Macrothink Institute™

Education and Linguistics Research
ISSN 2377-1356
2025, Vol. 11, No. 2

Some of the Misconceptions in Language Learning and EFL Classes in Turkey: A Descriptive Case Study

Dr. Ercan Tomakin (Corresponding author)

Department of English Language and Literature

Ordu University, Altınordu / Ordu / Turkey

Received: Sep. 19, 2025 Accepted: Dec. 4, 2025 Published: Dec. 16, 2025

doi:10.5296/elr.v11i2.23164 URL: https://doi.org/10.5296/elr.v11i2.23164

Abstract

This paper explains some of the misconceptions common in the literature and EFL classes in Turkey. To that end, it reviews the literature on EFL learners and their perceptions of language learning. In doing so, the researcher's three decades of experience in language learning and his observations of language teaching in the Turkish context are succinctly presented to explain misconceptions. The study uses a qualitative approach to explore and describe some of the perceptions addressed in this study, as well as the participant students' views on the misconceptions. As the study is limited to the field of language learning/teaching in the research context, a case study method was used in the study to explain the misconceptions. The students' views and the stereotypical views in the literature are referred to as "misconceptions" and the researcher's observations and explanations come under the name of 'counter-view'. The study ends with some suggestions on how to overcome the stereotypical views in the literature and unquestioned famous publications.

Keywords: language, learning, acquisition, skills, culture and immersion

1. Introduction

As terms such as language learning and language acquisition are frequently used in language studies, it is necessary to explain their purposes and usage in the research context at the outset. The term language learning refers to the learning of foreign languages, as the teaching of a language other than the mother tongue (Turkish) is considered foreign language learning according to the article of the Constitution of the Turkish State. The official language of the state is Turkish according to the third article. Turkey is not a country where a formal bilingual or formal second language is used in education. The terms 'language acquisition and language learning' are used in the following sense: The former is used for the acquisition of the mother tongue (Turkish), the latter for the teaching of English, French, German, etc. as a foreign language in classrooms.

Researchers in the fields of foreign and second language learning, language acquisition, and linguistics have been seeking solutions to language teaching as practiced in Turkey for years, but the field still faces problems in today's research context. Issues in foreign language learning include a lack of qualified teachers (Gedikoglu, 2005), insufficient use of technology (Gökdemir, 2010), and the theoretical focus of courses combined with a lack of teaching materials (Aydın, 2013), as cited in Can and Kartal (2020, p. 396). In addition to these research findings, there are persistent misconceptions that have not yet been questioned. A review of Google Scholar shows that, although there are some studies on Turkish EFL learners, the concept of misconceptions has not been investigated. The followings are a brief literature review.

Three studies use the term "attitude" (Kızıltepe, 2000; Göktepe, 2014; Cakır & Solak, 2014). Additionally, two studies use the term "motivation" (Kızıltepe, 2000; Göktepe, 2014), but for different purposes. For example, Kızıltepe (2000), in examining EFL students' attitudes and motivation to learn a second language, found that students were both highly instrumentally and integratively motivated, although they showed only moderate interest in British and American communities and culture. The respondents' motivation was high, and their attitude toward learning English and language learning was positive in general. Additionally, Göktepe (2014, p. 314) investigated the attitudes and motivation of Turkish EFL learners toward English. The study revealed that "Turkish first-year graduate students learn English as a foreign language mainly for instrumental reasons, and it also showed that integrative motivation is to some extent the dominant motivational orientation for the participants." In addition, Cakır and Solak (2014, p. 79) researched the e-factors influencing Turkish EFL learners' e-learning through Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). They found that while e-learning anxiety had a negative effect on academic performance, perceived ease of use, attitude, satisfaction, and self-efficacy had a positive effect on e-learners' academic performance.

The remaining of the studies on EFL learners address individual topics such as vocabulary learning, language learning strategies, effective foreign language teachers, current challenges in ELT, written error analysis and students' opinions on online learning platforms and blended language learning. These topics will now be briefly explained. For example, Celik and Toptas

(2010, p. 62) explored Turkish EFL learners' use of vocabulary learning strategies and found that "participants' generally used these strategies rather insufficiently, and there was a discrepancy between the use of the strategies and their perception of the usefulness of the strategies".

Besides, Razi (2012, p. 94) examined the use of language learning strategies among Turkish EFL learners and found that "participants mainly preferred compensatory and metacognitive strategies, while affective and social strategies were least preferred. A significant difference was found between preparatory class and third-year students in terms of strategy use. Yet, t-test and post-hoc test results revealed no significant differences between participants regarding gender, age, or length of time studying English".

In addition, Celik et al. (2013) searched how EFL learners perceive an effective language teacher and found that language teachers reduce students' worries and greet them with warmth. Teachers also need sufficient subject knowledge, language proficiency, and the ability to teach key skills.

Moreover, Solak and Bayar (2015) examined the current challenges in the Turkish EFL context and identified effective elements related to English textbooks, the improvement of the four language skills, practice-based courses, individual differences, teacher training and professionalism, and various materials.

The last two studies are as follows: Atmaca (2016) surveyed Turkish EFL learners on error analysis, focusing on error categories such as prepositions, verbs, articles, sentence structures, punctuation, gerunds, pluralism, possessives, and word choice. Istifci (2017) investigated Turkish EFL learners' perceptions of online and blended learning, concluding that students favored blended learning for its course format and attendance flexibility. The interviews with these students indicated that while students appreciated the flexibility of online learning, they preferred face-to-face communication with teachers and classmates. As a result, the studies cited indicate that no research has investigated Turkish EFL learners' misconceptions about language learning.

Although there are many postgraduate studies in the research context on how to improve skills such as listening, speaking, and reading, there is also some positive evidence on these topics. For example, in the Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education in Turkey (URL-1), there are about 166 postgraduate studies on "vocabulary learning," not including articles published in journals on the same subject. Therefore, language learners are confused about which findings they should consider. As far as the articles cited above and the Google Scholar reviews are concerned, there is no study on Turkish EFL learners' misconceptions. In addition, some assumptions about language learning have not been challenged and remain unexamined principles in the literature and in the minds of learners. For example, "Teach listening and speaking first, reading and writing next" (Demirel, 2004, p. 8) is a common and unquestioned motto in the literature and research context. Academics in language departments teach this motto to students in the classroom, but when they are required to learn a second foreign language to become an associate professor or professor, they do not apply this principle. Instead of starting with listening, they begin by reading grammar books and

doing translations. This issue is discussed in detail in Misconception 2. Therefore, these assumptions, or misconceptions, are examined one by one, and their answers are provided in the following section.

2. Aims

The aim of the study is to describe some stereotypical views about foreign and second language learning and to provide counter-arguments. These stereotypical views are considered misconceptions in this study because they have been accepted as unchanging truths for more than a century. One common cliché, for example, is that language teaching must begin with listening comprehension. However, this ignores the situation of the language learner: When a child learning their mother tongue is illiterate, but a person learning a foreign or second language is literate and can read and write. Similarly, the main skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – are considered the most important, although it is the knowledge and use of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation that make these skills possible. Therefore, the widespread misconceptions are challenged based on the researcher's 30 years of experience in language teaching and his observations of EFL learners. In particular, the study had the following aims.

a) to explain the states of the main and sub-skills in terms of affecting and affected skills.

b) to explain the conditions of language learners when they are illiterate and literate.

c) to explain that mere immersion in linguistic contexts is useless without understanding the sounds and sentences.

d) to explain that cultural integration is not necessary in language learning.

e) to show that it is not necessary to always start with simple topics.

3. Method

The study employed a qualitative descriptive design, limiting on five misconceptions for following reasons. A qualitative approach was used to explore the research objectives, as qualitative research aims to present findings in words and sentences (Robson, 1995). Since the study sought to explain common views of language learning descriptively, the goals of qualitative and descriptive research overlap. Research can be classified by purpose and strategy as "exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory" (Robson, 1995, p. 42), with descriptive studies used "to portray an accurate profile of persons, events, or situations" (Robson, 1995, p. 42). According to Salkind (2000), descriptive research "provides a broad picture of a phenomenon" under investigation. Based on these perspectives, the five misconceptions are described in detail. The study is limited to these five misconceptions because a case study is commonly defined as a bounded system (Adelman et al., 1984).

4. Findings/Misconceptions and Counter-views

Misconception 1: skills are divided into main and sub-skills, without deep thinking.

The references in language teaching generally divide language skills into main skills and

sub-skills (Richards & Rogers, 1993; Scrivener, 2000, p. 20; Demirel, 2004; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). For example, after classifying language systems and language skills, Scrivener (2000, p. 20) states, "there are four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing." Demirel (2004) confirms this classification, stating that the main skills are listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and that this order should be followed in language teaching. Scrivener (2000) uses the term "language systems," while Katavazi (2019) uses the term "sub-skills" to refer to similar concepts. For Scrivener, the language systems are "lexis, grammar, function, and phonology," while for Katavazi, the sub-skills are vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. This conventional understanding of main and sub-skills is generally accepted without questioning what is affective and what is affected.

Counterview 1: The naming of the main and sub-skills needs to be reconsidered.

We can draw a logical conclusion if we designate one skill as the main skill and the other as the sub-skill. The logic is that we can ask a few questions and try to find their answers. The questions are: a) Which skills activate other skills? b) Which skill enables other skills? c) Which skills become pointless or impossible without knowledge of other skills?

Let us answer these questions briefly and simply. For question a), knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation activates the ability to speak, listen, read, and write. For question b), knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation enables the skills of listening, speaking, and so on. Conversely, you cannot speak or write without knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. For question c), the skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing become meaningless without knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. That is to say, you can speak if you have mastered vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

The answers to questions a), b) and c) come from the researcher's three decades of experience in learning and teaching languages. This is because researchers incorporate their observations and experiences, as Cook (1993, p. 88) states by saying, "in my experience of talking with teachers… second languages are more popular school subjects among girls. Only one in four undergraduates studying in the Languages and Linguistics department at Essex are men". This case was observed by the researcher when he was completing his Master of Arts (MA) at that department in 1995–1996.

In addition to the researcher's experience, there are views in the literature that support the importance of subskills. Although Lewis (1996) does not explicitly emphasize the importance of subskills, he implicitly highlights their significance by explaining the lexical approach as follows: "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (Lewis, 1996, p.115). Here, the word 'convey' refers to the ability to speak. This means that we can say very little if we only know grammar, and we cannot speak at all if we do not know vocabulary.

Moreover, Katawazai et al. (2019, p. 1327) state that "sub-skills are the building blocks for the main skills of learning and mastering a language. This means that for a learner to master a language, ELT textbook developers need to contextualize all sub-skills for language learners to become successful. The sub-skills of vocabulary, grammar, and

pronunciation help learners not only understand a language but also enable them to communicate with others." Furthermore, Vasanthan and Nandhini (2022, p. 22) state that "learning English as a second language is a daunting task for many who find it challenging to master the four specific skills as expected with assigned tasks and activities. At the same time, it is encouraging that language learners, consciously or unconsciously, acquire sub-skills of the four main skills, which may be in the emergent stage of development."

In summary, language skills are typically divided into main and sub-skills, a distinction that has not been questioned until now. Grammar and vocabulary appear to be the most important factors for effectively using the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. If something is considered the main activator, it should be classified as a main skill. Therefore, the current naming of skills should be reconsidered. Vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation should be regarded as the main skills, while listening, speaking, reading, and writing should be considered sub-skills.

Misconception 2: Language learning must begin with listening.

As noted above, language skills are divided into four main areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They are also divided into three domains: vocabulary, grammar, and phonology (Scrivener, 2000, p.20). In the literature on language teaching, it is generally posed that instruction should begin with listening comprehension, followed by speaking, reading, and writing. For example, Demirel (2004, p. 5) states that "applied linguists have committed great blunders" by claiming that "a person should learn a second language in the same way they acquired their mother tongue."

He continues (ibid.) to illustrate this misconception by stating: "Teach listening and speaking first, reading and writing next" (p. 8). This sequence closely mirrors the way babies acquire their mother tongue. It also relates to theories about the origin of language and the experiments conducted to identify the first language. It is assumed that a healthy child typically listens to parents or caregivers until about one year of age, then begins to speak single words. The child is said to progress through the one-word, two-word, and three-word phases. This raises several questions. One is: Can a child learn or acquire their mother tongue solely by listening? Another is: Can a language learner acquire a foreign or second language only by listening?

Counterview 2: The teaching of skills must reconsider for being illiterate and literate.

It is commonly understood that a baby listens to their mother, father, or caregiver for an extended period before beginning to say single words such as mommy, daddy, puppy, kitten, juice, or milk. This suggests that "mothers and fathers tend to simplify the language they use so that the children can more or less understand it" (Harmer, 1995, p. 34). This raises the question of whether a child learns their mother tongue solely by listening or if they also receive additional support from others, such as their mother or father, to learn their native language. To address this question, we provided the following experimental context, as there has been much debate about historical experiments conducted by the Egyptian pharaoh

Psammetichus around 600 B.C. and James of Scotland around A.D. 1500 (Yule, 1993).

Experimental context 1: a lonely baby hears sounds from the loudspeaker.

As a university lecturer of graduate and postgraduate students, I gave the following example. Imagine a baby is born in normal health, has been cleaned and fed, swaddled, and placed in a room at room temperature. The baby is observed with a remote camera, and all its needs (feeding, cleaning, diaper changing) are met by a remote-controlled robot that does not speak at all. Also, imagine that this baby hears basic English words every ten or twenty seconds from a loudspeaker installed on the wall until the baby is one or two years old. This care process lasts for one or two years. If we take the baby out of the room and ask him or her about the words he/she has heard, such as mommy, daddy, come here, eat this, drink that, what is this, etc., can the baby understand the meaning of these basic words he/she has heard?

All the students said "no." They explained their reasoning as follows: there can be many sounds in a baby's mind, but there are no references for them. For example, the sound "mummy" may exist in the baby's mind, but the reference (sameness) for it does not exist in the baby's mind. Then I explained the reason and shared my experience as a father of three children. Mothers, fathers, and caregivers do not just say words (sounds) to their babies when they are born. What they actually do is, while saying words like "kitty," "doggy," or any object, they point to the cat, dog, or object, and the baby looks at it and eventually associates the sound with the object. When feeding the baby, the mother puts the nipple in the baby's mouth and says "suck," "drink," etc. In this case, the baby associates the word "milk" with "suck." When teaching the baby to walk, you hold him by the hand and say, "Let's walk, one step, two steps," etc. In this way, the baby learns the meaning of the words "step" and "walk." When teaching the baby about forbidden things, you tell them not to touch the hot stove or teapot by saying, "hoops, coss," as if he is burning his hand.

In short, when parents say to their children: "Come, go, sit, eat, drink, play, sleep", they are using explanatory and demonstrative language. A baby's hearing sounds like 'come', 'go', 'play', 'eat', 'drink' etc. can only be meaningful if the sounds are supported by actions, figures, facial expressions, etc. This process begins at birth and continues until the age of 4 or 5 years. The researcher has observed that the baby acquires its mother tongue when the caregivers support the uttered sounds with movements, jest, mimics, facial expressions, figures, actions and demonstrations, the sounds become meaningful to the baby. Harmer (1995, p.11) states this point by saying "*on their own, the sounds of a language may well be meaningless*".

Harmer (1995, p. 33) also states the importance of the outside help saying that "children hear and experience a considerable amount of language in situations in which they are involved in communication with an adult – usually a parent". Bearing in mind that a child is *illiterate* when it learns its mother tongue. The only thing the child can do is listen in order to learn. However, when students learn a foreign or second language at school, they are *literate*. They can read and learn the meaning of words and grammatical rules in the target language. Then they can understand what they listen to. This point is neglected by linguists and language researchers who claim that learning a foreign/second language must start with listening. The

following example of a literate person illustrates this point.

Experimental context 2: a literate person hears sounds from a person to learn it

For babies, learning their mother tongue begins with the ability to listen, but this is not the case for literate language learners or literate adults. In the second example, the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners – my students in the EFL department – were given the following scenario. I said, "We are in this classroom now. I have been speaking English for 30 years, and you have been learning English for 5 or 6 years. When I speak English, I explain ELT approaches, methods, and techniques to you. Did you all understand all the lessons I explained?" They all answered "yes." I asked them why they understood. They all said they knew the meaning of the words I used.

I then gave another example: "Imagine someone knocks on the door. I say, 'Please come in,' and a Chinese teacher enters and starts speaking Chinese. Can we understand him or her?" Everyone said "no." I asked, "What if he or she speaks very *slowly* and *repeats* the sentences many times?" Their answer was still "no." I then asked why they could not understand Chinese. They said they did not know the meaning of the words or the grammar of Chinese. I told them, "Yes, that is correct. We do not know the meaning of the sounds he or she uses. The sounds include Chinese words and grammar. Therefore, even a literate person cannot learn a language (e.g. Chinese) only by listening the sounds slowly or repeatedly. To put it another way, the sounds can only be meaningful to literate people when these sounds are supported as movements, jests, mimics, figures, actions, demonstrations, etc.

Another concrete example supporting the second experiment is the requirement for language lecturers in Turkey to learn an additional foreign language. Academics in language departments who wish to be promoted to associate professor or professor must learn a second foreign language – such as German, French, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Arabic, or Chinese – at a certain proficiency level and pass an exam, in addition to meeting publication requirements. For instance, if they choose French, they use a bilingual grammar book, study and translate previous exam questions, take the exam, and pass. For example, I scored 60 out of 100 on the YOKDIL French exam. I did not learn French by listening, nor did they. The key point is that, while language lecturers in the classroom teach that a language should be taught through listening, in practice, they do the opposite.

As a result, it is pointless to listen to sounds slowly or repeatedly if we do not know their meaning. From the first example, we see that sounds become meaningful to illiterate individuals when they are shown, explained, or demonstrated. From the second example, we conclude that even literate students or adults cannot learn a foreign or second language by hearing only the sounds of the words in the language they want to learn. Therefore, we can generally say that sounds are meaningful for both literate and illiterate people only when these sounds are supported by movements, gestures, facial expressions, figures, actions, demonstrations, and similar aids.

Misconception 3: Immerse the language learners in a language context.

A brief overview of the terms 'immersion' and 'immersion programs' in the field of language

learning is essential at the outset to reference them in the 'Counter-views' section. "Immersion describes a bilingual program in which children who speak only one language enter a school where the foreign language is the sole medium of instruction. The children are immersed in the new language for a specific period – total immersion if the language is used throughout the school day, partial immersion if it is used for only part of the day" (Crystal, 1993, p. 157). "Immersion programs aim to teach a second language through content-based instruction in subjects such as mathematics and social studies, focusing on the subject matter; the emphasis is on learning the subject matter, with less attention given to the formal aspects of the language" (Lightbown & Spada, 2000). The term has attracted more criticism than praise. Since 'content-based teaching' also concerns curriculum and syllabus, it is sufficient to mention its basic meaning here without associating it with other areas.

In the research context, Demircan (1990) states that immersion occurs when all courses in a classroom are taught in a foreign language. If children use their mother tongue at home and learn the foreign language only at school, this is called submersion. Academics who teach languages in Turkey often explain "immersion" with the following example: If you drop someone who cannot swim into a pool, lake, or the sea, they might learn to swim by flapping and struggling. However, in reality, we often read news stories about children who run away from home in the summer to cool off in a lake or the sea, but they do not learn to swim by struggling; instead, they may drown on their first attempt. In short, senseless immersion is like drowning while trying to swim.

Counterview 3: Only immersion is not enough to learn a language

The idea of immersion is similar to Misconception 2, which claims that learning a foreign or second language must begin with listening. In the same way, language learners are immersed in a classroom or language community and are expected to learn from what they hear and read. The claim that immersion alone is sufficient to learn a language is based on some research findings. For example, Lightbown and Spada (2000, p. 130) refer to French immersion programs in Canada, which are based on the principle of "just listen … and read" and are regarded by Krashen as communicative language teaching par excellence. They also note that "the focus in French immersion is on meaning through subject teaching and the provision of rich, comprehensible input."

The term "comprehensible input" is the key concept that makes immersion meaningful. This means that listening and reading in immersion depend on comprehensible input. Referring to Harley's (1989) immersion study on teaching two different French past tenses (habitual, descriptive past and simple, narrative past), it is stated (ibid.) as follows: "This study seems to confirm the value of some guided practice of particular language forms within content-based instructional programs" (p. 146). Here, "guided practice" can refer to outside help or guidance for practicing.

In discussing 'comprehension and production strategies in language learning,' Skehan (2001, p. 77) states that "features of immersion education, such as a supportive learning environment and bilingual teachers who provide ample content-based input while allowing learners to produce language at their own pace, are seen as consistent with Krashen's position." He

suggested that "comprehensible input is the driving force for interlanguage development and change" (Krashen, 1985, cited in Skehan, 2001, p. 75). The key idea is that a supportive environment and comprehensible input make immersion meaningful. However, the notion of "just listen … and read" raises many questions. To illustrate these questions, the following text from a website is included here. The text reads:

> Biology is the scientific study of life. It is a natural science with a broad scope but has several unifying themes that tie it together as a single, coherent field. For instance, all organisms are made up of cells that process hereditary information encoded in genes, which can be transmitted to future generations. Another major theme is evolution, which explains the unity and diversity of life. Finally, all organisms require energy to move, grow, and reproduce, as well as to regulate their own internal environment. (URL-2).

We must ask ourselves additional questions about the text. For example, is it possible to learn or infer the meaning of words like biology, scientific study, life, nature, and science simply by listening and reading, as suggested by immersion? It appears that understanding the meaning of these words is not possible through listening and reading alone. Hence, we can answer the question of what makes immersion meaningful as follows.

The first factor that makes the text – the immersion – meaningful is visualizing the text like a picture dictionary. The second is the actions and efforts of teachers to explain the text. The proverb supports this: I hear, I forget; I see, I remember; I do, I learn. Third, the teacher can draw and illustrate each word on the board. The saying "a picture is worth a thousand words" exemplifies this. Fourth, the teacher can use body language, such as jokes and facial expressions, among other techniques.

In summary, immersion presupposes that what is heard and read is also understood. Immersion is "an acquisition that can only take place when people understand the messages in the target language" (Krashen & Terrel, 1983, cited in Richards & Rogers, 1993, p. 130). When immersion is supported by visualization, actions, drawings (figures), jokes, facial expressions, and similar aids, – Krashen (1985) and Skehan (2001) refer this as "the supportive environment and comprehensible input" – communication and comprehension occur between speakers and listeners.

Misconception 4: learn the 'culture' of foreign/second language to speak it

Kramsch (2001) notes that the meaning of the term "culture" changed before and after the Second World War. Before the war, it referred to knowledge of great works of literature, social institutions, and historical events acquired through the translation of written texts. After the war, the rise of linguistics and the social sciences, along with the demands of market economies, gave prominence to spoken language and communication across cultures in everyday life. According to Carter and Nunan (2001, p. 220), culture reflects a kind of group membership in terms of "national, ethnic, professional, gender, and other characteristics." They also state that the term includes "both the high culture of literature and the arts and the small 'c' culture of attitudes, values, beliefs, and everyday lifestyle" (p. 221).

In addition to the definitions above, books and articles suggest that foreign or second language learners need to learn and accept the culture associated with the language they are studying, and many perspectives support this idea. Harmer (1995), for example, lists several reasons for learning a foreign language, one of which is culture. Some students are motivated to learn a foreign language because they are attracted to the culture of the target language. They want to learn more about the people who speak the language, the places where the language is spoken, and the writing system. Harmer (ibid) further explains that integratively motivated students seek to integrate themselves into that culture. Oxford (2001, p. 168) explains the relationship between language learning and culture by stating that "social strategies facilitate learning with others and help learners understand the culture of the language they are learning." Demircan (1990) states that cultural knowledge includes societal structure, values and attitudes, cognitive maps (schema maps), and acculturation (the exchange of knowledge and skills).

Hall (1959) explained the relation of culture and language by saying "*culture is communication and communication is culture*" cited in Carter and Nunan (2001, p. 201). This means that if you want to speak English, you need to learn English/British or American culture. At this point, it is necessary to consider the cultural elements and question some of them by asking to the language learners in context.

Counterview 4: *what is implied? Only knowing it in theory or applying it?*

Demircan (1990) provides the following examples of cultural elements that belong to a nation: weddings, birth, death, graduation, shopping, fortune telling, military service, dating, birthdays, local customs, visiting the sick, traveling, renting a house, etc. Some cultural elements in Britain include: English breakfast (consisting of bacon, egg, sausage, tomatoes, with tea or coffee), afternoon tea (people drink tea and eat small sandwiches and cakes), American football, British Summer Time (one hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time), Christmas (Santa comes down the chimney), Christmas dinner, Easter Sunday (commemorating and celebrating the resurrection of Jesus), Easter egg (a chocolate egg or a real egg), fish and chips (very popular in Britain), and garden parties (every year the British Queen hosts several garden parties at Buckingham Palace) (Longman, 2001).

As a researcher, I asked the EFL students in the department about certain cultural elements in the UK and around the world and received the following answers:

My question	: The literature states that it is necessary to learn the culture of the target language. What does learning the culture of the target language mean?
Students' answer	: Some stated that they learned the cultural element in theory, while others said they learned and adopted the cultural elements of the target language.
My question	: I asked what they mean by adoption of the cultural elements.
Students' answer	: they said: language learners can drink English tea, have English breakfast, or Christmas dinner before the New Year etc.

My question : do you think that an English tea or breakfast will improve your reading, writing and speaking skills in English?

Students' answer :some of them said "yes" and some others said "no".

My question : In this case my question was: Can we not read books to learn about cultural life in England, daily life in England, education in England, sports in England, and so on?

Students' answer : Some of the students disagreed and said, "This is just information from the books. In theory, learning the language means using cultural elements."

My question : My last question left everyone speechless. If we want to learn Chinese, do we have to use a chopstick to learn it? Or if we want to learn Scottish, do we have to wear a Scottish skirt to learn it? That is, does using a chopstick or wearing a Scottish skirt help us learn Chinese or Scottish?

Students' answer : no answer.

It was assumed that the students' responses about cultural integration were based on the theories of acculturation and nativization proposed by Brown (1980a) in Ellis (1994, p. 251) when explaining theories of second language learning. The theory is defined as "the process of becoming adapted to a new culture." It considers this adaptation an important element of SLA, as language learning is viewed as one of the most observable expressions of culture. This suggests that language learners must adopt and use the cultural elements of the target language. As a researcher, I was in England for six years, from 1995 to 2001. I completed my MA at Essex University and my Ph.D. at East Anglia University, where I made some observations.

At the universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, and Durham, there are native English-speaking students learning Chinese. There are also native English-speaking students studying Arabic at Durham, Manchester, and Edinburgh universities. Unfortunately, these students do not dress or live like Chinese or Arabs while learning Chinese and Arabic. Ultimately, the idea that students must adopt and live the culture of the target language appears to be political, social, and cultural imperialism aimed at influencing the lifestyles of other countries, rather than an educational rationale.

Misconception 5: *Teach the topics from simple to difficult one*

This misconception is widespread not only in English classes but also in most other subjects, such as chemistry, history, and especially educational sciences, which are known as formation courses (modules) in Turkey. The question of which structures are easy and which are difficult is usually answered as follows: The subject "to be – am, is, are" is considered easy compared to "was – were." Similarly, it is assumed that the present tense is simpler than the past tense, and the examples continue in this way. For example, in English, Demirel (2004, p. 8) makes this assumption when explaining the primary and secondary guidelines for teaching English. According to this view, language learning must be seen as a continuous process of

successive approximation to the mother tongue, moving from simple to complex. Similarly, Ozbay (2007) lists 24 principles for teaching Turkish and expresses the same idea in his book Special Teaching Methods for Turkish 1. Karamustafaoğlu (2006) also takes this view when explaining how to teach science.

Overall, understanding from easy to difficult naturally varies among learners. One learner may have difficulty with the verbs "to be," while another may struggle with "was" and "were." The concept of teaching from easy to difficult is interpreted differently in SLA studies, as discussed below.

Counterview 5: Starting with the difficult one may be useful

Cook (1993) explains the accessibility hierarchy on the basis of the formation of 6 types of relative clauses in English and a study by Eckman and his colleagues. The results sheds light on the misconception. For Cook (1993) different types of relative clause can be easily formed. By making some changes in the main clause and the relative clause, some words can be made more accessible for the formation of relative clauses than others and this is done through a hierarchy of accessibility. He (ibid) gives an example of 6 different types of relative clauses that form the hierarchy of accessibility in English.

"Type 1: The man *who left* was John (subject clause).

Type 2: The car *that he crashed* was John's (object clause).

Type 3: The person *that he gave the cheque* was Tom (indirect object).

Type 4: The person *to whom he gave the cheque* was John (object of preposition clause).

Type 5: The man *whose book I borrowed* was furious (possessive clause).

Type 6: The man *than whom I am taller* is John (object of comparison)" (pp. 19–20).

Eckman and his colleagues (1988) divided their EFL students into three groups to test the accessibility hierarchy. One group was taught only type 1 (subject), another group was taught type 2 (object) and the other group was taught type 4 (prepositional clause). The lessons for all groups lasted one hour and the researchers tested how well the students knew all three types, not just the one type they had been taught. Surprisingly, the third group achieved the highest score not only from Type 4 exercises, but also on the Type 1 and Type 2 exercises. Cook (1993) states that "L2 learners can extrapolate from one structure to others. The straightforward logical teaching sequence, essentially from easy to difficult, may be less effective than the reverse order". His conclusion (ibid) that "giving the students an example of the most difficult form is sometimes useful" (p. 22) is evidence of the common misconception in the research context.

5. Conclusion and Discussions

The aim of this article was to describe the five most common misconceptions in foreign language learning and in the research context. First, it shows how these misconceptions – the need to rename main and sub-skills, starting language learning with listening, immersion

without comprehension, cultural integration, and starting with easy or difficult topics – are illustrated through references to the literature on language teaching and the research context. Second, it provides research findings and observations from researchers with 30 years of experience teaching language to graduate students in response to each of these misconceptions. There are other topics of discussion, such as using the native language in teaching a foreign language, students teaching or learning the language, and teaching the native language and the foreign language simultaneously or separately. However, it is impossible and impractical to cover all of the discussion topics in one article.

It was found that the cited studies titled "EFL Students… in Turkey" did not incorporate the above misconceptions into their research context. It is generally assumed that the main skills are listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Scrivener, 2000; Demirel, 2004), while the sub-skills are grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. If we consider these skills from different perspectives, such as activating and activated or influencing and influenced, it becomes clear that knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation enables the other skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. If certain skills are dominant and activate the others, it has been suggested that these dominant and activating skills – vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation – should be referred to as the main skills.

It has also been observed that most references in EFL state that language teaching must begin with listening comprehension (Demirel, 2004, p. 8). According to this view, teaching should follow the order of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Although this sequence is emphasized, the literacy status of language learners – whether illiterate or literate – is often overlooked. It has been noted that an illiterate baby or child must start with listening comprehension to learn their mother tongue. It has also been established that a literate person can begin with reading, comprehension, translation, and similar activities. When a fully attentive baby hears words from a speaker, they cannot associate the meaning of these sounds with their references. Similarly, even a literate student or academic cannot associate the meaning of the sounds they hear unless these sounds are supported by actions, figures, demonstrations, and so on. Even hearing the sounds several times and slowly is meaningless if these sounds are not explained and supported by pictures, actions, and similar aids, as can be seen in the example of learning Chinese.

In addition, immersion is one of the most frequently used terms in the research context. Language learning is often compared to learning to swim. The implication is that if someone cannot swim, dropping them into a pool or lake is considered the only way to teach them. It is claimed that they learn to swim by flapping and struggling. The first attempt of this kind usually ends in drowning. The immersion program is based on the idea of "just listen and read" for understanding. However, it is stated that 'comprehensible input' (Krashen, 1985), 'guided practice' (Harley, 1989), and a 'supportive environment' (Skehan, 2001) are the most important elements. It has been noted that the idea of teaching a foreign language is similar to learning a language by listening. It was emphasized that simply reading and listening to a text is not enough to learn a foreign language. Solutions for language immersion include making the text comprehensible by looking up words in the dictionary, drawing pictures, figures, and shapes, and acting out the words as effectively as possible.

Moreover, culture and cultural integration are among the most important elements in foreign and second language learning. As Hall (2001) states, behind the statement "culture is communication and communication is culture" is the idea that you cannot learn a language without knowing the culture associated with it. Implicit cultural integration is similar to integrative motivation in linguistics. As we have seen, cultural elements in Europe are similar to each other but differ from those in the Middle East. Books on second language acquisition (Ellis, 1996; Cook, 1993) and their related sections on culture suggest that if you want to learn English, you must also learn British and Western culture. When the researcher was pursuing his MA at the University of Essex, the lecturers often told him, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." This was frequently said to him during social events because he did not drink alcoholic beverages. In response to misconception 4, it was found that using chopsticks while learning Chinese or wearing a Scottish kilt while learning Scottish does not aid in learning these languages. Therefore, the statement in first and second language books that one must learn the culture of the target language is not an innocent idea.

Last but not least, the idea of teaching from the easy to the difficult is commonly advocated by educators from primary school through university. This approach is used not only in language teaching but across all disciplines. In language teaching, this principle is often applied when teaching grammatical rules. These rules are typically organized in grammar books as follows: to be (am, is, are), was, were, has been, simple present tense, present continuous tense, simple past tense, past perfect tense, and so on. As already mentioned, a topic such as to be (am, is, are) may be easy for some students, while for others, the simple present tense may be easier.

Overall, these misconceptions are widespread in both the literature on language learning and the research context. The reason these are considered misconceptions is that, despite the passage of time, the same views on language learning are repeatedly presented in newly published books and articles. Some academics may resist challenging these misconceptions. This situation is similar to the spinach experiment, in which spinach was once incorrectly claimed to contain more iron (35mg instead of 3,5mg in 100mg spinach). The researcher believes that only experienced academics and teachers can challenge the approaches, principles, methods, and techniques proposed in the literature. In contrast, language learners at the elementary or intermediate level cannot criticize or question the assumptions in language learning because they lack the knowledge and experience that lecturers possess. It is hoped that new language learners and readers of this article, especially those in the research context, will correct their perceptions of language learning and become successful language learners. It is also hoped that language learners will not always focus only on famous universities (Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard) and their publications for guidance on language learning. There are other universities and views on language learning around the world.

References

Adelman, G., Jenkins, D., & Kemmis, S. (1984). Rethinking Case Study. In J. Bell et al. (Eds.), *Conducting small-scale investigations in educational management* (pp. 93–102). London, P. C. P.

Atmaca, C. (2016). Error Analysis of Turkish EFL Learners: A Case Study. *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 234–241. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.10.007

Cakır, R., & Solak, E. (2014). Exploring the factors influencing e-learning Turkish EFL learners through TAM. *TOJET: The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 13(3), 79–87.

Carter, R., & Nunan, D. (2001). *The cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages* (pp. 1–6). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667206.001

Celik, S. et al (2013). In the Eyes of Turkish EFL Learners: What Makes an Effective Foreign Language Teacher? *Porta Linguarum*, *20*, 277–297. https://doi.org/10.30827/Digibug.18114

Celik, S., & Toptaş, V. (2010). Vocabulary Learning Strategy Use of Turkish EFL Learners. *Procedia, Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *3*, 62–71. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.07.013

Crystal, D. (1998b). *The penguin dictionary of language* (2nd ed.). Penguin Books Ltd.

Cook, V. (1993). *Second language learning and language teaching* (2nd ed.). Edward Arnold.

Demircan, O. (1990). *Yabanci-dil ögretim yöntemleri*. Can Ofset.

Demirel, Ö. (2004). *ELT methodology*. Pegem A.

Ellis, R. (1994). *Understanding second language acquisition* (9th impr.). Oxford Universtiry Press.

Göktepe, F. T. (2014). Attitudes and Motivation of Turkish Undergraduate EFL Students towards Learning English Language. *Studies in English Language Teaching*, *2*(3), 314–332. https://doi.org/10.22158/selt.v2n3p314

Harmer, J. (1995). *The practice of english language teaching* (8th impr.). Longman Handbooks for Language Teachers. Longman.

Istifci, I. (2017). Perceptions of Turkish EFL Students on Online Language Learning Platforms and Blended Language Learning. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *6*(1), 113–121. https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v6n1p113

Karamustafaoglu, O., & Yaman, S. (2006). *Fen öğretiminde özel öğretim yöntemleri I – II*. Anı Yayıncılık.

Katavazai, R. et al. (2019). An Evaluation of Sub-Skills (Vocabulary, Grammar and Pronunciation) in the Grade 9 English Textbook of Afghan Secondary Schools. *International Journal of Engineering and Advanced Technology*, *8*(5C), 1236–1241. https://doi.org/10.35940/ijeat.E1176.0585C19

Kızıltepe, Z. (2000). Attitudes and Motivation of Turkish EFL Students towards Second Language Learning. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *129*(1), 141–168. https://doi.org/10.1075/itl.129-130.01kiz

Kramsch, C. (2001). Intercultural Communication. In R. Carter & D. Nunan (Eds.), *The cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages* (pp. 201–206). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667206.030

Larsen-Freeman, D., & Anderson, M. (2011). *Techniques & principles in language teaching*. Oxford University Press.

Lewis, M. (1996). *The lexical approach, the state of ELT and a way forward*. Language Teaching Publications.

Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2000). *How languages are learned*. Oxford University Press.

Longman. (1998). *Longman dictionary of English language and culture*. Longman Limited.

Oxford, R. L. (2001). Language Learning Strategies. In R. Carter & D. Nunan (Eds.), *The cambridge guide to teaching english to speakers of other languages* (pp. 166–172). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667206.025

Ozbay, M. (2008). *Türkçe özel öğretim yöntemleri I*. Öncü Kitap.

Razi, S. (2012). Turkish EFL Learners' Language Learning Strategy Employment at University Level. *Eğitimde Kuram ve Uygulama*, *8*(1), 94–119.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (1993). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Robson, C. (1995). *Real world research*. Blackwell.

Salkind, N. J. (2000). *Exploring research* (4th ed.). Prentice Hall Int.

Scrivener, J. (2000). *Learning teaching, the teacher development series*. Adrian Underhill, Macmillan, Heinemann.

Skehan, P. (2001). Comprehension and Production Strategies in Language Learning. In C. N. Candlin & N. Mercer (Eds.), *English language teaching in its social context* (pp. 74–89). Routledge.

Solak, E., & Bayar A. (2015). Current Challenges in English Language Learning in Turkish EFL Context. *Participatory Educational Research* (PER), *2*(1), 106–115. https://doi.org/10.17275/per.15.09.2.1

URL-1. (2025). Retrieved April 8, 2025, from https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezSorguSonucYeni.jsp

URL-2. (2025). Retrieved April 15, 2025, from https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/biology/m01540?hl=en

Vasanthan, R., & Nandhini, R. (2022). Integrating the Sub-Skills of LSRW for ESL Learners. In S. Mekala & R. Geetha (Eds.), *Contemporary ELT Strategies in Engineering Pedagogy* (pp. 95–116). India, Routledge, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003268529-9

Yule, G. (1993). *The study of language*. Cambridge University Press.