

Culture in Teaching: Experience over Training

Nicholas Bradley

Nagoya University of Foreign Studies

Today

- Teachers' views on culture
- Teacher education regarding culture
- Influences on teachers' views

Study

1. Culture & Essentialism Study

- 121 survey responses from university English teachers at Japanese universities
- 5 interview participants (class observations)

2. Teacher Background Study

- 76 survey responses from university English teachers at Japanese universities

Before we start....

- What does the “cultural dimension” of language teaching mean to you?
- Is culture a vital component of language teaching?
- What informs your concept of culture? (Why do you understand culture the way you do?)

The Cultural Dimension



- Foreign-cultural, cross-cultural, multicultural, transcultural approaches (Risager, 1998).
- Culture / The cultural dimension is increasingly viewed as an important part of the profession (Damen, 1987; Kohler, 2015; Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

Teachers' Views



- 72.7% agree- culture is a “vital” part of language teaching.
- 66.9% agree- teaching culture is the responsibility of the language teacher.
- 91.7% agree- culture and language are strongly connected.
- 90.7% agree- culture and communication are strongly connected.

Teachers' Views

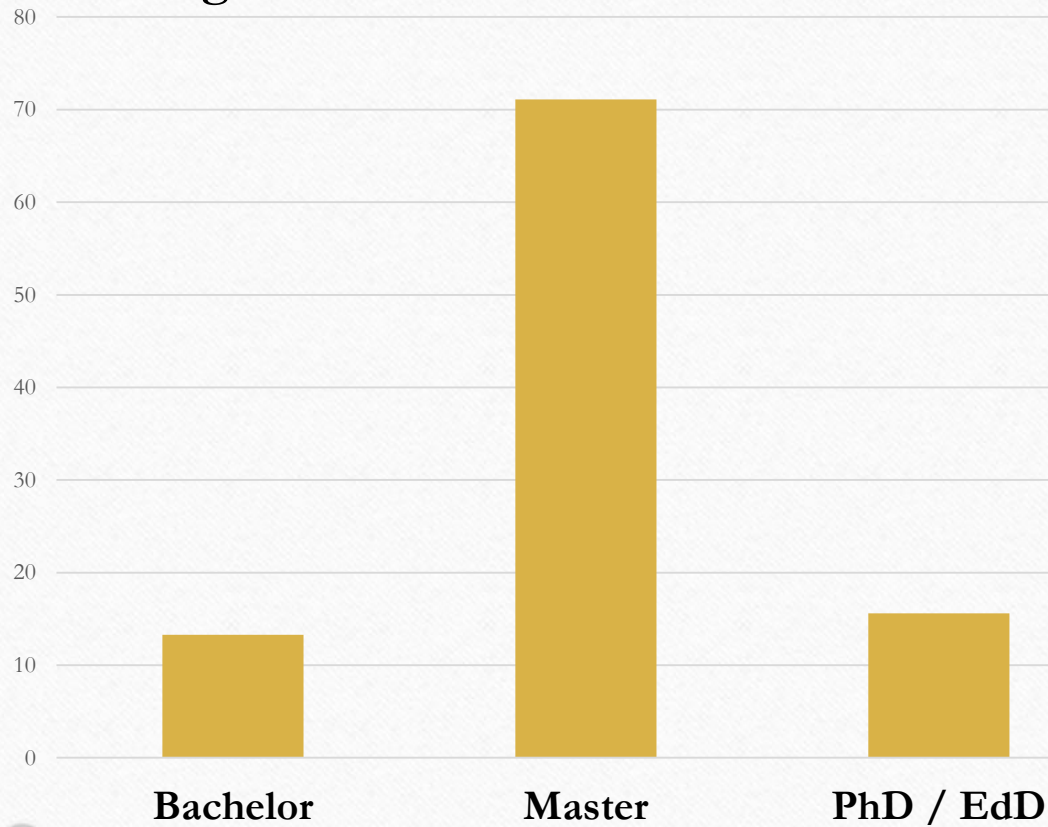
- Similarity in way teachers define culture.
- Strong difference in the level of essentialism in teachers views (Bradley, 2018).
- Teacher training courses at universities overwhelmingly continue to use dated understandings of culture (Hua et al., 2017).

So, teachers' views of culture are a consequence of the continued use of dated concepts in teacher education courses?

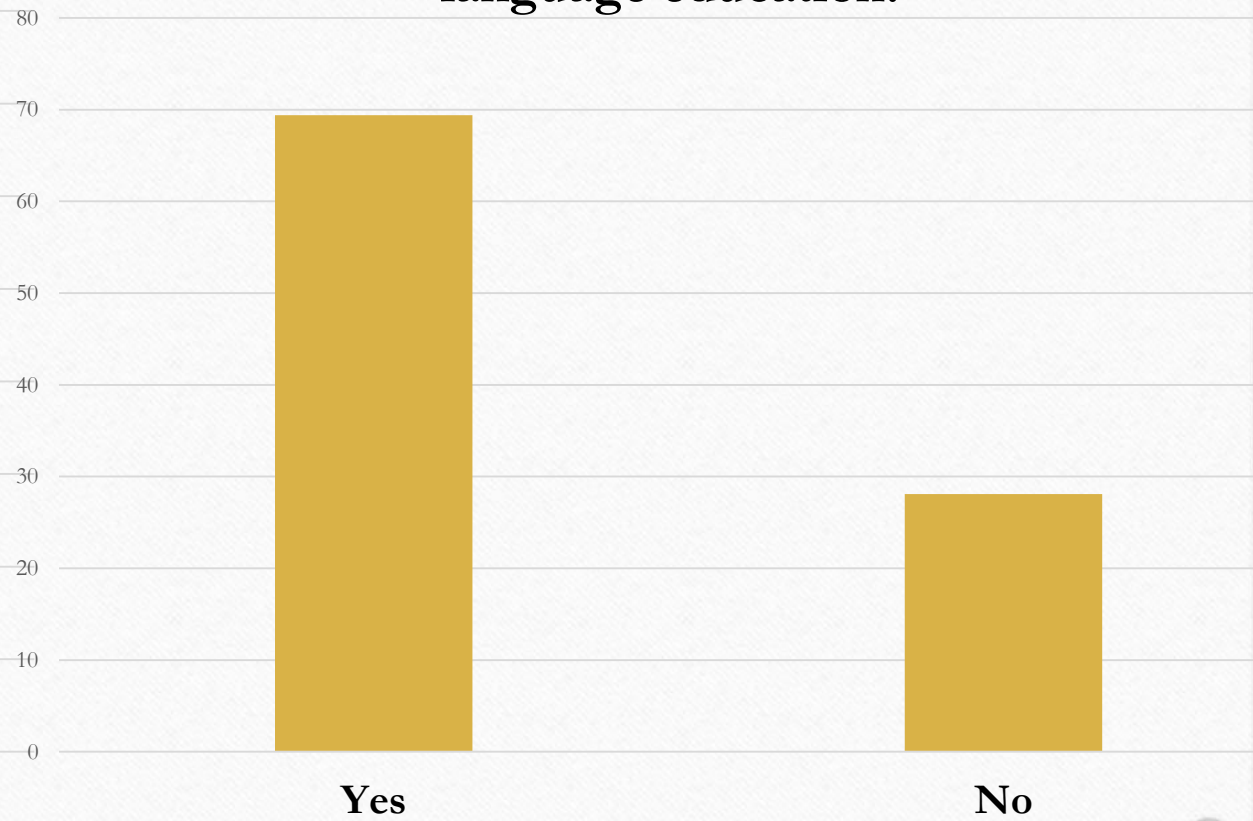


Teachers typically held a master's degree in
TESOL / Applied Linguistics

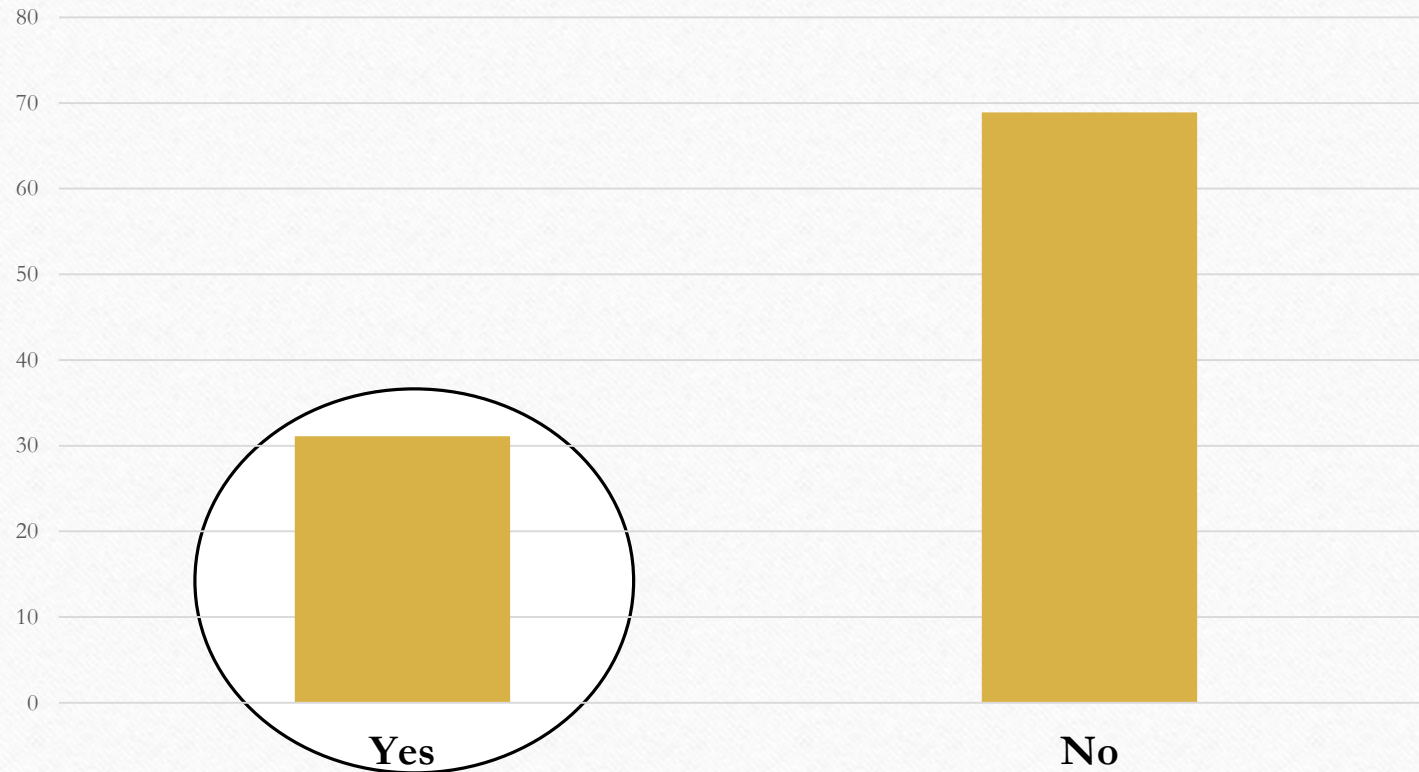
Highest Level of Education Achieved



**Is your highest qualification connected to
language education?**



Have you had any training regarding the cultural dimension of language teaching?

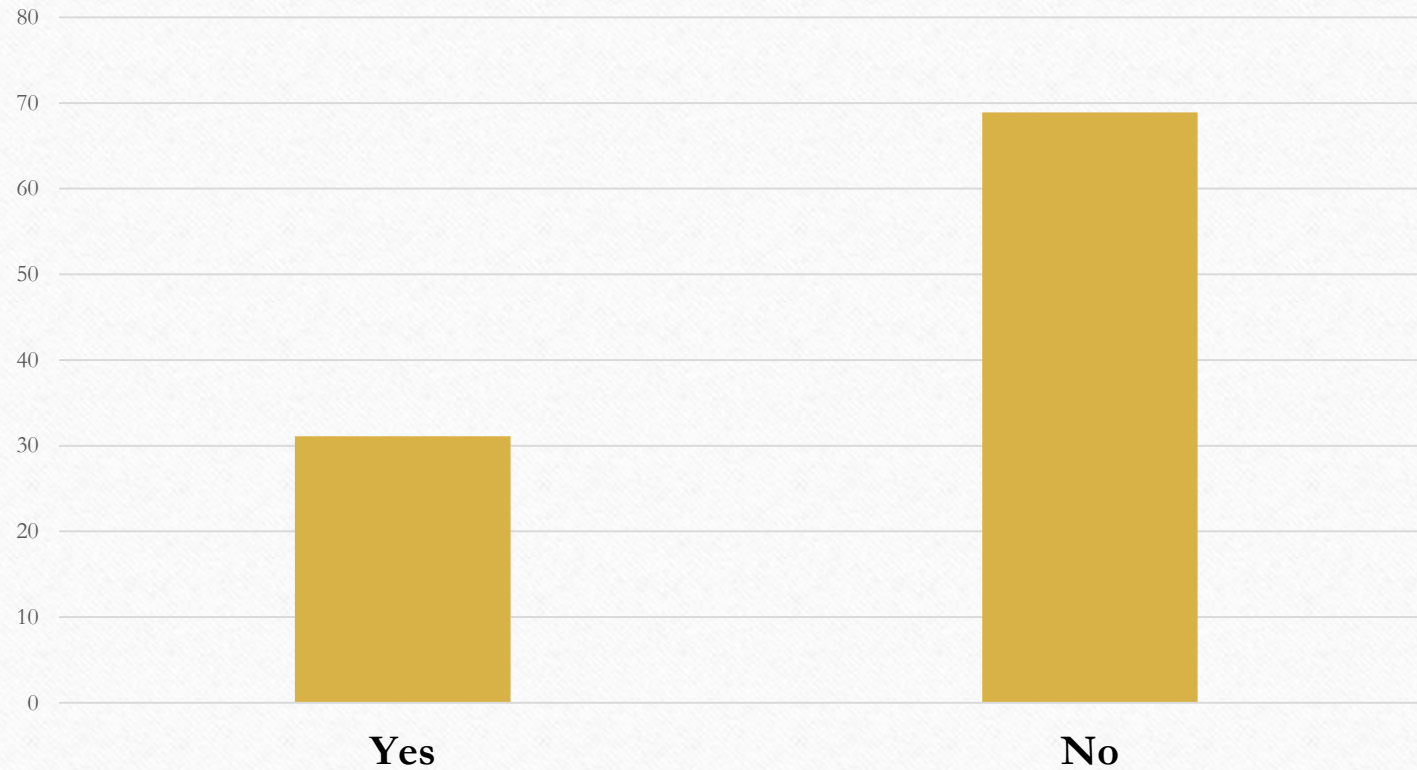


Most teachers hold master's degrees or higher, but the cultural dimension was typically absent

Training / Education – The Cultural Dimension

Incidental -----Focused		
The odd workshop at conferences	Masters coursework	My main area of research
I have lived in another country for 25 years	PhD coursework	Master's thesis was focused on this
Came up in some JALT forums	Took a culture course as part of my masters	Taught and developed courses alongside a Prof. of Intercultural Ed.
Part of a pragmatics workshop		
Part of my BA studies		

Have you had any training regarding the cultural dimension of language teaching?



Most teachers hold master's degrees or higher, but the cultural dimension was typically absent

Culture in Teacher Education



- Course literature of 24 master level TESOL / App Ling courses examined (Aus, Can, UK, US x5, Japan x4).
- Course literature examined for reference to culture or culture-related themes (cross-cultural, intercultural studies, learner identity, etc).
- Only half made any reference in their compulsory courses.
- Typically this was a reference to “sociocultural” or “multiple cultures”.

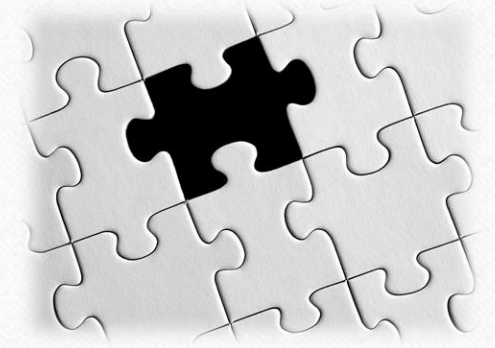
If teachers believe in the importance of culture, but do not have guidance / training on the cultural dimension, what informs their approach?



Concept Influences

Teacher	Culture Concept Influence	Teaching Purpose
A	International family – national traits highlighted. National focus reinforced by / consequence of reading habits – ‘Japanthink, Amerithink’	Be more empathetic, reduce shock in encounters with foreigners
B	Highlights bachelor study of philosophy- Speech acts, conservation maxims – topics seen as mere academic curiosities until revisited in his MA TESOL.	Focus on pragmatics – communicative expectations
C	Initially held a strong nation based concept of culture. This was challenged by living overseas in different countries.	Culture- pieces of knowledge to be addressed when they come up
D	Distinct regional identities of different family members caused questioning of traditional concepts. Disconnect between culture guidebooks and experienced reality.	Culture as knowledge – information that will help students overseas
E	Some recollection of Hofstede’s dimensions. Growing-up in a multi-cultural district – bordered multicultural view.	Culture is content that allows for exposure to important vocab.

Filling the Gap



- Interviews – teachers’ understandings of culture based on personal experiences, histories and interests. No reference of teaching literature, theory etc.

‘Experience over Training’

- Survey – Typical teacher:

Entered university teaching in mid-30s.

Several years in unrelated profession(s).

Undergraduate degree in different discipline.

Different Bachelor's Degree

Music	History	Journalism	Film and Media
Biology	Literature	Fine Art	Politics
Physics	Japanese Studies	Engineering	Chemistry
Modern Foreign Languages	International Relations	French	German
Aerospace Engineering	Psychology	Sociology	Computer Science
Ceramics	Pharmacology	Religious Studies	Theology
Social Policy and Admin	Creative Writing	Geology	Mathematics
Physical Education	Business Studies	Russian	Anthropology

Job History

Research Assistant	Publishing	Sales Staff
Call Center	Subtitler	Elementary School Teacher
Travel Agent	Translator / Interpreter	Hospitality
Pub Manager	Bank Teller	Waitress
Music Teacher	Flight Attendant	Engineer
Musician	Computer Programmer	Shop Worker
Courier	Commercial Fisherman	Recruitment
Hotel Manager	Radio Announcer	Production Controller

In the end..

- Culture concept in teacher training may be out dated (Hua et al., 2017)
- But.....absent as much as it is present
- Absences can result in huge potential for variation in concept.
 - Especially as culture is a concept that forms/develops through life
- If culture is a concept of central importance then it shouldn't be left to chance. Teacher training should contain a more thorough examination of culture.
 - (Evolution of the concept, social essentialism, language use & concept development)

Thank you

- nbradley@nufs.ac.jp

References

- Bradley, N. (2018). Essentialism in the concept of culture: Gauging belief. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 21, 55-76.
- Damen, L. (1987). *Culture learning: The fifth dimension in the language classroom*. Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Hua, Z., Handford, M., & Young, T. (2017). Framing interculturality: A corpus-based analysis of online promotional discourse of higher education intercultural communication courses. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 38(3), 283–300.
- Kohler, M. (2015). *Teachers as mediators in the foreign language classroom*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2008). *Cultural globalization and language education*. New Haven: University of Yale Press.

Teachers articulate their culture concept

“I’d define it as ways of thinking, maybe? And actions. But something deeper than....a lot of people think what people like to eat or how they dress, which is true, but maybe a little shallow. I would say primarily ways of thinking and what people value. Here it’s like a group culture, we’re more individualistic.”

“Culture is like common beliefs and practices that the people in the community share....it could be big, it could be very small.”

“So for me it’s ideas about how groups of people live, ideas about how they act. The way they do things, including customs and things like that, I suppose. As well as the other side of looking at culture is the arts, really.....It’s not something I’ve ever really, massively thought out to be honest.”

“I suppose there are two sort of distinct meanings of culture...I suppose there’s one form which is simply that...it just happens to be the habits of any particular society. So in that sense, every society- every time you have a group of people doing something together, you have culture.then I think that sometimes when people talk about culture, maybe in these situations, in language teaching situations, I think their more about – you know – so you’re from the UK so you have British culture...”

“I guess for me, culture is both the behaviors, attitudes and beliefs – so some of them are visible elements- of a specific group...I think whatever group we’re referring to, that the culture has certain expected behaviors, or attitudes, or values that they hold dear, and that maybe can be compared with others in terms of whether they are similar, or different.”