

Cultural Critical Thinking; Others on the Basis of Us The Secondary Education Third Year Textbook “New Prospects” as a Case Study, Ain Merane/Chlef

التفكير النقدي الثقافي آخرون في تكويننا، نصوص كتاب السنة الثالثة ثانوي توقعات جديدة
–عين مران الشلف كنموذج للدراسة–

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Date de réception : 17/12/2019

Date d'acceptation : 13/02/2020

Date de publication : 27/03/2020

ABSTRACT:

The Algerian secondary education English manual has been of a wide complaint in recent times. As a result, lots of studies were carried out to examine the rationale behind this educational concern. The latter concerns the school textbook as a case in point of the teaching/learning syllabus and its cultural implications. The current investigation focuses on bringing to light the most important cultural inferences inside the hidden curriculum. In addition it investigates the possibility of a cultural chock all the way through the teaching/learning process. Knowing that secondary school teachers are of a significant importance sample for this exploration, the researcher has as a result, opted for a descriptive analytic method that acts in accordance with both qualitative and quantitative data collection. The process implies additionally the use of questionnaires as a helpful research tool. The questionnaire is initially handed for twelve teachers of English from two schools at Ain Merane, Chlef. After that, a short overview of the textbook “New Prospects” is carried out. Findings draw attention to the existence of a cultural misunderstanding ending in teachers’ prejudgment regarding the syllabus cultural speculations.

Key words: Secondary education-Educational worry; School manual; Cultural implications; Cultural chock

الملخص:

كان دليل اللغة الإنجليزية للتعليم الثانوي الجزائري من شكوى واسعة. وبالتالي ، تم إجراء العديد من التحقيقات لفحص الأسباب الكامنة وراء هذا القلق التعليمي. يتعلق الأخير بالكتاب المدرسي باعتباره تجسيداً لمناهج التدريس / التعليم وآثاره الثقافية. يهدف البحث الحالي إلى الكشف عن الآثار الثقافية الرئيسية داخل المنهج الخفي. كما يدرس احتمال وجود صدع ثقافي طوال عملية التدريس / التعلم. معلمو المدارس الثانوية من عينة ذات أهمية كبيرة لهذا الاستكشاف. لذلك ، اختار الباحث طريقة تحليلية وصفية يتوافق مع جمع البيانات النوعية والكمية. تنطوي العملية على استخدام الاستبيانات كأداة بحثية فعالة. يتم تسليم الاستبيان لاثني عشر مدرساً للغة الإنجليزية من مدرستين في عين مران. بعد ذلك ، يتم تنفيذ نظرة عامة قصيرة على الكتاب المدرسي "آفاق جديدة". تسلط النتائج الضوء على وجود صراع ثقافي ينتهي بالمعلمين المتحيزين للمضاربات الثقافية للمناهج الدراسية.

. الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم الثانوي ، القلق التربوي ، دليل المدارس ، الآثار الثقافية ، الصدمة الثقافية

INTRODUCTION

There have been abundant complaints about cultural implications in teaching a foreign language as their means of expression. As a result, the present research focuses on possible ways of

investigating teachers' perspective in terms of the need for enhancing critical thinking as a teaching/learning criterion; i.e. thinking while teaching/learning. Besides, the main concern of this paper is identifying the most important variables intervening in either promoting, or hindering the life-long learning process in so far as culture is involved. More precisely, it tends to examine cultural implications of the secondary education manual "New Prospects". This paper studies the teaching/learning aspects by examining the included socio-cultural factors. It goes without saying that the reason behind this step is due to the fact that foreign language teachers' abilities can be deeply weakened by their attitudes. That is why the set of circumstances can take the form of a cultural conflict with the foreign language culture they are exposed to as contradicting their own.

To embark on the present investigation, one formulated the subsequent questions:

A. What cultural implications does the school manual hold?

- a. What are teachers' attitudes towards the schools manual cultural aspects?
- b. Does the hidden syllabus make available the native culture?

Probable reasonable answers to previous questions could be an outcome flow of some hypotheses to be tested:

B. The school manual is the starting point of cultural chock.

- a. Teachers' socio-cultural one-sidedness.
- b. The manual socio-cultural implications go up against the home culture.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Cultural Resistance

In Arabic countries, in so far as Algeria is concerned, people even now cling to conservative attitude concerning their culture. This state of affairs has stimulated their critical thinking by questioning what is alien to both their native customs along with cultural norms. Without a doubt, they have not only ceased being careful about all what is foreign to their mother tongue but also its cultural implications. The reason behind this view is that people worry about a cultural desalination that may cause them loose their magnified identity. These circumstances are due to the bitter experiences with the French colonists, who tried to confine Arabic to the religious matters merely by imprisoning it in the mosque. This case is well clarified by Professor Farouk BOUHADIBA (7: 2006) who emphasized that Arabs preserved their mother tongue; i.e. classical Arabic, especially Algerians. The latter believe that their native language as part of their identity should be preserved and protected against any endeavor of acculturation or disregard involving both their linguistic as well as cultural construct.

1.2. Hidden Curriculum as a non Value-free System

The educational programme implies a number of cultural implications known as the hidden curriculum. The latter is of a paramount importance in foreign language teaching/learning process. The viewpoint is well articulated by Cunningsworth (1995: 90) who states that together teachers and learners can become aware of some cultural aspects disagreeing with their native culture. Subsequently, a clash of cultures takes place, as far as the teaching material is concerned. The process is embodied in the form of a hostile response to the target language and its speakers. This unwelcoming attitude from the part of foreign language practitioners is justified by the native speakers' ideological or historical impressions. As a matter of fact, there happens a great impact on foreign language teachers and learners attitudes. The implication is that any teaching material cannot be a value system-free. In all, one can affirm that there is at all times an opinion or a social norm.

1.3. Textbooks as a cultural vehicle

It is a fact that the teaching manual cannot be cultural-free materials. This criterion is highlighted by Risager in Cunningsworth (1995: 90) who stated that in addition to their pedagogical role, textbooks work as a means of culture transmission. The point is that they are the major source for the teaching/learning process. The same idea is also claimed by Nunan, D. (1991) as most if not all teachers are wholly subjected to the school manual. The reason behind this slavery to textbooks lays in their importance as the official mandated source for teachers' daily performances. In reality, teachers are pretty certain that if they deviate or appeal to a different resource they will without a doubt be in charge of the consequences. In this case, teachers prefer not taking risks; as a result they show a high fidelity to textbooks.

Textbooks are supposed to play a vital role in culture spread. They initially expose the foreign learner to his native cultural norms and implications. The process is known by home culture awareness through inculcating learners with their native culture as a primary role. This step aims at preserving the native culture by introducing it to learners at an earlier stage. In the same line of thought, Risager in Cunningsworth (1995: 93) affirms that early exposition to the home culture is established as the primary if not compulsory principle for textbooks. Being rather regarded as a vital role for national unity, it points toward building along with maintaining an authentic identity for a reliable social integration. It's only after that; those learners can be exposed to the foreign culture.

Byram, M. (2002) points out that learners' home cultural stock that is provided by textbooks becomes a basis for dealing with a foreign cultural aspect. Following the idea claimed by Fenner and Newby (2000), it is therefore of paramount importance to not only take account of knowledge about the foreign culture and put into test but also subject it to filtering. At this point, learners begin a filter process. Hence, a probable cultural clash may take place whose consequences can lead to foreign culture rejection. That is why learners will be reluctant to adhere to the foreign language learning as an outcome of a cultural conflict.

1.4. Languages Fanatism:

Individuals in any society have always had an intimate tendency to preserve their language and keep it thriving. In contrast, they refuse any attempt of a foreign language obligation due to cultural differences. The intention is that there is constantly an attentive deal with foreign languages owing to the cultural values they transmit as expressed in the English Teaching Forum; (Volume 48 Number 2. 2010). That's why cultural norms commonly urge foreign learners to be anxious about the conflicts that can immerge between the two cultures. This worry is of most if not all E.F.L. learners' concern.

The focal point is that learners are not expected to let down their mother tongue straightforwardly for the foreign language they are supposed to learn. They definitely are going to exercise particular hostility to the foreign language and its culture. It is worth stating that native speakers of a certain language show their language and cultural resistance to the foreign language they are exposed to. The idea is dealt with by Risager in Cunningsworth (1995: 91) when he states that when dealing with any language, people are known by their mother tongue support rather than the foreign one, and so for the culture it carries. The intent is that they believe that their mother tongue and its cultural implications are part of their social identity and construct. Consequently, they do not intend to let down their native language and embrace the foreign one.

2. Methodology

This investigation appeals to implementing an analytic descriptive method. The latter implies qualitative and quantitative data collection.

2.1. Population and Research Tools

Initially, the researcher selected 12 teachers from two different secondary schools in Ain Merane; Chlef, which are located in the centre of this town. Teachers who come from dissimilar departments, universities and graduation years hold idiosyncratic backgrounds and attitudes. The choice of the school manual “New Prospects” can in fact be a good sample to exploit at this stage of the research process.

To attain the research objectives, two instruments are implemented namely; a questionnaire checklist is set for teachers to get an individual account of the teaching/learning situation at the two secondary schools. Then, there is a short overview of third-year textbook “New Prospects”, that is the mandated manual and the sole official source of the designed syllabus.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings are presented in the form of graphs and pie-charts, as a source for data analysis. For an easy retrieval, every datum is analyzed with reference to questions in each rubric; e.g. (App. Table. Qst). The aim is that results are dealt with in terms of percentages or numbers of respondents, followed by their analysis in the sort of implications.

3.1. Overview of the Textbook “New Prospects”

The school manual “New Prospects” was designed as an aftermath of the Competency Based Approach. The latter is expected to comply with the path for the fulfillment of the designed syllabuses of all Secondary Education streams in Algeria (Foreword of the textbook “New Prospects”, 2007: IV). In March 2006, this textbook was laid by the National Education Curriculum Committee (henceforth, N.E.C.C). The school manual aims at satisfying the pedagogical needs for the Baccalaureate candidates. It is; indeed, a matrix consisting of six units dealing with the main suggested themes in the English syllabus for third-year students.

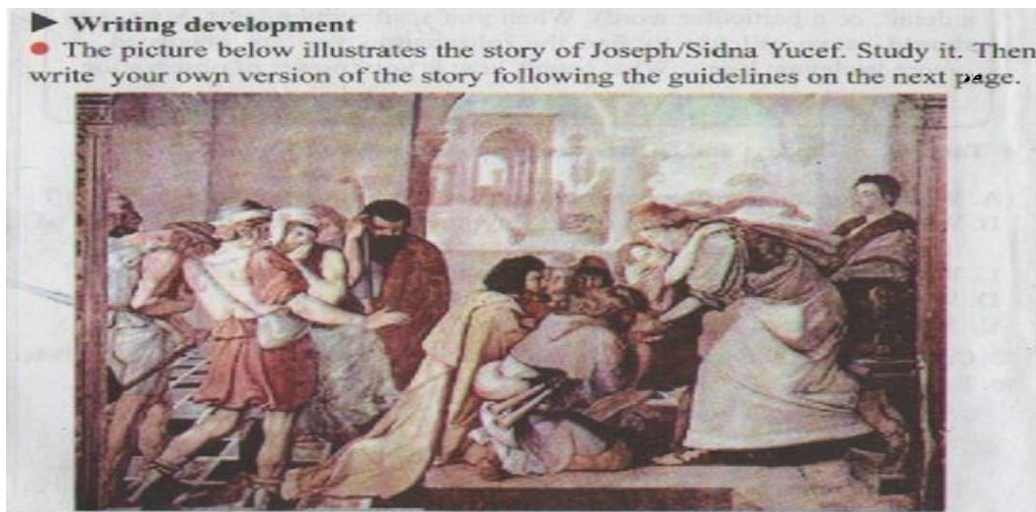
It is worth stating that when dealing with the designed syllabus, a quick deduction can be drawn concerning focus on the writing skills rather than the speaking one. Another point is that lessons are designed for all streams without any distinction. With the absence of any demarcations between the designed syllabuses for the Baccalaureate streams, the school manual is a “one- fits-all”. The general picture is confirmed in the textbook preface in the following statement:

*“**New Prospects** complies with the new syllabus for **SE3** as laid out by the National Curriculum Committee of the Ministry of National Education in March 2006; Three features of the syllabus have been given careful consideration in designing this book:*

- (i) *The fact that the Baccalaureate is exclusively of the **written mode**;*
- (ii) *The emphasis on the thematic orientation;*
- (iii) ***The need to cater for the pedagogical requirements of all Baccalaureate streams**”. Foreword of the textbook “New Prospects” (2007: IV).*

The above passage confirms the idea of a common school manual for all third-year level without any distinction between the different streams it comprises. However, these streams do not give the impression to possess the same needs for their Baccalaureate exam, and so for their future orientations after they pass it, or rather as university requirements.

Another point worth stating about third-year streams textbook is that it is not free from probable or anomalous socio-cultural implications. The latter are meant to be the set of activities that can bring divergence about their unsuitability to the home culture. The following picture, taken from the textbook “New Prospects” (2007:40) is a good example of possible samples that can learners be exposed to in classroom settings:



The above picture is obviously a good example of cultural contradictions. It is in fact taken out from the previous version of the school manual “New Prospects”. The aim behind it is to ask pupils to write a paragraph about the Prophet Yucef. But, personifying a prophet is religiously prohibited. The picture gave straight away birth to serious dissatisfactions among teachers and parents-association. Actually, the latter exhibited their hostile attitudes towards this shocking matter.

3.2. Teachers’ Questionnaires Results

This part is data collected through questionnaires from participants (teachers of English)

3.2.1. Personal details:

| | Total Number |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Teachers | 12 |
| Male | 4 |
| Female | 8 |
| Average age | 39 years |
| Average experience | 14 years |

Table1: Teachers Biographical Data

There are twelve teachers as participants in this study; eight of them are females and four are males. Hence, we can state that most of teachers are females. Feminization of the teaching staff can be the result of females’ primary interest in teaching as the most favourite job. The participants’ average age is thirty-nine which means that they have an average teaching experience of 14 years; it is therefore a significant resourceful population for the desired items to investigate.

3.2.2. Language and Socio-cultural Awareness

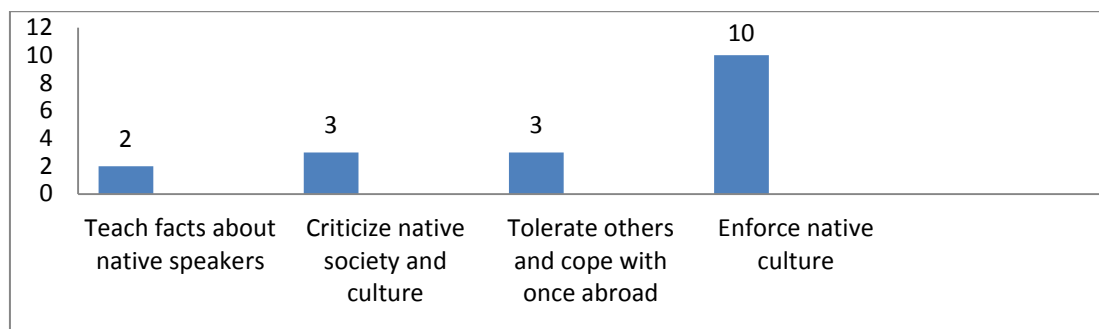


Figure: 1. Language and Socio-cultural Awareness.

Analysis:

As shown in the above graph, few teachers (02/12) facts about native speakers in their teaching process. It follows that, only three of them either aim at developing a critical attitude towards their native socio-cultural background, or tolerating the foreign cultural implications. The process requires maintaining the native cultural norms. This is well interpreted in the next finding, as the very majority of teachers responded positively for reinforcing the native culture in the teaching process.

It appears that, the aforementioned findings confirm the presence of a cultural bias as the majority of teachers are negatively charged towards the foreign culture. On top of that, developing a cross-cultural state of mind is of a great absence. The situation has led to a severe wide complaint of teachers, and teachers-parents' association alike concerning the picture of Yusuf, as the latter is regarded as a personification of a prophet. At this stage, it is worth stating that teachers are very careful about integrating foreign cultural items in their performances straightforwardly.

3.2.3. Cultural Aspects of Lessons

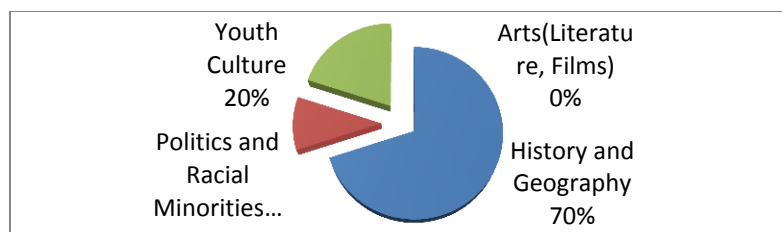


Figure: 2 Cultural Aspects of the Lessons

Analysis:

The above pie chart shows that the most dominant cultural aspect in lessons is history and geography as stated by the majority of teachers (80%). This positive response is due to the fact that the units dealing with ancient civilizations, the evolution of lifestyles and education in the mandated textbook are commonly acknowledged. Politics and racial problems are of the minority concern. This shows without a doubt the degree of implication that characterizes teachers who obviously seem of little interest in these domains.

One can also become aware of the total absence of arts that is to say; literature and films as a consequence of teachers' reluctance to deal with literary works. Besides Teachers' avoidance behavior can be interpreted as an outcome of their disregard and the difficult interpretation of the literary works. In all, one can assert that youth culture is not a widespread feature among teachers. Unfortunately no more than (20%) of them reckon dealing with it as it is closely related to pupils' daily practices.

3.2.4. Material Used to Teach the Target Culture



Figure: 3 Materials used to Teach the Target Culture

Analysis:

By examining the above pie chart, a quick deduction can be drawn. The matter is that the most used source in teaching the English language as a vehicle for culture is the official school manual. This means that teachers are fully subjected to the mandated textbook. This state of affairs gives an idea about teachers' hesitation or avoidance to deal with authentic materials which can imply directly items contradicting the home culture leading to a cultural chock. In addition, teachers had gone through a bitter experience in this issue within the previous edition of the textbook ("New Prospects" (2007:40). The unpleasant feedback went further and got serious observations when Pupils-Parents Association took part in this conflict.

This unpleasant incident is to be dealt with in the next item. It is noticeable in the pie chart that the use of videos or newspapers is the very minority concern. This uncommon use can be justified by its defects as time consuming. Literary works are of no use. The reason is that teachers avoid dealing with them as a consequence of deep feeling of lack of skill and lack of interest.

3.2.5. Cultural Bias

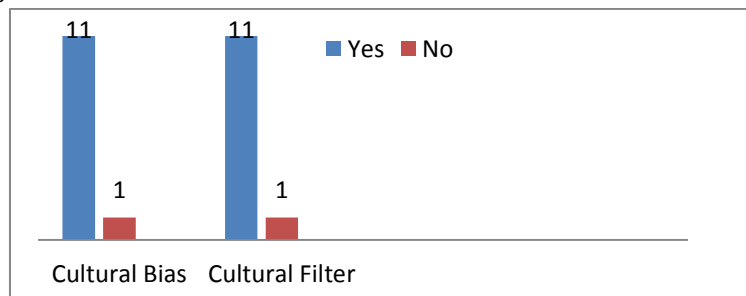


Figure 4. Cultural Bias

Analysis:

Findings in the bar graph above show that the very majority of teachers faced a cultural chock. The latter is an outcome of the image personifying the prophet Yusuf, which is religiously prohibited. This issue not only electrified teachers-parents' association, but also made public a huge teachers' protest in seminars organized by local inspectors. As a result, teachers are getting more and more vigilant when dealing with the foreign culture, which means the presence of a cultural filter. This process implies teaching/learning about others on the basis of us. The idea is confirmed in the figure above as the majority of respondents declare carrying out a cultural filter towards the target culture.

4. CONCLUSION

Findings of the research confirm the presence of a cultural opposition in the form of critical views towards any aspect of the target culture. It is not surprising that most teachers acknowledge the presence of a cultural clash inside the school manual. Accordingly, they show signs of hostile attitudes towards the foreign culture. This line of reasoning is well perceptible in teaching facts about foreign culture on the basis of the native one. As a matter of fact, a cultural filter mindset became visible from the part of teachers for a safe and sound learning process. Indeed, this decisive factor, known as cultural awareness, initially prospers among the teaching community and is later conveyed to learners coming to an end in a mutual critical thinking process. The latter is ultimately promoted by means of drawing a distinction between home and foreign cultures meant for a stress-free learning process.

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