English as a Foreign Language Students' Perceptions towards the British Culture: The Case of Batna 2 University, Algeria

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Abstract—The issue of cultural awareness triggers many controversies, especially in a context where individuals do not share the same cultural backgrounds and characteristics. The Algerian context is no exception. It is extensively important to highlight how culture remains essential in many areas. In higher education, for instance, culture plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' perceptions and attitudes. Henceforth, the current paper attempts to look at the perceptions of the British culture held by students engaged in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the department of English at Banta 2 University, Algeria. It also inquiries into EFL students' perceptions of British culture. To address the aforementioned research queries, a descriptive study has been carried out wherein a questionnaire of 15 items has been deployed to collect students' attitudes and perceptions toward British culture. Results showcase that, indeed, EFL students of the department of English at Banta 2 University hold both positive and negative perceptions towards British culture at different levels. The explanation could relate to the student's lack of acquaintance with and awareness of British culture. Consequently, this paper is an attempt to address the issue of cultural awareness from the perspective of EFL students.

Keywords—British culture, cultural awareness, EFL students' perceptions, higher education.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE topic of cultural awareness sparks a great deal of debate, especially when people come from different cultural origins and have different cultural traits. The situation in Algeria is likely to be similar in many ways. The literature has extensively documented how important culture still is in numerous fields. For instance, culture has a significant impact on how people perceive and approach higher education. Many scholars have emphasized the need to look at how language learners perceive and react to the culture of the second or foreign language they are learning during the past few decades [1]-[3]. This problem progressively came to be the focus of researchers in cross-cultural studies, and who are primarily interested in figuring out how to increase the learner's awareness of his own culture before moving on to that of the other [4], [5]. Researchers hope to do this by identifying and dealing with situations that cause emotions like rejection, animosity, resistance, and fear of losing one's identity and authenticity while learning a foreign or second language [6], [7]. The significant purpose of this study is to bring the learner develop awareness of the self in order to understand and tolerate the differences in the other, mainly due not to language per se, but rather related to cultural aspects like social values and norms, religion, and other social practices. Additionally, it is conceived that the issue is worth investigating for many reasons. First, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of other cultures do give neither individuals nor people the opportunity to communicate rationally in all fields, whether in the world of education- between teachers and learners- or in domains like business, diplomacy, and the like [8]. Second, the concern is even deeper and greater as the world is moving so fast towards globalization. That is, social mobility is higher than ever and is, henceforth, pushing millions of humans to permanently move cross-world seeking studies, work, and better conditions of life in general. This paper attempts to address the following research question: What are EFL students' perceptions towards the British culture?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before we start our account on cultural awareness, it is worth considering the concept of "culture". It refers to specific kinds of interest and practice like music, literature and art [9]. On the other hand, culture as defined by scholars, means all what exists in society [10]; and hence, a social hybridity transmitted by one generation to another. Reference [11] further suggests that culture refers to "the ideas, customs, skills, attitudes, beliefs, values and tools that characterize a given group of people in a given period of time".

A. Language, Culture, and Perception

From theoretical and empirical perspectives, humans learn their culture through language. Consequently, culture is transmitted through language. Similarly, studies reported that perceptual processes are influenced by culture [12]. Several researchers, like [13], [14], noted that there are two types of effect concerning that of culture on perception, and which are chronic and temporary. Eventually, the following closed relation is shown in Fig. 1 (cited in [15]).

For the following reasons, the relationship between language, perception, and culture is crucial to this subject: First, culture affects how we perceive things. Second, the language in which our perceptions are articulated is a component of our culture. Finally, any retroaction happens in a cultural context. This approach ensures its own poignancy and intensity in this way.

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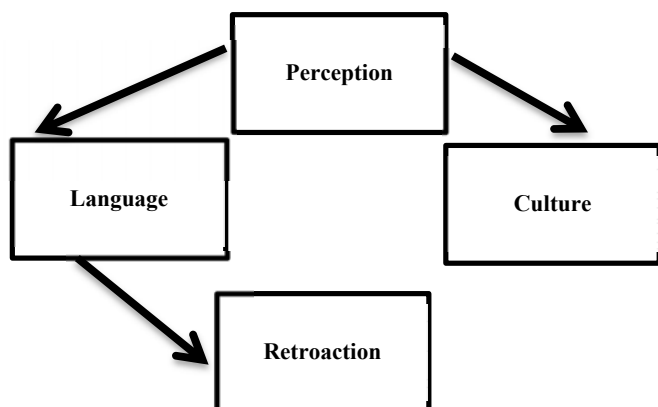International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences
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Fig. 1 Interrelation between language, perception and culture
(Adapted from [14], cited in [15])

B. Attitudes, Language, and Cultural Learning

It has been contended that attitudes are closely linked to a person's values and beliefs [16]. Along with this, research on language attitudes is needed in the fields of language planning, bilingualism, and notably foreign-language learning. Many studies [17]-[20] have demonstrated the essential role of affective factors in the process of second or foreign language learning. One instance could be exemplified by what [21] has underlined in a strong manner when highlighting the significance of attitude as one of the variables determining the level of second language proficiency a student attains. How effectively he learns the language will depend on how he feels about native speakers. When a person aspires to fit in with the group speaking that language, he or she learns a language more effectively. This bolsters the idea that respecting one culture is also valuing its language. Furthermore, it is doubtful that one could learn a language and its culture independently. Therefore, if language and culture are complementary, they will have an impact on both the student and the culture of the language he is learning.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY DESIGN

This study endeavors to examine the perceptions that EFL students at the department of English at Banta 2 University, Algeria, have towards British culture. What do EFL students think about British culture is another topic it raises. A descriptive study has been conducted to answer the aforementioned research question. A questionnaire with 15 items was used to gather students' opinions and perceptions concerning British culture. The population includes all students who are registered to study EFL in the department of English at Batna 2 University during the academic year 2016-2017. The total number of this population is 3000 students when we include all groups of all years at the three levels, that is, L+M+D standing for Licence (BA), Master one and Master two, and Doctorate, respectively. The questionnaire items have been self-designed. Data collected have been analyzed using SPSS and NVIVO.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results reveal that EFL students of the department of English at Banta 2 University do, in fact, have varying degrees of positive and negative attitudes about British culture. The students' ignorance of and disregard for British culture may be the basis for the explanation. In this section, the relationship between EFL students' perceptions of, and attitudes towards, the target culture is highlighted. This latter is categorized into the following main themes.

1. Which culture is better? The native or the target one?
2. Learning English without the integration of its culture
3. Learning English changes my attitudes to the British culture
4. The positive or negative impact of the British culture on the native one
5. The attitudes of acceptance or rejection towards different cultures
6. The impact of cultural differences on learning English
7. Students' readiness to learn about the British culture
8. The influence of learning British culture on the native identity
9. The fear of the influence of the British culture
10. The degree of British and native cultural awareness
11. Worth learning about the British culture and other cultures
12. Perceiving other cultures as a threat
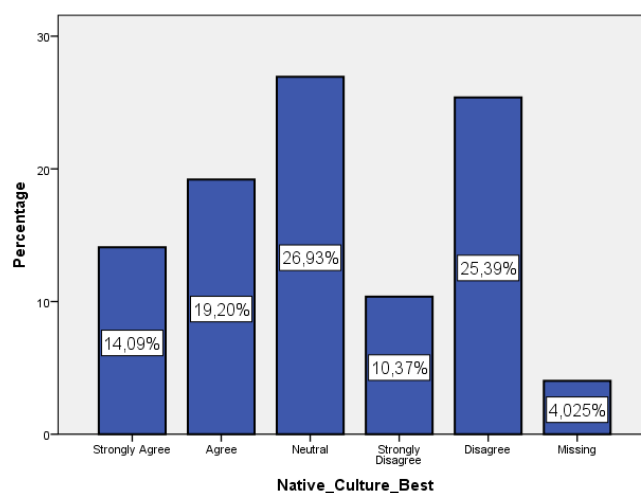13. Learning English without its culture

Fig. 2 Students' perceptions of the native culture

After a deep scrutiny of the main findings with respect to the students' perceptions towards both their own culture and the target one, it has been found that 36.53% of the students held a neutral view point towards the British culture being the best as opposed to a significant ratio of 25.23% and 10.22% for those who agreed and strongly agreed, respectively. However, 19.04% of the students still disagree with the fact that the British culture is the best knowing that a small proportion of 5.10% strongly disapproved this idea. Similarly, the former results do correlate significantly with their perceptions of their native culture. Data obtained demonstrate

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that 26.93% of the students have neutral attitudes as opposed to 25.39% who disagreed that their native culture is the best. Still, 19.20% and 14.09% of the students have agreed and strongly agreed respectively upon the fact that the native culture is the best. According to our EFL learners, despite having a neutral position with regard to the preferred culture, there is a clear indication that the target culture is better than the native one. This means that our EFL students reject at a certain extent their own culture at the expense of the target one. This might explain why they do not sound much attached to their identity and why they show readiness to change [22].
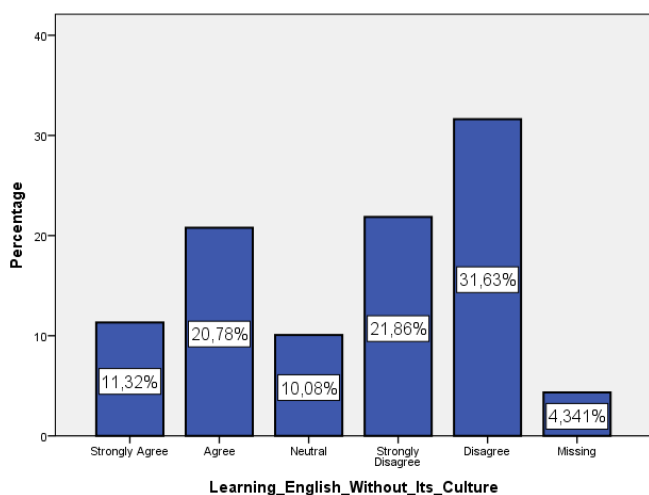

Fig. 3 Learning English without its culture

It is evident from Fig. 3 that 31.63% of our EFL students disapprove the fact that they can learn English without the integration of its culture. Similarly, an important rate of 21.86% strongly disagreed upon this idea. Nonetheless, a proportion of 20.78% represents those who are in favor of learning English without integrating its culture. This indeed is an indication of the focal role of culture for the learning of the target language according to EFL students' perceptions. From here, it could be assumed that the integration of culture in our EFL learning/teaching context has become a necessity for both learners and teachers. Thus, practitioners should look forward to incorporating syllabi that contain a cultural component in their teaching to satisfy the students' needs. It is quite abnormal that 32.10% of our respondents believe it is possible to learn English without its culture whereas all experts and researchers worldwide do assert that language and culture are so intimately interrelated that we cannot separate them [23].

Data findings summarized in Fig. 4 demonstrate significantly that our students' attitudes do change after being exposed to English with a representative rate of 31.42% and 17.80% respectively. On the other hand, few students representing 19.20% of the total sample disagreed with the fact that learning English would change their attitudes towards the British culture. These findings reinforce the assumption that our EFL learners' attitudes towards the British culture are eventually influenced by the learning process of the English language. These results, henceforth, extend to the presumption

that once being exposed to the English language, EFL learners' awareness about the target culture would probably increase accordingly whether it be negative or positive, and this will be explored thoroughly in the next section [24].
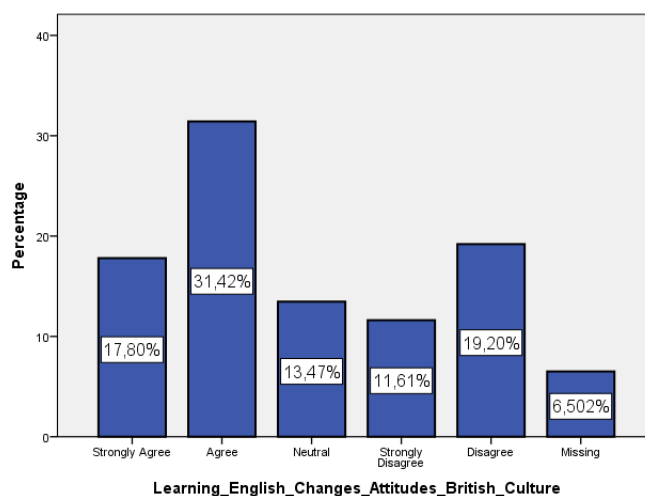

Fig. 4 English-learning and students' change of attitudes towards the British culture

TABLE I
LEARNERS' PRECONCEIVED KNOWLEDGE OF THE BRITISH PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Q1 What do you think of the British people and culture	
Students' thoughts of British culture	Students' thoughts of British people
Developed and Civilized	Arrogant
Different	Civilized
Good	Cold
Great	Conservative
Interesting	Developed
Rich	Friendly
	Hard Workers
	Individualistic
	Irreligious
	Kind
	Open Mind
	Organized
	Polite
	Proud
	Respectful
	Serious
	Sociable
	Tolerant
	Unsociable
	Well-Educated

TABLE II
RUN MATRIX CODING QUERY FOR STUDENTS' THOUGHTS OF BRITISH CULTURE

Q 2: Students' thoughts of British culture	
1: Great	28
2: Developed and Civilized	20
3: Rich	18
4: Good	12
5: Interesting	11
6: Different	10

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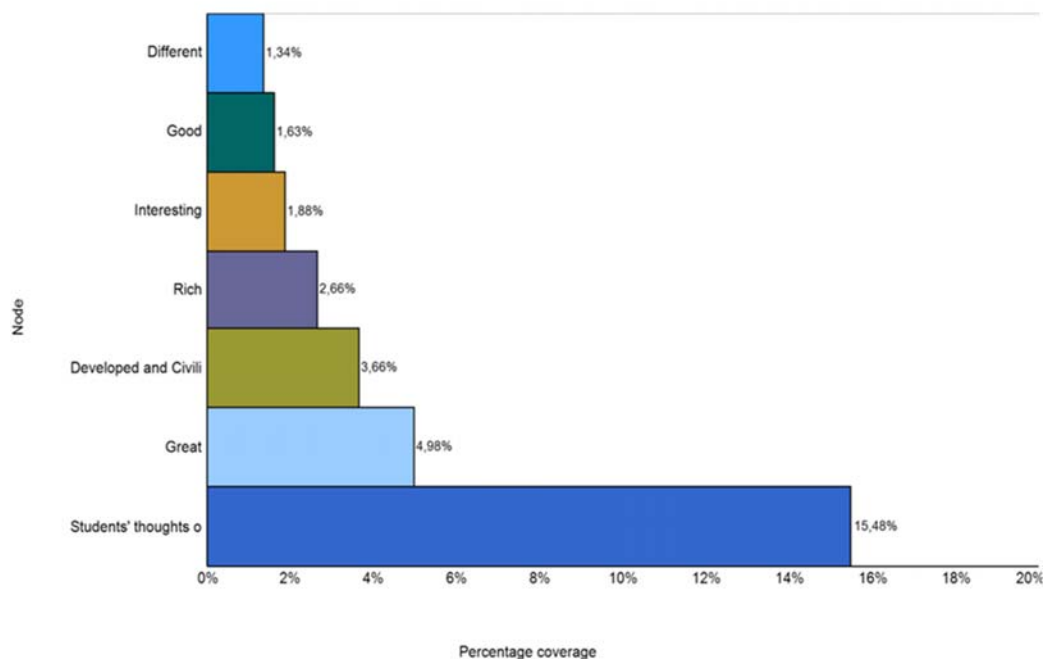International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences
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Fig. 5 Word classification with respect to students' thoughts of British culture

TABLE III
WORD CLASSIFICATION WITH RESPECT TO STUDENTS' PREDILECTIONS AND DISLIKES TOWARDS THE BRITISH CULTURE

Q3. What do you like/dislike in the British culture	
Students' dislike in British culture	Students' like in British culture
Culture	Behaviors and Attitudes
Drinking Alcohol	Education
Family disintegration	Food
Racism	Language
Religion	Organization
Social Life	Time Respect
	Work Value

TABLE IV
RUN MATRIX QUERY WITH RESPECT TO STUDENTS' DISLIKES IN BRITISH CULTURE

Q 4: Students' dislike in British culture	
1: Religion	31
2: Social Life	28
3: Drinking Alcohol	24
4: Racism	19
5: Culture	11
6: Family disintegration	10

TABLE V
RUN MATRIX QUERY WITH RESPECT TO STUDENTS LIKES IN BRITISH CULTURE

Q 5: Students' like in British culture	
1: Work Value	30
2: Organization	24
3: Time Respect	23
4: Language	18
5: Education	16
6: Behaviors and Attitudes	11
7: Food	11

Looking at EFL learners' different discursive word classification, the current study led to the clustered patterning in Table I.

Patterns listed in Fig. 5 are aggregated into a run matrix query which resulted into the themes summarized in Tables IV and V.

The displayed data evidence that EFL learners predilections and dislikes towards the British culture revolve around the following patterns: First, with respect to the respondents' deprecation rates which represent 120 of coded cases and a totality of 18.29% coded references, they contended that the British are disapproved for aspects related to "religion" referring to 31 coded cases and 4.35% as a coverage rate, "social life" representing 28 coded cases with a rate of 5.31%, "alcoholic attitude" with 24 cases and a range of 3.44%, "racism" standing for 11 cases and a rate of 2.54%, "culture", and "family disintegration" representing 11 and 10 cases, 1.14% and 2.14% in total range of coverage, respectively. Secondly, concerning the respondents' propensity on the same issue, they claimed that the British culture is approbated with 101 countenance coded cases and 12.90% references based on their: "work-value" representing 30 coded cases and a range of 4.28% coded references, "organization" standing for 24 cases and a rate of 3.06%, "time respect" referring to 23 cases and 0.57% of coded references, "language" with 18 cases and 1.80% references, "education" 16 cases and 2.00% references, "behaviors and attitudes" and "food" both 11 cases and 1.68% and 1.32% references respectively. The possible explanation of the presented findings could be multifaceted. First, it seems that EFL respondents' discourse is a mere illustration of the native contextual and societal conjunctures. It is clearly evident that EFL respondents favor the values of the British

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culture that do match their inveterate culture, ideology and premises, whereas, they disapprove what goes on the opposite direction of their principles. The cultural representations decoded through the EFL respondents' discourse entail that the British culture is a portrayal of a high intellectual, institution, including patterns of power and societal interaction, though, some momentous instances of disfavor and miss-acceptance of the other do exist in the EFL students' responses. This, again, is a mere subjective representation of the image of the British culture as being perceived and apprehended by the majority of EFL respondents.

The formerly displayed results indicate that EFL learners' perceptions of the British culture and people are patterned into students' thoughts of the British culture with 94 coding references representing 15.48% as a rate of coverage, and students' thoughts of British people with 276 coding references representing 23.92%.

These data findings showcase that the highest number of cases coded with respect to students' thoughts towards the British culture is the pattern "great" representing 28 coded cases with a range of 4.98%, and referring to the overall range of covered coded data followed by "developed and civilized" attributed to 20 coded cases with a rate of 3.66%. In addition, the least attributes provided by EFL respondents correspond to "interesting", "good", "different" orderly representing 11, 12, and 10 coded cases referring to 1.88%, 1.63%, and 1.34% as rates of coverage. Notwithstanding, being rich has been conceived as a quality of the British culture referring to 12 coded cases and a rate of 2.66%. In addition, in the data procured with respect to students' thoughts of British people, it has been found that the focal attributes of the British people according to EFL respondents are "kindness" representing 48 coded cases referring to 3.96% as a rate of coverage within the data coded corresponding to the fifth question of the questionnaire (see Appendix), "well-educated" representing 34 coded cases with a rate of 2.15%, "organized" betoken for 28 coded cases with a rate of 1.70%, "hard-working" indicating 24 coded cases and 1.83%, "tolerant" as 18 coded cases and 2.14%.

What is significant about these data is that EFL students consider the British people to be "irreligious" as 8 coded cases and 3.29%, "arrogant" and "unsociable" as 3 coded cases and 0.17% as well as 0.13% respectively. Still, "individualism", "pride", "politeness", "respectfulness", "open-mindedness", and "developed" are attributes of the British people standing for 12 coded cases and 1.64%, 11 and 1.42%, 10 and 0.36%, 9 and 0.58%, 6 and 0.48%, and 9 coded cases and 0.63% as a total range of coverage respectively. Nonetheless, some of EFL respondents negatively asserted that the British people tend to be cold referring to 4 coded cases and 0.38%. In reverence with the former indicated data, it could be inferred that EFL respondents of the Department of English at Batna 2 University tend to value more the positive attributes of the British culture and individual at the expense of the negative ones. This, indeed, shows that EFL learners' assertions and perceptions deeply reflect probably the influence of the target language or culture and a high sense of intercultural awareness towards the target culture.

The highest range of positive assertions documented on behalf of the British culture, as it is portrayed through EFL learners' discourse, is a significant illustration of the fondness of EFL students of the British culture, notwithstanding, the extent of the few reported assertions on this respect.

Although our EFL students do show appreciation for certain features of British culture, those aspects mainly related to hard work, systematicity, education, and organization, the results from the data collected demonstrate that they do not tolerate otherness. Their representation of some components of the British culture stems from ignorance and lack of the British daily social and societal life. Although our students possess the ability to see what is positive in the British culture, stereotypes concerning strictly intimate behavior and life (religion and alcohol) seem to be used in their way of perceiving the British culture and, consequently, in those attitudes they form towards British people. How to diminish subjectivity and to develop acceptance of otherness stand, again, as behavior components worth teaching in an intercultural perspective foreign-language education [31, p.67].

V. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the perceptions and attitudes of Batna 2 University LMD students of English towards the British culture have been investigated and inquired into. It has been discovered that a small percentage of LMD students taking English as a second language really adopt attitudes about British culture based on false assumptions that arise from their ignorance of this country's culture. The awareness they have of the positive aspects of British culture that their own culture does not provide, such as greater freedom, greater justice, greater respect and consideration for women and individual liberties, and thus a more democratic practice of social life, is quite positive and very encouraging. Second, students' misunderstandings of otherness are restricted to issues of religion and identity. Their cross-cultural perceptions tend to stem more from open mindedness and cultural awareness than from a deep sense of acculturation. The main research question is hence answered and the cause-and-effect relationship between perceptions of, and attitude-formation towards the British culture is clearly answered thanks to the amount of well-documented information gathered. Finally, the integration of an intercultural perspective in foreign language instruction seems doable given the high levels of preparedness, propensity, and acceptance our LMD students show for the otherness. Verifying one hypothesis and providing an answer to one study question cannot in any way be considered sufficient proof to start an educational reform since no acceptable and constructive change should be made without first having sound and rational methodological principles. We hope that our study will pave the way for future linguistic and cross-cultural research projects carried out by more seasoned academics and cross-national research teams.

APPENDICES

Questionnaire (Adapted from [32, pp. 260-262])

Dear student,

You are kindly invited to fill in this questionnaire to help the author gather information needed for the completion of his doctorate research. Information provided will be used only for the sake of the study and will neither be disclosed to others nor linked to any respondents. Thank you for your contribution.

Yours sincerely,

1. What do you know about the British people and culture?

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2. What do you think of the British people and culture?

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3. What do you like/dislike in The British culture?

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Please, tick (✓) appropriately.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE BRITISH CULTURE

Statements	A	B	C	D	E
1/ The British culture is the best in the world.					
2/ My culture is the best in the world.					
3/ I can learn English without learning its culture.					
4/ Learning English changes my attitudes to the British culture.					
5/ The British culture influences positively my culture.					
6/ The British culture influences negatively my culture.					
7/ I accept differences between cultures.					
8/ I reject all that is different from my culture.					
9/ Cultural differences prevent me from learning English.					
10/ I am happy to learn about the British culture.					
11/ I fear the influence of the British culture.					
12/ It is worth learning about the British culture.					

A: Strongly agree, **B**: Agree, **C**: Neutral, **D**: Strongly disagree, **E**: Disagree

Thank you

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