

Integrating Cultural Activities in the Algerian Language Classroom: On The Move Textbook

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ABSTRACT

Language and culture are two inseparable entities. Therefore, learning a language is at once learning the culture of the people using it. One's mastery of the linguistic elements of a language does not guarantee a person can communicate through it. Cultural understanding is obligatory. This paper discusses the various findings and ideas on the integration of culture into a foreign language teaching. Its focus is to highlight the importance, existence, impact, and the techniques of integrating cultural elements into the teaching of English as a foreign language.

INTRODUCTION

This research aims at investigating the place of teaching culture at the level of Algerian schools and showing its importance as a part of teaching English.

It also aims at exploring the teacher's knowledge, views and perceptions of culture teaching in theory and practice:

Our main aims in this research are:

- to examine the situation of teaching culture in the Algerian middle schools.
- to show the importance of integrating target culture.
- to test the teacher's awareness of the importance of teaching culture as well as their cultural knowledge.

The need to integrate culture in foreign language teaching is not a new debate, and has been long highlighted by many researchers like: *Kramsch, Byram, Seelye...etc*. yet it seems to be common practice that English textbook designers, in Algeria, frequently overlook the conclusions drawn in such studies, and neglect the essential information about the target language that would help students reach a cultural understanding to complete their linguistic one. In fact, the major purpose motivating this study is that there is a need of studies that examine the quality of materials used in teaching culture in Algerian textbooks.

It is intended to find out whether the Algerian classrooms provide sufficient content for student's cultural understanding and make them ready for communication, developing learner's ability to communicate with each other across

linguistic and cultural boundaries is the objective of teaching English in Algeria which cannot be reached unless the target culture is fully understood.

Our study aims at addressing the following questions

-what is the importance of teaching culture ?

-can language and culture be separated?

- Do middle school teachers and textbooks give importance to culture in teaching English?

To meet the objectives of the study, we will examine the place of culture in the fourth year middle school "On The Move". We choose it as a sample because students have gone through four years of English because they are following the new curriculum.

The Relationship between Language and Culture

It has been a subject of rapid change in the history of foreign language teaching. Many scholars and researchers like Kramsch and Byram emphasized that without the study of culture, teaching a foreign language is inaccurate and incomplete. Therefore, teachers must not only help to improve students' linguistic ability but also focus on developing student's cultural awareness.

What Do They Say about Culture?

Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities

and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Taylor, E,1871)

It is the way a group of people behaviour reacts to various conditions or circumstances (Boards, f, 1911). it is significant because it reveals relationships which are important to us due to their connection with our values “ (Weber,m,1904). It is the capacity for constantly expanding the range and accuracy of one’s perception of meanings “ (Dewey, j 1916).

The term culture [refers to] what is learned ... the things one needs to know in order to meet the standards of others “(Goodenough, w 1971). [the culture concept] denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life”(Geertz,1966). It is a presupposition of cultural psychology that when people leave in the world differently, it may be that they live in different worlds “(shweder,R,1991).

The most important characteristic of culture according to samovar (2004) is that “it is learned.and transmitted from generation to generation. From the moment a child is conceived, culture is already handed down to him/her through the rituals of child-bearing.

Consequently, culture nurtures a person throughout his/her lifetime persistently following him/her and dictating what to do in almost all circumstances from the cradle to the grave.Samovar also included five elements that are found in each culture: history, religion, values, social organization, and language.

History is handed down from generation to generation, religion influences culture, values help determines how people ought to behave social organization help members of the culture organize their lives and lastly, language allows members to communicate with one other”.

Language and Culture

Interest and inquiry on the question of language and culture originate in the field of anthropology. Boas and Sapir were the first to throw light on the crucial relationship of language and culture, language expresses the thoughts, beliefs and assumptions of a community hence, language reflects the way of looking at the world and understanding reality. The study of culture has developed under the heading of anthropology.

The language was already recognized as a valuable tool for the scientific study of culture.

Risager(2006) considers culture as a component and a part that cannot be separated from the language, and she adds that linguistic production and practice is a way of cultural practice since language is always embedded in the culture.

Byrams(1989) believes that language is a tool to express speaker’s knowledge and perception of the real world, thus it reflects their cultural concepts and values. He goes on saying that one cannot learn a language and neglect its culture because speaking a language means expressing its culture, exchanging a language embodies a particular way of thinking and living.

Language is bound up with culture in different ways; first, language expresses speaker’s beliefs, the point of view

and assumption about the real world, second, members of the same speech community create an experience through language, thus language always embodies cultural reality, third, language itself is seen as a cultural value.

Kramsh(1998) puts three links between language and culture which can be summarized as follows:

- language expresses cultural reality.
- language embodies cultural reality.
- language symbolizes cultural reality.

Language is an inseparable part of culture because it is impossible to ignore the place of language in a given culture.

Language reveals the way of thinking and norms which are common in the culture.

“ language as a symbol of culture ”. “ language can be considered as a symbol to defend or attack.

The Importance of Teaching Culture

Culture should be taught in language course because cultural competence is indisputably an integral part of foreign language learning.

Valdes insisted that it is impossible to ignore or avoid teaching target culture when teaching language since they are inseparable. Moreover; according to Byran (1989) cultural awareness is very important in language teaching because it contributes to language proficiency. He insists that any language curriculum should include either implicitly or explicitly elements of its culture because language reflects the speaker’s values and perception of the world. Thus, it is impossible to learn a language and ignore its speaker’s values and intentions. In other words, speaking a language is speaking its culture, and exchanging messages which embody a particular way of thinking and living.

Teaching culture is undoubtedly needed because *language use has its own social grammar of rules, settings, rules of speaking and norms of interpretation*

Ned Seelye writes: “Learning a language in isolation of its cultural roots prevents one from becoming socialized into its contextual use. Knowledge of linguistic structure alone does not carry with it any special insight into the political, social, religious, or economic system (1976).”

According to Wilga Rivers: “We must focus on both appropriate content and activities that enable students to assimilate that content. Activities should encourage them to go beyond fact so that they begin to perceive and experience vicariously the deeper levels of the culture of the speakers of the language (1981).”

In a seminar on linguistics and language teaching in GEORGETOWN Pulitzer(1959) points out: As language teachers, we must be interested in the teaching of culture not because we necessarily want to teach the culture of the other country, but because we have to teach it. We cannot be competent in the target language if we don’t comprehend the culture of the other and how it assimilates to our own culture.

The Consequence of Avoiding Teaching Culture

If students are not thought cultural aspects in FL lessons, They will face different problems.

First of all, in the process of language learning, students will go back to their Mother Tongue whenever they don't know how to say something in FL and linguistic transfer will arise (Nuria Calvo Cortes 2007:233)

Different linguists have expressed their opinion on this most of them agree that a language cannot be isolated from its correspondent culture and it will make such a learning process easier, although not many devote their attention to cultural transfer, is more likely to happen at linguistic levels rather than at cultural ones. However, there are different researchers drawing their attention to the fact that transfer can be present at socio-cultural level (E. OLSHTAIN & A. COHEN 1989), That is if students become aware of how the target culture works their knowledge of the foreign language will improve. R. LADO (1989:55)

Practical analysis:

METHODOLOGY

Description of the EFL pupils at Middle School

English is studied from the first year of the middle school until the third year of secondary school which makes seven years of English tuition. At the middle school, English is part of the curriculum. During learners studies, the focus of the four skills (Listening, speaking, reading comprehension and written expression) in addition to grammar, vocabulary and other language functions which learners have to show their proficiency and mastery of the target language through different units.

This research work has taken a sample population of pupils of fourth-year level in Cherif Moulay Idriss at Tlemcen.

Learners Profile

As far as the pupils of fourth-year level are concerned, their number is 240, among them 110 boys and 130 girls. These pupils ranging in age between 14 and 16 years. All of them are from Tlemcen, they nearly differ in their cultural, social and educational background.

Analysis of the Teachers' Questionnaire

The main objective of the questionnaire was the collection of a set of information about teaching culture in Middle school. The questionnaire result provided important information about the teaching culture.

Item one: what steps do you follow when teaching culture?

The teachers answer that they first warm up then introduce gradually the four skills in each session and use different techniques to acquire the culture of a language. These, in turn, should raise learners' awareness of intercultural issues and enable them to communicate effectively and appropriately in a variety of communicative contexts.

Item two: Does the textbook use sufficient items involved in discussions about other culture?

culture has been considered to be some sort of fifth macro-skill, which is introduced once the skills of speaking,

listening, reading and writing have been established. Quite often in language textbooks we see a separate section reserved for culture. However, these notes, while interesting, are not usually the elements of culture that learners typically experience difficulty with. When we use a language, we are involved in culture, whether we are speaking, listening, reading or writing.

The textbook focuses on manifold cultures such as the American, the British, the Indian compared to the Algerian one, promote mutual understanding and tolerance.

The teachers agreed that the textbook contains cultural aspects such as some songs.

(where have all the flowers gone? sung by Bob Dylan), (a rainy Sunday sang by Jimmy Sphens), (yesterday sang the Beatles) and (If I had a hammer sang by Peter, Paul and Mary).

Besides, we can find some American cultural texts such as Indian tribes living in the south-east of America, an article entitled: should we celebrate Martin Luther King Day.

Indian cultures like the biography of Mahatma Gandhi.

Songs could help to understand the other culture to be more emphatic, tolerant, promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for other identities and cultural diversity.

Pedagogical Recommendations

Despite all of us agree on the importance of teaching culture. This will remain limited. Thus, teachers need to decide about on appropriate techniques and combine between the culture related topics and activities in teaching. This should foster students' cultural knowledge and awareness.

Sometimes the students' knowledge of the foreign culture is very limited because teaching is not systematic and depends on what the teacher considers more important.

CONCLUSION

When teaching culture the teacher has to bear in mind students' age, maturity, command of language and educational level. The main aim is that teachers should be prepared to deal with students learning facts or opinions that may conflict with their own or what they regard as natural. Ideally, the textbooks should be more meaningful and relevant to the life experiences of the students and they should prepare them for real life situations since the textbooks dominate the educational practices.

They must be vigilant or aware of the challenges facing the learner's identity. And finally, this includes the teachers' skills, attitudes and knowledge.

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