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Seeking Traces of Interculturality in a Language Teacher Education Program: A Case from Türkiye



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Abstract

In accordance with the shift in focus towards a culturally varied world, foreign language education curricula in most contexts have been revised integrating elements of interculturality. Yet, it remains unknown how successful these modifications are in achieving culturally decentralized and varied language education (R'boul & Saidi, 2023). Especially in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region where such research is scarce, it is essential to understand whether language teachers are trained in line with critical intercultural education, as these teachers will definitely be teaching in more culturally varied settings in the near future. Türkiye is no exception to this, and language teacher education curricula have been recently modified providing more space for intercultural communicative education. Considering these changes, the aim of the current study is to examine interculturality in field-specific elective courses offered in English Language Teaching (ELT) programs at a state university in Istanbul. A critical thematic analysis of culture-related courses is employed, following the two-step analysis offered in Lawless and Chen (2018). The analysis produces evidence demonstrating that interculturality is insufficiently embedded in the ELT curriculum, where it appears scattered across field-specific electives without systematic organization and within a narrowly confined scope. In brief, the study indicates that the specific ELT curriculum under investigation falls short of supporting culturally diverse language teacher training.

Keywords: Intercultural communicative competence, intercultural communication education, English language teaching, MENA

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Language teaching is inseparable from culture since language both reflects and constructs cultural meanings (Kramsch, 2004; 2013; 2014). Such an understanding provides an important impetus for treating the language classroom as a context where learners and teachers explore the construction of meaning from an intercultural perspective (Hicham et al., 2025; Liu, 2024; Permatasari, 2023). This means that learners are not only expected to master grammar and vocabulary but also to consider what it means to use languages effectively and appropriately across diverse cultural contexts (Baker, 2011; Byram, 1997; 2021). Byram's (1997/2021) model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) advocates that language learners need to acquire "knowledge, attitudes, skills of discovery and interaction, skills of interpreting and relating, and critical cultural awareness" (p. 73). This latter notion of "critical cultural awareness" requires engaging with different values that underpin behavior and helping learners and teachers become able to articulate cultural perspectives. Among all other language driven competencies, this represents a humanistic understanding that foreign language education offers the possibility of "the personal development of the individual through empathetic understanding of other countries, people and their languages", thereby foregrounding ICC's "empathetic" nature (Byram et al., 2013, p. 251). Hence, addressing ICC helps EFL users, both learners and teachers, develop the ability to understand cultural differences, manage potential misunderstandings, and engage in meaningful interactions with speakers from various backgrounds.

In the context of ELT, the importance of integrating intercultural learning goals into the curriculum has come to be recognized internationally (see chapters in McConachy, forthcoming 2026). However, this has also raised various issues as to what 'intercultural' should mean exactly, given that the English language itself is now a global language spoken by individuals from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Baker, 2018; Holliday, 2009). In fact, many scholars now argue that the notion of 'interculturality' is a better fit for the fluid and processual nature of meaning making and understanding in intercultural interaction (e.g. Dervin & Gross, 2016). Intercultural interaction is not a process where individuals enact 'culture' in any kind of simplistic, pre-programmed way. Rather, it is a highly dynamic process in which cultural knowledge and normative understandings of communicative behavior are interactionally established and negotiated. Thus, scholars have argued that to foster ICC in language classes, there is a need to move away from teaching approaches centered on Anglophone culture (e.g. the US and UK) to raise learners' awareness of diverse and fluid norms of language use and the importance of learners expressing their own identities through English (Baker & Fang, 2023). More specifically, native speaker norms (usually British and American English) are treated as ideal and linguistic correctness is defined relative to these norms. Yet, research suggests that ideologies such as native speakerism make it difficult for teachers to move beyond the limits of 'standard English' and to embrace a dynamic understanding of cultural diversity associated with the English language. Against such a backdrop, there is much interest as to how teacher education itself may need to change to develop teachers' ICC and more effectively equip them with knowledge, skills, and attitudes to approach intercultural learning in their classrooms in a more nuanced way.

Teachers' ICC is particularly significant since teachers function as linguistic and cultural mediators in the classroom. Their cultural sensitivity directly influences how effectively they integrate intercultural perspectives into teaching materials, classroom practices, and learner engagement (Kohler, 2015; Lid-dicoat, 2022; Sercu & Bandura, 2005; Tolosa et al., 2018). In order for foreign language teachers to effectively promote intercultural learning in their own classes, they should be aware of ICC and ways to foster it in their specific contexts. Sercu (2006) argues that "teachers should know their own culture well and possess culture-general knowledge that can help them to explain similarities and differences between cultures to learners" (p. 57). Scholars have also argued that teachers need to be sensitive to stereotypes that students might have, such as who is a legitimate speaker of English and how cultures relate to the English language (Fang & Elyas, 2021). Hence, foreign language teacher competencies

are highly significant in the sense that they are a major determinant of the extent to which intercultural learning can be enacted in language classrooms in a way that represents the diversity of cultural influences on the English language and helps challenge native speakerism (R'boul, 2021). Thus, it is important that the design and implementation of language teaching curricula at universities be constantly evaluated and renewed in line with current trends in intercultural communication education (ICE), where there is increasing recognition of the need to challenge native speakerist understandings of language and culture and recognize that diverse cultural norms and values are inherent to intercultural communication through English (Baker, 2018).

ICE in the MENA and Türkiye

In addition to factors such as globalization and advancements in technology, the increase in the number of multilingual speakers all over the world has generated increased awareness of the importance of intercultural communication in the MENA region. Scholars in this region have noted that understandings of intercultural communication informing pedagogical practices in language education in this region are predominantly rooted in perspectives from the Western world. These understandings have largely been shaped by Western-oriented positivist and monolithic models of interculturality (Holliday & MacDonald, 2020), thereby perpetuating “colonial like” power relations (Saidi, 2025). Thus, there have been calls for ICE to be reconceptualized through a critical and decolonial lens in order to allow for ontological and epistemological assumptions about intercultural communication to be challenged and to move beyond “Euro-American frameworks” (R'boul, 2023; Saidi, 2025). Such critical perspectives on Anglophone dominance have made inroads in recent scholarship in the region (e.g. Bayyurt & Yalçın, 2022; R'boul & Saidi, 2023; Saidi, 2025). Saidi (2025) argues that “[s]ituating ICE within the critical turn allows us to recognize how the teaching of intercultural education in the Global South might reflect the Western-centric conceptualisations of the intercultural” (p. 174).

Reviewing previous studies in the MENA region, R'boul (2021) summarizes the need to recognize the potential for ideologies such as native speakerism to marginalize teachers' and learners' local identities and reinforce unequal power relations. Thus, it is important to exercise closer scrutiny of imbalanced power relations in the MENA region since it faces a different set of challenges in implementing ICC and/or ICE in comparison to Euro/Western countries. Furthermore, according to R'boul and Saidi (2023), “the underlying premise is that ICE is not about ensuring the smooth functioning of intercultural relations using a foreign language, but rather readdressing the complicated narratives conditioned by inequalities and imbalances with regard to language, perspectives, and ontologies” (p. 2). Hence, ICE serves the function of naming unequal power relations along with adding to critical and emphatic intercultural awareness.

To this end, some studies have focused on interculturality and related courses and their contribution to critical ICE in the MENA. For instance, R'boul and Saidi (2023) examined culture-related EFL courses at a Moroccan university through a critical thematic analysis and concluded, “interculturality becomes an end in itself, reproducing dominant narratives of traditional intercultural pedagogy” (p. 1186). Saba'Ayon et al. (2024) investigated Lebanese teachers' and learners' perceptions of interculturality and identified tensions between local, regional, and Anglophone paradigms (i.e. those of British and American English). They further highlighted the need for more critical and context-sensitive interculturality. In a very similar study conducted in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Mekheimer and Fageeh (2024) showed that there were curricular, ideological, and policy-based constraints that limited critical engagement with Anglophone dominance. To sum up, these studies investigating interculturality in the MENA region underscore the dominance of Anglophone paradigms (i.e. those of British and American English) and are calling for integration of critical intercultural pedagogy in EFL programs.

Even though many English language teachers would agree that ICC and/or ICE should become an indispensable part of EFL teacher education programs along with English language classes, ICE courses are predominantly offered as optional or supplementary courses in many contexts (Çopur, 2021; Dervin et al., 2020; Gedik Bal & Savaş, 2020; Mede & Güneş, 2021), including ELT curricula in Türkiye. Many studies conducted with EFL professionals including lecturers, professors, and pre-service teachers from almost all levels in Türkiye have indicated that while they were aware of ICE most of them either did not feel competent to integrate it into their courses or do not have flexibility to do so due to busy schedules, etc. (e.g. Atay, 2005; Bektaş-Çetinkaya, 2014; Duisembekova, 2021; Kılıç, 2013; Önalın, 2005).

In addition to teacher-based research, some program evaluation studies in Türkiye stress that ICC and/or ICE courses are needed as part of ELT curricula (Bayyurt, 2013; Coşgun-Ögeyik, 2009). Furthermore, in his review of ELT programs in Türkiye, Karakaş (2012) reports that “[c]ulture-specific courses should be offered since it [culture] forms an essential part of teachers’ knowledge base” (p. 10). In a more recent study, Duisembekova (2020) criticizes the fact that ELT programs in Türkiye lack ICC and/or ICE components while the majority of compulsory courses are geared towards language teaching methodologies. Furthermore, more research is needed because there is a dearth of data on how ICC-related courses affect preservice EFL teachers’ intercultural awareness in Türkiye (Bayyurt, 2013). To this end, a thorough analysis of elective ICC and/or ICE courses within critical intercultural education in language teacher training programs is required to consider whether they fulfil their mission in the sparse ICE landscape in Türkiye.

As discussed above, many scholars within and beyond MENA now argue that a critical perspective on interculturality and closely related concepts such as ICC and ICE is crucial in EFL teacher training. Considering this and the scarcity of research in the Turkish context, the current study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What aspects of interculturality are addressed in culture-related, field-specific elective courses offered in the English language teaching curriculum at a state university in Türkiye?
- 2) Which ideologies dominate these courses in the English language teaching curriculum at a state university in Türkiye?

Methodology

Study Design

This study is designed as a critical thematic analysis of a pre-determined case as described in Lawless and Chen (2018). Within the boundaries of qualitative studies, Braun and Clarke (2006) define a wide range of principles for thematic analysis “including familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for the themes, and reviewing” the themes in a cyclical fashion (p. 87). They advise researchers that this version of thematic analysis should be regarded as a “flexible” tool free from restrictions of any theoretical bounds. This provides adjustability and has multiplied the number of studies employing this approach. Lawless and Chen (2018) argue that critical theory can also be integrated into qualitative inquiries. Thus, they propose critical thematic analysis stating that there is a need for “a systematic process for analyzing everyday qualitative data with critical agendas” (Lawless & Chen, 2018, p. 97). More specifically, a set of “critical” questions is forefronted to guide critical thematic analysis. These are as follows:

How are everyday discourses enabled and constrained by social systems, dominant ideologies, and power relations? How do macro- and micro-level discourses, practices,

and systems intersect and reproduce dominations and oppressions? How can individual subjects become aware of dominant ideologies and work toward challenging them and promoting social justices? (Lawless & Chen, 2018, p. 97)

For the purposes of the current study, ICE-oriented elective courses in an ELT department at a state university in Türkiye were analyzed via critical thematic analysis with the help of the questions above. In particular, course materials including syllabi, books, and learning outcomes (as described by the course instructors in course descriptions) were all available online and were evaluated following the principles of critical thematic analysis.

Context

An ELT program at a state university in Istanbul, Türkiye, was selected as the research context, with considerations of practicality serving as the primary rationale for this choice. In this program, among field-specific electives (i.e. options within specializations), only three courses address culture and culture-related topics. They are provided as alternative options and are planned to be offered in each semester. However, only one or two of them have actually been offered in each semester for various reasons such as busy course schedules and lack of staff qualified to teach them. A thorough evaluation of these elective courses via a critical thematic analysis was considered essential in determining whether/how they serve the purpose of training culturally aware EFL teachers in this particular context in Türkiye.

In Türkiye, the curricula of Foreign Language Education Departments were originally provided by the Council of Higher Education, as were those of many other university departments, in order to achieve greater success in meeting national and international needs and expectations. Since 2013, universities have been provided with guidelines compatible with the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Türkiye (Council of Higher Education, 2025). The latest revision of these guidelines for ELT curricula was put into effect in 2018 and aimed to increase the weighting of elective courses over compulsory courses to equip pre-service teachers with a wide range of competences of their own choosing. To briefly summarize more recent developments, since 2020 all departments in Faculties of Education in Türkiye have been granted permission to revise and design their own programs. However, while some departments changed their programs to a great extent not all modified their curricula: some continued to follow the 2018 guidelines. Therefore, to gain an overall understanding of ICE in ELT programs, the 2018 version of ELT curricula, which was widely accepted and implemented, will be examined for the purposes of the current study. Our chosen study site uses this version of the curriculum.

The curriculum covers two sets of courses: compulsory and elective courses (see Table 1, below). The former consists of both non-credit courses such as “Turkish Language”, “Principles of Atatürk and History of Modern Turkey” and for-credit ones such as “Linguistics”, “Approaches to English language teaching”, “Educational Psychology”, and “Literature”. The majority of courses in the curriculum belong to the compulsory category because it aims to equip prospective EFL teachers with the required set of skills and competencies. On the other hand, elective courses are divided into three sub-categories one of which is field-specific. This sub-category includes courses treating the intersections of ELT with various subjects such as applied linguistics. Instructors are free to determine the content of field-electives and design the course however they want. English is the medium of instruction for these field-specific electives and related course materials are provided in English. The entire list of field-specific electives includes 15 courses with different specializations: “Corporate Translation in International Organizations”; “Social Media Networks and Translation Movements”; “Language and Society”; “World Englishes and Culture”; “Pragmatics and Language Teaching”; “English Textbook

Evaluation”; “Drama in English Language Teaching”; “Materials Development in English Language Teaching”; “New Approaches in Teaching English Language”; “Vocabulary Teaching in English”; “English in Mass Communication”; “Classroom-based Assessment of Learning”; “Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching”; “Discourse Analysis and Language Teaching”; “Teaching Integrated Language Skills”.

Table 1 *ELT Curriculum in Türkiye (version 2018)*

ELT Curriculum	Compulsory	Non-credit	Turkish Language Principles of Atatürk History of Modern Türkiye <i>Liberal/General Education</i> e.g. Information Technology, Foreign Languages <i>Professional Education</i> e.g. Philosophy of Education, Psychology of Education, Classroom Management, Special Education and Inclusion <i>Field-specific Education</i> e.g. Reading Skills, Linguistics, Literature, Approaches to Teaching and Learning English, Teaching Language Skills, Practicum
		For-credit	
	Elective	<i>Liberal/General Education</i> e.g. Intelligence and Mind Games, Art and Aesthetics, Nutrition and Health, Turkish Folk Dance <i>Professional Education</i> e.g. Curriculum Development in Education, Critical and Analytical Thinking, Drama in Education <i>Field-specific Education</i> e.g. Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching, Language and Society, World Englishes and Culture, Vocabulary Teaching in English	

Since the above are not all ICC-related courses, the following selection criteria were applied to choose the courses to be evaluated in this study. First, the course had to be on offer for at least one semester in the academic year. This excluded, for example, “English in Mass Communication” which was not available to preservice EFL teachers on a regular basis. The second criterion related to specific themes of culture and society: if one of these themes appeared in the course name then it was included. This necessitated the inclusion of “World Englishes and Culture” and “Language and Society”. Lastly, allusions to culture in the course description were the third criterion, which resulted in the inclusion of “Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching”. While checking the course descriptions for compliance with the third criterion, the concept of “context” was found to appear very frequently especially in the courses “Pragmatics and Language Teaching” and “Discourse Analysis and Language Teaching”. However, the notion of context was purposefully disregarded since the scope of the study would diverge from ICC to a broader set of discussions. In brief, the first criterion (availability) was a must while courses had to meet either the second or the third criterion. When these criteria were employed, “World Englishes and Culture”, “Language and Society”, and “Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching” were selected for the critical thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Although much research employing critical thematic analysis applies it to discursive texts such as narratives, Lawless and Chen (2018) indicate that this method could also be exploited in evaluating

“systems” because “a critical approach is necessary to understand the social construction of these shared realities, the influence of power, and the perpetuation of domination” (p.103). Hence, the three field-specific elective courses in the ELT curriculum identified above, “World Englishes and Culture”, “Language and Society”, and “Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching”, were examined in line with the procedures suggested by critical thematic analysis.

The researcher initially gathered materials (i.e. course materials, course objectives, learning outcomes, syllabi, etc.) from online course descriptions (bologna.yildiz.edu.tr). All of these were available online and listed under predetermined subheadings on the same webpage. While this site provides information in both Turkish and English, the materials collected were in English. At the initial stage, another set of criteria was utilized: any references to the course content, the target skills, the competencies, and the keywords such as ICC, culture, and society were identified and accepted as a part of the data set to be scrutinized. This necessitated the inclusion of sections such as the course content, course objectives, recommended or required readings, weekly subjects and related preparation studies. Other sections such as the program outcome matrix, the assessment regime, and the ECTS (i.e. European Credit Transfer System) workload table were excluded because they were predominantly numerical data regarding the workload of instructors and students.

Two types of coding were used, open and closed. The former requires researchers to immerse themselves in data as profoundly as possible by engaging in repeated reading and coding in order to identify emergent themes. In closed coding, researchers relate themes to already existing social theories taking a more distanced perspective and deducing how themes function. For the purposes of the current study, recent perspectives such as “the monolithic view” and “critical intercultural pedagogy” were revisited in the second phase, that of closed coding. The following questions were used to find themes and related ideologies.

Step 1: Open Coding: What is repeated, recurrent, and forceful in these texts?

Step 2: Closed Coding: What ideologies, positions of power, or status hierarchies are recurring, repeated, and forceful? (Lawless and Chen, 2018, p. 98)

Findings and Discussion

Prior to delving into findings, a brief introduction to these courses is provided to explain their structure: the course content and objectives for each are described below.

“World Englishes and Culture”: The course objective is as follows: “Introducing world Englishes and culture” and the course content is described as: “The use of English as an international language, English as a lingua franca and familiarizing different uses of English as an international language; reflections on English teaching and teacher education; developing students’ awareness of the relationship between language and culture and examining the place of culture in Language Teaching; textbooks, literary works, films, TV evaluation of cultural elements by examining materials such as programs and advertisements” (<http://www.bologna.yildiz.edu.tr/index.php?r=course/view&id=10266&aid=21&pid=96>). As is obvious from these descriptions, this course centres on English and varieties of English. Since this variation is triggered by culture and culture-related themes such as power relations, this course was assumed to provide an abundance of evidence for the research questions.

“Language and Society”: The course objective is “To examine the relationship between language and society”. The course content is described as follows: “Basic concepts and terms in the context of language-society relation; geographical and social differences in linguistic communities; the relationship between social strata and linguistic communities; changes in language; language and culture; language

planning” (<http://www.bologna.yildiz.edu.tr/index.php?r=course/view&id=10266&aid=21&pid=96>). Unlike “World Englishes and Culture”, the English language is not foregrounded in the course description. Instead, “language” is taken as a generic term and its relation to society is highlighted irrespective of any specific linguistic bounds. For the purposes of the current study, direct references to culture and language in use such as linguistic communities and language planning are areas to be explored.

“Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching”: The course objective is “To introduce ways to benefit from Sociolinguistics in Language Teaching”. The course content is described as follows: “This course aims to introduce interfaces between language and society; the key concepts in sociolinguistics and to discuss varieties in foreign language use in reference to distinct cultural factors” (<http://www.bologna.yildiz.edu.tr/index.php?r=course/view&id=10266&aid=21&pid=96>). As clearly explained, this course specifically focuses on sociolinguistics, a study of the relation between language and society and its implications for language teaching. Similarly to “Language and Society”, no direct references to any specific language such as English is made. Yet, most of the discussion unsurprisingly relies on English examples. The first reason for this is that, like all other field-specific electives the medium of this course is English. Secondly, this course is offered in an ELT program which aims to train English language teachers.

Following the steps described in critical thematic analysis, the course objectives and the content descriptions for the three courses were examined carefully. In order to enrich the data pool, various data sources were used, including weekly course schedules. Table 2 below exemplifies one set of data analyzed in accordance with the premises of critical thematic analysis.

Table 2 *Weekly Schedules for the Culture-related Elective Courses in the ELT Curriculum*

Week	World Englishes and Culture	Language and Society	Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching
1	Introduction: Why World Englishes?	Introduction	Introduction
2	Historical Context: English, imperialism, and globalization	The beginnings of language development	Introduction to Sociolinguistics
3	English in the past, today, and tomorrow	Dialogue and language development	Sociolinguistics in English Language Teaching
4	Internationalization: Standards of English	Language and regional variations: Dialects and accents	Language and Society
5	English as a Lingua Franca	Language and ethnicity	Language and Identity
6	Pidgin, creole and dialect	Language and subcultures	Language and Gender
7	The effect of language on society	Language and situation	Language and Variety
8	Midterm 1 / Practice or Review	Midterm 1	Midterm 1
9	British Culture	Practice or Review	Language and Interaction
10	American Culture	Language and gender	Ethnographies
11	Analyzing texts for defining English culture	Linguistic diversity and the speech community	Language and Culture
12	Analyzing Englishes in TV series, news, and literary texts	Language and social interaction	Language Policy
13	Providing samples of World Englishes	Language and representation	Language Planning
14	Linguistic Analysis of World Englishes	Revision	Revision
15	Final Exam	Final Exam	Final Exam

The analysis of data, including course objectives, titles featured in the reading list (i.e. only the name of the materials was analyzed rather than their content), syllabi, and the learning outcomes forefronted two themes: 1) traces of Anglophone paradigms (i.e. those of British and American English) and 2) a diversity of descriptions of culture. While the former echoes a common phenomenon highlighted in many other studies on the culture and language interface, the latter signals confusion concerning how to operationally define the construct of culture. More specifically, a divergent list of lexical items is formulated to refer to similar conceptions.

Dominant Pedagogical Narratives

Data analysis revealed traces of Anglophone paradigms (i.e. those of British and American English) embedded in instructors' material and content choices across data sources. To illustrate, all course books and recommended readings for these three courses are either British- or American- based. One possible reason for their choice might be the easy access to these materials on the market. Yet, considering local products are far cheaper most of the time due to exchange rates, instructors' preferences might reveal their preconceptions as to "good materials" for their learners. Another concern might be that of keeping up with mainstream trends in EFL education worldwide. Even though they are aware of decentralized course materials, instructors might feel that preferring these would cause their students to be disadvantaged in the international arena of EFL teachers. Conversely, suggesting that all British and American based publications cited in the syllabi inevitably promote monolithic views of English constitutes another form of oversimplification. Therefore, conclusions should be drawn with caution, considering each document on its own merits.

On the other hand, instructors could have incorporated both centralized resources (i.e., those oriented towards Britain or the USA) and decentralized ones (i.e., materials representing other varieties of English) in order to challenge residual monolithic perspectives. This, however, was not reflected in the course materials and content examined in the present study. Irrespective of speculations as to instructors' preferences, the critical thematic analysis revealed that course materials are under the influence of Anglophone paradigms (i.e. those of British and American English), which has been echoed in many other studies investigating the appropriateness of English coursebooks in EFL settings in Türkiye (Atar & Erdem, 2020; Bayyurt et al., 2023).

Another set of evidence for the Anglophone influence comes from weekly schedules. As indicated in Table 2, in the early weeks of the World Englishes and Culture course, a wide range of topics such as World Englishes, historical discussions of imperialism and globalization, and English as a Lingua Franca might be taken as an attempt to integrate a critical perspective. However, once the course shifts to specific examples, we can see the pervasiveness of traditional hierarchies. The course devotes one week to 'British' and one week to 'American' cultures. Furthermore, these two themes precede the themes, 'Analyzing Englishes in TV' and 'Providing samples of World Englishes'. Thus, although the name and the aim of the course forefronts World Englishes, the actual sequencing of content appears to privilege British and American cultures, as they are implicitly positioned as prerequisite topics before examples of World Englishes can be covered. It could be argued that this reflects native speakerist ideologies which regard Anglophone varieties of English as the most prestigious (R'Boul, 2021). Even though the course content is deliberately oriented toward World Englishes and related concepts, it cannot be fully disentangled from the broader, implicit hierarchies that position certain varieties of languages as more legitimate or prestigious than others.

In brief, critical thematic analyses of the data collected and scrutinized for the purposes of the current study revealed that British and American Englishes prevail in the content of these field-specific elective courses despite the references to varieties and different cultural elements. Although the dominance

of English can be expected within this ELT program, a stronger connection to the ICC and/or ICE literature could be preferred to foster critical interculturality. The connection becomes apparent through the relatively limited references to ICC and/or ICE in the data, most notably in discussions that involve negotiating multiple and diverse definitions of culture.

A Diversity of Descriptions for Culture: Variety, Identity, Society

The critical thematic analysis revealed that the concept of culture occurs in several parts of the English language teaching curriculum with diverse conceptualizations. Culture is the most frequently emerging key word in all data sets. Yet, in some sections it is used interchangeably with related themes such as society. For instance, in “Language and Society”, one of the course objectives was stated as follows: “to explain the relationship between language and culture/society”. Suggesting that these two terms are alternatives ignores underlying differences between the two.

The other most recurrent key terms employed along with culture are “variety and variations”, “identity”, “community”, “gender”, “dialects”, and “diversity” (in decreasing order of frequency). All these concepts are linked to culture in one way or the other. Terms such as “variety”, “dialects”, and “diversity” emphasize differences in cultural dispositions whereas “community” and “society” point to a shared set of beliefs. More precisely, culture seems to be conceptualized via references to its several components. There is no structured account that guides the English language teaching curriculum in defining culture. That is, there is no one clear definition and/or framework accounting for how language and society interact with one another. Instead, miscellaneous references to divergent aspects of culture seem to be scattered throughout. Monceri (2022) emphasized that ICE studies are predominantly “inter-disciplinary” and supported by data driven from various disciplines, from a sociology to psychology. Hence, given the abundance of thinking from distinct sources, English language teaching practitioners might be disoriented in defining and referencing ICE.

From a wider perspective, this finding is crucial because the same confusion reflected in various uses of similar notions might make it difficult to teachers to come to a clear understanding of culture for pedagogical purposes. The fact that these courses are offered in the form of field-specific electives potentially adds to the confusion since not every pre-service teacher in the program takes all these courses due to quota restrictions and the availability of other field-specific electives. For instance, one student might take only “World Englishes and Culture”, whereas another might enroll in two or three of these electives. Thus, their awareness of key constructs underpinning ICE will be confined to the type of course(s) that they take, which means that each course needs to offer clear definitions and guidance relevant to EFL contexts.

Finally, neither ICC nor ICE is mentioned in the data even though a number of culture-related key terms are repeated in these elective courses. This suggests that the scope of these courses was planned as covering divergent descriptions of culture and related themes, excluding ICE from the rest. Despite the lack of explicit citation, interculturality is expected to be at the nexus of culture and society driven discussions in ELT curricula. However, three field-specific electives having been thoroughly scrutinized, it was seen that the English language dominates course content and materials while a diversity of definitions for culture reveal confusion about concepts that are similar but not identical. Just like many other teacher education programs worldwide, the one under investigation imparts theoretical knowledge but does not effectively help teachers bridge theory and practice.

Conclusion and Implications

As established at the start of this paper, training interculturally aware and competent EFL teachers is of increasing importance worldwide, including in the MENA region (R’boul & Saidi, 2023; Üzümlü et al.,

2020). As underscored by Bayyurt and Yalçın (2022), the successful implementation of ICE in Türkiye hinges on the training of interculturally sensitive future teachers of English. Considering these factors, the current study has reported on a critical thematic inquiry into the curriculum of an EFL teacher education program in Türkiye. The study showed that the content of courses appeared to privilege US and UK varieties of English over others. Furthermore, three field-specific electives under investigation indicated the coexistence of multiple definitions of culture while the course contents and materials embody a constrained conception of interculturality. Finally, it has been observed that course contents and materials do not show any traces of critical intercultural pedagogy in the ELT curriculum. Rather, there seems to be confusion as to how to define the intertwined relationship between second language acquisition and culture. As a whole, the study suggests that interculturality is insufficiently embedded in the ELT curriculum, where it appears scattered across field-specific electives without systematic organization and within a narrowly confined scope. Thus, preservice EFL teachers in this context have limited options to attain culture-related awareness and competencies unless instructors address intercultural concepts and themes in courses other than these electives.

This study is not without its limitations. Although critical thematic analysis provided a comprehensive review of target courses, the findings were drawn from course materials only. It is important to keep in mind that course design does not necessarily represent the totality of the enacted curriculum. It is possible that real-life practices might differ since these materials function as guides and they are proposals, providing space for instructors to modify the content in the way they wish to make changes. The reality of teaching and learning could have been captured more comprehensively through interviews or stimulated recall protocols. It would be useful for future research to take such an angle in order to understand how teachers work with and beyond the course descriptions.

Looking forward, it is important for English language teacher education in Türkiye to take on board insights from recent critical scholarship. From a critical vantagepoint, there are two fundamental functions associated with ICE in the MENA context: identifying uneven power relations and building a strong, critical intercultural awareness. There is already evidence of attempts to accommodate intercultural competencies to raise pre-service EFL teachers' awareness in a university context in Türkiye. For instance, Üzümlü et al. (2020) reported that weekly online discussions through telecollaboration enabled Turkish pre-service EFL teachers to raise "nascent critical cultural awareness" and "curiosity and willingness to learn more about the other culture" (p. 162). These attempts should be enhanced even further to take on board the ambitions articulated by R'boul and Saidi (2023):

we aspire to draw educators' attention to the importance of designing culture-based courses along polycultural resources in order to shun the archaic and hegemonic conceptualisations of intercultural awareness and relations. This teaching outcome would only be attainable if these courses are interculturally-laden and if teachers' understandings of interculturality are anti-essentialist and are poly-cultural/civilizational (p. 16).

This means challenging ideologies such as native speakerism and the hierarchies of languages and cultures that such ideologies support. As expressed by Fang and Elyas (2021), English language teacher education needs to challenge notions of Anglophone dominance (i.e. British and American English) and help pre-service EFL teachers exercise critical judgment in relation to 'whose' voices, perspectives, and standards are represented in the curriculum.

Bio

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