

Integrating Artificial Intelligence in EFL Culture Teaching Classes: Exploring University Teachers' Practices and Challenges

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Abstract: Teaching culture in EFL classes is not a new topic; many studies strongly recommended the integration of culture as an important component in FL curriculum. Besides, they still interested in discovering effective methods to incorporate culture in foreign language classrooms. EFL teaching seeks to promote students' linguistic and cultural awareness to develop their communication skills. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has positively changed EFL education. Thus, this descriptive study aims to investigate teachers' practices towards the application of Artificial Intelligence in EFL classes for teaching culture. The descriptive design, mixed method was applied. A web based questionnaire was administered to the EFL university teachers across the country of Algeria. Both qualitative and quantitative data was obtained from 89 teachers. The finding revealed that the majority of the teachers agreed on the power of AI tools in prompting students' cultural competence.

Keywords:Artificial Intelligence; EFL; Challenges; Culture;Practices; Teachers.

1.INTRODUCTION

Implementing culture in EFL classes is not a new trend or topic to discuss. It has been highly recommended that culture and foreign language teaching classes be implemented. Accordingly, teachers must be fully conscious of the prominence of teaching culture in developing their students' cultural knowledge. Additionally, the crucial impact of culture on foreign language teaching should be given more importance when adapting FL teaching programs. Culture is everything and everywhere. It affects all forms of communication. Cultural distinctions may

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appear in language, modes of communication, informal signals, societal standards, and learning styles. Additionally, it has become vital to go beyond conventional study and focus on linguistic components of students' language learning by bringing culture into the classroom and unearthing language learners' experiences in this new digital setting.

Teaching culture is an essential component of foreign language education. One must grasp the culture in order to comprehend the language. For the last 200 years, scholars have focused on the profound relationship between language and culture. Byram (1989) shortened the relationship by calling "the language teachers as teachers of culture." Language and culture are interconnected, with language as an essential and invisible component of any culture. Lado (1964) enumerated the objectives of acquiring a foreign language, contending that educators must comprehend the target language. They ought to concentrate on both linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding. Lado also asserted that the primary goals of acquiring a foreign language include the capacity to utilize it, comprehending its meanings and connotations within the context of the foreign culture, and the proficiency to interpret both spoken and written forms regarding their significant ideas and accomplishments.

Therefore, foreign language learners should concentrate on acquiring grammar and vocabulary and understanding the associated/ target culture to utilize the language successfully in its proper and appropriate context. For instance, certain words possess meanings that vary between cultures; thus, learners must understand the foreign culture to comprehend the meanings of these words and utilize them effectively. Teachers should give the same time, interest, and support to develop students' cultural competence as they gave to their linguistic competence. Consequently, numerous researchers asserted that foreign language instruction should be complemented by cultural teaching (Çakir, 2006; Chen & Wang, 2016; Pishghadam et al., 2017). Teaching culture seeks to enhance intercultural communication and foster a deeper understanding of the target culture.

Nevertheless, blending culture into foreign language teaching is not taken seriously (Pishghadam et al., 2017). Many issues and challenges may arise when integrating culture into English teaching classes. Taşdemir and Gürbüz (2024) addressed a number of issues that constrain fostering students' cultural understanding in EFL, such as the "lack of cultural knowledge" of the target language. EFL teachers are also considered foreign culture learners as they belong to the same culture as their students. Another challenge is the noticeable "shortage of time" teachers express dissatisfaction over the number of instructional hours

allocated for teaching culture at the university level. Also, the availability of materials and choosing the proper and appropriate ones are important. The precise delivery of cultural material is as essential as linguistic information, as cultural knowledge acquired by students is often, unavoidable, contextually prejudiced, and misinterpreted. The educators indicated that they have not received training on managing cultural content. However, it is difficult to address topics related to religion, taboo, and culturally sensitive topics, in addition to all mentioned points and issues. Another significant issue is that EFL curriculum designers and instructors still negate the crucial importance of cultural teaching. Henceforth, EFL students lack communicative competence. So, they fail to use the foreign language in a more natural and appropriate context. Similarly, this can only occur via successful instruction in which we apply sophisticated educational theory and achieve our aim of teaching English culture with the appropriate use of new educational technologies. The major purpose of using digital materials in language acquisition is to inspire and excite learners to take part in learning about English culture.

On the other hand, Artificial intelligence delivers several benefits to teaching English in foreign language classes (Manns, 2017; Gao, 2021; Sumakul et al., 2022). It offers a new perspective that could help teachers overcome their obstacles in teaching foreign languages and cultures. Ermağan (2022) observed that AI facilitates the making of customized educational subjects and situations that enhance the learning experience for learners. Avgousti (2018) found that online learning platforms provide extraordinary chances for learners to develop and enhance their intercultural learning as they become more familiar with their target cultures. Levy (2009) stated that teachers may use websites to present cultural information more easily, facilitating the task and reducing culture shock since the information is presented from a technological device, not someone who shares the same culture. Accordingly, the traditional way of teaching may involve an absence of appropriate tactics and explicit objectives that would assist in establishing a framework for structuring instruction. Technology makes culturally authentic materials such as films and podcasts based on works of literature relevant both within and outside the classroom, allowing educators and learners to explore extra dimensions of these texts. Furthermore, the accessibility of modern tools has streamlined the process for educators and learners to acquire genuine cultural resources with less effort. Genuine resources can also stimulate and encourage students to engage with the target culture, particularly artistic and technologically advanced ones.

AI technologies are anticipated to become more widespread across all industries, especially in educational disciplines around the globe. Additionally, the main objective of using AI in education is to provide customized experiences that support individual work and students' autonomy, keeping in mind the progress they have made in their education, preferences, and particular needs and outcomes. Implementing AI tools in EFL classes is brand new. Daweli & Mahyoub (2024) explores the role of AI tools in developing students' reading skills in EFL classes. The results revealed the students' positive perceptions towards AI implementation as they helped them develop their reading skills through customized platforms. The researchers recommend the use of AI in their classes to enhance students' motivation and autonomy.

Nouari et al. (2023) experimented with investigating the impact of AI Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) on students' creative writing skills in undergraduate literature students in Algeria. The findings showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in terms of creative writing. Thus, the researchers suggested the implementation of the AI GTP as a supportive tool to stimulate students' creativity. However, no scientific attempt has been made to investigate teachers' practices towards using artificial intelligence tools for teaching culture outcomes in EFL classes, particularly at the Algerian university level. This study tentatively explores teachers' practices and challenges in teaching culture in this digital era through artificial intelligence. Consequently, this study aimed to explore the following questions:

- To what extent do teachers use Artificial intelligence aids/ assistants to teach culture in EFL classes?
- How do teachers employ Artificial intelligence aids/ assistants to teach culture in EFL classes?

2. Literature Review

2.1 AI in Educational Setting

The quick changes in the world and the intensive use of technology have alerted people to their lifestyles; they have also impacted how we communicate, work, and study. Innovations appear daily, making our life activities easier and more practical. Moreover, as we live in this digital era, students are now interested in something other than the traditional way of presenting information, as they spend most of their lifetime using different advanced technological machines. The necessity of educational reform is in its ability to enhance teacher effectiveness, promote student engagement, and provide a modern educational framework that realizes the full potential of every student. Integrating educational technology and

intelligence-advanced tools into the curriculum of educational systems is developing teaching and learning strategies designed for individual learners' conditions or behaviors within the context of a new educational system.

The phrase artificial intelligence, or AI for short, has emerged more recently as a technological advancement. It is beginning to garner attention as a tool to mimic human behavior. As artificial intelligence has advanced, it has also impacted educational institutions. With education aids like bots, artificial intelligence (AI) technologies enable human learning. In order to increase the quality of education, the educational community must respond to technological advancements, particularly those related to information and communication technologies. AI can be used to deliver the digital learning materials that are now being developed. It is now possible to provide thicker textbooks that are more concise. The concept of artificial intelligence (AI) is described as machine platforms engineered to associate with the environment using visible and oral senses and acknowledgments.

Contemporary studies introduce *artificial intelligence* as a field of computing discipline that enables software to replicate how humans act to enhance performance in technological developments and research. (Moumita & Thirugnanam, 2021). Artificial intelligence is simply the intelligence demonstrated by machines in which they can understand, evaluate, make decisions, learn, perform projects, and interact with others. Humans employ them to perform processes or activities considered tedious or beyond human capacity. The rapid advancement of AI, especially for educational needs and benefits, has initiated what we can call a contemporary "renaissance" (Tan & Lim, 2018, p.1), prompting discussions over the potential effects of AI breakthroughs on the field of education and future educational policies (Gentile et al., 2023).

Researchers specializing in AI have documented substantial progress during the last few decades. The increase in these products that provide "intelligent services" has been significant. These products exhibit human-like behavior and reasoning capabilities, accomplished by using techniques including traditional device learning and contemporary deep learning (Hwang et al., 2020). AI technology, particularly in language learning, offers a progressive method for improving the quality of education and knowledge acquisition for educators and students in academic environments. The concept of AI involves the creation of intelligent machines by humans implemented via computer programs.

Artificial intelligence in foreign language teaching contexts usually offers learners highly customized support, a fundamental aspect of personalized education and a principal requirement of contemporary pedagogy. Teachers

cannot consistently evaluate every student's work, identify their specific learning requirements, modify instructional materials accordingly, and deliver substantial input within a few seconds in a class of thirty or more students. Teaching language through technology encompasses several resources to enhance the learning experience and facilitate engaging instruction. Artificial intelligence (AI) tools for cultural learning offer novel and engaging experiences that promote the appreciation and comprehension of other cultures. This study exclusively examines the role of AI in foreign language teaching mode for expanding the significance of AI-powered tools in teaching culture in the EFL context from teachers' practices and challenges.

3. Methodology

This present study is a descriptive, mixed-method approach; consequently, both qualitative and quantitative data were used. It is important to look over teachers' practices for teaching culture using artificial intelligence. The fact-finding open-ended questions supply qualitative data, allowing the respondents to express different answers in their own words, while the close-ended questions provide quantitative information. To this aim, A web-based questionnaire was administered to EFL University Teachers in Algeria. Also, it was composed of 7 sections. The first section contains biographical information such as degree, affiliation, and years of experience. The second section investigates teachers' objectives toward teaching culture using AI tools. The third section dealt with teachers' strategies towards teaching culture through AI tools. The fourth section explored the use rate of different types of AI tools in their classes. The fifth section is devoted to seeking participants' practices of AI incorporation in EFL teaching activities. The sixth section purposefully survived teachers' challenges and issues. The last section is devoted to teachers' suggestions and recommendations.

4. Results, Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Teachers' Background Information

The results showed that teachers from different Algerian universities, including (54%) Abbes Laghrour University, (12%) Oum EL Bouaghi University, (8%) Batna University, (5%) Algiers, (7%) Setif, and (4%) Tlemcen, (2%) Elouad, and (5%) Tebssa Universities, completed 89 EFL teachers. The majority of respondents were females. Additionally, most respondents (66%) had more than five years of teaching experience, as shown in the figure and the table below. These results mean that their responses are considered reliable.

Table 1. Teachers' Background Information

Teachers Experience	From 0 to 5 years	From 5 to 10 years	More than 10%
Number of Teachers	23%	66%	31%

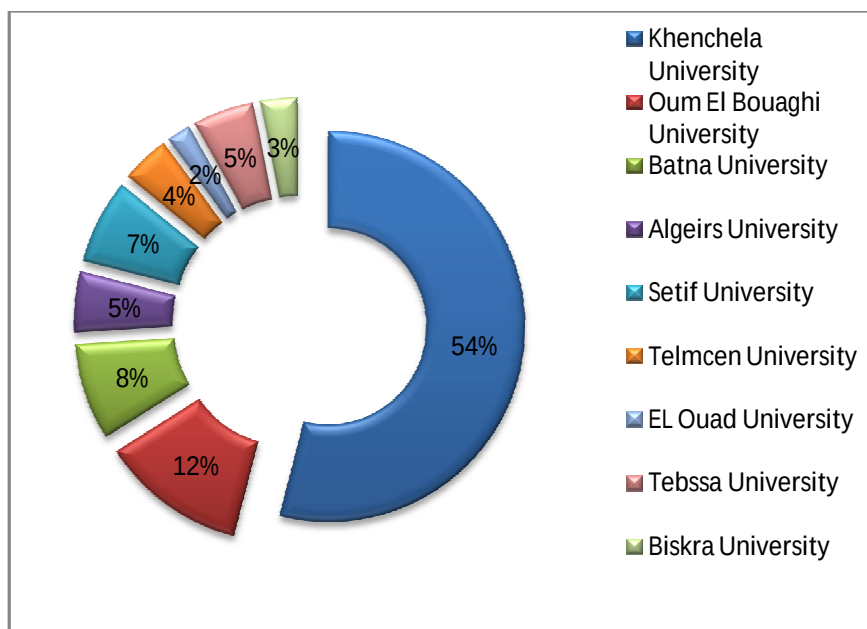


Figure 1. Teachers' Affiliation

4.2. Teachers' objectives towards using AI tools in culture teaching

The participants answered five closed-ended questions using a 3-point Likert scale to assess their goals for employing AI assistants in teaching culture in their classrooms.

Table 2. Teachers' objectives towards using AI tools in culture teaching

Statements	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1.Using AI tools helps students to develop their cultural awareness and understanding.	18%	2%	80%
2.Using AI tools to teach helps students avoidmiscommunication, and misinterpretation.	13%	10%	79%
3.Using AI techniques helps students improve their comprehension of language'cultural associations and meanings.	7%	13%	80%
4.Using AI tools helps to boost students' intellectual curiosity regarding the target culture.	9%	8%	79%
5.Using AI tools helps develop students' intercultural competence.	8%	10%	80%

The table above shows that most teachers agree on implementing culture in their classes to enrich students' cultural awareness and understanding with a percentage (80%). While only (18%) of the participants disagree. Also (79%) of the participants agree that integrating culture would enhance students' understanding of words and phrases of the target language that associate deep cultural meanings. As a reaction, most participants agree that teaching culture is enabled through AI assistants, which helps students avoid miscommunication and misinterpretation with a percentage (80%). Most (80%) of teachers accept that AI integration can help their students develop intercultural competence. Within the same objective, (18%) disagree. Nevertheless, it is obvious that most teachers are fully aware of and recommend teaching culture in their classes through AI assistants. Consequently, students will be able to be involved and motivated more in the learning mode as they use interactive applications and platforms.

4.3 Teachers' Strategies towards Culture teaching through AI implementation

According to teachers' responses towards their strategies of integrating Artificial intelligence in cultural teaching, their provided strategies can be summarized as follows:

- The lectures should be culturally oriented, as the main objective is to develop students' cultural understanding of the target culture.
- Cultural information should be presented by comparing students' sources and target cultures to avoid bias.
- Encourage students to use AI applications that involve intercultural interactions.
- Teachers should monitor the learning process and guide the cultural information AI tools provide, especially when dealing with taboo and culturally sensitive topics.
- The lectures should foster critical thinking towards cultural misunderstandings.
- Teachers should always provide feedback on the AI tools they use and the cultural information they provide.
 - o Teachers should use AI tools as supportive assistants to teaching, not as the only source or the main core of teaching.

4.4 AI Tools used by Teachers to Teach Culture

In this section, the respondents were supposed to range their use (from usually, rarely, to never) of 5 different AI assistant types

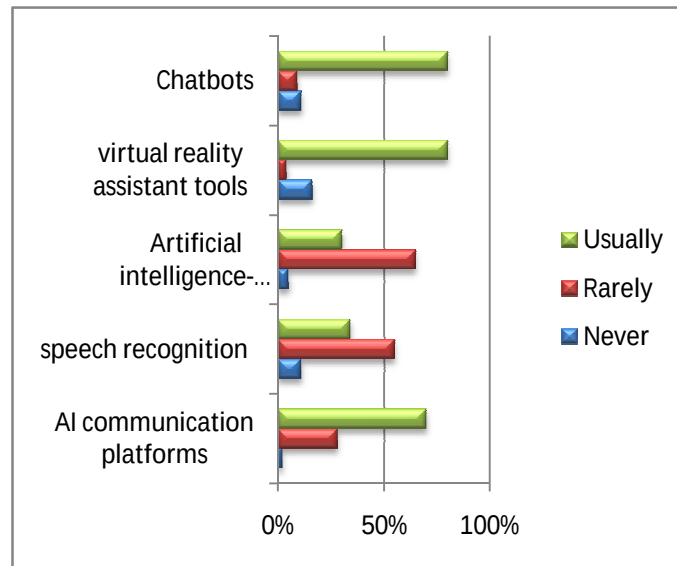


Figure 2. AI Tools used by Teachers to Teach Culture

Observing the figure above, we can understand that the majority of the participants usually used Chatbots (80%), AI communication platforms (70%), and Virtual reality assistant tools (80%). The results also revealed the low frequency of using speech recognition tools, with a percentage of (60%). The answers also indicate that (65%) of the participants rarely use Artificial intelligence-assisted language learning tools. Accordingly, indicated that teachers used tools that involve interaction with different cultures, as the aim is to develop students' cultural information. Accordingly, virtual classrooms open the doors for students to create global connections and exchanges, preparing them for intercultural understanding.

4.4. Teachers' Activities in Culture Teaching Using the AI tools

In this section, the participants were asked to answer 10 questions closed-ended to explore their activities towards using AI tools to teach culture.

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Table 3 Teachers' activities in teaching culture through the use of AI tools

Statements	Rarely	Never	Usually
1.I use only traditional method to teach culture.	0%	80%	20%
2.I use AI tools to teach culture in my class.	0%	20%	80%
3.I use chatGPT to help the students' to compare their culture' to the target culture.	2%	20%	78%
4.I use AI to provide personalized learning experiences, identify knowledge gaps, and offer targeted interventions.	0%	20%	80%
5.I use AI tools to create cultural virtual experience.	13%	20%	67%
6. I use AI to access to cultural exchange platforms.	5%	20%	75%
7. I use AI to address students' stereotypes and prejudices	5%	20%	75%
8. I use AI to involve my students into online discussion with native speakers.	3%	20%	77%
9. I monitor my students to use appropriate AI application on the internet.	14%	20%	66%
10. I assist students' use of AI tools for learning.	14%	20%	66%

Observing the table above, we can see that not all teachers use AI tools in their classes (20%) of the respondents use the traditional method of teaching culture. Within the same regard, most participants (80%) employ AI tools to teach culture. The table also emphasizes that (78%) claimed that they use ChatGPT as a source of knowledge that can offer the similarities and differences between the student's native culture and the target culture. Although teachers, with a percentage of (67%) usually use AI tools to create cultural virtual experiences. As the fifth statement shows, over half of teachers (75%) use AI cultural exchange platforms to address cultural information. That goes with the results of the sixth statement that the same percentage of teachers (75%) use AI tools to address stereotypes and prejudices. Teaching a different culture can open the door to such assumptions, and teachers should know this. So, they develop tolerance for both their culture and the target culture.

Furthermore, most teachers (77%) help their students engage in online discussion with native speakers. The findings of the table above revealed that the majority of the participants (66%) control and assist the use of AI tools among their students; the results of statement "9" and statement "10" illustrate that. Most teachers acknowledge the benefits of using AI tools in their classes, but they cannot replace humans. Artificial intelligence (AI) tools for cultural learning offer novel and engaging experiences that promote the appreciation and comprehension

of other cultures. However, teachers demonstrate a lack of knowledge and resources. AI technology can enhance learning platforms by decreasing the time needed for various tasks and augmenting capabilities beyond human limitations, such as assessing students' levels of understanding, facilitating feedback, refining teaching strategies, and optimizing the teaching and learning process (Kuprenko, 2020).

4.6 Teachers' Challenges

In this section, teachers were asked to share the challenges based on their experience with AI implementation.

- Teachers strongly address that these AI platforms usually obtain users' personal information, encompassing individuals' academic histories and learning behaviours. This may elicit substantial apprehensions over data privacy and security of both teachers and learners. For example, this collection of personal data may leak or be used without permission, leading to harmful consequences.
- Teachers claim that integrating AI into education could be costly and require significant investments in technology, classroom' equipment, and teachers' training. For instance, some AI agents, such as Chat GPT 4 and Virtual Intelligence, are considered highly expensive. Some universities may fail to benefit from these tools.
- Another important point is that teachers encounter issues related to the implementation of AI in education, which prompts numerous ethical inquiries, particularly around the degree of AI's involvement in learning settings. Sometimes, students misuse these applications and platforms for their assignments and tests. Accordingly, this may kill their curiosity and creativity.
- Teachers also asserted that the dominance of technology in their EFL classes may cause teacher replacement. Nearly all the teachers demonstrated that they lack training in these advanced technologies, which can cause teachers' resistance.

4.7 Teachers' Suggestions and Recommendations

In this section, teachers were asked to share their suggestions and recommendations based on their experience using AI tools to teach culture in an EFL setting.

- Teachers suggest that there are a significant number of AI applications and platforms that can generate virtual worlds that replicate different cultures.

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Therefore, students can engage and explore them more safely. This point is extremely beneficial for foreign language learners as they may interact directly with the target culture and lack the opportunity to travel. Applications such as Virtual Sapiens, Hexagram, CulturePulse, and Reddit.

- Teachers strongly recommend using AI tools, as they provide cultural information in an easy and interactive manner. For example, games that assess and evaluate students' understanding of various traditions, beliefs, values, customs, histories, and cultures are recommended.
- Teaching culture through these interactive games and activities can be enjoyable and instructive. Most participants agreed with a fair percentage that using chat GPT to provide cultural information comparing students' native and target cultures can facilitate students' cultural tolerance and understanding interactively.

CONCLUSION

Globalization and advanced technology posed by the world nowadays are leading to numerous changes in our lives; education is no longer restricted to limited boundaries. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has changed the educational systems across the globe. This paper investigated to what extent Algerian University teachers are willing to incorporate Artificial intelligence assistants/tools in their EFL classes to teach cultural objectives. Furthermore, this study aims to discover how these tools can help them to achieve their objectives. Based on the findings, the paper revealed that most EFL teachers employ AI assistants/tools in their classes. They supported the essential role of AI tools in developing their student's cultural information. This paper also addressed how teachers can effectively use these tools to design lessons and achieve specific objectives, such as improving students' cultural knowledge and developing students' communication skills within particular cultural contexts. AI tools facilitate the students' exploration of the target culture through videos, discussions, and articles. The findings also showed that the teachers integrate the AI tools in preparing their lessons and adjust their teaching strategies, such as facilitating the comparisons between the students' native and the target culture by providing real-life situations and illustrations to develop their critical thinking and enhance their cultural understanding. One practical example involves a lesson on "Thanksgiving" and then asks the students to ask Siri about Thanksgiving's cultural practices and reasons. After that, the teacher and students analyze the answers regarding cultural similarities and differences. Another pedagogical

practice is selecting the teaching material and designing classrooms' tasks; these tools help the teacher to choose the appropriate resources based on learning objectives, for instance Chat GPT can be utilized for cultural discussions, Duolingo for learning proverbs and idioms, Rosetta Stone for immersive real-world cultural scenarios. This study can encourage other researchers to carry out other studies with different participants, tools, and contexts to identify AI's effectiveness and power in developing students' cultural information and competence. However, these tools should be supportive and cannot replace human experience, empathy, tolerance, and passion. The results suggest that teachers continuously incorporate cultural subjects into their classes.

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