TOWARDS CULTURE TEACHING: BETWEEN NECESSITY AND DIFFICULTY

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Abstract:

The Algerian educational system has given concern and importance to culture and culture teaching. Yet, it seems that all the sustained efforts did not yield the desired objectives. This research paper is an attempt to discover the reasons behind the negative attitudes of students toward these courses and try to come with possible remedies. The method used to reach the above goal was the descriptive method, and data was collected using a questionnaire administered to a random sample of second year LMD students at the Department of English, Batna2 University. The results demonstrated that little importance is given to the courses of culture, and a limited awareness of their significance exists among students of English. Moreover, course content and teaching methods are behind these negative outcomes. Therefore, teachers and course designers are called upon to react to this situation by taking the necessary measures which might include a revision of the objectives sought from culture teaching and a reconsideration of the teaching strategies.

Key words: culture, cultural awareness, intercultural competence.

ملخـــــــص:

لقد أولى النظام التربوي الجزائري عناية واهتماما بالغا للثقافة و تدريس الثقافة. لكن يبدو أن ما بذل لم يأت ثماره ولهذا جاء هذا البحث كمحاولة لمعرفة الأسباب وراء السلوكيات السلبية للطلبة اتجاه الدروس المخصصة للثقافة ومحاولة إيجاد الحلول الممكنة. المنهج المتبع لتحقيق هذا البحث هو المنهج الوصفي وقد تم جمع البيانات باستعمال استبيان وجه لطلبة السنة الثانية لقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة باتنة 02وقد أثبتت النتائج ما يلي :لا تحض دروس الثقافة بالأهمية والوعي الكافيين من طرف طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية و يعود هذا بالدرجة الأولى إلى مضمون الدروس والطرق المتبعة في تدريس هذا المقياس. ولهذا فالأساتذة مطالبو ن بمواجهة هذه الوضعية باتخاذ الإجراءات اللازمة والتي قد تشمل مراجعة الأهداف المرجوة من تدريس الثقافة والآليات المستعملة في تدريسها لبلوغ الأهداف المرجوة .

الكلمات الدالة

الثقافة، الوعي الثقافي، الكفاءة بين الثقافات.

Introduction:

Acquiring a basic understanding of the target culture has become a primary objective in the field of foreign language education. a global world changing rapidly and bringing cultures closer, more than any time before, altered all visions to teaching foreign languages in general and teaching English in particular. Teaching methodologies have been designed with the assumption that learning a language should be subordinated to the learning of the ways and attitudes of the social group. A review of literature has revealed the tremendous efforts carried out by educators in promoting culture teaching. Different methodologies have been worked out to meet the different teaching contexts and achieve the objectives designed by both educators and politicians, who consider "culture" and "culture teaching" a necessity to be pursued with all means. But what do we mean exactly by culture and how it links to foreign language teaching?

Literature Review

Culture and Foreign Language Teaching

Once researchers attempted to define culture, two types of culture have been distinguished: Big culture or Big C and Little culture or Little C. The former was associated with a general knowledge of the arts and literature. Big C culture is traditionally taught with standard national languages. Putting a heavy emphasis on the study of literature, language study had been the focus of philologists and anthropologists before it was given a more pragmatic understanding as a way of life by communicative language teaching (Kramsch, 2012).

Little C culture; however, has become the most relevant concept since the 80's. It included all that constitutes people's way of life including behaving, eating, talking, and believing. A situation which obliged language teachers to teach language from a sociolinguistic perspective that equals language to culture (Kramsch, 2012). In this sense, language, in addition to other symbolic systems, gives meaning to the habits, beliefs, institutions and monuments that are considered part of what makes culture. Meaning is given by language. Language, in other words, constitutes a system of arbitrary signs that obtain their meaning after their use. Holiday in this sense says: "they are arbitrary in their form and motivated in their use" (cited in Kramsch, 2012, p. 63).

The fact that language and culture proved to be interwoven entities made language teachers conclude that teaching language cannot be accomplished without the inclusion of culture in that process. Peck (cited in Chahak&Basirizadeh, 2012) referred to the importance of the issue in these words: "without the study of culture, foreign language instruction is inaccurate and incomplete" (p.1). Therefore, the teaching of language proved to be more than the teaching of grammar or syntax. Cultural elements are present in different forms of language use. In the reading of original texts, in the utterances of native speakers…etc. There are, also, some cultural norms that govern conversations and failing to make students aware of such cultural elements would lead to misunderstandings and misconceptions of the target culture in the syllabus of foreign language teaching (Chahak&Basirizadeh, 2012).

An intercultural dimension in language teaching is expected to help learners acquire the linguistic competence needed to communicate their ideas, either in writing or speaking in appropriate ways and develop their intercultural competence which will ensure a dual capacity to be understood by people belonging to different social identities (Byram, Gribkova, Starkey, 2002).

Developing an Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching

In language teaching, there has been a continuous desire to produce learners similar to native speakers in linguistic competence, in knowledge of what is appropriate language and in knowledge about a country and its culture. For this, it has become necessary for language educators to revise their goals from teaching English, and reconsider their roles in preparing students for a more effective communication that requires an accepted way of behavior and interaction (Fantini, 2008).Hence, it becomes clear that the central aim from an intercultural dimension in language teaching is to enable learners become intercultural speakers who are capable of engaging with different identities without using or referring to stereotypes in their perception of the other who is different from them and who needs to be discovered (Byram, Gribkova, Starkey, 2002).

The possibility of being in touch with our global neighbors has increased in the new age, via different mediums of communication systems, like TV and the Internet. And this has also enlarged the cultural milieu of learners. It is not the family or the school, but the larger world. Therefore, there is a growing responsibility of teachers to

adjust their teaching to the requirements of the new age. Preparing students for today's world requires from course designers to reexamine and reconsider their objectives from teaching English as a second or foreign language. The inclusion of a cultural element proved to be necessary for students to learn the appropriate way of interacting within the language. Course content and assessment of students' performance make an important part of that revision (Fantini, 2008).

The Research Method

Algerian Universities are working towards the integration of culture in foreign language education and serious efforts are being made towards setting up a methodology based on clear and well thought objectives. Yet, it seems that these good intentions are not fully met. In Batna2 University, the situation is not different. Little importance is given to the course by students of English and no positive outcomes are to be observed form the inclusion of these courses in the curriculum. For example, few students are showing the benefit from these courses by using the knowledge acquired from them in their speaking or writing. Therefore, many questions have been asked about the causes that led to this situation and about the possible remedies to it. Thus, to meet the requirements of the above described situation, the descriptive method was adopted and data was gathered using a questionnaire administered to a random sample of second year LMD students at the Department of English, Batna2 University.

Population and Sample

The issue of incorporating a cultural element in the teaching of English as a foreign language is of immediate concern to learners of English; therefore, knowing their attitudes towards the issue would be of an immense help to teachers who are looking for better teaching means and strategies to culture teaching. For this reason, students of English at the department of English, Batna2 University, constituted the population of the present study. Working with the whole population of second year student sounds to be a difficult task, and because in research it is possible to work with a sample and be able later to generalize the findings on the rest of the population, a sample was chosen randomly using random sampling as the most suitable sampling technique for the present study.

The Instruments

The basic tool employed to collect the necessary data was an attitude questionnaire administered to a population of second year LMD students at the department of English, Batna2 University. The questionnaire aims at collecting necessary data from students. The data concerned their attitudes towards culture, culture teaching and the teacher of culture.

Description of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a twelve item questions divided into two sections. Section one aims at discovering students' understandings of culture and their attitudes towards culture and culture teaching. The second section, however, aims at gaining further insight about their expectations from the teacher of culture, and their views about the best ways and means to teach culture.

Discussion of Results

In the first section of the questionnaire, results demonstrated that most students hold the belief that the courses given under the LMD system focus on teaching both language and culture. Drawing a clear line between the courses aiming at the teaching of culture and those aiming at teaching the language seems to be difficult, as language and culture are interwoven entities and trying to draw a border line between them is no easy task.

In response to question 2, Culture and Civilization of Language (CCL), British History, American History are names given by students to the courses which are thought to teach culture. CCL is a course in the syllabus of the new LMD system and students receive instruction in this course for two successive years (their first and second years). American History and British History are courses which existed in the curriculum of the old decaying classical system. Yet, students have shown some confusion, and still think that courses in culture, introduced under the LMD system, are courses in the history or literature of the foreign language. This may reflect to a certain degree some truth regarding the nature and the way CCL in addition to other courses in culture are taught. Basically, most methods focus on Big C while Little C (the focus of today's foreign language teaching) receives little attention.

In trying to know whether our students are aware of the reasons behind the inclusion of these courses, results presented in Table 02show clearly that the majority seem to hold some awareness regarding the intricate link between culture and language and the impossibility to learn one without the other. Knowing the differences between their native culture and the target culture was, according to others, another significant reason to have instruction in these courses. To a large degree, these views converge with the new approaches to culture teaching which aim at achieving understanding, tolerance and cultural exchange between two or many cultures. And which can be realized, only, if learners were able to see the differences and accept them.

Table 01 Reasons to teach culture

Option	N	%
You don't need to know about the culture of the target people?	04	12.5%
You do not expect to be in direct contact with the target culture?	08	25%
Learning language can be achieved successfully without the learning of culture?	17	53.12%
Other reasons?	03	9.73%
Total	32	100%

Discovering the attitudes of students towards culture courses was disappointing. Results demonstrated that most students did not hesitate to express their dislike to these courses, while few have expressed opposite feelings (Table 2). And to know the reasons behind, students were asked to justify their attitudes. So, those who were positive in their attitudes believed that thanks culture courses; they have been introduced to a variety of topics in the English language and English culture. A belief, if it holds to be true, converges with the pedagogical claim given by different researchers regarding the importance of the inclusion of culture in foreign language education. Looking, however; at the dominant negative attitude, the majority of

student believed in their ability to learn English successfully without necessarily learning things related to its culture, in their little hope of being in direct contact with this culture one day, andin the difficulty they have with these courses. What students ignore, however, is that competence in a language has become the combination of different competences, where intercultural competence proved to be essential if one hopes to communicate effectively in a foreign language. Also, communication is not necessarily a direct contact between individuals. A variety of ways and means of communication are bringing people together without necessarily being together.

Table 02.Students' like and dislike to culture courses

Answers	N	Percentage
Yes	18	36%
No	32	64%
Total	50	100%

Figure.01. Students' like and dislike to culture courses

In the second section of the questionnaire, the results indicated that the majority of students (47.61%) hold a negative attitude about their teacher's role in facilitating their learning of cultural content. His/her incapacity to teach culture was, according to them, due to the inadequate use of teaching material. Teaching culture in non-native settings requires the use of the adequate pedagogical means (such us texts, pictures, video tapes …) which facilitate the transmission of cultural knowledge to learners. Other students, on the other hand, attributed the teacher's difficulty to teach culture to the fact of not being a-native speaker. Having native speakers to teach culture, however, was not a prerogative to all students, as many know the difficulty of its realization. In this regard, many researchers were of the opinion that belonging to the target culture is never a requirement or a perquisite to successful foreign language teaching or culture teaching.

Non-native teachers do not lack the capacities of native speakers if given the necessary means and afforded the adequate teaching environment.

Table 03.Reasons behind teachers incapacity to teach culture

Answers	N	Percentage
The teacher is not a native speaker	2	9.52%
The teacher does not have enough knowledge about culture	0	00%
The teacher is not employing enough teaching materials to teach culture	10	47.61%
Other reasons	09	42.85%
Total	21	100%

In defining the kind of material to be utilized in the course of culture, results in Table 04 illustrate the desire among many students to have the new technologies integrated in their language classrooms, like, internet, audio visuals ...etc. This fact has identified the new type of learners we have in our classes' toady, learners who are largely influenced by modern ways of communication. The new technologies can shorten distances and bring peoples and cultures closer. Learners and native speakers can exchange the language and culture easily and effectively. This, however; does not deny the appeal that the printed word has among many students. About 34% of students have admitted the important role this kind of authentic material has in teaching both language and culture.

Table.04. Materials to teach culture

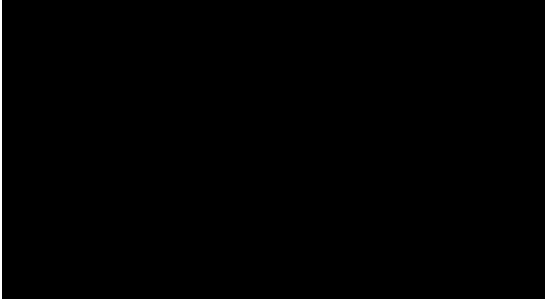| Answers	N	Percentage
Audio visual aids?	28	56%
The internet	05	10%
Readings like books, newspapers, magazines,…etc?	17	34%
Others?	00	00%
Total	50	100%

Figure. 02. *Materials to teach culture*

Recommendations

Analyzing students' responses to the questionnaire demonstrated that culture teaching in our universities may not reflect the needs and demands of our students who are looking for better teaching which may satisfy their desire to learn English successfully. Success for them stands for effective communication in the target language in its native and non native contexts. However, not considering culture a necessary ingredient and ignoring the essence of intercultural competence may not help those students meet their hope of learning the foreign language successfully. Not only this, but showing a continuous satisfaction with what they are provided with may mean a rejection to any newness in the content of courses Therefore, raising the necessary awareness among our students and revising the objectives sought from culture teaching deem necessary if the ultimate goal is to improve foreign language education in general and culture teaching in particular.

Conclusion

To conclude, culture and culture teaching are drawing the path to foreign language education. Serious efforts were and are still made in pursuing this objective. Therefore, students must be aware of the fact that the different ways of thinking, behaving and acting are culturally determined. Such awareness would reduce the prejudices students may hold in learning the foreign language. Yet, what theories state is quite different from what real teaching contexts are demonstrating. Students may be aware of the changes taking place at a global scale, but there is doubt of whether they are conscious of being part of these changes, or that learning a foreign language goes beyond a mere linguistic competence to be acquired in the target language.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for Students

Dear students, you are kindly invited to answer a set of questions. They are part of a research gathering material. The main concern of the research is to see the importance of culture teaching for a better cultural understanding and a better learning of English as a foreign language. Your cooperation is necessary and helpful. Your answers would be kept anonymous. Please answer with a tick in the appropriate box or with a short answer wherever necessary.

1-Section One: Culture and Language Teaching

Q1-Do you think you are given courses that focus more on:

a-Teaching the language (grammar, syntax, phonetics…)?
b- Teaching culture (history, geography, traditions, customs, beliefs…)?
c- Both?

Q2- Do you think you are given courses that focus more on:

a-Teaching the language (grammar, syntax, phonetics…)?
b- Teaching culture (history, geography, traditions, customs, beliefs…)?
c- Both?

Q3- Do you think these courses have been included in the curriculum because:

a-You need to discover new people and new cultures?
b-You need to see the differences between your culture and other cultures in this global world?
c-You cannot learn the language without its culture?
d-Other reasons?

Q4: Do you like these courses?

a-Yes
b-No

Q5: If your answer is yes, say why?

……………………………………………………………………………
………………………....

Q6: If your answer is no, is it because

a-You don't need to know about the culture of the target people?
b-You do not expect to be in direct contact with the target culture?
c-Learning language can be achieved successfully without the learning of culture?
d-Other reasons?

2- Section Two: Culture and the Language Teacher

Q7: Has your teacher of culture helped you learn things about the target culture?

| a-Yes |
| b-No |

Q8: If you answer is no, is it because:

| a-The teacher is not a native speaker |
| b-The teacher does not have enough knowledge about culture |
| c-The teacher is not employing enough teaching materials to teach culture |
| d-Other reasons |

Q9: Is the teacher of culture is providing you with:

| a-Knowledge about history, geography, literature? |
| b-Knowledge about traditions, customs, beliefs, values? |
| c-All of the above? |

Q10: Which is more important?

| a-To learn how people from the target culture communicate and interact in their daily life? |
| b-To learn about people's history, literature…etc? |

Q11: Do you prefer to have:

| a-A native speaker to teach you culture? |
| b-A teacher from your native culture to teach you the target culture? |

Q12: What kind of material you would like to be used in teaching you culture?

| a- Audio visual aids? |
| b-The internet |
| c-Readings like books, newspapers, magazines,…etc? |
| d- Others? |