



Teaching English Culture in EFL Classrooms: What? When? How? Cultural Content should be included in EFL Classroom

Ryma Guechi¹, Hariharan N. Krishnasamy²

^{1&2} School of Languages, Civilisation & Philosophy, university Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah 06010, Malaysia
Email: hn1084@uum.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

This article categorically analyzes the key issues faced in the teaching of culture in foreign and second languages to students. The definition of these two interrelated concepts given, respectively. Next, the characteristics and components of culture that need to be incorporated into the EFL classrooms. Additionally, the article defines relevant concepts such as language and culture that although commonly used some learners may not be able to identify how they relate. The article also provides various techniques used to incorporate cultural studies into second and foreign language classes. Besides, providing various views and assumptions on culture in the teaching foreign language. Moreover, factors such as teachers and curriculum explored and additionally the role they play in integrating culture to foreign language learning and the guidelines necessary to ensure that culture is integrated into EFL classrooms. This article sheds some light on this matter and additionally assists by giving effective methods used in order to integrate culture into foreign language classrooms. This article not only discusses the relationship between language and culture but also give a briefing on the necessary cultural components that need to be discussed such as cultural awareness, cultural identity among others, how the concepts help in language learning. In order to enable one realize the significance of integrating culture into foreign language learning, certain terms need definition.

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Corresponding Author's Email: rm.gue25@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Globalization of this century has seen various revolutionary changes into the world of information and technology, the world is reduced to global village hence communication and contact among people is made easier (Bayramova, 2016). Due to this, there is a resultant growth in the number of people looking to learn and master second or foreign language. This may be either for professional or personal reasons (In Chan, In Bhatt, In Nagami, & In Walker, 2015). Despite, practitioners in the field carrying out a commendable job on Teaching and Learning Foreign Language, there is need to accommodate and address the needs of the language learner (Liyanage, Walker, Bartlett, & Guo, 2015). Therefore, specific emphasis put on teaching cultural aspects of language simultaneously with the linguistic aspects (Sehlaoui, 2001). The teaching of culture concurrently to second and foreign language learners is a topic that has been widely discussed by various authors and scholars across the centuries. However, since a lot of time has passed, the relevance to the incorporation of cultural learning to foreign language teaching is under question (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010).

2. Factors to consider when integrating culture to EFL classrooms

According to Liyanage, Walker, Bartlett, & Guo (2015), the issue of integrating culture into foreign language teaching remains a hot debate among scholars and other practitioners in

the field. The question of including culture into foreign language learning has raised concerns from many concerned individuals, there is thus need to define what and how much socio-cultural information learners ought to know, the techniques used and ensuring relevancy of the information to the learning of foreign language (Sehlaoui, 2001). The teacher should therefore not limit discussions to target culture only but teaching the concept in wide scope while exploring global cultures (Liyanage, Walker, Bartlett, & Guo, 2015). Additionally, learner's characteristics, needs, and aims should be examined. When answering the questions what and when, cultural content is useful for EFL classrooms (Sehlaoui, 2001).

3. Answering the question "what"

Although several scholars have discussed the concern of including culture into the teaching and learning of foreign language. There are just but a few or almost none who have developed strategies that would help practitioners and teachers in the teaching of culture to second or foreign language class (Sehlaoui, 2001). In order to incorporate culture into the language studies various activities must be done to include culture in the studies within the grammar, speaking, reading and writing among other techniques applied in language teaching (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). Teachers can use various strategies to assist learners in understanding the cultural content that need to be included in EFL classroom. As Murray & Christison (2011) puts it, they may include the following cultural components into their language lessons:

Use of authentic materials that discuss cultural issues such as movies, news broadcasts, television programs, photos, magazines, websites, journals, and other printed works; this helps in engaging students into discussions.

- Using literary devices and techniques such as proverbs to assist students in exploring the target culture
- Having students involved in acting some of the misunderstanding that may arise from cultural variations.
- Presentation of historical and cultural objects such as ornaments, implements, jewelry, or pictures that originate from the target culture to assist in research on the historical and linguistic factors of the target group.
- Using external and internal experts, i.e. students who are bilingually equipped or exchange students, immigrant students, as a source of reference.
- Creating of trips to the native community of the speakers of the target language to assist in gathering more information on target culture
- Use of literary sources of different languages as points of reference.
- Using movies and television programs that reveal different cultural concepts that are absent in texts.

4. Relevance to learners' needs (The question "what")

This factor helps in revealing whether the cultural information handed is relevant to the language teaching process. It thus helps answer the question, what cultural content should be included in EFL classrooms (Sehlaoui, 2001). The EFL curriculum should thus incorporate the following aspects as Sehlaoui (2001) puts it to meet the requirement above:

- The learner's needs and how they relate to the study on the target culture
- Examine the learners' experiences in learning language, their weakness, and strengths.
- Characteristics of the class, concerning age, attitude, educational status, socio-economic status among others.
- Students' general attitude towards learning of culture of the target group.

The teacher's role is therefore to ensure that the learners know how to analyze different cultures. Make the learners be open in order to help them think and behave as those within the presented culture. Consequently, help the learners appreciate their culture and that of others, while understanding that culture differs (Sehlaoui, 2001).

5. Creation of cultural awareness: Answering the question "how"

Creation of cultural awareness where learners grow out of the shell of their native language and culture exposes them to the knowledge of other cultures and their contents

(Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012). They are able to make clear judgements and opinions without bias thus abolition of cultural stereotypes. Stereotypes may hinder learners from having a better understanding of the target culture and therefore their incapability to master the foreign language (Murray & Christison, 2011). While analyzing this cultural concept, the course books should avoid the representation of these negative stereotypes in a manner that may make the students lose interest. Bokyung Murray (2016) holds that stereotypes are a point of learning to assist in understanding different aspects of culture, such as gender as understood by different communities. He (2016) adds that when integrating culture to foreign language learning, the students additionally understand that within culture there are some actions and words generally accepted by the community. But this does not mean that everyone agrees there are those who prefer autonomy and therefore often question certain concepts, therefore, students should be made sensible to such underlying differences ("Kilickaya - Authentic Materials and Cultural Content in EFL Classrooms (TESL/TEFL)," 2016).

6. Incorporation in the curriculum: Answering the question "when"

The question of when cultural content needs integration into EFL curriculum has raised different views from many scholars. Analysis on this matter holds that most of the books used within the curriculum, explain only details of a specific language (Alshenqeeti, 2016). Some of them may or may not briefly discuss some cultural concepts (Sehlaoui, 2001). Therefore, in order to incorporate cultural studies into foreign language learning then, there is need to change the curriculum and the general education system to a more flexible manner that would allow this necessary development (Alshenqeeti, 2016). The course books need reform in such a way that they include detailed analysis of cultural values that are instrumental in understanding language (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012). Many countries are appreciating the need of not exposing learners to a specific culture, but a new trend is developing where language teaching incorporates intercultural studies of different cultures. (Murray & Christison, 2011), this assist in raising awareness of the students' culture and help in additionally understanding those of others. In this method, the curriculum does not pay attention to one specific culture but studies a variety; this helps teachers acquire bilingual skills, which provide them with knowledge and insight for teaching cultural studies (In Paradowski, 2015). Consequently, the students become aware of the differences in culture and are thus able to come up with strategies of coping up apart from getting familiar with international cultural contexts (Murray & Christison, 2011). Furthermore, it allows for interactions and thus intercultural communicative competence. Cultural content should thus be an integral part of the foreign language syllabus from the initial stages of learning (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015).

7. Conclusion

Following the previous discussions on cultural context that need integration into the EFL classrooms, the curriculum should emphasize on the following: Development of curriculum with course books, which give information and suggestions on how to handle the teaching of cultural context within the classrooms (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015). The books should additionally, address the characteristic of different studies and how studies are designed to help them understand easily. The books should also suggest the role of the teacher who is to use it (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015). Consequently, the books on cultural learning should contain vast information on the various cultures of the world and not limited to British or American culture (Tseng, 2017). Furthermore, such books should be free from biasness and address the reality on target cultures and not just a representation of the authors ideologies, this information ought to result from empirical research (Tseng, 2017).

Moreover, the topics under study should be relevant to what the learners need to learn in class. The information should not be limited to a particular group and should not include a series of stereotypes (Sehlaoui, 2001). The books additionally should not give general views on culture but should also discuss underlying difference. Information within the books should not be subject to judgement or comments from authors to avoid making learners develop formed opinion (Shah et al., 2014). Shah et al., (2014) add that these books may at times contain illustrations that may be appropriate to the learner's native culture, thus assist in understanding local communications better. Consequently, the books may incorporate tasks activities for learners to give them better understanding of cultural concepts (Sehlaoui, 2001). Ideally, the books should contain content that can be easily explained by teachers and additionally provide relevant information that can be used by learners in their daily lives (Alshenqeeti, 2016).

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