

CULTURE IN THE EFL CLASSROOM: WESTERN INSTRUCTORS
AND ARAB STUDENTS IN THE UAE

by

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Abstract

In the field of EFL teaching, it is common for instructors and students to come from very different cultural backgrounds. Instructors who leave their home countries and go to teach abroad may have trouble adjusting to the culture of their new teaching context, and cultural misunderstandings that interfere with learning may occur in the classroom (Kramsch, 1993). This research focused on cultural conflicts between Western, native English-speaking instructors and their Arab students at two university-level EFL programs in the UAE. Questionnaires and interviews were used to discover key cultural differences between these two populations, instructors' awareness of these differences, the details of specific classroom cultural conflicts, and the instructors' and students' attitudes toward culture. It was discovered that the Western, native English-speaking instructors and their Arab students hold different values in several areas, including the roles of religion and family in one's personal life and the ideal atmosphere of a classroom. The very experienced instructors involved in this research were also found to be aware of the cultural differences between them and their students. Nine categories of classroom cultural conflicts were identified, the major ones being inappropriate materials/discussion topics, mixed-gender issues, and disrespect for religious customs. Finally, both instructors and students reported having positive attitudes toward cultural understanding in the classroom.

Search Terms: intercultural competence, cultural conflict, culture in EFL classrooms, UAE culture, Western culture

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1. Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The nature of EFL teaching – spanning nationalities, ethnicities, and countries – means that teachers and their students may often come from different cultural backgrounds. Many EFL instructors who have grown up in and received their education from English-speaking countries may experience difficulty adjusting to the culture of their students when they go to teach abroad (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2004; Al-Issa, 2005). Teachers who are fully qualified to teach English may still feel anxiety in the classroom when confronted with students whose cultures and learning practices are very different from their own. These feelings of anxiety and a lack of understanding of the students' culture can lead to conflicts in the classroom that interfere with learning (Kramsch, 1993; Al-Issa, 2005).

In addition, some native English-speaking instructors teaching abroad in cultures very different from their own may not realize that the conflicts they are encountering in the classroom actually stem from these cultural differences. The skills these teachers will use to overcome this cultural divide fall into the category of Intercultural Competence (ICC). ICC is “an individual's worldview, and in turn, his or her perceptions and responses to cultural difference” (DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009, p. 438). Teachers with well developed ICC - whether innate or obtained over years of experience or during a teacher training program – will be able to effectively alter and adapt their teaching practices and re-orient themselves toward their host culture in ways that allow them to engage with students from different cultural backgrounds.

In the UAE in particular, where the host culture is very different from the US, the UK, and other English-speaking countries, instructors who are native speakers of English may have very little experience with or knowledge of the host culture. Instructors with well developed ICC may need time and training to adjust to their very new, very foreign environment, while those without skills in ICC may flounder. These instructors may be fully qualified in terms of pedagogical training or subject matter knowledge, but the effectiveness of their teaching may be diminished by a lack of skills in dealing with student/teacher cultural conflicts that arise in the classroom. These conflicts may be obvious to the instructor, as might be the case for someone aware of the principles of ICC, or s/he might not be at all aware that problems arising in the classroom stem from cultural differences. Cultural conflicts that are ongoing

and unresolved – especially those in the EFL classroom, where the English language is sometimes the source of cultural barriers – can create a culturally hostile or insensitive environment that is not conducive to learning. Furthermore, even instructors who are aware of cultural problems in the classroom, and have perhaps even dealt with them successfully in other contexts more similar to their home culture, may not know how to effectively resolve these issues.

In order to find out more about intercultural competence in native-speaking EFL instructors in the UAE, this research seeks to determine key aspects of the cultural differences between native English-speaking instructors and Arab students in foundation-year intensive English programs at two universities in the UAE, and to what extent the instructors are aware of these cultural differences.

This research also seeks to characterize the conflicts that occur between native English-speaking teachers and Arab students in EFL classrooms in the UAE. In addition, it investigates these instructors' and students' attitudes toward culture in the classroom.

Significance of this Research

The Arabian Gulf is an increasingly popular destination for English teachers seeking work overseas (Wages, 2012). The UAE is a particularly attractive choice for English teachers from countries such as the US, UK, and Australia, because it offers a style of living to expatriates that is on par with what they are used to in their home countries.

However, these external similarities to Western nations can be deceiving. When expatriates who are native speakers of English come in contact with other members of UAE society, it becomes clear that they are “not in Kansas anymore.” Instructors who assume that relatively permissive behavior and dress standards out and about in Dubai translate to a similarly liberal atmosphere in the classroom may not be sensitive enough to the very real cultural influences at work on their students and in society at large. A 2012 news story in Britain's *The Sun* frames itself as a cautionary tale for UK citizens seeking work in Dubai, relating the experiences of British expats in the UAE who ended up in jail for behavior that would be completely permissible in the UK and other Western countries. Charlotte Adams, a British resident of Dubai who spent a month in jail for kissing a man in public, warns: “Even though Dubai looks glamorous and Western, it isn't...It's a strict Islamic country, after all” (Roberts, 2012).

This research seeks to investigate the cultural differences that exist between native English-speaking instructors and their Arab students in the UAE, as well as the instructors' levels of awareness of these cultural differences. This research will also identify the kinds of conflicts that occur in the classroom between instructors and students, as well as these instructors' and students' attitudes toward culture in the classroom. A clear report on the state of instructor intercultural competence in native-speaker-taught English classrooms in the UAE could go a long way toward illustrating whether it is enough for instructors to only be qualified to teach their subject matter. This research aims to show whether instructors would benefit from training to improve their intercultural competence before or soon after their arrival in the UAE, in order to ensure that when they enter the classroom, they are committed to creating a culturally welcoming environment that will not alienate students and will contribute positively to learning. Research detailing the kinds of cultural conflicts that occur between native English-speaking instructors and university students in the UAE can be very useful to schools or departments seeking to implement training programs that will produce instructors with the above-mentioned attributes.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The introduction has presented the background for this research and explained its significance. Chapter Two, the literature review, examines key issues in the literature and relates them to the research at hand. Chapter Three sets forth the methodology used in this research, including an explanation of the research instruments used and how they were administered. Chapter Four presents the data that were collected, interprets them, and answers the research questions. Finally, Chapter Five sets forth the main conclusions and implications that can be drawn from the results of the research, and suggests future avenues for research.

2. Literature Review

In order to investigate instructors' and students' attitudes toward and understanding of culture in their UAE classrooms, and to determine the kinds of conflicts that occur there, it is necessary to formulate a working definition of culture. The specific culture(s) of the UAE must also be described, and the ways in which it differs from Western culture should be identified. Furthermore, the role of culture in ESL/EFL classrooms will be investigated. A detailed explanation of Intercultural Competence will then be presented, particularly as compared to general content knowledge and expertise in ESL/EFL instructors. Then, an overview of the kinds of cultural (and other) conflicts that occur in the classroom will be included. Finally, solutions from the literature for improving ICC skills in teachers and avoiding or mediating conflicts in the classroom will be presented, including several frameworks of cultural conflict resolution.

For ease of reference, the term "native English-speaking instructor" has been abbreviated as "NES instructor." Although it is certainly possible for an ESL/EFL teacher to have grown up or been educated in a non-Western country and still claim English as a native language, for the purposes of this research, "NES instructor" (native English-speaking instructor) refers to a person who grew up and was educated in a Western country such as (but not limited to) the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, or New Zealand. This research will highlight the experiences of instructors who speak English as a native language in part because "native speakers of a language speak...the established knowledge of their native community and society...and the categories they use to represent their experience" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 43).

Similarly, this research discusses Arab students in UAE classrooms. For ease of reference, the term "Arab student(s)" is meant to designate a student from an Arabic-speaking country in the Middle East or North Africa, including the subset of Gulf Arabs (those from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the GCC), which in turn includes the smaller subset of Emirati Arabs. It is expected that most of the EFL classrooms involved in this research will feature Emiratis and other Arabs from the Gulf, but in order to widen the applicability of the findings and highlight the multicultural nature of this research, Arabs who claim a nationality outside the Gulf are also included.

The term “conflict” as used in this thesis denotes a mismatch or difference that occurs when two cultures come in contact. These conflicts may be relatively benign in nature and may go unnoticed by one or more participants, or they may be significant encounters that have immediate, negative consequences for those involved.

What is Culture?

Formulating a comprehensive, simple definition of *culture* presents a challenge, to such an extent that Atkinson (1999) noted that the term “is sometimes avoided by those working in this vein as one that is so encumbered and compromised as to be misleading or dangerous” (p. 627). However, because this research deals at length with the cultures of Western NES instructors and the cultures of Arab students studying in the UAE, a working definition must be formulated.

Hamad (1999) defines culture as “one form of social, cognitive and inherited knowledge in addition to its actual manifestation in a form of behavior,” and also references Sapir’s (1921) assertion that culture is “what a society does and thinks” (p. 40). Protheroe and Barsdate (1992) add that one’s culture is one’s “ways of being, knowing, and doing” (p. 1). In these definitions, two components of culture are clear: beliefs on the one hand, and actions on the other. These beliefs and actions are necessarily informed by Sapir’s (1921) “socially inherited” factors, which may include religion, style of upbringing, method of education, attitudes toward women, and more, all existing in what Keesing (1974) describes as “the game being played in the society into which [one is] born” (cited in Hamad, 1999, p. 40). Both the *belief* side of culture and the *action* side of culture are informed by society at large, but these beliefs and actions are formulated on an individual basis. It is clear that culture is a deeply held, at once individual and collectivized concept, resistant to change and prominent in shaping the way someone understands the world surrounding him or her.

Cortazzi and Jin (1999) add an additional component to these definitions when they suggest that “culture can be seen as the framework of assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that are used to interpret *other people’s* actions, words, and patterns of thinking” (p. 197, emphasis added). This addition shifts the perspective of the definition of culture to include how one perceives others, whether those others share one’s culture or not. This aspect of culture is especially important for this research, since it allows for culture to exist not in isolation, but in constant relation to other people and other cultures: in other words, it is “a social construct, the product of self and other perceptions” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 205, emphasis added). In classrooms

featuring Western NES instructors and Arab students, it is this “framework of...beliefs” that is used to “interpret” the actions of others that is most relevant to this research (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999, p. 197).

Culture, therefore, involves what people do and what people think, according to the ways they have been influenced by the society in which they participate. Culture exists at once on an individual level and a societal level, and the latter informs the former. Moving outside of the individual’s thoughts and actions, *culture* also involves how one responds to the thoughts and actions of other people. This response may be characterized by a misunderstanding of others’ cultures, or it may seek to include them in a wider context of different cultures. This research takes the first element of culture – the way people think and act – as a basis for exploring more about the second element of culture – how people respond to the thoughts and actions of others. Especially relevant are the times when any differences in thought and action (culture), particularly in the classroom, lead to conflict that interferes with learning, for “culture is difference, variability, and always a potential source of conflict when one culture enters into contact with another” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 1).

UAE Culture and Western Culture

If culture is, as discussed above, a system of beliefs and actions informed by society and formed individually, which in turn influences one’s interpretations of others, how do these elements differ between Western NES instructors and the students they teach in the UAE? Several differences between these two populations have been noted in the literature. Darwish and Huber (2003) note a focus on the “private self,” or an individualistic orientation, in North America and Europe, compared to a more collectivistic orientation in the Middle East (p. 48). Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov rate the United States, UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand as the most individualistic societies, with index scores in the 80s and 90s (2010, p. 96). The same study ranked Arab societies as among the most collectivistic, with index scores in the 30s. Hofstede, et al.’s 2010 research also ranked the United States and other “Anglo” countries as being disparate from Arab societies in other areas, such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, gender roles, and restraint. In addition, Hall’s 1976 research on high-context societies and low-context societies puts Arabs in the first category and Westerners in the second (in Strong, 2012, p.90; see also Al-Issa, 2005).

Such substantial differences in culture between students and teachers mean that

students from different cultural backgrounds may view, interpret, evaluate and react differently to what the teacher says and does in the classroom. Teachers therefore have to constantly bear in mind that the more substantial the differences in cultural background between sender and receiver involved in the communicative process, the more substantial the differences in the meaning attached to the message and social behavior will be. (Le Roux, 2002, p. 38) This is in agreement with Protheroe and Barsdate (1992), who point out that culture affects not “*what* students learn, but *how* students learn” (p. 1).

Of course, even with a working definition of culture, and an idea of the differences that can exist between two cultures, it is difficult to assign one, all-encompassing “culture” to the entire Middle East, or even the individual countries that comprise it. The UAE in particular presents a challenge for anyone seeking to describe its culture, being host, as it is, to dozens of nationalities from across the globe and consisting of less than 12% Emiratis (Salama, 2011). The UAE is sometimes described as having “third-world status, with first-world money” (Godwin, 2006, p. 9), a quip that at once tries to capture the country’s very recent, very fast entrance into the modern world of business and infrastructure, juxtaposed with the effect of the discovery of oil contributing to the country’s status as the fourth-richest country in the world in terms of GDP (UAE Yearbook, 2010, p. 145). One hundred years ago, the economy of the UAE was dependent on pearl-diving; fifty years ago, oil emerged as the mainstay of business activity in the UAE and led to spectacular growth in all industries, including construction, technology, business, and education.

As a result, the modern-day UAE has found itself straddling an awkward divide between East and West, adhering to traditional social mores rooted in Islam even as it encourages participation in its economy by a diverse crowd of expatriate professionals and laborers (UAE Yearbook, 2010). The establishment of post-secondary colleges and universities in the UAE exemplifies the fact that “the [UAE] is poised to become a hub for higher education in the region” (UAE Yearbook, 2010, p. 203). Amidst all this growth, development, and change, the UAE Yearbook, an official publication of the UAE government, proclaims that “culture is central to national identity” (p. 230). In that case, UAE culture is an increasingly complex construct that may at times find its Islamic roots at odds with Western influences.

However, one cannot simply append the word “culture” after the name of a nation-state and be satisfied: “Both the ethnological and the national naturalisms present associations of people and place as solid, commonsensical, and agreed-upon, when they are in fact contested, uncertain, and in flux” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 12). Neither can culture be determined without “further specification of other cultural factors such as age, gender, regional origin, ethnic background, and social class” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 206). It is only in general terms, then, drawing upon the characterizations in the UAE Yearbook (2010), that the culture of the UAE and many of its Arab residents can be described as being family-centric, patriarchal, collectivistic, conservative, extremely conscious of female virtuous conduct, and devoutly Muslim. In addition, there is no inherent sense of guaranteed liberty in speech, press, or politics - Morris (2010), for example, suggests that “political freedom is not exactly UAE's strong suit” (p. 36).

This working definition of the culture of the UAE is necessarily simplistic for the purposes of this research. Of course, as with any culture, there is variation within the society as a whole as to the exact culture of the individuals who comprise it (Kramsch, 1993). For example, the above characterization of UAE culture does not explore the nuances of cultural difference within sub-communities such as Arab Christians or Pakistani Muslims. Both of these groups are or have been, in certain areas or at certain times, significant members of UAE society and could be included in the wider picture of UAE culture. In order to have a defined scope, however, this research limits the above definition of the culture of the UAE to apply to Arabs, even as it is understood that there are other populations in the UAE who contribute to its culture and who may share many of the elements mentioned previously. Similarly, it is also understood that there is cultural variation even with an Arab, or Emirati, or Gulf Arab designation. Perhaps it is best to think of UAE culture as a continuum, upon which all of its participant nationalities and ethnicities are placed. This research focuses on one segment of the continuum, taking in only those who are Arab.

It is similarly difficult to formulate an all-encompassing description of so-called “Western” culture, such as exists in English-speaking countries like the United States, Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, etc. Taking the above description of UAE culture as a pattern, however, Western culture can be described as individualistic, liberal, and secular, with a strong emphasis on freedom of speech, press, and religion. Lind (1991), drawing upon a US governmental official's

characterization of Western culture, lists seven values or virtues: “freedom, justice, work, education, excellence, frugality, and community,” noting that especially “freedom and justice have flourished” (p. 42). This description seems to fit Hofstede, et al.’s (2010) characterization of Western culture having an individualistic orientation. The same allowances for variation between countries that were made when describing UAE culture must be made here as well. Where Western culture is a continuum, this research focuses on the part of the continuum that includes English-speaking countries.

In these general terms, then, the cultures of Western countries can often be characterized as being in direct contrast to the culture of the UAE in many key areas. Where UAE culture is centered on the family, with a relatively low divorce rate (Abu Dhabi reports a rate of 1.6 divorces per 1000 population), in the West divorce and remarriage are common (the US reports 3.6 divorces per 1000 population), and children often move out of the family home soon after graduating from high school (Marriage and Divorce Rates in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi; CDC Marriage & Divorce). Western culture also does not generally place restrictions on the public behavior of young women, and sexual relations outside marriage are widely considered to be acceptable. In contrast, UAE culture guards the reputations (often determined by the sexual behavior) of its female members very carefully, and the bringing of public shame on the family is a serious issue. The culture of the UAE is heavily influenced by the religion of Islam. However, there is no single religion in Western culture that plays an analogous role. Rather, different religions may hold a central place in certain areas of Western countries; for example, in some regions, the Baptist denomination of Christianity may be most influential, while other areas Mormonism may dominate. Finally, the political system and cultural expectations of the UAE do not guarantee the right of individuals to freely express any opinion they wish, especially those in opposition to commonly held values, and especially religious ones. In the West, on the other hand, vehement public debate is a common form of political expression.

These working descriptions of the culture of the UAE and the culture of the West being in direct opposition to each other do not take into consideration many of the shared values these two cultures embrace. It is certainly not the case that UAE culture and Western culture are constantly at odds with each other, leaving conflict in their wake at every moment of contact. However, it cannot be ignored that in many

ways, the cultures of the UAE and the West seem to share very little common ground, which creates a classroom environment ripe for cultural conflict. As stated above by Le Roux (2002), the more substantial the difference in cultural background, the more substantial the potential for conflict. Taking the two cultures discussed above and placing them on multiple cultural continuums of religion, family relations, political atmosphere, etc. would find UAE culture and Western culture often occupying different segments of that continuum, and perhaps, sometimes, even entirely different ends of it.

The Relationship between Culture and ESL/EFL Teaching

Atkinson (1999) asserts that culture is an important component of ESL/EFL teaching and warns unsuspecting instructors that “they will face it in everything they do” (p. 625). Instructors who ignore the cultural component of their ESL/EFL teaching could instead find “frustration, misapprehensions, intercultural conflict, and ultimately school failure” (Le Roux, 2002, p. 37). This is true even when teachers and students speak the same language, whether natively or otherwise (Le Roux, 2002; Kramsch, 1993). Consider that such “frustrations, misapprehensions, intercultural conflicts, and...failure[s]” can be even more volatile when the language of instruction (in this case, English) is *different* from a student’s native language.

Thus, ESL/EFL teaching in particular bears a heavy cultural weight. Higgs (1990, cited in Lessard-Clouston, 1997) recognized an “unbreakable bond between language and culture” (p. 132). It has long been assumed that in order to learn English properly, students must also assimilate native English-speaking culture, often at the expense of their own cultural traditions, or at least in opposition to them (Thomas, 1997). Course materials, especially those not prepared for a particular learning context in a particular country, often portrayed (and often still portray) an idealized “English” culture that did not allow for the inclusion of non-native paradigms. As Kramsch (1993) relates, ESL/EFL instructors “[tend] to transmit, with the language, a view of the world that reflects only the values and cultural assumptions of the native speaker’s society” (p. 12).

It was only in the 1990s and 2000s that researchers began to argue that one need not become *bicultural* in order to become *bilingual*: “learners of an international language do not need to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers of that language;...the educational goal of learning an international language is to enable learners to communicate their ideas and culture to others” (McKay, 2000, p. 7). In this

same vein, Hamad (1999) advocates teaching a foreign language in the context of *both* the foreign culture *and* the native culture, and encourages learners to apply elements of their native culture to the speaking of the foreign language; for example, exchanging greeting rituals or common religious expressions in the foreign language. This approach allows for the preservation of the learner's culture and leaves him or her the flexibility to adopt as many or as few characteristics of the foreign culture as he or she wishes.

Intercultural Competence (ICC) vs. Content Knowledge and Pedagogical Expertise

With culture being an unavoidable component of ESL/EFL teaching in classrooms around the world, it is increasingly important for instructors to possess the skills to navigate cultural conflict. Intercultural competence is the set of skills that teachers and students use to overcome challenges “when the producers and receivers of a message belong to different cultures” (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005, p. 100). Because “there is a universal tendency for people to put their own culture in a central position,” utilizing ICC in English classrooms is a skill that may not come naturally to teachers (Muhammad, 2005, p. 354). But it is through strong ICC that the cultural gap between students and teachers who come from diverse backgrounds can be bridged without having an adverse impact on the quality of English language teaching.

In the past two decades, the focus of teacher training has widened to include not only pedagogical or content training, but intercultural competence as well (Byram & Feng, 2004). This increased attention to the important factors of location and culture – context – in the development of one's teaching style is encouraging, but it is not enough (Nieto, 2006). There is still a strong tendency for teacher education programs to train ESL/EFL teachers “simply to deliver language instruction with no other major concerns” (Crookes, 2006, p. 46). The result of such programs is that “native English-speaking teachers of ES/FL with an international orientation have often entered the profession themselves with a relatively limited amount of prior preparation,” rendering such beginning teachers “largely unaware” of philosophical or value-based aspects of the host culture (Crookes, 2006, p. 46).

One's mere presence in a society does not necessarily lead to increased cultural fluency and stronger ICC skills (Eoyang, 2003). As Eoyang (2003) points out, “there are ways of being in a foreign country without *being* in a foreign country,” particularly in countries where, on a surface level, at least, one can carry on living

much as one did in one's home country (p. 6, emphasis added). In places like the UAE, where universities often feature "an American-style system, with a US-based curriculum, and English as the language of instruction," some instructors may be able to "convince themselves that beyond the fact that they are in a foreign country, students are just like students they taught in their American or other Western institutions. However, this is far from the truth" (Al-Issa, 2005, p. 155). Such a fundamental misunderstanding of one's students and their culture(s) "exacerbates" the potential for conflict (Alptekin & Alptekin, 1984, p. 16).

It is clear that

we need to go beyond current reforms that focus only on...increasing teachers' subject matter knowledge...they are simply not enough. Subject matter knowledge is important, of course,...but if teachers do not develop meaningful relationships with their students of all backgrounds—no matter what their own backgrounds are—the students simply will not succeed. (Nieto, 2006, p. 470)

In addition, teachers must be able to "make instant-by-instant decisions based on both local and global knowledge and on an intuitive grasp of the situation" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 3). The "meaningful relationships" mentioned by Nieto (2006), above, and an understanding of the cultural forces at work in the classroom can assist teachers in making these key decisions. This ability is especially important in ESL/EFL classrooms, where "with every turn-at-talk, teachers either perpetuate or subvert the traditional social culture of the classroom" (Kramsch, 1993, p.48). If not done sensitively, then, every turn-at-talk could give rise to cultural conflicts.

The Nature of Intercultural Conflicts

Escobar-Ortloff and Ortloff (2003) describe cultural conflicts as developing "when a major cultural difference exists alongside or in addition to typical instructional challenges in school" (pp. 255-256). Put more simply, cultural conflict may be brewing when a Western teacher exclaims in exasperation, "But, they just behave in ways Western students don't behave" (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2004, p. 9).

Students taught by teachers who come from a culture different from their own often wish that teacher would take the time to familiarize him/herself with important aspects of the host culture. Prodromou (1992) found that 74 percent of intermediate/advanced students (in Greece) felt that teachers from abroad should be familiar with their (the host) culture (p. 44).

Al-Issa (2005) describes a few of the kinds of cross-cultural conflicts that can occur in classrooms in the UAE. These encounters include:

- casual contact between the sexes, which is acceptable in one individual's culture but not the other
- feedback on academic work that is worded appropriately for one culture but is offensive or discouraging in the other
- different expectations on eye contact, body language, etc. during class presentations
- class material that is acceptable to one culture but offensive to another
- controversial opinions that run counter to the host culture introduced in class by the teacher

These kinds of conflicts – and others yet to be described in the literature – are particularly prone to happen in ESL/EFL classrooms. It is the aim of this research to find out more about the kinds of cultural conflicts that occur in EFL classrooms in the UAE. The conflicts could occur as stated above or in categories such as grading, feedback, class materials, class discussions, styles of dress, and others that will be identified through the research instruments.

Other Sources of Conflict

It must be pointed out that culture is not the only source of conflict in the classroom. Even where cultural barriers exist, whether or not instructors are culturally insensitive, or a foundation of cultural understanding is not present in the classroom, conflicts may occur that are completely independent of any cultural cause. Le Roux (2002) lists other variables such as “[s]ocio-economic status, educational background, religion, gender, age and world-view,” and indicates that these “are some of the determinants that influence *who* and *what* we are, but also *why* we react in a particular way in certain situations” (p. 42). Before one sets out to resolve a cultural conflict, one should be quite sure that the conflict has its origin in culture to begin with.

Then again, it should be noted that even seemingly culture-independent factors such as Le Roux's (2002) above-mentioned religion, gender, world-view, etc. could have a cultural impact in certain contexts. Cultures that ascribe great weight to religion in determining one's identity, or which have heavily socially embedded ideas of gender roles, for example, may be more at risk of conflicting with another,

dissimilar culture in the classroom, even when a peripheral factor is the proximate cause.

Solutions

It is probable that teachers who develop good skills in the area of ICC will become better teachers overall. As Young and Sachdev (2011) explain, “no single recipe can be used to make a good language teacher. However, most are likely to have the ability to feel empathy towards diverse types of learners....[and] to engage with difference” (p. 90). Similarly, mindful teachers should “take into consideration differences in class, gender, race, and ethnicity in the design of classroom activities” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 49). Those teachers who learn to “engage with difference” and take cultural elements of the classroom into consideration through ICC awareness and/or training can move past difficult intercultural situations and toward effective English teaching.

The idea of teaching ICC to teachers is advanced by Dogancay-Aktuna (2005), who believes that “this awareness of cross-cultural variation in norms of teaching and learning...[forms] the first step in developing an appropriate methodology” (p. 100). Both pre- and in-service training programs for EFL teachers can be effective ways to convey ICC skills – and their importance – to these teachers either before they go out into the field, or as they are starting to deal with the challenges of methodology/culture disconnects. At the very least, even a basic awareness of ICC on the part of teachers can have a positive effect on English classrooms anywhere in the world, as teachers move toward “[creating] conducive learning environments that incorporate students’ cultural ways of being” (DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009, p. 438).

The logical solution for remedying disparities in content knowledge and cultural navigation skills (intercultural competence), therefore, is to “develop teacher education programs that encourage prospective teachers to learn more about the students they will teach and the contexts in which they live, and to respect their families and communities” (Nieto, 2006, p. 470). Similarly, Escobar-Ortloff and Ortloff (2003) recommend “develop[ing] workshops for teachers in order to increase their awareness of the cultural diversity present at their school and how diversity may impact their classroom’s instructional and behavioral climate” (p. 260).

Such training programs or workshops could consist of a single unit of a larger training or orientation program for new instructors (new to the teaching context, not just new to the profession). However, an entire teacher education program could be

devoted to the development of ICC skills, especially in teaching contexts where instructors and students usually come from very different cultural backgrounds. Either type of program would not necessarily need to take place at the beginning of a teacher's period of service; beginning, mid-career, and experienced instructors could all benefit from an introduction to or reinforcement of existing skills in ICC.

Improved skills in ICC on the part of teachers could have a beneficial impact on the quality and sensitivity of teaching in classrooms where the instructor and the students come from very different cultural backgrounds. Le Roux (2002) urges a move toward cultural competence:

Cultural competence...does not imply knowing everything about all different cultures. It is rather an active demonstration of respect for differences, an enthusiastic eagerness to learn about other cultures, an acceptance of different viewpoints on reality and a flexibility and willingness to adjust, change and reorientate where required. (p. 43)

An example of Le Roux's (2002) vision of cultural competence being achieved by a NES teacher can be found in Marielle Risse, an American teaching at a university in Oman. She reflects, "I have to respect the culture if I am going to teach here" (Risse, 2009, para. 1). Risse also takes care when treating subjects that would be particularly sensitive for the Omani students in her Western Literature class, such as slavery:

[I] would like to be able to teach all texts...as they are written, with references to all aspects of human life...From conversations with Omanis, I know the legacy of slavery is freely debated among the citizens. [But] from what I know of the culture, the subject is still too raw and recent to be brought into an academic setting with a foreigner leading the conversation. (para. 1)

Risse is a NES teacher working in the Middle East who appears to be an example of Nieto's (2006) call for teachers who "learn more about the students they will teach and the contexts in which they live, and respect their families and communities" described above (p. 470).

Khondker (2006) urges that we "negotiate and make peace with differences and discover how to live in peaceful co-existence and reasonable harmony in a world riven by hostile differences" (p. 442). Certainly, developing ICC skills in instructors – especially NES Westerners who teach abroad in diverse cultural contexts – is one way to work toward achieving this goal, at least in ESL/EFL classrooms.

Other models of cultural understanding include Atkinson's (1999) version, which advocates living culturally, rather than living in a culture. To achieve this, Atkinson posits six principles of culture, beginning with the idea that all humans are

individuals, gradually expanding and ending with the statement that culture is multiple and complex. His principles also include the notions that individuality as well as social group membership are elements of culture.

Al-Issa's (2005) framework for analyzing cultural conflict uses the acronym RELAX: Raising cultural awareness, Examining culturally conflicting incidents, Looking at the conflict, After the analysis, and eXcitement/developing competence. This framework "is meant to help teachers and students work systematically towards the process of attaining appropriate levels of cultural competence to enable them to deal with and find solutions for conflicting situations" (p. 162).

In other areas of promoting cultural understanding and ICC in the classroom, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) propose a textbook evaluation checklist to ensure that course materials do not heavily favor a particular incarnation of English-speaking culture. Rather, they suggest that materials be made to appeal to an inclusive, international audience with plenty of room for different cultures.

Clarke (2007) suggests that in the UAE specifically, English-speaking Emirati instructors should take an active role in UAE language education policy because they are better able to bridge conflicts between the two cultures than a complete outsider. Working together, Western NES instructors and Emirati instructors could accomplish much in promoting cultural understanding and better ICC skills in the classroom.

McBride (2004) and Risse (2011) also offer specific solutions for Western NES instructors in the Gulf. McBride advises on simple ways to incorporate Islamic principles into the classroom, adapting or discarding content in US- or UK-produced textbooks, being accommodating to family and cultural demands that are placed on students, and taking a "non-knowing stance" – an ethnorelative orientation – toward her students' backgrounds (p. 2). For her part, Risse (2011) shares the ways she has dealt with conflict in her classroom in Oman, including managing expectations toward punctuality, respecting family ties and responsibilities, and presenting only those materials that are most relevant and appropriate to the students' cultures. Additional specific solutions for coping with cultural conflict in UAE classrooms will depend on the precise nature of the conflicts that occur, which this research hopes to discover.

Recognizing the importance of ICC in the classroom – especially in the UAE, where Western NES instructors are often unprepared to teach students from a starkly different culture – is a step toward fulfilling the admonition of Spack (1997): "As teachers and researchers of English, we also need to examine our own identities...and

to find room in our pedagogy and scholarship for students to...define and construct their own identities” (p. 773). In EFL classrooms where instruction must often overcome a cultural divide, cultural understanding, sensitivity, and conflict resolution skills are prerequisite in order to make this thoughtful, understanding view of teaching a reality.

3. Research Methodology

Context

Studies mentioned in Malallah (2000) have shown that students throughout the Gulf region, including those in Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE, and Kuwait, have a high opinion of learning English. In the UAE, many of the most prestigious universities in the country feature student bodies that are majority Arab, and teaching faculty who are native speakers of English (NES) from Western countries. The high concentration of Western NES instructors at these prominent universities is because the government of the UAE welcomes universities that offer “an American-type liberal arts education”; therefore, “recruited academics” at these institutions “tend to come from North America predominantly, although most other regions of the world are also represented albeit to a far lesser extent” (Crabtree, 2007, p. 577). This holds true for both public and private universities.

Two EFL programs at two universities in the UAE were selected for study in this research: the Bridge Program at the American University of Sharjah (AUS); and the Preparatory Program at Khalifa University (KU) in Sharjah. The American University of Sharjah is a private university catering to many nationalities, while Khalifa University is a public, non-federal university funded by Abu Dhabi that provides 100% tuition assistance for Emiratis, and whose student body is almost entirely Emirati. In addition, AUS and KU offer a variety of NES faculty across several nationalities and levels of experience to participate in this research. These two universities have been selected for this research because they offer a robust representative sample of university instructors and students in the UAE, encompassing the private/public university experience as well as a mixed student body and a dominant Emirati student body. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to be relevant to both private and public universities in the UAE and wider Gulf region.

The EFL programs at both AUS and KU are designed to function as foundation-year English programs for students who have been admitted to university but whose academic English skills (as measured by TOEFL/IELTS scores) are not sufficient to allow them to begin their majors.

Participants

Instructors. Many of the teaching faculty at each of the EFL programs at the two universities mentioned above are native speakers of English who have come to

the UAE from Western countries. An investigation of each university's EFL teaching faculty yielded the information in Table 1.

Table 1. *EFL Instructors at AUS and KU*

Institution	EFL Program	Total Teaching Faculty (Full-time)	NES Teaching Faculty	Percentage NES Faculty
American University of Sharjah	Bridge Program	18	11	61%
Khalifa University	Preparatory Program	6	6	100%

A total of 18 instructors (five instructors from Khalifa University and thirteen from the American University of Sharjah) completed the questionnaire. Table 2 summarizes the demographic information of the instructor respondents.

Table 2. *Demographic Information of Instructor Respondents*

#	M/F	Nationality	Native Language	Religion	Age	Total Teaching Experience	UAE Teaching Experience
1	F	British	English	Christian	*	16+	16+
2	F	British	English	Other	*	16+	12-15
3	M	British	English	Christian	*	16+	8-11
4	F	US	English	Christian	40+	16+	12-15
5	F	US	English	Christian	40+	16+	12-15
6	F	British	English	Christian	30-40	16+	12-15
7	F	Lebanese	Arabic	Muslim	< 30	0-3	0-3
8	M	Canadian	English	Other	40+	12-15	8-11
9	F	Irish	English	Christian	40+	12-15	8-11
10	F	UK	English	Other	30-40	8-11	4-7
11	F	Tunisian	Arabic	Muslim	40+	16+	12-15
12	F	British	English	Christian	40+	16+	16+
13	F	*	*	*	30-40	*	*
14	F	Irish	English and Irish	Other	40+	16+	16+
15	F	Lebanese	Arabic	Christian	40+	16+	4-7
16	F	British	English	Muslim	40+	12-15	12-15
17	F	US	English	Christian	40+	0-3	0-3
18	F	US	English	Christian	40+	16+	16+

Note. An asterisk (*) denotes that no response was given.

In accordance with the design of this research, the responses of instructors 7, 11, and 15 were excluded from analysis, as they indicate instructors who are not NES.

Instructor 13 was excluded because she did not indicate her NES status.

Most of the instructors who responded (86%) were age 40 or above; 14% were between the ages of 30-40. There were no instructors under the age of 30.

The majority (64%) of the instructors were very experienced, with 16+ total years of teaching experience, while 21% had 12-15 years of experience. One instructor had 8-11 years of experience and one was a novice instructor with 0-3 years of teaching experience.

As for teaching experience in the UAE specifically, four instructors indicated that they had 16+ years of experience. Five instructors had 12-15 years of experience, three had 8-11 years, one had 4-7 years, and one had 0-3 years.

The instructor respondents indicated additional teaching experience in the UK, Lebanon, Tunisia, United States, France, Portugal, Ireland, Eritrea, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Greece, Spain, Australia, Italy, Taiwan, China, Germany, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Benin, Libya, and Vietnam. They also indicated proficiency in speaking languages other than English, such as French, German, Arabic, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Irish, Chinese, Spanish, Italian, and Dutch.

Students. The two universities also offer a good variety of student body diversity for this research. The American University of Sharjah, a private institution, has a student body of 4688 undergraduates featuring students from more than eleven different countries, including 21% from the UAE and a further 63% from Arab countries such as Jordan, Syria, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia (AUS Spring 2013 Fast Facts). At the time of research, its Bridge (EFL) Program had 229 students enrolled. The Bridge Program requires that students score a 6 on the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) in order to graduate from the program and continue to their major

Khalifa University is a nationally funded public university and, as such, features a mostly Emirati student body. Four years ago, the university opened up to women and non-Emiratis; women now make up approximately half of the student body, while non-Emiratis make up approximately 5% of the student body. There are two campuses: one in Abu Dhabi, and one in Sharjah. In this research, only the Sharjah campus was visited. At the time of research, the Preparatory (EFL) Program at KU had 46 students enrolled, all of whom were Emirati. The Preparatory Program

requires that students score a 6 on the IELTS in order to graduate from the program and continue to their major.

This investigation of the student bodies at each university yielded the demographic information contained in Table 3.

Table 3. *EFL Students at AUS and KU*

Institution	Total Enrollment	EFL Enrollment	Nationalities Represented	% Arab	% Emirati
American University of Sharjah	4688	229	14+	90	33
Khalifa University	1212	46	1	100	100

A total of 75 students completed the questionnaire. Twenty-one of these students were from Khalifa University and the remaining 54 were from the American University of Sharjah. In accordance with the design of this research, the responses of four students (#26, #30, #68, and #69; see Appendix A for a complete list of student respondents) were excluded from analysis, as they indicate students who are not Arab.

The remaining 71 student respondents all reported Arabic as their native language and Islam as their religion. They represent 10 different Arab nationalities, as summarized in Figure 1.

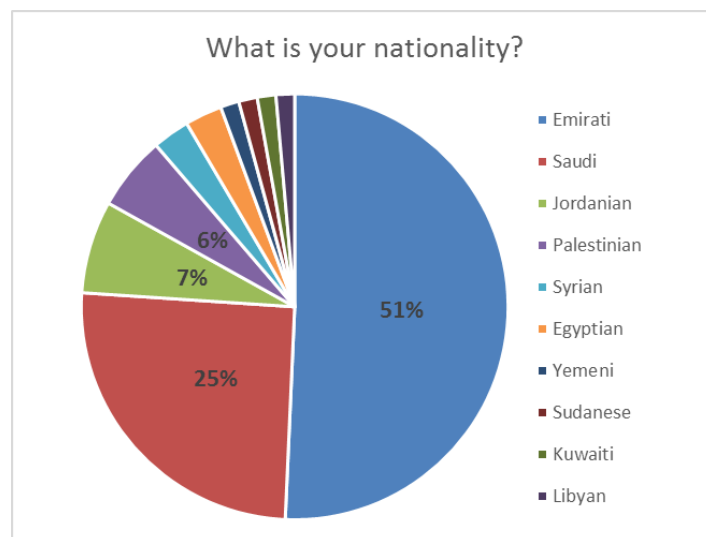


Figure 1. Nationalities of student respondents.

Half of the student respondents (51%) were Emirati. A quarter of them were Saudi. The remainder of the students indicated their nationality as Jordanian, Yemeni, Syrian, Sudanese, Palestinian, Kuwaiti, Egyptian, or Libyan. For a complete listing of the demographic information of the student respondents, refer to Appendix A.

Instruments

After approval of the research design and instruments from the Institutional Review Board was granted, permission was obtained from each institution to administer questionnaires to the instructors and students involved in the foundation-year English programs. In the initial stages of this research, questionnaires were administered to all available instructors and students. Afterward, in accordance with IRB protocol, only the responses of NES instructors and Arab students were included in this research. Interviews with selected, willing participants (both instructors and students) were also conducted.

Questionnaires. Two questionnaires were developed for use in this research: one for instructors (see Appendix B), and one for students (see Appendix C). The questionnaires asked for some biographical data from each participant in order to gather relevant information about his/her background. The questionnaires then presented participants with statements pertaining to the research questions, with respondents marking their level of agreement with the statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). The questionnaires also featured open-ended questions, which gave respondents an opportunity to elaborate on previous answers or provide specific details about cultural conflicts they have encountered in the classroom.

The questionnaires were piloted prior to their implementation, on individuals who were demographically comparable to the targeted respondents in this research. Before the piloting period, there was some consideration given to making the student questionnaire available in Arabic. However, the people who participated in the pilot study indicated a few areas where the English could be simplified, thus eliminating the need for translation. As a result, both the instructor and the student questionnaires were available only in English.

The instructor questionnaire was administered online. At each university, the director of the EFL Program was provided with a secure link to the online questionnaire, which s/he then distributed via email to all teaching staff in the

program. The results were automatically recorded on an online spreadsheet as each questionnaire was completed.

The student questionnaire was administered in person, in a hard-copy format. At Khalifa University, access was provided by the program director to the students after they had completed an exam. The students remained at their desks in the testing hall and completed the questionnaire. At the American University of Sharjah, access was provided by the program director to three classrooms of students. One of the classes completed the questionnaire at the end of the period; the other two completed the questionnaire at the beginning. In all cases, at both universities, the students returned the completed questionnaires to a folder so that no individual questionnaire would be connected with a specific person. After the administration of the student questionnaires was complete, the folder was collected, the questionnaires were numbered, and the data from each was entered into a spreadsheet.

Interviews. After the administration of the questionnaires, interviews were conducted with selected instructors and students, depending on their willingness to participate as indicated on the questionnaire. The interviews had a structured format, with questions (see Appendix D) focusing on exploring specific instances of cultural conflict in the classroom more thoroughly. However, respondents were encouraged to share thoughts and opinions that went beyond the questions asked in the interview.

An invitation to participate in an interview was extended to all instructor respondents. Four instructors agreed to be interviewed, including three from Khalifa University and one from the American University of Sharjah. The three Khalifa University instructors' interviews were recorded and transcribed; the interview with the American University of Sharjah instructor was carried out via email by the respondent's request, as she was away from campus on holiday at the time. Despite repeated invitations to the instructor respondents, additional interview volunteers were not forthcoming, perhaps due to the onset of the summer term and busier schedules for the instructors.

An invitation to participate in an interview was extended to all student respondents. Nine students agreed to be interviewed, including three from Khalifa University and six from the American University of Sharjah. The three Khalifa University students' interviews were conducted informally in the lounge area at the university; since I am unknown to the students there, it was necessary to keep the atmosphere relaxed. The interviews with the American University of Sharjah students

were carried out in my office, and detailed notes were taken. These notes were visible to the students on a computer monitor as they spoke with me so that they could clarify any points or ask that parts of their responses be omitted if they preferred. Since the students considered me an authority figure, it was important to me that they felt they had some control over the resulting content of the interview session.

Data Analysis

The questionnaires administered to instructors were sorted according to the instructor's status as a NES. Only data from the questionnaires completed by NES instructors was analyzed. Similarly, the questionnaires administered to students were sorted according to the student's nationality. Only data from the questionnaires completed by Arab students was analyzed. The instructors' and students' responses to the Likert-type scale questions and the open-ended questions were recorded and analyzed to discover any patterns that emerged in the results. During this analysis, in order to "improve the intelligibility of the outcomes" and more clearly identify trends in responses, the categories of "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree" were combined into one category; "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" were also combined (Grimbeek, Bryer, Beamish, & D'Netto, 2005, p. 2). In this way, the five-point Likert-type scale was reduced to a three-point Likert-type scale. In addition, the responses to the interview questions were analyzed to detect any recurring themes or opinions, and any anecdotes about cultural conflicts were categorized to group similar events together.

Summary

Overall, the instructor participants were very experienced, both at teaching in general and teaching in the UAE specifically, and they represent a variety of Western nationalities. The student participants were similarly diverse, reporting nationalities from ten different Arab countries. The majority were Emirati and Saudi, and all of them were Muslim. With this background information in mind, the results of the questionnaires and interviews will be presented and analyzed in the following chapter.

4. Findings and Discussion

The research instruments (questionnaires and interviews) yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. This chapter presents the findings in relation to the research questions, which are:

1. a. What are some of the differences between the culture of Western NES instructors and the culture of their Arab students in foundation-year intensive English programs at two universities in the UAE?
- b. To what extent are the Western NES instructors aware of these cultural differences?
2. What kinds of conflicts occur between Western NES instructors and Arab students in EFL classrooms in the UAE?

and

3. What are these instructors' and students' attitudes toward culture in the classroom?

Cultural Differences between Students and Instructors

To answer the first part of the first research question, identifying the key differences in culture as perceived by the participants in this research, both students and instructors were given 11 statements on the questionnaires (see Appendices B and C) with which to indicate their agreement along a 5-point Likert-type scale. The differences and similarities in their responses, indicating areas of cultural divergence and convergence, are shown in Tables 4-6.

Four statements asked instructors and students about their personal beliefs. Their opinions are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Instructors' and Students' Personal Beliefs*

Statement		%	%	%
		Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree/ Agree
Religion is important in my daily life.	Instructors	36	45	18
	Students	9	11	81
What my family wants for me is more important than what I want for myself.	Instructors	91	9	0
	Students	27	28	45
Confrontation helps solve problems.	Instructors	55	36	9
	Students	21	35	44
The Western tradition of education is most effective.	Instructors	0	57	43
	Students	11	30	59

In general, the instructors and students differed in their personal beliefs. Religion was reported to be more important in the daily lives of the students (81%) than in the daily lives of the instructors (18%). In addition, family expectations were reported to have more weight in the lives of the students (45%) than in the lives of the instructors (0%). The majority of instructors (55%) did not believe in confrontation to solve problems, while the majority of students (44%) did. A significant portion of both instructors and students (36% and 35%, respectively) responded that they were neutral to this statement. However, 43% of instructors and 59% of students agreed that the Western tradition of education is most effective. The remaining 57% of instructors were neutral to this statement.

Four statements asked instructors and students for their opinions on the atmosphere of the EFL classroom. Their opinions are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Instructors' and Students' Opinions about Classroom Atmosphere

Statement		%	%	%
		Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree/ Agree
There should be equality in the classroom because we are all human beings.	Instructors	9	27	64
	Students	7	14	78
The classroom should be a formal place.	Instructors	55	45	0
	Students	22	31	47
The teacher should know all the answers.	Instructors	55	9	36
	Students	12	13	75
Competition is a good way to encourage learning in the classroom.	Instructors	9	36	55
	Students	9	10	81

Overall, regarding the atmosphere of an EFL classroom, instructors (64%) and students (78%) both believed that equality should be present there, on the basis that we are all human beings. A large majority of students (81%) and a smaller majority of instructors (55%) also agreed that competition is a good way to encourage learning in the classroom. However, students preferred that the classroom be a formal place (47%) and that the teacher know the answers to all questions (75%), while instructors mostly did not (0% and 36%, respectively).

Instructor and student participants were presented with three statements regarding the materials and topics used in class. Their opinions are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Instructors' and Students' Opinions about Controversial Materials in Class

Statement		% Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	% Neutral	% Strongly Agree/ Agree
It's OK to use materials in class that show a different viewpoint, even if this viewpoint contradicts many students' personal values.	Instructors	9	45	45
	Students	69	17	14
In class, it's OK to discuss sex.	Instructors	91	0	9
	Students	25	31	44
In class, it's OK to discuss politics.	Instructors	82	9	9
	Students	14	54	33

In order to simplify the language for the student questionnaire, instructors and students were asked about the presence of controversial materials in class using different wording. As a result, the instructors' responses to their statement ("It's OK to use materials in class that show a different viewpoint, even if this viewpoint contradicts many students' personal values") cannot be directly compared to the students' responses to the more straightforward "It's OK if teachers show/use materials in class that go against my religion."

The instructors mostly agreed/strongly agreed with or were neutral toward (45% each) using controversial materials (questionnaire wording: "materials that contradict many students' values") in class. However, regarding sex being a topic of discussion in class, the instructors were overwhelmingly (91%) against it. Similarly, most instructors (82%) reported being against discussing politics in class. Therefore, instructors seem to be willing to introduce alternative viewpoints into the classroom, but not ones that deal with sex or politics.

The students reported strong opinions against controversial materials in class (questionnaire wording: “materials that go against my religion”), with 69% of them against it. However, the students showed distribution among all levels of disagreement/agreement regarding materials/discussions about sex in class. Most (44%) agreed/strongly agreed that it was OK to discuss sex in class, with a further 31% expressing a neutral opinion toward this topic. Only 25% of student respondents came out definitively disagreeing/strongly disagreeing with sex being a topic in class. The majority of students may have been against the general idea of materials that go against their religion, but when it comes to sex, 75% of the students (including those who strongly agreed/agreed or were neutral to the statement) are either making an exception for that topic, or do not believe the discussion of sex in class would go against their religion. In addition, most of the students (54%) were neutral toward the discussion of politics in class, with a further 33% agreeing/strongly agreeing with it; only 14% of students reported that it was not OK to discuss politics in class.

The responses to these eleven statements illustrate some of the cultural differences and similarities between Arab students in the UAE and their Western NES instructors. The Western NES instructors tended to be less religious, did not generally see the classroom as a formal place, did not generally think the teacher should know the answers to all questions in the classroom, tended to think that confrontation was not a good way to solve problems, and did not generally object to having materials/topics in the classroom that contradict the students’ values. Specifically regarding these materials/topics, however, instructors tended to stay away from discussing topics related to sex, as well as topics related to politics. Instructors were also less likely to consider the opinions of their family members as important in their lives.

In contrast, the Arab students were more religious, saw the classroom as a formal place, generally indicated that teachers should know the answers to all questions in the classroom, considered confrontation to be a good way to solve problems, and tended to be against the idea of having materials/topics in the classroom that go against their religion. However, most of the students were not against the discussion of sex in class, and they did not seem to mind if the teacher discussed politics in class.

Western NES instructors and their Arab students tended to report similar views on a few points. Both groups indicated agreement that competition is a good

way to encourage learning in class (students more so than instructors), and both groups believe that there should be equality in the classroom because we are all human beings. Many instructors agreed with students that the Western tradition of education, as found in universities in the UAE, is most effective. This attitude is documented in Al-Issa and Dahan (2011).

The cultural beliefs revealed by the questionnaires are in line with the Western/Eastern cultural dichotomies proposed by Hofstede, et al. (2010) and also explored in Darwish and Huber (2003), with one exception. The finding that students in this study were generally in favor of confrontation as a means of solving problems – and that instructors were not – goes against established research, such as Khakimova, Zhang, and Hall (2012). In a study that compared the conflict resolution styles of Arabs and Americans, those three authors found that Arabs preferred “integrating” styles of solving problems, while Americans preferred “dominating” styles (p. 44). It is possible that the research presented in this thesis yielded different results because the power dynamic between the two studied populations was unequal, unlike the two populations in Khakimova, et al. (2012). Instructors – even Western NES individuals who would normally tend toward a dominating style of conflict resolution – may feel that it is necessary to soften such tactics because they are already in a position of authority over the students. Students, on the other hand – even Arab individuals who would normally tend toward an integrative style of conflict resolution – may feel that it is necessary to stand up for themselves more against an authority figure. Further research in this area could clarify this discrepancy.

In answer to the first part of the first research question, the results from the questionnaires and interviews show that while there are key areas of difference in the cultures of these Western NES instructors and their Arab students, there are areas where their opinions are quite similar. Instructor E at Khalifa University saw it this way, as expressed during her interview:

I think that opening up to the world – it’s easier now. [...] They all have their mobile phones, several of them, they all use iPads, they all use social media, they watch a lot more foreign films... It’s a big difference. They’re a lot more mature than they used to be. And they’re culturally mature in the sense that, you know, they’re well aware and are quite comfortable about other cultures. Thus, the students’ core values regarding religion and family seem to be holding strong, while other opinions regarding what should and should not be discussed in the classroom seem to be changing to be more accepting of other views.

Instructors' Awareness of Cultural Differences

The second part of the first research question asked about native English-speaking instructors in foundation-year intensive English programs' awareness of the differences between their own culture and the cultures of their students in the UAE. Five items in the instructor questionnaire (see Appendix B) elicited information related to the instructors' awareness of cultural differences between them and their students. In addition, one item on the students' questionnaire (see Appendix C) pertains to this research question as a point of comparison to the instructor data.

The opinions of instructors regarding four statements about their culture and the culture of the UAE, including expectations and reality of living and working in the UAE, are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Instructors' Opinions of Living and Working in the UAE

Statement		% Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	% Neutral	% Strongly Agree/ Agree
The culture of the UAE is different than my home culture.	Instructors	7	7	86
It has been difficult for me to adjust to living in the UAE.	Instructors	79	14	7
It has been difficult for me to adjust to teaching in the UAE.	Instructors	93	0	7
Teaching in the UAE is different from what I expected.	Instructors	57	21	21

Almost all of the instructors indicated that they felt that the culture of the UAE is different from their home culture, with 86% agreeing/strongly agreeing. Despite this acknowledgement of great cultural difference, most (79%) of the instructors indicated that they did not find it difficult to adjust to living in the UAE. Opinions were even stronger regarding the adjustment to teaching in the UAE. The vast majority (93%) of instructors disagreed/strongly disagreed with this statement, indicating that they did not find it difficult to adjust to teaching in the UAE.

The experience of teaching in the UAE differed from expectations for 21% of instructors. The majority of instructors, 57%, indicated that they did not find teaching in the UAE to be very different from what they expected.

Therefore, although instructors almost universally reported the culture of the UAE being different from their own, they generally did not report any great difficulty adjusting to living or teaching in the UAE. Furthermore, teaching in the UAE seemed to turn out according to the expectations of most of the instructors.

At the core of this research question is the instructors' specific awareness (or lack thereof) of cultural differences between them and their students. When asked to indicate their agreement with the statement, "My students' culture is different from my own culture," most (72%) of the instructors indicated that they agreed/strongly agreed. In order to compare the instructors' view with the students' view, information was also sought from the students regarding their perception of cultural differences between them and their teacher. The results are shown in Figure 2.

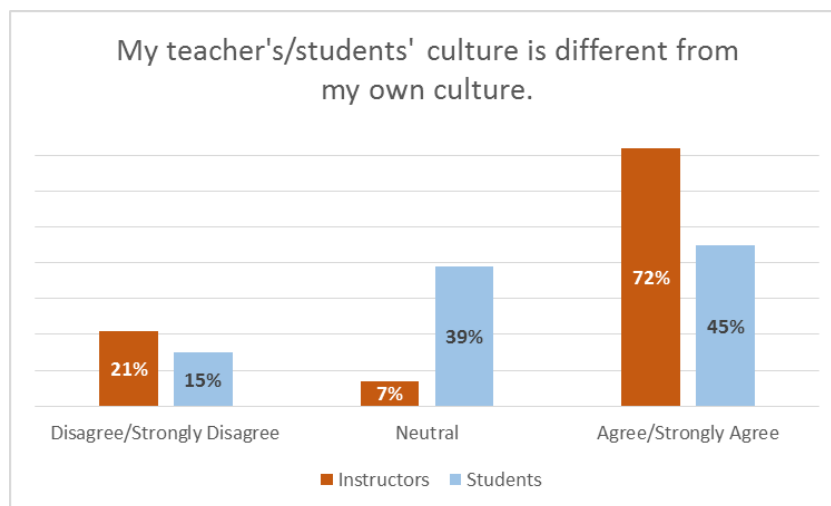


Figure 2. Comparison of instructor and student perceptions of cultural differences.

Overall, these Western NES instructors can be said to be very aware that there are cultural differences between them and their students. Their students are also aware, albeit less so (45% agree/strongly agree), that their culture is different from that of their instructors. Thirty-nine percent of student respondents indicated neutrality toward this statement.

The answer to the second part of the first research question, "To what extent are native English-speaking instructors in foundation-year intensive English programs

at two universities in the UAE aware of the differences between their own culture and the cultures of the UAE?” appears to be, “very aware.” The instructor participants in this research were, on the whole, extremely experienced, with most of them having achieved more than 12 years of teaching experience in the UAE. Instructors rarely reported having difficulty adjusting to living or teaching in the UAE, even as they indicated that the culture of the UAE is very different from their home cultures. During the interviews, several instructors commented that they had lived and taught in the UAE for so long that they had become accustomed to the cultural differences between them and their students, and how to manage these differences while teaching. Instructor P commented, “I’ve been here so long, it’s almost like second nature to me that there are certain places you don’t go, and certain things you don’t do.”

In general, the instructor participants in this research seem to have overcome the “universal tendency for people to put their own culture in a central position,” and reached an awareness of the cultural differences in their classrooms (Muhammad, 2005, p. 354).

The Nature of Cultural Conflicts Occurring in EFL Classrooms in the UAE

The second research question is, “What kinds of conflicts occur between native English-speaking instructors and Arab students in EFL classrooms in the UAE?”

Instructor data. In order to discover the nature of cultural conflicts that are occurring in EFL classrooms in the UAE, instructors were presented with three Yes/No questions and three short-answer questions. In response to these questions, 86% of instructors said that they had encountered sensitive cultural issues in the classroom. The same percentage indicated that cultural issues in the classroom had an impact on their teaching. Furthermore, 93% of instructors said that they had altered or adapted classroom materials to conform to cultural guidelines.

Two of the three short-answer questions asked instructors to share details of cultural conflicts they have experienced in their classrooms. This information was also collected during the interviews. Their responses have been categorized and are summarized in Table 8, with accompanying illustrative examples excerpted from the short answers and interviews. The categories are presented in descending order of the number of occurrences for each.

Table 8. *Categories of Cultural Conflict in the Classroom - Instructors*

Type of Conflict	#	Illustrative Example
Inappropriate material in class (films, books, texts, discussion topics)	16	“Certain books had pictures which were inappropriate for the culture here. I had to blank [them] out when making photocopies so students would not focus only on the picture.”
Mixed-gender difficulties	6	“Introducing male and female Emirati[s]... to the concept of working together in groups where both genders are represented can be problematic.”
Teacher too casual with students	5	“In another culture I would share some details of my life outside the classroom with students. I still do but I edit carefully what I say so as not to cause offence.”
Dress and appearance	3	“Inappropriate dressing of peers and teachers.”
Lack of respect for religious customs/events	3	“Insensitive approaches to religious customs/events i.e. Ramadhan.”
Intrusion into family privacy	2	“When I first started teaching in the UAE...I asked male students to bring in photos of their siblings including sisters and couldn't understand why they didn't. I handled it badly by insisting, but they never did!”
Causing shame in front of the class	2	“A colleague came into my class...and noticed a student doing something a bit silly. He broke off the conversation and confronted the male student in front of his peers...The student lost face and therefore replied man-to-man aggressively. The incident escalated and took quite a bit of fixing.”
Western teacher seen as “other”	2	“I think that students accept me less readily than they do an Arab/Muslim teacher. I think they see me as ‘other’ and when I ask them to do something they are not familiar with, I think they see that I am asking that as an ‘other’ and they don’t trust me.”
Perceived unfairness on the part of instructor	0	*no instructor data (see student data in Table 9)

The final short-answer question asked instructors to describe the cultural orientation they received from their employer upon arrival in the UAE, if any. Twenty-nine percent indicated that they had received such training from their employer. Forty-three percent of instructors indicated having received “none” or “not

much” of such training. Otherwise, one instructor received training in her MA program, one indicated previous familiarity with the culture of the region, one instructor could not recall whether she received training, and one instructor did not respond to this question. During the interviews, one teacher recounted how she herself had been asked to lead a training session for teachers: “I started doing some teacher training there because in fact they asked. There were some terrible issues going on between the teachers and groups and teachers and individual students.”

This general lack of cultural sensitivity training for the EFL instructors involved in this research is in line with the situation described by Crookes (2006), as stated in the literature review, that “native English-speaking teachers of ES/FL with an international orientation have often entered the profession themselves with a relatively limited amount of prior preparation” (p. 46). These EFL instructors are not receiving training even though almost all of them have indicated that they are dealing with sensitive cultural issues in the classroom, are having to alter or adapt class materials, and believe that cultural differences are having an impact on their teaching.

One example of successful cultural training was given by Instructor S, as she described the orientation she received from a previous employer in the UAE:

I arrived with a team of 20 other new hires and it was evident that they were struggling a lot more to deal with the demands and cultural differences of their new environment. [The university] gave all new hires a comprehensive three-week induction which covered an introduction to the cultural aspects of living and working in Sharjah, as well as an introduction to the profile of the students.

Instructor S concludes her account with, “It was very helpful.” Her description of the training she received is an example of Nieto’s (2006) idea for teacher training programs that “encourage prospective teachers to learn more about the students they will teach and the contexts in which they live, and to respect their families and communities” (p. 470).

Student data. The student questionnaire also included items intended to discover the nature of cultural conflicts that are occurring in EFL classrooms in the UAE. Students were presented with three Yes/No questions, two statements to rate on a Likert-type scale, and three short-answer questions.

When students were asked if there were cultural misunderstandings in class, 62% indicated that there were not. Furthermore, 93% of students said that they had not felt that their culture was being disrespected by the teacher. Finally, 65% of

students said that cultural differences between themselves and their teacher did not affect the classroom. However, when asked in the short-answer questions about these same topics, many students reported that they were, in fact, experiencing cultural misunderstandings in the classroom. This data will be now be examined.

Despite students indicating on previous Yes/No questions that cultural conflicts are not occurring in the classroom, the short-answer questions and the interviews yielded many examples of such conflicts. Two of the three short-answer questions asked students to share details of cultural conflicts they have experienced in their classrooms. This information was also collected during the interviews. Their responses have been categorized and are summarized in Table 9, with accompanying illustrative examples excerpted from the short answers and interviews. The categories are presented in descending order of the number of occurrences for each.

Table 9. *Categories of Cultural Conflict in the Classroom - Students*

Type of Conflict	#	Illustrative Example
Lack of respect for religious customs/events	8	“Yes, they make [jokes] about having four wives in our religion!!”
Perceived unfairness on the part of the instructor	8	“Some teachers think they are right and the students are always wrong.”
Mixed-gender difficulties	8	“He wanted to shake her hand but she doesn’t want to. But he made her shake his hand. When he left, she said ‘how could he do this?’”
Western teacher seen as “other”	3	“In my opinion she needs to understanding [sic] my culture.”
Causing shame in front of the class	3	“Teacher announcing a low score in front of everyone. A high score is ok but not a low score!”
Inappropriate material in class (films, books, texts, discussion topics)	1	“One time I feel so strange because my teacher suppose knows my culture and my religion but she put a video in youtube is unrespect in our religion. It was only a music but the pictures was rude in our religion.”
Dress and appearance	1	“Clothes, the way she/he talk, attitude.”
Intrusion into family privacy	0	*no student data (see instructor data in Table 8)
Teacher too casual with students	0	*no student data (see instructor data in Table 8)

Students were presented with two statements to rate on a Likert-type scale about how important it was to them that their teacher understand their culture. Sixty-seven percent of the students indicated that it was important that their teacher understand their culture. As Student A put it during her interview, “Of course she should know about the culture. It’s very important.” Only 11% of the students did not feel that it was important that their teacher understand their culture. This is in line with the research of Prodromou (1992), who found that 74 percent of intermediate/advanced students (in Greece) felt that teachers from abroad should be familiar with the host culture. As for the reality of Western NES instructors understanding their culture, 64% of students agreed/strongly agreed that “in general,

teachers from the US/UK/Australia/NZ understand my culture.” This shows that the students generally want their Western NES instructors to understand their culture, and generally believe that Western NES instructors do understand their culture. Student B, a Palestinian male, noted in the interview that

I do appreciate when they learn about [my culture] before they come. I’m glad for them to learn about my culture and my religion, to change their idea about [how] “Muslims are terrorists or Westerners are good and Arabs are not” to know how Arabs live in peace and they are not as bad as they think.

Student F, a Saudi male, added that students are sometimes aware of the difficult task ahead of Western NES teachers in the UAE, and that they are sympathetic:

But there are some [teachers] who are new and they don’t understand us and they’re learning about us. So you might feel like this is disrespectful in the beginning but when you know the person – he’s learning. He’s learning, but he wants to know about Islam.

On a related note, the final short-answer question asked students, “In your opinion, what does your teacher think about your culture?” Responses were varied and are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10. *Instructor Opinions of Culture as Reported by Students*

Response	Illustrative Examples
Positive	“I don't found that teacher that hate our culture yet!”
	“It is positive thinking.”
	“They are clear about my culture and they understand my habits.”
	“I think that he or she thinks about my culture as one of the most important cultures in the world and he or she have to respect it.”
	“I think that the most foreign teachers in my country understand the culture and respect it.”
	“They love to learn about my culture and they respect it.”
Neutral	“I don't know and I don't care.”
	“Have no idea we didn't talk about it.”
	“I honestly don't know, because he never talked about my culture and we are new students with him.”
	“No idea.”
Negative	“Some think that we are very stricket [sic] and we have a lot of thing that is not allowed for us to do them. Which totally not right.”
	“[They think] that Saudis are a close minded people but actually we are not.”

In relation to the second research question, “What kinds of conflicts occur between native English-speaking instructors and Arab students in EFL classrooms in the UAE?” it was discovered that both instructors and students are experiencing cultural conflicts in the classroom. In response to short-answer items on the questionnaire as well as during in the interviews, instructors gave details of cultural conflicts they had experienced in the classroom. Among the nine categories of cultural conflict that were identified in this research, instructors reported having the most trouble with inappropriate material in class (films, books, texts, discussion topics) and managing sensitive mixed-gender issues.

The mention of avoiding problems with inappropriate material in class was almost universal among the instructor research participants. Instructor J explained it this way:

I feel very sensitive to textbooks, videos, and audio materials which mention alcohol or Western relationships when there are Muslims in the class. I feel that there are so many other ways to explore language [that] I would rather use an alternative. I think I am sometimes more sensitive to the subject matter than the students are, but it makes me feel uncomfortable to think that the material may offend even one student in the class.

Instructor E agrees that:

there's quite a lot of stuff I really do want to use...on YouTube, and TED Talks, and all of that kind of stuff, [but] it has to be so cleverly vetted because within any one group that you teach...there was always the one or two [students] you could see were uncomfortable. So again, as a resource to actually teach something, I don't use music. I just don't. And 70% of [the students] would probably love it, but I don't. It's just not worth it.

The other major area of cultural conflict in the classroom reported by instructors was managing mixed-gender issues. Instructors found it difficult to be appropriately sensitive to the fact that many of their students were in mixed-gender classes for the first time. Pair and group work issues between boys and girls were commonly reported by the instructors, who struggled to know when it was acceptable to place girls and boys together, and when it was best to leave an unspoken assumption of segregation alone. Instructor E describes the situation in her classroom:

[Y]ou've got the girls on the one side, the guys on the other, which I dislike intensely, but there you go. And I think many of them do as well, but again, who's going to break that one down? [It] is there to protect against murmuring rumors or whatever and that's fine. [At the Abu Dhabi campus of Khalifa University], they have them doing group work together. I have never gone there. I'm just not willing to do it. Because again, we're in the Northern Emirates. And the girl who says "yes," bless her little heart, is the one who's going to get talked about.

Despite most students answering "no" when asked directly (via a Yes/No question on the questionnaire) if they had experienced cultural conflicts in the classroom, when given the chance in the short-answer questions and the interviews, many students described such cultural conflicts. The three most frequent categories of concern for students (eight occurrences each) were a lack of respect on the part of the teacher toward religious customs/events, perceived unfairness on the part of the teacher, and sensitive mixed-gender issues.

The instructors' lack of respect for religious customs/events, as reported by students, most often took the form of negative statements about Islam or the Islamic traditions of particular countries (mostly Saudi Arabia). Students reported Western NES instructors making fun of Islam because of its provision for multiple wives, or ridiculing the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia, or saying that Islam is an extremely prohibitive religion.

Conflicts described by the students that were allocated to other categories, such as the example from mixed-gender issues, below, also have relevance in this category. A student at Khalifa University reported that her instructor

asked students to put mobile phones away. One student put her mobile phone in a side pocket of her purse. The instructor (male) came over and unzipped her purse. She was very shocked that he would do that. He then started to look through it a little, looking for the phone. She said no, she can do that herself, and she put her phone inside. Later, she heard that people were saying she had slapped his hand away, which embarrassed her since females should not touch males in this way.

Another student at Khalifa University talked about how one instructor at her school is known for saying "ladies first;" sometimes "ladies first: if you are gentlemen (or men) you will let them go first." Some of the boys [get angry] at that because they feel he is saying they are not men, or he is questioning their manhood. As a result, the girls get first choice of topics, etc. and the boys sometimes resent it. [It is a big deal] to question someone's manhood.

These incidents are interesting because they are examples of a disconnect between the Western NES idea of what is acceptable to their students in the classroom, and the Muslim Arab reality. Each of these incidents would probably not have been worthy of mention if it had taken place in the US or UK. If a male teacher going through a female student's purse were mentioned, it would be because it was an invasion of privacy in general, not because of the genders of the people involved or because the girl student supposedly slapped the male teacher's hand away. These two incidents are occasions where a Western NES instructor may not even be aware that s/he has caused cultural offense.

The second-most cited area of cultural conflict for students was perceived unfairness on the part of teachers. In this case, it is impossible to determine to what extent this unfairness (as it was reported by the students) actually stems from cultural differences between the instructor and student. In some cases, it is possible that the

difference in culture is contributing to the conflict, as in a situation described by a female student at Khalifa University during her interview:

I submitted a first draft of an essay and received comments and changes. Then I submitted a second draft and received even more comments and changes! This was a surprise to me since I expected fewer changes the second time. I felt like the teacher didn't like me personally.

This teacher seems to have been giving feedback in the Western style, without regard to the expectations of his/her student from another culture, in which feedback may not take the same form. Instances of this kind of cultural conflict were described in Al-Issa (2005).

In other cases, however, it may be that given a chance to describe a conflict in class, some students chose to describe any conflict, rather than only those that were spurred on by cultural difference. One such example may be the following, as related by a Saudi student at AUS:

Yes, in my last semester I really worked hard and there were some people who didn't work as much as me but I had some issues which makes me absent for some classes and at the end I failed my course.

It is not immediately apparent that this conflict was due to overt cultural differences.

The third-most cited area of cultural conflict for students was mixed-gender issues. Students reported incidents of hand-shaking and other casual touch between the sexes that made them uncomfortable. In an interview, one student told about "another situation like maybe the teacher, he's not flirting, but he's saying really nice words to a female student that she's embarrassed." Hand-shaking, casual touches on the shoulder, and the praising of a female student by a male instructor are incidents that would probably not cause problems in a Western classroom, and Western NES instructors may not have thought twice before doing those things in a UAE classroom. However, this category of cultural conflict was a major one for both instructors and students, which shows that it is an area that is especially difficult to manage for both sides.

It is interesting to note that, in line with the previous findings on cultural similarities and differences that showed that students seem to be increasingly open to discussions of topics such as sex and politics in class, students reported almost no incidents of inappropriate material in class. This is in contrast to the instructors, for whom this was the most frequent category of cultural conflicts. Instructor J explained it this way in her interview:

You want to have a debate in the classroom and discuss things more, you feel that maybe the locals are more worldly-wise than actually they are, and prepared to debate and talk about maybe more controversial areas...[T]he students are all progressing, though, they've moved on a lot more...especially with social media and they are more worldly-wise and are exposed to the Western culture full-on, not in the little bits as they were in the past. So they're well aware, but we still try and avoid it in the classroom.

Instructor P adds that

there are certain teachers that can push the envelope more than others and get away with it. But I would always say then if anyone asked me, I would always veer on the conservative side.

The fact that the Western NES instructors seem to be hyper-aware of avoiding the introduction of inappropriate content into the classroom appears to be borne out by the fact that students are not encountering enough of this kind of conflict in the classroom to mention it in the questionnaire or interview.

Fortunately, and despite the previously mentioned areas of conflict, students seem to be picking up on this awareness on the part of Western NES instructors of the cultural differences between themselves and their Arab students. Most students who responded to the question about their instructor's opinion of their culture said that they thought their instructor felt positively toward it. These experienced instructors are aware of the cultural differences in the classroom and are navigating cultural issues sensitively.

One anecdote shared during a student interview illustrates the cultural give-and-take that is going on in the classroom. Student S spoke at length about a classroom activity that at first alarmed him as being outside the proper bounds of his culture, but that he later learned to appreciate in his own way (his words have been edited slightly for clarity):

Last semester, when there were one or two weeks left, [my teacher] wanted to do some exciting experience. She told us she would write our names on papers, and we would choose the papers and give that person a gift [Secret Santa exchange]. This was the first time doing this for all of us in the class.

I chose a girl name. So I was like, "Oh my gosh! What should I do?" So I asked my friends, "What should I give to her?" They told me to give her flowers or something like that. But I thought maybe I wanted to give her a mug. But I said, "I don't know anything about girls!"

I waited until the last day to prepare something. I woke up at ten, went to the supermarket, and bought some flowers and chocolates to give to the girl

in class. It was a new experience. It was positive, in the end. It was my first time buying a gift for a girl!

[Interviewer Bridget]: What if you told your parents about that activity?

[Student S]: I did tell them. I said it was like a homework assignment. I told my mother I brought flowers to a girl and she said, “What???” But I explained to her that I don’t really know the girl and I brought it like a gift because I had to.

The experience of this Palestinian student illustrates a cultural conflict averted. The Western NES instructor’s idea for a Secret Santa activity was possibly ill-advised, seemingly flouting several aspects of Muslim culture and tradition, namely that it is associated with a Christian holiday, and it requires gift-giving between the sexes. It certainly does not appear to have been implemented with Kramsch’s (1993) advice in mind, to “take into consideration differences in class, gender, race, and ethnicity in the design of classroom activities” (p. 49). However, students like S took the activity, made it a learning experience, and were all the happier for it.

It is possible that other students in the same class, or other students another time in another class, could be offended at such an activity, and a serious cultural conflict could arise. Student S himself appends at the end of his account that “it would be more awkward for a girl to give to a boy,” allowing for the possibility of his positive experience having been a very negative one for some of his classmates. Indeed, data collected from the instructors and students in this study, including those summarized in Tables 8 and 9, show plenty of similar instances of cultural conflict that did not turn out so well. But Student S’s way of dealing with an unfamiliar cultural experience in class brings to mind the words of Instructor E when she explained that her students are

curious about the world. So they wouldn’t have thanked me if I had diluted the content. That wasn’t why they were there. They wouldn’t have thanked me if I didn’t match them up with other nationalities to do pair work, [etc.]. That was all part of what they signed up for. So you can be overly sensitive and actually end up not doing much good either!

Instructor and Student Attitudes toward Culture in the Classroom

The final research question sought to discover these instructors’ and students’ attitudes toward culture in the classroom.

Instructor data. Instructors were asked about their attitudes toward the importance of the host culture. Their responses are shown in Table 11.

Table 11. *Instructor Attitudes toward Host Culture*

Statement	% Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	% Neutral	% Strongly Agree/ Agree
When teaching overseas, it is important to get to know the host culture.	0	0	100
My knowledge of the host culture informs my teaching practices.	0	0	100

Instructors indicated unanimous agreement (100%) that it is important to get to know the host culture when teaching overseas. They also indicated (100%) that their knowledge of the host culture absolutely informs their teaching practices. These two themes were also mentioned in the interviews by almost all participants.

Instructor P said that it was “absolutely essential” to get to know the host culture, with Instructor S adding, “I believe that knowledge of the host culture equips the teacher with the capacity to select appropriate materials [and] design appropriate classroom activities, which will help the students to meet their outcomes in the most meaningful way.” Instructor J concurs: “Know about [the students’] country. Know about the emirate they’re from.”

In response to another statement, 71% of instructors indicated that in class, they avoid criticizing the cultural values of their students.

Instructor and student comparison data. Instructors and students were asked about their attitudes toward culture in general and in the classroom. The results are presented in Table 12.

Table 12. *Instructor and Student Attitudes toward Cultural Understanding*

Statement		% Strongly Disagree/Disagree		% Strongly Agree/Agree	
		%	% Neutral	%	%
I want to understand other cultures.	Instructors	0	0	100	
	Students	4	14	79	
An understanding of other cultures is important in the classroom.	Instructors	0	0	100	
	Students	4	13	81	

Instructors all indicated (100% strongly agreed) that they want to understand other cultures, and that cultural understanding is important in the classroom. Students agreed on both of these points, albeit to a lesser extent (79% and 81%, respectively).

The questionnaires also investigated how well instructors think they understand, and try to understand, the cultures of their students, and how often the students report that this is actually the case. Then, the questionnaires asked instructors whether their students are aware of how well they understand, or try to understand, their cultures. The results are presented in Figures 3 through 6.

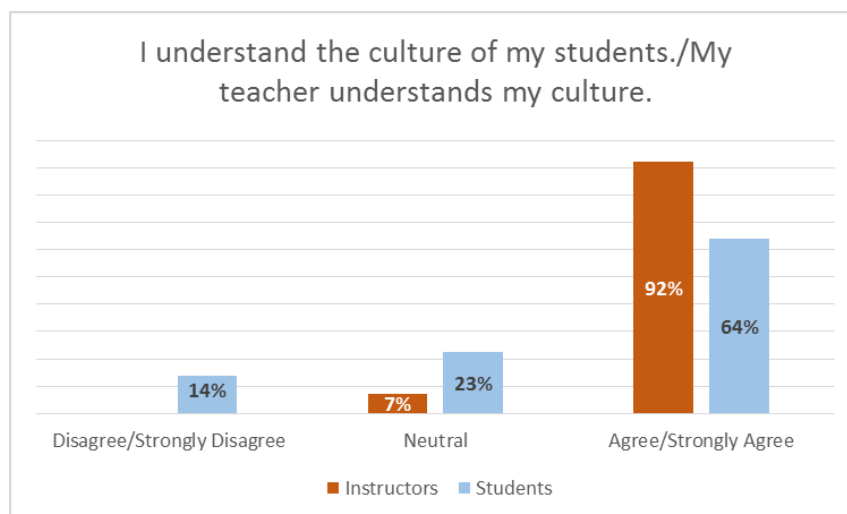


Figure 3. Instructor understanding of student culture.

Ninety-two percent of instructors believe that they understand the culture of their students. However, only 64% of students agree/strongly agree that their teacher

understands their culture. The instructors seem to be aware of this disconnect between their own perception of their cultural understanding, and the students' perception of their cultural understanding, as seen in Figure 4.

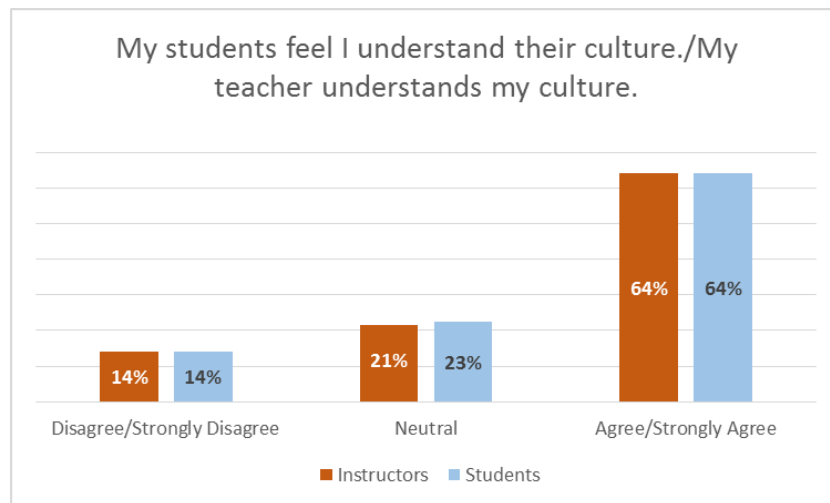


Figure 4. Student perception of instructor's cultural understanding.

Here, the instructors concede more ground to the possibility that while they themselves believe they understand the students' culture, the students do not think they do to the same extent. The instructor and student data correlates almost exactly, with 64% of each group agreeing/strongly agreeing about the extent to which the instructors understand the students' culture. The numbers of instructors and students who remained neutral and those who disagreed/strongly disagreed are also very similar (21%/23% and 14%/14%, respectively).

When the statements about instructor understanding of the students' culture were modified to include the effort and perceived effort on the part of instructors to understand the students' culture, the results were slightly different, as seen in Figure 5.

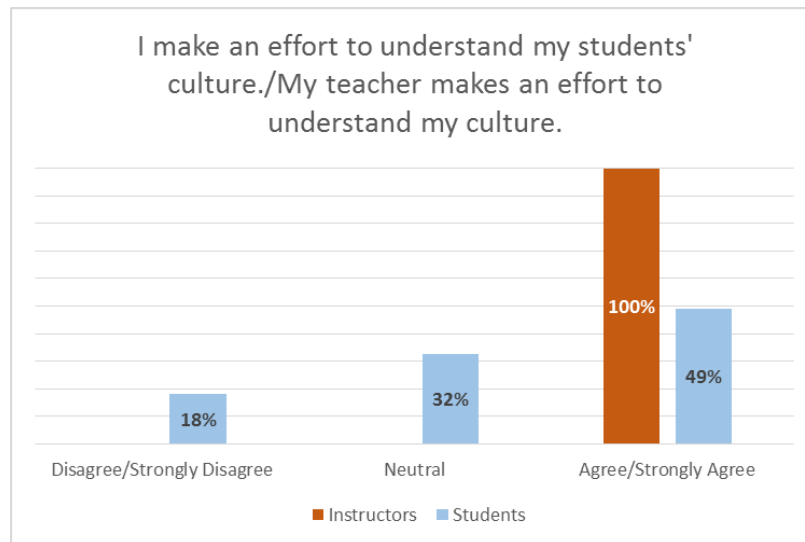


Figure 5. Instructor effort at understanding student culture.

More instructors were able to report more strongly that they make an effort to understand their students' culture, even if, as reported in Figure 3, slightly fewer of them (92%) reported actually understanding their students' culture. The students did not distinguish as much between the actual understanding of their culture on the part of their instructor, and the instructor's effort to do so. Rather, they reported a similar level of cultural understanding and an effort to achieve that cultural understanding.

However, as seen in Figure 6, instructors overestimated the degree to which students thought instructors made an effort to understand their culture. All of the instructors agreed/strongly agreed that their students knew they were making an effort, while only about half (49%) of the students indicated such knowledge.

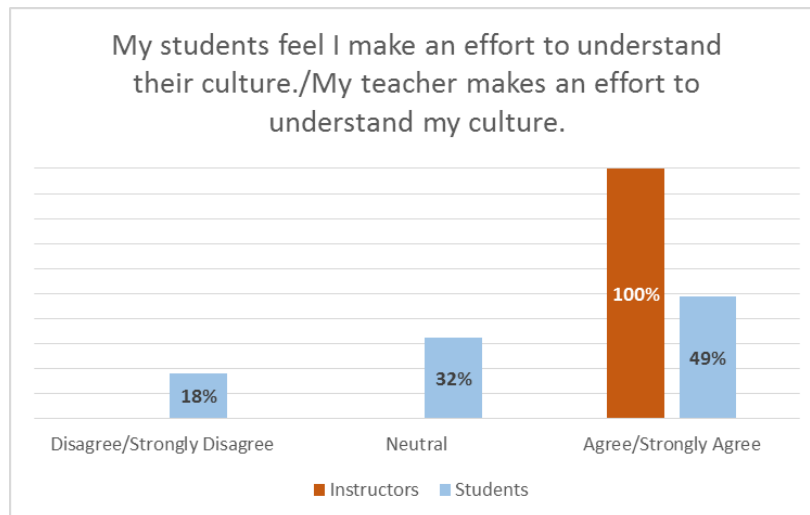


Figure 6. Student perception of instructor’s effort at cultural understanding.

Finally, instructors and students were asked about two different methods of dealing with cultural differences in class: encouraging debate, or seeking common ground. Instructors indicated that both encouraging debate and seeking common ground were agreeable methods of dealing with cultural differences in class. Students mostly remained neutral to both methods, but a greater part of them responded that seeking common ground was the way to resolve cultural differences in class. This finding that students prefer seeking common ground over debate in order to resolve cultural differences is in line with Khakimova, et al. (2012).

The results for the third research question, “What are these instructors’ and students’ attitudes toward culture in the classroom?” were encouraging. Both instructors and students sense the value of maintaining cultural understanding in the classroom. All of the instructors and the majority of their students indicated a desire to understand other cultures. The students generally wanted their instructor to understand their culture, and most of the time, they indicated that they felt the instructor made an effort to do so and actually succeeded in doing so.

5. Conclusion

This research focused on cultural conflicts between Western, native English-speaking instructors and their Arab students at two university-level EFL programs in the UAE. Questionnaires and interviews were used to discover key cultural differences between these two populations, instructors' awareness of these differences, the details of specific classroom cultural conflicts, and the instructors' and students' attitudes toward culture.

It was discovered that the Western NES instructors and their Arab students hold different values in several areas, including the role of religion in one's personal life and the ideal atmosphere of a classroom. In these areas, students held religion to be far more important than instructors did, while instructors believed in a more casual classroom atmosphere. However, in other areas, such as opinions on the Western style of education and the use of competition as a learning style in class, instructors and students tended to agree.

As for the instructors' awareness of these cultural similarities and differences, the instructors involved in this research were also found to be very aware. This could be attributed to the fact that the instructors involved in this research were, on the whole, very experienced in teaching EFL in the UAE. However, most instructors reported having received no cultural sensitivity training or orientation before beginning to teach in the UAE.

Nine categories of classroom cultural conflicts were identified. For instructors, the major concerns were inappropriate materials/discussion topics in class, and problems managing boy/girl interactions sensitively. Students also reported problems with these mixed-gender issues, as well as a lack of respect for religious customs on the part of instructors. Finally, both instructors and students reported positive attitudes toward cultural understanding in the classroom, with instructors indicating a desire to understand their students' culture and students indicating a desire to be understood.

Implications

This research holds several implications for Western NES instructors teaching in EFL programs in the UAE. With increased experience teaching in this context, there seems to come a greater awareness of cultural differences in the classroom. However, even the most experienced teachers continue to report having difficulty managing sensitive cultural issues with their students. Teachers who are

inexperienced may need training – perhaps even from the more experienced teachers themselves – in order to avoid serious problems in the classroom related to culture.

Indeed, during the interviews, instructors were full of advice for the inexperienced. Their recommendations included:

- “[B]eing über-sensitive to very small things happening in your classroom will teach you something and give you a heads-up that there’s something happening that you don’t understand” (Instructor E).
- “[T]alk to your students about their culture. Because I think a lot of the time they expect that we’re not interested. They blossom with that kind of interest. And even the shy ones and even the ones who know very little about the world...will begin to ask you questions about [your culture] as well. And you create that dialogue. And that the cultural dialogue is, it is the education in a sense” (Instructor E).
- “Keep a distance, you know, keep it professional at the beginning” (Instructor J).
- “Know about the country, obviously understand Islam, be sure that you respect their customs, and their values. Point out that you also have your own values” (Instructor J).
- “Keep your [social life] very separate from your teaching. There shouldn't even be a whiff of alcohol on your breath on Sunday morning. It would just be unacceptable” (Instructor J).
- “I think it’s just absolutely essential that you know the host culture. Absolutely essential” (Instructor P).
- “[G]et to know a little bit about your students. Not just their name. That’s a start, for heaven’s sake! Get to know their names. But know a little bit about them” (Instructor P).
- Seek out culturally relevant materials: “The good thing happening now is we’re getting more and more materials that we can use in class that are actually written for this part of the world. So that is wonderful” (Instructor P).

The implications for more formal teacher training programs are also clear. A teacher training program intended for Western NES EFL instructors in the UAE that lacks a cultural orientation component is not going to produce fully competent teachers. It is important that Western NES teachers in the UAE receive cultural

sensitivity training, particularly in the areas of religious understanding and managing mixed gender issues in class.

This training could be conducted in workshop sessions, as suggested by Escobar-Ortloff and Ortloff (2003), or as a single unit of a larger orientation program for new employees. In the latter case, a cultural sensitivity training component could be presented to new employees alongside other orientation topics such as housing, shopping, school selection, and department organization. Workshop sessions, on the other hand, should be interactive in nature and allow many opportunities for instructors to role-play the kinds of conflicts they will experience and talk through resolution strategies. In addition to the potential areas for conflict identified by this research, those involved in the design of such training programs should consider conducting a needs analysis in order to identify additional areas of concern for their specific teaching context. Experienced instructors from within the EFL programs, as well as members of the host culture, can be asked to serve as teacher trainers in orientation or workshop sessions. Several frameworks for classroom cultural conflict resolution and sensitivity were mentioned in the literature review, including Atkinson (1999) and Al-Issa (2005). These frameworks could be applied to the training sessions in order to give them structure.

Western NES instructors in the UAE EFL context should also realize that while student attitudes toward foreign cultures are changing to be more inclusive, certain core values, such as the importance of religion in one's daily life, remain strong and should not be challenged in the classroom. Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) compare this phenomenon to an onion: the outer layers may start looking the same in two very different cultures, but the inner layers remain as different as they ever were (p. 20). Western NES instructors should continue to be vigilant about ensuring that the classroom remains free of materials that may be offensive (outer layers of the onion) as they work toward cultivating a genuine, overall respect for religious customs and traditions (inner layers of the onion). Minding the more important, more crucial differences that lead to cultural conflict will probably take care of the more superficial problem areas.

A particular area of Muslim religious customs and traditions that should be focused on, according to this research, is managing sensitive gender issues in class. Instructors who are unsure of cultural norms regarding group/pair work, seating arrangements, appropriate physical contact, and other behavior between the sexes

should seek out a knowledgeable source for advice. Preferably, this source should be very familiar with the intricacies of the host culture. This can be difficult, since views on this issue can differ, even within Islam. Consider this exchange between two male, Muslim students at AUS (their words have been edited slightly for clarity):

Student S: Cultural issues are more important for females because they are more sensitive. They cannot do stuff like the males. For example, male or female teachers can shake hands with anyone. But female students cannot touch the male teacher.

Student D: It doesn't matter. Teachers can do anything they want to improve their students' knowledge. They shouldn't divide them [by gender].

Student S: I do like it when the Western teachers do something like dividing us into mixed groups. An Arab teacher would divide us into separate male and female groups. But a Western teacher, even if the teacher knows our culture, she will do this [form mixed groups] to make energy and change.

Student D: And the Arab girls don't care. Maybe a few are very Islamic and they care, but the others don't care.

Student S: Yeah, after three or four weeks, it's normal, and they don't care if they are in mixed groups.

Student D: But not always!

Within this single exchange, each student expresses the opinion that mixed groups are acceptable and not culturally inappropriate, as well as the opinion that mixed groups *are* culturally inappropriate, at least for certain class members. A Western NES instructor attempting to navigate cultural issues such as this one without training or assistance from a trusted source is almost sure to run into trouble. Consulting any established institutional guidelines or policies about mixed-gender pair work and groupings will also be helpful in this regard.

Developing meaningful relationships with students, as described in Nieto (2006), also assists with cultural understanding in the classroom. Instructor J, who has 36 years of teaching experience in the UAE, offered her opinion that “students like to have a rapport...it's very important to have this rapport with your teacher.” Instructor P built upon this idea of cultivating a rapport with one's students, and how the quality of that relationship affects what you will and will not do in class:

It depends on the rapport you have with the class. You know yourself, you can feel yourself, you know the students who are in the class. What will be acceptable to them? I suppose it changes class to class, person to person. Instructor P recommends developing this rapport, which will influence the success or failure of the class, by “not just teaching them in class and following the syllabus but also getting to know a little about them, getting them to talk about themselves.” She

added that she likes to meet the students' family members on university "open days," so that the parents can put a face to the teacher's name – and so that she can understand more about the student's family dynamic and what motivates the student. That, in turn, contributes to cultural understanding in the classroom.

Limitations

The findings of this research apply best to the context of Western NES instructors teaching in EFL classrooms in the UAE, where the students are mostly Muslim Arabs. Its findings could also be applied to other countries in the Gulf region, such as Qatar, Oman, etc., and possibly to Arab countries outside the GCC, such as Jordan and Egypt. However, the findings of this study are unlikely to have relevant, specific implications for EFL programs outside these areas, though its general conclusions can be taken into consideration wherever there are cultural differences between instructors and students in the classroom.

In addition, the scale of this research was relatively small, especially regarding the number of instructors who agreed to participate. This was due to the timing of the administration of the research instruments, occurring, as it did, at the very end of the spring semester and extending into the summer, when many instructors go on leave for the duration. Future studies should seek to incorporate the opinions of more instructors.

One consequence of having only a medium-sized group of instructors as participants is that almost all of the instructors were very experienced. As a result, this research did not yield much data from inexperienced instructors, which limits the generalizability of the conclusions.

The number of universities featured in this research was also limited by the complicated permissions process required by schools such as Zayed University and the University of Sharjah. Access to these schools was impossible to obtain for an external researcher, despite repeated attempts.

Suggestions for Further Research

In order to address some of the limitations of this research, future studies could seek to expand the scope of the instructors, students, and universities involved in this study. Additional studies could also expand the student participant pool to include more segments of UAE society such as non-Arab Muslims, non-Muslim Arabs, and other non-Western nationalities.

Since almost all of the instructors involved in this research were very experienced, future studies could focus on inexperienced instructors, or compare the opinions of inexperienced and experienced instructors to note the differences, if any, that emerge. Further research could also compare the opinions of students at different universities.

In addition, now that some key areas of cultural conflict in the EFL classroom have been identified, further research in this area could seek to design and even pilot a standard curriculum for cultural sensitivity training intended for Western NES instructors in the Gulf region. Such a curriculum could identify specific areas of potential for cultural conflict, and teach avoidance or resolution strategies for each.

Concluding Remarks

This research has shown the significant presence culture and cultural conflicts have in EFL classrooms in the UAE. Day in and day out, Western NES instructors and their Arab students are navigating the issues raised by cultural differences. In fact, rather than cultural differences in the classroom being peripheral to the learning that is going on, it could be, as Instructor E pointed out, that the cultural dialogue *is* the education. When Western NES instructors and their Arab students “engage with difference,” together, in ways that contribute to the building up of cultural understanding, this education can proceed without impediment, to the enrichment of all (Young & Sachdev, 2011, p. 90).

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Appendix A: Complete List of Student Respondents

Student #	M/F	Nationality	Native Language	Religion	University
1	F	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
2	F	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
3	F	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
4	F	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
5	F	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
6	F	Emarati	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
7	F	Emirati	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
8	F	Emaraty	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
9	F	Emirati	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
10	F	Emirati	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
11	F	Emirati	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
12	F	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
13	M	Emirati	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
14	M	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
15	M	Emarati	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
16	M	Emirates	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
17	M	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
18	M	Emirati	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
19	M	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
20	F	Emarati	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
21	F	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	Khalifa University
22	M	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
23	M	Emarati	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
24	M	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
25	M	Jordan	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
26	M	China	Chinese	Other	AUS
27	M	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
28	M	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS

29	F	Emirati	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
30	F	China	Uyghur	Muslim	AUS
31	M	Yemeni	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
32	M	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
33	F	Syrian	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
34	F	KSA	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
35	F	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
36	M	Sudan	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
37	F	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
38	M	Jordanian	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
39	F	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
40	M	Local	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
41	F	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
42	F	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
43	M	Emirati	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
44	F	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
45	M	Emirati	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
46	F	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
47	F	Emirati	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
48	M	Palestinian	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
49	M	Kuwaiti	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
50	M	Palestinian	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
51	F	Jordanian	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
52	M	Jordanian	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
53	M	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
54	M	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
55	M	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
56	F	Egyptian	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
57	M	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
58	M	Emirati	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
59	F	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
60	M	Emirati	Arabic	Muslim	AUS

61	F	Palestinian	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
62	M	UAE	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
63	F	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
64	F	Emarati	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
65	M	Libyan	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
66	M	Syrian	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
67	M	Palestinian	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
68	M	Chechen	Chechen	Muslim	AUS
69	M	Russia	Russian, Tatar	Muslim	AUS
70	F	Egyptian	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
71	M	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
72	M	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
73	M	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
74	M	Saudi	Arabic	Muslim	AUS
75	F	Jordanian	Arabic	Muslim	AUS

Appendix B: Instructors' Questionnaire

Questionnaire: Investigating Culture in the Classroom

Researcher: Bridget M. W. Palmer, MA TESOL Program, AUS

Purpose: I am investigating teacher attitudes toward culture in the classroom, especially in situations where the culture of the students is very different from the culture of the teacher. This area of study is called *intercultural competence*. The main purpose of this research is to fulfill the requirements of my MA thesis, supervised by Dr. Ahmad Al-Issa at the AUS.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Any identifying information collected in the process of this research will be kept confidential, and the results will be presented in an anonymous manner.

Estimated Time Commitment: 10 minutes

Demographic information

Gender: Male Female

Age (circle one): under 30 30-40 40+

Nationality: _____

Native language (mother tongue): _____

What other languages, if any, do you speak?

Religion: _____

Total years of teaching experience: _____

Years of teaching experience in the UAE: _____

Other countries where you have teaching experience: _____

Current teaching institution: _____

Instructions: Please circle your view about each of these statements (1 = strongly disagree; 2= tend to disagree; 3=neutral; 4 = tend to agree; 5= strongly agree), as they apply to your *current* teaching context in the UAE.

For the purposes of this research, "culture" is defined as what people do, think, and how they respond to others, according to the ways they have been influenced by the society in which they participate.

	strongly disagree	tend to disagree	neutral	tend to agree	strongly agree
The classroom should be a formal place.	1	2	3	4	5
As the teacher, I should know the answer to all student questions about the subject.	1	2	3	4	5
Competition is a good way to encourage learning in class.	1	2	3	4	5
There should be equality in the classroom because we are all human beings.	1	2	3	4	5
Confrontation helps solve problems.	1	2	3	4	5
It's OK to use materials in class that show a different viewpoint, even if this viewpoint contradicts many students' values.	1	2	3	4	5
What my family wants for me is more important than what I want for me.	1	2	3	4	5
Religion is important in my daily life.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, I avoid discussing topics related to sex.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, I avoid discussing the politics of the UAE.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, I avoid criticizing the cultural values of my students.	1	2	3	4	5
My students' culture is different from my own culture.	1	2	3	4	5
The Western tradition of education (as found in universities in the UAE) is most effective.	1	2	3	4	5
I have an interest in understanding other cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
An understanding of other cultures is important in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I make an effort</i> to understand the culture of my students.	1	2	3	4	5

I understand the culture of my students.	1	2	3	4	5
In my opinion, my students feel <i>I make an effort</i> to understand their culture.	1	2	3	4	5
In my opinion, my students feel I understand their culture.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, I encourage debate when dealing with cultural differences.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, I seek common ground to resolve cultural differences.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, I avoid topics that might lead to cultural conflict.	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching in the UAE is different from what I expected.	1	2	3	4	5
The culture of the UAE is different from my home culture.	1	2	3	4	5
It has been difficult for me to adjust to living in the UAE.	1	2	3	4	5
It has been difficult for me to adjust to teaching in the UAE.	1	2	3	4	5
When teaching overseas, it is important to get to know the host culture.	1	2	3	4	5
My knowledge of the host culture informs my teaching practices.	1	2	3	4	5
I have encountered sensitive cultural issues in the classroom.	yes		no		
I have had to alter or adapt lesson materials to conform to cultural guidelines.	yes		no		

Is there an incident related to cultural differences in your UAE classroom that you can describe and how you handled it?

Do you feel that cultural differences between you and your students have had an impact on your teaching in the UAE? **Yes / No.**

If **yes**, please

share: _____

What kind of cultural orientation, if any, did you receive before starting to teach/during your teaching in the UAE?

Are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview? Yes No

If **yes**, please write your contact information (phone or email) here:

Contact information: Please return the completed questionnaire to Bridget Palmer, office M-349 (AUS). You may contact me with any questions or concerns by email (g00042748@aus.edu), or at 056.746.2363.

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix C: Students' Questionnaire

Questionnaire: Investigating Culture in the Classroom

Researcher: Bridget M. W. Palmer, MA TESOL Program, AUS

Purpose: I am investigating culture in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms in the UAE. The main purpose of this research is to fulfill the requirements of my MA thesis, supervised by Dr. Ahmad Al-Issa at the AUS.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Any identifying information collected in the process of this research will be kept confidential, and the results will be presented in an anonymous manner.

Estimated Time Commitment: 10 minutes

Demographic information

Gender: Male Female

Nationality: _____

Native language: _____

Religion: _____

Instructions: Please circle your view about each of these statements (1 = strongly disagree; 2= tend to disagree; 3=neutral; 4 = tend to agree; 5= strongly agree), as they apply to your *current* English class.

	strongly disagree	tend to disagree	neutral	tend to agree	strongly agree
What my family wants for me is more important than what I want for myself.	1	2	3	4	5
The classroom should be a formal place.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, the teacher should know all the answers to questions.	1	2	3	4	5
Competition is a good way to learn.	1	2	3	4	5
There should be equality in the classroom because we are all human beings.	1	2	3	4	5
Confrontation (arguing) helps solve problems.	1	2	3	4	5

If my friend does something wrong, I will tell other people.	1	2	3	4	5
It's OK if teachers show/use materials in class that go against my religion.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, the teacher should not discuss topics related to sex.	1	2	3	4	5
Religion is important in my daily life.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, the teacher should not discuss topics related to politics.	1	2	3	4	5
My teacher's culture is different from my own culture.	1	2	3	4	5
The Western style of education (like at this university) is the best one.	1	2	3	4	5
I want to understand other cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
It's important to understand other cultures in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that my teacher <i>makes an effort</i> to understand my culture.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that my teacher understands my culture.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, students argue about cultural differences with the teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, students calmly discuss cultural differences with the teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, culture is discussed.	1	2	3	4	5
It's important to me that my teacher understand my culture.	1	2	3	4	5
In general, teachers from the US/UK/Australia/NZ understand my culture.	1	2	3	4	5
In class, there are cultural misunderstandings.	yes		no		
I have felt that my culture is being disrespected by the teacher.	yes		no		

Have you ever felt angry, confused, sad, disrespected, or embarrassed because of something your teacher did? Tell me about what happened.

Do you feel that cultural differences between you and your teacher have affected the classroom?

Yes / No.

If **yes**, please share:

In your opinion, what does your teacher think about your culture?

Can I meet with you to ask you a few more questions in an interview? Yes No

If **yes**, please write your contact information (phone or email) here:

Contact information: Please return the completed questionnaire to Bridget Palmer, office M-349 (AUS). You may contact me with any questions or concerns by email (g00042748@aus.edu), or at 056.746.2363.

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Note: These questions may be modified, skipped, or clarified, depending on the participant's answers.

1. Tell me about yourself. Where are you from? How long have you lived in the UAE? How long have you taught in the UAE? Etc.
2. Do you think culture has an effect on the learning that takes place in the classroom?
3. Have you ever experienced a conflict in the classroom that you think was related to culture?
4. If you have experienced conflict in the classroom that you think was related to culture, tell me more about what happened. How did you feel? What did you do to resolve the situation, if anything?
5. What do you think students and teachers should know about culture before they enter the classroom?
6. How would you compare your expectations of teaching in the UAE (before your arrival) with the reality of teaching in the UAE?
7. How important is it to know the host culture to teach English? Why?
8. How would/does knowledge of the host culture influence your teaching practices?
9. How could one develop her/his intercultural competence? [Interviewer may need to define term verbally.]
10. How could we, as teachers, develop our students' intercultural competence?

Vita

Bridget Maureen Walker Palmer was born in 1981 in Boise, Idaho, USA. She graduated from Westview High School in Portland, Oregon, USA, in 1999. She received a Heritage Scholarship to study at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, USA, and graduated in 2001 with a Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and a minor in Japanese.

Ms. Palmer and her husband, Jeremy, have lived in Moscow, Russia; Damascus, Syria; Amman, Jordan; and Cairo, Egypt. Prior to obtaining her MA TESOL, Ms. Palmer gained experience in those cities teaching English as a private tutor as well as at organizations such as Amideast. Ms. Palmer and her husband and two daughters moved to the United Arab Emirates in 2010. She began working on her MA TESOL at AUS in 2011, while also teaching part-time at the university's Achievement Academy Bridge Program. She was awarded the Master of Arts degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages in the Fall Semester of 2013, shortly after the birth of her son.