The existent audiovisual material at your school (e.g. available DVDs, CDs, etc)	
3	School equipment (e.g. CD/DVD players, computers, library, internet access, labs)	
4	The system of EFL education itself at state schools	
5	The availability of native English speakers	
6	EFL teachers' target culture knowledge	

8. To what extent do you think culture is a neglected component in the EFL classroom at school?				
Not at all neglected <input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly neglected <input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat neglected <input type="checkbox"/>	Very neglected <input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely neglected <input type="checkbox"/>

C) EFL Teachers' Attitude towards Language & Culture Integration:

9. To what extent do you think it is important to integrate culture into EFL learning?				
Not at all important <input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly important <input type="checkbox"/>	Somewhat important <input type="checkbox"/>	Very important <input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely important <input type="checkbox"/>

10. Do you think that learners' cultural awareness can enhance EFL learning?	
Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

11. To what extent do you think culture and language integration in the EFL classroom may produce the following benefits? Put the number you will choose in the degree column according to the relevant scale:

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----
 Not at all Slightly Moderately Much To a great extent

	Culture & Language Integration Benefits	Degree
1	Understanding the linguistic patterns of the target culture at a more conscious level	
2	Understanding the behavioural patterns of the native culture at a more conscious level	
3	Improving learners' EFL communication skills	

4	Increasing learners' EFL learning motivation	
5	Developing awareness of the potential mistakes that might come up in comprehension and communication	
6	Promoting intercultural awareness, understanding, respect and tolerance	

D) Personal Data:

Gender

Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Female <input type="checkbox"/>
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Age

22-30 <input type="checkbox"/>	31-40 <input type="checkbox"/>	41-50 <input type="checkbox"/>	Over 50 <input type="checkbox"/>
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Professional Qualifications

BA in English Language & Literature <input type="checkbox"/>	MA in TESOL/TEFL/Applied Linguistics <input type="checkbox"/>
Other <input type="checkbox"/> Please, specify:	

Current Teaching Situation

Primary Education <input type="checkbox"/>	Secondary Education <input type="checkbox"/>
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Years of Teaching Experience

0-5 <input type="checkbox"/>	6-10 <input type="checkbox"/>	11-15 <input type="checkbox"/>	16+ <input type="checkbox"/>
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