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## Parental attitudes toward children’s cultural learning while learning German: A comparative study between Turkish and Swedish parents

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### Abstract

In today’s world, millions of people can speak more than one language. Culture plays a critical role when learning a foreign language. Whether the culture is to be added to target language teaching has been an important issue throughout teaching history. The bridge between culture and language has always been a big challenge, according to teachers and academics. During the last decades, they discussed the importance and possibilities of including culture in teaching. And in many different studies, the influence of cultural teaching on learning a new language or the thoughts of both teachers and learners on target cultural teaching have been investigated when learning a foreign language. Nevertheless, there are few studies about the parents’ impact on their children’s foreign language learning development regarding target cultural teaching. This study tries to find out what parents in Turkey (Bursa) and Sweden (Borås) think about their children’s target cultural teaching of German as a foreign language and whether there are differences between the parents’ attitudes on cultural learning in their children’s German lessons. Fifty parents from each country participate in this study, using a quantitative research design. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and an unpaired t-test with independent samples. The results showed that both groups of parents consider culture and language together, and cultural teaching should be given in their children’s German lessons. However, data analysis also demonstrated that there were significant differences between Turkish and Swedish parents regarding most attitudes. Finally, there were differences between the perceptions of both groups of parents on statements that include cultural teaching motivates their children in German classes, helps their children to speak like a native speaker, increases their cultural awareness, offers them better job opportunities and successful communication in German and cultural teaching could harm their children about own culture.

**Keywords:** Parental attitudes; cultural learning; foreign language; German

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## 1. Introduction

Today, everyone can speak at least one language or more languages, including their mother language or foreign language. They use them as a basis to exchange, acquire and share knowledge. A language expresses emotional, social, historical, moral, and cultural aspects of life (Sallat, 2008: 1). Foreign language teaching during the early age period has recently been of great importance (İlter, 2007: 1). Foreign language teaching develops the ability and flexibility of thinking and the ability and sensitivity of listening in the child. It also improves the ability to understand in mother language, allows the child to communicate more easily with people, gives the child a wide range of linguistic foresight for future education and training, and expands the spectrum of future career possibilities. The phenomenon of a foreign language opens the child's mind to other cultures and helps the child understand and evaluate people in other countries (Berlitz: 2003). It, therefore, makes sense to offer especially children the opportunity to learn foreign languages as early as possible: the earlier children can start learning a foreign language, the longer they are exposed to it, and the more time they can learn it (Piske & Kitas, 2009). Cohen (1977) showed that the children of foreign families (especially those under three years old) speak foreign languages with a perfect emphasis in a short period of three months (Cohen, 1977).

There are a lot of options for learning a foreign language in schools. However, in educational institutions in different countries such as Turkey and Sweden, where German is not the language of communication, it is not always easy to make learners aware of the importance of learning German or another foreign language.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 Literature review

Nowadays, learning a foreign language is very essential for all ages and in every aspect. It cannot be limited to a few hours a week if learners are to achieve a high level of language proficiency. They need more time and labor, and they should be guided by their parents and teachers. Parents' influence on encouraging and motivating learners in language learning has been reported in various research (Akgül, Yazıcı & Akman, 2019; Bartram, 2006; Gardner, 1985).

When learners don't get the possibility to interact with the target language in their everyday lives, they cannot realize the importance of learning it. They think learning a foreign language is determined by remembering vocabulary and grammar rules. It means that they cannot use the language skills in real-life interactions, which can be a reason for losing their inspiration to learn. One way to better understand this is to introduce

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<sup>2</sup> Considering that in many countries, interest in German as a second foreign language is low, and many learners have the attitude that English is sufficient (Çakır, 2002: 4; Lindemann, 2007: 2; Nilsson, 2019: 25); this result is not surprising for these two countries either.

learners to some cultural traits that might catch their attention. (Akpınar-Dellal, 2005: 1; Lamb, 2004: 15; Orhan, 2018: 954). Language teaching should not be cut off from its cultural background (Byram, 1988; Kramsch, 1993; Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova & Dejaeghere, 2003). In this regard, teaching the target language's cultural characteristics also has a place in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Byram, 1997; Trim, Brian & Daniel, 2001: 14).

Another culture-related viewpoint of language learning is the reasonable use of language. Without a lot of face-to-face contact in the target language, learners may not be able to understand how specific rules play an essential role in the interaction. Such misinterpretations in the target language can lead to misunderstandings and embarrassing situations. For example, some studies state a widespread assumption that Germans are often seen as cold and not emotional in intercultural encounters (Rieger, 2008: 83; Schroll-Machl, 2007: 13). Jiang, Green, Henley & Masten (2009) examined Australian students who learned Chinese. It was observed their development over time and compared their performance with native Chinese speakers. It was found that native Chinese speakers appeared to choose their learning strategies considering social factors such as power, social distance, and task importance, but Australian students did not consider the impact of these variables at all. Jiang, Green, Henley, & Masten (2009: 482) also searched out that learners' pragmatic-linguistic competence developed faster than their socio-cultural competence since the former developed with increasing language proficiency. It seems that teaching a foreign language requires a particular focus on learners' socio-cultural and pragmatic linguistic competence.

When direct one-on-one contact with the target language community is not possible, different learning methods can select to overcome the limitations of learning a foreign language. For this purpose, teachers can include specific cultural features in the classroom. This allows learners to realize that the topic of their German class is a topic of conversation for real people. They can thus associate abstract language rules and characteristics with their own lives (Orhan, 2018: 954). Additionally, this can be done at home and in the classroom by exposing learners to various cultural products. Some examples could be films, videos, published and printed documents, music, and effects of other audiovisual arts (Besedová, 2016).

Dörnyei and Csizer (2005) pointed out that the German language has become a language used in intercultural communication. Students who have been involved in intercultural life contact and received information about learning a foreign language and their culture from their close surroundings showed more focus on the cultural characteristics of a foreign language (Dörnyei & Csizer, 2005: 178). Therefore, young people could also be informed about their native and target language's cultural backgrounds.

### *1.2. The influence of parents on culture learning in Foreign Language Teaching*

Pedagogical studies point to parents' influence on their children's academic success (Kováčová, 2017: 2; Stamm, 2016: 52; Wild & Wieler, 2016: 77). Parents may not realize it, but their way of thinking about language learning and the cultural characteristics of the target language is very authoritative. Gardner (1985: 109) indicated that parents usually act as a bridge between the cultural context of the target language and their child. For their children, parents who listen to classical music and read novels by Western writers have sent a message that they are interested in the cultural peculiarities of the western world. This attitude can encourage the children to follow the same lifestyle as their parents. In this way, parents indicate that they are not closed to different cultures. According to these studies, cultural interests could be developed at a very early age and therefore still mainly dependent on the parental home (Neubecker, 2017: 5).

According to Gardner (1985: 110), parents can effectively motivate their children to learn a foreign language. For example, some parents who behave in a positively active role talk about learning a language with helpful motivation. They can even attempt to learn a language and share positive learning impressions with their children and support the language learning process of their children. They also see and honor the success and keep up their help through their children's times of failure. They show their children their attitude towards learning a foreign language and their desire to learn, e.g., read a German book or do the homework together (Gardner, 1985: 109).

As studied by Bartram (2006), he interviewed 411 young people from England, Germany, and the Netherlands who were learning English, German and Dutch. Bartram examined the parents' attitudes toward these young people and found that almost all German parents favored their children learning languages. Likewise, most Dutch parents supported their children's language learning, while more than half of English parents felt their children did not need to learn a foreign language. Bartram (2006: 212) concluded that parents' unfavorable thoughts and discouraging comments about language learning also negatively influenced their children's orientation in learning a foreign language.

Akpınar-Dellal and Atadere (2015) prepared a questionnaire to evaluate the parents' attitudes about culture teaching in their children's foreign language classes. The results showed that 54 % of parents supported the culture teaching, while 46 % disagreed.

However, some parents who have negative thoughts about learning foreign languages intentionally demoralize their children (Gardner, 1985: 110). They keep recounting their own unfortunate experiences around. They can take a patriotic position, saying that

learning a foreign language is unnecessary. Some parents can passively encourage their children's language learning process and, at the same time, support their children's positive results at school. However, this may not be enough to induce children to invest more effort in the language learning process. In his study, Gardner (1985: 111) pointed out the role of the parents in keeping children on track in language learning.

This study aimed to investigate and compare the attitudes of Turkish and Swedish parents toward cultural teaching in their children's German lessons. At first, the demographic information such as age, educational background, foreign language skills, and stays abroad was determined for both groups of parents. Then, it was asked how Turkish and Swedish parents think about their children's cultural learning in German classes, and least it was focused on the differences between the attitudes of both groups of parents. In the following, it has been investigated and discussed in detail on some attitudes toward cultural teaching in German lessons for Turkish and Swedish parents. In the following, it has been investigated and discussed in detail on some attitudes toward cultural teaching in German lessons for Turkish and Swedish parents.

### *1.3. Research Design*

The main aim of the present study is to determine the differences between the attitudes of Turkish and Swedish parents toward cultural teaching in their children's German lessons. Firstly, the attitudes of the Turkish parents are analyzed, followed by the Swedish parents in a research section with descriptive statistics. This part of the research is followed by the evaluation using a t-test, which clarifies quantitative differences between both groups of parents and their attitudes toward learning culture<sup>3</sup> in their children's German lessons.

The present study explores what parents think about cultural teaching in foreign language classes while their children learn German in Turkey (Bursa)<sup>4</sup> and Sweden (Borås)<sup>5</sup>. Against this background, the study attempts to answer the research questions as below:

1. What do Turkish parents think about learning German culture while their children are learning German?
2. What do Swedish parents think about learning German culture while their children are learning German?

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<sup>3</sup> The present study is based on the definition of culture and how culture is determined from the point of view of teaching and learning foreign languages. According to Moran & Lu (2001: 3), it mainly refers to "the ability to enter into other cultures and to communicate effectively and appropriately, establish and maintain relationships, and perform tasks with people of those cultures." On this basis, the term 'culture,' as used in the present research, encompasses the system of values, beliefs, and behavioral patterns or lifestyles of a society or a group of people.

<sup>4</sup> Bursa is south of Istanbul on the Sea of Marmara in western Turkey.

<sup>5</sup> Borås is in the southwestern province of Västra Götaland County in Sweden.

3. Is there a difference between the attitudes of Turkish and Swedish parents toward learning about the target culture in your children's German lessons?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Study Group

A total of 100, 50 Turkish and 50 Swedish parents took part in this study, whose children took German classes at a state secondary and high school in Turkey (Bursa)<sup>6</sup> and Sweden (Borås)<sup>7</sup> in the 2021-2022 school year. In connection with the questionnaire, participants were given a brief explanation of the aim of the research and its contribution to the subject. The participants were selected using a practical random sampling method and participated voluntarily in this study.

### 2.2. Data Collection Tools

The questionnaire was used to collect quantitative<sup>8</sup> data and it<sup>9</sup> was redesigned based on the study by Allehyani, Burnap, and Wilson (2017). The questionnaire consisted of two-part first, the demographic information, and the second, the attitude scale. Parents were asked to indicate their age and education in the demographic information section. In addition, data on their foreign language skills and stay abroad<sup>10</sup> were collected. The second part contained 12 statements; the parents were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

This questionnaire was created with the help of Google Documents to collect the data and was uploaded to the internet. Then questionnaire link was sent to participants' e-mails. Ten days later, a follow-up email was sent again. These two email efforts constituted all of the responses for the study. They activated their connections, answered every question, and recorded their answers. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the content of the questionnaire, and ethical considerations. After giving their consent to join the study, the participants could fill in the questionnaire. The answers were obtained through a Google account and downloaded in Excel as a table to the computer.

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<sup>6</sup> In Turkey, another foreign language (German or French) is offered as an optional subject in fifth grade (T.C. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı. Turkish Ministry of Education, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> In Sweden, an additional language is chosen in sixth grade (Skolverket, 2011b). Among modern languages, German, French, Spanish, and Chinese are offered (Skolverket, 2018a).

<sup>8</sup> This study is about a data collection method (quantitative) in which the numerical data are collected. This data is then statistically processed.

<sup>9</sup> The required approval for the scientific questionnaire was granted by Bursa Uludağ University Social and Human Science Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Meeting Date: 02.07.2021 Number: 2021-06 Decision Number: 45).

<sup>10</sup> The term 'stay abroad' should be understood here to mean any stay outside of the home country, regardless of whether it only lasts a few days or weeks.

Ethical clearance was provided for all participants before the questionnaire. Participation in this questionnaire was voluntary and data was collected anonymously. This study did not contain personal information about the subjects. Before starting the questionnaire, all participants were informed about the significance of the research and the type of information being collected. Their right to withdraw at any time during the questionnaire was explicitly stated. Moreover, data confidentiality was assured. Data collected from this research was kept confidential (Alharbi and Drew 2014).

The answers were obtained through a Google account and downloaded to the computer. The data were tabulated with the aid of Microsoft Excel and Word and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science software (SPSS-IBM) for Windows (version 25).

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the questionnaire. The internal consistency of the question scales was examined with Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) coefficient (Cronbach 1984, Eisinga, Grotenhuis et al. 2013). Cronbach's alpha coefficient can be written as a function of the number of test questions and the mean inter-correlation among them as follows:

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{c}}{\bar{v} + (N-1) \cdot \bar{c}} \quad \text{Equation (1)}$$

Here, N is equal to the number of questions,  $\bar{c}$  is the mean inter-question covariance among the questions and  $\bar{v}$  equals the mean variance. The level of significance adopted for the statistical tests was 5%, that is,  $P < 0.05$ .

Cronbach's alpha coefficient normally ranges between 0 and 1, and the closer Cronbach's alpha coefficient is to 1.0, the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient value was found to be 0.825 (Turkey/Bursa) and 0.717 (Sweden/Borås) using SPSS. These results showed the high internal consistency of the scale for the next step of further analysis and the questionnaire was considered reliable. As per many studies (Nunnally, 1978; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), constructs are considered to have internal consistency reliability when the Cronbach Alpha value exceeds 0.7.

Finally, descriptive statistics and an unpaired t-test with independent samples were also used to analyze the data.

### 3. Results

In the following, the demographic results of the Turkish and Swedish parents were presented as their ages (Table 1), their educational background (Table 2), their foreign language skills (Table 3), and their stay abroad (Table 4). These results were followed by the evaluations of the attitudes of Turkish and Swedish parents toward their children's cultural learning in German as a foreign language environment. The attitudes of Turkish

parents (Table 5) and Swedish parents (Table 6) were described, and the results were statistically evaluated. This was intended to determine the areas in which there were significant differences between the attitudes of Turkish and Swedish parents (Table 7).

### 3.1. Demographic Results

The participants' demographic information such as age, educational background, foreign language skills, and stays abroad was summarized in Table 1-4.

The age information for the Turkish and Swedish parents was given in Table 1. Among Turkish parents, they belonged to different age groups, but the majority were between 34 and 49 years, with 20% from 26 to 33, 24% from 34 to 41, 40% from 42 to 49, and 16% above 50, with an age range of 26 to 55 ( $M=41.9$ ). Among Swedish parents, the majority were between 42 and above 50 years, with 10% from 26 to 33, 22% from 34 to 41, 24% from 42 to 49, and 44% above 50, with an age range of 26 to 55 ( $M=46.3$ ). It can be concluded that the Swedish parents were on average older than the Turkish parents.

Table 1. Age ranges

Age	Turkish Parents (N=50)		Swedish Parents (N=50)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
26–33	10	20	5	10
34–41	12	24	11	22
42–49	20	40	12	24
50 and older	8	16	22	44
Age Mean	41.90		46.32	

The educational background information for the Turkish and Swedish parents was shown in Table 2. Among Turkish parents, the majority had university degree, with 8% from vocational school degree, 78% from university degree, 14% from master and PhD degree. Among Swedish parents, the majority had university and master and PhD degree, with 4% from high-school diploma degree, 12% from vocational school degree, 40% from university degree, 44% from masters and PhD. It can be concluded that the Swedish parents were more well-educated than the Turkish parents.



Table 2: Educational background

Degree	Turkish Parents (N=50)		Swedish Parents (N=50)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
High-school diploma	0	0	2	4
Vocational school	4	8	6	12
University	39	78	20	40
Master and PhD	7	14	22	44

The foreign language skills information for the Turkish and Swedish parents was presented in Table 3. Among Turkish parents, the majority could speak 1 foreign language, with 6% from none, 74% from 1 foreign language, 20% from 2 foreign languages. Among Swedish parents, the majority could speak 2 foreign languages and more, with 4% from none, 30% from 1 foreign language, 42% from 2 foreign languages, 24% from three and more. It can be concluded that the Swedish parents could speak more foreign languages than the Turkish parents.

Table 3. Foreign language skills

Foreign Languages	Turkish Parents (N=50)		Swedish Parents (N=50)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
None	3	6	2	4
1 Foreign Language	37	74	15	30
2 Foreign Languages	10	20	21	42
Three and more	0	0	12	24

The staying abroad for the Turkish and Swedish parents was given in Table 4. Among Turkish parents, the majority had stayed none and one time abroad, with 36% from none, 30% from one time, 34% from more than one time abroad. Among Swedish parents, the majority had stayed one time and more than one time abroad, with 18% from none, 22% from one time, 60% from more than one time abroad. It can be concluded that the Swedish parents had more experience of staying abroad than the Turkish parents.

Table 4. Staying abroad

Stay abroad	Turkish Parents (N=50)		Swedish Parents (N=50)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
None	18	36	9	18
One time	15	30	11	22
More than one time	17	34	30	60

### 3.2. Turkish parents' attitudes

For the first research question, the Turkish parents answered 12 statements, including the cultural teaching and the individual statements of Turkish parents, and their frequencies, mean values, and standard deviations were calculated using SPSS. The statistical data on the Turkish parents' responses were shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Turkish parents' responses about learning German culture

Statement	Completely Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Completely Agree		Mean**	SD***
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
1. Learning about German culture is important.	8	16	9	18	8	16	20	40	5	10	3.10	1.28
2. Learning about German culture motivates our children to learn German.	3	6	10	20	3	6	27	54	7	14	3.50	1.15
3. Learning about German culture helps our children to speak German like a native speaker.	3	6	13	26	15	30	14	28	5	10	3.10	1.09
4. Learning about German culture increases our children's cultural awareness.	2	4	8	16	1	2	30	60	9	18	3.72	1.07
5. By learning German culture, our children can successfully communicate with German people.	3	6	7	14	1	2	28	56	11	22	3.74	1.14
6. Learning about German culture could harm our children's culture.	9	18	22	44	9	18	9	18	1	2	2.42	1.05
7. Learning about German culture influences our children's own cultural identity.	11	22	29	58	7	14	2	4	1	2	2.06	0.84
8. Within the framework of the Ministry of Education, it is better to learn about German culture in the classroom.	7	14	16	32	11	22	13	26	3	6	2.78	1.16
9. My children are learning German just to find a good job.	1	2	5	10	5	10	30	60	9	18	3.82	0.92
10. Watching German films/series is a good option for my children to learn about German culture.	0	0	6	12	7	14	29	58	8	16	3.78	0.86
11. Listening to German songs helps my children learn German better.	0	0	2	4	1	2	36	72	11	22	4.12	0.63
12. My children can learn German without being exposed to German culture.	4	8	21	42	9	18	13	26	3	6	2.80	1.10

\*Frequency, \*\*Mean, \*\*\*Standard Deviation

Looking at *the first statement* about whether German culture was important or not in Table 5, half of the parents (50%) thought that culture was an important part of language learning. In addition, 16% of them were neutral. Furthermore, 34% of the parents did not think there was any connection between culture and language. Concerning the *second statement* about the motivating role of cultural characteristics, over half of the parents (68%) agreed that learning German culture motivated their children to learn German. But 26% of the parents negatively responded and 6% of them didn't seem to know what to think. The *third statement* dealt with the influence of the target culture on pronunciation. Just over a third of the group (38%) indicated that learning German

culture helped their children pronounce German like a native speaker. However, 32% of parents took the opposite view, while 30% of them were neutral. The *fourth statement* concerned the learners' awareness of the culture. When asked this question, a large percentage of parents (78%) supported the idea that learning German culture could increase their children's cultural awareness in general. But 20% of parents seemed to disagree, while 2% of them were neutral. The *fifth statement* dealt with the role of learning German cultural characteristics to communicate successfully in the German language. The majority of parents (78%) agreed that learning culture could enable their children to communicate successfully in German. However, 20% of them thought the opposite while 2% remained neutral on this statement. The *sixth statement* addressed parents' concern that learning German culture might negatively affect their children's identity. Interestingly, 20% of parents believed that learning German culture could harm their children's culture, while 8% of them showed a neutral opinion. After all, the majority of parents (62%) did not think that German culture might unfavorably affect their children's identity. The *seventh statement* was intended to help determine whether or not parents perceived learning German culture as a loss of their children's own cultural identity. The majority of parents (80%) seemed to have no concerns about it while only 6% of them mentioned that learning German culture could influence their children's own cultural identity. Meanwhile, 14% of them preferred to be neutral. The *eighth statement* aimed to collect information about parents' views on the source of information for learning cultural information. Surprisingly, almost half of the parents (46%) pointed out that the Ministry of National Education should not be the primary source of cultural knowledge in German classes. However, a third of the group (32%) supported this thought. In addition, 22% preferred to be neutral. The *ninth statement* asked whether the parents only considered learning German for instrumental purposes. According to the majority (78%), they remarked that their children learned German for finding a good job while only 12% of the parents negatively responded. At the same time, 10% of them preferred to be neutral. The *tenth statement* dealt with German films and series in German lessons. Three-quarters of parents (74%) specified that watching German films/series was a good opportunity to learn about German culture for their children, while 12% of them did not think so. Also, 14% of parents preferred to be neutral. The *eleventh statement* dealt with the parents' views on the role of songs in learning German. Almost all parents (94%) believed that songs in the German language could help their children learn it better, while 4% did not think so. Moreover, 2% preferred to be neutral. The *twelfth statement* aimed to collect information about parents' views on the role of learning German cultural properties. Half of the parents (50%) thought that dealing with cultural characteristics was necessary for learning German, but 32% of them agreed that their children could learn German without being exposed to German culture. Furthermore, 18% of parents preferred to be neutral.

### 3.3. Swedish parents' attitudes

For the second research question, the Swedish parents answered 12 statements including the culture teaching and the individual statements of Swedish parents, and their frequencies, mean values, and standard deviations were calculated using SPSS. The statistical data on the Swedish parents' responses were presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Swedish parents' responses about learning German culture

Statement	Completely Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Completely Agree		Mean**	SD ***
	f*	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
1. Learning about German culture is important.	0	0	0	0	4	8	25	50	21	42	4.34	0.63
2. Learning about German culture motivates our children to learn German.	0	0	0	0	7	14	26	52	17	34	4.20	0.67
3. Learning about German culture helps our children to speak German like a native speaker.	1	2	6	12	17	34	17	34	9	18	3.54	0.99
4. Learning about German culture increases our children's cultural awareness.	0	0	0	0	3	6	20	40	27	54	4.48	0.61
5. By learning German culture, our children can successfully communicate with German people.	0	0	1	2	4	8	28	56	17	34	4.22	0.68
6. Learning about German culture could harm our children's culture.	37	74	10	20	3	6	0	0	0	0	1.32	0.59
7. Learning about German culture influences our children's own cultural identity.	33	66	11	22	5	10	1	2	0	0	1.48	0.76
8. Within the framework of the Ministry of Education, it is better to learn about German culture in the classroom.	6	12	13	26	28	56	3	6	0	0	2.56	0.79
9. My children are learning German just to find a good job.	3	6	16	32	28	56	3	6	0	0	2.62	0.70
10. Watching German films/series is a good option for my children to learn about German culture.	1	2	1	2	3	6	33	66	12	24	4.08	0.75
11. Listening to German songs helps my children learn German better.	1	2	0	0	4	8	28	56	17	34	4.20	0.76
12. My children can learn German without being exposed to German culture.	5	10	22	44	13	26	10	20	0	0	2.56	0.93

\*Frequency, \*\*Mean, \*\*\*Standard Deviation

Looking at the *first statement* in Table 6, almost all parents (92%) believed that culture was an important part of language learning. This ratio indicated that culture and language belonged together for them. Only 8% of them were neutral. About the *second statement*, the majority of parents (86%) agreed that learning the target culture could motivate their children to learn German. Only 14% of them were neutral. According to the *third statement*, more than half of parents (52%) approved that learning German culture helped their children express themselves like native speakers when learning German. While 14% of parents disagreed with this statement, 34% of them expressed a neutral opinion. Looking at the *fourth statement*, almost all parents (94%) felt that learning German culture could increase their children's cultural awareness while only 6% of them were neutral. Considering the *fifth statement*, the majority of parents (90%)

agreed that learning culture could enable their children to communicate successfully in German. However, 2% of parents thought the opposite while 8% of them remained neutral on this statement. In the *sixth statement*, it was shown that most parents (94%) did not think that the target culture could negatively impact their children's own cultural awareness. But 6% of them had a neutral opinion. About the *seventh statement*, most of the parents (88%) had no concerns about the loss of cultural identity while only 2% of them disagreed. Moreover, 10% of parents preferred to be neutral. Regarding the *eighth statement*, unexpectedly, more than half of the group (56%) did not give an opinion on it. Fewer parents (6%) agreed with this statement, while 38% of parents disproved that the Ministry of National Education should be the primary source of cultural information in German classes. According to the *ninth statement*, slightly more than half of the parents (56%) remained interestingly neutral on the issue while 38% of parents disagreed with it. Only 6% of the parents believed that German could give their children better job opportunities. Considering the *tenth statement*, a large majority of parents (90%) mentioned that films/series could support cultural aspects of the German language. Fewer parents (6%) remained neutral while only 4% of them did not believe in it. Looking at the *eleventh statement*, most parents (90%) pointed out that using songs could help their children learn German. Fewer parents (8%) remained neutral while only 2% of them did not agree with it. In the *twelfth statement*, more than half of the parents (54%) mentioned that dealing with cultural characteristics was necessary for learning German, while 20% of them disagreed with it. Meantime, 26% of parents remained neutral.

### 3.4. T-test between Turkish and Swedish parents' attitudes

An unpaired t-test was performed using independent samples to determine whether the differences in the statements made by Turkish and Swedish parents on cultural teaching when learning German are statistically significant. The mean, standard deviation, and p-values was calculated for each group, and they were summarized in Table 7. P-value should be <0.05 to be considered statistically significant.

Table 7. t-test between the attitudes of Turkish and Swedish parents

Statements	Countries	Mean*	SD**	T	df	p-Value
1. Learning about German culture is important.	Turkey	3.10	1.28	-6.15	98	0.01
	Sweden	4.34	0.63			
2. Learning about German culture motivates our children to learn German.	Turkey	3.50	1.15	-3.73	98	0.01
	Sweden	4.20	0.67			
3. Learning about German culture helps our children to speak German like a native speaker.	Turkey	3.10	1.09	-2.11	98	0.04
	Sweden	3.54	0.99			
4. Learning about German culture increases our children's cultural awareness.	Turkey	3.72	1.07	-4.36	98	0.01
	Sweden	4.48	0.61			
5. By learning German culture, our children can successfully communicate with German people.	Turkey	3.74	1.14	-2.56	98	0.01
	Sweden	4.22	0.68			
6. Learning about German culture could harm our children's culture.	Turkey	2.42	1.05	6.46	98	0.01
	Sweden	1.32	0.59			
7. Learning about German culture influences our children's own	Turkey	2.06	0.84	3.61	98	0.01

cultural identity.	Sweden	1.48	0.76			
8. Within the framework of the Ministry of Education, it is better to learn about German culture in the classroom.	Turkey	2.78	1.16	1.11	98	0.27
	Sweden	2.56	0.79			
9. My children are learning German just to find a good job.	Turkey	3.82	0.92	7.36	98	0.01
	Sweden	2.62	0.70			
10. Watching German films/series is a good option for my children to learn about German culture.	Turkey	3.78	0.86	-1.85	98	0.07
	Sweden	4.08	0.75			
11. Listening to German songs helps my children learn German better	Turkey	4.12	0.63	-0.58	98	0.56
	Sweden	4.20	0.76			
12. My children can learn German without being exposed to German culture.	Turkey	2.80	1.11	1.17	98	0.24
	Sweden	2.56	0.93			

\* Mean, \*\*Standard Deviation

Firstly, it was clearly seen that there was a significant difference between the Turkish and Swedish parents according to 1-7 and 9 of the statement while comparing all results in Table 7. Considering the *first statement*, it can be viewed that the mean value of Swedish parents (4.34) was remarkably higher than that of Turkish parents (3.10). The significant difference ( $t_{(98)}=-6.15$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) showed that learning German culture was much more important for Swedish parents (see Table 6). According to the *second statement*, Swedish parents believed more than Turkish parents for learning the culture in German classes would motivate their children ( $t_{(98)}=-3.73$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Regarding the *third statement*, both groups of parents thought that learning German culture could help their children for speaking German like a native speaker. However, Swedish parents' value was slightly higher than Turkish parents ( $t_{(98)}=-2.11$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), which means Swedish parents assumed that teaching German culture would help their children to speak. As seen from the data for the *fourth statement*, the mean values of the Swedish parents (4.48) were also notably higher than those of the Turkish parents (3.72). It can be said that Swedish parents mentioned that learning German culture would increase their children's cultural awareness ( $t_{(98)}=-4.36$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The findings for the *fifth statement* also indicated a significant difference between the groups ( $t_{(98)}=-2.56$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Although both groups of parents contemplated that learning German culture would help their children to communicate successfully with German people, the mean values of the Swedish parents (4.22) were higher than those of the Turkish parents (3.74). Looking at the *sixth statement*, it could be observed that the mean value of Swedish parents (1.32) was lower than that of Turkish parents (2.42), and a significant difference between Turkish and Swedish parents ( $t_{(98)}=-6.46$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Swedish parents considered that learning the target culture would not harm their children. In contrast, some Turkish parents thought that German culture would negatively impact their children. For the *seventh statement*, there was a significant difference ( $t_{(98)}=-3.61$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) between the attitudes of both parent groups as well. It could be remarkable that both groups of parents did not mostly agree with the *seventh statement*. However, few Turkish parents were concerned that learning about German culture could cause their children to lose their cultural identity. On the other hand, Swedish parents did not take into account such concerns. According to the attitudes for the *ninth statement*, a significant difference

( $t_{(98)}=7.36$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) can be seen between the attitudes of both parent groups. While Turkish parents approved that the German language was an opportunity for their children to get a better job (3.82), Swedish parents did not mainly concur with it (2.62). They did not see any connection between cultural teaching and possible better job opportunities (see Table 6).

Considering the 8, 10, 11, and 12 of the statement, the p-Values were greater than 0.05. This meant that there was no significant difference between the attitudes of the Swedish and Turkish parents. It can be concluded that both groups of parents had similar views on those statements. Especially, watching movies and listening to songs were rated equally positively.

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

The present study aimed to investigate and compare the attitudes of Turkish and Swedish parents toward cultural teaching in their children's German lessons. As the first step in data collection, demographic information such as age, educational background, foreign language skills, and stays abroad was determined for both groups of parents. In the second step, it was asked how Turkish and Swedish parents thought about their children's cultural learning in German classes and then focused on the differences between the attitudes of both groups of parents.

In principle, various aspects of cultural teaching were rated positively by both groups of parents. However, it was striking that this rating was consistently and significantly higher for Swedish parents. Comparing them among themselves, different information about attitudes of both groups has been reached by the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire. The data showed that half of the Turkish parents consider culture necessary. And they, therefore, believed that cultural teaching should be given in their children's German lessons. On the contrary, this value was almost twice higher in Swedish parents. Similarly, it can be observed that the value of cultural teaching as support for motivating their children in German lessons was higher among Swedish parents. Comparatively to these findings, the study by Akgül, Yazıcı & Akman (2019: 1598) presented also cultural teaching as support for motivation, communication skills, and self-confidence.

The results revealed that both groups of parents had the same opinion about cultural teaching in German classes got encouraged their children to speak like a native speaker. This value was significantly higher among Swedish parents. Abushihab (2016: 56) also determined that the use of cultural characteristics in language teaching got encourages the learners. Especially in children, there might be a slight fear of speaking. For this reason, their fears can be trained with a good pronunciation like a native person (Kubanek, 2004). Closely, in their study, Jiang, Green, Henley & Masten (2009: 489) reported that learning culture made it possible for learners to develop their fluency in the target language at native speaker levels.

Concerning early studies on foreign language learning, it can be seen that positive attitudes could be achieved in children, especially when they start learning the foreign language and culture. In this way, children can understand the culture in particular (Varga, 2009: 53). Related to this, the fourth statement on cultural awareness in learning the target culture indicated that many Swedish parents believed that learning German culture would increase their children's cultural awareness. It was worth mentioned that no Swedish parent thought the opposite. Some Turkish parents did not agree with this opinion although the majority approved that the transmission of culture supported their children's awareness. Still, it's fair to say that cultural awareness was at the heart of interacting with people from other cultures for both groups of parents. This view is confirmed in the study by Quappe & Cantatore (2005). Comparatively, they found that cultural awareness was the basis of communication, becoming aware of cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions (Quappe & Cantatore 2005: 1). The results also displayed that the learning of German culture supported the successful communication in the target language according to both parent groups. Nevertheless, there was a difference in the attitudes of both groups of parents. The number of Turkish parents who did not participated in this view was greater than that of Swedish parents.

Teaching foreign languages to children includes the essential elements that were investigated in current research. Within the framework of language acquisition studies in Turkey, there is still a discussion and conflict about how and how many cultural contents should be taught at a young age (Akpınar Dellal, 2011: 89). In relation to this, the special trained teachers play an essential role in early foreign language acquisition for children. At the same time, technical equipment in classrooms and schools also determine how much foreign language teaching can succeed. Considering education system in Turkey, the numbers of foreign language teachers and lessons are low for in all education stages. In addition, the technical equipment in classrooms and schools are insufficient, and the numbers of students in the classes are too high. Some Turkish parents expressed their concerns about the teaching of culture in early foreign language classes. Based on this, some Turkish parents' fears about the learning culture, such as problems of providing a suitable learning environment for the child, might harm their children. The Turkish parents' results showed that some thoughts about the learning German culture could harm their children.<sup>11</sup> Similar fears were also reported in the study by Allehyani, Burnapp & Wilson (2017: 3). They described that learning cultural characteristics in the target group could lead learners to emulate the new culture in their normal life. In contrast, in another study by Akpınar-Dellal and Atadere (2015: 34), it was measured parents' awareness and perceptions of language education. Parents were convinced that learning the target culture had no negative impact on their own culture.

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<sup>11</sup> The fears of the Turkish parents are possibly like those that Gardner (1985: 112) recorded in his study. In his research, he pointed out that cultural traits that parents are interested in might also encourage their children to follow the lifestyle of the target culture.



Interestingly, in this study the Turkish parents thought the opposite while Swedish parents did not think the German culture could threat their children's identities considering the attitudes on it.

Although there is a significant difference between both groups of parents in whether learning German culture would mean a loss of the children's own cultural identity, they did not support this view. The majority of both groups of parents were convinced that their children's cultural identities were strengthened by learning German culture in schools. Akgül, Yazıcı & Akman (2019: 1598) also highlighted this result in their study and they spoke of more self-confidence in learners through cultural teaching.

It is well known that the Internet and global communication nowadays offer learners relatively quickly the opportunity to get to know the target language culture and to discover cultural aspects of languages (Dörnyei & Csizer 2005: 327). This allows learners to find the cultural characteristics of languages. In this context, integrating cultural teaching in German lessons was also relevant for both groups of parents.

Another significant difference between the attitudes of Turkish and Swedish parents was found in the ninth statement. Over two-thirds of Turkish parents believed that their children would only learn German for commercial purposes. Accordingly, they perceived that German and cultural teaching not only as a new journey of knowledge in the target language much more as a better career opportunity. The opposite results were exactly observed for the Swedish parents. Interestingly, they didn't see learning the German language as a better career opportunity for their children.<sup>12</sup> According to Lindemann, English plays an important role in Swedish, as it is usually the first foreign language and is generally taught in schools very early on. Therefore, they think, that German is not related to the desired career. Also, Kirchner's article states that it is not so much the country, culture, people, or career chances that motivate them to learn German. It is more the need for communication to use the language themselves actively (Kirchner, 2004: 14).

The analysis results of the 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> statements demonstrated that there was no significant difference between the attitudes of Turkish and Swedish parents. About an equal number of both groups of parents did not agree that the Ministry of Education could only be responsible for teaching culture in the classroom. The percentage values between the attitudes of the tenth and eleventh statements were close to each other. Therefore, for both groups, it can be stated that they could see German films/series or German songs as a good opportunity for their children to learn something about German culture. The fact that this is a global world in which foreign films and pop singers dominate TV channels, radio programs, and internet media, and in which

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<sup>12</sup> Lindemann recorded a comparable result in the study (2007: 7). Still, this time it was (Swedish) schoolchildren who saw no connection between knowledge of German and better career opportunities in the future.

children's exposure is unavoidable to it, confirms these results. In the same way, according to Dörnyei and Csizer (2005: 338), films, music, and other artistic activities and media help to motivate learners by increasing their interest in learning the language, even if there is no personal contact with the culture and community of the target language.

Learning foreign language is unlike learning mathematical and scientific concepts. Unlike these concepts, it has a cultural aspect. Language should not just be presented as a list of grammar rules and vocabulary to motivate young people. Significant factors can undoubtedly take more attention than just grammar rules. It increases the efficiency of teaching and learning, especially when learners do not have many opportunities to communicate in the target language (Akgül, Yazıcı & Akman, 2019). Cultural teaching considers learners' needs, allowing them to empathize with the language (Dörnyei & Cziser, 2005: 354).

The present study supports the notion of seeing 'culture' in language teaching as an object. According to Brown (1994: 165), the language is part of the culture, and the culture is part of the language. He expresses that both are so closely intertwined that one cannot separate the two without losing the meaning of language or culture. In the context of foreign language teaching, language and culture are to be understood as connected tightly to each other. Viewed this way, language is not separate from the way of life (culture) that supports it. It is not separable from people's concrete activities or specific interpersonal relationships. After all, learning a language means being accepted or drawn into the living environment of individual guests and groups.

In summary, it can be said that most of the attitudes of both groups of parents toward cultural teaching in their children's German lessons were different from each other. Nevertheless, the questionnaire results pointed out that Turkish and Swedish parents saw a positive connection between language and culture and thus it has displayed that culture should be included in German lessons. This finding can strengthen the view in the present study that culture should be given a place in language teaching. However, it should be highlighted that the present study was a small case study, limited to 50 Turkish and 50 Swedish parents. Therefore, the evaluation of the results in this study should not be taken as a generalization for the respective countries.

Finally, it should be added that the way parents perceived the place of learning German was reflected in their children's behavior. Parental influence has been ingrained in our minds and identities since the beginning of our lives. Parents should therefore be made aware of these cultural issues. They should realize that learning about cultural properties and quirks in the German language will not affect their children's identity but can strengthen their own identity. So, it should be possible to see foreign language teaching as a place where cultural characteristics are integrated. Parental influence has been ingrained in our minds and identities since the beginning of our lives.

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