

*Intercultural Interactions in Teaching French as a
Foregin Language (FFL) in Palestine: Perspectives,
Practices, and Challenges*

**التفاعلات بين الثقافات في تعليم اللغة الفرنسية كلغة أجنبية
في فلسطين: وجهات النظر، الممارسات،**

Fouzia MARMASH *

AL Istiqlal University
Palestine

Fouzia.marmash@pass.ps

Husam QADDUMI

AL Istiqlal University
Palestine

Dr.hussamqadomi@pass.ps

Received: 09/08/2024 Accepted :06/11/2024 Published :20/12/2024

Abstract:

This study investigates French language teaching in Palestinian universities, focusing on intercultural interactions and contextual challenges. It examines students' perceptions of French culture, their motivations for learning French, and the obstacles they face, such as limited resources and socio-political constraints. Despite these issues, there is a strong interest in learning French, reflecting its global significance.

The findings highlight that student are driven by academic, career, and cultural goals, yet encounter significant hurdles in their educational journey. The study provides valuable insights to enhance educational practices and intercultural exchanges, aiming to improve the quality of French language education in Palestinian universities.

Key words: FFL; Intercultural Interactions; Cultural Perceptions; Attitudes and Motivations; Learning Obstacles

الملخص:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة تعليم اللغة الفرنسية كلغة أجنبية (FFL) في الجامعات الفلسطينية، مع التركيز على التفاعلات الثقافية والتحديات السياقية المحددة. تفحص الدراسة تصورات الطلاب

* Corresponding author.

الفلسطينيين حول الثقافة الفرنسية، ودوافعهم ومواقفهم اتجاه تعلم اللغة الفرنسية، بالإضافة إلى العقبات التي يواجهونها. رغم التعقيدات السياسية والاقتصادية في فلسطين، يبقى الاهتمام بتعلم اللغة الفرنسية قويًا، مما يبرز أهميتها الدولية.

تكشف النتائج أن الطلاب لديهم دوافع أكاديمية ومهنية وثقافية، لكنهم يواجهون عقبات مثل نقص الموارد والقيود السياسية والاجتماعية، وغياب العناصر الثقافية في المناهج الدراسية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم رؤى لتحسين الممارسات التعليمية وتعزيز التبادلات الثقافية المثمرة، مما يساهم في تحسين جودة تعليم اللغة الفرنسية في الجامعات الفلسطينية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعليم اللغة الفرنسية كلغة أجنبية (FFL)؛ التفاعلات الثقافية؛ التصورات الثقافية؛ المواقف والدوافع؛ عقبات التعلم

Introduction

The acquisition of Foreign Languages is a multidimensional field of study essential in an interconnected world. As Kramsch (1993) highlights, learning a foreign language involves immersion in a new culture and building bridges between different worlds. This study examines the teaching and acquisition of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in Palestinian universities, focusing on intercultural interactions and the challenges faced. It explores Palestinian students' perceptions of French culture, their motivations, attitudes towards learning French, and the obstacles they encounter. The educational context in Palestine, complicated by socio-political and economic realities (Abu Moghli, 2012), underscores the strategic importance of French (UNESCO, 2010). The study investigates students' perceptions of French culture, their motivations, and encountered obstacles (Galisson & Coste, 1976). It aims to illuminate the interactions between Palestinian students, their perceptions of French culture, and their intercultural influences (Zarate et al., 2013). The research seeks to measure students' motivation for learning French, explore their representations of the French language and culture, identify difficulties due to cultural differences, and propose pedagogical approaches to enhance intercultural French language teaching in Palestine.

I. Literature Review:

Research on teaching French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in Palestine has evolved to address learner needs and educator challenges. Galisson and Coste (1976) established a foundational framework for FFL

pedagogy, focusing on social interaction and communication. Recent studies, including those by Zarate, Lévy, and Kramsch (2013), have explored the linguistic and cultural diversity of Palestinian learners, resource limitations, and political constraints. Their work has significantly influenced the development of inclusive instructional models adapted to the Palestinian context. Martine Abdallah-Pretceille (2002) has significantly advanced our understanding of intercultural dynamics in education. Her work highlights the importance of recognizing and valuing students' cultural diversity and promoting intercultural education. These insights are crucial for addressing the challenges and opportunities in teaching French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in Palestine.

Relevant Models and Theories:

The work of Martine Abdallah-Pretceille (2003) is pivotal in intercultural theories, stressing the importance of acknowledging learners' cultural and linguistic differences in teaching French as a Foreign Language (FFL). It underscores the need for teachers to adapt their methods to these differences.

Additionally, Daiute's (2014) concepts from cultural psychology offer a framework for understanding how cultural identity is shaped through social and educational interactions. These theories highlight the role of personal narratives and experiences in forming cultural identity, which is essential for designing FFL programs that reflect the socio-cultural context of Palestinian learners.

II. Method

Language evolves to meet social needs and defines identity within groups, playing a key role in social integration and cultural adaptation (Blanchet, 2004). Culture encompasses traditions, practices, and historical links, integrating human creations such as art and literature (Cuche, 2001). In foreign language teaching, integrating cultural content is essential, as language and culture are intertwined (Galisson, 1991; Louis Porcher, 1995). The CEFR promotes intercultural competence, which includes understanding and integrating into the target culture while avoiding ethnocentrism. Social representations, often shaped by stereotypes, can hinder intercultural relations. Addressing these through supportive classroom exchanges helps learners navigate foreign cultural codes and improves communication skills (Zarate, 2008). This research

explores Palestinian students' cultural representations and aims to prevent cultural shocks by educating them about cultural diversity. Effective intercultural communication involves understanding and respecting differences, as advocated by Martine Abdallah-Pretceille and Zarate (2008). The study will assess learners' perceptions of cultural differences and challenges in communication, using interviews and questionnaires to test the hypothesis: Learners' representations of the target culture and the magnitude of cultural differences hinder intercultural communication.

1. Hypothesis

Data analysis will test the following hypothesis

Learners' representations of the target culture and the intensity of cultural differences make intercultural communication difficult.

This study adopts a quantitative approach to examine the cultural representations of Palestinian students learning French. Using semi-structured interviews, this approach allows for obtaining precise and robust data to analyze learners' perceptions, motivations, and intercultural experiences.

2. Participants

a. Empirical Corpus

The study includes second and third-year students from universities in the West Bank (An-Najah, Hebron, Bethlehem, Birzeit), offering a wide representation of various social, cultural, political, and economic contexts in Palestinian French language education.

b. Data Collection Instruments

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews in Arabic with 184 students from Palestinian universities to explore their perceptions, motivations, and intercultural experiences. After obtaining consent, the interviews were recorded, translated, and analyzed to ensure diverse representation across academic levels and genders.

c. Data Analysis Methods

We processed the quantitative data statistically to obtain significant results. Interviews help identify recurrent themes in students' representations and intercultural experiences.

d. Selected Universities for the Study

This research includes four Palestinian universities: An-Najah University in Nablus, Hebron University, Bethlehem University, and

Birzeit University. This selection, based on varied geographical distribution and socio-economic status, enriches the study's context

- **An-Najah University in Nablus:** Founded in 1918, An-Najah is a prestigious Palestinian university. Its Faculty of Arts and Humanities, established in 1977, includes the French department founded in 1999. This department offers a four-year French degree with an optional English minor and courses in Islamic culture, Arabic, and French literature. The Francophone Resource Center, supported by the French Consulate General in Jerusalem, provides resources to enhance French skills.
- **Hebron University:** The French minor in the B.A. English program, supported by the French Consulate in Jerusalem, includes 30 hours of French courses over three years. In 2023-2024, 112 students are enrolled, with 80 taking optional French courses. The curriculum features intensive language, culture modules, and translation courses taught by qualified professors.
- **Bethlehem University:** The Faculty of Arts at Bethlehem University, the largest faculty in the institution, offers a minor in the French language among its various specializations. This minor, open to all university students, prepares them for careers in teaching, translation, and French-speaking institutions. The program consists of 24 credits, covering elementary, intermediate, and advanced French courses with a focus on communication skills and writing.
- **Birzeit University:** The French program at Birzeit University aims to provide a quality education aligned with international standards. The program, totaling 69 credits, includes mandatory and elective courses covering linguistics, literature, translation, and education. It encourages the use of French in various social, cultural, and academic contexts.

This research examines Palestinian students' views on French and Francophone cultures. It identifies challenges and facilitators in learning French and aims to enhance pedagogical strategies for better intercultural communication and competencies.

III. Results

The initial interview findings shed light on the Palestinian university system's approach to teaching French, aligning with the theoretical framework on the diversity of educational offerings. They

reveal students' expectations, motivations, and intercultural experiences, highlighting practical needs and challenges.

1. Respondents' Identity

Table 1. Respondents' distribution based on affiliation

<i>University</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Valid Percentage</i>	<i>Cumulative Percentage</i>
An-Najah	48	26.1	26.1	26.1
Birzeit	55	29.9	29.9	56.0
Bethlehem	33	17.9	17.9	73.9
Hebron	48	26.1	26.1	100.0
Total	184	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 shows the respondent distribution: Birzeit (29.9%), Hebron (26.1%), An-Najah (26.1%), and Bethlehem (17.9%), reflecting a balanced participant distribution.

Table 2. Respondents' distribution based on major

<i>Major</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Valid Percentage</i>	<i>Cumulative Percentage</i>
French Literature Literature	19	10.3	10.3	10.3
French Language	16	8.7	8.7	19.0
French Studies	149	81.0	81.0	100.0
Total	184	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 reveals diverse student specializations: some pursue French for career advancement, while others are passionate about French literature and culture.

Table 3. Respondents' distribution based on Education Level

<i>Education Level</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Valid Percentage</i>
Sophomore	89	48.8	48.4
Junior	95	51.6	51.6
Total	184	100.0	100.0

The balanced distribution of second and third-year students indicates steady interest and progression in French, enhancing Palestinian students' cultural and linguistic experiences.

2. Language Biography

2.1. First Language Learned

Empirical results reveal that English dominates as the primary foreign language in Palestinian territories, affecting French language education. This dominance limits advanced French proficiency and cultural engagement. To address this, pedagogical approaches should cater to diverse learner needs and enhance intercultural understanding.

2.2. What do you think about learning your first foreign language?

This study reviews Palestinian students' perspectives on learning English, finding 61.3% see it as easy, while 38.6% find it difficult. Despite challenges, perceptions remain positive. The research highlights the need for adaptable teaching methods and intercultural competencies to improve language learning and cultural respect.

2.3. Have you had any contact with French people?

The study shows a significant gap between participants who have interacted with French speakers (40%) and those who haven't. This interaction enhances linguistic and cultural skills, yet most lack this experience, indicating a need for immersive methods. Adopting pedagogies that encourage cultural openness and native speaker interactions is essential for improving cultural understanding in the Palestinian context.

2.4. How was this contact? How was your experience with French people?

The analysis reveals that 27.6% of respondents found interactions with French people enriching, 0.5% reported communication issues, and 68.5% had no clear opinion. This underscores the value of intercultural exchanges and the need for greater awareness of cultural nuances.

2.5. Were there any misunderstandings in your interactions with French people?

Table 4. Type of Misunderstanding

<i>Type of Misunderstanding</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Valid Percentage</i>
Interpretation and communication difficulties	1	0.5	0.5
Linguistic differences	1	0.5	0.5
Differences in interaction rules	21	11.4	11.4

Presence of perceptions about French culture Excellent	19	10.3	10.3
There were no misunderstandings	9	4.9	4.9
There were no contacts	1	0.5	0.5
Total	3	1.6	1.6

The survey reveals that 12.5% of Palestinian students faced interpretation and communication issues with French people, and 10.9% struggled with insufficient knowledge of French culture. Some encountered stereotypes and discrimination, while a few had positive experiences. These findings highlight the need for FFL programs in Palestine to enhance intercultural competencies and communication skills.

3. Motivations for learning French

The survey shows Palestinian students are motivated to learn French due to passion, career prospects, travel, and family ties. French programs and local policies also influence their choices, emphasizing the need to address diverse motivations and contextual factors in program design.

4. Representations of the French Language/Country and Speakers

4.1. What images do you have of this language?

The survey reveals that Palestinian students view French in diverse ways some see it as romantic or a gateway to success, while others find it challenging. Their views on France vary from cultural heritage to fashion. This highlights the need for teaching strategies that counter stereotypes and foster a balanced understanding of French culture.

4.2. What are the images you have of the country?

Table 5. Images of the country

<i>Images of the country</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
France is a beautiful country beautiful language	52	28.3
It's the country of fashion and perfumes romantic language Others	34	18.5
It's the country of culture and freedom language in the world Total	73	39.7

Other	25	13.6
Total	184	100.0

Palestinian students' perceptions of France vary: 28% see it as aesthetically pleasing, 18% associate it with fashion and perfumes, 40% view it as a land of freedom, and 14% have limited knowledge of its culture. These perceptions, shaped by cultural and media influences, impact their interactions with French people. Moscovici and Durkheim's theories explain how social norms and collective representations shape these views, highlighting the need for a respectful and open approach to intercultural communication.

4.3. What are the images you have of the speakers of this language?

The results show varied perceptions of French speakers among Palestinian students, influenced by cultural stereotypes and personal experiences. Some highlight traits like fashion sense and education, while others note kindness and beauty. These views reflect associations with French culture and underscore the need for respecting and understanding cultural differences. Openness to French culture and values is crucial, as attitudes are shaped by students' interactions with and perceptions of foreign cultures.

5. What is your knowledge about French culture?

Opinions on Palestinian students' perceptions of France vary. About 80% associate Paris with French culture, citing its fashion, beauty, and historical significance. In contrast, 20.7% refer to other French cities, indicating a broader range of experiences and cultural knowledge.

74.5% of respondents view the Eiffel Tower as a symbol of French history, while 25.5% identified other historical monuments, reflecting a broader appreciation of France's diverse cultural heritage among Palestinian students.

The results show varied perceptions of French culture among Palestinian students. While most recognize Paris and the Eiffel Tower, some are also interested in French daily life, traditions, and social customs.

The findings reveal cultural similarities and differences between Palestinians and French, highlighting the need for cultural understanding in French education. Palestinian students display varied reactions and

face communication challenges and stereotypes. The study suggests tailored programs and exchanges to enhance linguistic and cultural skills, addressing challenges in grammar and cultural semantics. Promoting intercultural awareness and respect for diversity is crucial.

IV.Synthesis of Results

- **Diverse Experiences and Expectations:** Palestinian learners have varied experiences with French, indicating a need for immersive, intercultural teaching methods.
- **Motivations:** Students choose French for career prospects or cultural passion. Literature students often have deeper cultural insights compared to those in linguistics.
- **Teaching Needs:** Pedagogical strategies must balance motivations, incorporate cultural content, and address linguistic challenges.

1. Curriculum Development:

- **Promote Interactions:** Engage with native speakers through exchanges and digital platforms.
- **Integrate Cultural Content:** Include French culture in the curriculum.
- **Expand French Education:** Increase emphasis on French alongside English.
- **Address Challenges:** Tackle phonological, lexical, and grammatical issues; integrate intercultural training.

2. Key Points:

- **Motivations:** Career and cultural interests.
- **Interactions:** Valuable but often lacking.
- **Perceptions:** Artistic to practical.
- **Challenges:** Cultural understanding, pronunciation, grammar.

3. Implications:

- **Intercultural Awareness:** Enhance understanding.
- **Curriculum Design:** Adapt to diverse needs.
- **Teaching Strategies:** Promote intercultural learning.

V. Recommendations for Enhancing French Language Education in Palestinian Universities

To improve French language education in Palestinian universities, several key recommendations are proposed:

1. **Conduct Targeted Research:** Investigate Palestinian students' motivations, challenges, and needs in learning French to tailor educational programs more effectively.
2. **Promote Intercultural Exchanges:** Facilitate interactions with native French speakers through exchange programs, educational trips, and virtual collaborations to enhance both language skills and cultural understanding.
3. **Integrate Intercultural Curriculum:** Incorporate French cultural content into the curriculum and provide opportunities for authentic language use to bridge the gap between linguistic proficiency and cultural competence.
4. **Expand French Language Programs:** Develop diverse and innovative educational programs that address the needs of a broad student body, and provide intercultural awareness training for both educators and learners.
5. **Address Perceptions:** Analyze and challenge stereotypes and biases about the French language and culture to promote more open and effective intercultural communication.

VI. Conclusion

This study highlights the complexities of French language learning among Palestinian learners, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach integrating linguistic and cultural dimensions. It shows the diversity in learners' motivations and experiences, stressing the importance of addressing individual needs and incorporating intercultural interactions into curricula. The research underscores the value of immersive, culturally rich educational practices and the necessity of adapting teaching methods to better meet learners' expectations. The findings advocate for a reassessment of pedagogical practices, increased promotion of intercultural exchanges, and greater awareness of cultural contexts. By adopting inclusive and adaptive teaching methods, educational institutions can enhance both linguistic skills and cultural understanding.

In summary, the study calls for a focused effort to optimize French language education in Palestine, aiming to develop well-rounded, culturally competent global citizens. It emphasizes that integrating intercultural exchanges and diverse learning approaches can significantly improve educational outcomes and foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

References

- [1] Abdallah-Pretceille, M. (2003). **Vers une pédagogie de la diversité et de la citoyenneté**. Paris: Nathan.
- [2] Abu Moghli, M. (2012). "Challenges of Education in Palestine." **Journal of Palestinian Studies**, 41(3), 24-36.
- [3] Blanchet, P. (2004). **Ideas on the Evolution of Language as a Cultural and Identity Tool**.
- [4] Byram, M. (1997). **Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence**. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- [5] Byram, M. (2008). **From Foreign Language Education to Education for Intercultural Citizenship: Essays and Reflections**. Multilingual Matters.
- [6] Byram, M., & Risager, K. (Eds.). (1999). **Language Teachers, Politics, and Cultures**. Multilingual Matters.
- [7] Council of Europe. (2001). **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment**. Cambridge University Press.
- [8] Cuhe, J.-P. (2001). **La notion de culture dans les sciences sociales**. Paris: La Découverte.
- [9] Daiute, C. (2014). **Narrative Inquiry: Cultural Psychology Perspectives**. New York: SAGE Publications.
- [10] Fantini, A. E. (2000). "A Central Concern: Developing Intercultural Competence." **SIT Occasional Papers Series**, 20.
- [11] Galisson, F., & Coste, D. (1976). **Didactics of Foreign Languages**. Paris: Didier.
- [12] Hussin, M. H. M., & Othman, M. K. (2015). "The Importance of Intercultural Competence in Foreign Language Learning." **Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences**, 186, 1045–1051.
- [13] Kramsch, C. (1998). **Language and Culture**. Oxford University Press.
- [14] Lázár, I. (2005). "Incorporating Intercultural Communicative Competence in Language Teacher Education." **Language, Culture and Curriculum**, 18(1), 63–70.
- [15] Liddicoat, A. J. (2002). "Dynamics of Intercultural Communication." **Australian Review of Applied Linguistics**, 25(1), 89–101.

- [16] Moeller, A. J., & Nugent, A. (2014). "Intercultural competence and foreign language learning: The acquisition of cultural meaning in Spanish." **Foreign Language Annals**, 47(1), 36–53.
- [17] Porcher, L. (1995). & Galisson, F. (1991). **Inseparability of Language and Culture in Foreign Language Teaching**.
- [18] Pretceille, M. A. (2005). **Intercultural Education**. Paris: PUF.
- [19] UNESCO. (2010). **World Data on Education**. 7th Edition.
- [20] Zarate, G., Lévy, D., & Kramsch, C. (2008). **Précis du plurilinguisme et du pluriculturalisme**. Paris: Editions des Archives Contemporaines.
- [21] Zarate, G., Lévy, D., & Kramsch, C. (2013). **Handbook of Multilingualism and Multiculturalism**. Routledge