

## Integrating Culture in EFL Classrooms: A Plea for an Integrated Model

Ms. Zakia DJEBBARI

[djeb13@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:djeb13@yahoo.co.uk)

Abu Bekr BELKAID

UNIVERSITY Of Tlemcen – Algeria

### Abstract:

This changing time of globalization has increased the need for cross-cultural communication so that people have access to information all over the world. This growing and extending need leads to growth in the foreign language teaching profession. However, culture teaching has been neglected in foreign language education, resulting students' lack of cultural knowledge which is one of the significant problems that need careful consideration. Thus, based on the assumption that incorporating culture in the foreign language teaching may provide students with insights into the target society which may foster positive attitudes and tolerance vis-à-vis the foreign culture, the present article strives to find out how culture incorporation in language teaching may enhance language teaching. To achieve this, a case study was held at the University of ABOU BEKR BELKAID –Tlemcen, Algeria on first-year EFL students.

**Key-Words:** Language teaching, culture teaching, integration, case study.

### Résumé In French :

L'évolution de la mondialisation a accru la nécessité pour la communication interculturelle afin que les gens aient accès à l'information partout dans le monde. Ces besoins conduisent à la croissance de la profession d'enseignement des langues étrangères. Néanmoins, l'intégration de la culture a été négligée dans l'enseignement des langues étrangères. Basé sur l'hypothèse que l'intégration de la culture dans l'enseignement des langues étrangères peut fournir aux étudiants un aperçu clair de la société ciblée qui peut favoriser des attitudes positives et la tolérance vis-à-vis la culture étrangère, le présent article cherche à trouver comment incorporer la culture dans l'enseignement des langues peut améliorer l'enseignement des langues. Ainsi, une étude de cas a eu lieu à l'Université de Abou Bekr Belkaid-Tlemcen, en Algérie avec les étudiants de première année Anglais.

**Mots-clés :** L'enseignement des langues, enseignement de la culture, l'intégration, étude de cas.

## ملخص بالعربية:

ضرورة التواصل بين الثقافات في زمن العولمة من أهم الطرق من أجل الحصول على المعلومات في جميع أنحاء العالم. هذه الحاجة المتزايدة تؤدي إلى نمو ملحوظ في مهنة تدريس اللغة الأجنبية. ومع ذلك، فقد أهمل تدريس الثقافة في تعليم اللغات الأجنبية، مما أدى إلى نقص الطلاب من المعرفة الثقافية التي هي واحدة من المشاكل الكبيرة التي تحتاج إلى دراسة متأنية. وهكذا، على أساس افتراض أن دمج الثقافة في تدريس اللغة الأجنبية قد توفر للطلاب الرؤى المختلفة في المجتمعات والتي قد تستهدف تعزيز المواقف الإيجابية والتسامح من أجل قبول اختلاف الآخر. لذا، يحاول هذا المقال إيضاح معرفة كيفية دمج الثقافة الإنجليزية عند تعليم اللغة لتعزيز قدرات الطلاب الثقافية. ولتحقيق ذلك، قمنا بدراسة حالة في جامعة أبوبكر بلقايد تلمسان، الجزائر على طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في السنة الأولى.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تدريس اللغة، تدريس والثقافة، التكامل، دراسة الحالة.

## 1. Introduction: Culture Defined

Many researchers acknowledge that learning a foreign language is a requirement to survive in today's world. The English language plays an important role, as it is the lingua franca of the world, and the language that one needs to learn in order to keep up with the latest information technologies in the world. Consequently, it is of great necessity to draw attention to its culture as an aid to motivate its learners. Indeed, the incorporation of culture in EFL classrooms is crucial for effective language learning. Thus, seeing that culture is embedded within every aspect of society, language learning, in Seelye's (1984) words, should not be isolated from the society that uses it.

Although one may find a variety of definitions, it is difficult to find out one valid definition that covers all the aspects of culture. In general, culture has been referred to as "**the ways of people**"; (Lado 1957). Anthropologists define culture as the whole way of life of a group of people. In this context, culture includes all the social practices that bind individuals together and which distinguishes them from other groups. In this sense, Duranti (1997:24) defines 'culture' as:

*Something learned, transmitted from one generation to the next, through human actions, often in the form of face-to-face interaction, and of course, through linguistic communication.*

From another point of view, the relationship between language and culture has been a focus of attention for many years. Linguists, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and others have sought to understand how cultural factors may influence aspects of human behaviours such as language.

Linguists and language teachers have become increasingly aware that a foreign language cannot be taught without the culture of its community. In the same way, Kramsch (1998) believes that the teaching of culture implicitly or explicitly allows the teaching of social interaction, in her view, a foreign language teaching is a foreign culture teaching because language cannot be learned without an understanding of the cultural context where it is used.

Another important connection between language and culture was found by the psychologist Osgood (1957) who maintains that the full meaning of a word for a person is related to an experience he had with that word in the cultural milieu, as a result, it is difficult to establish exact equivalence between words in two different languages, and thus two distinct cultures.

To add a further layer to the complexity of culture incorporation, numerous scholars such as Kramsch (1996), McKay (1996) have tried to find a definition to cultural competence. As it became evident, communicative competence has to be complemented by cultural competence, thus, cultural competence falls in the category of the pragmatic aspect of communicative competence. It could be described as the ability to understand behaviour from the perspective of the members of a culture, and thus behave in a way that would be understood by members of the culture in the intended way.

It, therefore, involves understanding of all aspects of a culture, but particularly the social structure, the values and beliefs of the people, and the way things are assumed to be done. Kramsch (1996:181) described cultural competence as '**To behave in accordance with the social conventions of a given speech community**'. In her part, Risager (1994:224) conceives cultural competence as '**a competence that approaches as much as possible the competence of the native speaker**'.

Foreign language learning is said to be foreign culture learning and in no form, culture needs to be taught implicitly or explicitly in the classroom. Many teachers argued that they cannot teach a foreign language without offering some insights into the foreign culture; therefore, they cannot focus on fostering communicative competence without taking

into account the different views and perspectives of people in their speech community. As believed by Politzer (1951:100-101);

If we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture it operates, we teach meaningless symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning.

The acquisition of cultural knowledge in language learning is defined as intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is the underlying knowledge successful language learners of English acquire through culturally and linguistically integrated English language instruction. Intercultural competence, as part of a broader foreign speaker competence, identifies the ability of a person to behave adequately and in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures (Meyer, 1991). This appropriateness and flexibility imply an awareness of the cultural differences between one's own and the foreign culture. Intercultural competence includes the capacity of establishing one's self identity in the process of cross-cultural mediation, and of helping other people to stabilize their self-identity.

In intercultural foreign language education, the process of foreign language learning engages the learner in the role of a 'comparative ethnographer' (Byram, 1991, p. 19). Entering into a foreign language implies a cognitive modification that has implications for the learner's identity as a social and cultural being, and suggests the need for materials which consider the identity of the learner as an integral factor in developing the ability to function fully in cultural 'third places' (Kramsch, 1993, p. 233-259).

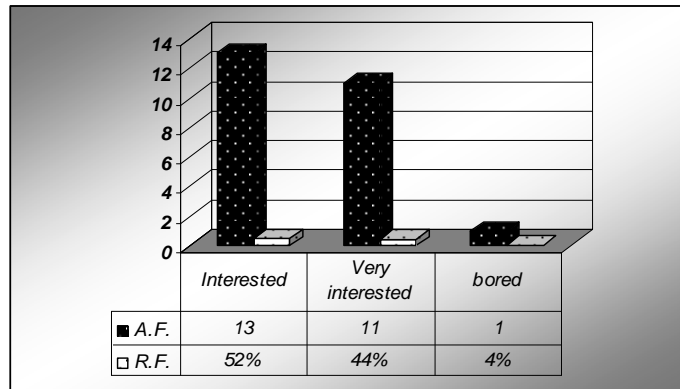
To develop cultural awareness alongside language awareness, materials need to provide more than a superficial acknowledgement of cultural identity and address more thoroughly the kind of cultural adjustment that underlies the experience of learning a foreign language.

In this way, teachers should make culture teaching an integral part of language teaching to develop students' ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various situations, hence, the reasons for implementing culture in the classroom is to enable students to take control of their own learning as well as to achieve autonomy by evaluating and questioning the wider context within which the learning of the target language is embedded. Along these lines, the main goal for foreign culture teaching is to develop students' knowledge about the target culture and to raise their cultural awareness and interest towards the people of the language they are learning and to understand the dynamic nature of the target culture, in other words, to develop real intercultural communication.

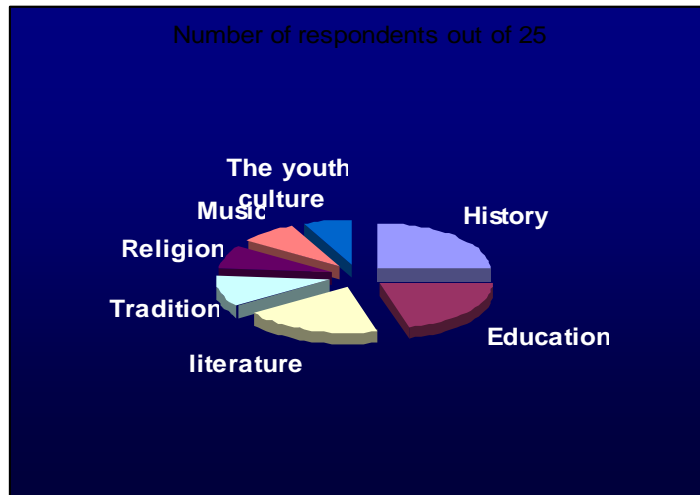
**2. Case Study: Objective and Application**

The researcher attempts to find out the reasons why students lack the basic cultural knowledge of English through a questionnaire administered to first-year students at the University of Abu Bakr Belkaid, the English department. He tries to elicit from the informants the influence of the English culture on their learning and examine their attitudes towards the target culture checking at the same time the students' point of view about the importance of learning culture in learning a foreign language.

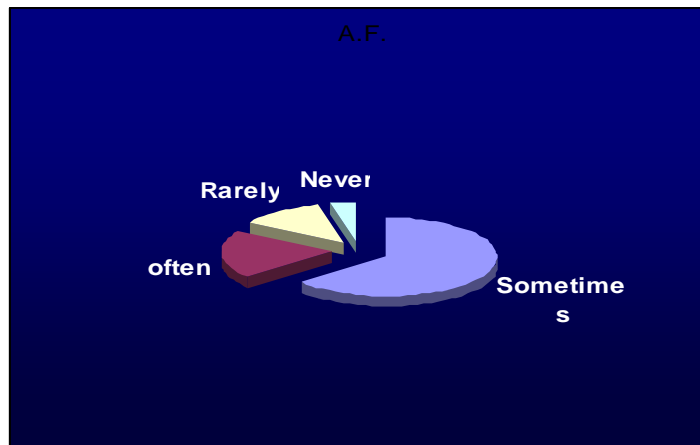
As far as the students' Degree of Interest about the English culture they reported that when introduced to something related to culture they are more motivated, interested and want to learn more the results are shown in the present graph:



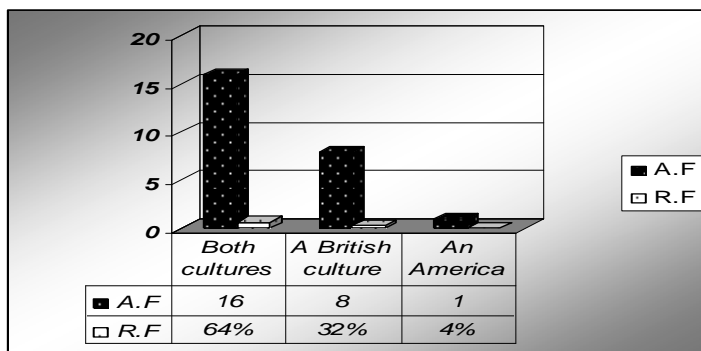
Additionally, their interest was drawn to the study of the target population history being chosen by (72%) of students. Others regarded Education and literature as a key to understand the target culture, whereas religion, tradition, festival, youth culture and music were favoured by a minority of students. The following pie chart demonstrates the result obtained:



Regarding the frequency of exposure to the English culture, most of students (64%) replied that they were sometimes introduced to the target culture, and (20%) of the others answered that they were often introduced to the target culture. Yet, (4%) of students stated that they were never introduced to the culture. The pie chart bellow shows the results achieved:



Learners demonstrate their interest in both cultures (British & American); (32%) prefer the British culture and only (4%) favour the American culture. The following graph sums up the findings:



### 3. Suggestions for an Integrated Model:

Consequently and to make the teaching of English a better experience for both teachers and students, selected activities are chosen to facilitate the teaching of English through culture and to raise students' awareness and interest toward the target culture. Culture could be taught in puns, idioms, and sayings to present students with new vocabulary and culture.

❖ **Puns:** are defined as a humorous substitution of words that are alike in sounds but differ in meaning, they are very common in the English culture.

E.g. On a British street a policeman stops a car. In the car, there is a visitor from another country:

Policeman: (holding up his hand) Stop!  
 Visitor: (in car) What is the matter?  
 Policeman: Why are you driving on the right side of the road?  
 Visitor: Do you want me to drive on the wrong side?  
 Policeman: You are driving on the wrong side.  
 Visitor: But you said I was driving on the right side.  
 Policeman: That is right. You are on the right and that is wrong.  
 Visitor: A strange country! If right is wrong, I am right when I am on the wrong side. So why did you stop me?  
 Policeman: My dear sir, you must keep to the left. The right side is the left.  
 Visitor: It is like a looking glass! I will try to remember. Well I want to go to Bellwood. Will you kindly tell me the way?  
 Policeman: Certainly. At the end of this road turn left.  
 Visitor: Now let me think. Turn left! In England left is right, and right is wrong. Am I right?

Policeman: You will be right if you turn left. But if you turn right you will be wrong.

Visitor: Thank you it is as clear as day light.

(Bessmertnyi 1994:24)

❖ **Idiom sand Sayings:**

Another practical way to incorporate culture in the classroom is by means of idioms and sayings, For example:

- When a friend of mine went to live in USA, he did not feel comfortable there and he did not know English very well, in other word:

HE FELT LIKE A FISH OUT OF WATER.

- Prince Charles is a wealthy person because he was born in a wealthy family, i.e.

HE WAS BORN WITH A SILVER SPOON IN HIS MOUTH.

- Jack got up in the morning in a angry mood, i.e.

HE GOT UP ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE BED.

To reach this, teachers need to have an insight of the culture of his students and the culture of the language they are teaching to avoid stereotypes and misunderstandings. Fortunately, our teachers and students share nearly the same cultural background with differences in some cultural variations, thus, they understand their students' reactions and prejudices.

#### 4. Teachers' Role

Moreover, teachers need to be aware of the socio-cultural environment and background of the target community, they should also know the shortcomings of the target culture and how misunderstanding can be avoided. Thus, every teacher has to be cognisant of special knowledge of culture to be able to teach it to his students. According to Rivers (1981:339):

*[Teachers] will need to acquire specialized knowledge of how cultures are organized, their value systems, their institutions, their interpersonal relationships, their adoption to their commend.*

#### 5. Conclusion

To sum up, cultural information should be presented in a non-judgemental fashion, in a way that teachers do not place a value on the students' native culture and the culture taught in the classroom. Some teachers have found it effective to present students with objects, ideas that are specific to the target culture.



The students need to be introduced to certain clues or background information about these objects to add them to their own cultural repertoire. At this level, students will develop sympathy and appreciation to the target culture.

Seeing that culture is of great significance in terms of raising awareness and changing attitudes towards native speakers and target societies, the work tried to search for some useful ways to incorporate culture in the classroom. At this level, a number of activities have been suggested to keep students more interested and to create positive attitudes, greater awareness and academic success. As it seems to be realized, culture should become a vital component in foreign language teaching and learning, it has a great deal to offer the development of communicative competence and the language four skills.

Accordingly, language teaching goes beyond teaching grammatical rules and vocabulary items. Successful language learning requires language users to be aware of the socio-cultural environment of the language supposed to be learnt to get the meaning across.

### References:

- Bloomfield, L.A. (1970), 'Language and Culture'; in Landmarks of American Language and Linguistics, Unites States Agency of Information. USA (pp.40-48).
- Byram, M. and Fleming, M. (eds) (1998), Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective: Approaches through Drama and Ethnography. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Brooks, N. (1964), Language and Language Learning. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Canal, M. and Swain, M. (1980), Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing. Applied linguistics 1: pp 1-47.
- Chomsky, N. (1965), Aspects of the Theory of Syntax. Cambridge, Mass.:M.I.T. Press.
- Duranti, A. (1997), Linguistic Anthropology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goodenough, W.H. (1957), Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics, In.p.l. Garwin, ed. Report of the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Study. Washington: Georgetown University Press.
- (1981), Culture, Language, and Society. London: The Benjamin / Cummings Publishing Company.
- Henrichsen, L. E. 1998. 'Understanding Culture and Helping Students Understand Culture'. In [http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue3\\_3/7-thanasoulas.html](http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue3_3/7-thanasoulas.html)
- Hinkel, E. (1999), Culture in Second Language Teaching and Learning. Cambridge Applied Linguistics: Cambridge University Press.

- Hymes, D. (1972) 'On Communicative Competence'. In J.B. Pride and Holmes, J. (eds.). *Sociolinguistics*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex. Penguin.
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kramsch, C. (2001). *Language and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kramsch, C., Cain, A., & Murphy-Lejeune, E. (1996). Why should language teachers teach culture? *Language, Culture and Curriculum*.
- Lado, R. (1957), *Linguistics Across Cultures: Applied Linguistics for Language Teachers*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Lessard-Clouston, M. 1997. Towards an Understanding of Culture in L2/FL Education. In Ronko, K.G. *Studies in English*, 25, 131-150 Japan: Kwansei Gakuin University Press.
- Nostrand, H. L. (1974), 'Empathy or Second Culture: Motivation and Techniques' In Jarvis, G.A. (ed.). *Foreign Language Education 6*. Illinois: National Textbook Company.
- Risager, K. (1998), 'Language Teaching and the Process of European Integration'. In Byram, M. and Fleming, M. (eds) 1998, *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective: Approaches through Drama and Ethnography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sapir, E. (1921), *Language and Linguistics an introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [<http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue3-3/7-thanasoulas.htm>]
- Seelye, H. 1984. *Teaching culture: Strategies for inter-cultural communication*. Revised edition. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company.
- Valdes, J. M. (ed.). 1986. *Culture Bound: Bridging the Cultural Gap in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.