

Integrating the Target Language Culture in the Algerian EFL Classrooms

تضمين المحتوى الثقافي في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في المدارس الجزائرية

✉ Madani Habib

elmadani.mosta@gmail.com

Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret / Algeria

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ABSTRACT:

ملخص البحث

The aim of this paper is to overview the general concepts of culture and language teaching. In particular, it addresses the status of culture teaching in the Algerian EFL classrooms. It attempts to present some recommendations and guidelines for EFL teachers about how to embed cultural aspects in their EFL instruction. More, this study intends to display some methods and techniques that help EFL teachers to consolidate the cultural content of their instruction.

Key words: Language, culture, EFL instruction, teaching culture and language.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استعراض المفاهيم العامة لتدريس الثقافة و اللغة. وعلى وجه الخصوص ، فإن هذا المقال يتناول حالة تعليم ثقافات اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في المدارس الجزائرية. كما يهدف هذا المقال إلى تقديم مقترحات و توصيات و إرشادات إلى مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية حول كيفية تضمين الجوانب الثقافية المرافقة لهذه اللغة في مقرراتهم و دروسهم. بالإضافة لهذا فإن هذا البحث يعرض بعض الأساليب والتقنيات التي تساعد معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية على دمج المحتوى الثقافي في تعليمهم هذه اللغة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة ، الثقافة ، تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية ، تدريس الثقافة واللغة

1. Introduction

Culture and language are strongly interrelated. Indeed, the foreign language instruction cannot be restricted to the linguistic forms and structures or to language skills and areas. Instead, the target language instruction should be supported by the cultural aspects that reflect the norms, the behaviours, and the customs of the native speakers.

Actually, integrating culture in EFL teaching has been the focus of many researchers and educationalists over decades. However, its importance has not been appropriately adopted in Algeria. In fact, most of the Algeria EFL teachers emphasise only the linguistic patterns of the English language such as grammar and vocabulary. Moreover, there are no clear guidelines or recommendations for the Algerian EFL teachers to integrate culture in their EFL instruction.

Needless to say that culture and language are strongly linked. In fact, all customs, beliefs, etiquettes, attitudes, objects, and arts are described and maintained by language. Without language, we would never know about these components of culture. Language is the container of culture. On the other hand, language is figured, influenced, and manipulated by culture.

1. Definitions of Culture

Researchers and scientists have long discussed the concepts and the nature of culture. The dictionaries define culture as the art, customs, lifestyles, beliefs, values, knowledge, ideas, taboos, languages, religions, rituals, ethics, and behaviour of a given society (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1992). In the world, there are different societies with different cultures, and sometimes within the same society we have many cultures. Liu (2013) defines culture as a system of social and public rules and behaviours. This system involves what people believe, the way they interact and act, and the way they live. Still, culture refers to people's attitudes, traditions, and habits which are inherited and passed on through generations.

Some researchers define culture as the amount of knowledge which is shared and agreed upon by the people of a society (Gabriella, 2017). Certainly, culture encompasses the many linguistic, religious, social, behavioural, and historical traits of a group of people. In this regard, Moran views:

Culture is the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social contexts.

(Moran, 2001: 24)

According to Nababan (1974), the term *culture* stemmed from the Latin word *cultura* which means being cultivated. Other researchers view that the word *cultura* refers to the study of civilisation and society. Some scholars distinguish between *Culture* with big C and *culture* with small c. The former refers to literature, art, and music while the latter refers to the customs, lifestyle, and traditions (Halverson, 1985& Lafayette, 2005).

Kramsch (1993) says that culture can be defined as a system of standards for believing, perceiving and evaluating which is shared by a certain community. According to Gurney (2005), culture incorporates the many characteristics of the cognitive aspects and the social interactions, and behavioural ways within a community.

According to Brooks (1968), culture can be seen as formal and deep. As for the formal culture, it refers to the artistic elements of culture such as; theatre, dance, literature, writing, painting, and poetry. The deep culture is a lifelong process which involves the way of eating, speaking, dressing, believing, and living of a certain population.

2. Culture and Language

Language conveys the cultural facts of its speakers. While speaking, people utter facts, ideas, beliefs, events, and point of views. By doing so, they are creating and instilling cultural experience. Still, language is seen as a source of social identification as people can identify themselves and distinguish other peoples through the languages they use. If people

are not allowed to use their language, they feel that their culture and their identity are rejected and oppressed.

Furthermore, language and culture are both dynamic as they progress, move on, and change together; according to Sapir (1921), language does not exist apart from culture. Indeed, the cultural features and characteristics are stored and transmitted throughout time from one generation to another only through language. On the other hand, language cannot be utterly understood if it is separated from its cultural contexts that are essential to give meaning to the words and expressions. In other words, language is the product of culture and the cultural product is embodied and exemplified by language. In fact, The language words, scripts, and utterances reflect the cultural practices, concepts, and perspectives of a certain community as the cultural concepts reflect and influence the meanings of the language elements (Liu, 2013).

Moreover, Culture and language are interactive and interrelated. Indeed, cultural knowledge and concepts are transmitted and conveyed through language. Kramsch (1993) views that language is bound to culture in many complex ways and it is through language that we can conduct our social lives. Definitely, the cultural realities are reflected through communication. In this regard, Pourkalhor, O. & Esfandiari view:

The language people use for every day communication is proved in the culture where the language is shaped by and at the same time shapes the culture. To communicate within a social group means not only to speak and exchange thoughts but also to learn, think and believe in a given way of interacting in a cultural context.

(Pourkalhor, O. & Esfandiari, 2017:24).

Over decades, there has been much interest about integrating culture into language teaching. For example, Byram (1989) called for an integrated discipline of teaching language and culture while Moran (2001) argues that learners' cultural knowledge and awareness lead them to discover and explore not only the target culture but the world cultures. Indeed, FL learning is always culture-bound.

In short, many researchers have argued that when learners are exposed to the target culture, they are more likely to build up an intercultural competence. Topics evolving around economy, civilisation, history, society, and politics would help them enrich their cultural knowledge and make them able to communicate and interact successfully with the native speakers (Moran, 2001).

3. Culture and Language Teaching

Culture and language are inseparable elements in EFL teaching. Unquestionably, when learning a foreign language, EFL learners should be exposed to the culture of the native speakers. Researchers have insisted on integrating culture in language teaching and have recommended including cultural tricks in the curriculum.

In addition, researchers have argued that culture has significant roles in foreign language teaching, therefore; it is inevitably to separate culture from language. In this respect, FL teachers are much more in necessity to enhance their instructional plans and to vary their lessons by involving literary works, short stories, drama, poems, customs, and plays. In this sense, Kramsch (2013:62): says: *“Without language and other symbolic systems, the habits, beliefs, institutions, and monuments that we call culture would be just observable realities, not cultural phenomena”*. In other words, language is the means by which we give sense to the traditions and the customs of the native speakers.

As far as EFL teaching and learning are concerned, the global status the English language has put new demands and challenges on EFL experts and teachers. Indeed, English

has gained much importance as a global language since it is spoken by millions of people and used in many countries as national, second, foreign, official, working, scientific, technical, and educational language. Therefore, some researchers called for the implementation of new language teaching approach which takes into consideration the global status of the English language and encompasses appropriate teaching materials that help learners master this language in order to survive in various intercultural and international contexts (Alptekin, 2002).

When learning a foreign language, learners are exposed to many unfamiliar cultural concepts that accompany this language, therefore; Byram (1997) suggested the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) that takes into account the cultural aspects of the target language teaching. In fact, many researchers have called on focusing on the communicative and the cultural aspects of the foreign language.

According to Nostrand (1975), there are ways to include culture in language teaching: describing the good sides of the target language population, describing the social behaviours, recognising the situations where these social behaviours appear, and explaining all these patterns.

Additionally, researchers have proposed many instructional objectives for culture teaching. For example, Lafayette (1988) set the following objectives for the target culture teaching: learners should be able to recognise the famous geographical and the artistic monuments; know about the historical events; learn about the political, educational, and religious parts; and be aware of the way of eating, dressing, behaving, and greeting.

4. Culture Teaching in the Algerian EFL Classrooms

Since the major aim of FL teaching is to enable learners to use the target language appropriately, it is important to incorporate culture in the FL instruction. Certainly, in order to communicate successfully, learners should develop the basic cultural knowledge of the native speakers.

EFL teachers are required to teach culture along with language since language and culture are inseparable elements. As for the Algerian EFL teachers, most of them do not have the theoretical and the practical knowledge that help them involve the target language culture in their EFL instruction. Besides, they are not appropriately trained and guided to encompass cultural points in their lessons. Indeed, most of them have never been in England or have had a direct contact with a native speaker. Consequently, most of them depend on the textbooks or the internet to prepare the least amount of cultural contents for their learners.

Furthermore, the cultural backgrounds of the Algerian learners pose another challenge for teachers. Undoubtedly, the majority of them cannot attain their instructional objectives and fail to explain and transmit the target language culture to learners due to the divergences between the local and the target culture.

In reality, EFL teachers do not care about the target culture and emphasise only the language areas and skills; grammar; listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, and speaking. They do not have the practical knowledge or the mechanisms that help them teach culture through language. Unfortunately, there are deficiencies and derelictions in the EFL teaching strategies and methods. However, they are required to make efforts to develop cultural knowledge and know about the didactic techniques in order to achieve this purpose.

Academically, there are two broad objectives of teaching English as a foreign language in Algeria: the linguistic objectives and the cultural objectives. As for the linguistic purposes, learners are supposed to acquire the basic knowledge of the English knowledge including grammar, orthography, vocabulary, pronunciation, writing, reading, speaking, and

listening. Concerning the cultural objectives, learners are supposed to learn about the target culture as they are supposed to be exposed to the various contexts of this foreign culture.

5. Recommendations for Integrating Culture in the EFL Instruction

When teaching a foreign language, teachers need to make a balance between the foreign culture and the local culture. In fact, when planning their instruction, they should use authentic materials with a variety of topics that actually reflect the fine culture of the native speakers and neglecting the topics that negatively affect the local culture.

Besides, teachers are required to set a good productive learning atmosphere in which learners can develop positive attitudes towards the English language and culture. More, they are asked to provide their learners with clear understanding of this culture and raise their awareness about it. Indeed, EFL teachers should not provide only the knowledge and the skills of the English language, but also the cultural tools and means that help them use this linguistic knowledge successfully.

Obviously, teaching the target culture should not aim to install new habits in learners, but rather to show them the cultural elements of the target language in order to prepare and help them to successfully communicate in this language. In fact, learners should know about cultural backgrounds of the native speakers.

According to Rivers (1981), foreign language teachers are required to introduce the content and the activities that reveal and highlight the cultural aspects of the native speakers including the norms, the behaviours, and the lifestyle of these people. More, they need to use useful techniques and strategies that help their learners digest and grasp any unfamiliar cultural content.

Surely, when teaching the target language skills, teachers can involve culture. For example, in listening, teachers can use videos or any audio-visual materials that give learners the opportunity to observe and listen to the native speakers. In fact, they can observe behaviours, gestures, and values.

In reading, EFL teachers can use newspapers, magazines, poems, and short stories. Further, they can select useful proverbs, idioms, and expressions used by the native speakers. Still, in speaking sessions, learners can be asked to take roles in plays, dialogues, or interviews and be recommended to imitate the gestures and the behaviours of the native speakers.

Taking into account the socio-cultural context of the local culture, the Algerian educationalists and EFL teachers can select and employ appropriate teaching programmes that do not disregard learners' domestic beliefs and values. Along with the target culture examples and models, it is important to integrate the very fine and famous tenets of the local culture. Certainly, this would alleviate the burdens of the foreign language content and will encourage students to learn the foreign language through familiar topics and help them find and use the linguistic forms and functions of the target language. Likewise, this would push them to get further to learn about the very unfamiliar topics which are included in the target culture.

In the case of the English language, teachers should be trained appropriately in order to be able to set instructional objectives that actually take into account the cultural sides of the curriculum and to select purposeful activities and tasks that link culture to language teaching. Further, experts and educationalists at the national level should refine EFL textbooks and provide teachers with useful guidebooks that help them meet the above mentioned objectives. More importantly, since English is a global language, these manuals and textbooks should reflect the intercultural aspects without neglecting the source culture.

In addition, learners should be encouraged to read, watch, and listen to the target language with a deep understanding of the cultural occurrences that accompany this language. This would help them know about the global community and discover and understand other cultures in the world. More, they should be aware about the fact that being proficient in a foreign language requires gaining its culture. Thus, EFL teachers should introduce a variety of subjects in order to help students learn the target language in multiple ways and in different contexts.

More importantly, the English language curriculum at all levels should incorporate both the linguistic and the cultural part of the target language. In fact, it should include guidelines, techniques, and activities that truly connect language with culture. It should make learners able to communicate successfully in authentic contexts and to interact with other people with different cultures.

The curriculum should determine the most effective methods and approaches that appropriately enhance both learners' linguistic and cultural attainments. Still, it should target the importance of culture with respect to the local culture and should never address the clashes and the disrespectful elements. It should clearly describe the objectives, the skills, the knowledge, and the competencies to be acquired as it should guarantee a logical sequential progress in transmitting the content.

In addition, EFL teachers are required to use authentic materials such as television shows, newspapers, and pictures. Indeed, the carefully selected authentic material would increase learners' motivation and make them see and feel the native speakers and help them better understand the cultural and social traits of these people. Nunan (2004) and many other scholars recommend the use of authentic materials because it develops learners' linguistic and cultural awareness.

More to the point, EFL teachers should not rely heavily on textbooks as they should take into account learners' age, level, and abilities when selecting the teaching materials. Definitely, they should select the appropriate tasks and activities that prepare learners for real-life situations. Indeed, authentic products includes different topics that deal with the different areas of the target culture. Over again, the authentic material, with the help of the teacher, lead learners to understand the meanings and the implications of the communicative styles and the behaviours of the native speakers. Actually, this type of material can be considered as a great source of motivation.

Moreover, EFL teachers are not supposed to make personal judgements about the cultural characteristics of the target population by advocating, criticising, or mocking any aspect. Instead, their role should be more positive and neutral as they should explain the cultural differences and facilitate the task for learners to understand and assimilate the target culture.

Still, learners should be asked to listen and read in the target language extensively in different fields. In the classroom, role plays allow learners to communicate and practice the target language as they are trained to imitate the native speakers' gestures and behaviours and use idioms and proverbs. In this respect, the teacher can introduce some idioms and proverbs, explains their meanings, and asks his/her learners to practice them.

Moreover, Learners can be asked to compare the target culture with their own by discussing, with the help of the teacher, the differences and similarities in behaviours, lifestyle, and art. This activity would make them able to develop their critical thinking and lead them to make their personal assumptions towards the foreign and the local cultures.

Furthermore, learners should be exposed to and read the target language literature because it mirrors the many constituents of the target culture. Indeed, literature reveals the social interactions, the historical events, the emotional sides, the religious traits, and the

political convictions of people. Still, newspapers and magazines are another source for culture teaching as they provide up-to-date information about the native speakers' lives and news.

Once again, in listening, learners can be exposed to authentic media broadcasts. For example, the EFL teacher can select advertisement videos that illustrate the customers' traditions and preferences. This would make them enjoy learning about the foreign culture at many points (Mishan, 2005). Watching videos of social content would make learners observe what people drink and eat, how they behave, how they dress, the way they do the shopping, and how they spend their leisure time. More, songs and folklore represent various convictions and attitudes towards many concerns such as love, poverty, endurance, myths, nationalism, revolutions, and religious and national ceremonies.

In brief, both FL Learners and teachers should be aware of the importance of the cultural sides of the target language because without a full understanding of the target culture, language teaching would be deficient.

6. Conclusion

This paper highlighted the importance of culture in EFL teaching and learning. Indeed, acquiring a set of cultural knowledge is necessary for mastering any foreign language. Culture and language are strongly connected. Certainly, gaining proficiency in a foreign language requires necessarily learning and understanding its culture. Likewise, learners cannot know about any foreign culture without learning its language.

Teaching culture within language has long been of a main concern for researchers, educationalists, and experts. In fact, they have attempted to resolve the intricacies and the complexities of this issue. In this respect, they set methods, approaches and techniques to involve the target culture in the target language instruction.

Apparently, for better foreign language leaning, both EFL teachers and learners should develop an intercultural understanding as they need to know about the specific cultural elements that are reflected in the behaviours and the way of communicating of the target population.

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