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Refraining from culture-related discussions in English as a foreign language classrooms: lessons from negative cases

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Introduction: This study examined the factors that determined English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher decisions to refrain extending the use of culture-related classroom discussions. Specifically, we focused on the episodes in which teachers decided against holding specific culture-related discussions, to better understand the reasons for limited inclusion of diverse cultural content.

Methods: In our examination of the data, we opted for the Theory of Planned Behavior as a lens to interpret teachers' motives for deciding at will not to have a culture-related discussion. The study followed negative case methodology to gain insight into why teachers avoided classroom discussions about culture. Within this methodology, we applied the Possibility Principle to define and select relevant sample of cases. To analyse the cases, we employed hybrid approach of qualitative methods of thematic analysis.

Results: A thematic analysis of teacher interviews ($N = 30$) revealed that Israeli EFL teachers' decisions to refrain from culture-related classroom discussions were influenced by their personal norms and attitudes, perceptions of their roles as teachers, social conventions, and expectations of various school stakeholders. Specifically, we found that the major barriers to conducting culturally-related classroom conversations in the Arab sector had to do with the values endorsed by the school culture, with teachers' tendency to avoid taboo topics in their teaching due to concerns about how students would react or become alienated. For immigrant teachers, personal norms and perceptions of control operated as key factors in their decisions to avoid sensitive issues. Majority teachers cited negative attitudes, moral panics, school culture and perceptions of control as principal reasons for avoiding controversial topics.

Discussion: The emergent patterns are discussed as embedded in the cultural and social norms with possible implications for teaching in the multicultural classroom.

KEYWORDS

culture, foreign language teaching, language-and-culture-teaching, teacher practices, multicultural classroom

Introduction

The ongoing process of globalization and cultural fusion worldwide necessitates cultural competence on the part of EFL students and teachers. According to Kramsch (1993, p. 1), "culture is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them." Therefore, an important goal of foreign language teaching is not only to develop students' linguistic competence, but to instruct them to become

aware of cultural boundaries, misunderstandings, and the way of life of a foreign culture (e.g., Kramsch, 2006, 2013). In this vein, language teaching has become cognizant of an intricate relationship between culture and language since teaching the latter without considering the aspects of the former is inadequate (Genc and Bada, 2005). That being the case, limited inclusion of diverse cultural content still remains an acute problem in the language classroom (Byram, 1997; Lázár, 2003; Chlopek, 2008; Mekheimer and Aldosari, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2016). This is surprising given the reported effectiveness of dialogic approaches to language and culture (e.g., Kramsch, 1993) for giving students broader cultural understandings behind language and thus better equipping them for effective communication across cultures (Lee, 2015; Fantini, 2020). Moreover, in conflict-ridden countries like Israel, such discussions can become a powerful tool for moving beyond negative mutual stereotypes, improving communication and understanding, promoting tolerance and accepting diversity (Maoz, 2000; Maoz et al., 2007).

A lot has been written about why EFL teachers in diverse contexts all over the world do what they do pertaining to their classroom practices concerning culture teaching (e.g., Larzén-Östermark, 2008; Young and Sachdev, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2016). However, a recurring research challenge is attending to what is coined in the research literature as negative evidence, especially in social sciences (Fanelli, 2012; Franco et al., 2014; Scheel et al., 2021). Attending to this challenge, this study examined negative data on teaching culture in the Israeli EFL classroom focusing on episodes when teachers avoided discussions of particular cultural issues thereby missing opportunities for potentially useful exchanges of experiences and views. This is an interesting angle to pursue in *research* given the fact that "non-action" or "non-event" (Sjoberg and Nett, 1997) may be of great interest for social inquiry (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015). Especially, qualitative research cannot ignore negative cases because they not only provide a rich source for further analytic thinking but may also prompt understanding of what is happening for the larger sample (Bazeley, 2009) and, what is more, help increase credibility of scientific record (Scheel et al., 2021). Given the merits of examining outliers in the data (e.g., Punch, 2013), this study addressed the above research challenge by focusing on Israeli high school EFL teachers' reported practices of "not-doing" culture teaching. Specifically, we focused on the episodes when teachers refrained from entering in-depth discussions of certain societal or cultural topics that could have been developed in the classroom to promote cultural awareness. We aimed to uncover why teachers were ambivalent to address specific controversial subjects, whether pre-planned or arising spontaneously in class discussions. These descriptions of episodes in which teachers decided to avoid discussing particular ideas emerged during the interviews and were brought in by the participants on their own initiative. Under term "culture-related discussions" we included teaching episodes pertaining to either planned (e.g., using teaching materials) or incidental (e.g., student-initiated discussions) instruction about either target or home culture(s).

Whereas a review of the literature highlighted a growing body of research on cultural dynamics prevailing in teaching and learning EFL in Israel by comparing various aspects of Arab and Jewish teacher practices (e.g., Orland-Barak and Yinon, 2005; Leshem and Trafford, 2006) or investigating professional experiences of Russian-speaking immigrant teachers (e.g., Remennick, 2002), there has been little discussion encompassing Arab (Muslim and Christian), Israeli-Jewish and Russian-Jewish teachers. We believe that including diverse populations allowed us to identify and select information-rich cases that could bring into focus the challenges faced by teachers in the context of student linguistic and cultural diversity, particularly when stereotypes become integrated into language teaching materials persistently (Awayed-Bishara, 2015, 2020). The study reported here contributes to research on teaching practices in multicultural educational contexts by comparing majority (Israeli-Jewish), minority (Arab-Muslim and Arab-Christian) and immigrant (Russian-Jewish) high school teachers as representing major pieces in the Israeli cultural mosaic. Since such a sample is in some way representative of the *global population characterized by* increasing immigration and changing national composition, *the study* could be of interest for the international reader as examining the relationship between the contemporary cultural scene and teachers' pedagogical choices in a given context.

Context of the study

This study is part of a larger research project that investigated teachers' reported practices of teaching societal cultural topics in EFL classrooms in Israel (Lavrenteva and Orland-Barak, 2022) (excluding schools from the Palestinian region). Specifically, the school-age population consists of Hebrew speakers, native speakers of English, native speakers of Arabic, and new immigrants that need to learn Hebrew as a second language as well as English as a foreign language. In schools serving the Jewish sector, all subjects are taught in Hebrew. In the Arab sector, the language of instruction is Arabic.[1] Given this diversity, the role of English in Israel—in terms of instructional, social, and cultural importance—is often complicated with cultural factors often playing an important role in determining motivation and achievement (Abu-Rabia, 1999; Ellinger, 2000; Remennick, 2004). In an attempt to better establish language learning goals that relate to the ethnic makeup of the Israeli classroom, the curriculum incorporated the domain of appreciation of literature, culture, and language (Ministry of Education, 2018a). However, the standards developed for this domain can be difficult to achieve for a number of reasons. For instance, Arab students suffer from limited exposure to English outside school[2] (Amara, 2014) combined with an ongoing teacher shortage (Olshtain and Inbar-Lourie, 2014). In addition, English instructional materials—which are the same for Arabs

1 In recent years, there have been a growing number of initiatives to create mixed educational settings. One such initiative is evident in bilingual educational institutions attended by both Jews and Arabs, where Hebrew and Arabic are used equally as languages of instruction and two teachers are in the classroom simultaneously, each teaching in a different language. However, these schools did not participate in this study.

2 Please note that most schools involved in this study are situated in fairly large towns and cities, therefore various teaching resources (including home digital) are equally available for all the students.

and Jews (Ministry of Education, 2018b)—have been criticized for cultural insensitivity toward minority students (Awayed-Bishara, 2015, 2020). Russian-speaking immigrant students, in their turn, suffer from insufficient knowledge of Hebrew paired with drastic differences between the Russian and Israeli educational systems (e.g., Niznik, 2008). Apart from that, their language, culture and traditions often become the target of teachers' intolerance and stereotypical views (Geiger, 2012). Taken to the context of teachers' instructional behaviors, such stereotypes and negative attitudes toward "the other" may, for instance, become incentives affecting teachers' choices not to discuss local conflicts within a context of de-politicized Israeli school (Lavrenteva and Orland-Barak, 2022).

It was with an eye on these concerns the study examined individual and contextual factors influencing teacher decisions not to integrate culture with their teaching to enrich our understanding of teaching practices as shaped by the cultural and social context. We asked: what similarities and differences can be discerned between majority and minority teachers' reported practices of refraining from teaching culture? What factors might affect their decision-making in the EFL classroom?

Significance of the study

To this end, the study drew on the potential of negative evidence—an often-neglected side of culture teaching in foreign language education—to address underlying messages that reproduce certain teaching practices. In doing so, we continue a line of study exploring teachers' curricular decision-making concerning difficult topics and focusing on avoidance as a strategy in dealing with controversial issues in various social science disciplines (Schmidt et al., 2007; Engebretson, 2018; Girard et al., 2021; Alvén, 2024). We aim at highlighting the value and significance of detailed empirical work for examining the reasons for limited inclusion of diverse cultural content that persists within foreign language teaching (Byram, 1997; Lázár, 2003; Chlopek, 2008; Mekheimer and Aldosari, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2016). Building upon previous applications of the theory of planned behavior for examining teacher practices, our study furthers prior understanding of why teachers are often ambivalent to integrate cultural aspects into their teaching. In addition, the diversity of the teacher sample and the variety of behavioral patterns that emerged from the data can add to the discussion of how teachers make decisions in challenging classroom situations, as informed by cultural and social norms. Furthermore, how such decisions translate into teaching practices in multicultural classrooms. More importantly, the insights that can be gained regarding the factors that determine teacher decisions to refrain from discussing certain societal and cultural topics could provide understandings for designing effective interventions geared to promote better integration of the cultural dimension into teaching and learning. We hope these findings can be used as a starting point for more in-depth research in multiple directions. For instance, the results of this study can be extended by observing how the identified set of factors drives actual instructional decisions about culture teaching in the EFL classroom.

Literature review

The growing cultural diversity of school students globally and locally, and the increasing awareness of the significance and implications of this diversity, call for adopting intercultural and decolonial pedagogical approaches in order to develop teaching methods that are respectful of and engage students from different cultural backgrounds (e.g., Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017). In the case of Israel, whose educational policies are often criticized for being designed to secure Jewish cultural hegemony and serve as a mechanism of control (e.g., Al-Haj, 2005; Awayed-Bishara, 2020), acknowledging the existence of different narratives belonging to various national groups seems crucially important. In this respect, "culturally relevant pedagogy as a decolonizing practice" (Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017) involves deconstruction of existing norms and assumptions in order to challenge deficit thinking regarding "the other", disrupting ethnocentrism to critically reflect on practice and curriculum design as well as developing more ethical and caring relationships with students (Sachs et al., 2017). This entails crossing the boundaries between national cultures and moving away from confining interculturality to observing and comparing the practices and values of one's own and the other's national cultures, and to finding commonalities to enhance toleration of the other culture (Holliday, 2011, p. 164).

The perspective pursued here is based on theories that approach the notion of culture in a non-essentialist manner (e.g., Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2011; Dervin and Liddicoat, 2013) which allows social behavior to speak for itself. According to Holliday (1999), the non-essentialist view of culture provides the resource of an overall understanding of how culture *per se* works, which offers a framework for analysis of behavior without imposing pre-definitions of the essential characteristics of specific national cultures. At the same time, this approach recognizes that culture is used by people as their own resource for self-presentation (Holliday, 1999, p. 40). We adopted this stance for two reasons: first, it allowed us to analyse the participants' statements about culture as artifacts of how they see themselves and others, and how they wish to be seen. Second, it provided an opportunity for examining how teachers' decisions to avoid in-class discussions of specific cultural content might be connected with different national scenarios, with experience of other types of classroom, educational or political cultures. As stated earlier in the paper, this study reported cases of teachers refraining from having culture-related discussions with the aim to uncover the reasons behind their choices.

While there is abundant research reporting on successful integration of culture with foreign language teaching in different contexts across the world (e.g., Byram, 2014), studies taking the negative case stance are far fewer in number. For this reason, we had to search for cases of not-doing culture teaching in the literature on *successful practices of culture* and language *integration*. Specifically, this review looked into the issue of which aspects of culture (both target and home) were absent from classroom discussions and why.

Two views on culture in English language study: culture-bound or culture-free?

Whereas most language teaching professionals will agree that culture and language learning are closely intertwined (e.g., DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2016), the question of how to teach culture in the context of language education has become complicated with the globalization of English (e.g., Kramsch, 2014). These changes have given rise to two opposing ideologies as regards the teaching of the target language culture: culture-free and culture-bound views (for discussion see Pulverness, 2000; Canagarajah, 2006).

Culture-free views attach relatively little importance to culture in language education. From this standpoint, English is seen as a "multinational, culture-free language or lingua franca that speaks all cultures and none in particular, and that can be appropriated and owned by everyone to express their local meanings" (Kramsch, 2006, p. 18). English language teaching must therefore be implemented based on the learners' needs and goals (Kramsch, 1993). Within a culture-free perspective, two views can be discerned. One supports the teaching of the local culture (e.g., McKay, 2003; Nault, 2006), while the other holds that English should be taught in a culture-free context (Jenkins, 2004; Alptekin, 2005). This latter view makes assumptions about home culture as being "essentially fragile" and "at risk of contamination" from the target language culture (Holme, 2003). From the former viewpoint, even when Anglo-American values or concepts are not regarded as a threat in EFL contexts, they may simply be seen as irrelevant or confusing (McKay, 2003). More recently, research has been questioning the possibility of a core variety of English shared by all communities giving way to the view of English as a heterogeneous language with, among other things, plural cultural norms, accommodating the expression of diverse local values and identities (see Canagarajah, 2012 on how the language-culture connection has been debated in the field of English studies). That said, instead of defining English as a culture-free language, lingua franca communication is seen as negotiating differences through effective (culture-specific) pragmatic strategies that facilitate the use of local varieties each interlocutor brings to the communication and enable speakers to maintain their own varieties and values (Canagarajah, 2012). This holds valid for Israel, where "everybody's second language" (Spolsky and Shohamy, 1999) can assume different meanings for distinct groups in particular contexts. While English is highly valued by all population groups, for minority and immigrant students acquiring English comes at a greater cost. For those student populations, together with increased mobility and high prestige, English carries connotations of a cultural and linguistic occupation, loss of identity, and marginality given that their home languages have inferior status and limited value (Shohamy, 2014).

At the other end of the continuum lies the culture-bound approach that gives culture an important place in language teaching seeing it as essential for the full grasp of meaning in the target language. Proponents of this view assert that language has no function if it is devoid of its cultural context (Byram and Kramsch, 2008). Such cultural context defines the language patterns being used when particular people come together under particular circumstances at a particular time and place (Byram, 2012). According to this view, unless language learners are exposed to cultural elements of the target society, they might find it challenging to communicate meaning with the speakers of that society (e.g., Pulverness, 2003). From this standpoint, students do not learn about culture independently of language because studying language inherently exposes learners to target culture (McDevitt, 2004). As Gao (2006) puts it, the interdependence of language learning and culture learning is so evident that one can conclude that language learning is culture learning and hence, language teaching is culture teaching (p. 59). Consequently, foreign language teachers are foreign culture teachers (Wang, 2008). Moreover, foreign language classroom has its own cultures that should be recognized and made use of to help culturally diverse students to make necessary connections among themselves and the target language culture (Montgomery, 2001). Therefore, foreign culture and students' own culture should be placed together in order for learners to understand the former (Kramsch, 1993, 2013).

Integrating culture with foreign language teaching: what works against?

While teachers generally express positive attitudes to integrating cultural aspects into EFL education, in reality they face various constraints, which result in them either not dealing extensively with culture or ignoring it completely (e.g., Young and Sachdev, 2011). In this section we review research findings on societal cultural topics that are often toned down in classroom discussions, highlighting reasons given for their omission.

Whereas research generally advocates the pedagogical relevance of popular culture and argues for giving it a more prominent role in the EFL curriculum (e.g., Benson and Chik, 2014), some studies report on teachers' ambivalence in integrating popular culture in their teaching. Specifically, teachers in Hong Kong study admitted screening out popular cultural materials that they considered to be "bad" in order to prevent students from being exposed to "dark sides" of popular culture (Luk, 2012). Alvermann et al. (2018) described this approach as viewing popular culture as "detrimental to youth" and leading to the "degradation of young minds" (p. 23). A similar censoring technique was reported in Gray's (2000) study that focused on how Spanish teachers use curriculum materials that made them feel uncomfortable. The results showed that the teachers dropped the material containing stereotypical representations or irrelevant, outdated, and sexist content (Gray, 2000). Such fear of stereotypes related to the target culture on the part of EFL teachers was ascribed to their concerns about students' ability to deduce meanings from what they read and how they interact (Byram and Kramsch, 2008). In addition, topics that were taboo in specific educational contexts were also dropped as inappropriate for discussion in the language classroom (Gray, 2000).

Speaking of possible reasons for such "missed opportunities" (Lazaraton, 2003), international research highlights all kinds of impediments to culture teaching. For instance, the findings of a study conducted in Hong Kong underscore teachers' contradictory feelings toward cultural resources to draw on, the connectivity between cultural components and examinations, and the role of

teachers (Luk, 2012). In the Vietnamese context, EFL teachers reported students' low level of language proficiency, the demands of university examinations, time constraints vs. heavy workload and their own insufficient cultural knowledge as the main reasons for the limited integration of culture into their teaching practices (Nguyen et al., 2016). Similar concerns regarding test-oriented teaching and shortage of adequate methods and approaches for teaching culture were voiced by Japanese teachers (Aubrey, 2009; Mao, 2009). Apart from the above-mentioned time constraints, methodological challenges and lack of training to meet the demands placed upon today's teachers of language-and-culture, Finish-Swedish teachers mentioned the students' as well as their own lack of motivation for introducing cultural aspects in their teaching (Larzén-Östermark, 2008). Likewise, in the Turkish context, the students' lack of interest in learning about culture was found to be the reason for the lack of teachers' motivation to include cultural information in their language teaching (Bayyurt, 2006). Moreover, some participants in the study shared the idea of culture-free language teaching in an attempt to protect the cultural integrity of language learners (Bayyurt, 2006). In a more recent study in Turkey, more than half of the teachers voiced similar concerns regarding the damaging impact that the inclusion of certain cultural materials might have on learners' sense of cultural identity (Civelek and Toplu, 2021). They also mentioned student and parental bias, the opposition of school administration, lack of time, and learners' proficiency as common obstacles for the integration of culture into their teaching practices (Civelek and Toplu, 2021).

Such a "culture-free-language view" (Holme, 2003) is particularly conspicuous in Muslim countries. Despite the wealth of research advocating a role of culture in foreign language instruction, studies conducted in certain Islamic contexts highlight negative attitudes to target culture teaching. For one, literature points to doubts about the significance of incorporating culture as a component in the EFL curriculum both on the part of teachers and students (e.g., see Mekheimer and Aldosari, 2011 for Saudi Arabia). Another oft-cited reason for teachers' ambivalence lies in the incongruence between the target cultural values inherent in imported instructional materials and that of learners' home cultures (e.g., see Hermessi, 2017 for Tunisia; Jabeen and Shah, 2011 for Pakistan; Prastiwi, 2013 for Indonesia). For instance, findings from a recent study in Algeria showed that students did not favor texts containing cultural taboos and were reluctant to participate in classroom discussions (Boubekeur, 2021). Moreover, in certain EFL contexts, not only content, but a teaching method or working mode can create problems in the classroom. For instance, the effectiveness of communicative language teaching based on student participation was questioned in the Turkish context (Işik, 2008) while co-education was referred to as problematic and potentially hindering the learning process in Jordan (Khuwaileh, 2000). What is more, imported materials and pedagogies find resistance not only among teachers and students. For instance, results of a study conducted in Iran showed that the high school students' parents strongly resisted possible adoption of the western lifestyle and their exposure to the manifestations of western culture as incompatible with the established cultural norms of the Iranian society which are greatly inspired by Islam (Kasaian and Subbakrishna, 2011). Therefore, even though more recent research suggests that EFL teachers in Iran held positive beliefs regarding the role of culture in foreign language instruction, they still prioritize teaching language over teaching culture (Ghavamnia, 2020).

On top of the above challenges associated with intentional (or planned) culture teaching, unplanned culture-related discussions are reported to bring additional difficulties (Forsman, 2012). That said, notwithstanding the fact that such incidental cultural knowledge displays provide an opportunity to involve students in co-constructing cultural knowledge (e.g., Lazaraton, 2003), EFL teachers admitted that they either choose to ignore such opportunities or fail to utilize them to engage students in developing their own thinking (Forsman, 2012). Among the reasons for deliberately avoiding unplanned discussions about culture, teachers reported a lack of knowledge about the topic or absence of concrete activities and materials addressing the matter (Forsman, 2012).

Finally, research suggests that social norms and cultural expectations influence teacher decisions regarding integrating sensitive content in classroom discussions. For instance, a US study into the impact of dominant social norms on teaching practices toward children of LGBT parents identified a set of teacher norms in connection to parental and administrative expectations (Bower and Klecka, 2009). These norms included: not contradicting parents' personal, moral, or religious beliefs, providing students' physical and emotional safety within schools, prioritizing coverage of the core academic content and planning classroom instruction based on students' knowledge (Bower and Klecka, 2009).

In a similar vein, research conducted in the Israeli context revealed that teachers' classroom behavior was affected by external socio-cultural forces and seemed to reflect multiple cultural traditions that exist side by side in Israel (e.g., Leshem and Trafford, 2006). Specifically, the patterns of talk prevalent in the classrooms (Jewish secular, Jewish ultra-orthodox, and Arab) stemmed from cultural imperatives brought into the classroom by various school stakeholders (Leshem and Trafford, 2006). To this end, the tacit taboo against talking about politics observed in most Israeli classrooms seems to emanate from the educational policy of avoiding political discourse both in the Arab and Jewish sectors (Perry, 2007). As to parental involvement, the Israeli context revealed ambivalent attitudes to parents' influence and intervention on the part of teachers. Specifically, Jewish teachers working in schools where parents were empowered perceived parental influence on the educational process as undermining their work and contributing to the declining level of teaching (Addi-Raccah and Ainhoren, 2009; Addi-Raccah and Grinshtain, 2016). Arab teachers, on the contrary, reported less collaboration and more favorable relationships with parents (Addi-Raccah and Grinshtain, 2016). The latter seems to derive from the power structure of the Arab education characterized by a clear distinction between parents and teachers as well as the ethnic congruency between the two (Arar et al., 2013; Romaguer, 2015 as cited in Addi-Raccah and Grinshtain, 2016).

Applying the theory of planned behavior to understand teaching practices

Research in various fields has applied the theory of planned behavior (TPB, Ajzen, 1985, 1991, 2011) to examine teacher beliefs

and practices. Overall, TPB has underpinned over a thousand empirical studies (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010), making it one of the most influential theories in social psychology (see Methodology section for more detailed information on the theory).

An abundance of studies applied the TPB framework for assessing teachers' intentions toward implementing inclusive education (for overview see Opoku et al., 2021). Among those, we foreground Schwab and Alnahdi's (2020) investigation into the factors influencing Austrian teachers' use of inclusive teaching practices. The results showed that self-efficacy played a critical role toward teachers' use of inclusive practices (Schwab and Alnahdi, 2020). This implies that successful teaching experiences of an inclusive class could be a powerful way to boost efficacy and thus positively influence teacher attitudes (Schwab and Alnahdi, 2020). Another interesting finding emerged from a more recent longitudinal study into the relationship between Finnish teachers' inclusive education attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs (Savolainen et al., 2022). The results revealed that teacher concerns, i.e., what teachers think about including students with disabilities in their class, extend a stronger influence on their use of inclusive teaching practices than their general attitudes toward working in inclusive settings (Savolainen et al., 2022).

In the field of foreign language teaching, TPB has been used to predict a wide range of behaviors, such as EFL students' in-class participation (Girardelli and Patel, 2016; Girardelli et al., 2017), their perceptions about cheating (Hysaj et al., 2023) or their rationalization of plagiaristic behavior (Khathayut et al., 2022). It has been widely used to examine EFL teacher beliefs and intentions regarding classroom instruction (e.g., see Underwood, 2012 for teaching grammar, and Laksani et al., 2020 for integrating digital literacy in the classroom). Among others, we highlight a fairly recent study in Turkey into the major reasons behind EFL teachers' decisions to deviate from their lesson plans by considering the contextual factors (Başar, 2021). The findings point to academic concerns, affective factors, classroom management, and timing as major reasons for lesson plan deviations (Başar, 2021). The study highlights the need for more comprehensive research focusing on why such deviations take place, how they are perceived and utilized by teachers to be integrated into the pedagogical and curricular objectives (Başar, 2021).

Against this backdrop, the present study investigated specific cases when EFL teachers avoided classroom discussions of cultural issues related to target countries, home country or any other part of the world to uncover the reasons and motives attributed to their decisions not to integrate cultural content into their teaching practices.

Methodology

Theoretical and analytical frameworks

As already stated, the study relied on narrated accounts of "not-doing" culture teaching in the EFL classroom. Different from those things over which one has no control, negative cases included in this study entailed voluntary refusal to perform acts one could and was expected to do. Such "not-doings" were therefore based on intention and careful action to avoid doing. Drawing on the fact that "some things a person may choose not to do send powerful and explicit messages about who that person 'is'" (Mullaney, 2006, p. 2), our goal was to bring to the fore the potential of negative cases to enrich our understanding of teaching practices as shaped by the cultural and social context. These social and cultural influences called for focusing on content and context dimensions of language teaching and learning (Risager, 2011). In terms of the cultural content, we looked for cultural issues pertaining to target countries, home country or any other part of the world that were missing from classroom discussions. Studying the cultural context gave us insight into particular guidelines for appropriate social behavior and interaction that could influence teacher practices and their choices to avoid such discussions. For that reason, we adopted a view of culture as a "negotiated 'process'" which allowed us to investigate how social behavior operates as culture *per se* rather than seeing individual behavior as confined by the constraints of a national culture (Holliday, 2012). Therefore, instead of viewing the teacher as coming from one national culture and the students from another, we looked at the classroom as a small culture (Holliday, 1999) to explore how its dynamics could lead to such "not-doings" on the part of the teacher. We thus opted for the theory of planned behavior (TPB, Ajzen, 1985, 1991, 2011) as a lens to interpret teachers' motives for deciding at will **not** to perform a particular behavior (in our case, to have a culture-related discussion) in a specific "context of opportunity" (Sarver, 1983 as cited in Ajzen, 1991) (i.e., EFL classroom). To put it simply, the theory suggests that whether a person chooses to perform a certain behavior jointly depends on motivation (their intention or wilful decision to perform or not perform the behavior) and ability (availability of requisite opportunities and resources) (Ajzen, 1991). As a model that has been applied successfully in a wide variety of behavioral domains (for an overview, see Armitage and Conner, 2001), TPB provided a viable lens for analyzing such motives. Specifically, TPB assumes that behavioral intention is the best predictor of future behavior and that this intention is determined by three components: (a) a person's global evaluation of performing the behavior (attitude toward the behavior), (b) the perceived social pressure to perform the behavior (subjective norm), and (c) the person's conviction about whether the required skills and resources to perform the behavior are at one's disposal (perceived behavioral control) (for a more extensive presentation of the theory, see Ajzen, 1985). Additionally, while in theory, the three predictors are conceptually independent of each other, empirically it is often the case that the factors are interrelated since the same information can influence multiple predictors (Ajzen, 2006).

According to the tenets of the theory, attitude toward the target behavior and subjective norms about engaging in the behavior are thought to influence intention, which, in turn, is also influenced by perceived behavioral control over engaging in the behavior. Our study, however, was not focused on future behavior. Since we aimed to explain specific examples of reported (past) behavior and not to make predictions, we modified the original model by excluding the intention variable and positing the relationships between the three determining factors—attitudes, subjective (social) norms, perceived behavioral control—and the actual behavior as direct (and not mediated by the intent). In addition, since our original intent was to examine how different socio-cultural backgrounds might relate to the ways teachers encourage or avoid cultural discussions,

we included the personal norm variable[3] that refers to culturally specified rules of what constitutes "good" and "bad" interpersonal interaction (Schwartz, 1970). Unlike social norms that have an external reference (the perception of what others are doing or should be doing), personal norms have to do with internalized self-expectations (inner conviction that is defended irrespective of the expectations of others). To assess this component, we analyzed the participants' data for expressions pointing to strong feelings about certain actions, their moral obligations, or personal expectations to behave in a certain way in general or under specific circumstances.

Using TPB as the interpretative lens, this study investigated the factors determining Israeli EFL teachers' decisions against conducting classroom discussions about culture.

Data collection

In an attempt to reduce validity threats and increase the credibility of the conclusions, this study utilized various techniques intended to help ensure investigative rigor. These included use of mechanical recording, "rich" data, contradictory evidence, member checking, triangulation, and fair dealing (Maxwell, 2010; Gray, 2021).

In our research we drew on several sources of data. The primary source of data was a semi-structured interview with 30 high school teachers (see Table 1 for details on the teacher sample and Table 2 for question categories and sample questions). Since the purpose of the study was to surface shared understandings of particular groups of teachers, we made sure that the sample of interviewees was fairly homogenous and shared critical similarities related to the research question (McCracken, 1988). Specifically, all the participants were experienced high school teachers working in multicultural classrooms. In this respect, teachers participating in this study mentioned two types of classroom composition: (1) classes of Israeli- and Russian-Jewish students with low levels of minority student enrolment and (2) classes of Palestinian Arab students (Muslim or Christian) with a sparse majority student population. In order to maximize the depth and richness of the data, the participants were selected using purposeful sampling (Kuzel, 1999). Our goal was to obtain insights into the phenomenon in question rather than generalize our findings to the specific population, which called for inclusion of certain categories of participants that may have a unique, different or important perspective (Mason, 2017). Specifically, we used typical case strategy to demonstrate what is normal or average for teachers in each of the three groups. The purpose was to describe and illustrate what is typical to those unfamiliar with the setting (Patton, 2014).

3 Originally, a moral value component (measured as a "perceived moral obligation" to behave in a certain way) was included along with attitudes and social norms to predict intentions (Fishbein, 1967). However, it was removed from the original TPB model because it correlated highly with intention, and, as a result, the authors judged that it served mainly as an alternative measure for behavioral intention (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1970).

TABLE 1 Teacher demographics.

	Years of experience	Levels taught	School location
AT1	33	Junior high, high school	A large mixed city in the north
AT2	27	High school	A large mixed city in the north
AT3	33	High school	A large mixed city in the north
AT4	30	High school	A large mixed city in the north
AT5	15	Junior high, high school	An Arab town in the north
AT6	15	Junior high, high school	An Arab town in the north
AT7	30	High school	A large mixed city in the north
AT8	20	Junior high, high school	A large mixed city in the north
AT9	15	Junior high, high school	A large mixed city in the north
AT10	31	High school	A large mixed city in the north
HT1	11	Junior high, high school	A Jewish town in the central district
HT2	15	High school	A large mixed city in the north
HT3	16	High school	A Jewish town in the north
HT4	33	High school	An immigrant city in the north
HT5	37	High school	A large mixed city in the north
HT6	20	High school	A large mixed city in the north
HT7	22	High school	A large mixed city in the north
HT8	17	High school	A large mixed city in the north
HT9	30	Junior high, high school	A large mixed city in the south
HT10	30	Junior high, high school	A large mixed city in the south
RT1	13	High school	Tel Aviv
RT2	17	High school	Tel Aviv
RT3	13	High school	A city east of Tel Aviv
RT4	24	Junior high, high school	A Jewish city in the central district
RT5	20	High school	A Jewish city in the central district
RT6	18	High school	A Jewish city in the central district
RT7	40	Junior high, high school	A large mixed city in the north

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Years of experience	Levels taught	School location
RT8	15	High school	A Jewish town in the north
RT9	20	Junior high, high school	A large mixed city in the south
RT10	18	High school	A large mixed city in the south

TABLE 2 Semi-structured interview question categories and sample questions.

Question category	Sample questions
Questions about the teacher	Could you tell me a bit about yourself? How long have you been a teacher? Why did you choose this profession?
Questions about the school and the students	Could you tell me about the school you work in, the classes you teach and whether you can call those 'multicultural' meaning kids from different socio-cultural backgrounds… anything that you think would help me to draw a picture of your working environment?
Questions connected to teachers' narratives	How did you feel about the situation? Why did you act like this?
Teachers' views about the teaching of culture	How do you define 'culture' in the EFL context? What do you think about integrating culture into EFL classes?
Teachers' attitudes toward instructional plans and activities	How do you view curriculum materials within the framework of your instructional plans and actions? What role do coursebooks play in your classroom practice?
Teachers' reported practices pertaining to the teaching of culture	Do you discuss cultural topics in the classroom? Why? Why not? How do you use the cultural content provided by the book in your classroom practice? • Adhere to the text with minimum deviation from the book; • Adapt the text for it to better fit the learners' needs; • Create text in case there are aspects/topics, which the coursebook does not cover.

The interviewees self-identified as either Palestinian Arabs (as well as members of a minority group) or Jews (and majority group members). However, since within the Jewish category we needed to differentiate between immigrant (from the former USSR) and Israeli born teachers, we chose to label the three groups according to the teachers' mother tongues. We hereinafter referred to Arabic-speaking teachers as ATs, Hebrew-speaking teachers as HTs and Russian-speaking teachers as RTs.

The interviewees were informed about the nature of the study and signed informed consent forms prior to an interview. It is worth mentioning that originally our focus was not on collective negative evidence. Rather, in the process of interview data analysis we came across a number of episodes of teachers avoiding conversations about a specific aspect of culture, which we labeled "negative cases". These outliers formed a separate pool of cases for examination of additional emergent themes in the data that were not specifically addressed by the original research design (Heaton, 2008). The interview data were collected between October 2018 and January 2019. The interviews were conducted in English, averaged 60 min in length and were recorded digitally. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim as Word documents. Transcripts were typically between 7 and 12 single-spaced pages long. These were loaded into MAXQDA 2018 qualitative data analysis software, which we used to develop our coding scheme and then to code the transcripts. Teachers were mostly interviewed at schools, however, occasionally the researcher traveled to teachers' homes or met them in a café or another public place. All interviews were audio-taped, and notes were additionally taken by the researcher. To protect the interviewees' information, recorded data was carefully guarded and destroyed once analysis was complete. In order to enhance the validity of transcripts and receive clarifications and statements that could enrich what was said in the interview, at first, the participants were asked to review the transcripts. However, due to data processing regulations and policies the researchers were unable to obtain direct clarification from participants.

The main idea behind the interview methodology was using written texts produced either by the researcher or interviewee before the interview to stimulate talk (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Secondary sources of data included (1) interviewee-generated texts (solicited writing produced specifically for the research) and (2) researcher-generated vignettes (hypothetical but realistic circumstances and dilemmas relevant to the research inquiry). Such triangulation of different data collection modes allowed to obtain richer data and increase credibility of the research findings and interpretations (Nowell et al., 2017).

The critical incident technique (1) was chosen to obtain recollections of the participants' memorable cultural experiences. Specifically, they were asked to describe a critical incident—any unplanned and unanticipated event that occurred during class, outside class or during their teaching career but is vividly remembered (Brookfield, 1990)—connected to the teaching of culture in the Israeli EFL classroom. We opted for this technique prompted by research on using the stories of critical incidents as a reflective tool for engaging teacher participation and encouraging use of the knowledge of their previous experiences to effect changes in classroom practices (e.g., Yu, 2018). The participants were asked to submit critical incident reports in advance following a special format (see Appendix A).

Using vignettes in educational research can be particularly effective for gaining insights into interpretations and concerns that teachers may have about particular phenomena (Skilling and Stylianides, 2020). For the purposes of this study, vignettes (2) also allowed for comparing different cultural groups' interpretations of a "uniform" situation (Barter and Renold, 1999; Goerman and Clifton, 2011). Construction of the vignettes (see Appendix B) was based on the themes that emerged at an earlier stage of the project (Lavrenteva and Orland-Barak, 2023). Stylistic similarities among the two vignettes as well as adherence to other educational cases in existence were followed, including standardized construction criteria (Seguin and Ambrosio, 2002). Both critical incident reports and the vignettes were used as a complementary component during the interviews.

Data analysis

The study followed negative case methodology (Ragin, 2014) to gain insight into why teachers avoided classroom discussions about culture. Within this methodology, we applied the Possibility Principle (Mahoney and Goertz, 2004) to define and select relevant sample of cases. The Possibility Principle holds that "only cases where the outcome of interest is possible should be included in the set of negative cases; cases where the outcome is impossible should be relegated to a set of uninformative and hence irrelevant observations" (Mahoney and Goertz, 2004, p. 653). First, we reviewed the interview transcripts and listed all instances in which teachers reported and provided justifications for having refrained from discussing culture-related issues. At this stage, each such episode represented a case. Second, we applied Mahoney and Goertz's (2004) eligibility criteria for deciding which negative cases to include. Initial criteria for inclusion were: Appearance of cultural content in curriculum materials, initiation of in-class discussions about culture by either teachers or students, and occurrence of current events that can be related to cultural issues. Aligning with findings from previous studies conducted in different national contexts, we excluded cases which alluded to the most frequently cited reasons for refraining from teaching culture such as teachers' reported doubts about the significance of incorporating culture as a component in the EFL curriculum; problems related to time constraints; expressed challenges in teaching culture such as lack of training, lack of motivation and taboos. Since we searched for context-dependent explanations, these cases became less relevant for our analysis, although we kept the "taboo" factor given the fact that it is highly context-bound and can reveal differing attitudes ranging from taboo boundary maintenance to boundary crossing (Valsiner, 2007). Since the participants talked solely about sexuality-related taboos, we labeled the category as "moral panic" to better reflect a perceived societal threat. Here, we were drawing on the definition of a moral panic as a widespread fear, most often an irrational one, that someone or something is a threat to the values, safety, and interests of a community or society at large (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2009). Specifically, given current moral panic around a so-called "gay agenda". All in all, we identified 18 negative cases that met the following conditions: (1) the outcome of interest was possible, (2) the decisive variable was not identified by previous research, (3) the case was context sensitive. Once we finalized the sample, case files were transferred to MAXQDA 2018 for evaluation. Figure 1 illustrates the process of data collection and analysis.

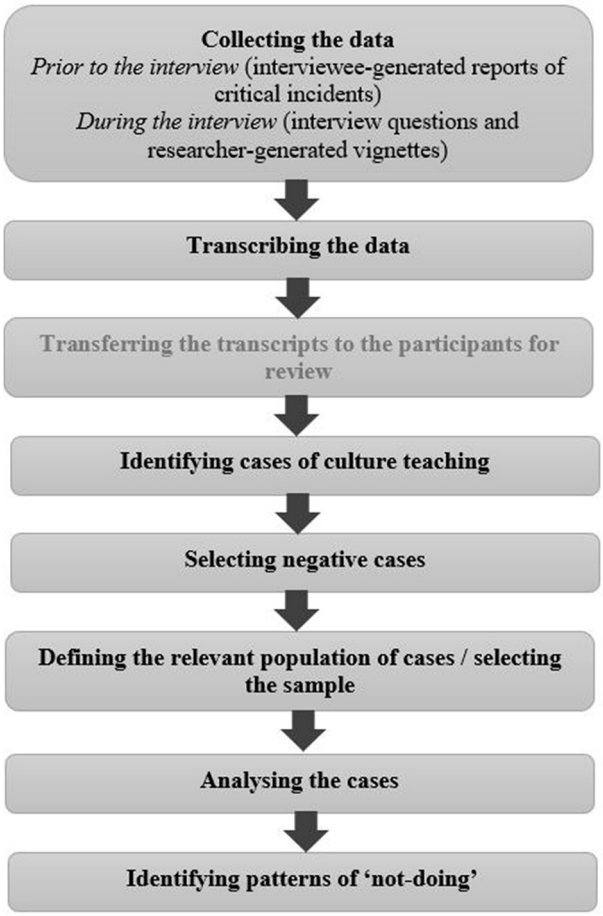


FIGURE 1
Stages of data collection and analysis.

In order to analyse the cases, a hybrid approach of qualitative methods of thematic analysis described in detail in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) was used, which incorporated both the data-driven inductive approach of Boyatzis (1998) and the deductive a priori template of codes approach outlined by Crabtree and Miller (1999). To arrive at a coding frame, first, the TPB model-based (deductive) categories were added to a codebook. To this end, each code was accompanied by a memo containing the name of the code, author and creation date, the code definition, and a "perfect example," i.e., a text passage prototypical for the assignment of the code in question. The first step of the analysis was to code the corresponding text passages of the answers of the participants with these five codes (see Table 3 for the full list of deductive codes with definitions and examples of coded segments and Figure 2 for an example of a coded segment and).

This first deductive step was followed by a second inductive step. In this step, new (data-driven) categories were assigned to a text (see Table 4 for the full list of inductive codes with definitions and examples of coded segments and Figure 3 for an example of a coded segment and).

These emergent categories were then created in MAXQDA's "Code System" as subcodes of the top-level (theory-driven) codes. Once we have sequentially processed all texts and added all inductive categories to the codebook, we grouped the formed codes, systematized and organized the category system, making sure that the categories form a meaningful whole. Figure 4 presents the coding frame for analysis developed with MAXQDA's visual tool.

In order to ensure consistency in coding decisions and improve the precision of the coding frame, intercoder reliability was assessed (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). First, the two researchers independently double-coded a small amount of data (one interview). Code patterns were then compared to reveal any inconsistencies in code definitions or interpretations, which

TABLE 3 Theory-driven codes.

Code	Definition	Example of a coded segment
Self-report of behavior	Teacher reported action in a specific (culture teaching) situation	'***I generally avoid topics that are potentially hazardous in terms of discipline***, of like ***having too much noise and not being able to control what is going on in the group***.' (Interview with RT5, 15.11.2018)
Attitude	The degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question	'The Israeli society is so self-focused on 'me me me' and 'we we we' and, you know what, so ***I don't mind it [the coursebook] being about the American culture or the British culture or whatever else that doesn't have to do immediately with what is going on here***.' (Interview with RT5, 15.11.2018)
Subjective (social) norm	The perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior	'In the end, it's teaching language because what I have in mind when I come to class is ***whether they will do good in their exam and whether they will be ready for a college or university***.' (Interview with RT6, 09.12.2018)
Personal (moral) norm	A feeling of obligation to act in a particular manner in specific situations	'It was very important for me to have co-existence programs with people who are not Jews. And to teach students at our school their narrative. ***I really think it's very important not to be so self-centered and to know only the Israeli narrative or the Jewish narrative***. Since as a person, the more narratives you know, the better person you become. ***That's what I believe in***.' (Interview with HT5, 30.12.2018)
Perceived behavioral control	The perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior and reflecting past experience as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles	'I wouldn't go, again, very deep. Even though at times, you know what, ***my fears more, it's not a fear, my cautiousness, cautious is a more precise word, I'm more cautious about the reaction of their parents than of theirs***.' (Negative case 12, RT5)

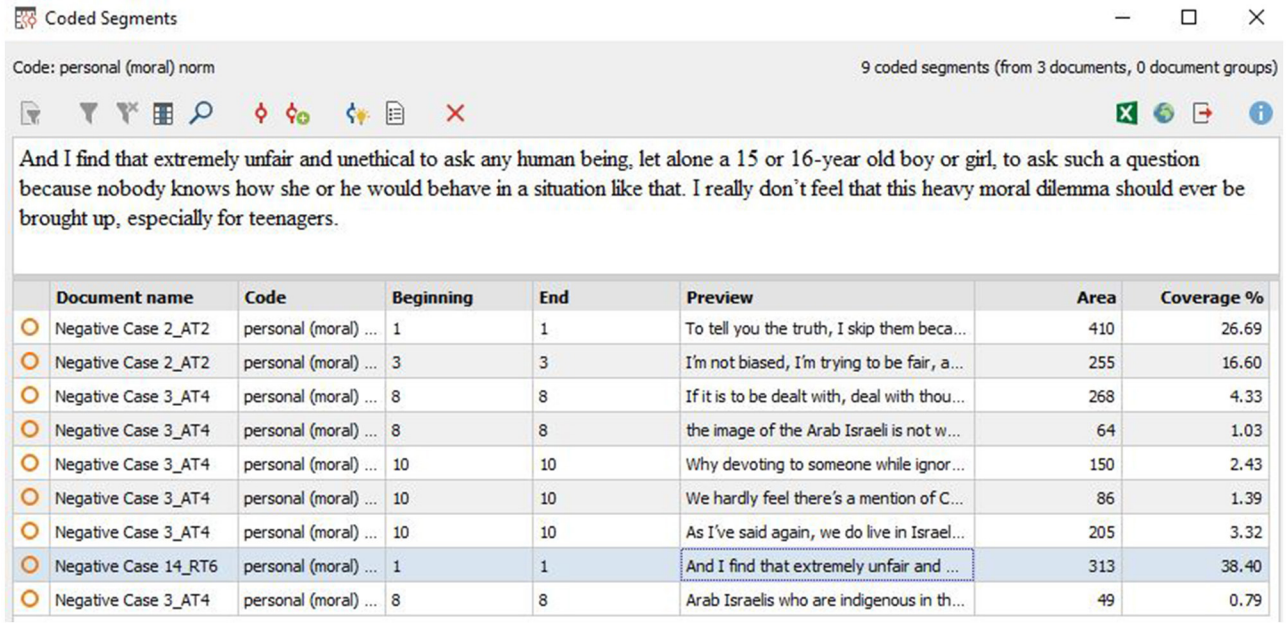


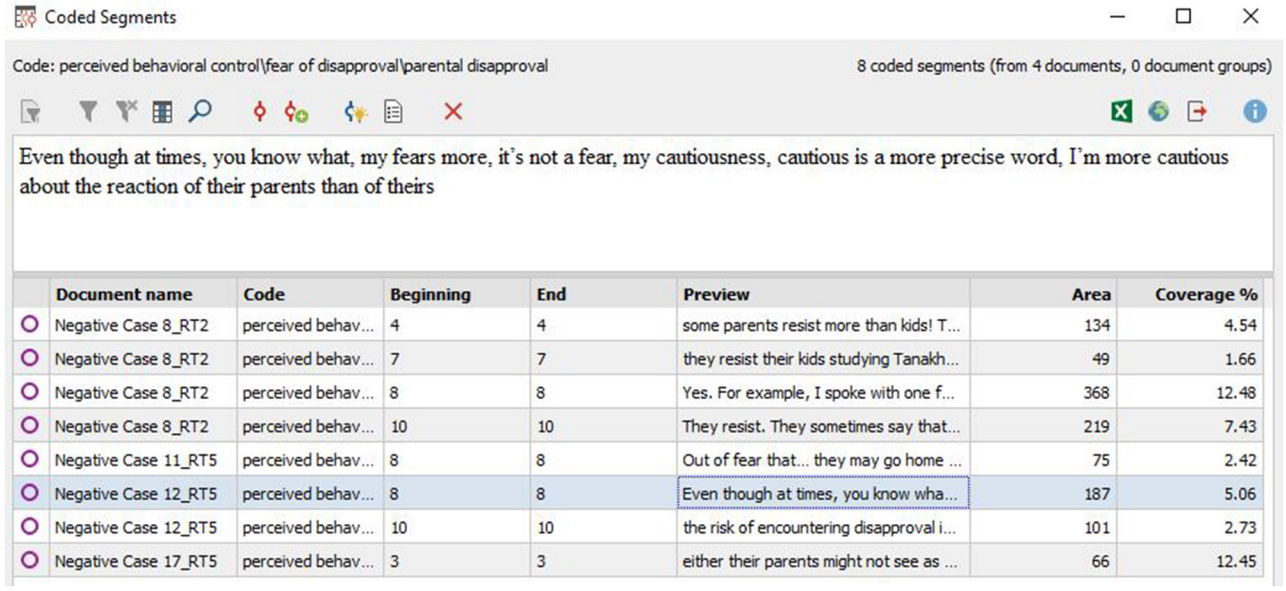
FIGURE 2
An example of a coded segment (theory-driven code).

were discussed among the coders to clarify the conflicting interpretations. Once the coding frame was refined, the two researchers commenced the formal independent double-coding with the larger subset of data (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). We continued to sample transcripts and refine the code scheme until we were satisfied with the level of intercoder reliability (Campbell et al., 2013). Specifically, since our marginals were evenly distributed, showing little bias in the off-diagonal disagreements, we relied on Cohen's kappa for an estimate of the reliability of our intercoder agreement (Geisler and Swarts, 2019). Using GraphPad's online calculator for Cohen's Kappa for MAXQDA Data, we received a value of 0.84, which is an acceptable level of corrected agreement (Geisler and Swarts, 2019). Overall, the process of familiarization with the data, unitizing, coding, discussing coding discrepancies, refining codes and code definitions, and finalization of the coding frame took ~110 h.

Once all the texts were coded, cross-case analysis was performed in order to identify patterns in the data. For instance, the negative case below (see Figure 5) comprising a critical incident report and a discussion that followed illustrates how a combination of motivational and control factors induced a teacher's decision not to address a student's behavior breaching *social norms. Specifically, analysis of the report part pointed to two factors that chiefly influenced the teacher's decision to avoid discussing this incident:*

TABLE 4 Data-driven codes (emergent subthemes).

Code	Definition	Example of a coded segment
Refraining from discussion	Deliberately avoiding discussing certain topics in class	'There's a text about gender roles, in which they go into a discussion of whether we are born with gender roles or whether it's something that society teaches us along the way. And there's a certain lead-in into things like "if you were born a boy and you felt like it's not your gender, would you do something about that?" It's an explosive question to ask because you don't know what is going on in their minds and what they are considering and how they will react to that. And even though it's a great topic, ***I wouldn't bring this up in my class***.' (Negative case 15, RT6)
Stopping the discussion	Stopping the discussion initiated by the students in class	'It happens that they strain me along to this prolonged conversation of more than I wanted to say on the subject. ***And then when I feel that that's much more than I wanted to say to them, I stop it***.' (Negative case 12, RT5)
Raising a subject and then stopping the discussion	Raising a subject and then stopping the discussion in order not to dive deep but at the same time give the students food for thought	'***I raise the subject, I do, I walk the borderline, and then I stop***. I hope it's enough for thinking about it on their own.' (Negative case 12, RT5)
Laughing the issue off	Using humor when dealing with sensitive issues in order to avoid serious discussion	'Mostly in the end ***it ends on a humoristic note because I don't want to take it any more seriously than that and find myself in a heated discussion***.' (Negative case 11, RT5)
Cognitive aspect of the attitude	Beliefs about attributes of the behavior	'***I think that's the time to argue, they have opinions, they have notions, and it could be discussed, it's a potentially wonderful thing because it draws in so deeply. They really think seriously on subjects***.' (Negative case 12, RT5)
Affective aspect of the attitude	Feelings or emotions associated with the behavior (e.g., teachers' own cultural biases and attitudes toward the individual's culture)	'***I tend to forget about them [Arab students], and I'm not very excited teaching them***. It was due to some specific circumstances that I got there, and now I have to I handle this situation in order not to hurt anyone's feelings because there are three cultures simultaneously.' (Negative case 9, RT1)
Social conventions	Arbitrary rules and norms governing behaviors and specifying what is acceptable and what is not in a society or group	***As Arabs we don't stand in such cases due to the complexity of the situation, since we commemorate the innocent civilians who have been killed and we mourn for our Nakba***! (Negative case 1, AT2)
School culture	School culture intentionally endorsing specific values (e.g., minority patriotism, zero tolerance policy)	'***This school***, as I've said, i***s a patriotic school, it teaches… the emphasis is on identity… as minorities***.' (Interview with AT1, 29.10.2018)
Moral panics	A public panic over an issue popularly deemed to be a threat to, or shocking to, the sensibilities of 'proper' society (e.g., homosexuality)	'***Caucasian families are still very traditional***. They have been in Israel for many years, and the kids were born in Israel, but ***still they are very traditional, and they stick to old opinions***. So, ***for those kids it's really difficult. When we watched the show [about transgenderism], some students were complaining 'when is it going to end?', 'why do we have to see this?' And they told me 'why are we wasting our time?!***' (Negative case 7, HT3)
Discipline issues	Anxiety about chaos in class as a result of discussing certain topics	'***There were students openly wearing a crucifix, and not everybody was happy about it***. These were not Arab students [Cristian Arabs], these were new immigrants who came to Israel as a part of Jewish family. So, ***I had to say that we live in a democratic state, where it's a person's right to belong to any religion they want and to wear a cross as a symbol of personal faith if they wish***.' (Negative case 16, RT7)
(Fear of) parental disapproval	Fear of encountering disapproval from parents	'***I try to refrain from it [discussing politics] as much as I can***. And I tell them that ***it's mostly because of that incident with a teacher five years ago who got fired for expressing their opinion***, and while we may have a very productive discussion, ***either their parents might not see as favorably as I do or they do***, and so I wouldn't like to find myself in that situation. I nip it in the bud.' (Negative case 17, RT5)
(Fear of) school administration's disapproval	Fear of encountering disapproval from school administration	
(Fear of) student disapproval	Fear of encountering disapproval from students	When we watched the show, ***some students were complaining 'when is it going to end?', 'why do we have to see this?' They were very uncomfortable seeing this movie***, this 25-minute show. And ***they told me 'why are we wasting…?', they really felt they were wasting their time***. (Negative case 7, HT3)
Concerns about student alienation/bullying	Concerns about student alienation/bullying as a result of a student's opinion or action	'***I was afraid that the pupils will resist him and, you know, reject him***. I didn't want this to happen to anyone. Still, they are not that aware of things, and they might get hot-tempered. ***I didn't want them to push him in the corner and that he would feel embarrassed or something***.' (Negative case 1, AT2)
Risk of insulting students	Risk of hurting students' feelings by raising/discussing certain topics	'Some people in class may react as bigots. People have prejudices against that [transgender]. And ***this might hurt a student who felt he was in an environment secure enough for him to share certain issues that form his core identity of being either a boy or a girl***.' (Negative case 15, RT6)



Document name	Code	Beginning	End	Preview	Area	Coverage %
Negative Case 8_RT2	perceived behav...	4	4	some parents resist more than kids! T...	134	4.54
Negative Case 8_RT2	perceived behav...	7	7	they resist their kids studying Tanakh...	49	1.66
Negative Case 8_RT2	perceived behav...	8	8	Yes. For example, I spoke with one f...	368	12.48
Negative Case 8_RT2	perceived behav...	10	10	They resist. They sometimes say that...	219	7.43
Negative Case 11_RT5	perceived behav...	8	8	Out of fear that... they may go home ...	75	2.42
Negative Case 12_RT5	perceived behav...	8	8	Even though at times, you know wha...	187	5.06
Negative Case 12_RT5	perceived behav...	10	10	the risk of encountering disapproval i...	101	2.73
Negative Case 17_RT5	perceived behav...	3	3	either their parents might not see as ...	66	12.45

FIGURE 3
An example of a coded segment (data-driven code).

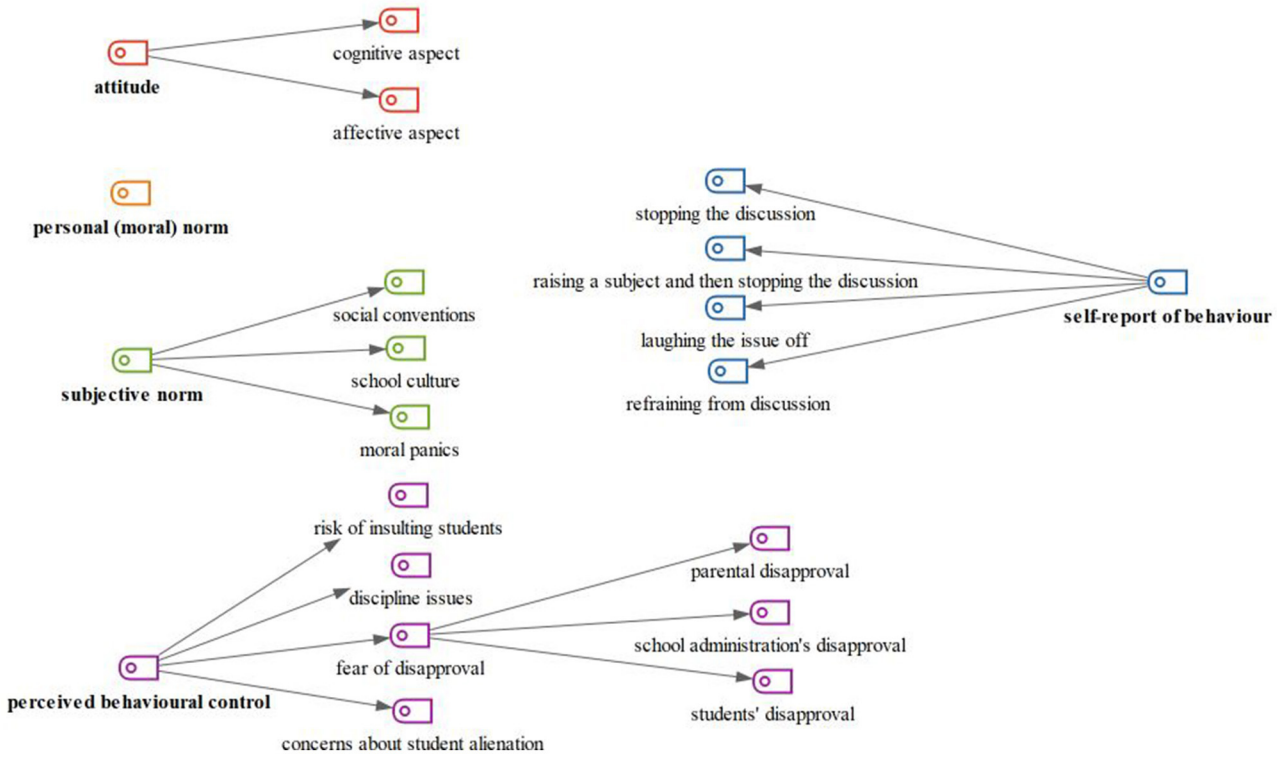


FIGURE 4
Coding frame for analysis.

social conventions defining the student's behavior as unacceptable in a given society and a fear of having heated classroom debates over the issue. Discussion of the incident during the interview revealed two more influential factors: school culture fostering tolerance and acceptance as well as worries about possible student victimization. We detailed the resulting pattern as "*social conventions + school culture + concerns about student alienation + discipline issues > refraining from discussion*".

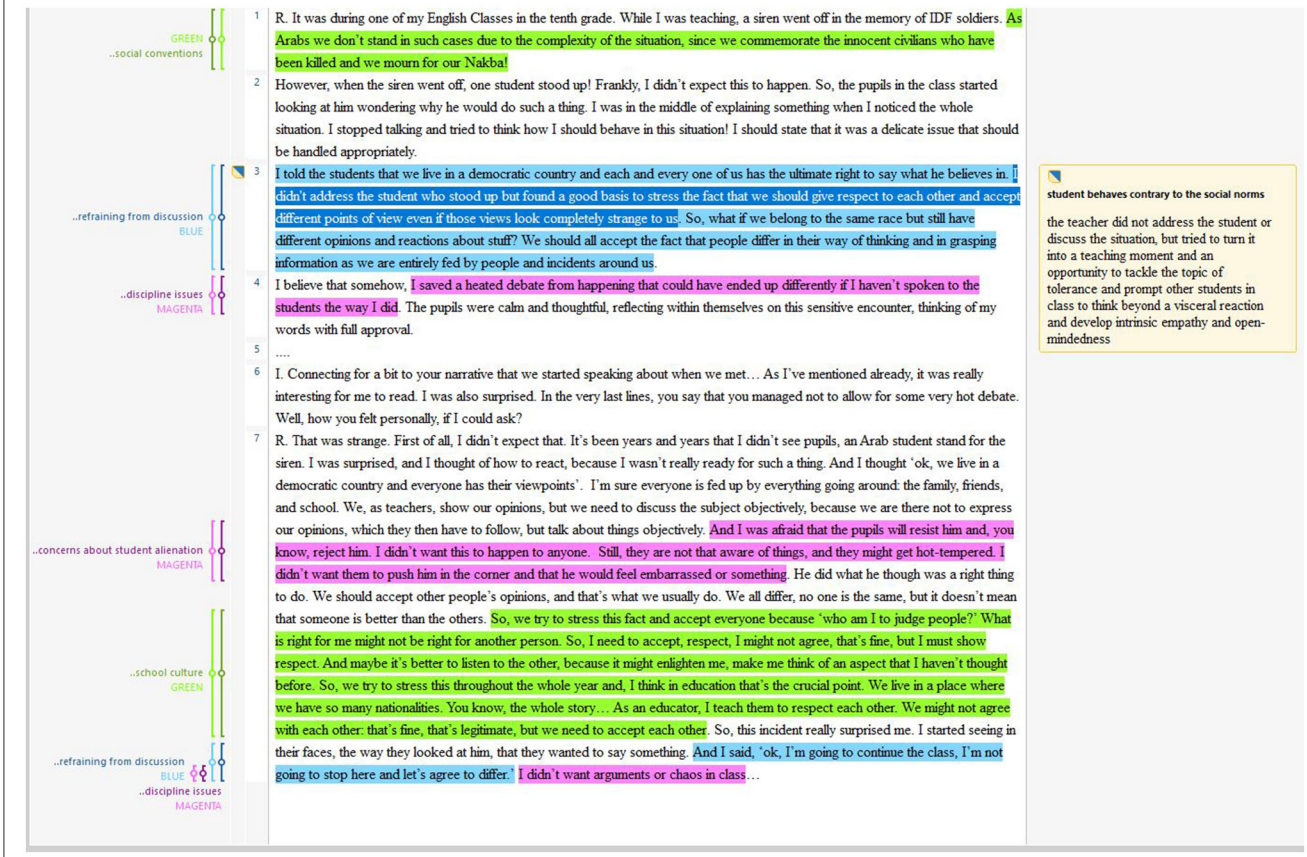


FIGURE 5
Example of a coded text (Negative Case 1, AT2).

Findings

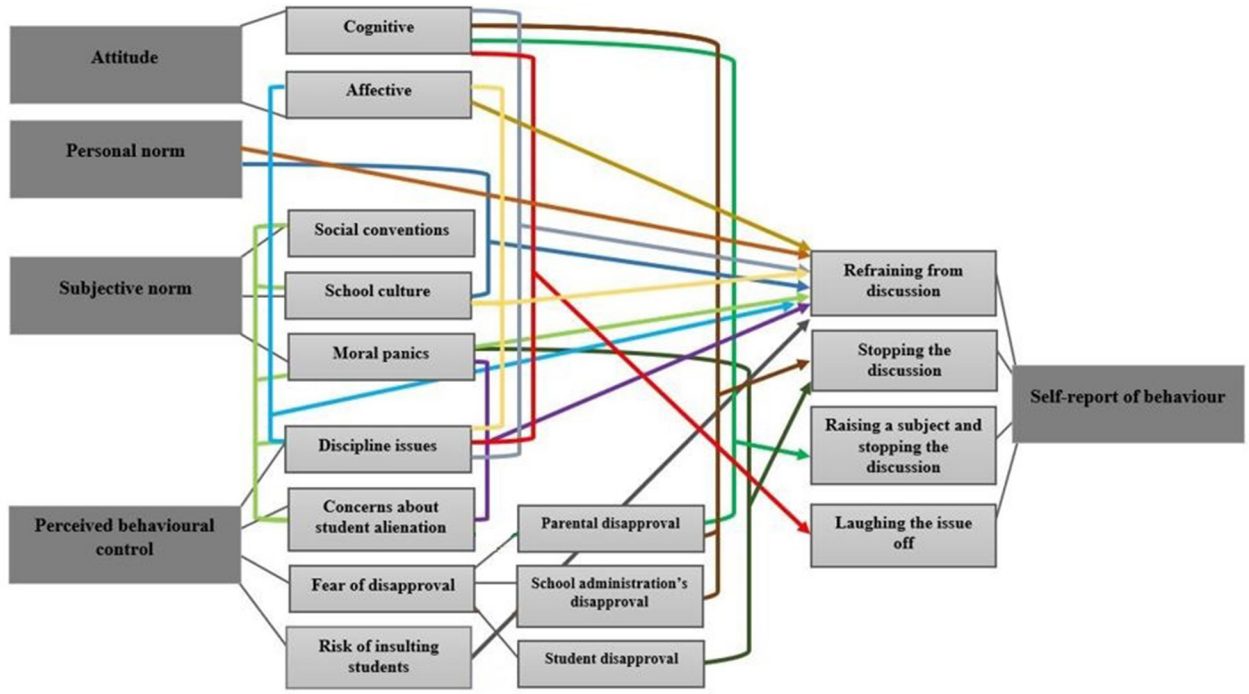
Overall, we can say the participants' decisions against holding specific culture-related discussions were influenced by their personal norms and attitudes, perceptions of their role as a teacher, social conventions and expectations of various school stakeholders. That said, analysis of teacher narratives and interview transcripts revealed key similarities and differences within and across the groups regarding the culturally related classroom conversations that teachers refrained from and their justifications (see Figure 6 for the emergent patterns). Below we present a synthesis of the findings within and across the three teacher groups.

ATs: minority patriotism, moral panics, and related student victimization concerns as barriers to culturally related classroom conversations

In their choices to refrain from the discussion about a certain aspect of culture, ATs were mostly guided by motivational factors, specifically, personal and social norms. For instance, five (or half of) ATs admitted avoiding "Jewish" topics in class (including skipping the relevant coursebook content) due to minority patriotism, both as a personal value and a value prioritized within school culture (see Figure 6 for P1). By this we mean any topic that is connected to the history of the Jewish people, their religion, way of life, etc. One teacher explained her position on texts around the Holocaust in the following terms:

> AT2: What happened to the Jewish community is devastating, and nobody wants this to happen again, but there were other similar tragedies that they do not speak about. Armenians had a big genocide. Nobody talks about it. Why don't you bring it? Not only Holocaust. If you want to devote the whole chapter to genocide, so talk about other cultures, not merely the Jewish one. And they put aside the Arab society. But we live here! And we are using these books. So that is the role of the teacher to take whatever suits you and skip whatever you think will not speak to the kids. And I'll tell you why. I'm not biased, I'm trying to be fair, but if you want to talk about genocide, there are a lot of genocides in the world. One of them is about my people, and you need to learn not only about the Jewish community, but everyone else, especially your people. (Negative case 2)

The above quote illustrates the teacher's attempt to challenge problematic assumptions of the dominant narratives in education and society used to marginalize the experiences of the minority.



P1: personal norm + school culture > refraining from discussion
P2: social conventions + school culture + concerns about student alienation + discipline issues > refraining from discussion
P3: moral panics + concerns about student alienation > refraining from discussion
P4: cognitive attitude + parental/school administration's disapproval > stopping the discussion
P5: cognitive attitude + parental disapproval > raising a subject and stopping the discussion
P6: cognitive attitude + discipline issues > refraining from discussion
P7: cognitive attitude + discipline issues > laughing the issue off
P8: risk of insulting students > refraining from discussion
P9: personal norm > refraining from discussion
P10: affective attitude > refraining from discussion
P11: affective attitude + school culture + discipline issues > refraining from discussion
P12: affective attitude + discipline issues > refraining from discussion
P13: moral panics + student disapproval > stopping the discussion

FIGURE 6
Emergent patterns of "not-doing".

In particular, this teacher emphasizes the importance of teaching students their story to achieve a better recognition of their social identity within the majority paradigm.

Related to this point, most interviewees indicated notable omissions and misinterpretations of minority groups in texts and education materials and expressed an urgent desire to make their cultural heritage visible in the classroom:

> AT1: I do hope that one day I will not have to think how to adapt the book to my own culture. That it will be in the text, built in the text. I hope that one day I will be able to teach Mahmoud Darwish and Tawfiq Ziad, our poets, in English. And we can't. I do hope. And I do hope that they [the Ministry of Education] will take into consideration, that the text will mention minorities. And not the minorities of the falafel and humus. The educated minority, and we are very, so much, educated as a minority. (Interview, 29.10.2018)

Here, for example, the teacher expresses her frustration over the educational policy that restricts the use of minority literature in English lessons. Hence, the ever-increasing role of home culture literary sources as a means for giving way to minority voices and their stories.

We also identified a number of cases when teacher decisions to stop a culture-related discussion were induced by a combination of social norms and perceptions of control. In terms of the former, social conventions and school culture were a strong influence. In terms of the latter, the choice was driven by their concerns regarding student alienation paired with the fear of chaos in class (see Figure 6 for P2). Here we highlight preventing a heated debate over an Arab student standing up for the siren on the Holocaust Remembrance Day. In response to an interview question related to her critical

incident report, the teacher described the situation in the following terms:

> AT2: That was strange. First of all, I didn't expect that. It's been years and years that I saw pupils, an Arab student, stand for the siren. As Arabs we don't stand in such cases due to the complexity of the situation, since we commemorate the innocent civilians who have been killed and we mourn for our Nakba[4]! I was surprised, and I thought of how to react, because I wasn't really ready for such a thing. And I was afraid that the pupils will resist him and, you know, reject him. I didn't want this to happen to anyone. Still, they are not that aware of things, and they might get hot-tempered. I didn't want them to push him in the corner so that he would feel embarrassed or something. He did what he though was a right thing to do. As an educator, I teach them to respect each other. We might not agree with each other: that's fine, that's legitimate, but we need to accept each other. This incident really surprised me. I started seeing in their faces, the way they looked at him, that they wanted to say something. And I said, "ok, I'm going to continue the class and let's agree to differ." I didn't want arguments or chaos in class. (Negative case 1).

This episode shows the difficulties this teacher faced in dealing with an unplanned teachable moment. In this case, the aspect that held the teacher back from action was the intensity of the emotions that exist on both sides of the conflict. On the one hand, the teacher might think that the students' readiness to stand up for what they believed should be applauded. On the other hand, however, she was apprehensive of other students' reaction to their classmates' action that directly contradicts shared expectations of the minority group about what should not be done in this specific social situation. Hence, the teacher's decision not to bring the students' voices about their experience into the open which resulted in a missed opportunity to transform the incident into a teaching moment.

In addition, a different set of motivational and control factors revealed within-group differences between ATs working in schools located in mixed Jewish-Arab cities and those in Arab towns and villages. Specifically, while the former underscored more open attitudes toward LGBT, the latter stressed moral panics still associated with the above issues as well as their concerns about student alienation or bullying as the grounds for refraining from discussing such topics in class (see Figure 6 for P3). As such, a teacher working in a school in an Arab town, highlighted cultural conservatism of the local population:

> AT5: We are still a very closed society. Especially, the Druze. They are very conservative. I remember there was a boy who looked like a homo, and the students just made fun of and bullied him, all of them, all the time. I tried to stop them, but you see that they don't respect him, they don't treat him as a human being. He is a different category. He's an outsider. So that's why we don't touch such issues. (Negative case 4)

In her comment, the teacher refers to persistent hostile attitudes toward gay people in closed communities, especially those in rural areas, and expresses frustration at the treatment of homosexuality as deviance. It's worth mentioning that orthodox Jewish and Muslim communities (generally rural) share a strong aversion to LGBTQ, whereas more reform (generally urban areas) Jews and Muslim tend to be more open to LGBTQ issues. As such, teachers working in mixed cities mentioned freedom of expression:

> AT1: I see the transition, the difference, and how much they dare to open topics which I've never ever used to be able to discuss. They talk about transgender, homosexuality, they talk about lesbians, they talk about "miz'ad hageava" [pride parade] in Tel Aviv, and they are so free! (Interview with AT1, 29.10.2018)

Here, on the contrary, the teacher describes her urban students as free from anti-gay attitudes and open to discussing homosexual issues in the classroom.

On the whole, the above examples point to the influence of socio-cultural norms and cultural traditions on teacher practices. Based on the analysis, we would argue that in our case dominant social and cultural norms limited the teaching of culture in cases that involved classroom discussions of politically sensitive issues and taboo topics. In addition, as members of the minority group, ATs tried to confront the dominant narrative with a counter-narrative in order to provide a more holistic representation of the marginalized groups.

RTs: negative attitudes, personal norms, and perceptions of control as key factors in teacher decisions to avoid sensitive topics in class

Compared to the other two groups, RTs exhibited the widest range of strategies of "not-doing"—from taking care to avoid certain cultural topics to joking off sensitive issues. For most of them, their perceptions of control overweighed a favorable cognitive attitude toward the behavior. For example, among most frequent reasons for avoiding (serious) discussions around the issues of religion and politics alluded to were the risk of encountering disapproval (see Figure 6 for P4 and P5) or fear of having heated debates and chaos in class (see Figure 6 for P6 and P7). In terms of the former, teachers generally reported being cautious about possible negative reaction of concerned parents or anxious about a possible administrative action for publicly sharing their opinion on the subject. One teacher referred to her apprehension about the parents' reaction in the following way:

> RT5: I teach something about the ban on the veil right now in France, and it's about religion and whatever. So, we did talk about, we shifted the discussion toward somewhere

4 The 1948 Palestinian exodus, also known as the Nakba (Arabic: النكبة, al-Nakbah, literally "disaster", "catastrophe", or "cataclysm"), occurred when more than 700,000 Palestinian Arabs – about half of pre-war Palestine's Arab population—fled or were expelled from their homes, during the 1948 Palestine war.

> about Yom Kippur[5] or something. And I did say that I fail to see the reason behind the fact that the God may or may not continue or discontinue my life like dependent on the fact that I fast or not. And you know what, some of them said 'yeah, yalla, maybe you're right and maybe you are not.' So, we do go there, but not to the extent that I would really want to have a 100% serious discussion on the subject. I wouldn't find myself in that situation, I would cut it off. Out of fear that… they may go home and whatever their parents may complain. That's it. (Negative case 12)

As can be seen from the above extract, the teacher generally does not object to religion being mentioned or discussed in class provided that it pertains to culture or societal issues. That said, she would avoid any serious discussion of the topic for the fear of being blamed by her students' parents of pushing her views or beliefs to their children.

Related to this point, some RTs mentioned parental resistance in relation to extra-curricular activities connected to visiting Arab schools:

> RT6: We were supposed to go to a summit day where they discussed storytelling and public narrative in Qalansawe,[6] one of the schools in Qalansawe, and the parents simply did not sign the papers [parental consent]. We canceled the field trip because they did not allow their children go to Qalansawe. And I think that is because they often don't see behind the stereotype that all Arabs are terrorists or there are security issues'. (Interview, 09.12.2018)

This example shows how a joint school initiative aimed at creating more empathy and trust between Jews and Arabs failed, due to Jewish families' misconceptions and stereotypes about Arab culture and identity stemming from a combination of war, politics, and mutual distrust.

As for the latter, a few RTs admitted avoiding serious student-initiated cultural discussions out of fear of feelings running high in the classroom:

> RT5: Usually the cultural issues that are not curriculum-related have to do with this differentiation of Sephardic vs. Ashkenazi Jews. It sort of arises as a joke, but, you know, there's a grain of truth in every joke… But mostly in the end it ends on a humoristic note because I don't want to take it any more seriously than that and find myself in a heated discussion. (Negative case 11)

Again, humor was used to handle and bring to closure a vulnerable discussion around ethnic identity and the cultural divides that still exist among different communities in Israeli society.

In addition, among control factors, we found evidence of the risk of hurting students' feelings as a reason of refraining from culture-related discussions (see Figure 6 for P8). In this vein, RTs working in multicultural classrooms admitted avoiding an issue of national identity. For instance, one teacher referred to her experience of teaching immigrant classes:

> RT6: Oftentimes there's a fine line between touching upon someone's identity and being really cautious not to insult someone and not to bring up an issue that you have no clue how to deal with later. For instance, if you bring up an issue of Jewish identity, and some students, you know, love to talk about how they feel now that they are in Israel, and now that they immigrated to Israel after spending so many years abroad, that they feel being Jewish and observing festivals and Sabbath is part of their identity… But you'll be surprised to find out "Well, I'm not Jewish at all and I don't know what the hell I'm doing here, and I hate all of you". There's a certain caution with this subject and therefore it is not touched upon to a great extent because people don't want to dig into someone's wounds or someone's insecurities. (Negative case 13)

As the above extract suggests, teachers often hesitate to encourage students to articulate their ideas about and their connection to Jewishness, especially when teaching in an environment with competing cultural systems such as Jews and non-Jews. Indeed, migration, whether voluntary or forced, brings about plenty of challenges such as language, psychological and emotional, and of course, cultural barriers that young people face as they adapt to their new environment. If we add here prejudicial attitudes in school settings, it is not surprising that many teachers prefer to avoid discussing national identity in class.

Analysis also revealed a number of cases of personal norms being a key factor in the decision to avoid sensitive topics in class (see Figure 6 for P9). For instance, one teacher referred to censoring coursebook cultural content connected to a painful moment in the history of the Jewish nation:

> RT6: There's one of the newest books that has just come out. And it has some great topics. For instance, there's an article on Irena Sendler and her heroic act of saving Jewish children during World War II. And then "bang!", in the middle of one of the pages, it goes like that: "If you were in a situation like that, if you were in the Holocaust and belonged to a non-Jewish, like Polish family, would you save Jews?" And I find that extremely unfair and unethical to ask any human being, let alone a 15 or 16-year old boy or girl, to ask such a question because nobody knows how she or he would behave in a situation like that. I really don't feel that this heavy moral dilemma should ever be brought up, especially for teenagers. And I felt that with this task they really crossed the line. So, I skipped it. (Negative case 14)

The above case reports how, driven by her moral principles, the teacher chose to skip a discussion of a serious hypothetical

5 Yom Kippur, also known as the Day of Atonement, is the holiest day of the year in Judaism. Its central themes are atonement and repentance. Jews traditionally observe this holy day with a day-long fast and intensive prayer, often spending most of the day in synagogue services.

6 Qalansawe is a city in the Central District of Israel and part of the Triangle. In 2001, the ethnic makeup of the city was virtually all Arab Muslims without significant Jewish population.

dilemma that in her opinion was too acute to be addressed in a high school classroom.

Finally, a mixed educational context[7] displayed a few cases of negative affective attitude resulting in refraining from discussing certain issues (see Figure 6 for P10). For instance, one teacher expressed her unwillingness to discuss domestic politics in front of minority students:

> RT2: When I have a class with Arab speakers, I'm not ready to discuss political issues. Because I'm not a good actress, and therefore afraid I might say or show somehow my attitude. For me it's difficult. I can't say that I don't like Arabs, but yes, I voted for Bennet.[8] So, you see, I don't want. (Negative case 10)

The above case is illustrative of the teacher's ambivalence to discuss vulnerable topics that can trigger her reactions exhibiting prejudiced attitude toward Arab minority she is trying to conceal.

As a side note, it's worth mentioning that unlike their minority counterparts quite a number of RTs admitted they do not mind the fact that local cultures are not reflected in curriculum materials. As one teacher put it:

> RT5: The Israeli society is so self-focused on "me me me" and "we we we" that I don't mind it being about the American culture or the British culture or whatever else that doesn't have to do immediately with what is going on here. I don't mind that so much, the fact that it's not about their own community. I even a kind… a sort of take joy in the fact that it isn't. (Interview, 15.11.2018)

In her attempts to avoid discussions about the complexity of the local conflict, this teacher prefers to shift the focus away from local cultures and concentrate, instead, on the foreign culture.

Another teacher expressed a similar viewpoint during a vignette discussion:

> RT2: The aim of the English course is to represent English-speaking countries. It's not about Israeli culture. It's about British, American, South-African, Australian, etc. culture. So, if, for example, Russian, or Arabic is not represented in a coursebook, it's not some sort of nationalism. (Interview, 06.11.2018)

The perspective voiced by an immigrant teacher is that foreign language coursebooks should present target-and international culture perspectives. Accordingly, the limited exposure of language learners to the local (especially, nondominant) cultures in language materials is not seen as problematic.

Overall, our findings point to immigrant teachers' unwillingness to contradict personal, moral, and religious beliefs of families or challenge administrative expectations—even when those ran counter to their personal norms and attitudes. This, however, does not include cases when suggested discussion topics contradict teachers' moral principles or ethical considerations. In addition, most Russian-Jewish teachers reported avoiding discussions of the growing complexity of the local conflict and even felt relieved when such topics were absent from classroom materials.

HTs: negative attitudes, moral panics, school culture, and perceptions of control as reasons for teachers' avoiding controversial topics

Interestingly, compared to their Arab and Russian-Jewish colleagues, HTs reported very few negative cases. Among those, we identified a few episodes when a teacher had to stop an abusive verbal exchange on the issue of domestic politics. One of the teachers shared her experience:

> HT5: I have kids who are very right-wing. One of such kids stood up and said something like "This is Jewish land. If you don't like it, go to Syria." The moment he said that… First, I couldn't believe that. And I told him, "Please leave my classroom. This is a sentence I will not accept." I had to make a statement in front of everybody, not only that kid, to make sure things like that will not happen again. You can be against it, you can be strongly opposed, whatever, but you have to use appropriate language. And again, it's a question of culture, because if you belong to kahane[9] movement, that's a part of the culture, maybe they say that. But in my lesson, you cannot say that. (Negative case 5)

This teacher chooses to remove a *student* using biased language *from class* in order to warn against future hate incidents. This example is illustrative of the bigger struggle against students' ethnocentric and conflict-based misconceptions regarding the minority population and stereotypical attitudes toward the other. In the above case, the teacher's behavior was informed by a mixture of motivation and control factors, specifically a negative personal attitude to hate speech, zero violence school policy and fear of a heated debate sparking in class (see Figure 6 for P11).

A similar set of factors, but this time, negative affective attitude combined with fear of heated debates in class brought up a few cases of teachers avoiding controversial topics (see Figure 6 for P12) in mixed (Jewish and Arab) classes. For instance, in her response to a vignette question one teacher admitted avoiding culturally sensitive issues in front of minority students:

7 Classes having a composition of Arab and Jewish students are still relatively rare since the Israeli state school system falls into discrete streams (Jewish and Arab sector) that have very little contact with each other.

8 Naftali Bennett is an Israeli politician who led the Jewish Home party between 2012 and 2018 and currently serves as a Member of Knesset for New Right, a right-wing political party he established in December 2018 together with Ayelet Shaked, justice minister at the time.

9 Kahanism is an extremist Jewish ideology based on the views of Rabbi Meir Kahane, founder of the Jewish Defense League and the Kach party in Israel. Kahane maintained the view that the majority of Arabs living in Israel are enemies of Jews and Israel itself, and believed that a Jewish theocratic state, where non-Jews have no voting rights, should be created. The Kach party has been banned by the Israeli government and the U.S. State Department has labeled it a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

> HT6: It depends on the cultures that the students come from, and some cultures for me are harder to deal with. For example, students who come from a more eastern culture that is intolerant toward other cultures, who feel that they are a minority who's been not heard for a very long time, who have been shut down out of society, and they have this sense of victimization, or a feeling that they are victims. And those I have a hard time with because they tend to not really listen to other cultures, and not really accept them. [. . .] They just think that their culture is the one that should be prevalent. So, with those types of students in class I have a harder time bringing up diverse cultural topics because I know their reaction will be less tolerant. So, in that class I would think twice before bringing in a text that is controversial or whatever. Because you want the kids to be involved but you don't want them to be passionate in a sense that they are getting really upset and yelling. (Negative case 18)

The above extract exhibits an opinion that is not often voiced. Specifically, this Jewish teacher explains her reluctance to discuss vulnerable topics in a class with Arab students by their perceived intolerance toward the culturally different. As the teacher suggests, such stereotypes and prejudices fostered by feelings of exclusion, antiminority bias and strained intergroup relations prevent minority students from seeing other cultures in a favorable light.

Finally, we found evidence of moral panics combined with student disapproval playing a decisive role in teacher decision to stop a discussion of sexuality-related issues (see Fig. 6 for P13). For instance, one teacher shared an example of a classroom discussion on the topic of gender she had to stop due to anger and *protest expressed by some of her students:*

> HT3: Many students come from very traditional families, like boys coming from Caucasian families, and a lot of things seem strange to them. For example, transgenders. I showed them a video about a boy who changed to be a girl. . . And it's very difficult for them to accept it and to see it as something normal. When we watched the show, some students were complaining "when is it going to end?", "why do we have to see this?" These were not many, but there were quite a few. And we have a transgender girl in this class, they do accept her, they treat her nicely, but they were very uncomfortable seeing this movie, this 25-min show. And they told me "why are we wasting. . . ?", they really felt they were wasting their time. (Negative Case 7)

The above reflection points to transphobic attitudes that still prevail in traditional societies. Hence, the teacher's decision to bring the discussion of this salient issue to closure prompted by the divided response among the students in class.

Analysis also pointed to patterns of behavior shared among the groups. Similar to cases identified in RT data, we found evidence of HT perceptions of control determining their course of action. Again, we foreground refraining from discussion for the risk of insulting a student's feelings (see Figure 6 for P8). One of the teachers gave an example of addressing transgender students before rising a topic of gender in class:

> HT3: If I have a chance, I talk to relevant students in advance. First of all, to see if it's OK to touch upon this topic because if I see that they won't feel good about it, I won't do it, I won't talk about it in class. (Negative case 6)

This teacher acknowledges the individual impact of group activities regarding trans identities and makes sure to establish a safer learning environment for all students who may feel personally connected to the material. This means respecting transgender students' privacy and only having gender-related discussions in the classroom context after receiving their consent.

The above analysis demonstrates that HTs participating in the study were generally guided by motivation and control factors while giving preference or avoiding certain topics within the spectrum of cultural issues to be discussed in class. Specifically, various orientations connected with different national scenarios, with experience of other types of classroom, educational or political cultures could guide these teachers' actions.

Discussion and conclusion

Considering that negative results teach us to critically analyse our pre-existing thoughts and direct new avenues of research (Fanelli, 2012; Scheel et al., 2021), this study strived to explore an often-neglected side of the language-and-culture-teaching story by reflecting on reported episodes of "not-doing" culture teaching. Using TPB as the analytical lens, it examined the factors determining Israeli EFL teachers' decisions to refrain from culture-related classroom discussions. In doing this, we wanted to add to the discussion of possible reasons behind intended or unexpected deviations from the lesson plan, and how these curricular modifications are perceived and utilized by teachers (e.g., Başar, 2021). Overall, these factors could be divided into internal (one's personal motivation) and external (contextual influences).

Among internal factors, personal attitudes proved to be a serious obstacle to integrating culture with foreign language teaching in mixed educational contexts. To this end, majority teachers' expressed unwillingness to discuss culturally sensitive topics with minority students seems to be grounded in the perceived ethnocentrism of the minority groups viewing their culture as superior and striving to preserve their heritage as "the moral right to be heard and listened to" (Kramsch, 2006, p. 19). Alternatively, stereotypes and negative attitudes toward "the other" expressed by some majority teachers may become incentives affecting their choices not to discuss local conflicts within a context of de-politicized Israeli school (Lavrenteva and Orland-Barak, 2022). Such dissonance between the cautious attitudes toward Arab cultures in Jewish schools and the weight attached to their cultural capital within the Arab community concurs with previous research into how particular views of Arab cultures manifest themselves within educational discourses (e.g., Ghaffar-Kucher, 2015). Additionally, personal norms (alone or occasionally conflating with social norms) often became a determining factor in teacher decisions against planned culture teaching. This holds true for episodes of teacher censoring coursebook cultural content which seemed unethical or irrelevant to them, which is in line with previous research on teacher screening out cultural materials (e.g.,

Gray, 2000). In this study, however, these choices were based on a different set of reasons. For minority teachers, patriotism and nationalism were the key factors that appeared to be related to their decisions to avoid Jewish topics and instead teach Arabic culture through English. This finding echoes previous research pointing to the influence socio-cultural norms and cultural traditions exert on teacher practices (e.g., Leshem and Trafford, 2006). By contrast, majority teachers were guided by purely moral considerations while skipping cultural content that raised difficult ethical dilemmas.

Among external influences, the analysis revealed instances where perceived behavioral control played the main role in teacher decision-making. Those cases hinted at two basic categories of control factors: those related to students and those to other school stakeholders. Among student-related control factors we came across cases when concerns about possible student alienation or the risk of hurting students' feelings resulted in teachers refraining from certain cultural topics or closing culture-related discussions. This finding echoes previous research pointing to teachers' perceived obligation to provide emotional safety for their students (Bower and Klecka, 2009). Finally, expressed anxiety about losing control of the class over a heated discussion supports research evidence of a strong influence of teacher concerns on their practices, especially with regard to managing challenging student behavior (e.g., Savolainen et al., 2022). As for the reasons connected with other school stakeholders, we found reference to concerns regarding parental complaint or the risk of encountering school administrators' disapproval. Here, too, our finding is in line with previous research regarding teacher unwillingness to contradict personal, moral, and religious beliefs of families or challenge administrative expectations (Bower and Klecka, 2009). If we take an example of political talk, majority teachers' reported reluctance to engage in classroom conversations about politics in face of parents' objections fits previous findings pointing to Jewish high school teachers' disengaged relations with parents based on the perception of parents as threatening the teachers' expertise (e.g., Addi-Raccah and Ainhoren, 2009; Addi-Raccah and Grinshtain, 2016). In addition, teachers' ambivalence toward talking politics can be explained by the existing condition of the Israeli educational system that keeps politics out of schools both in the Arab and Jewish sectors (Perry, 2007).

Apart from that, we came across various combinations of motivation and control factors. When viewed together, these combinations were complex and often contradictory. For instance, we identified cases when attitudes and personal norms came in conflict with dominant social norms or perceptions of control. These contradictions forced participants to make choices between what they wanted to do (e.g., initiate or encourage a culture-related discussion) and what was the right thing to do under the circumstances (to refrain from or stop a conversation about culture). Since in this case dominant social or cultural norms or teacher perceptions of control carried more weight than personal motivation, the choices were largely against culture teaching, particularly in the context of student diversity.

Finally, it's worth mentioning that our analysis pointed to very few similarities among the strategies of "not-doing" across groups. Specifically, a single pattern shared between Russian-Jewish and Israeli-Jewish teachers illustrated their decision to avoid a culture-related discussion for the risk of insulting a student's feelings. One possible explanation lies in the ethnic makeup of the Israeli classroom. Unlike their Arab colleagues predominantly working in Arab schools and therefore being more familiar with the cultures of the students (Islamic, Christian, Druze), Russian-Jewish and Israeli-Jewish teachers have more cultural variation in the classroom. This situation on the one hand offers tremendous pedagogical potential, but on the other poses real and significant challenges making teachers more apprehensive in raising certain topics for discussion.

In our interpretation of the findings, it was not our intention to criticize these individual teachers for particular episodes of "not-doing" culture teaching in a specific "context of opportunity"; rather, what we have observed through teachers' articulation of personal and social norms within classrooms is that teachers were largely operating under normative social influence. That being the case, our findings highlight the need to encourage teachers to examine their own expectations and practices in relation to teaching culture, to gain an understanding of how their choices privilege some narratives and marginalize others. More than that, to encourage students' reflection on language, culture and communication, critical discussions about how language is used to represent social and cultural realities is needed (Byram and Kramsch, 2008).

By way of conclusion, we should restate the main premise of the present study: the teaching of culture should become an integral part of foreign language instruction. What is more, given that simply integrating culture in the classroom does not guarantee a meaningful discussion about culture (Forsman, 2012), the goal should be "to translate culture teaching into a culture learning experience for our students" (Ryffel, 1997 as cited in DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2016, p. 31). Finally, given that multilingual and multicultural classrooms are today a growing reality in many countries all over the world, such culture teaching should aim to foster empathy with the cultural norms of the target language community (Willems, 1992, cited in Byram and Morgan, 1994) through a recognition of "otherness", and of the limitations of one's own cultural identity (Killick and Poveda, 1997; Fantini, 2020).

Implications

The findings of the study invite several data-based pedagogical implications for overcoming the above impediments to quality in-depth culture-related classroom discussions.

First and foremost, related to significant disparities between different communities, pedagogical interventions should be designed in order disrupt the norms that get in the way of a good culture-related discussion. For instance, organizing systematic mutual visits and creating partnerships among schools from different locations with different ethnic composition could be an efficient method for combating the influence of mutually hostile attitudes and practicing cultural humility among students (Maoz, 2000; Maoz et al., 2007). As some participant teachers involved in similar projects suggest, such initiatives encourage students to engage in intercultural dialogue, bringing their cultural backgrounds and their individual life narratives to bear on the discussions. In doing so, language learners can "grasp the emic view of another culture" and "suspend and revisit" [their] judgments

… [that] may be incorrect or unfounded in new contexts' (Fantini, 2020, p. 56). In addition, introducing literary works of marginalized groups into the curriculum mentioned by quite a few minority teachers can provide a means to change deficit attitudes. Specifically, these literary pieces "can serve as a kind of counter screen in a field of other varieties of texts that often tend to screen (reduce and represent) societies, cultures, and individual experience" (Edgerton, 2014, p. 6). Finally, considering cultural stereotypes articulated by many participants against the increasing diversity in Israeli schools, explicit training that challenges deficit thinking regarding "the other" needs to be given to teachers in order to combat "cultural diversity burnout" (Geiger, 2012). Indeed, such interventions paired with successful teaching experiences may extend a considerable positive influence on teacher attitudes toward diversity in the classroom (e.g., Schwab and Alnahdi, 2020).

Related to external stakeholders, given identified parental resistance to certain classroom discussions and extra-curricular opportunities, more frequent communication is needed to initiate a change in attitude. For instance, we suggest that family engagement days may be hosted at schools, where families from different socio-cultural backgrounds could bring diverse and complementary perspectives in overcoming barriers to establishing intercultural dialogue at the local level.

Limitations and future research

This article has presented an attempt to call attention to the potential of negative evidence to enrich our understanding of teaching practices as shaped by the cultural and social context. The findings presented are not free of a set of limitations inherent to the research question and method chosen.

The main limitation of the present study is the relatively small teacher sample which yielded a limited pool of negative cases available for analysis. Having said that, large samples would not work for its naturalistic design utilized to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. Further, these results represent a self-reported snapshot of teachers' practices as they interact with students and their families. This is of concern in light of the potential discrepancy between teachers' self-reported rates of culturally responsive teaching strategies and observed teacher practices (e.g., Debnam et al., 2015). Unfortunately, we were unable to obtain observational data due to upcoming exams, which meant that the primary focus of language classes was on the preparation for the test. However, encouraged by research findings demonstrating close alignment between teacher self-reports and actual classroom practice (e.g., Clunies-Ross et al., 2008), we presume that the participants' readiness to share episodes of "not-doing" on their own initiative is indicative of their genuine responses. That said, we believe that even this limited set of self-reported cases allowed to gain insights into specific attitudes, personal and social norms, and perceptions of behavioral control that determined teacher decisions to avoid certain cultural discussions. In other words, these data offered a valuable insight into the foundations of the behavior of a given population at a given point in time (Ajzen, 2006).

Directions for future research are, thus, based on the open challenges highlighted by the analysis. We believe that the results of the present in-depth study can form the basis for the construction of a questionnaire to evaluate the relative weight of the key considerations in teacher decisions against incorporating culture into their teaching. This can serve as a basis for the design of more appropriate professional development frameworks around the topic of language-and-culture-teaching in diverse classrooms that would attend to the context-based determinants of teacher ambivalence to integrate culture with their teaching.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the study involving human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants.

Author contributions

EL has developed the ideas, study design, collected the data, suggested approaches to deal with the collected data, performed the analysis, and produced the first draft of the manuscript and finished the writing in cooperation with her co-author, LO-B. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2024.1234871/full#supplementary-material

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