

Cross-Cultural Awareness for EFL Curricula: Mapping Classroom Based-Activities

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Abstract:

The intertwined connection between language and culture has always been the concern of foreign language teachers and educators in recent decade. Further prominence is given to cross-cultural awareness as a fundamental objective in language curriculum. Thus, the ultimate objective of the present paper is to try to refine the notion of cultural mediation in language teaching curricula and to clarify its place and role in language teaching and learning. It attempts, therefore, at mapping a set of classroom-based activities which, hopefully, may facilitate the teaching/learning process.

Key-words:

Language teaching, cross-cultural Awareness, language teaching curricula, classroom based-activities.

Résumé en Français:

L'intime relation existante entre langue et culture a toujours été une préoccupation majeure de la part des enseignants des langues étrangères, ainsi que des éducateurs dans les décennies précédentes. Un plus grand rôle est attribué à la sensibilisation interculturelle comme objectif fondamental dans les programmes de langues. En conséquence, l'objectif ultime du présent article est d'essayer d'affiner la notion de médiation culturelle dans les programmes d'enseignement des langues, et de clarifier sa place primordiale dans le processus d'enseignement et d'apprentissage. Il tente, donc, à schématiser un ensemble d'activités en classe.

Seeing that society embarks upon the twenty-first century, the world is becoming more and more interconnected. Our global society is, in fact, affected by several decisions made and actions taken. Notwithstanding the world's growing connectedness, our educational systems seem to be still far from reflecting such phenomenon.

The present paper is based on the belief that the overwhelming majority of countries appear to still accentuate nationalistic curricula (Tye, 1999). This may, in part, be attributed to the fact that decision makers seem to focus much on the localized culture. Yet, in this newly emerging digital informational age, cultural awareness represents a key-factor in learning/teaching process considering the assumption that all forms of culture are shaped by global influences.

In this changing time of globalization, we are living in an interconnected society where our generation seems to receive the majority of their "global" education from the media (Hahn, 1998). As a result, it is fairly trying time that global education and cultural awareness is given much more outstanding place in the curricula.

Incorporating culture in the foreign language teaching provides students with insights into the target society which fosters positive attitudes and tolerance vis à vis the foreign culture. However, it has been neglected in foreign language education, resulting students' lack of cultural knowledge which is one of the significant problems that need careful consideration. Before considering cross-cultural awareness, one needs to be aware of the notion of culture. It has been referred to as "**the ways of people**"; (Lado 1957). In this context, culture includes all the social practices that bind individuals together and which distinguishes them from other groups.

Foreign language learning is said to be foreign culture learning and in no form, culture should be taught implicitly or explicitly in the classroom. Many educators (Hinkel (1997); Politzer (1951); Brooks (1975); Nostrand (1978) argue that teachers cannot teach a foreign language without offering some insights into the foreign culture; therefore, they cannot focus on fostering communicative competence without taking into account the different views and perspectives of people in their speech community.

Teachers' experience is based on the belief that culture is vital in language learning, and that language and culture, be it their own or others, are interrelated in many ways. Thus, their ability to describe and discuss the similarities and differences seems to be classified at the top priority.

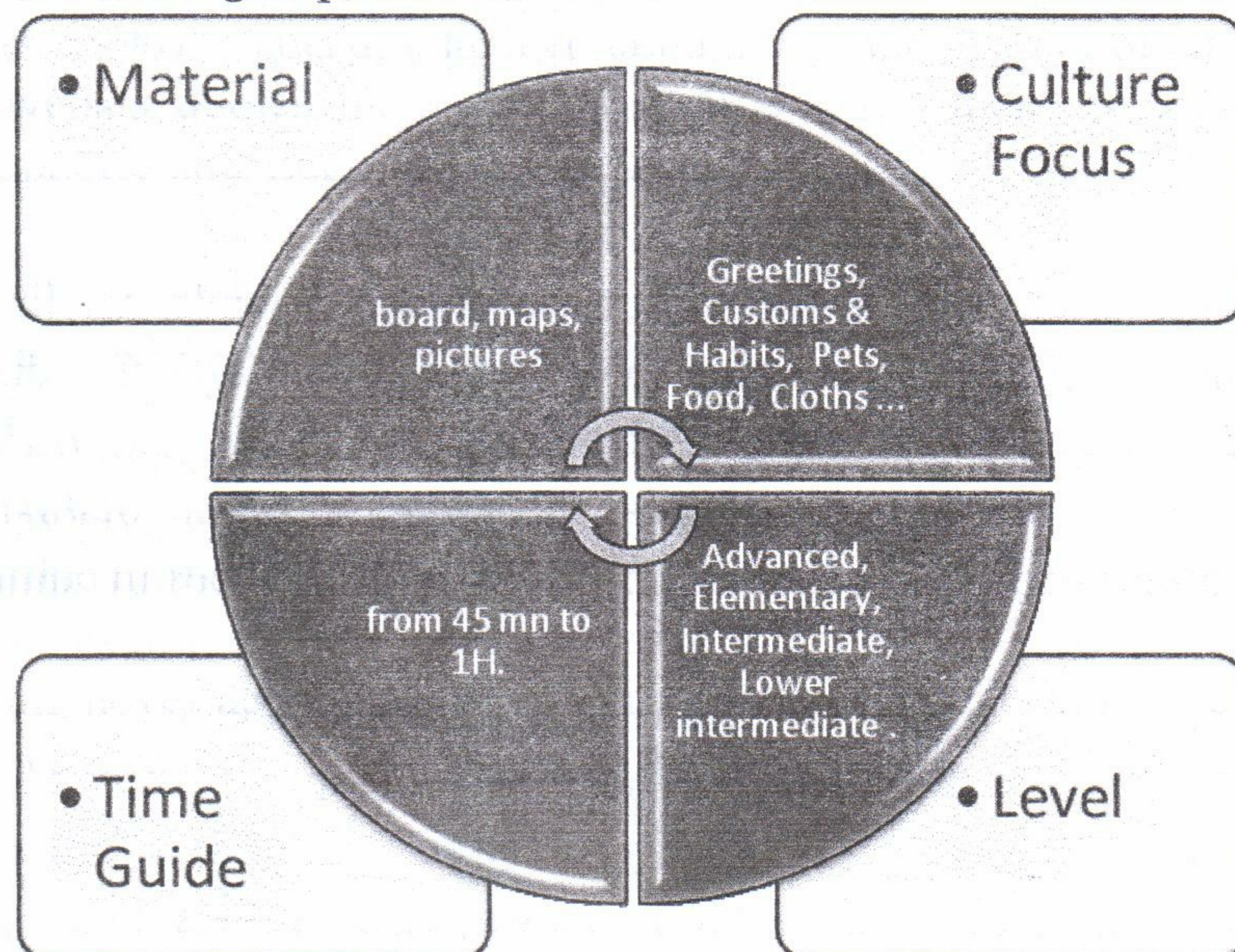
Cross-cultural awareness involves students to carefully explore their learning edge by examining both their cutting edge and their flat-side surrounding cultural competence, i.e., they investigate a culture or person's experience from the perspective of the society being studied (Carano & Berson, 2007). A great number of educators often stress the fact that culturally-aware students seem to have less misinterpretation and more appreciation to the target culture (Holloway 2002; Risinger 2006). By being so, students may gain a certain level of cross-cultural awareness.

As cultures meet, cross and mix, the result is that cultures come out of their isolation, i.e., they are no longer autonomous entities. Hence, our principal aim is to map a set of culturally-loaded activities within the curriculum to achieve a cross-cultural awareness. Our argument is that, traditionally, teachers put an emphasis mainly on linguistic knowledge and language skills. Notwithstanding, they need to take great consideration and prominence to the cultural awareness in language learning. What researcher stress, is to enhance positive attitudes and tolerance vis-à-vis the culture in the target language as well as to have a sensibility to the cultural differences; in addition to this, teachers are required to gradually develop the cultural dimension according to the age and cognitive abilities of the learners. What follow is a proposal and a description of the cultural content criteria:

- Learning about the simple forms of address, greetings, farewells and making proper responses to the general praise from others or request in English-speaking countries;
- Learning about some important festivals, holidays, symbols such as “Big Ben”, and some popular food and drinks;
- Learning about the main entertainment, capitals and diet habits.

Therefore, this article is particularly relevant to teachers and learners who seem to be uneasily aware that culture plays a crucial role in learning a foreign language- both the culture of the new language and the learners’ culture. Yet, teachers often are at loss about how to appropriately incorporate inter-cultural activities in their classrooms. Thus, a number of culturally-loaded activities are introduced within EFL curriculum in a way in which it is hopefully challenging and helpful to learners’ language learning process and thus, progress. A key variation is strongly considered when selecting the activities is to design the activities which encourage *cultural comparison* rather than the imposition of the target language culture of learner.

All the selected activities need very simple, easily accessible materials; they are based on the following steps:



Inasmuch as the first thing an English teacher should ask is: Can this be taught? How can the learners acquire this in the language classroom? Thus, a great number of researchers have tackled these questions in hope to design cross-cultural training to develop of intercultural communicative competence. It is worth mentioning that awareness and knowledge to face emotional challenges are not sufficient, changes in behaviours may lead to greater probability of success in

interaction with culturally different people. the following activities are recommended to develop learners' cross-cultural awareness.

Cultural assimilators

- is a brief description of critical incidents of cross-cultural behaviors that would probably be misunderstood by students.

Cultural capsule

- are brief presentations showing one or more essential differences between cultures, accompanied by visuals that illustrate these and a

Culture clusters

- It is a group of two or more culture capsules. The advantage of culture capsules is important for giving students knowledge and intellectual awareness of several cultural aspects

Cultural simulation games

- to simulate culture shock. i.e., experiencing cultural shock prior to field experience will cushion actual shock by increasing awareness of cross-cultural problems.

Role play

- In role-play activities, students imagine themselves in an intercultural situation outside the classroom, and perform a role-play about a situation within one's own culture or another culture.

This may in all probabilities increase students' understanding of culturally complex issues, which helps develop their *cognitive* and *affective* dimensions. It is "*an effective way of teaching individuals to make culturally appropriate interpretations or attributions of the meaning of other behaviour*" Krasnick (1984:217), it also encourages greater sensitivity to differences in cultures.

To sum up, by giving equal emphasis to learners understanding of other cultures and ability to describe their own, we hope to develop a sharing of knowledge and mutual understanding of each other's cultures. Cultural information should be presented in a non-judgemental fashion, in a way that teachers do not place a value on the students' native culture and the culture taught in the classroom, in this sense, Rivers (1968:271) claims: "**The teacher's approach to culture, whether he be foreigner or native speaker, should not be a chauvincistic one: he must overcome any temptation to try to prove the superiority of one culture over another**". Some teachers have found it effective to present students with objects, ideas that are specific to the target culture. The students need to be introduced to certain clues or background information about these objects to add them to their own cultural repertoire. At this level, students will develop sympathy and appreciation to the target culture.

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