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Teaching Across Cultures: Considerations for International Language Teachers in Kazakhstan

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Abstract

This study explores the expectations and possible mismatches that arise from cultural differences between local students and their foreign English language teachers with a global mindset in the classroom interaction as an important domain of the intercultural communication. The authors view the language classroom and teacher-student interaction as truly intercultural settings that need a close inspection which is likely to contribute to a high level of intercultural competence and improvements in the quality of language education. Thus, the aim of this study is to raise awareness in the English-medium intercultural communication in secondary and higher education ELT classes in Kazakhstan by describing several significant aspects of teacher-student interaction. The local and international teachers as well as the English language learners provided data on the role of the teacher, types of teacher guidance, attitudes to lateness, types of the tasks for assignments and exams, attitudes to cheating, responsibility for the learning process, teacher attitudes to students' questions and the degree of student's initiative to describe local ELT classes. The study includes practical recommendations particularly for international teachers of English in Kazakhstan; however, local teachers and educational administrators, who need to work cooperatively with international teachers, may find the implications quite useful as well.

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1. Introduction

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Recent changes in the social and economic life after the collapse of the Soviet Union revealed a need in high competitiveness in all spheres including the education sector. ELT has become an important market where investors compete with others through their publications, technological innovations, and competent teachers in order to get superiority. In addition to the language schools that have been opened recently almost as many as supermarkets, universities, colleges, public and private schools comprise the organizations that invite ELT teachers from around the World. Nowadays respected language schools, universities or English courses have at least a few foreign teachers of English, usually native speakers. These international teachers of English are hired because they usually demonstrate a good standard of English at advanced levels. Since their existence also brings authenticity to the learning environment, they are treated with enthusiastic welcome. On the other hand, there is considerable concern about whether such foreign teachers really contribute to the quality of ELT services at their best. There seem to be three essential components that contribute to the success of English language teachers in any country. They are language, teaching techniques, and culture (Millrood, 1999). However resourceful a teacher is in the other two components, success is hardly an issue of end product that could be achieved if one of them is missing. Therefore, foreign language teachers' best contribution can only be provided if they are well aware of the peculiarities of the local culture and mindset, which determine the norms of learner behavior during the interaction in an ELT class.

In this paper, we will attempt to explore learner expectations on certain significant aspects of teacher-student interaction in ELT classes in Kazakhstan. These aspects focus on the authentic communication between the foreign teacher and local learners and comprise several issues such as the role of the teacher, types of teacher guidance, attitudes to lateness, types of the tasks for assignments and exams, attitudes to cheating, responsibility for the learning process, teacher attitudes to students' questions and the like. We further will compare them to those of the international teachers who we assume to have adopted a second identity as they work in Kazakhstan. This second identity requires the promotion of global values and trends in students' personal development and language learning. We are also aware of the fact what gives these values a global acceptance is their popularity through the mass media rather than their truthfulness. As such an international teacher of English is likely to be a native speaker or an advanced speaker of English who tends to use a communicative approach to language teaching which basically promotes 'facilitator' or 'interlocutor' roles of teachers, 'democratic' and 'indirect' styles of guidance, 'linear' and 'exact' concepts of time management, 'critical thinking skills' and 'creativity' in assignments, 'accuracy' and 'objectivity' of assessment. They tend to encourage learners to develop autonomy and take more responsibilities for their own learning in a learner-centered class atmosphere. As one can easily notice that these features are based on the values of western cultures and the product of language teaching methodology that has been developed by English-speaking scholars who were born to or exposed to the western cultural environments.

Owing to the fast economic growth and educational policies that emphasize the nation's integration into the modern world, language teachers from abroad has been hired to work in local institutions recently. Therefore, the study introduces a new issue for ELT in Kazakhstan. In fact, there has been some research comparing Western and East Asian cultures and their influence on teaching. Kazakhstan, nevertheless, is in the Central Asia and has a different unique Eurasian culture, which belongs to both the East and West, without being Eastern or Western, remaining original according to the official identification that is given at the website of the Emblem and Flag of Kazakhstan.

Thus, this study will be practically useful for both Western and local teachers as well as the ELT managers of local educational institutions.

2. Background of the Study

The first axiom for any teacher, especially in a cross-cultural setting, is to adapt your teaching to the context of the students, school and community in which you are working (Barnhardt, n.d). Therefore, when teachers from abroad come to teach English in Kazakhstan, they should be aware of the cultural peculiarities of the local

students. In other words, they should clearly understand what local students expect from a teacher and the teaching-learning process on the whole. Such teacher-student interactions comprise authentic communicative situations with an intercultural dimension which is provided by cultural differences between learners and their foreign teacher as well as the expectations that arise from these differences. In order to compare the two cultural backgrounds, first of all there is a need to define the conceptual framework of culture and to develop a set of criteria that can at least roughly measure any culture as an essential component of context for communication.

2.1. Defining and Teaching Culture

Adopting a relevant definition of culture is an important first step of incorporating it into foreign language teaching. A broad definition that comes to the mind first would be “civilization” represented in manners, arts and crafts and their products that are acquired through education in a society. Geert Hofstede, a Dutch academic who put corporate culture on the map (Guru: Geert Hofstede, 2008), calls this meaning of culture as the domain of a “ministry of culture” on his personal website. Bennett refers to the same notion of culture with “capital C”, which is about the great literary works, historical figures and thinkers, as opposed to “small c” culture meaning “the learned and shared patterns of beliefs, behaviors and values of groups of interacting people” (Bennett, 1998, p.3). This second type of culture is about the particular way a group of people think, feel, and act in general. Hofstede has defined it as “the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from another”. The “category” in this definition refers to one’s socio-cultural identity determined by nationality, regional or geographical belonging, ethnicity, gender, religion, occupation, or corporal organizations (Hofstede, n.d.).

Culture teaching received considerable conscious attention in language teaching after the introduction of the construct of intercultural communicative competence. (Hymes, 1972) Culture and language are believed to be inseparable and intertwined. Therefore, culture has always been taught along with the language though in the forms of separate courses known as *background studies*, *area studies*, *British life and institutions*, in Europe (Byram, 1989, pp. 58-60, 1998, p. 2) and *country studies* in the Soviet and early post-Soviet era in Kazakhstan. However such courses were limited to factual knowledge pertaining to the structure and functions of institutions and people’s lives through generalizations and stereotypical perceptions (Mountford & Wadham-Smith 2000: 1). These courses also viewed culture “as mere information conveyed by the language, not as a feature of language itself” (Kramsch 1993:8). In other words, the teaching of culture, which was particularly known as ‘the capital C culture’ (Bennett, 1998, p.3), was considered to be supplementary to language teaching, not a part of it. In Bennett’s terms, “the small c culture”, which is represented in everyday lives of people and in their beliefs, values and skills, was just ignored. Traditional Grammar-Translation approach to teaching foreign languages in Kazakhstan probably considered cultural skills as inferior to the knowledge and skills of grammar and translation. Now that communicative approach has prevailed language teaching, it is believed that “the person who learns a language without learning a culture risks becoming a fluent fool” (M. Bennett, J. Bennett, & Allen, 2003, p. 237).

2.2. Identifying and Comparing Cultural Dimensions in Intercultural Communication

Two of the research proponents who investigated cultural differences have been Geert Hofstede and Edward T. Hall. Geert Hofstede researched cross-cultural groups and organizations and as a result, developed a systematic framework for assessing and differentiating national cultures and organizational cultures. His studies demonstrated that there are national and regional cultural groups that influence behavior of societies and organizations. The values that distinguished countries from each other could be grouped statistically into five clusters (Hofstede, n.d.). These groups, which have become the Hofstede dimensions of national culture, are known as ‘individualism versus collectivism’, ‘power distance’, ‘uncertainty avoidance’, ‘masculinity versus femininity’, ‘long-term/short-term orientation’(Guru:Geert Hofstede, 2008). Moreover, among the research on intercultural studies, anthropologist Edward T. Hall’s constructs of polychronic versus monochronic time orientation describes how cultures structure their time. A very brief review of such constructs enables a relative comparison and a better understanding of cultural peculiarities that provide a more meaningful context of ELT for foreign teachers in Kazakhstan.

2.2.1. Individualism versus Collectivism

As one of the Hofstede dimensions of cultural variation, ‘collectivism-individualism’ indicates the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. On the individualist side of the spectrum, we find societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after themselves and their immediate family. On the collectivist side, we find societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families - with uncles, aunts and grandparents - which continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, n.d.). In collectivist cultures, people promote respect for authority and group consensus. In individualist cultures, the emphasis is on self-expression and individual thinking. When individualists are dissatisfied with the group they leave it; collectivists tend to stay. While collectivist cultures emphasize developing and sustaining stable, hierarchical roles, individualist cultures are associated with equalitarian relationships and flexibility in roles. In collectivist cultures, the boundaries of property ownership are more permeable. In individualist cultures, personal items are private property and are not to be shared. (Ho, Holmes and Cooper, 2004).

Education is a way of gaining higher status in collectivist cultures. In individualist cultures, the aim of education is to acquire knowledge and to improve one’s competence in order to earn a better living. In collectivist cultures, students expect to learn “how to do” and tend to perceive that there is only one right perspective to a given problem. Learning in individualist cultures is about how students experience and organize the subject matter of a learning task. It is about “how” they learn, rather than “how much” they remember. In collectivist cultures, students usually do not freely express their opinion in a large class situation unless they are being called upon personally by their teacher. In individualist cultures, students are generally more willing to speak up (Ho, Holmes and Cooper, 2004).

The difference of student behavior is also visible in students’ acceptance of the authority of their teacher, which lead them to cooperation and support the teacher at all times in collectivist cultures. They avoid confronting the teacher even when they disagree with the opinions that their teacher or fellow students expressed. The students in individualist societies have a weak face consciousness, so giving appropriate information is more important than saving one’s face (Chang & Chin, 1999)

2.2.2. Power Distance

Another dimension of cultural variation is ‘power distance’ which means to measure the degree to which power, prestige and wealth are unequally distributed in a culture. Cultures with high ‘power distance’ scores believe that control and influence should be concentrated in the hands of a few. In cultures with low ‘power distance’ picture, control and influence are believed to be more equally distributed. For instance, employers are expected to stand in a line with their employees in a low-power distance business corporation.

In a high -power distance class, teachers are greatly respected by students because of their age and profession. The lesson tends to center around the teacher - they initiate most communication and students are rarely proactive or challenging. Teacher’s main goal is to transmit his knowledge to students. On the other hand, teachers and students from low ‘power distance’ cultures have equal responsibilities; both contribute to the learning process. Students are usually active and initiative.

2.2.3. Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Unstructured situations are novel, unknown, surprising, and different from the usual. For strong uncertainty avoiding cultures something new and different is dangerous, whereas people from weak uncertainty avoiding cultures are curious about new unknown things and situations.

Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures, and on the philosophical and religious level by a belief in absolute Truth. People in uncertainty avoiding countries are also more emotional, and motivated by inner nervous energy. The opposite type, uncertainty accepting cultures, are more tolerant of opinions different from what they are used to; they try to have as few rules as possible, and on the philosophical and religious level they are relativist and allow many

currents to flow side by side.. People within these cultures are more phlegmatic and contemplative, and not expected by their environment to express emotions (Hofstede, n.d.).

2.2.4. Masculinity and Femininity

The binary opposition of masculinity versus femininity refers to the range of emotional roles between competitive-assertiveness and caring-sharing-modesty. Hofstede's studies for the IBM company revealed that women's values differ less among societies than men's values and men's values from one country to another contain a dimension from very assertive and competitive and maximally different from women's values on the one side, to modest and caring and similar to women's values on the other. The assertive pole has been called masculine and the modest, caring pole feminine. The women in feminine countries have the same modest, caring values as the men; in the masculine countries they are more assertive and more competitive, but not as much as the men (Hofstede, n.d.).

2.2.5. Long-term vs Short Term Orientation

Hofstede's fifth cultural dimension is long-term versus short-term orientation which is based upon the teachings of Confucius. Confucianism looks at life in the long-term rather than the short-term by promoting the stability of society, considering family as the prototype of all social organizations, appreciating the virtuous behavior toward others with the principle of treating others as one would like to be treated oneself and encouraging such moral values as patience and perseverance (Hofstede & Hofstede, n.d.).

2.2.6. Monochronic and Polychronic Cultures

The monochronic time concept follows the notion of “one thing at a time”, time is inflexible, while the polychronic concept focuses on multiple tasks being handled at one time, and time is flexible (Tamas, 2007)

A manager's office in a polychronic culture typically has an open door, a ringing phone and a meeting all going on at the same time. Though they can be easily distracted they also tend to manage interruptions well with a willingness to change plans often and easily. People are their main concern (particularly those closely related to them or their function) and they have a tendency to build lifetime relationships. Issues such as promptness are firmly based on the relationship rather than the task and objectives are more like desirable outcomes than must do's (“Cultural”, 2012).

While in monochronic cultures schedule coordinates activity and appointment time is rigid, in polychronic culture interpersonal relations coordinate activity and appointment time is flexible. In a monochronic culture, the work time is clearly separable from the personal time, whereas in polychronic culture it is not. Another difference is that in monochronic culture's tasks are measured by output in time, but in polychronic cultures tasks are measured as part of overall organizational goal. Interactions between the two types can be problematic. Monochronic businessmen cannot understand why the person they are meeting is always interrupted by phone calls and people stopping by. Is it meant to be insulting? When do they get down to business? Polychronic businessmen cannot understand why tasks are isolated from the organisation as a whole and how one can separate the work time from personal time? Why would you let something as silly as a schedule negatively impact on the quality of your relationships? (Bhattacharyya, 2010, p.54).

2.2.7. Other Approaches to Understanding Cultural Differences through Bipolar Constructs

Obviously there are more studies on cultural differences and the ways of comparing cultures through bipolar constructs are not limited to the ones that we reviewed so far in this paper. For example, a dialogic versus dialectic model describes whether a certain culture favors a student-centered and collaborative class or a teacher-centered and competitive class (Hammond & Gao, 2002, p. 235)

Similar to Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension is Hall's high and low context dimension. *High context* implies that a lot of unspoken information is implicitly transferred during communication. *Low context* implies that a lot of information is exchanged explicitly through the message itself and rarely is anything implicit or hidden. People in low context cultures such as the UK tend to have short-term relationships, follow rules and standards closely and are generally very task-oriented (“Crosscultural”,2012) (Jandt,1998). It influences whether a direct or indirect style is preferred in a certain culture. (Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998).

The choices of formal or informal styles of communication, use of verbal and nonverbal communication styles, the interpretation of silence (Samovar & Porter, 2004), the use of space or distance in high and low contact cultures (Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, (2008) may be common causes of miscommunication in intercultural interactions between representatives of different cultures when they meet.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

This study, which seeks to provide data about classroom expectations of Western teachers and Kazakhstani students, is based on interviews and questionnaires that revealed relevant data relying on participant observations in appropriate intercultural contexts where Kazakhstani students are taught by Western teachers of English. The participants of interviews were five Kazakhstani students studying abroad, seven Western EFL teachers who are currently working or worked in Kazakhstan, and eight local teachers. Questionnaires were conducted to sixty students in their 2nd, 3rd and 4th year of education at Suleyman Demirel University and forty of the 8th grade pupils at a local secondary school in Taldykorgan. All of the participants have been to ELT classes as a student or teacher, or as an observer. Local teachers also have had worked with foreign teachers of ELT in Kazakhstan.

The questionnaires were available both in English and Russian, but presented in Russian to locals and were responded anonymously and conducted by a third person - a senior student at the university as a part of the undergraduate research project - in order to achieve reliable results. Participants were asked to respond to the statements by choosing one of the four options on the basis of an 'agree - disagree range'. Data from the questionnaires are assumed to reveal student attitudes and analyzed globally together with local teachers' detailed responses to interview questions. Local teachers were asked about their own views of the description of their ELT classes whereas international teachers were additionally required to comment on differences in their expectations. One of the authors of this paper has been working as an ELT teacher and teacher trainer for almost two decades in Kazakhstan. Therefore the conversations with participant teachers have been productive as the author described himself as an international speaker of English who is originally from Turkey.

A part of the results that is relevant to describing language learners in terms of their expectations during their interaction with teachers in the intercultural atmosphere of ELT classes have been shared in the following sections of this paper.

3.1. Exploring Culture in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is composed of a multi-ethnic, multi cultural nation. As the citizens of a post Soviet republic, people in Kazakhstan mainly use Russian for inter-ethnic cross-cultural communication. However, the native language of the majority and the titular nation is Kazakh, which is slowly becoming a dominant language in all spheres of life owing to its status as the state language. For quite a long time Kazakhstan has experienced a multi cultural life through peaceful means of successful communication in a diverse community. There is a lot in common though there are also differences between them. "These differences are welcome, well known and viewed as richness in the form of a beautiful mosaic of cultures" said a Kazakh scholar, Ahmetzhanova Z. in a roundtable discussion at the 5th International Conference on Building Cultural Bridges in Almaty in 2013 (personal communication, April 26, 2013) In the light of past activities of this conference and the public opinion reflected in other social and academic events and in mass media, we drew following assumptions about the cultural features of locals, their beliefs, values and behaviors that determine the attitudes in relationships, particularly between teachers and students in language education.

Kazakhstan is a collectivistic country where strong family relationships, loyalty to friends, neighbors and colleagues, hospitality towards guests, respect for the aged and mercy for someone in need are greatly valued. Kazakhs historically preferred to lead a collective way of life and there are many proverbs about the importance and power of living in groups, not alone. "*Adamga adamsyz kyun zhok*", or "*Kozsyz ali omyr syurup, adamdarsyz omyr syurmeisin*", are two of such proverbs which mean life is impossible without having people around you.

On the other hand, power distance is quite high in Kazakhstan. Social roles are well defined in a hierarchical way and this is visible in a typical Kazakh family where individuals are ranked according to their age. Younger members are expected to be obedient to the elderly. Education is meant to shape the younger generation to serve the above mentioned values. In a European country children may be allowed for equal voice and encouraged to develop autonomy, while being consulted by their parents instead of being obedient (“Kazakhstan”, 2012).

The Kazakh society shows the features of a mixture of both masculine and feminine societies, though masculine qualities may be a bit more dominant. When there is a conflict in communication, they believe that the resolution depends on the loss of one of the sides. Perhaps some people who have interacted with a feminine culture would strive for a win – win type of resolution. However, if you look at gender roles in Kazakh society, you would notice the respect for the higher status of the male which does not discourage the female to take up significant positions in the social, economic and bureaucratic life. Traditionally there is a strict role distribution between men and women and children are brought up with appropriate roles to their genders. A commercial video broadcast by an international brand may receive negative feedback and reaction if stereotypical gender roles are ignored in the video clip. For instance, the man in the family preparing breakfast and making tea with an international tea brand for the wife and children who get up quite later than him is not a likely picture of a Kazakh family; so it may be protested by some academicians and community leaders.

People in Kazakhstan want stability, structure and security and due to this they have strong uncertainty avoidance. This can be seen especially in political, social, academic spheres of life. However, this does not coincide with how they conduct business. Since the society has a high-context culture, unspoken rules play an important role in communication. Locals are well acknowledged about the unwritten regulations and they may assume that their international interlocutors are also aware of them.

An interesting stereotypical opinion about Kazakhs is that they have polychronic time orientation. Therefore they usually do not follow an agenda (“Kazakhstan”, 2012). Completing tasks in time is subordinated to interpersonal relationships, which influences decisions and coordinates activities. People attempt to do many tasks at a time, and usually succeed them. Appointment time is flexible. As one of the authors of this paper reported, if you want to go to a wedding party at the exact time that you are invited, it is not unusual to wait for almost two hours until the party starts since everybody will almost often be late.

3.2. The Culture of the ELT Classes

In any class students’ or teacher’s expectations as well as their preferred learning or teaching styles are greatly influenced by their cultural background. Cultural expectations are often coded or implicit in intercultural communication. Cultural differences can have a negative impact on learning outcomes if they are not attended during the lesson. When a teacher and students have different cultural backgrounds teachers can misdiagnose cultural peculiarities as learning problems. This study shows that there are some differences in classroom expectations of students and international teachers of English in Kazakhstan. We have investigated the following peculiarities of learner preferences that can be useful for foreign teachers in Kazakhstan.

3.2.1. Role of the teacher

Based on the data collected from questionnaires and interviews, we can conclude that a teacher in Kazakhstan is likely to be viewed and expected to have adopted the roles of an *authority, parent and font of knowledge*. The level of authority is stronger with younger students than those who study at university. Although students prefer to conform to teacher authority and avoid conflict with teachers, they feel rather close to them. This indicates the influence of the high power distance of Kazakh culture on schools.

Table 1. Students’ attitudes to teachers

Accepted teacher roles	University (% of positive answers)	School (% of positive answers)
Authority		
Teacher’s word is a law for me.	49	79
	35	63

I will not contradict my teacher, even though he/she is not right.		
Friend		
Teacher is my best friend.	56	41
I can talk about my feelings with a teacher	50	50

Pupils and students show respect toward a teacher, use formal communication, address the teacher by the title name and surname (patronym) such as “Professor Chris Kennedy”, “Mr Holland”, “Mehmet Teacher”, “Anna Ivanovna”, “Toktar Agay” or “Kymbat Apay”, which is always formal regardless of the language background of communication.

Here are some of the responses to the questionnaire for international (western) teachers reflecting their experience and opinion about ELT learners in Kazakhstan.

An American teacher at university said:

“Students here in Kazakhstan act very respectfully to the most part, for the very most part. I think the students here are cheerful and very forthcoming to all teachers. They show to all teachers a high-degree respect. I am not sure if this is the case in the United States or Canada. Not so much... They have even terms...expressions of respect for educators: “hodjam” in Turkish or “apay/agay” in Kazakh. I feel very welcome with that reception. It impressed me very much – such a welcome!” (Personal communication, November 8, 2011)

Another university teacher from a European country said:

“They are very respectful, and very interested in people from other countries. In the bigger cities, people are very interested in the west and western ways.” (Personal communication, February 24, 2011)

A university teacher from Canada said:

“One major difference between US and Kazakhstani students is that Kazakh students may expect the teacher to be strict with them and force them to work.” (Personal communication, April 27, 2012)

This is different in Western countries where students address teachers just by their first names. Teacher plays the role of a *friend*. The distance between teacher and students in Kazakhstan is bigger than it is in the West. In Kazakhstan he is like a guru, but in West teacher and students are equals.

One of the western teachers told a story that happened to him in an ELT class in Kazakhstan because of the cultural differences in expectations. Here it is:

An international native-speaker teacher from the South East Asia working at a school said:

“I didn’t realize that it is common in Kazakhstan for the teacher to enter the classroom after the bell has rung. I like to go to my classroom early to get materials prepared, to hang up posters, write some things on the board, etc. When my students would enter the room (before the bell had rung) they would apologize. I couldn’t figure out why they were apologizing and then I realized that since I was there they thought that they were late and that class had already started!” (Personal communication, April 12, 2012)

A university teacher from Canada said:

“I am an educator but I am a learner as well.” (Personal communication, February 20, 2012)

As the teacher comments speak for themselves, an international teachers’ tolerance for ambiguity due to the self view as One more difference is that Kz teachers are supposed to have a deep knowledge about their subject, whereas W teacher does not have to know everything, because he is also learning.

3.2.2. Guidance

All students and pupils who participated in the survey agreed to teacher's moral guidance and expect their teachers to set a good example for them. Local teachers approached to the same point with reservation at university level. As a Kazakh student in Canada reports, the international (especially western) teachers, however, focus on just the academic knowledge and achievements in their home culture. Those who work in Kazakhstan seem to be cautiously meeting students' needs for guidance by just acknowledging them about general and universal moral values although they avoid teaching how to behave or take personal action on specific issues.

3.2.3. Lateness

Kazakhstan being a polychronic culture is supported by the results of this study. Ninety five per cent of the students and two third of the pupils believe that lateness is tolerated in schools in Kazakhstan. School teachers said that they allowed late students to get in the class, because they feel responsibility for them. If something happens to the late pupil outside the classroom during the lesson time, teachers will be responsible for it.

3.2.4. Assessment

Western institutions usually use tasks that comprise such lesson objectives as *explain, justify, compare, discuss, contrast, describe, analyze, evaluate, and review* for assignments and examinations, in order to develop independent thinking and problem solving skills. The preferred type of exams may be multiple-choice, true/false or gap filling when objectivity is more important than measuring advanced cognitive skills. Local teachers also prefer multiple-choice tests when the number of students is high, although some 39 % believe open ended questions and oral reports contribute to better levels of knowledge[10].

Few students prefer open ended questions because they give them freedom to express their thoughts. A majority of university students (91 %) and school pupils (77 %) would like the exams to be in multiple-choice format. However, local teachers usually ask questions that students can answer if they remember the instruction. Foreign teachers' questions usually require more knowledge and skills than what has been discussed during the lessons as a local teacher reports.

A major difference in assessment between local and international teachers is that local teachers tend to help with test instructions and even questions during an achievement or placement test. Most of them seem to be indifferent to objective measurement and evaluation and they probably still think of teaching during any type of test. This might stem from the old Soviet habits of ideological teaching and learning which did not prioritize measurement to teaching, because the younger generation of local teachers rarely help or give hints to examinees when they are asked for. A significant part of students (about one third) and pupils (42 %) find teachers' help acceptable and seek for teachers' help during an exam. It seems that the local culture of assessment in education does not match international systems. A Kazakh student from Canada said that she realized that she had not known what a real examination was like till she went to study there.

Research also unveiled a big problem in Kazakhstani classrooms. That is cheating and plagiarism. It seems that most students are unaware of how serious it is to attempt cheating and turning in an assignment just copied from a wiki site. The reason might be that they interpret the issue wrongly as cooperation which is an important value in other spheres of life in Kazakhstan.

3.2.5. Responsibility for the learning process

Western educational systems use student-centered approach, which emphasizes student's independent learning. The teaching style in Asian countries is mostly teacher-centered, where the teachers would give all or most of the information to the students. This makes the learning easier for students because they do not need to take much responsibility for finding the information on their own. In Kazakhstan, education is usually still teacher-centered, and there are some people who can blame the teacher for students' failure by all means (one fourth of student participants and about the same ratio of local teachers). However, the education system in Kazakhstan has aimed to integrate into the global system since they signed the Bologna Declaration in 2007. Higher education of Kazakhstan is in the transitional period between using a strong-teacher centered approach,

which was used in Soviet Union time, and a student-centered approach, which is one of the main requirements of western credit system adopted in Kazakhstan in 2010.

3.2.6. *The other issues*

The cultural issues for a description of ELT classes are not only the ones mentioned above or limited to everything that is referred in this study. For instance, when students voluntarily ask questions, both international and local teachers would view their questions in class as active learning in progress. However, few of the local students (5 % to 18 %) prefer to keep quite in order not to appear to be trying to check the teacher's knowledge. So, a quiet classroom does not mean that students are not following the lecture. They will ask questions if they really need so, not for showing the teacher their activeness. Teachers and students believe that working in groups is very important part of the learning process, as it helps to teach collective responsibility, mutual help and sociability.

4. Conclusion

In this study, attempts have been made to describe the current state of ELT in Kazakhstan with respect to a cross cultural comparison of learners' expectations and international teachers' attitudes to some key issues of discussion pertaining to the intercultural atmosphere of ELT setting. Initially, a review of identifying how national cultures differ from one another has been presented with reference to Hofstede's dimensions, Hall's constructs and some other bipolar definitions of differences. The study showed that there are several differences in classroom expectations of Kazakhstani students and teachers from the West. In Kazakhstan a teacher is expected to play a role of authority and parent, whereas in western countries he is a friend. Western student is more responsible for the learning process, while in Kazakhstan a teacher holds almost all responsibility, consequently, students are not autonomous and do not have well developed critical skills. The goal of the western teacher is often to guide learners only academically, whereas in Kazakhstan it is very important to educate students morally. Western teachers prefer to assess learners objectively through various types of questions on examinations and assignments, while Kazakhstani teachers' attitudes do not match international systems of assessment as they tend to help students during the exams or tolerate cheating unlike the international teachers. Lateness is tolerated in Kazakhstan probably more than it can be tolerated elsewhere in the World. Kazakhstani students may be passive during the lesson, not asking questions to the teacher, but western students are more active. This is also true about answering the teacher's questions. Unlike the western learners, Kazakhstani ones may keep quiet until the teacher points out particularly them. The last difference in classroom expectation is that in Kazakhstan doing assignments in groups is believed to teach mutual help, sociability, collective responsibility, while in the West it presents a risk of cheating and contradicting. The results of the research at school and university were similar.

This study reveals some of the challenges for international EFL teachers as a result of intercultural differences. However, it also partly unveils the current picture of ELT in Kazakhstan. Following tips are also based on the authors' selection of collective experience that is mostly acquired during this study.

- **Learn a little of source language (Kazakh or Russian).** This is particularly important if you have classes with elementary and pre-intermediate students. Sometimes students do not understand your explanations in English, and then they turn to their friends, who know English better than them, to translate your words. If you know at least a little Kazakh or Russian, you may try to help them figure out the meaning. You will see that your students will appreciate your efforts for communication in a language that you do not know well. This will help you build a good rapport with your class. They will try to communicate in English using different strategies even when they feel they are unable to do so. Moreover, such code-switching is something they are familiar with when they communicate in both Russian and Kazakh outside your classes.

- **Give feedback.** It is very important for the local students to hear or to see teacher's comments on their performance.

- **Show interest in their lives.** Ask them how their weekend was, for example, and really listen to their answers. They will appreciate it.

- **Use pair and group work.** Kazakh students enjoy working in groups. However, remember different personality types in your class and adapt you activities and types of student interaction according to their needs. Group work may be an opportunity for some students to overcome anxiety before they demonstrate their skills in public.

- **Use games and songs fairly often.** But remember that some students may feel that you are not taking your job seriously if there is too much fun and too often in the lesson.

- **Be ready to fight with cheating.** You will be surprised to know the extraordinary ways of cheating in you class. Be strict from the first examination or a quiz. Show the students that you will not tolerate cheating. However, remember that the school authorities and the society will be unwilling to punish the students who cheat. It is still easier r to prevent them from attempting to cheat than catching them cheat and punishing them for it.

- **Be ready to fight with plagiarism.** Tell your students that you are practicing checking the assignments with the help of special websites or software. Warn them about the consequences of plagiarism in real modern life. Persuade them that plagiarism is not only immoral, but illegal as well. Specifically, give them appropriate feedback on their essays on plagiarism.

- **Explain the tasks/assignments in a detailed way.** Tell your students about how to produce a good assignment. They may need detailed guidance on where they can find possible sources for relevant information. You can show one example of a good essay and explain why it is good.

- **Be ready for lateness of students.** Of course, this does not mean that you should welcome it, but sometimes you should be able to tolerate it.

- **Be strict enough when you follow your teaching agenda.** This can help you to win your students' respect.

- **Be ready for formal communication.** Do not try to make them call you just by your first name. It will be strange and not very comfortable for them.

- **Be available at office hours.** If you tell your students that you have an office hour on Friday from 3 to 4 o'clock, this means that they can come to you at that time without making an appointment.

We hope that the study presented above will help international speakers of English, who want to try their pedagogical talent in Kazakhstan, cope with the difficulties, caused by the mismatches in expectations and be very successful in all their professional undertakings. We also suggest that they should be provided with a cultural orientation training seminar before they start working in Kazakhstan.

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