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## *Culture Teaching in Foreign Language Education: Theoretical Foundations and Pedagogical Implications*

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### *Abstract*

The current research work focuses on an investigation carried out in the University of El- Oued, Algeria about EFL university teachers' perceptions of their culture teaching practice as mediators of language and culture in the foreign language class. The study's main purpose is to outline the main concepts, principles, and approaches regarding culture in English language teaching. This study focuses on what should be taught about culture in English language teaching. In order to achieve the aims and objectives stated above, a questionnaire targeting twenty English teachers was used as a data gathering tool. A multi-method approach that involved both quantitative and qualitative research methods is adopted in this research work project. Triangulation of sources and methods is also used in order to secure the validity and reliability of the research. The findings of this study serve as a guide in enhancing intercultural competence teaching in foreign language education.

**Key words:** Cultural communication, Cultural understanding, Culture teaching, English language teaching, Intercultural competence.

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of learning foreign languages is to learn to develop communicative competence in the target language, to acquire intercultural competencies, and to explore the customs and traditions of the speech community of the target language. The concept language and culture are highly interrelated to the extent that they are inseparable as language is the means of transmitting cultural messages to others.

In foreign language teaching contexts, culture teaching is central since it is considered the fifth skill side by side to listening, speaking, reading, and writing that should be acquired by foreign language learners. Thus, it is hard to imagine foreign language teaching without paying much attention to the target culture. So, culture should always be present in the teaching process (Byram, 1999).

This study focuses on how to integrate cultural components in EFL classes. It is also concerned with how to equip foreign language students with intercultural competence that allow them to develop their general communicative competencies. The general purpose of the current research paper is to drive both English language teachers' and learners' attention towards the necessity and importance of incorporating cultural content in EFL teaching and learning.

This research work attempts to answer the following two (2) questions:

- (1) What should be taught about culture in English language teaching?
- (2) How can cultural content of the target culture be integrated in English language teaching?

## I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before moving to the practical part of this research work, the concept culture should be defined, relationship between culture and language should be presented, and the strategies of integrating culture in EFL context will be reviewed.

### I.1 Definitions of Culture and its Relationship with Language

There are many definitions given by different scholars to the concept culture. In general, culture refers to society and its way of life. It is defined as a set of beliefs and values, or a cluster of learned behaviors that people shared with others in a particular society, giving a sense of identity. Cultural understanding is thus important because of the call to interact with other individuals from other cultures (Lee, 2006). The definition given in *the New Encyclopedia Britannica* seems to include all the elements that may be components of this term. It states that culture is:

*The integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behavior. Culture thus defined consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art. Rituals, ceremonies, and other related components; and the development of culture depends upon man's capacity to learn and transmit knowledge to succeeding generations. (P. 784)*

Lado (1957: 111) defines culture as "cultures are structured systems of patterned behavior". Lado's definition to culture signaled two key features of culture: that is structured and patterned. Another definition to culture was given by Kramsch (1993: 205) in which he states that "culture is a social construct, the product of self and other

*perceptions*". This definition asserts that culture is not only collective but also individual.

McCarthy and Carter (1994) view culture from a social discourse perspective. According to them, it refers to *"social knowledge and interactive skills which are required, in addition to knowledge of the language system"* (pp. 151 – 152).

Moran (2001: 25 – 26), on his part, sees culture as a social phenomenon. According to him *"a cultural phenomenon involves tangible forms or structures (products) that individual members of the culture (persons) use in various interactions (practices) in specific social circumstances and groups (communities) in ways that reflect their values, attitudes, and beliefs"*.

In brief, the notion of culture is deeply linked to the society, individuals, the interpretation of the self and the other customs, traditions, and beliefs, and the product of a social phenomenon. Each dimension of culture is not exclusive but highly interrelated with the other culture dimensions.

The relationship between language and culture is dynamic. Language is the medium of transmitting cultural content and is an important part of culture. It is the primary vehicle by which a culture transmits its beliefs, values and norms. If there is no language, culture would not be known as culture is the basis and one of the most important attributes of language and exerts great influence on the latter (Fantini, 1995).

Language has a dual character: it is a means of communication and a carrier of culture. One cannot think of language without culture, so is human language without culture. Brown (1994: 165) describes the relationship between language and culture in the following words: *"a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture"*. So, a particular is a mirror of a particular culture.

## **I.2 The Integration of Culture in Foreign Language Teaching**

Language and culture are inseparable. When it comes to the realm of teaching and learning, the interdependence of language learning and culture learning is so evident that one can conclude that language learning is culture learning and vice versa (Hamza, 2018: 798). Some educationists considered culture teaching the fifth language skill that should be paid much attention from both teachers and learners. In this respect, the international role of the English language and globalization are the two main driving forces to teach culture as a fifth language skill, in addition to listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Fantini, 1995).

In foreign language teaching and learning, linguistic transfer refers to the effect of the native language on the learning of the target language. Learners usually use native language patterns or rules in learning the target language that results in inappropriate forms in the target language. As far as culture in foreign language teaching and learning is concerned, language is inextricably bound up with culture. Hence, it is inevitable that the way of thinking and expressing thought influenced by the native culture will be unconsciously transferred to the target language via

cultural transfer during the intercultural communication. As a matter of fact, the difficulty that is encountered by foreign language students is not the linguistic form of grammar and their uses, but the cultural difference between the native language and the target language (Li Sun, 2013).

Making learners aware of the important traits in the target culture aids them realize that there are no such things as superior or inferior and there are differences among people of distinctive cultures. A foreign culture and learners' native culture should be placed together in order for students to understand the foreign culture. Students' interaction with a foreign language text requires them to construct their own meanings rather than having teachers simply transfer information about people and their culture. Thus, non-native learners should have opportunities to make their own meanings and to reflect on both the target culture and their own. Kramsch (1993) refers to this as establishing a "sphere of interculturality". Above all, teachers when teaching culture should always have in mind the necessity of raising students' awareness of their own culture and the target culture in order to cultivate a degree of intellectual objectivity essential in cross-cultural analyses (Hamza, 2018).

When integrating culture in EFL classes, teachers as well as learners should be aware that the entire process involves understanding how to use language to accept differences, to be flexible and tolerant of ways of doing things which might be different to what belongs to teachers' and learners' culture. Teaching culture in ELT should include cultural knowledge of both the native and the target culture, cultural values of both, cultural behavior, that is, the knowledge of daily routines and behavior, and finally, cultural skills via developing and mastering intercultural sensitivity and awareness when using English as the medium of interaction (Cited in Hamza, 2018).

All in all, syllabus designers and EFL teachers are asked to take their students socio cultural background into account when choosing teaching materials and pedagogical approaches for particular teaching contexts to prevent frustration and subsequent failure in language classrooms (McKay, 2003).

### **I.3 Strategies of Integrating Culture in EFL Context**

In foreign languages teaching traditions, teachers usually focused on teaching language points while neglecting or even excluding the importance of culture introduction in language teaching. So, most students store a huge amount of vocabulary and know how to use grammar rules, but they lacked the ability to use the language properly. When such students communicate with native speakers, they may make mistakes in terms of the inappropriateness of the use of some expressions in the target culture. For this reason, teachers should be creative by adopting effective teaching strategies aiming at developing learners' cultural awareness.

Among the promising propositions for teaching culture, is the one introduced by Lessard-Clouston (1997). He claims that cultural awareness is necessary for developing learners' understanding of the dynamic nature of the target and learners' own culture. In this framework, instructors should adopt a systematic and structured approach since when the cultural aspects of language teaching are well planned and developed, this will have a positive effect on learners' mastery of both language communicative skills and the cultural content of the target language. Teachers

should know that cultural learning assessment is a part of learning process and provides important feedback to learners and teachers. Correspondingly, teachers help learners express and respond to their cultural learning experiences; and learners move through the stages of learning cycle building skills, developing cultural behavior, and discovering cultural explanation. The teacher's role in the learning cycle is crucial as it can influence learners' attitude towards culture learning. There are numerous roles teachers have to perform: *"To present and elicit cultural information, coach and model cultural behavior, guide and conduct cultural research and analysis"* (Moran, 2001: 138).

Another very effective technique for integrating culture in ELT is role play and drama. In a role play, students take on the role of another person. Role play is a popular method for communicative use of language where learners are encouraged to use language imaginatively and creatively. As it is based on real life situations, it is always recommended to use authentic aids from English speaking countries.

Byram (1999) on his part urges teachers to start with reflecting on learners' own culture and only later introduce the target culture. The technique for developing intercultural competence supported by Byram is comparative approach which *"should provide a double perspective but not to evaluate to see which is better"* (Byram, 1999: 189). In this strategy, the teacher begins each discussion period with a presentation of one or more items in the target culture that are distinctly different from the students' own culture. Then, the discussion moves on why these differences might cause problems. Culture assimilators, developed by social psychologists for facilitating adaptation to a foreign culture, are used as a brief description of a critical incident of cross-cultural interaction that would probably be misunderstood by the learners. Culture assimilators are supposed to be an effective method to promote understanding of cultural content and emotional empathy (Hamza, 2018: 801 – 802).

Byram and Esarter-Sarries (1991) introduced a promising model for integrating culture in foreign language education. Four elements are included in this method. The four elements are: language learning, language awareness, cultural awareness, and cultural experience. They are presented as a circle of experiences and techniques. Double headed arrows show the mutual support of each quarter with the other two adjacent quarters (Byram and Esarte-Sarries, 1991).

In Byram and Eraste-Sarries method, **language learning** refers to the learning of the foreign language. The focus of foreign language learning is devoted to the language use and its context under the umbrella of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). **Language awareness** presents the opportunity for the learners to analyze and understand the relationship between language and cultural phenomena. This element links students' language skills with the understanding of a foreign culture. It is considered as pragmatic awareness that helps the learners to use the language appropriately in specific situations (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). The third element, **cultural awareness** is non-linguistic dimension of culture. So, cultural awareness raising is an important dimension in culture teaching. Fantini (1995) suggests that developing culture awareness is an important task for foreign language teachers as students' failure in linguistic competence could be due to the lack of culture competence. Finally, **cultural experience** refers to the direct experiences that FL learners have with the target culture either by direct contacts with native speakers of the target language, traveling, or creating similar atmosphere in the

classroom. This model provides a theoretical foundation for the development of intercultural communication competence (ICC).

## II. METHODOLOGY DESIGN

### II.1 Methodology Description

The research methodology adopted in the current study is both quantitative and qualitative. Thus, research is divided into two main paradigms: qualitative and quantitative. The main difference between the two paradigms is said to be in the use of numbers. The quantitative paradigm uses numeric data, the qualitative uses non-numerical data. Quantitative research is defined by Aliaga and Gunderson (2002) as: "explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)" (quoted in Daniel Muijs, 2004, p.1).

Triangulation as a strategy for increasing the validity of evaluation and research findings is adopted in this research work. By definition,

*"Triangulation is a process of verification that increases validity by incorporating several viewpoints and methods. In the social sciences, it refers to the combination of two or more theories, data sources, or methods in one study of a single phenomenon to converge on a single construct, and can be employed in both quantitative and qualitative studies"* (Sabina and Khan, 2012: 156).

### II.2. Sample of the Study

The population of the study are twenty (20) full teachers of English at the University of El-Oued, Algeria. Five are teachers obtaining doctorate degree while fifteen are assistant teachers, magister degree holders. The sample of the study includes five female teachers and fifteen male instructors. The field study was conducted during the academic year 2019/2020 at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Language, University of El-Oued, Algeria. The table (1) below gives details about the sample of the study:

**Table 1:** The sample of the study

Gender	Male	Female	Total
Teachers	15	05	20

### II.3. Data Gathering Tool

In the present study, data is collected by using a teachers' questionnaire that includes ten items or statements and is administered to twenty (20) teachers of English. The central objective of this questionnaire is to investigate the different teaching strategies utilized by English teachers to integrate culture in the overall



teaching of English language. It also aims at identifying whether teachers are aware of the deep relationship between language and culture, and their role as facilitator and mediator of transmitting cultural content to their students. The choice of a particular instrument of data collection depends on the characteristics of the respondents as well as the field situation. Questionnaires are usually designed to gather data from large, diverse, and widely scattered groups of people. Hence, it is a device for securing answers to questions by using a form which the respondent himself/herself fills in. It is either mailed to the respondents or administered to a group of people at the same time by giving them appropriate forms and collecting them later.

### III. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The findings of the study revealed that a great proportion of the population of the study agreed that teachers should pay much attention to cultural content while teaching the language. For instance, 85 % of the respondents believed that culture teaching facilitates acquiring the target language; similarly, the study results demonstrated that 85 % of the targeted population asserted that teachers should have prior cultural knowledge associated with the syllabus axes. In an attempt to perceive teachers' perceptions about the efficient strategies of culture teaching, 70 % of the instructors perceived that teachers should use visual aids to develop learners' intercultural competence.

All in all, the study' results showed that teachers should give similar importance to teaching culture to that of teaching the four language basic skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Besides, the core aim of teaching foreign languages is not solely developing learners communicative competence but also intercultural competence. Furthermore, culture teaching should not be associated with a particular subject as "Language Culture or Civilization" module, but with all English modules. Further details about the findings of the study are demonstrated in (Table.2) below in terms of statistics.

**Table.2:** Teachers' Attitudes and Perceptions towards Teaching Culture to EFL Students.

Item	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
Teachers should drive learners' attention towards cultural aspects in the linguistic content taught.	70 %	30 %	00 %
Teachers should give equal importance to teaching culture similar to that of teaching language basic skills.	55 %	40 %	05 %
Teaching culture facilitates acquiring foreign languages.	85 %	15 %	00 %
Students should be taught the language with culture associated with it.	65 %	25 %	10 %
Teachers should keep in mind the importance of culture and must have prior cultural knowledge associated with the syllabus axes.	85 %	15 %	00 %
Foreign language teachers should be foreign culture instructors, and should have the ability to analyze both the home and the target culture.	55 %	35 %	10 %
Teachers should design language activities focusing on analyzing and identifying the target culture components.	60 %	40 %	00 %

The module "Language Culture and Civilization" is satisfactory to teach foreign culture.	55 %	45 %	00 %
Teachers should use visual aids (films, videos, drama, etc.) to develop learners' intercultural competence.	70 %	25 %	05 %
Teachers should evolve their beliefs so that they will be more compatible with teaching intercultural competence.	60 %	25 %	15 %

#### **IV. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the current research work ends up with a number of recommendations and pedagogical implications that may serve as a roadmap to guide teachers to teach or address cultural issues appropriately as well as effectively. The results are matched with Brown (2007) who provided four guidelines on accounting for cultural issues for classroom teachers.

(1) A student's cultural identity is usually a deeply seated bundle of emotions, so teachers should practice empathy as they relate to their students in cultural matters: behavior patterns, and expectations; expected relationship to authority, family, and peers; ambiguity, tolerance, and openness to new ideas and ways of thinking; students' attitudes toward their own and the second language culture; their view of individualism versus collectivism; linguistic conventions of politeness, formality, and other socio-pragmatic factors.

(2) Teachers should recognize the cultural connotations and nuances of English and the first language of their students. Teachers should capitalize those aspects in their teaching.

(3) Teachers should use the classroom as an opportunity to educate their students about other cultures and help them to see that no one culture is better than another. Teachers should also practice in words and deed their respect for their students' deeply ingrained emotions that stem from the students' cultural schemata.

(4) When cultural differences emerge, teachers should help their students to appreciate and celebrate diversity. Especially in an English as a foreign language context where students in the same class may represent many different cultures, teachers should try to make their classroom a model of openness, tolerance, and respect. (Cited in Tran-Hoang, 2010: 28 - 29)

The study also shares Peterson and Coltrane (2003) viewpoint that culture should be taught without preconceptions; that is, cultural information should be provided in a nonjudgmental fashion that does not place value or judgment on distinctions between the students' culture and the culture being explored in the classroom.

Teachers should also vary the techniques of teaching culture in EFL classes. The use of audiovisual tools is proved to effective in transmitting cultural content to EFL learners. Besides, teachers' should give much importance to cultural content by



providing learners' with activities that enhance their intercultural competence together with other linguistic competencies.

## **CONCLUSION**

Culture teaching and language teaching are inseparable and culture is always embedded and integrated into language learning context. Hence, while teaching English, students should be taught the language with the culture associated with it so that the learners can acquire the target language with cultural background and can communicate effectively in real life situations. The close interaction of language and culture justifies the cultivation of cultural awareness in foreign language teaching as well as challenges the traditional teaching approach centered on the teaching of linguistic knowledge. In this context, teachers should pay much attention to raising learners' cultural awareness when dealing with any linguistic knowledge in terms of the different activities, tasks, and assignments given in the different English subjects.

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