

Investigating Awareness of the Concept of Culture and Motivation to Learn the Culture of English as a Foreign Language: The Case of EFL Second Year Learners at the Teachers' Training School of Constantine

استكشاف الوعي بمفهوم الثقافة والرغبة في تعلم ثقافة اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية:
طلبة السنة الثانية لغة انجليزية بالمدرسة العليا للأساتذة بقسنطينة نموذجاً

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Abstract:

This article investigates the level of cultural awareness and motivation to learn the culture of the English language by EFL second year learners at the Teachers' Training school of Constantine (ENSC). A questionnaire was administered to a sample of students. The data showed that few students display sufficient awareness of the notion of culture while most of them show a desire and positive attitudes towards studying the English culture especially the big 'C' cultural elements. However, the majority are not sure of their acceptance, understanding, and respect of the different social behaviours of the target culture community, which represent the small 'c' culture.

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Keywords: Big C culture; cultural awareness; English as a Foreign Language; motivation; small c culture .

ملخص:

يهدف هذا المقال إلى تفصي مستوى الوعي بمفهوم الثقافة والرغبة في تعلم ثقافة اللغة الانجليزية لدى طلبة السنة الثانية لغة إنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالمدرسة العليا للأساتذة _ قسنطينة. وقد وزع استبيان على عينة من الطلبة وأظهرت النتائج أن الطلبة لديهم قليل من الوعي بمفهوم الثقافة وحافز قوي ومواقف ايجابية اتجاه تعلم ثقافة اللغة الانجليزية غير أن اهتمامهم يقتصر على الثقافة الاكاديمية دون الثقافة اليومية كما أن الأغلبية ليسوا متأكدين من قبولهم وتفهمهم واحترامهم للسلوكيات الاجتماعية المختلفة لمجتمع هذه الثقافة .

الكلمات المفتاحية: الثقافة الكلية ؛ الوعي الثقافي؛ الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ حافز تعلم الثقافة؛ الثقافة الجزئية.

1. Introduction:

Due to globalization and with the steady increase of communication technology, teaching culture is gaining more importance compared with the past. The aims of foreign language teaching and learning have now expanded to include promoting and fostering the understanding and acceptance of other cultures. It is no longer adequate that language learners merely have a command or a level of competence in a language. They are expected to converse through cultures and beyond borders (Byram, 1997). This can be made possible by knowing others, accepting and respecting their culture while developing awareness .The awareness of cultural otherness is the beginning of learning a foreign language and requires culture and language as a unity.

The inclusion of culture in language teaching is grounded on the assumption that one cannot be explored without the other; they are interrelated (Brooks, 1986; Gao, 2006). Kramsch (1998) states that language is primarily needed to manage our social lives, and it is tightly linked with culture in instances of communication. Starting from the premise that a language is part of a culture and culture is implicit in a language, Brown (1994) purports that the two are closely linked to the extent that any attempt to separate them makes them lose their significance. Similarly, Seelye (1984) propounds that the study of both language and culture cannot be separated. Therefore, it is obvious that language teaching or learning cannot be achieved without the integration of culture and cultural components to achieve the main objective of EFL teaching which is the ability to use the language in the same way its native speakers do.

Practices in language education that have not reflected this interrelationship were criticized. Hence, according to Sellami (2000), to maintain that a language culture is obviously taught while teaching the language is a wrong claim. In response, Pulverness (2003) also notes that approaches which disregard the cultural dimension of language are fundamentally flawed. Another narrow vision is the one that puts culture on an equal footing with the four linguistic skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Such a structural approach draws a line between culture and language and ignores their intrinsic relationship. To this respect, Kramsch (1993) suggests that culture is not just a fifth skill or an aspect of communicative competence; it is the underlying dimension of all one knows and does.

Every culture has its norms for communication which differ from those of another culture. Students need to gain knowledge and understanding of societal and cultural norms and values associated with the culture of the target language. They should be introduced and helped to understand otherness. Cultural awareness teaches them to understand how different cultures may help them in terms of communication or collaboration. In Byram's view (Byram, 1997), foreign language courses should not only teach students the language needed to communicate but also make them encounter another culture and perceive it in its own context. Accordingly, promoting learners' cultural understanding is a requirement that renders the integration of culture in foreign language teaching a necessity.

2. Definition of Culture

Culture is both a ubiquitous and difficult term to define. The result is a multiplicity of definitions among scholars and researchers even within the same field of study. For Graves (1996), culture provides a broader context for how one determines what is valued, appropriate, or even feasible and why. Brown (2007) also suggests that culture includes all the social practices that bind individuals together and which distinguish them from other groups.

Although most anthropologists tend to disagree on what the precise substance of culture is, generally, the term culture may be understood in two different ways. It may refer to the ways social groups represent themselves and others through their works of art, literature, social institutions or artifacts of everyday life. It may also refer to a social group's attitudes and beliefs, ways of thinking, behaving and remembering which are all common to all

members of a speech community. The second type of culture, however, is the most significant as it makes a particular language and culture community function appropriately. According to Banks (2010), what matters most are not the concrete elements of a culture but how the members of a community use and understand them.

2.1 Big C Culture

It is also known as highbrow or objective culture and involves information related to literature, arts, drama, music, civilization and similar aspects. It is a body of factual knowledge shared by all members of the same community. It is that culture which is most visible and could be explicitly learned and of conscious awareness.

2.2 Little c Culture

Little c culture, also termed lowbrow or subjective culture stands for the way of life of people, for the sum of their learned behaviour patterns, and attitudes. This knowledge is related to the ordinary activities of a society, how people behave in their day-to-day lives; in other words, the day-to-day patterns and rituals of a given society. It consists mainly of a set of rules which individuals must know in order to function appropriately within their community. These elements tend to be unconscious and implicitly learned. It is this culture that leads to intercultural communication (Bennett, 1998) and cross-cultural awareness.

3. Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness, as the most relevant term for this paper, is according to Tomalin and Stempleski (2013, p. 5) "sensitivity to the impact of culturally-induced behaviour on language use and communication". It is the ability to understand the personal values, beliefs, and perceptions from people of one's own culture as well as from other cultures (Quappe & Cantatore, 2005). Cultural awareness starts with a basic understanding that people come from various cultures. It is based upon the acknowledgement of the characteristics of a cultural group.

Learners' cultural awareness is their recognition of variations between themselves and people from other countries or other backgrounds, especially differences in attitudes, values and beliefs. They can understand strategic cultural cues or principles to use the language successfully in different cultural contexts and to integrate themselves into different cultural environments while still maintaining their own cultural identity. Cultural awareness helps them to avoid misjudging people from various cultural backgrounds and allows a way for better relations than having a conflict. Learners' ability to develop emotions towards

understanding and appreciating cultural differences should be the starting point for language education. When it is achieved, cultural awareness may foster increased acceptance of diversity, break down barriers between groups, and enhance understanding that includes shared values of dignity and solidarity.

3.1 Levels of Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness has more than one level. Quappe and Cantatore (2005) define the levels of being culturally aware as parochial, ethnocentric, synergistic, and participatory. In the parochial level, one group is only aware of its own cultural norms. People at this stage ignore the impact of cultural differences; they consider their way to be the only way. In the ethnocentric level, people are aware of other cultures but believe their own culture to be superior and do not want to make changes to their own behaviour. Individuals in the synergistic level, however, value differences in cultures and make a conscious effort to understand their own biases and adopt new ways of doing things. At this stage, people realize that cultural differences can lead both to problems and benefits and are willing to use cultural diversity to create new solutions and alternatives. People from various cultural backgrounds come together at the final stage, known as the participatory level, to create a culture of shared meanings that honours each person's contributions and helps them understand other people's cultural behaviours on an instinctual level.

4. Motivation

However simple and easy the word motivation might appear, it is worth noting that there is little agreement with regard to its exact meaning. Literarily, motivation means enthusiasm or drive. It is the driving force that pushes people to do things in order to achieve something. Language teachers, educationalists and psychologists have conceptualized motivation in different ways. Gardner (1985), for example, defines it as the sum of positive attitudes, hard work, and impulse to learn a language.

5. Research Aim and Question

This study aims to explore the level of cultural awareness of EFL second year learners at the teachers' training school of Constantine. It analyses their attitudes towards English culture learning and the extent to which they are open-minded, tolerant, and respectful towards otherness. In order to attain this aim, the following research question is raised: are

second year learners at the teachers' training school of Constantine culturally aware and motivated to learn about the English culture?

6. Research Methodology

A fundamental step in any study is to choose an appropriate research design (Kothari, 2004). In pursuit of the proposed aim and in order to answer the already stated question, a questionnaire was opted for as the most suitable tool for carrying out the present study as it offers a good deal of precision and clarity to the data generated (Mc Donough & Mc Donough, 1997).

The questionnaire was designed and administered to 108 EFL second year learners at the teachers' training school of Constantine after being piloted with a sample of 15 learners from the target population. The aim behind the pilot test was to check both the face and content validity of the instrument used.

The questionnaire comprises twenty items of various question types (close-ended questions, questions that require responding to statements on a five-point Likert scale, and open-ended questions) divided into three sections. The sections address factors including general information about the learners (questions 1-2), the learners' attitudes (questions 3-6), and the participants' areas of interest concerning the topics (questions 7-8). The last section, however, tests the respondents' level of cultural awareness through a set of statements with which they would either agree or disagree (question 12).

7. Interpretation of results

For analyzing the data, percentages (%) were used for all the questions.

7.1 Background Information

Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents are females (98) with a percentage of 90.74 %. while males (10) represent only 9.27 % of the whole population. Table 2 reveals that their age ranges from 18 to 25 years. Most students (49) representing 45.37% of the respondents are 19 years old; 39 learners (36.11%) are 20 years old. The age of the remaining students is between 21 and 23 years with a percentage of 13.88% and 2.78% respectively. Only one student (0.93 %) is 18 and another is 25 years old.

Table 1. Students' Gender

Gender	Male	Female	Total
Subjects	10	98	108
%	9.27	90.74	100

Table 2. Students' Age

Age	18	19	20	21	23	25	Total
Subjects	1	49	39	15	3	1	108
%	0.93	45.37	36.11	13.88	2.78	0.93	100

7.2 Students' Attitudes towards Culture Learning

The analysis of this section from the learners' questionnaire reveals that most subjects; 93 students (86.11%) claimed that they are interested in learning about the English culture. Only a small proportion (15) representing 13.89% of the population said the opposite. Among those who answered the question positively, 18 students (19.35%) considered knowledge of the English language culture a means to communicate effectively with the natives. 12 respondents (12.90%), however, justified their claim by the fact that culture teaching is part of the curriculum. A similar number of the students saw culture as a powerful means to raise their motivation to learn the English language whereas only 8 students (8.60%) viewed culture as a necessary medium to broaden their knowledge. The remaining students (43) with a percentage of 46.23%, on the other hand, chose more than one option to justify their answer. Among those who showed no interest in learning about the English culture, 8 students (53.33%) thought that learning about the target language culture would affect their cultural identity. 5 learners (33.33%) held the view that they are not fascinated with the lifestyle and traditions of the English-speaking people whereas 2 learners (13.33%) justified their position by their interest in the English language only.

When asked to choose the best definition for the term 'culture', most students (80) representing 74.07% of the respondents defined the concept as the totality of customs,

artistic achievements and general civilisation of a country or people. 20 learners (18.52%), however, opted for the totality of a way of life shared by a group of people linked by common and distinctive characteristics, activities, beliefs, patterns of behaviour, day- to- day living patterns, etiquette etc. as the best equivalent for the notion 'culture'. Only 8 informants (7.41%) combined both options as a definition for the term. Indeed, the aim behind this question was to check learners' awareness of the meaning they attribute to the term 'culture', which revolves around both provided choices.

To know about their areas of interest as far as the learning of culture is concerned, the students were asked to choose among the topics of history, literature, music, daily life and routine, beliefs, values, traditions, etc. Most students chose the first three topics (big C cultural elements) with a percentage of 12.90%, 16.13%, and 21.5% respectively. The remaining four options (little 'c' cultural elements) were chosen by 5.38%, 1.07%, 2.15%, and 4.30% of the respondents. The remaining students, however, linked between various topics referring to both little 'c' and big 'C' cultural issues. In the subsequent question, the learners were asked to rate the extent to which the cultural topics they found interesting were helpful for them in communication. The majority of students (71) representing 64.81% of the population claimed that they were helpful, and 29 learners with a percentage of 26.85% opted for 'very helpful'. Only 9 informants (8.33 %), however, said that they were not helpful.

7.3 Cultural Awareness

To find out whether or not the learners had any problems in their attempt to communicate in English, 56 students representing 51.85% of the population answered the question positively. 52 learners (48.14%), however, said the opposite. Among those who had those problems, 12 (21.42%) replied that those matters are of a linguistic nature whereas 44 (78.57%) considered them of a cultural nature.

Moreover, the majority of respondents (94) representing 87.03% of the population confirmed the fact that linguistic competence should be coupled with cultural awareness for successful communication. Only a minority of learners (14) representing 12.96% did not answer the question positively.

To test the learners' level of cultural awareness, they were provided with statements and asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with them by choosing one of the options given. Table 3 indicates that 40 (37.04%) of the students disagreed with the fact that

different cultures have different social norms and practices, and 30 (27.78%) refuted the effect of cultural differences on communication. In addition, 40 (37.04%) and 38 (35.18%) learners were neutral regarding the view that people from different cultures do things in various ways and in response to the significance of being aware of cultural differences when interacting with people from English-speaking countries. Moreover, 38 learners representing (35.18%) of the population showed no openness and sensitivity to cultural differences when speaking with people from English-speaking countries, and 30 of them (27.78%) disagreed with the fact that they often compare and contrast between the target culture and their own culture. Likewise, 32 learners representing 29.63% refuted the fact that they accept and respect different social behaviours from people of diverse cultures. Their reaction was neutral towards understanding but not accepting others' behaviours as well as rejecting those behaviours and feeling discouraged to deal with people from different backgrounds.

Table 3: Students' Level of Cultural Awareness

Items of the questionnaire	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree
I am aware that different cultures have different social norms and practices.	18 (16.66 %)	40 (37.04%)	20 (18.52%)	15 (13.89%)	15 (13.89%)
I recognize that cultural differences can influence communication.	15 (13.89%)	30 (27.78%)	28 (25.92%)	20 (18.52%)	15 (13.89%)
I know that people from different cultures do things in various ways.	25 (23.15%)	30 (27.78%)	40 (37.04%)	10 (9.26%)	3 (2.77%)
I understand the significance of being aware of cultural differences when interacting with people from English-speaking countries.	9 (8.33%)	35 (32.41%)	38 (35.18%)	16 (14.81%)	10 (9.26%)

I am open- minded and sensitive to cultural differences when speaking with people from English-speaking countries.	20 (18.52%)	38 (35.18%)	30 (27.78%)	8 (7.41%)	12 (11.11%)
I often compare and contrast between the target culture and my own culture.	20 (18.52%)	30 (27.78%)	28 (25.92%)	15 (13.89%)	15 (13.89%)
I accept and respect different social behaviours when dealing with people from different backgrounds.	23 (21.30%)	32 (29.63%)	29 (26.85%)	16 (14.81%)	8 (7.41%)
I understand but do not accept different social behaviours when dealing with people from different backgrounds.	8 (7.41%)	16 (14.81%)	30 (27.78%)	29 (26.85%)	25 (23.15%)
I reject different social behaviours and feel discouraged to deal with people from different backgrounds.	8 (7.41%)	10 (9.26%)	31 (28.70%)	29 (26.85%)	30 (27.81%)

8. Results and Discussion

The results generated from the questionnaire show that the target EFL students at ENSC have a positive attitude towards learning the English culture. Studies in the field reveal the leading role of positive attitudes in the progression of learning. In fact, they foster motivation which in turn leads to learning improvement. On the one hand, their positive attitudes were justified by various reasons. Some were attributed to the fact that knowledge of the English language culture is a means to communicate effectively with the natives, to raise their motivation to learn the English language, and to broaden their knowledge. Others, however ,

were justified by the fact that the English culture is part of the curriculum. The few negative attitudes, on the other hand, represent the students' interest in learning the English language, their demotivation to know about the natives' lifestyle and traditions as well as their fear to lose their own cultural identity.

The findings also demonstrate that the learners did not have a clear picture about the definition that best describes the term 'culture'. Learning about 'big C' cultural issues does not render the learners competent in the language. Their knowledge about 'little c' cultural elements is the key to successful communication with the natives. For instance, they must understand how to approach people, show thanks, make requests, and agree or disagree with others in a culturally appropriate manner. They should know that the behaviours and practices that are appropriate in one's speech community may be regarded otherwise by members of the target language speech community.

Their limited view regarding the definition of culture was reflected in their choice of the topics they deemed interesting. Most of the topics chosen by the learners refer to highbrow culture. They, indeed, reflect the surface level of the whole picture of 'culture'. What matters most, however, is knowledge about the hidden rules that govern the behaviours of a given community's members, i.e. knowledge about lowbrow culture.

To shed light on the type of problems the learners might encounter in communication, most of them attributed these barriers to cultural rather than linguistic factors. This shows the importance of integrating cultural issues into the teaching of the English language as well as reflects the students' consciousness regarding the necessity to combine linguistic competence with cultural awareness.

Despite the fact that most students favoured the study of the English language culture besides the language, their responses reveal a low level of cultural awareness. They did not recognize that social norms and practices vary from one culture to another and that these variations may affect communication and the way people do things. In addition, it is noticed that most students reacted neutrally to the significance of being aware of cultural differences in communication and showed low openness and sensitivity to them. Besides, the majority denied the fact that they often compare between their own culture and the target one. They should, however, deal with cultural phenomena and attempt to interpret and to

compare them to those found in their native culture. Their main focus should be to find answers to how, why and what the native speakers do or say and how all these differ from their own ways of thinking, acting and saying things. Indeed, the main goal of education is not to prepare native speakers of English but learners who are able to use the language as a tool of interaction among other languages and cultures. Moreover, most students reacted negatively to accepting and respecting different social behaviours when dealing with people from different backgrounds. They were similarly neutral in their answer to the fact that they understand but do not accept different social behaviours and that they reject different social behaviours and feel discouraged to deal with those people.

9. Conclusion

The main premise of the current study is to investigate the level of cultural awareness and motivation to learn the English culture among EFL second year learners at ENSC. The findings generated by means of a questionnaire assert beyond doubt that most students were motivated and had positive attitudes towards learning the target culture. However, they were interested mostly in big c cultural issues. Additionally, they were unaware and unsure of their opinions towards cultural differences and the impact they have on communication. They did not recognize and understand that all people have different ways of doing things and that these are culture- bound. Moreover, they showed low sensitivity and openness to otherness and reacted either indifferently or negatively to it. Cultural awareness is, indeed, indispensable in foreign language teaching. The cultivation of learners' cultural awareness leads them to think critically and to realize that people are not all the same; both similarities and differences are important, and there are multiple ways to reach the same goal. Henceforth, learners should be exposed to a language of understanding, respect, and tolerance, a language of appreciation for the others' values, customs and beliefs.

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