

Analysis of Intercultural Practices in the Teaching of French: A Mixed Method Study in Palestinian Universities.

D/ Fouzia Marmash^{*}

Al Istiqlal University Jericho, Palestine,

Fouzia.marmash@pass.ps

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Abstract:

This study investigates the intercultural practices of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) teachers in Palestinian universities. It employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collected through structured questionnaires, which include open-ended and closed questions, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Drawing on the works of Abdallah-Pretceille (1996), Byram (1997), and Kramsch (1998), the study explores teachers' views, knowledge, and implementation of intercultural approaches. The findings reveal significant challenges, including institutional constraints, limited resources, and socio-cultural barriers. However, opportunities for improvement are identified, such as enhancing educational content, providing in-service training, and adopting innovative teaching methods. Recommendations are made to optimize

^{*} Corresponding author.

teaching practices and strengthen intercultural understanding, informed by the frameworks of Paige et al. (2002) and Zarate et al. (2007).

Key words: Interculturality, Teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FFL), Palestinian Universities, Pedagogical Practices, Intercultural Approach, Mixed Method.

1- Introduction :

Interculturality is a critical concept in the teaching of foreign languages, particularly French as a Foreign Language (FFL), as it fosters a deeper understanding of cultural nuances, communication strategies, and global perspectives. In the context of Palestinian universities, integrating intercultural competence into foreign language teaching is both essential and challenging. The diverse cultural backgrounds of students, combined with the socio-political context, make it crucial to explore how interculturality is addressed in language education. French, as a language with rich cultural and historical significance, offers an ideal platform to examine the intersection between language learning and intercultural understanding.

This study focuses on the integration of the intercultural approach into the didactics of French in Palestinian universities. It builds upon the theoretical foundations established by scholars such as Abdallah-Pretceille (1996), Kramsch (1998), Byram (1997), and Zarate et al. (2007), whose works emphasize the role of intercultural competence in language acquisition and the broader educational context. By adopting these frameworks, the study aims to better understand how French teachers in Palestine perceive and incorporate interculturality into their teaching practices.

The main objective of this study is to explore how French teachers in Palestine perceive and implement the intercultural approach in their pedagogical practices. Given the importance of intercultural competence in preparing students for a globalized world, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

Do French teachers in Palestine adopt the intercultural approach in their language lessons?

What is their knowledge and perception of interculturality in language teaching?

How do they practically integrate this approach in a culturally distant context, such as Palestine?

Based on the current challenges in integrating interculturality into teaching practices, we hypothesize that although teachers in Palestine recognize the importance of interculturality, their pedagogical practices may not sufficiently integrate French culture. This is consistent with the findings of Paige et al. (2002), who highlighted that language teaching often lacks adequate cultural immersion despite teachers' awareness of its value.

To assess the knowledge, practices, and perceptions of the intercultural approach among French teachers in Palestine, this study employed a mixed-method approach. Quantitative data were gathered through structured questionnaires distributed via Google Forms in Arabic, targeting French teachers at four universities in the West Bank: An-Najah University, Hebron University, Bethlehem University, and Birzeit University. These universities represent a

range of geographical areas and social categories, providing a comprehensive view of the teaching practices across the region.

The empirical data were analyzed qualitatively through thematic analysis, which allowed for the identification of key intercultural trends and practices. Additionally, descriptive statistics were used to interpret the quantitative data, providing a well-rounded understanding of how the intercultural approach is perceived and implemented.

This study also aims to propose pedagogical recommendations to improve the integration of intercultural competence in French language education at Palestinian universities. The results of this study will inform pedagogical practices and educational policies, contributing to the enhancement of the teaching of French and the promotion of greater intercultural understanding in the Palestinian context.

2. Literature Review:

Interculturality, as defined by Abdallah-Pretceille (1996), is a dynamic process of understanding and dialogue, which transcends simple cultural confrontation. It aims to enhance learners' sensitivity to cultural differences and facilitates better communication. In the context of teaching French as a Foreign Language (FLE), the integration of an intercultural approach is seen as crucial in enriching the learning experience. According to Byram (1997), intercultural competence is a key component of language learning, requiring both curiosity and understanding of other cultures. Similarly, Kramsch (1998) stresses that language acquisition is inextricably linked with cultural learning, where the two are mutually reinforcing.

However, integrating interculturality into FLE in Palestine faces numerous challenges. These are largely driven by socio-political constraints, including occupation and mobility restrictions, which limit opportunities for cultural exchange and impact perceptions of foreign cultures (Al-Haj, 2005). FLE textbooks often focus predominantly on linguistic aspects, leaving little room for the exploration of French culture, which limits students' exposure to real-world cultural contexts (Candelier, 2003). Teacher training programs in Palestine must therefore address not only linguistic skills but also the intercultural dimension, ensuring that educators are prepared to teach cultural as well as linguistic competencies (Goullier, 2010). Furthermore, it is essential to consider how students' cultural perceptions influence their expectations of the language learning process (Kramsch, 1993).

The importance of intercultural skills in language teaching is underscored by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which calls for the development of both language and intercultural competencies. The CEFR advocates for pedagogical methods that incorporate intercultural activities to enhance students' learning experiences (Council of Europe, 2001).

This study aims to address the existing gap in research on interculturality in Palestinian FLE classrooms. It focuses on analyzing the practices and perceptions of French teachers through structured questionnaires and thematic analysis. By investigating these practices, the study aims to offer valuable insights into current pedagogical methods, inform educational policies, and recommend strategies for improving French language teaching in Palestine, with a particular focus on enhancing intercultural competence.

3. Methodology:

This study aims to assess the knowledge, practices, and representations of the intercultural approach among French teachers in Palestine. It uses a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Questionnaires were employed as the primary tool for data collection, providing both closed and open-ended questions. The data collected will be analyzed using both statistical techniques (for the quantitative data) and thematic analysis (for the qualitative data), which will help identify recurring themes in the teachers' intercultural practices and experiences.

3-1- University Selection and Geographical Diversity:

The universities selected for this study represent a variety of geographical areas and social, cultural, political, and economic categories within Palestine. Four universities in the West Bank were chosen: An-Najah University, Hebron University, Bethlehem University, and Birzeit University. These institutions are located in cities such as East Jerusalem, Jericho, Nablus, Hebron, Jenin, Tulkarm, and Bethlehem. The West Bank was chosen over the Gaza Strip, as it provides more opportunities for exchange despite occupation constraints, allowing for a diversity of perspectives on interculturality and French language teaching.

3-2- Empirical Corpus and Analysis of Intercultural Practices:

The empirical corpus for this study consists of the data collected through the questionnaires. These questionnaires were distributed in Arabic via Google Forms, ensuring that teachers could easily understand and respond to the questions. The questionnaire assessed various factors, such as the integration of intercultural competence in FLE, the pedagogical practices of teachers, their cultural knowledge, and the resources available to them for

teaching intercultural topics. The analysis of these responses will allow for a detailed examination of the current intercultural trends in Palestinian universities and will help to identify the main challenges and opportunities in integrating intercultural competence into French language teaching.

3-3 Sampling and Data Collection:

The sample for this study consisted of 12 French language teachers (3 from each university). The teachers were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that they represented a variety of perspectives in terms of experience, academic background, and teaching contexts. The sampling procedure aimed to include teachers from different geographical areas and universities, thus ensuring a broad and diverse representation of French teaching practices in Palestinian universities.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis:

The data collected through the questionnaires will be analyzed using both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The quantitative data, such as frequencies and percentages, will help to identify general trends in the responses, while the qualitative data will be analyzed to uncover recurring themes and insights related to intercultural practices. This dual approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how interculturality is perceived and implemented by French teachers in Palestine.

4. Results:

A. Identity of teachers:

Table 1. Qualifications and Teaching Profiles of Instructors of French as a Foreign Language (FFL).

University	Diplomas	Location / Year	Subject Matter Taught	Level
An-Najah	Master	Grenoble III, France 2003	French language	Year 2 and 3
An-Najah	Doctorate	2000	French language	Year 1 and 2
An-Najah	Doctorate	2000	French language	Years 3 and 4
University of Hebron	Master's degree in French	2000	French language	Years 1 and 3
University of Hebron	Master's degree in French as a Foreign Language (FFL)	2002	French language	Years 2 and 3
University of Hebron	Doctorate in FFL didactics	2006	French language	Years 2, 3 and 4
Birzeit University	Doctorate in FFL didactics	2006	French: Most courses	All levels
Birzeit University	Master's Degree in	Grenoble, France	French language	All levels

	Didactics FFL			
Birzeit University	Master's Degree in FFE Didactics	An-Najah University Palestine	French language	All levels
Bethlehem University	Doctorate in FFL didactics	Montpellier, France	French language	All levels
Bethlehem University	Ph.D. in French Literature	Rouen, France	French language	All levels
Bethlehem University	Master's Degree in French Literature	An-Najah University Palestine	French language	Year 1 and 2

Teachers of French as a foreign language in Palestine generally hold high-level qualifications, including masters and doctoral degrees, obtained from prestigious French universities such as Grenoble III, Montpellier, and Rouen. These degrees, often in French literature or FLE didactics, reflect their strong academic backgrounds.

The diplomas were earned across different locations and times (2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006), showcasing a variety of academic perspectives. This diversity highlights different pedagogical approaches and evolving educational trends, with courses in French literature, FFL didactics, and grammar enriching their teaching skills. However, differences in training

may lead to inconsistencies in integrating the intercultural approach into their teaching in Palestine.

B. Teaching the French language

1.Teaching French for you is...

Table2. Teachers' Perceptions of French Language Teaching.

		Response	
		Number of Responses	Percentage
Teaching French for you is...	To transmit the knowledge and skills from a teacher to a student or learner.	2	18%
	To enable individuals to understand and use the language fluently in various contexts.	1	9%
	Learning listening, reading, and writing skills and discovering French culture.	1	9%
	A pleasure.	1	9 %
	To teach grammar, vocabulary, listening skills, conversation, reading, and writing.	2	18%
	To enable the student to master the four skills.	3	27%
	Communication skills.	2	9%
Total		12	100%

Teachers' perceptions of French language teaching in Palestine emphasize traditional methods, focusing on basic language skills (18%) and technical aspects (18%), with limited integration of intercultural and communicative approaches. While the mastery of the four skills is valued (27%), cultural and intercultural elements are not sufficiently emphasized. Communication skills and the discovery of French culture are acknowledged by the respondents (each 9%), but they are not prioritized in their teaching practices. Abdallah-Pretceille (2006) advocates that interculturality as central to language teaching, but the data highlights teacher's limited emphasis on culture integration in teaching. This finding suggests the need for continuous training to introduce and incorporate cultural elements more thoroughly into teachers' lesson implementation.

2. What skills do you aim for in your courses?

Table 3. Targeted Skills in French Language Courses.

		Reponses	
		Number of Responses	Percentage
What is the targeted skill in your French language courses?	Linguistic skill (vocabulary, (.syntax, phonology, etc	1	10.0%
	Communication skills (oral and written expression, listening and reading (comprehension	6	60.0%
	Cultural competence (knowledge of French	1	10.0%

	language use, customs, and intercultural (understanding		
	All of the above	2	20.0%
Total		10	100.0%

French language teachers in Palestine demonstrate partial awareness of interculturality, with only 10% valuing cultural competence. The majority (60%) focus on communicative skills, often neglecting essential cultural elements. A mere 10% incorporate cultural aspects into their lessons, while 20% adopt a holistic approach, integrating linguistic, communicative, and cultural skills. These findings validate the hypothesis that, despite the recognition of the importance of interculturality, teaching practices predominantly emphasize language and communication. This highlights the need for greater integration of cultural elements to achieve a truly intercultural approach, as advocated by Abdallah-Pretceille (2003).

3. Knowledge of French culture:

Do you think it is useful? For what purpose?

The survey reveals that French language teachers in Palestine perceive significant benefits in integrating French culture into their teaching. The main advantages cited include enhancing both linguistic and cultural understanding (26%), emphasizing the importance of learning the language within its cultural context (16%), and engaging students through cultural exploration (10%). Although teachers recognize the value of an intercultural approach, further investigation is needed to determine whether these principles are effectively implemented in practice or encounter obstacles. Classroom observations and in-depth interviews, guided by frameworks

from Abdallah-Pretceille (2006) and Bennett (2009), are recommended for a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of intercultural teaching practices and the implementation of intercultural principles.

4. How do you teach culture in your classes?

The strategies employed by French language teachers to teach French culture largely rely on traditional approaches, such as using books and documentaries, which each account for 15% of the methods. Videos about France are used by 12% of the teachers, while the Internet and modern electronic platforms are utilized by 9%. Other methods, including expressions and texts, conversations, conferences, artistic activities, French cuisine, documentaries and songs, virtual tours, educational games, research projects, and workshops, are used infrequently, each representing about 3-6% of the approaches.

While teachers acknowledge the importance of integrating French culture, the predominant use of traditional methods and the limited application of immersive activities—such as cooking, art, and games—suggest that current practices do not fully facilitate a comprehensive intercultural experience. The theories of Abdallah-Pretceille (2006) and Byram (2003) highlight that true intercultural integration requires methods that include direct interactions and immersive experiences, which are currently underrepresented in the teaching practices reported in teachers answers.

5. How do you proceed?

In teaching French, Palestinian educators use a variety of strategies. The most prevalent approach involves discovery, analysis, and comparison in Arabic (19%), followed by discussions (14%). Other strategies methods include group work, dialogues, technology, and lectures (9% each), with PowerPoint, reading literary texts, art activities, and cooking used less

frequently (5% each). Despite this diversity, more interactive and immersive strategies are rarely used by teachers. Although teachers recognize the importance of interculturality, they often fall short of fully engaging students with French culture. To improve, it is recommended to adopt more immersive and interactive techniques, aligning with the view of Abdellah Pretceille' (2006) and Byram (2003) emphasizing the need for direct interaction and immersive experiences in intercultural education.

6. with what means?

The study highlights the diverse techniques used by French teachers in Palestinian universities, with films (25%) being the most common, followed by songs (19%), books, and online resources (12% each). While this media introduces French culture, it may present stereotypical views. Less utilized resources like technological media and research projects (6%) limit deeper intercultural interaction. Despite teacher's recognition of the value of the intercultural approach, the methods they use remain insufficient. Drawing on Abdallah-Pretceille (2003) and Byram (1997), the study suggests a need for more immersive, interactive practices to enhance students' understanding of French culture.

5. Results and Discussion:

The findings highlight the predominance of traditional methods in teaching French as a Foreign Language (FLE) in Palestine, primarily focused on grammar and communication, with limited integration of intercultural competencies. Intercultural activities, often superficial, are hindered by the lack of modern resources and interactive tools. Although educators recognize the importance of interculturality, their training remains insufficient for its effective implementation.

To address these limitations, it is essential to revise curricula, provide continuous professional development focused on interculturality, and enhance the use of technology. These changes would bridge linguistic and cultural competencies, offering a more comprehensive and contextually relevant learning experience in a globalized world.

6. Synthesis of Results:

1. Background and Current Practices:

French language teaching in Palestine focuses mainly on grammar and linguistics, with limited emphasis on cultural integration.

2. Practices and Approaches:

Teaching practices largely involve grammar exercises and textual analysis, with few immersive activities, restricting cultural understanding.

3. Lack of Cultural Immersion:

There is a scarcity of immersive experiences, leading to theoretical rather than practical intercultural skills development.

4. Assessment of Intercultural Competencies:

Assessments focus on language skills rather than practical intercultural competencies, resulting in incomplete evaluations.

5. Summary of the Key Findings:

Teachers perceive the need for intercultural integration, but current practices and assessments lack immersive elements and effective cultural evaluation tools.

Implications and Recommendations :

- 1. Reforms Needed:** Enhance cultural integration and teacher training.

2. **Teacher Education:** Offer intercultural training and workshops.
3. **Professional Exchange:** Create networks and online platforms for sharing practices.
4. **Curriculum Enrichment:** Revise curricula to include intercultural activities.
5. **Institutional Support:** Increase funding and foster international collaborations.
6. **Evaluation:** Continuously assess and improve teaching methods.

7. Conclusion:

The study of teaching practices for French as a foreign language in Palestine highlights a growing recognition of the value of intercultural competence in language education. However, the analysis reveals that current pedagogical methods often fall short in fully integrating intercultural learning. Traditional teaching practices, which focus heavily on grammar and textual analysis, limit opportunities for cultural immersion and the understanding of the nuances of French culture. To bridge this gap, it is essential to implement more interactive and immersive approaches, such as incorporating virtual exchanges, practical cultural activities, and revising curricula to incorporate explicit cross-cultural learning objectives. By adopting these strategies, French language classes in Palestine can better equip students with the skills needed to navigate a globalized world and become interculturally competent individuals. These changes would contribute to a more comprehensive and meaningful language learning experience.

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