

REVIEW ARTICLE

# A Systematic Review of Integrating Culture into Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

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## ABSTRACT

Culture has become an indispensable element in foreign language teaching. This paper intends to systematically review the existing research on culture teaching or integrating culture in foreign language teaching. 30 studies in the field of culture teaching and learning published in the last five years were reviewed systematically. The review followed the PRISMA Statement's guidelines, and the included studies were analyzed and synthesized with seven codes, intending to investigate the latest areas of discussion in the literature of culture teaching in foreign language teaching and learning, the stakeholders' attitudes towards culture teaching in foreign language teaching and learning, pedagogical methods used to teach culture in foreign language classrooms, the effect of culture teaching practice, as well as the research gaps derived from the analysis. In light of this information, recommendations for future research were proposed.

**Keywords:** Culture teaching; Culture Learning; Foreign language teaching

## 1. Introduction

In foreign language teaching, the four fundamental linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing were once highly valued. However, the element of culture was long neglected in language

teaching (Altun, 2019). In the last three decades, with globalization now affecting every country and cross-cultural exchange increasing across various fields, there has been a growing emphasis on teaching culture as part of foreign language learning (Tseng,

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2019) due to the emergence of communicative language teaching, which interprets the relationship between language and culture (Altun, 2019). The close link between language and culture makes cultural learning an important means of improving basic language skills and intercultural communicative competence.

The significance of teaching culture in foreign language teaching and learning has prompted educators to make various attempts to incorporate it into their teaching practices. Consequently, studies have been conducted to address questions like “what to learn?” “how to learn it?” and “what is the effect”, etc. (Qian and Garner, 2019). Despite the extensive research in this field, it is important to periodically evaluate existing knowledge and encourage further inquiry due to the rapidly evolving methodologies. However, most of the existing review articles follow the method of narrative reviews, lacking a comprehensive and in-depth synthesis and analysis systematic analysis (e.g. Qian and Garner, 2019; Tseng, 2019; Ramirez et al., 2018).

Additionally, most of the existing review articles focus on fundamental concepts and issues, such as defining culture and related terms like cultural variation and cross-cultural communication, as well as the significance of teaching culture. For instance, Qian and Garner (2019) reviewed the definition of culture and culture learning, highlighting a gradual transmission of pedagogical theory and practice in China. As noted by the authors, the issue of cultural teaching in foreign language teaching or learning has not been thoroughly explored in a systematic manner, with insufficient synthesis of perceptions, practices and strategies on cultural teaching. The only review of cultural teaching practices based on empirical literature was published in 2009 (see Young et al., 2009), which only selected articles from 1993 to 2007. Therefore, there is a need for a systematic review of recent studies on culture teaching in foreign language teaching or learning to identify knowledge gaps and unresolved issues and help to determine the focus and direction of research, guide subsequent research to fill knowledge gaps and

promotes the development of the subject area.

Therefore, this SLR(systematic literature review) is prompted by a major research question: What research has been conducted on culture teaching in foreign language teaching or learning between January 2018 and December 2022? The main purpose of the SLR is to review existing studies on teaching culture in foreign language teaching and learning between 2018 and 2022, in order to gain an up-to-date conclusion of research trends and gaps in this area. With the seven codes obtained from other review articles, namely (1) research methodologies, (2) educational levels, (3) target languages, (4) culture types, (5) pedagogical approaches, (6) themes, and (7) research findings, this study aims to explore the issue from the following aspects:

RQ1: What are the latest areas of discussion in the literature of culture teaching in FL teaching and learning?

RQ2: What are the stakeholders’ attitudes towards culture teaching in FL teaching and learning?

RQ3: Is teachers’ perception on culture teaching consistent with their practice?

RQ4: What pedagogical methods were used to teach culture in FL classroom?

RQ5: What is the effect of culture teaching practice?

RQ6: What are the research gaps and recommendation for further study in FL teaching and learning?

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Language and culture**

Although language and culture are distinct concepts studied in different fields (e.g. linguistics for language and sociology for culture), they are closely interwoven and inseparable. Neither can exist without the other (Brown, 1994; Kramsch, 1993; Liu, 2019). Many scholars consider culture to be the “fifth skill” alongside the four basic skills (Condrat, 2019). Oxford and Gkonou (2018) compare the relationship between culture and language to “a tightly woven tapestry, rich with vibrant colors, shadows, and highlights”.

Language is the most visible and available

expression of culture (Brown, 1986). Human language reflects and expresses cultural reality, including facts, practices, values, and beliefs (Kramersch, 1998). It is through language that culture can be transmitted from one generation to the next (Jiang, 2010). Language serves as the carrier of culture, allowing people to describe, interpret, interact, and practice within their culture (Moran, 2001). Furthermore, language, whether verbal or non-verbal, conveys meaning and reflects cultural reality (Kramersch, 1993). As Liu (2019) argues, culture is constructed through language, as the structure of a language shapes and influences the worldview of its speakers. Furthermore, language plays a crucial role in our social interactions (Kramersch, 1993). Our worldview is shaped through the exchange of meaning within cultural and social contexts (Wardhaugh, 2002). Language also holds cultural value, allowing individuals to distinguish their cultural and social identities. Without it, there would be no diversity in the expression of the same meaning across different languages (Kramersch, 1993).

However, it is important to note that culture plays a significant role in shaping language. Lantolf (1999) notes that one thing in a language may not refer to the same thing designated with a corresponding expression in another language. Kramersch (1993) argues that context is an important part of meaning and that the meaning of language depends on the situation and context in which it is used. Context is a reflection of culture, and people in different cultures may have different understandings and reactions to the same context. Therefore, understanding context must take into account the influence of cultural factors and understand the contextual rules and communicative habits of different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is clear that the complex relationship between culture and language means that foreign language teaching and learning cannot be separated from culture.

## **2.2 Intercultural communicative competence**

Byram (2000) introduced the concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as a combination of intercultural competence and communicative

competence. ICC refers to the complex abilities required to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals who differ linguistically and culturally from oneself. Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) also emphasize the importance of mutual understanding among individuals with different identities. To become intercultural competent, foreign language learners must acquire certain affective, behavioral, and cognitive abilities (Byram, 2006).

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) represents the pinnacle objective of language learning (Tran, 2020). The primary objective of language learning is to effectively communicate in the target language. Intercultural communicative competence enables learners to communicate more effectively with both native and non-native speakers. This involves not only using the language correctly but also understanding and adapting to the communication styles and habits of different cultures. Intercultural communicative competence necessitates learners to comprehend not only the lexicon and syntax of the language, but also the cultural implications and pragmatic norms that underlie the language. Therefore, the incorporation of culture into language education is a response to the concept of “intercultural communicative competence” (Ho, 2009).

## **3. Methodology**

The study employed a systematic literature review as its research method. SLR is a rigorous process of reviewing existing literature that allows researchers to thoroughly investigate the literature, leading to the development of new theories, examination of new hypotheses, identification of research gaps, and more (Xiao and Watson, 2019). This systematic literature review aims to evaluate existing studies on teaching culture in foreign language teaching between 2018 and 2022, in order to identify current trends and research gaps in this area.

### **3.1 Search strategy**

This systematic literature review follows the

instruction of the PRISMA 2020 Statement, which provides support for the conduct and report of systematic literature review (Page, et al., 2021). The Statement consists of a 27-item checklist and a four-phase flow diagram. This SLR follows the four phases mentioned in the Statement, i.e. identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, and adheres to the item requirements of the checklist.

### 3.2 Databases

This paper reviews literature on culture teaching in foreign language teaching and learning published in peer-reviewed journals from 2018 to 2022. To find relevant articles, four databases were searched: Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar (GS), Scopus, and China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). The search began with the European database ERIC, which specializes in collecting educational literature, as the reviewing objectives fall within the area of education. However, due to its limited number of articles, two larger databases, GS and Scopus, were also used. In a study by Martín-Martín et al. (2019) comparing the citation counts of GS, Web of Science (WoS), and Scopus, GS has significantly higher citation counts (93% – 96%) across all areas, compared to Scopus (35% – 77%) and WoS (27% – 73%). In the field of foreign language learning, GS had the highest citation count (96.6%), followed by Scopus (18.9%) and WoS (13.2%). GS covered 88% of the citations from Scopus and 91% from WoS (Martín-Martín et al., 2019). This indicates that GS is a larger database with significant overlap with Scopus and WoS, ensuring comprehensive data collection. The research team included the Chinese database CNKI to avoid bias towards reviewing only English articles and to ensure that the findings of this review can be useful for future studies related to culture teaching in EFL in a Chinese context. CNKI is a major national project established in 1996, covering prestigious academic journals in all disciplines (Qian and Garner, 2019).

### 3.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Once the databases were settled and researched, we determined the criteria for including or excluding articles to narrow down the literature in order to further narrow down the literature. Selected articles had to meet all the inclusion criteria, while articles that met any of the exclusion criteria were excluded. An article was included if (1) the setting is foreign language learning or teaching at different levels, i.e. the target language of instruction is a foreign language; (2) it is a journal article or an unpublished doctoral thesis; (3) it is published in English or Chinese; (4) the publication period is between 2018 and 2022; (5) it is a study with empirical data; (6) it is named/titled/described as integrating culture (of a nation or ethnic group) in foreign language teaching or learning. Conversely, articles were excluded based on the following conditions: (1) it is published in the form of a book, book chapter, conference paper or review article; (2) it is a document analysis of policy research; (3) it is a master's thesis; (4) the target language of instruction is a second language or one of the official languages of the majority of the population; (5) the term “culture” referred to is not the culture of a nation or ethnic group, e.g. “pop culture”.

### 3.4 The systematic review process

The SLR process starts with the identification of keywords to find potentially relevant studies. These studies were then screened and assessed for eligibility according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Finally, the remaining studies were included in the review (see **Figure 1**).

The first step was to decide on the keywords to be used in the search. The keywords were generated according to the research questions and relevant studies, and then expanded into longer and more precise search strings by adding synonyms and abbreviations. Different strings were tested, refined and selected by examining the resulting article lists to ensure that the results were credible. Due to the different search mechanisms of different databases,

the exact search strings varied slightly. For example, because of the huge collection capacity of GS and the full-text search mechanism, which would yield many irrelevant studies, a title search was conducted with the following string: (allintitle: culture “language teaching” OR “foreign language teaching” OR EFL OR “foreign language learning” OR ELT). On the other hand, as Scopus offers an advanced title-abstract-keyword search, the following string was used: (TITLE-ABS-KEY (culture) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“language teaching” OR “foreign language teaching” OR EFL OR “foreign language learning” OR ELT) ) and the result is limited to the field of “SOC” and “ARTS”. In total, the keyword search initially yielded 2465 studies, 80 from Eric, 854 from Scopus, 676 from GS and 855 from CNKI. After removing duplicates, 2292 references remained.

The studies initially yielded were screened in steps. Firstly, the titles and abstracts of the references were read to screen out irrelevant ones. A total of 259 studies were deemed relevant to the research questions. During the process, a special research topic emerged: the analysis of the representation of culture in foreign language textbooks. While foreign language textbooks are indeed a significant research subject, they entail a distinct research framework that is separate from the broader scope of this study. However, analyzing them alone cannot answer the research questions of this study. Accordingly, they need to be reviewed independently. Including them in this review does not reflect the overall situation of cultural teaching in foreign language learning or teaching. Therefore, the analysis of the representation of culture in foreign language textbooks was considered for exclusion criteria. This can be reviewed independently in future studies. After adding this criterion, 212 studies were identified as initial data. A full-text inspection was then conducted using the inclusion and exclusion criteria, resulting in the selection of 59 eligible articles. Finally, a quality evaluation was conducted to ensure that the collection of references is of high quality. The selected articles must have clear, feasible, and appropriate methodology, as well as

adequate and reliable evidence. After this step, a final sample of 30 studies remained for inclusion, all of which are in English. As a result, none of the Chinese-language articles that were sourced from CNKI satisfied the inclusion requirements.

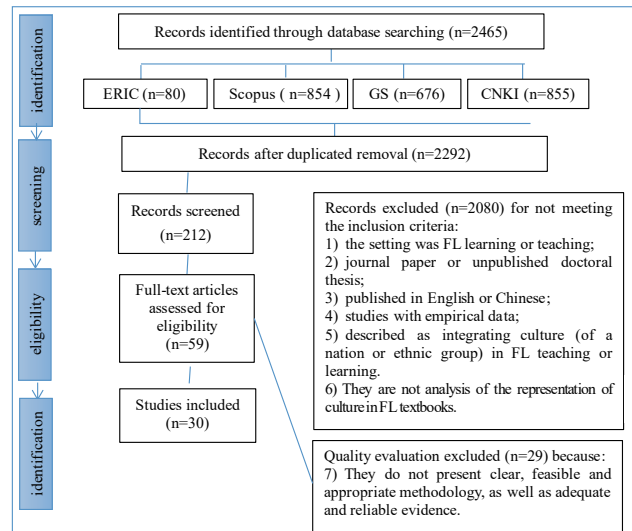


Figure 1. The PRISMA flow diagram of the literature search and review process.

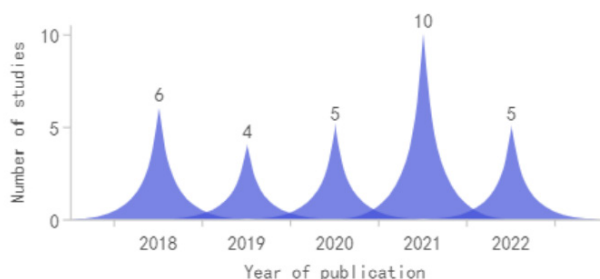
### 3.5 Data abstraction and analysis

To achieve a systematic review of the retrieved references and address the research objective of understanding current research trends in culture teaching for foreign language learning or teaching, the remaining studies after screening were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Initially, an overview was conducted to capture the basic characteristics of these studies, including the authors’ names, titles, years of publication, and contextual countries. Then the studies are further analyzed topic-wise based on seven codes: (1) research methodologies, (2) educational levels, (3) target languages, (4) culture types, (5) pedagogical approaches, (6) themes, and (7) research findings. The authors aimed to explore the research questions proposed in the introduction section by qualitatively analyzing the studies in these seven aspects.

## 4. Findings

This section reports the results and discussion

of the SLR. An overview of the studies included in the SLR is provided in **Figure 2** and **Table 1** with detailed presentation of the basic characteristics and eight codes related to the research questions.



**Figure 2.** Distribution by year of publication.

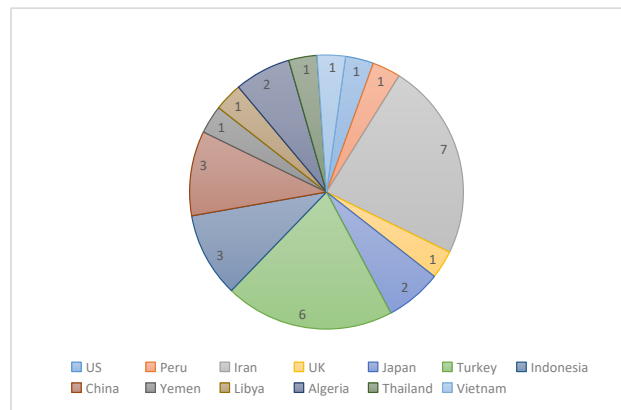
**Table 1.** Distribution by level of education.

Level of Education	Number of Studies
tertiary	20
secondary	8
Not mentioned	2

#### 4.1 Quantitative overview of studies on culture teaching in FLT

A quantitative analysis was done to illustrate the distribution of the geographic region (**Figure 3**), year of publication (**Figure 2**) and education level (**Table 1**) of the reviewed literature. As illustrated in Figure 1, during the 5-year period, the number of studies on cultural teaching in FLT shows no declining trend. Although cultural teaching has entered FLT since the second half of the last century, the interest in its research has not disappeared over time, which also shows the importance of cultural teaching in FLT and the profound implications for its research, and there are still research gaps left for further study. In addition, from the perspective of regional distribution (see **Figure 3**), these studies are mainly located in Asia, among which Iran and Turkey are particularly prominent. The reason why cultural teaching is highly concerned in Asia is partly because English is regarded as an international language in these countries and is widely used in international communication. Furthermore, in certain Asian countries, “English language teaching

has always been treated as a socio-cultural issue” (Esmat Babaii, 2022); thus educational authorities endeavored to reform the educational policy, leading to increased attention and research on cultural teaching in these countries.



**Figure 3.** Distribution by geographical region.

Regarding the education level of the studies, the majority are at tertiary level (n = 20), the rest are mainly at secondary level (n = 8), 2 studies do not mention the educational level. (see **Table 1**) While none of the studies involve primary education. This shows the popularity of English in higher education and the importance of cultural teaching at this stage.

#### 4.2. Areas of discussion

The latest areas of discussion are identified through the coming of research themes. A descriptive code was developed for each of the themes emerging from the reviewed studies. Then, color coding was applied to categorize the generated themes. All themes are analyzed comparatively to ensure accuracy and relevance of descriptions. The color-coded themes then underwent an iterative process of coding and were grouped again. Finally, all the 30 studies are mapped into 5 major research themes (see **Table 2**), i.e. a. perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of culture teaching (PABCT) (n = 9); b. effect of the culture teaching programs, activities, approach, projects, materials, and techniques (ECT) (n = 11); c. teachers’ perception-practice correspondence regarding culture teaching (TPPC) (n = 8); d. practice of culture teaching (PCT) (n = 5); e. culture

syllabus (CS) (n = 1). 4 of these studies involve two research themes of culture teaching and learning. Obviously, research on the perceptions/ attitudes/ beliefs of culture teaching as well as its effectiveness have become mainstream in the field of cultural teaching and learning. Overall, the related literature emphasizes cognition, instructional practices, and methodologies in culture teaching and learning

### **4.3. Stakeholders' cognition of culture teaching and learning**

In the 30 studies, altogether 17 of them investigated stakeholders' cognition of culture teaching and learning (see **Table 2**). However, their emphases are not the same, therefore, they are divided into two categories—perceptions/ attitudes/ beliefs of culture teaching (PABCT), teachers' perception-practice correspondence regarding culture teaching (TPPC).

The stakeholders involved in these studies include teachers, students and parents, among whom teachers become the major concern as they are the direct practitioners of culture teaching in foreign language teaching and learning. Table 2 shows that the majority of stakeholders have positive attitudes and perceptions towards the integration of culture in language learning. however, only three studies indicate the presence of negative or divergent interpretations of culture teaching among varying respondents. (Baltaci and Tanis, 2018; Punar, N., and Karatepe, 2019; Civeleki and Toplu, 2021).

As practitioners of foreign language teaching, teachers generally have a positive attitude towards integrating culture into language teaching. Many of these studies first investigated their understanding of culture. In his study of the pre-service and in-service teachers' perceptions of culture teaching, Baltaci and Tanis (2018) found that the crucial role of culture in language learning was accepted by the majority of the respondents. The same conclusion was confirmed by the similar investigation from different context. (e.g. Khilafat and Reddy, 2022; ÖZDİL and Debreli, 2021; Estaji and Savarabadi, 2020; Ahmed et al. 2019; Novita and Purwati, 2021; Çankaya, 2018) Teachers believed that they consider that the foreign

language learning includes language skills, patterns, rules, and target culture (Novita and Purwati, 2021). Rohmani and Andriyanti (2022) reported the similar beliefs and attitudes to culture teaching of both state and private junior high school English teachers in Indonesia, which is different from the study of Civeleki and Toplu (2021) whose result indicated that private school EFL teachers in Turkey had more positive opinions about culture teaching than public school EFL teachers. Most of the studies on students' perceptions also showed agreement on integrating culture into language learning; however, one outstanding opinion should be payed attention to is that the main goal in presenting cultural elements in language learning should be to develop cultural awareness towards other cultures and different groups of people (Belli, 2018), which indicates the intercultural turn in culture teaching.

The reason of their considering culture teaching to be significant in foreign language teaching and learning is seen as “facilitating engagement, communication and broadening learners' perspectives” (ÖZDİL and Debreli, 2021), “developing learners' proficiency in English, their openness and tolerance towards English people as well as enhancing their critical thinking and their understanding of their cultural identity” (Ahmed et al. 2019).

Furthermore, the understanding of culture is a crucial element guiding teachers on what and how to teach about culture. In Baltaci and Tanis' (2018) research, the pre-service and in-service teachers were asked to define culture, according to them culture was generally “the customs, traditions and institutions of a country as well as characteristics of home life, family nature and interpersonal relations”, but there was no commonly agreed understanding, which would cause difficulty in the decision of what culture to learn. In another research, teachers also revealed some features of culture, and they believed that “culture is multifaceted, and culture learning is experiential, negotiable, deliberate” (Mohamed, 2020), which is very enlightened and advanced, and will guide their practice in culture teaching. For most of studied and the teachers investigated, cultural teaching was

Table 2. Research matrix.

Author	Methodology	Target Language	Type of Culture	Theme	Pedagogical Approach/ Material/ Program/ Techniques/ Activities	Findings
Mohamed (2020)	case study (MM)	/	C2	PABCT/ECT	a language program with culture teaching project hours	POS/NFE
Baltaci and Tanis	survey (MM)	English	/	PABCT	/	DIF/CHA
Khilafat and Reddy	survey (MM)	English	C2	PABCT	/	POS
Belli	survey (QUAN)	English	C2	PABCT	/	POS
Estaji and Savarabadi	case study (MM)	English	/	PABCT	/	POS
Punar, N., and Karatepe	survey (MM)	English	C2	PABCT	/	DIF/NEG
Christopher	survey (QUAN)	English	C2	ECT	IcLL	EFF
Yang	case study (MM)	English	/	ECT	CLIL culture course	EFF
Diep et al.	quasi-experimental (QUAN)	English	C2	ECT	Culture-Based Instructional Materials	EFF
Sheridan et al.	quasi-experimental (QUAN)	English	C1 vs. C2	ECT	culturally familiar materials as assignment	EFF
Namaziandost et al. (2021)	quasi-experimental (QUAN)	English	C1 vs. C2	ECT	culture instruction based on different cultures	EFF
Menacho-Vargas et al.	quasi-experimental (QUAN)	English	C2	ECT	culturally-based conversations	EFF
Razavi and Gilakjani	quasi-experimental (QUAN)	English	C2	ECT	cultural and social concepts of the reading passages	EFF
Namaziandost et al. (2018)	quasi-experimental (QUAN)	English	C1, C2, International Target Culture	ECT	culture-based listening instruction	EFF
Gao et al.	quasi-experimental (QUAN)	English	C2	ECT	Virtual reality	INF
Wang	quasi-experimental (MM)	Chinese/Spanish	C2/C1	ECT	Reflection Prompt--connecting one's own culture to reflect on cultural topics	EFF
Rasouli and Moradkhani	case study (MM)	English	C2	TPPC	/	POS/INC/CHA
Peng	case study (MM)	English	C1 & C2	TPPC	/	POS/INC/CHA
Mumandar	case study (QUAL)	English	/	TPPC	/	POS/CON
ÖZDİL and Debreli	case study (QUAL)	English	/	TPPC	/	INC/CHA
Ahmed et al.	survey (QUAN)	English	C2	TPPC	/	POS/INC
Novita and Purwati	survey (QUAN)	English	/	TPPC	/	POS/INC
Rohmani and Andriyanti	survey (MM)	English	C2	TPPC	/	POS/CON
Çankaya	survey (QUAN)	/	/	TPPC	/	POS/INC
Civeleki and Toplu	survey (MM)	English	/	PABCT/PCT/	/	DIF/CHA
Estaji and Rahimi	survey (MM)	English	/	PABCT/PCT/	/	POS
Lien and Hoa	survey (MM)	English	/	PABCT/PCT/	/	POS/CHA
Al-Jamal and Zennou	case study (QUAL)	English	/	PCT	/	ACT/CHA
Pattaraworathum	case study (QUAL)	English	/	PCT	/	ACT
Khattalal and Mebarki	case study (MM)	English	/	CS	/	CHA/INF

Note: PABCT = perceptions/attitudes/beliefs of culture teaching; ECT = effect of the culture teaching programs/ activities/ approach/ projects/ materials/ techniques; TPPC = teachers' perception-practice correspondence regarding culture teaching; PCT = practice of culture teaching; CS = culture syllabus; POS= positive attitudes/ perceptions; NFE = not fully effective; DIF = differences in the perceptions/ practice of stakeholders; CHA = challenges in culture teaching; NEG = Negative attitudes/ perceptions; EFF = effective culture teaching; INF = ineffective culture teaching; INC = in-consistence between perceptions and practice; CON = consistence between perceptions and practice; SIM = similarity in the perceptions/ practice of stakeholders; ACT = actively practice of culture teaching



more about learning the target culture. In Estajia and Savarabadi's (2020) study, the EFL teachers were given an explicit instruction considering English as an International Language (EIL); before the instruction, their understanding of culture teaching mostly involved target culture, while the significance of teaching diverse cultures was ignored.

Though there is consensus on the teaching culture in FL classroom, some different voice also emerged. For instance, Khilafat and Reddy (2022) revealed teachers' concern about the preservation of native culture, because their perception of culture teaching is mainly about the target one. Punar, N., and Karatepe (2019) reported the disparity in parents attitudes towards culture teaching. Some parents recognized the significance of language teaching, however, others did not believe its necessity for language learning. The majority of the the parents thought that "learning about a foreign culture could harm their children's own culture and that they can learn the target language without being exposed to the target culture".

#### **4.4. Consistency between perceptions and practice of culture teaching**

When teachers' cognition of cultural teaching is clarified, an obvious question arises: Is their actual teaching practice consistent with their cognition? In the eight studies addressing teachers' perception-practice correspondence of culture teaching, six of them (i.e. 75%) reported in-consistence between perceptions and practice of culture teaching. Such a high proportion suggests the difficulty of integrating culture into language teaching.

Rasouli and Moradkhani (2021) interviewed Iranian university EFL teachers about the culture teaching techniques. As a result, teachers self-reported using a variety of methods to teach culture. They then conducted on-site observations which suggested teachers' self-report and real practice are inconsistent. In Peng's (2020) study, a majority of teachers expressed their confidence in integrating culture in college English instruction; on the contrary, only a small percentage of them regularly

teach culture in language classes. Munandar (2019) found that EFL teachers in Indonesia were aware of the interrelationship between language and culture and thought some values of English culture are opposite to and harm their own culture. They see themselves as 'cultural guards' to the students. However, there was a belief-practice divergence because seldom explicit discussion of culture was seen in the language classrooms. In Novita's and Purwati's (2021) study, although teachers believed intercultural competence to be crucial in their teaching activity, they did little in textbook adaptation to implement their perception of culture teaching. Çankaya (2018) also showed that teachers had strong agreement on intercultural competence, but culture teaching was at a low level and mostly concentrated on target culture.

The reason for the high rate of in-consistence in perception and practice of culture teaching is the challenges and obstacles teachers encountered in language teaching. First, it is the consequence of the "constraints on institutional policies, learners' religious beliefs, disinterest in the target culture, and low language proficiency, as well as teachers' subjective judgment of local culture" (Rasouli and Moradkhani, 2021). Secondly, teachers' limited cultural knowledge and teaching methodologies can be attributed to a dearth of available in-service training programs (Peng, 2020). Lastly the limited teaching-time, heavy teaching load, and examination-oriented education system also account for the divergence between perceptions and practice of culture teaching (Munandar, 2019).

It is gratifying to note that some studies have found that some teacher groups can effectively integrate culture into language teaching. Rohmani and Andriyanti (2022) investigated teachers' practices, and pointed out that the English teachers in Ngawi, Indonesia had implemented the teaching of culture and incorporated various cultural elements in the process of their teaching in the EFL classes. In Vietnam, a new curriculum of teaching cultural contents during the Covid-19 pandemic might face challenges, but they were mostly overcome by the

high school teachers and gradually improved in their online teaching process (Lien and Hoa, 2022).

#### **4.5. Pedagogical methods of culture teaching**

Among the included literature, there are two types of themes related to cultural teaching methodology, namely the effect of cultural teaching and cultural teaching practices. The researchers classified the cultural teaching methods used in these studies and identified six categories: cultural teaching programs, strategies, approaches, materials, techniques, and activities (see **Table 3**). The most frequently used ones are teaching programs, which are not limited to culture-based language teaching programs (e.g. Menacho-Vargas et al., 2021; Namaziandost et al., 2021; Razavi and Gilakjani, 2020), but also independent culture teaching programs (e.g. Mohamed, 2020; Yang, 2021). It is interesting to see that the teaching objectives of these programs cover all the dimensions of language teaching. For example, Menacho-Vargas et al. (2021) aimed to develop learners' speaking skill through a culturally-based conversation instruction. Namaziandost et al. (2021) saw listening skill enhancement as the objective of a culture-based listening instruction. Razavi and Gilakjani (2020) did a culture-based reading instruction to improve learners' reading skill. Mohamed's (2020) language program including separated culture teaching hours and Yang's (2021) CLIL-based culture course both focus on the intercultural performance, including intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and cultural quotient (CQ).

Culture is perceived as a fifth skill in language learning (Kramersch, 1996; Corbett, 2003; Tomalin, 2008), which broadens the scope of four fundamental linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Corbett, 2003). However, the term "fifth skill" may give teachers and learners the misconception that cultural skill is secondary to the other four skills. During the literature review, the research team observed that many culture teaching practices are geared more towards enhancing linguistic skills rather than cultural competency. "The

ultimate goal of language teaching and learning is to be able to communicate in another language", and every message that humans communicate through language is conveyed in a cultural context (Liddicoat, 2004). Some scholars even regard improving ICC as the ultimate goal of foreign language teaching and learning. (e.g. Zhang, 2012) Therefore, more efforts should be made and more pedagogical methods should be developed and examined for the purpose of enhancing learners' intercultural performance.

Strategies such as comparing and contrasting, and reflective practices, are valuable in designing culture teaching activities. It was reported that synchronous activities gained teachers' preference during the Covid-19 pandemic in online learning (Lien and Hoa, 2022). The role and value of authentic materials in the foreign language learning process have been widely discussed and now are considered to be an undeniable fact, for it can be both stimulating and beneficial for learners (Ellis, 2004). Authentic culture teaching materials can reveal the real world with more information to avoid stereotypes and accept culture differences. Schema theory, however, holds that all prior knowledge is organized into schema or units of knowledge about concepts such as objects, situations, events, sequences, and actions (Rumelhart, 1984). The reader brings these concepts into the printed material in order to understand its meaning, because the text itself has no meaning (Brown and Lee, 2015). Therefore, Sheridan et al. (2019) adapted the culturally unfamiliar materials into culturally familiar materials, though not authentic materials anymore, but can improve students' reading comprehension ability. With the rapid development of science and technology, information technology is also applied to teaching, and teachers report that they use many ICT applications such as Kahoot, Quizzes, Bamboozle, etc. for cultural teaching (Lien and Hoa, 2022).

Though these strategies, materials, activities and techniques are deemed to be beneficial in integrating culture into language teaching, systematic and structured approaches are required to integrate culture into language teaching as a whole. Therefore,

**Table 3.** Classification of pedagogical methodology in culture teaching.

Categories	Pedagogical methodology	Authors	Number
Programs	Language program with culture teaching project hours	Mohamed (2020)	5
	culturally-based conversation instruction	Menacho-Vargas et al. (2021)	
	culture-based listening instruction	Namaziandost et al. (2021)	
	culture-based reading instruction	Razavi and Gilakjani (2020)	
	CLIL-based culture course	Yang (2021)	
Strategy	Compare and contrast	Rasouli and Moradkhani (2021) Lien and Hoa (2022)	2
	Connecting one's own culture to reflect on cultural topics	Wang (2021)	
Approaches	Intercultural language learning (IcLL)	Christopher (2020)	2
	Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)	Yang (2021)	
Materials	Authentic materials	Rasouli and Moradkhani (2021)	3
	Culture-based instructional materials	Diep et al. (2022) Namaziandos et al. (2021)	
	culturally familiar materials as assignment	Sheridan et al. (2019)	
Techniques	ICT application	Lien and Hoa (2022)	2
	Virtual reality	Gao et al. (2021)	
Activities	Code-switching	Rasouli and Moradkhani (2021)	2
	Role play	Rasouli and Moradkhani (2021) Lien and Hoa (2022)	

the approaches of IcLL and CLIL were proposed. As holistic approaches, they are not only developed to improve ICC, but also linguistic skills at the same time.

#### 4.6. Effect of culture teaching practice

As is shown in **Table 2**, most of the findings of the studies about the effect of culture teaching practices indicated success of the pedagogical methods employed. Moreover, a large majority of these studies are designed using quasi-experimental approach, which means a pre- and post test non-equivalent group design. For example, Diep et al. (2022) gave the experimental group culture-based instructional materials, while the control group used the traditional learning materials, and after the treatment, the experimental group outperformed the control group in reading skill. Sheridan et al. (2019) distributed culturally familiar and cultural unfamiliar versions of the articles to two groups of students, and the culture familiar group performed

better in reading comprehension and vocabulary retention. Wang (2021) developed reflection prompts for students to connect one's own culture to reflect on cultural topics. Both the two groups were given the reflection prompts, but only the experimental group was required to associate with their own culture. The experimental group was finally found to outperform the control group in gaining cross-cultural awareness.

Some cultural teaching methods have been proved not to have expected effects. For instance, Gao et al. (2021) adopted the VR technology and developed an application to teaching the Christmas culture. The result showed no significant effect on either knowledge learning, behavior learning, attitude learning, or interaction. Likewise, Mohamed's (2020) language program with culture teaching project hours also failed in that the result showed that the culture teaching project do not fully contributes to the components of IC.

A small portion of studies used case study to

identify the effect of culture teaching practice. For example, Yang (2021) designed a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning)-based culture training course to college students, and surveyed them after the intervention to investigate their improvement in cultural quotient (CQ). The CQ tests reported an great improvement in the learners' CQ, and the interview of the students show their satisfaction with the CLIL course.

## **5. Discussions**

In general, through the classifying and analyzing the literature, we fully acknowledge stakeholders' beliefs about culture teaching in language teaching and the discrepancy in practice, while several research gaps on the integration of culture into language teaching have emerged when we look at the bulk of research on this particular aspect.

### **5.1 Research gaps and recommendation for further study**

First, the large number of studies on the cognition of culture teaching in foreign language teaching and the perception-practice divergence in culture teaching compared with the relatively smaller proportion of studies on other research themes demonstrates that research on stakeholders' cognition on cultural teaching has been too extensive, and the focus of study can be turned to the effect of a specific culture teaching practice. While in the current literature about the effect of the culture teaching, most of the effects examined are around the improvement of learners' linguistic competence, such as reading and writing. The effect of culture teaching on the enhancement of intercultural competence is rarely studied. As Kramersch (2013) stated, cultural integration into language teaching can help learners to better understand and use the language, and it can also help to cultivate their intercultural awareness and communicative competence. Therefore, future study about the effect of culture teaching can be conducted from an intercultural stance. and the successful culture teaching syllabus.

Second, when examine the effect of culture teaching pedagogy on intercultural competence, due to the lack of sufficient research, the methods used to examine the effect are not rich enough. Deardorff (2006) argued that it was impossible to evaluate intercultural competence accurately and comprehensively with a single method. Various methods and instruments can be considered to investigate the effect of culture teaching on this aspect.

Third, as Yang (2021) has called for it, "various teaching techniques or educational policies borrowed from Internationalisation at Home (IaH)" need to be implemented to "enhance the success of cultural training in the classroom". The effectiveness of some holistic approaches in culture teaching like CLIL and IcLL need to be investigated under wider contexts with more scientific design of research methods.

### **5.2 Limitations of this review**

Studies written in languages other than English and Chinese were not included in the databases searched due to the language limitations of the researchers. As the database search was completed in December 2022, literature published since then was not included in the in-depth review. During the exclusion of studies based on titles and abstracts, some relevant studies may have been excluded due to generalization of the search strings and lack of specificity. Some studies may not reflect the integration of culture into language teaching in their titles and abstracts, while actually conducting this aspect of research, making the selection of the relevance of the studies challenging. Finally, although we searched and found a large number of sources, we did not include all the databases, perhaps biasing the results of the study.

## **6. Conclusion**

The findings of this systematic review provide insights into the related issues of culture teaching in foreign language teaching and learning. It showcases the five major research themes about culture

teaching and learning in foreign language teaching. The emerging themes are perceptions/ attitudes/ beliefs of culture teaching, effect of the culture teaching programs/ activities/ approach/ projects/ materials/ techniques, teachers' perception-practice correspondence regarding culture teaching, practice of culture teaching and culture syllabus.

The findings shows that most of the stakeholders have positive perceptions and attitudes towards integrating culture in language learning. However, through survey or onsite observation, the divergence between teachers' perceptions and real practice in culture teaching was widely recognized, and teachers further reported the obstacles and challenges they met in integrating culture in foreign language study. To address the problem of low level of culture teaching, various cultural teaching approaches, programs, materials, techniques, and activities have been adopted by teachers, and the effects of some teaching methods have also been verified through research.

Nevertheless, the value of intercultural communicative competence as the most important objective in culture teaching has not been fully reflected in these studies. Therefore, future research on cultural teaching should focus more on addressing improving students' intercultural competence and expand it to broader research contexts, with a variation of evaluation instruments to generate new insights into the issue.

## Author contributions

Conceptualization, YJ and AS; methodology, YJ and AS; validation, AS; formal analysis, YJ; resources, YJ and AS; data curation, YJ; writing—original draft preparation, YJ; writing—review and editing, YJ; visualization, YJ; supervision, AS. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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