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The Impact of Cultural Awareness on Foreign Language Learning.

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ABSTRACT

The present research work analyses the impact of cultural awareness on foreign language acquisition. In fact, an important research tradition in foreign language studies has investigated language learning as a form of socialization. From this perspective, the acquisition of linguistic features is a process of taking on the habits and forms of a target culture. In other words, to acquire a language is to acquire a culture. Accordingly, we hypothesize that cultural awareness; open-mindedness and absence of stereotypes represent some important enhancing factors in the foreign language learning process. Within this context, the research investigation has been undertaken with the collaboration of first year Master students of English at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra. The principal objective that we assigned to this work was to demonstrate the utility and significance of those factors in increasing the students' proficiency in the foreign language. At the conclusion of the research work, we have obtained two major outcomes that are respectively the development of positive and tolerant attitudes on the part of the learners in relation to the target culture and, consequently; a better mastery of the foreign language.

Keywords: cultural awareness, socio-cultural manifestations, foreign language proficiency, intercultural tolerance.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays it is largely recognized that the role of foreign language learning- particularly English which can be regarded as a lingua franca in international communication- in the curriculum is a life skill and should be taught as a core subject. The reasons for this are firstly the widespread phenomenon of globalization and, secondly the fact that to operate internationally (whatever the type of interactions or transactions like business, politics, arts, etc.) people find it more practical, time-saving and beneficial to use English as an international language. On the other hand, it is generally assumed that if we learn a language, we also learn the culture but, actually it is not true. The cause is that we can acquire a lot of cultural features, nevertheless, they do not teach us cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness or even how to behave in certain situations.

Accordingly, modern instruction of foreign languages requires not only mastery of the structural components but also proficiency in the socio-cultural norms of the foreign speech community. Hence, the foreign language teaching process considers the teaching of cultural skills to be a significant constituent in addition to the 'traditional' four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Within this context, intercultural awareness has become an expression that figures prominently these days in anything having to do with the teaching/learning of foreign languages.

On a more practical ground, the concept of intercultural awareness has been translated into what is usually known in pedagogical jargon as the fifth language skill. In fact, what the culture skill teaches us is the mind set and techniques to adapt our use of English to learn about things and unique qualities of other cultures. It involves understanding how to use language to accept difference and equally to be flexible and tolerant of ways of cultural behaviours which might be different to ours. Indeed, it is an attitudinal change that is expressed through the use of a foreign language. In sum, intercultural communication should betoken a desire to join in and to share, giving substance to a truly universal dimension to international cultural co-operation in terms of cultural values and aspirations.

2. Strategies of Developing Cultural Awareness

A valuable precursor to the teaching of foreign cultural manifestations such as politeness or apology strategies used in English is the contrastive teaching of cultural norms related to those cultural behaviours in a specific English as a

Foreign Language (EFL) context. This comparative method of teaching is sensitive to how the needs of both cultures (source culture and target culture) should be considered and it also studies factors that can potentially impact on cultural components. In fact, this kind of contrastive analysis has the potential as Byram (1997: 20) notes ‘to turn learners’ attention back on their own practices, beliefs and social identities.’

In an attempt to increase the effectiveness of the cultural contrastive analysis procedure, one can possibly adopt certain important strategies in order to develop intercultural communication competence. First, one should ‘seek commonalities’. With a view to overcome any eventual misunderstanding or even total breakdown of communication; one should focus on participants’ similarities rather than differences. As we gain more knowledge about each other, we may find that despite the visible differences, we share the same traits in a number of ways. Therefore, perceived similarities reduce uncertainty and, hence facilitate intercultural communication.

Second, one should ‘overcome stereotyping and prejudice’. Indeed, one of the most important barriers to intercultural competence is ethnocentrism. The latter is usually based upon some negative conceptions and beliefs about cultural out-group (foreign speech community) members compared to the in-group (native society). One possible solution to the problem is to practise cultural relativism, which encourages us to understand and, eventually, tolerate the behaviour of others from their own cultural perspectives.

Lastly, it is primordial to develop ‘flexibility and openness’. In fact, when we participate in an intercultural interaction, we may not know all the discursive rules (loudness of voice, gestures, distance, information shared and relations) governing the appropriate behaviours in the other culture. Therefore, we must keep an open mind and be aware that our cultural behaviours are not necessarily the only correct or best way of doing things. On the whole, any successful intercultural communication requires huge skill, patience, tolerance and a high level of foreign cultural awareness. (Liu, Volvic&Gallois, 2015, pp 315-316).

2.1 Advantages of Cultural Comparative Analysis

Cultural contrastive analysis can result in many positive outcomes that are able to essentially reduce the ‘hypersensitivity’ of the target culture. Consequently, as it is pointed out by Lingley (2001: 9) the procedure should involve the utmost in terms of sensitivity, acknowledgement of exceptions or singularities

and avoidance of ‘otherization’; eventually students would be able to recognize, appreciate and accept difference. In this manner, students are prepared with the skills ‘to be able to look at their own interaction with others analytically’, therefore, looking with fresh eyes at the acts of communication would probably help learners better understand or even solve the puzzle of verbal cultural behaviours (Holliday, Hyde & Kullman, 2004, p. 2).

The contrastive analysis procedure also focuses on the development of key intercultural communication skills such as self-awareness and cultural sensitivity which can be seen as ends in and of themselves. In fact, a major aim of intercultural communication and language teaching is to help students improve pragmatic ability in English which can be translated into a better linguistic understanding of cultural strategies (e.g. apology or politeness) for actual use in the foreign language. Accordingly, the primary objective of such lessons focus on developing a ‘critical awareness’ (Byram, 1997, p. 35) consisting of recognition of cultural differences, tolerance of other’s values and understanding of cultural relativity.

2.2 Objectives of Cultural Contrastive Teaching Procedure

The principal objectives of the cultural contrastive teaching are mainly concerned with the comparison of the monolingual and multilingual cultural paradigms of these communities. The process is based on the hypothesis that multilingual speech societies offer better opportunities in terms of cultural awareness and, consequently, a higher level of foreign language proficiency. Thus, the first aim is to teach some basic concepts of intercultural communication. Indeed, Gumperz (1982: 65) states that what distinguishes bilinguals or multilinguals from their monolingual neighbours is the juxtaposition of cultural forms. The awareness that their own mode of behaviour is only one of several possible modes, and that there are others with different communicative conventions and standards of evaluation that must be taken into account.

The second objective is to help students move to the high level of acceptance of ethno-relativity in terms of tolerance and open-mindedness in relation to the target culture. The concept of ethno-relativity implies that human societies may share the same basic cultural elements, namely: products (literature, folklore, art, music, artefacts); ideas (beliefs, values, institutions); and behaviours (customs, habits, dress, food, leisure). However, there are numerous discrepancies between these elements in the multiple communities which by no

means imply superiority, better development or moral value, but solely display differences between the cultural manifestations from one society to another (Tomalin&Stempleski, 2009, p. 7).

The third objective is to show how cultural norms can potentially impact intercultural communication. On a large range, the development of intercultural interaction competence in the educational context may have a significant contribution in societal well-being through a policy of multiculturalism, the integration of ethnic minorities and thus by supporting social cohesion. On a narrow scale, language teachers' conceptualization of such aim is the developments in attitudes which are more likely prioritized as aims, ahead of the skills area, which in turn comes ahead of knowledge in order of importance.

The last objective is to build self-awareness skills and heighten awareness of cultural differences. In a practical classroom situation, various activities can be suggested to students, nevertheless, the six most frequent methods that are usually proposed by teachers are listed and ranked in terms of importance as follows: oral teacher input; written information; online information; role plays; task-based activities; and literature and the arts (Oatey& Franklin, 2009, p. 232).

3. Intercultural Approaches to Foreign Language Instruction

There have been many research investigations and analyses in connection with the reflective practice and awareness of the social, cultural, and political nature of language teaching. Within this context, Kramsch (2009) suggests two major approaches with regard to intercultural foreign language teaching. The two approaches were initially proposed by Luke (2005: 16) who is a fervent supporter of language teachers' liberation from the myth of linguistic nationalism and to enable them to be cosmopolitan and transcultural.

The first approach is the Critical/Reflexive Approach which encourages the critical awareness of language use in the foreign language classroom. It should concern elements like live conversations, blog postings, email exchanges, websites, students' autobiographical essays and stories. These aspects should be critically discussed and reflected upon in the foreign language. In fact, there is an increasing demand for greater critical awareness of the international and global dimensions of language teaching (Kramsch, 2009, p.p. 194-195).

The second approach is the Creative/Narrative Approach. Both critical thought and narrative experience disclose the contradictions of social reality, the conflicting positions of the individual and the social, of one language or world

view and the other. However, multilingual subjects can be drawn from the flexibility and versatility afforded by the various languages. In sum, it is essential to indicate that critical thought points to these paradoxes while the narrative/creative experiences reconcile them through new possibilities of greater tolerance and better understanding (Kramsch, 2009, p. 198).

As far as intercultural teaching material is concerned, Cortazzi and Jim (2009: 199-200) propose a useful conception with regard to the roles of textbooks for cultural elements. They list and explain six principal roles, however, in the present situation, it is beneficial to focus on only four significant roles. The first role is that a textbook can be a ‘teacher’ because it contains material that is intended to instruct students directly. The second role is that a textbook can represent a ‘resource’ because it constitutes a set of materials and activities from which the most appropriate or useful items will be chosen. The third role is that a textbook works as a ‘trainer’ as long as it represents for inexperienced or untrained teachers the explanations and guidance, the step-by-step instructions of teacher’s guidebook, can be very useful. The fourth role of a textbook is that it can constitute an ‘ideology’ in the sense that it reflects a worldview or cultural system, a social construction that may be imposed on teachers and students, and that indirectly constructs their view of culture.

Therefore, newly independent countries make efforts to produce their own textbooks, because they may serve different purposes, namely, cultural commodities, a changing political and moral culture, the influential process of cultural transmission. In sum, the ideological level can represent the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the users concerning what textbooks are for and how they should be used.

4. Procedural Steps of Intercultural Teaching

4.1 Lesson

The application of the cultural contrastive analysis in foreign language teaching requires the following up on the part of the teacher of a number of carefully organized activities. The first steps can be displayed in a mini-lecture that may be used as a listening activity in which students use a note-taking print. However, if it is necessary, the teacher could present a brief teacher-fronted introduction to intercultural sensitivity and intercultural contrastive analysis. Within this perspective, the teacher introduces pertinent vocabulary: general vocabulary such as ‘ethnocentric’; ‘ethno-relativity’; ‘self-awareness’; ‘sensitivity’; ‘socio-cultural norms’; ‘intercultural awareness’. Particular

vocabulary in connection with a specific cultural behaviour like ‘politeness strategies’; ‘negative politeness’; ‘positive politeness’.

The following activity may consist of a general discussion of the selected cultural manifestation: how it is presented and how it is performed. Students may be required to present clear examples of how culture impacts the cultural manifestation under scrutiny. It is equally important to debate the language-related aspects of a particular cultural behaviour, especially in the British speech communities. Lastly, the teacher may request students to perform an outdoors activity to be rendered back in the following session. For example, students may be asked to read and discuss particular critical incidents (different or similar to those analysed in the classroom) in small groups and report their findings to the whole class. It should be pointed out that the teacher’s role is as facilitator, eliciting responses from students as they work through their interpretation of the cultural behaviour.

Besides, students can express their opinions and feelings about the possible cultural differences that can probably cause misunderstanding or even breakdown of intercultural communication (Kramsch, 1993). Finally, students may be encouraged to suggest ways or solutions which can alleviate or prevent such problems of misinterpretations that are culturally determined.

4.2 Teachers and Learners

Intercultural foreign language learning requires the application of some practical measures that may improve the instructional process and enhance learners’ foreign language proficiency. Indeed, it is primordial that teachers should benefit from pre-training programmes and in-service support. The objectives that should be assigned are respectively to:

- * Refresh or develop teachers’ competence in the foreign language.
- * Analyse linguistic performance.
- * Develop their knowledge of foreign language countries through courses exchanges and extended study visits if possible.
- * Ameliorate teachers’ competence in the classroom: locally based collaborative activities among specialists, teachers and advisers.

As far as learners are concerned, it is necessary to emancipate the quality of learning through the opportunity to hear and use the foreign language and the

embedded cultural manifestations. A large spectrum of pedagogical activities can be organized such as:

- * Visits abroad, group exchanges (if possible) or individual exchanges with home- stay arrangements.
- * The development of Town-Twinning Schemes.
- * Links between universities and local firms that collaborate (trade, business, etc.) with British companies.
- * Access to publications, un-dubbed broadcast, recordings or films in the English language.

In summary, all intercultural EFL training programmes, in order to strengthen their intercultural perspective, should strive to implement some necessary measures. First, teachers should have a strong background in comparative cultures and/or training in intercultural communication. If it is not the case, in-service training opportunities in intercultural communications should be provided for teachers currently on staff. Second, it is important to integrate intercultural education with language instruction through carefully designed syllabi. The latter should comprise materials which encourage an intercultural opinion. Moreover, the English programmes should develop specific strategies for teaching culture (Valdes, 2001, p. 159). Third, students should be provided with a comprehensive programme of outdoors activities such as excursions, tours, lectures, films, conversation groups that involve native speakers of English, particularly in intercultural manifestations.

On the whole, the acquisition of English across cultures has broader promise and is not restricted to a language specialist. As it is asserted by Kachru (1982: 10), intercultural foreign language learning is 'a symbol of an urge to extend oneself and one's roles beyond the confines of one's culture and language.' The concern in this case is to focus on cultures that exist in English-speaking nations. The varieties and large number of cultural sources have become a requirement of modern foreign language teaching. Indeed, intercultural teaching should make available course-books which should necessarily include content on different countries and peoples with various customs and literary materials. The probable reason is that students would need to communicate not only with native speakers of English but also with other people who use English as an international language. This category of interlocutors implies different native languages and different cultures; consequently, intercultural

competence has become a necessary constituent of English language proficiency (Ur, 2012, p.p. 218-219).

5. Field Work Investigation

The researcher has adopted a descriptive research methodology for two main reasons. First, the limited scope of the present investigation that would be probably in the form of a seminar and/or an article does not allow a lengthy experimental work. Hence, this research can be regarded as a pilot study which is obviously restrained in time and space. Second, this type of research methodology is quite appropriate as long as it uses a semi-structured questionnaire as a research tool. The main objective is to analyse learners' attitudes, degree of motivation, commitment and cross-cultural tolerance with regard to the target language (English) and culture at university level.

The population is the First Year Master students of English Studies at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra. The total number of students enrolled in the Applied Language Studies option is 186 students. Lastly, the sample study is represented by 41 students who have been randomly selected from 4 different groups.

5.1 Students' Questionnaire

5.1.1 Description

The students' questionnaire is semi-structured and it fulfils the requirements of this type of research tools since it comprises close-ended and open-ended questions. Hence, the respondents are alternatively requested to answer Yes/No questions whereas in other cases they are asked to elaborate their answers with respect to some specific questions. The students' semi-structured questionnaire displays three (3) major sections that have been constructed as follows:

Section One: the first section investigates the Respondents' Profile and comprises five (5) questions which deal respectively with the Age, Gender, and Choice of the English language, Students' Proficiency in the foreign language and, finally, their Degree of Mastery of the five language skills.

Section Two: this section is entitled 'Students' Attitude towards Foreign Language Cultural Awareness'. The section incorporates six (6) major questions that inquire into the following issues:

- * The students' opinions about foreign language cultural awareness;
- * The importance of knowing the cultures of English speaking communities;

- * The cultural components that should be given importance;
- * The incorporation of target culture instruction in the English Language Studies curricula (B.A. and M.A.).
- * The students' proficiency in the target culture;
- * The complementarity of the foreign language linguistic and cultural constituents.

Section Three: the third section is denominated 'Cultural Instruction at University Level'. This section also includes six (6) main questions that investigate the following points:

- * The students' points of view about the contrastive/ comparative procedure in cultural instruction;
- * The benefits that can be drawn from studying other cultures (especially English speaking societies) in addition to the target and source cultures;
- * Whether cultural instruction should form an independent course or is it necessary to incorporate it as an important component of other courses such as Oral Expression, Written Expression or Discourse Analysis;
- * The students' preferred cultural classroom activities in terms of interest, motivation, effectiveness and enjoyment;
- * The utility of outdoors culture learning as a major constituent of English language Master Studies. Indeed, some very interesting activities were suggested to the students in order to choose among them;
- * In the final part of this section the students were asked if possibly they could propose some further suggestions or observations.

Lastly, we think it is essential to point out that for a total of seven (7) questions, we were convinced of the necessity to obtain additional information. Therefore, we encouraged the students to propose further explanation, to provide more detailed justifications, or to suggest different choices.

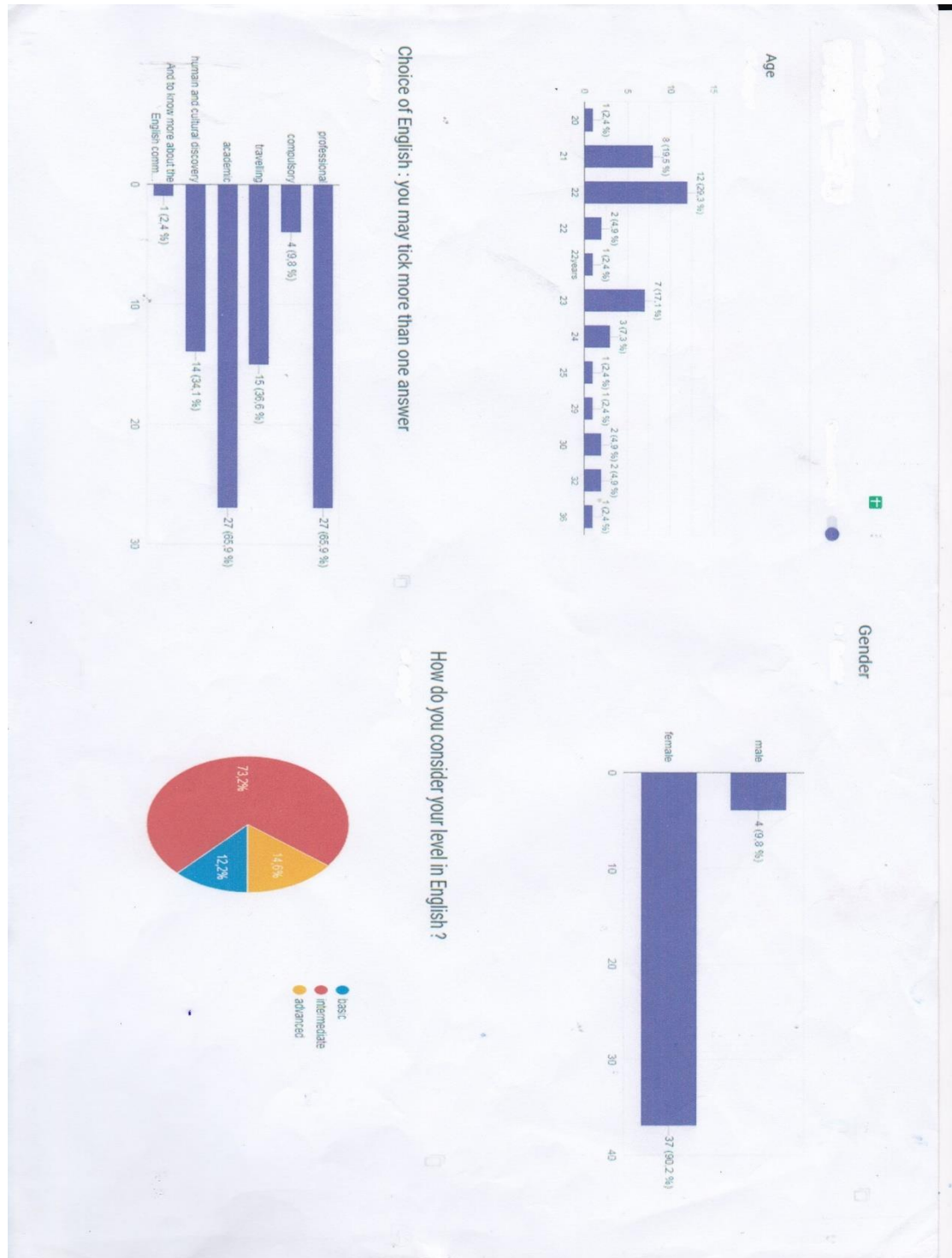
5.1.2 Interpretation and Findings

Section One: Respondents' Profile.

It is generally admitted that the population which is constituted of university students usually displays a relatively similar profile. Therefore, we notice that

the average age of First Year Master students is comprised between 22-23 years which represents 22.3%-17% respectively. Besides, the Algerian higher education level, particularly in foreign languages studies, is dominated by female students. Accordingly, the gender-graph indicates that female students represent 90.2% whereas male students 9.8% of the total number of the respondents.

As far as the motives that have driven the students to enrol in foreign language studies, especially English, we observe that the dominant motives are 'Professional' 65.9% and 'Academic' 65.11%. However, we should take into account that students were allowed to give if they desire more than one motive. The remark which we can put forward is that Master students are really convinced that proficiency in the English language can open new horizons and possibilities of obtaining a job (notably as teachers of English).



Concerning the students' level in English, the majority of learners 73.2% believes that their level is 'Intermediate', whereas 14.6% of students think it is 'Advanced' and, surprisingly 12.2% of students state that it is just 'Basic'. Consequently, despite the relative high level of students in English Studies (Master Degree), they are nevertheless convinced that their mastery of English

is simply 'Intermediate'. We think this result denotes an acute sense of realism and consciousness on the part of the Master students in relationship to their actual proficiency in the foreign language, particularly with regard to aspects which are related to socio-cultural and discursive abilities in the English language.

The last question in this section is quite significant because it enquires into the students' level in the five language skills: speaking, writing, reading, listening and culture. The results display an absolutely prominent and questioning score, indeed, a great number of the Master students are totally convinced that their performance at the culture skill is of a very low level. In fact, 63.4% of students think that they do not master the target culture. In addition, the other element which is logically related to socio-cultural acts of communication is the speaking skill; therefore, 39% of the Master students are not satisfied with their mastery of this skill. As a matter of fact, it is put in the second position after the culture skill in the scale of low-level proficiency in the language skills. These figures incite us to conclude that Master students feel that there is a real need for further and more elaborated instruction of the culture skill in particular.

Section Two: Students' Attitude towards FL Cultural Awareness

The first question in the second section has been posed for a specific objective which is to have insights into the students' perception of foreign language cultural awareness. We have provided the learners with a number of options which represent different perceptions, understanding and aspects of what should be foreign language cultural awareness; namely open-mindedness, cross-cultural knowledge, absence of stereotypes and tolerance, FL linguistic proficiency and/or all options at the same time. The majority of students 51.2% has answered that all options should be taken into consideration, whereas 48.8% of the students perceive FL cultural awareness as a type of knowledge that should be confined within the option of 'Cross-cultural Knowledge'. In accordance with these two striking figures, we can deduce that students are perfectly conscious that FL cultural awareness should not be limited to only one aspect of human acts of communication but it should encompass the socio-cultural and linguistic components of the foreign language.

The second question analyzes the pertinence and benefits of studying other cultures, especially of English speaking communities, along with the source and target cultures. In fact, we aimed to discover the students' points of view or appreciation of the possibility to put into application an 'Intercultural Foreign

Language Procedure' in the teaching/learning process. The result is significant enough to demonstrate the students' deep conviction, because 100% of the learners gave a positive answer (Yes). Besides, we requested the students to provide us with their justifications whatever choice (Yes/No) they would opt for.



The most recurrent justification 51% is that intercultural foreign language teaching represents a guarantee of not only proficiency in the FL but it constitutes an influential factor in terms of cross-cultural tolerance, decrease of stereotypes and, consequently; more appeased relations as well.

The third question is concerned with the two major aspects of culture instruction, the small 'c' or the capital 'C' cultural manifestations. In other words, we wanted to know what could be more beneficial and motivating in teaching the two main aspects of cultural behaviours. The first type is represented by the daily life cultural activities such as food, clothing, etc. The second type is related to complex and more elaborated cultural behaviours like music, literature, architecture, etc. We also proposed a third option that would combine the two levels (capital C and small c) at the same time. The students' reaction was quite clear since 85% of Master students prefer a culture instruction which would consist of a combinatory presentation of both levels of cultural components.

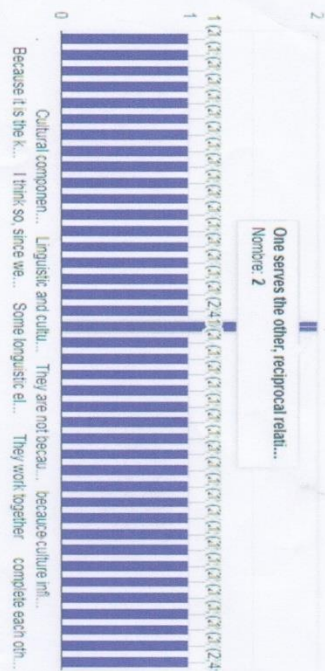
The fourth question is concerned with English language curricula (BA and MA) in relationship to culture instruction. The results are interesting because they serve as indicators of the learners' understanding of what should be the offerings of foreign language culture instruction. Indeed, the students' opinions were divided into two groups: 52.2% believe that culture instruction is not incorporated in their curricula whereas 48.8% think that the teaching of cultural constituents is an integrated part of their programmes. Consequently, it is manifest that students have different perceptions of the contents of culture instruction.

The fifth question deals with the students' level of proficiency in the target culture. A large number of students 75.6% believe that they have reached an average level in foreign culture mastery. Furthermore, we think it is significant to note that 14.8% of First Year Master students are persuaded that their mastery of FL culture is still of a low level.

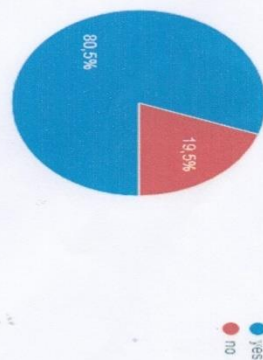
The sixth question is linked to the inter-complementarity of the FL cultural and linguistic components. Obviously, a great majority of Master students 90.2% think that the two elements are certainly complementary. The most repeated justification 41% is that the two parts serve each other, and there exists a relationship of reciprocity because it is impossible to isolate the human language (acts of communication) from its socio-cultural and contextual norms and behaviours.

please, justify

One serves the other, reciprocal relationship.
Nombre: 2

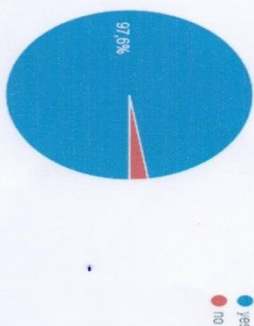
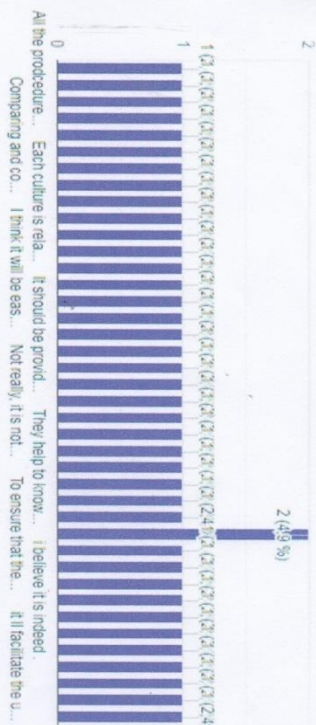


Do you believe that cultural instruction should be provided through a comparative/ contrastive procedure (source culture and target culture)?



Please, elaborate on your answer

In your opinion, would it be more beneficial to you to study other cultures of the world (particularly English speaking communities)?



Section Three: Cultural Instruction at University Level

The first question in this section is linked to the procedure that should be adopted in teaching the FL culture. A large majority of Master students 80.5% is more motivated when the instruction takes the form of a comparative/contrastive analysis of the source and target cultures.

However, the second questions investigates the issue of culture instruction on a wider scale; whether the teaching should take an intercultural dimension- which implies the incorporation of other world cultures especially those that originate from English speaking societies- or should the teaching process be limited to the source and target cultures solely. The results indicate that the students opted for an intercultural perspective and they were very enthusiastic because 97.6% strongly advocated this procedure.

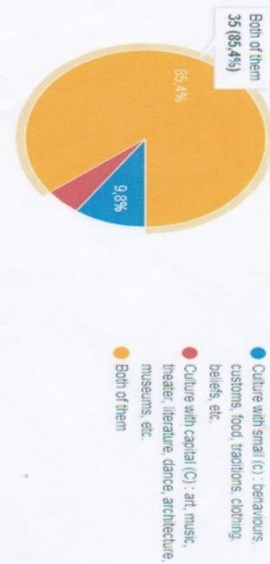
The third question analyses the place of culture instruction in the English language Studies curricula. Master students were asked about the status of culture teaching in terms of independence (a course in itself) or integration into other courses such as Oral Expression, Written Expression or Discourse Analysis. In fact, we have observed that, with regard to the importance the students assign to culture instruction, a great number 56% of learners answered that they would appreciate to take culture teaching as an independent course.

The fourth question deals with the preferred type of classroom activities in culture instruction. The students were provided with seven (7) major activities and they were allowed to choose more than one activity. The scores indicate that Master students tend to favour three (3) principal classroom activities which are respectively: 'Watching and Commenting on Films' 75.6%, 'Chat-Rooms with Native Speakers of English' 65.9% and 'Plays and Role Play' 61%. We believe that the significance of those figures lies in the fact that students prefer to be independent learners who actually and practically participate in the FL teaching/learning process. In such context, they show a high degree of motivation and optimism in acquiring an advanced level of foreign culture proficiency.

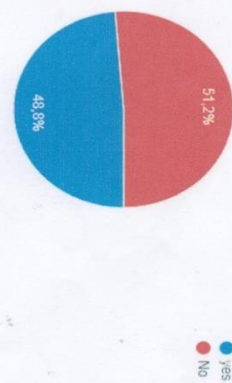
The fifth question is concerned with outdoors foreign culture learning. We think that culture instruction, particularly in the case of advanced level learners like Master students, can take many forms as long as it is confined within a planned and organized framework. Consequently, we have provided the

students with a choice of four (4) essential outdoors activities which are as follows: 'Visits Abroad, Town-Twinning Schemes, Links and Exchanges (Algerian and British students and teachers) and Pedagogical Short Sojourns' (particularly in Great Britain). The outcomes show that Master students chose the 'Links and Exchanges' in the first place 53.7%, then the other activities outdoors were classified in order of importance respectively in this manner: 'Visits Abroad' 26.8%, 'Pedagogical Short Sojourns' 17.1% and, finally 'Town-Twinning Schemes' 2.4%.

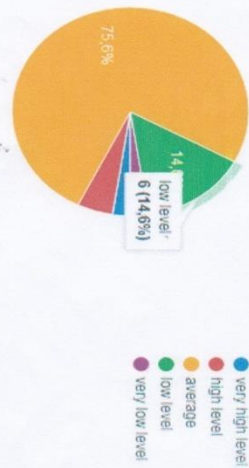
What cultural components do you think should be given importance ?



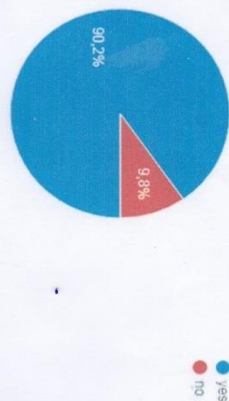
Do your English language curricula (B.A. Master) incorporate target (English) culture instruction ?



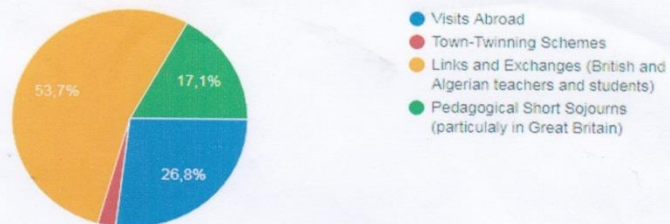
How do you qualify your proficiency in the target culture ?



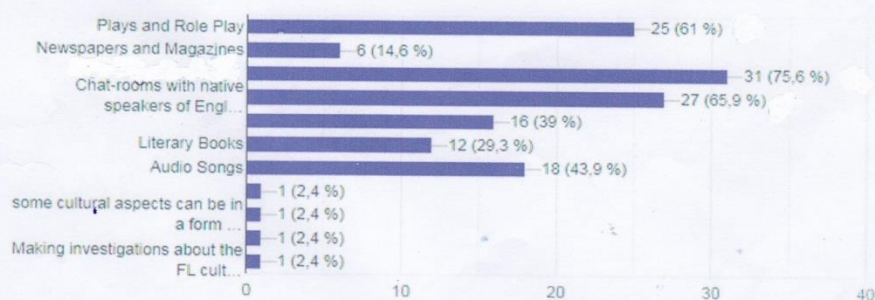
Do you think that FL linguistic and cultural constituents are complementary ?



Do you think that outdoors culture learning should be part of your Master studies (cursus), namely :



What are your preferred cultural classroom activities (you may choose more than one activity) ?



The sixth and last question in this section represents an opportunity which was offered to Master students to provide further suggestions or observations with regard to the issue of Intercultural Awareness in FL Teaching/Learning. We have noticed that fifteen (15 out of 41) students kindly proposed many interesting points. The most recurrent observations are their positive appreciation of the topic in itself, the high degree of motivation that they feel in learning foreign language culture and the necessary adjustments and ameliorations that should be incorporated in the local (University Mohamed Kheider of Biskra, Algeria) culture instruction programmes.

6. Conclusion

In summation, the present study has analysed the theoretical background of intercultural foreign language teaching in addition to a field work investigation with university students which largely contributed in the testing of our hypotheses. The main observation we can put forward is that our research work has demonstrated to a certain extent the importance of emphasizing culture teaching and awareness-raising activities in the foreign language teaching process. Besides, we have tried to prove the necessity to encourage students to deal with cultural differences in way that is characterized by open-mindedness and a high sense of cross-cultural tolerance. Therefore, we strongly advocate the principle that modern foreign language teaching should focus, in equal and balanced proportion, on the instruction of the foreign language structures and functions along with the socio-cultural components of the foreign language community. On the other hand, it would not be axiomatic but rather an evident reality that the ability to understand other cultures is mediated through language. As a consequence, we can advance that the intercultural instruction pedagogy should reaffirm the foreign language teacher in his/her full social and political role.

7. General Recommendations

At the conclusion of the present research work and after the analysis of the results which we have obtained and, in accordance with the Master students needs, wishes and preferences; we propose the following recommendations:

1. It is primordial that foreign culture instruction should constitute an independent course in itself because of the impact of the socio-cultural parameters that characterize all human languages.
2. Intercultural classroom activities particularly those which are based upon a Learner-Centred Approach should be constantly encouraged, because they enhance students' interconnection and, eventually social relations with native speakers of English.
3. The absolute necessity to use ICT means in the teaching/learning process. We take it for granted that some observers would state that such modern tools of FL teaching have become a reality nowadays. However, we would like to point out that this sort of pedagogical means are often rare and, if they exist they are in very small quantities in numerous developing countries. In fact, no one would deny that several Algerian universities also suffer from this problem.
4. We believe that an essential task is still awaited for FL teachers' initiatives with respect to the analysis, evaluation and improvements of the existing culture courses at university level.
5. We are strong advocates of the idea that culture instruction requires competence, experience and sometimes particular skills. Accordingly, we think that In-Service training programmes should be organized with the help of local senior lecturers of culture courses and even second/foreign language instructors on the international level. The aim is certainly the acquisition of modern methods, techniques and experience in culture instruction by novice or inexperienced university foreign language teachers.

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