Running Head: Internet-based activities and Intercultural Dimensions to Promote EFL Learners' Writing Skills
The Case of Third year Letters and Foreign Languages Stream

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore critically the participants' views regarding the integration of Internet-based activities and Intercultural education in the learning methods in order to promote greater understanding and acceptance of difference and otherness, as well as develop alternatives modes of providing our EFL learners with opportunities and techniques to improve their writing skills for more exposure to the present multicultural, multilingual, and multimedia learning environments. Our purpose is therefore, to stress on the imperative assessment of the students as EFL learners and as people meant to become intercultural writers, not only to be successful in communicating information, but in the way they express themselves in writing as well as in putting the principles of writing coherently in the front position. Therefore, implementing Internet-based activities and considering the intercultural dimensions in the EFL learning process are, according to us, adequate techniques which can help our learners develop genuine writing performances, being aware of their strengths and weaknesses in the aforementioned skill. This paper answers the following questions: 1-How can Intercultural dimensions help EFL learners become effective language users while writing? 2- What are the results and conclusions from Intercultural education and Internet-based activities project in promoting the EFL learners' writing skills?

Introduction

There are indeed, great subjects that should be discussed and which have a great interest in developing individual potential and abilities to communicate with others: the learning of foreign languages. Therefore, knowledge of English as a foreign language in Algeria is, these very recent years, at the heart of important and constructive discussions and investigations, as the major objectives of such scientific actions are directed towards successful steps to more communication and understanding which are, according to us, the key elements in inspiring the Algerian learners and the elite communities to get in contact with diverse cultural aspects and to work hand in hand towards common goals.

Moreover, in a world of total globalization where the cultural and the linguistic potential is actually used as a means to integrate the world societies, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Algeria is of central importance too. Therefore, we, as researchers and language practitioners, have to understand that the foreign language teaching and learning process does not only rest on the linguistic features but on the language entirety embedded in its culture and history; a process that enables the language users to convey and comprehend correctly and coherently target messages considering thus the language stylistic principles, whether these are oral or written.

As a matter of fact, this paper explores participants' views regarding the integration of Internet tools and intercultural dimensions in language learning classroom activities. It is also meant to contribute to the development of quality education shedding light on the main factors that hinder

a good and meaningful learning embodied in EFL writing skills; a project that encourages new aspects to support and supplement EFL learning actions and practices.

1. Considerations in Intercultural Language Learning in Developing the EFL learners' Writing Skills

In language teaching and learning activities, the learner has now become a subject at the centre of the educational process, a subject who is taught to be responsible for his / her learning, able to interact, and able to be, at same time, an analyser and a performer of the language in use. Thanks to the emergence of intercultural perceptions and dimensions, these changes are likely to occur. Therefore, and according to language educationalists, there is significantly an expressed need to build facts about the language target culture, to integrate methods based on participants' observation, role plays, and simulations to allow the learners under study to develop intercultural competence. Moreover, we do believe that these activities will provide our learners with opportunities to develop reflexive and critical skills mainly in writing. In so doing, we are moving towards the direction of understanding and researching that intercultural language learning and teaching is an approach and a tool which we, as researchers, practitioners and educationalists must take into consideration in order to render the language writing skills more effective. We also have to bear in mind that when teaching our learners English as a foreign language, we not only teach the language as a means to convey messages, whether these are oral or written, but we are, in a way or another, teaching its culture as well, because as mentioned by (Goodenough, 1964: 36):

Culture is not a material phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people, behaviour, or emotions. It is rather an organisation of these things. It is the form of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them.
In this sense, we are making our participants become conscious of the importance of context and how they can manipulate contextual frames through language.

According to the reviewed literature, we can say that most of the authors read focus on culture. (Archer, 1986: 170), for instance, defines it as a "culture bump" mentioning that:
When an individual from one culture finds himself or herself in a different, strange, or, uncomfortable situation when interacting with persons of a different culture, it is then, a bump of culture.

While (Penny Cook, 1994: 62), identifies a number of different meanings incorporating various elements in a reasonable and acceptable way. The author therefore, adds that culture is a set of higher aesthetic principles embodied in works of art. At this stage, we agree that writing as a language skill is a work of art indeed. The writer goes through different steps of drafting, revising, reviewing, adjusting, adding, deleting, reading, then editing; a task which is not easy to accomplish if this writer is not fully acquainted with both, the language mechanisms and its culture. As a matter of fact, placing and integrating culture in language learning communication means to encounter an intercultural dimension within this process. We would thus, say that in so doing, we have to take into account some factors which are as follows:
- Language: a variable that develops in the context of a particular culture, and therefore, reflects that culture;

- Non-verbal communication: a variable that can be spontaneous, ambiguous, carrying a great number of significance; but still closely related to language;

- World position: this is to determine the cultural group; either we are speaking about the language learner group, or the language provider group (generally defined as natives.);

- Cultural values and attitudes: considering the different cultures, races, and generations;

- Group identity: this deals more with the identity the individual wishes to be placed in.

- Bearing these factors in mind, it is then worth to set up intercultural communication within the field of EFL teaching/learning process, mainly within the writing skill.

- Additionally, by applying the cultural variables embedded in intercultural communication, it will be then possible to focalize on the language mechanisms we want our learners to achieve while producing their writings as they will probably discover models as:

- The language enjoyment which enables them to basically extend their knowledge about the language itself and its culture;

- The language skills because culture is an adjunct to these skills;

- Survival models which provide information about the close relationship between the language system and culture;

- Academic model which is in fact examination- oriented meant to assess linguistic competence, and language presentation.

2. Emerging Development in EFL Learning through Intercultural Dimensions

As aforementioned, basic to intercultural language learning, an invaluable link between language and culture is acknowledged. As put by (Liddicoat, 2002: 5):

Culture shapes what we say, when we say it, and how we say it from the simplest language we use to the most complex. It is fundamental to the way we speak, write, listen, and read.

In this dimension, we believe that language has a major role in the transmission of cultural codes and constructions because this will likely impact on how teachers teach and how learners learn. In order to identify ways of appropriately integrating culture into language learning and language into culture learning, teachers have to consider some broad approaches to culture in language teaching. These approaches have been categorized as follows by (Crozet, Liddicoat, and Lo Bianco, 1999:120):

- Traditional approaches: links between language and culture are done with texts being the object of study, rather than the expression of cultural positions being explored through text's language choices;
- Cultural study approaches: treat cultural competence as knowledge about a target country through history or geography;
- Cultural as societal norms: identifies cultural competence as knowing what members of a particular cultural group are expected to do. This is obviously based upon known ways of acting or beliefs;
- Intercultural language learning: identifies culture as lived experience of individuals. Learners engage in developing cultural competence from the beginning of their language learning, engage in understanding their own language and

culture in relation to the additional language and culture they are to learn.

3. Principles to Develop Intercultural Language Learning

The principles which guide curriculum design and inform classroom pedagogy are as follows:

- Active construction: explores language and culture through active engagement, developing a broad intercultural space;
- Making connections: this can be achieved when relevant bridges are built between home language/culture and target language / culture;
- Social interaction: this involves communicating across linguistic and cultural boundaries;
- Reflection: involves engaging in critical, constructive analysis of linguistic and cultural similarity and difference;
- Responsibility: encourages learners to contribute to successful communication across languages and cultures, and to develop intercultural perspectives including self-monitoring.

These are, according to us, important insights gained, an endeavour made to shed light on intercultural dimensions and their role in foreign language learning; a fundamental component which contributes to the growth of EFL learning in general and EFL writing skill learning in particular. Moreover, since these dimensions are based on principles as social interaction, reflection, responsibility which all encourage communication, we cannot but involve a new variable, a tool which, according to our belief, will reinforce and develop the target objective: implementing Internet-based activities to meet both poles: language and culture because as a purely pedagogical support, this technique:

- Shows that language learning is given a real purpose, relevant to the learners' attitudes and interests;
- Integrates knowledge about language and culture, and facilitates apprenticeship;
- Makes the uniqueness of each encountered situation appreciated, and the integrity of each learner respected.

4. Considerations into Internet-based Activities in Developing EFL Writing Skills

With the development of computer technology, foreign language (FL) learners and teachers are increasingly using Internet information and communication tools in their respective process in order to support intercultural interactions and target language development, because internet-based activities enable mostly learners to move from classroom-based contexts towards real interaction with expert speakers of the language they are actually learning. Moreover, these tools can provide both learners and teachers with various opportunities and configurations as for:
- Implementing Visio-collaboration between educational institutions;
- Encouraging learners' autonomy;
- Making use of intra/ and/ inter-community resources;
- Encouraging learners' participation in and out-door school oriented Internet communities.

As aforementioned, the advent of the generally available information and communication technology (ICT) tools such as e-mail, Internet relay chat and more recently instant Audio and Visio-conferencing has added new trends and attributes as ease and speed of access, new quantities of information availability

on the World Wide Web (www.), and of course endless opportunities to access to native speakers and cultural informants virtually across the globe.

5. The Internet as a Classroom Tool

An Internet classroom is like an ordinary classroom with the exception that the learners can use the Internet to complete the activities and tasks set by the teacher. The role may alternate and vary between being a classroom and a self-access centre or an Internet Café for the whole school, bearing in mind that the layout and set up of the room itself reinforce rather than dictate the teacher's approach to language teaching.

6. Internet Classroom –Based Distinct Phases

In order to successfully put this tool into action, we should follow the phases as:

- Planning: budgeting, finding the right location, finding out equipment needs and layout, contracting technical experts;

- Set- up: physical assembly of the room, installation and configuration of all the necessary hardware and software, testing, piloting, co-ordinating schedules, initial staff training, introducing learners to the technology;

- Maintenance: reconfiguration, repositioning of equipment, further staff training, updating, upgrading of installations, system maintenance, back-up and repair;

- Lay out: there should be a basic consideration when setting up an Internet classroom: space, because the teacher needs to: move around, interact with learners easily, and enable learners to work collaboratively, mingle, discuss, or work on other tasks.

7. Considerations on Equipment

The feasibility of different types of activities in Internet classroom will depend on:

a- Speed and capacity of the Internet

b- Multimedia computers to manipulate texts, view pictures, play sound and video files.

Having mentioned that the changes to communication and interaction among learners via computer enable to move from the cognitive approach to learning, to an integrative socio-cognitive approach linking traditional language skills as listening, speaking, reading, and writing with electronic literacy skills in order to learn to interact and communicate with others through the variety of technological tools as a full part of language teaching and learning. (Shield; Hauck; and Hewers, 2001: 1) emphasize that:

Information technology may provide us with the means of overstepping the boundaries between classroom and real life, making experiential learning a possibility… That is why we need teachers who can adapt or modify their students' language acquisition devices when necessary.

8. Criteria to Design Internet-Based Activities

One point of departure to design tasks via Internet is to take the criteria into serious and constructive consideration: deciding on the objectives to achieve. Therefore, the teacher, rather call him/her the tutor, has to set a route map to avoid any disagreements. The route map should consider:

- What the tutor hopes and expects from the learners to get out of the activity;

- The reason why such an activity should be done on the Internet rather than through other media;
- The activity timing;
- Who the learners are going to communicate with, and
- Whether the activity is planned to be used with only one class and/or level.

9. Internet-Based Activities to Improve the Learners' Writing Skills

Once the learners are introduced to the technology in the classroom and familiarized with the different materials, many activities are then possible to set. As far as the target skill is concerned, the tutor may ask the learners to write short personal notes, welcome, fan letters, giving them the opportunity to focus on language checking on online dictionaries for instance. Some other activities can be furthered as to defining problems, sharing opinions, or asking for advice. One very interesting and instructional Internet-based activity to improve the writing skills is to create "key-pals", or "e-mail pen pals". This kind of correspondence gives the learners a real audience for their writing. For the success of this activity, there should be:
- Partners: found by the learners adding messages/ or/ by the tutor;
- Logistics: writing and sending messages regarding timing and accounts;
- Response time: learners should be patient as not all messages are responded to immediately;
- Content: the tutor plays an important role in supervising and checking the content of the messages sent and received.

- Having given important considerations on the value of Internet-based activities and intercultural dimensions in reinforcing the EFL learners' writing skills, and having focalized on the way these two pedagogical means can be made together as complementary elements to the language learning process, we believe that developing an analysis and an interpretation of the participants needs is a necessary phase to validate the idea of suggesting this technique in the teaching/learning process. Therefore, the next point to discuss refers to this objective.

10. Research Methodology and Research Design

In order to establish a good understanding of the proposed technique whose target objective is to improve EFL learning embodied in improving the learners' writing skills, we sought more judicious to implement a descriptive methodology in order to explore the participants' views regarding the integration of Internet tools and Intercultural dimensions in language learning activities. This will be the starting point which will pave the way to other research methodologies; a situation which is left to future research undertaking. We also opted to design a questionnaire to learners as they represent our major information source and that the work at hand explores the learners' positions as far as the suggestion to implement is concerned. We however, encountered some problems in completing this part of the work as for the participants' presence, time shortage, institutions' strikes; a difficult situation but we could more or less cover it.

11. Significance of the Research

We strongly believe that the dimensions of Interculturality and the concept of implementing Internet-based

activities technique in EFL learning classrooms are really very difficult to teach and learn, and mainly to adopt, since this may be the first attempt in secondary schools in Béjaia. This suggested technique seeks to analyse the learners' concept and views in order to develop appropriate and reliable ways to do so; not only to offer this population opportunities to gradually and collaboratively construct knowledge in a concrete and dynamic manner, but to develop a strategy that will be mutually beneficial to different partners; whether these are at home or in any foreign country, as well as to allow more comprehension of different cultures.

- Participants

The key element to the implementation of the suggested technique is to involve some learners' representatives who compose our population sample: eighty five participants (85). The following table gives some information to describe our population sample:

Age	stream	level	English Proficiency	Technology proficiency
17-19 years old	Letters and Foreign Languages	3rd year	Presenting some difficulties in writing and speaking in English	-Familiar with technology (The Internet) -Possess electronic accounts.

Table 1: Population Sample Description.

12. Procedures

When we decided to conduct this work, we planned two directions to be discussed:

- Evaluating the learners' written productions (stands as a diagnostic test), in order to localize areas of strength and weakness;

- Finding out whether the host institution uses the different existing Internet-mediated tools to integrate in the EFL learning and teaching process.

Drawing some preliminary conclusions from our first observations as far as the writing skill and the teaching/learning supporting materials are concerned (see appendix 1: learners written productions), we have been able to notice the following:

Table 2: Preliminary Observations Report

Written productions	Language Mastery				Use of Technological Tools			
		Yes	No	Somehow		often	never	rarely
Total population : 85	Vocabulary Syntax Punctuation Productivity Creativity coherence		X X X X X X		Classical labs Multimedia labs Recorders Projectors/data show Internet computers		X X X X	X X
Only 05 productions								

In the light of the aforementioned conclusions, we devised a short questionnaire to gather data about the actual learners' positions as far as the two variables of the research are concerned.

13. Analysis and Interpretations
13.1 Description of the Learners' Questionnaire

The questionnaire is composed of three sections since the whole work at hand is meant to collect data about the population sample's views about the suggested technique.
- Section one reveals the learning background of our participants

- Section two is directed towards our respondents' views on the project

- Section three is opened to any suggestions proposed by our informants.

13.2 Analysis and interpretations
  Section One: Learning Background
Q1: How do you find the writing skill at your level?
- Difficult: 60
- Annoying: 15
- Enjoyable: 10

Most of the learners (60), find the writing skill difficult. We have however, been able to notice that (15) of the respondents find it annoying. These are simply speculations; but according to our personal experience in teaching this level and stream, we think that:

- The learners are not enough trained to write regularly;
- There is not an attractive and easy technique or strategy to help learners engage fully and effectively in this skill;
- The topics are not sufficiently adequate and appropriate to the needs and interests of the learners.

Q2: Please, justify your choice
Different arguments have been given to justify the informants' answers. We can therefore list some:
- We are not good at writing because the needed vocabulary to express our ideas about any topic is very restricted;
- Grammar is very difficult to master. We really do not know which tense to use, or which punctuation to insert, or even which function to work on;
- We have plenty of ideas in mind. We could write easily if this were in Arabic or at least in French;
- The topics are annoying. They do not suit our generation. Each year the same topics are put on the table. They are not updated; they are continuously chewed;
- With Internet, we discover, we learn even if the English used is difficult for us. It is a daily refreshed library.

Q3: What do you need as supports to improve your writing skills?
- Extra hours at school: 00
- Read any article/ book in English: 02
- Use technological tools at school: 83

    The choice has been clearly and evidently made. The great majority of the respondents opted for using technological tools to help improve their writing skills. In an era where

technology is omnipresent in all fields, it is obvious that our respondents react this way and express their wish on this alternative. May be because:

- They find these tools fashionable, useful, and part of their daily life. Therefore, introducing them in their learning process is a "must do";

- The data available through these tools are endless and daily updated; a situation which makes of the learners feel at ease when using them;

- These tools offer different opportunities to practice any skills the learners want to, either synchronously or asynchronously.

Section Two: Internet-based Activities and Intercultural language learning.

Q4: What developments can be involved or introduced in EFL learning?

All of the respondents (85), answered: Internet at school.

The collegial answer shows that:

- The learners are conscious about the necessity to implement this technological tool at school and mainly about the facilities and benefits it can provide;

- The learners' desire for a learning process change, to build up some sense of autonomy and self-responsibility starts to emerge;

- The teaching/learning environments are becoming more and more dynamic since learners because learners can carry this process wherever they want to.

Q5: How far are you familiar with internet-based activities?
- Very familiar: 85
- Somehow familiar: 00
- Not familiar at all: 00

Again, the totality (85) of our informants shows their familiarity with these tools. An encouraging position indeed since there will be no challenge in putting this tool into practice at school.

Q6: What do you generally use these tools for?
- Chatting: Yes
- Learning: Yes
- Satisfying one's curiosity about the different world events: Yes

All the respondents (85) have crossed at the three alternatives. This encourages us because the introductory phase of preparing the learners to use these tools and what to use them for is not as difficult as it sounded to be.

Q7: which activities do you want to implement at school using these tools?
- E-blogs/ E-forums/ E-Café: Yes
- E-mails: Yes
- E-pal Café: Yes

To this question, the three suggestions have been ticked to show the respondents' desire to see these activities implemented at school. This also shows that breaking with routine at school can bring positive results.

Q8: If you were given the chance to create "E-pal Café", would you privilege?
- English native speakers: Yes
- Classmates in your school: No
- Classmates in your country: Yes
- English speakers around the world: Yes

Positively surprising, English language attracts the learners' interest. This is, once again, to show their consciousness about the importance this language is taking either on the educational or, any other field scale.

Q9: Which language would you use to correspond with foreign e-pals?
- Arabic: No
- French: Yes
- English: Yes
- Jargon: No

Q10: Justify your answer(s)
Since the majority of the participants opted for French and English, we can stop at this point for a while to explain that the respondents opted for French because in Algeria, most of the population prefers writing and speaking in French rather than in Arabic. As far as English is concerned, the justifications are as follows:
- Write in English in a more or less correct way;
- Learn some new items especially expressions, idioms and alike to help us write in English;
- Learn about the language and how the English people live (culture, traditions…);
- Establish a writing habit in English since it is the language used world widely in different domains especially in business.

Q11: Have you already heard about "Intercultural dimensions in EFL learning"?
- Yes: 00; No: 85;

The total number ignores what the whole matter is about. May be they have not heard about the term; but according to the content of the expression they know a lot since they openly said that they wanted to have foreign e-pals and correspond with them in English because they wanted to satisfy their inquisitiveness as far these pals' culture, and traditions. Moreover, we believe that evidently this topic should be firstly dealt with by teachers, educationalists, linguists, and syllabus designers in order to find out appropriate ways to approach this new variable in EFL teaching/ learning process.

Section Three: Further suggestions

We could have only a few but pertinent answers to this section:

- Modernize schools with technological and new materials,

- Open the boundaries to learners in letters and foreign languages stream to training scholarships in any English speaking country,

- Invite English teachers (natives why not?) in our schools to help us promote the language;

- Give opportunities to our teachers of English to be trained in any English speaking country and get in contact with natives, and

- Open new spaces of specialization in English (English for Specific Purposes) as teaching has become nowadays a saturated field.

13. Recommendations

Since the dimension of the present paper needs more than a few pages and a few questions to be correctly covered and investigated, we cannot but give some recommendations which will hopefully serve as directions to both educationalists and

learners in order to put the suggested technique into action. Moreover, in the light of the different data gathered, standing as learners' needs, we could understand that in addition to observational descriptive methodology, there should be an experimental phase with an eye to validate the tools effectiveness, reliability, and profitability. So much so, and because of shortness of time, we believe that stating some recommendations is only the starting point to enable the target audience reflect critically about the project. Therefore, we modestly recommend and suggest that these revolutionary tools and pedagogical dimensions; apart from their backwards, had better be gradually implemented in the Algerian schools where English is being taught and learnt because:

a. They have a great pedagogical significance;

b. They offer research importance where International partnerships between Algeria and English speaking countries are being established;

c. They forge a synergy which stimulates research creativity and apprenticeship, and

d. They reinforce teachers' and learners' productive potential, contact and confidence.

Conclusion

In the present paper, an attempt has been made to underline the important insights gained through an analysis and interpretation of the target population's needs in regard to the suggestions of introducing and implementing Internet-based activities and Intercultural Dimensions in EFL learning to evolve and reinforce the learners' writing skills in English. Indeed, it is an extensive value to establish effective and beneficial educational and language learning principles. We are

very conscious that the project itself requires more than one year experiential phases since this needs to intensively and extensively research the effects of the different existing Internet-based activities and Intercultural EFL projects in Algeria, exchanging ideas, establishing continuous communications, and draw technological supports and advice for the suggestion. In this sense, an endeavour has to be made to foster awareness of EFL language and Interculturality. Therefore, appropriate technology training and a profound understanding of culture and Interculturality in the realm of education are essential to making this project work.

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Appendix 1: Learners' written productions.

*SPORT

In the word there are many people practice the sport because it is *verry important for you are *anrgetic and fine *physicale.

The *sportman *generaly have a good Weight about 70kg or 80 kg and tall about (1.80m or 1.90m)

The weight and tall change *surhapsse the games do you *pley because there are many games in the sport for *exemple *volly-*Balle-*Bayceklle-*Skin-*Footballe and they *palay in the *staduim or player

So the *medcin must to practice the Sport for you are not ill.

*Therefor I*prefere *practice the sport because I will not *brobleme *physicale after that.

The Algerian education system was, quoted a long time, in the past countries and contributed, to maintain, the feeling on national, *memberchip since 1962, the school attendance is compulsory *For the children From 6 to 16 years, *wich Follow a *cycl know as " *Fandamental" nine years

Algeria has 8 universities, which accommodate 456 358 students in 1998, the university of Algeria, Founded in 1879 offer a teaching in several disciplines, seven of these university of the specialized. Establishments of the higher education were Founded After in dependence. *the arabization of teaching *introducced in 1978was considered to be too brutal by*, considerable *observers.*it *requized; the hasty training of teacher Arabic, speaking, people.

The *finnest *mitad education is *a *learn.