**Culture Inclusion In Language Teaching**

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**Abstract**

A great deal of research body has been devoted to investigate the phenomenon of culture integration in language teaching and learning. The current study is no of a less significance. In this paper, the researcher adopts an analytical argumentative method in the study of the role of cultural content involvement in classrooms and educational materials. The researcher initiates his study by clarifying the two concepts of culture and language through citing a number of the most common definitions in dictionaries and by different well-known scholars. Then he shifts to provide an account for the connection between the two terms and the way in which they are interwoven and overlapped. The next phase of this study is assigned  to highlighting the importance of cultural integration into language teaching and learning and how this might result in  better educational outcomes including an improved linguistic competence, a better communicative proficiency, and a recognizable target language cultural awareness. The following part includes an explanation of the four most common approaches to cultural integration in teaching. It provides a detailed description as well as different citations by specialists in this field on each type. The final section of the research includes exhibition of some previous studies that has been conducted to shed light on this issue of cultural integration into teaching in an attempt to contribute to a better understanding of it and to pave the way to further studies in areas that lack sufficient researching.

**1.Introduction**

Cultural content occupies a high prestige in the field of language teaching in general and in the area of foreign language teaching and learning in particular. It is considered as a fundamental as well as a complementary element to the linguistic content in this field. Thus, cultural components full integration into the target language is an urgent necessity to the educational material, especially the curriculum considering the fact that it represents the reference which provides educational content and guidance to language teachers. A set of foundations which make the culture of a core part of foreign language learning and teaching may include; the ability to fully master target language skills cannot be attained unless an extensive understanding of the culture of its nation is existent, a communicative adequacy is unlikely to take place  without achieving cultural adequacy, developing an understanding of the foreign language culture and interacting with it is itself an important factor, cultural customs resembles, to a large extent, language skills, and finally there is almost an agreement on the part of studies in this respect that culture is the ultimate goal of any foreign language teaching course. In general, a nation's culture is a representation of the set of beliefs, values, customs, thoughts and traditions which are dominant in that nation and consequently in the language they speak. Therefore, culture is regarded as the single gateway through which a learner of a foreign language is licensed towards mastering it. Due to its complexity, foreign language teaching ( FL) is viewed as a real challenge. Foreign language professor is overwhelmed with the dual duty of improving learners' four skills; reading, writing, listening and speaking, in the same line along with raising their awareness of the contexts and cultures in which that target language is used. A lot of work is needed to be accomplished so that it is mostly difficult for FL teachers to determine or prioritize what to teach and how. Traditionally, a lot of FL teachers favoured an emphasis on the linguistic forms in their classes at the expense of creating a balance between teaching  language structures accompanied with the communicative contexts in which they might possibly used. Consequently, culture was also underestimated and neglected. Despite the fact that the matter of imbalance between cultural and linguistic components has been frequently addressed, culture remains undervalued in FL teaching methodologies. Indeed, cultural inclusion in foreign language teaching and learning should not be perceived as an additional supplement to the classroom, but as inseparable unit along with language since the first provides the contextual framework through which the latter is interpreted. Despite their complete recognition of the critical relation between culture and language, it still remains challenging to FL teachers to involve cultural content in their curricula. Some of the causes which are theorized to be the reason why FL teachers struggle to achieve it may include; the absence of transparent definition leading them to be unsure what to teach in the first place, time limitation is claimed to be an obstacle since much of the class time is devoted to the focuses on improving learners' linguistic competence, and selection of an appropriate methodology to teach culture ,or even more complicated, the  way of evaluation the cultural content already taught. No easy or simple answers can be sought with these issues and a plenty of efforts are need to be made to achieve a progress in understanding the role culture in this regard. However, defining language and culture, expressing the relationship between the two concepts, shedding light on the importance of culture integration into language teaching as well as describing the different approaches of cultural contents will be the main concern of the current study considering their significant contribution to an extensive understanding of culture impact on teaching.

**1.1. literature Review**

**1.1.2. Definitions of Language and Culture**

Language and culture are two crucial terms that have always been associated with one another. Language , on the one hand, is a human property which is particularly related to human beings as a means of communication. This claim is supported by Mohsen (2013, p. 12) who points out that " language in itself is a human phenomenon that only relates to human kind".

According to Collins English Dictionary, language is"a system of communication which consists of sounds and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country or region for talking and writing".In this sense, language is viewed as an organized way through which a community communicate either in spoken or written approach.

Again, an emphasis is put to the notion that language is humans' device of expression with references to the different units from which it consists. Sweet(1900, p. 16) defines language as "the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts". Crystal (1995, p. 454) defines language as "the systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs, or written symbols in a human society for communication and self-expression".

Culture, on the other hand, has been defined by different scholars and dictionaries. Culture is the integration of three basic components crediting its continuity to the existence of the ability for learning and the transfer of knowledge to next generations. In this sense, *Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines culture as "the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations".

A higher level of complexity is present when Kroeber and Parsons (1958, p.583) refers to the transmitted set of values, ideas and other symbolic meaningful systems as a crucial factor in farming human behaviour. On the contrary, In its easily definition, White(1959/2007, p.7) claims that "By culture we mean an extra- somatic, temporal continuum of things and events dependent upon symboling". In some cases, culture is defined in relation to internal mental process as Hofstede (1980, pp. 21-23) points out that culture is "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another".

However, McCharty and Carter (1994, pp. 151-152) defined culture as "social knowledge and interactive skills which are required in addition to language system". From this view, it is indicated that culture represents the framework that is considered complementary and necessary for the application of linguistic knowledge in a particular society.

**1.1.3 The Relationship Between Language and Culture**

In the previous section, the majority of attempts to define the two concepts, despite their diversities and varieties in approaching the two terms, agree that language is a systematic device invented by a mankind for the sake of expressing beliefs, ideas, values or any other human-related communicative purposes either in a written or spoken form according to certain set of principles. Language and culture are perceived as vital and interdependent for each another. The relationship between the two concepts is skilfully depicted in Wenying Jiang's (2000, p.328) famous statement "language and culture make a living organism; language is flesh, and culture is blood. Without culture, language would be dead; without language, culture would have not shape".Due to its vitality in connecting the two concepts with each other, communication is introduced as one of triangular equation including language and culture. This equation is beautifully portrayed in Jiang(2000, p.328) statement that "communication is swimming, language is the swimming skill, and culture is water. Without language, communication would remain to a very limited degree (in a very shallow water); without culture, there would be no communication at all" .

To simplify it, language represents the mirror that honestly reflects the culture of the person standing in front of it. Indeed, it is culture which shapes peoples' interactions and gives them the meaningful framework that they convey. That is, any form of language that is used at an situational context must be relevant to the cultural norms of that context;otherwise, this form is at risk of being misunderstood and this might lead to unpleasant results.For instance, in some Arab countries especially those which are famous for hot climate, people used to utilize the word "milk" to describe the high degree of whiteness of an object stating that "something is as white as milk". In contrast, the same linguistic purpose is expressed with used of the word "snow" in European countries where fall of snow is typical, so people of such countries tend to say that "something is as white as snow".

The connection between language and culture has been elaborately discussed by different well-known scholars from various perspectives. In their perception of the nature of the relationship between the two concepts, Peterson and Coltrane (as cited in Fleet, p.7) say that "in order for communication to be successful, language use must be associated with other culturally appropriate behaviour". From their point of view, association of a particular linguistic form with a suitable cultural behaviour is a precondition for successful communication process. This assumption is strongly supported by Brown (2000, p.186)who addresses the issue from more philosophical vision literally stating that "language is a part of culture and a culture is a part of language; the two are inside each other and they cannot be separated from each other without losing the significance of either language and culture". In his view, he puts an emphasis on the dual interdependence of the two concepts and the impossibility of isolating one from another.

From a pedagogical perspective, language and culture are displayed as two parallel lines as Chuodhury (2014, p.1) clarifies that language is a reflection of culture so that teaching of language without reference to the cultural features of the community to which it belongs would be meaningless. This claim is advocated by Hendon (as cited in Fleet, p.5) who states that "culture should be taught when we have student". Finally, the Encyclopaedia Britannica also describes the mutual destiny of the two terms explaining that language cannot be mastered away of its cultural environment and that language paves the way to systemizing and evolving of cultural values.

**1.1.4 The Importance of Culture Integration into Language Teaching**

Since the main goal of language teaching is providing learners a guidelines through different stages of their study and assisting their progress towards achieving their aims, creation of an appropriate learning environment is inevitable for obtaining better pedagogical outcomes and that is unlikely to occur without boosting cultural awareness. Developing the quality of the educational system and improving its outcomes has always been the main concern of many critics, researchers, curriculum designers, professors, experts and everyone interested in this field. From this base, the process of culture involvement stands on a solid ground and derives its importance that linking the subject matter to its cultural context greatly contributes to enhancing the student's understanding of it, and thus this leads, obviously, to higher quality educational outcomes.

Historically, introduction of this method of teaching represents a reaction to the traditional approaches which relies heavily on teaching subject matter in isolation from its cultural context as a rigid teaching block far away from promoting interactive cultural consciousness of learners.This claim is advocated by Liddicoat and Crozet (1997) indicating that mastery of four language skills in the target language is prioritized and preconditioned to the introduction of target language cultural material according to the teaching standards at that time. They criticized this method explaining the extent to which the concept of culture is limitedly perceived in this view. In that period of time, culture is expected to be taught as part of teaching literary artefacts such as novels, plays, poems, etc., considering these works are created using language.

More recently, it is noticed that the tendency to adopt the view that culture should be embedded within the teaching material itself and not isolated subject is growing drastically. This is however seen in Veinar*etal* perspective (2008, p.268) that culture teaching is regarded as the fifth skill for language learners that enriches learners' overall learning experience. A stronger support of this view is what Kramsch (1993, p.1) mentions in his statement that "culture is not expandable fifth skill that is attached to other language skills; culture is always in the background, from day one".

Furthermore, assumptions on the importance of the interplay between language and culture is beautifully expressed in Wang's (2008) statement that "foreign language teaching is foreign culture teaching, and foreign language teachers are foreign culture teachers".In the same concern, Stuart and Nocona (as cited in Kilickaya, 2004, p. 3) point out that "learning about the lived culture of actual target language speakers as well as about one's own culture requires tools that assist language learners in negotiating meaning and understanding the communicative and cultural texts in which linguistic codes are used".

Sun (2013) puts it clearly that an intensive understanding of the linguistic knowledge of the target language cannot be attained unless cultural knowledge of the same language is present. Accordingly, the whole notion might be best represented as follows that "language, as a code, reflects cultural preoccupation and constrains the way people think"Kramsch (1998, p.14). Along with, Steelye (1993, p.6) states that "unless the student is learning the language in the target culture, the cultural referents necessary to understanding a native speaker must be learned in addition".

**1.1.5 Approaches to Culture Involvement in Teaching**

With regard to language teaching and learning in association to culture, a set of various approaches has been introduced and occupied an important room in this field. While some of which have lost their prestige, others retained their domination. These approaches are categorized in different ways. According to Saluveer (2004) division, these approaches are classified into two categories:

1- those which emphasize only (or mostly) on the language of the target culture community (*mono-cultural approach*).

2- those which are basically established on drawing a comparison between both the target language culture and that of the learner (the comparative approach).

Rasigar (1998, pp. 243-252) names four approaches to cultural integration in teaching. These include: the multicultural approach, the foreign cultural approach, the Tran-cultural, and the intercultural approach.

To begin with, the multicultural approach, as the name suggests, is derived from the assumption which supposes the existence of sub-cultures within the same community. This approach not only takes into consideration ethnics and linguistic variations of the target language, but also the pupils' own culture. A comparison of culture is a crucial element here. Through this approach, Risager (1998) emphasizes the necessity of creating a sort of democracy, equality, and balance among learners who belong to different cultural background and eliminating any sort of disdain or racism. The foreign cultural approach is based on the notion of a single culture and stresses only the target culture.

Learners' own culture, according to this approach, is overlooked and so is the notion of comparing cultures with a great emphasis that is solely directed towards the target culture. The core of this approach is to maintain communicative competence and cultural consciousness in target language. Unsurprisingly, this approach received a plenty of criticism for neglecting the importance of drawing an analogy to discover areas of similarities between the two cultures which may in turn contribute to developing a better understanding of both.

The third approach suggested by Risager is known as trans-cultural approach. The prefix "trans" is added to the beginning of some words to mean "across" or "between". This approach views the world as a small village in which communication has been facilitated through the introduction of modern technological devices and other means featuring what is known today as globalization affecting, as a natural result, the different cultures of the globe as they are intricately interwoven. Nowadays, a lot of people around the world utilize foreign languages as lingua francs. In this approach, it is claimed that language is an international phenomenon that does not belong to a specific group or place. Consequently, there is no need at all to relate it to any other particular culture. Nevertheless, Byram(1997, p.55) ensures that in spite of the possibility to speak of topics which are of universal significance to all various cultures, it has a black side of depriving learners from topics that feature a particular community, that one which "characterizes its uniqueness for language learners".

The last, but not the least, approach of Risager's set is the so-called inter-cultural approach. From the prefix "inter" which means "between", it is easily guessed that this approach involves more than one culture. It depends on the notion that comparing the two cultures: that of the target language and the one of the learners' own culture is the best way to gain an extensive understanding of the desired culture. Despite the main emphasis is put on the target culture, this approach highlights the connection between both cultures. It seeks push learners towards developing a comprehension of intercultural and communicative proficiency, paving the way to them to play the role of mediators between the two cultures. However, this approach is criticized by Risager himself (1998, p.246) as being inadequate stating that it is "blind to the actual multicultural character of almost existing countries or states". Proposing the use of multicultural approach instead.

**2. Previous Studies**

The issue of cultural inclusion in language teaching has always attracted the attention of many researchers into deepening in it attempting to investigate this phenomenon and highlight all aspects relevant to it. In this section, the researcher provides some of the most important studies in this regard in a chronological order. Particularly, since the introduction of the first edition of the Standards in [1996](tel:1996), researchers have increasingly shown   
an interest in the way FL teachers integrate culture into their   
classes. In his study, Moore ([1996](tel:1996)) testified the [210](tel:210) Upstate New York   
teachers involved culture in teaching, particularly with reference “new” Standards and their principles of products, practices, and perspectives. Moore came up with an inference that time obstacles seemed to account for teachers’ resort to adopt certain methodologies of culture teaching, which in turn led to more emphasis on facts, or practices and products ,than on perspectives. Later studies by Garrett-Rucks and Hoyt ([2014](tel:2014)), Moore and Jernigan ([1997](tel:1997)), and Klein ([2004](tel:2004)) also concluded that teachers’ classes were characterisedwith the lack of sufficient emphasis on cultural perspectives.A national survey by The Social Science Education Consortium’s (SSEC) [1999](tel:1999)that involved 12,[000](tel:000)FL teachers examined the quantity of time high school teachers assigned to culture in their classes, the cultural content attained in those classes, and the materials and strategies used. The SSEC reported that despite the tendency to integrate culture in teaching was noticeably present among   
language teachers, the gap between what is hypothesized and what is really done is still large gap, and that teachers assigned less time to the connections between cultural products, practices, and perspectives than to any other criterion of culture teaching. Unexpectedly, over 80% of participants expressed their feeling of comfort and readiness that they felt well prepared for teaching culture in line with the Standards.

Proceeding the controversy on the extent to which teachers shows preparation to teach culture as principledin the Standards, Byrd ([2007](tel:2007)) investigated twenty FL teacher methodological course syllabuses in his PhD dissertation, and inferred that “pre-service teachers lack direct instructional strategies on cultural pedagogy” (p. vii). This inference was subsequently approved when Byrd et al. ([2011](tel:2011)) displayed the outcomes of their survey of [415](tel:415) world language teachers and 64 teacher instructor in relation with the role of culture inclusion in the classroom and the “motivators and barriers in maintaining culture knowledge” (p. 4). Byrd et al. also assured that among the three principles of culture included in the Standards, “perspectives” was the most complicated for teachers to handle in their classrooms.

Teachers explained that time constraints and shortage of funding was the two most significant obstacles to culture integration in teaching.

The influence of the Standards was additionally investigated in [2011](tel:2011) by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (Phillips & Abbott, [2011](tel:2011)a, [2011](tel:2011)b).findings revealed three areas of significant impact of the Standards: “using the three modes of communication and making communication meaningful; shifting from learning about the language into focusing on communicative teaching; and using the target language as the means of instruction and making it comprehensible” (p. 40). Three areas of “less impact than expected” were the Comparisons, Cultures, and Communities goal areas;   
“preparing students to use the language for real-world purposes beyond the classroom and increasing students’ interest in continuing their learning beyond the courses they take;” and teaching the aimed areas of the Standards as “separate entities” instead of interconnected components (p. 40).

International study on teaching culture in the classroom has shown similar  
outcomes to those previously mentioned: a confliction between culture teaching beliefs and classroom experience (Gonen&Saglam, [2012](tel:2012)) and limited care to culture  
(Gonen&Saglam, [2012](tel:2012); Young &Sachdev, [2011](tel:2011)).   
Despite the fact that the body of research regarding involving culture in the foreign language classroom is increasing, the requirement for additional research by Paige et al ([1999](tel:1999)) is still vital.

**3. Conclusion**

This research has explored some of the most important aspects relevant to culture integration in teaching with a particular emphasis on the area of language teaching and learning. The study, through a close examination of the arguments of the extinct to which cultural content inclusion may influence teaching and learning process, has concluded that it is noticed over the past few years the change in the attitudes towards the urgent necessity of cultural involvement in the educational process. Unlike the traditional vision held by language teachers and syllabus designers paying much attention to the linguistic competence and relegating to the sidelines the importance of developing learners' communicative proficiency through cultural contextual involvement, the recent study has touched an increasing degree of consciousness that language and culture symbolize a reflection of each other that the two concepts should never be looked at as isolated entities but as an concurrently in cooperated unified unit aiming at facilitating the educational process and equally participated to its success. Unfortunately, through the current study, it is also inferred that the majority of teachers, though totally convinced of the critical role of culture integration into the teaching material, they reported a sense of difficulty relevant to the absence of clear guidelines and standards to the application of this process (the content and the manner), time constraints as much of the class time is directed to the mastery of the language skills leaving no room to the cultural content teaching, and the lack of evaluations standardizations upon which the learners' progress to be judged. As a result, this opens widely the windows for further researching and exploration of this aspect.

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