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# An Investigation of Target Culture Teaching in the Oral Expression Classroom:

A Probe into Culture- Specific Techniques and Strategies

استقصاء حول تدريس الثقافة المستهدفة في فصل التعبير الشفهي: تحقيق في التقنيات والاستراتيجيات المحددة لتدريس الثقافة

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#### Abstract:

The present research started from an existing validated problem which reveals that some target cultural aspects are neglected in the second year oral classrooms at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University, Setif 2. Hence, it aims at exploring the perceptions of second year oral teachers towards target culture integration, the problems teachers face when integrating it along with the techniques and the strategies they generally use for such purpose. A semi-structured interview- analyzed using the thematic approach and a questionnaire were designed to answer this work's research questions about the teacher's perceptions towards target culture integration and the techniques they use in their oral classrooms for this aim. The results obtained showed that although all the teachers were aware of the importance of target culture integration and held a supportive perception towards its integration; they did not integrate it explicitly using culture-specific techniques and strategies. Ultimately, a number of practical implications were suggested to give possible solutions to the issue under scrutiny.

**Key words:** target culture, teaching culture, perceptions, teacher, English.

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## الملخص:

ينطلق البحث الحالي من مشكلة موجودة تم التحقق من صحتها والتي تكشف أن بعض جوانب الثقافة المستهدفة تم إهمالها في فصول الشفوي للسنة الثانية لغة انجليزية في جامعة محمد لمين دباغين، سطيف 2. ومن ثم فهو يهدف إلى استكشاف تصورات اساتذة السنة الثانية تجاه ادراج الثقافية المستهدفة ضمن محتويات دروسهم، المشاكل التي يواجهونها، بالإضافة الى التقنيات والاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمونها بشكل عام لهذا الغرض. تم تصميم مقابلة شبه منظمة - تم تحليلها باستخدام النهج الموضوعي و استبيان للإجابة على أسئلة البحث لهذه الدراسة. أظهرت النتائج أنه على الرغم من إدراك جميع المعلمين لأهمية دمج الثقافة المستهدفة ودعمهم تجاه إدراجها؛ الا انهم لم يدمجوها بشكل صريح باستخدام تقنيات واستراتيجيات خاصة بالثقافة. في نهاية المطاف، تم اقتراح عدد من الحلول العملية لإعطاء حلول ممكنة للمسألة قيد البحث الكلمات المقتاحيم: الثقافة المستهدفة، تدريس الثقافة، تصورات، الأساتذة، إنجليزية.

## 1. Introduction

It has been long recognized by linguists and anthropologists that the linguistic forms and uses of a given language mirror the social context where the language is spoken (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 1997, p. 5). Furthermore, One of the main concerns of today's research does not revolve around the kind of relation that governs language and culture, yet it has to do with what perceptions foreign language instructors hold concerning target culture integration; still whether they agree or disagree is not the center of the debate. However, what seems to be trendy in the research area nowadays is whether they possess the appropriate techniques and strategies to a better target culture integration, Kitao (2000, p. 13) clarifies this idea by putting forward that;" foreign language teachers recognize the necessity of teaching culture.... However they were not adequately trained to do so." Hence, instructors are required to be aware of the importance of the culturally integrated classrooms and therefore employ appropriate, useful and beneficial techniques and strategies to present cultural knowledge in their course objectives.

## 2. Statement of the Problem:

Wang (2008) asserts that" foreign language teaching is foreign culture teaching and foreign language teachers are foreign culture teachers". However, it seems that some aspects of the target culture are neglected in foreign language classrooms at Mohamed Lmine Debaghine University, Setif 2.

Thus, a pre-interview was conducted with six oral teachers revealed that all the teachers are aware of the importance of integrating the target culture in their classrooms, yet they tended to focus much more on the linguistic and the communicative competences when designing their lesson plans. Moreover, a pre classroom observation revealed that all the observed teachers did not integrate the target culture explicitly using culture-specific activities however they kept target culture integration an occasional, secondary and a superficial event, using a limited set of techniques and strategies such as proverbs and comparisons.

This issue of cultural negligence in foreign language contexts calls the need for solutions. Thus, a detailed presentation of the different teacher's perceptions towards target culture integration and its vitality to foreign language study are set out, in addition to the possible challenges that may face teachers when dealing with target cultural issues. Ultimately, a comprehensive analysis of appropriate techniques and strategies may be put forward to facilitate the process of target culture integration in foreign language classrooms.

Thus this study aims at answering the following research questions:

- **a.** What are second year oral expression teacher's perceptions towards target culture integration in EFL classrooms?
- **b.** What are the techniques and the strategies used by second year oral expression teachers to integrate the target culture in EFL classrooms?

## 3. Culture Integration in Foreign Language Classroom

Culture can be defined from many perspectives by various researchers. To start with, According the English anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1871, p. 1) culture is:" that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, low, morals, costume and any other capabilities and habits acquired by men as a member of the society." Yet, although Taylor was one of the pioneers who defined culture, his definition was limited to the archaeological and the aesthetic use which refers to artifacts and fine culture.

Secondly, culture is "various costumes, values, typical behavior, attitudes and the overall approach regarding the way of life reflected in movies, songs, fashion, literature and on numerous products of arts, but also in everyday use of a particular language e.g. recognized proverbs, common idiomatic expressions or phrases which are characteristic for

certain members of the society and which significantly differentiate these people according to their age, level of education as well as their position in society. (Ritlyova`, 2009, pp. 88-93). Although the later definition reflects the language as being one aspect of culture, still what is reflected in movies, songs and fashion mainly might not reflect the real culture of a particular country even literary text may be "dangerous" as stated by Brumfit & Carter (1986, p, 27) in their book Literature and Language Teaching "there are features here that suggest something bigger than life, an exaggerated picture which can scarcely be used as a source of information about real hospitals, common sense...."

Thirdly, Goode & Sockalingam, Brown, & Jones defined culture as an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes, thoughts, communication languages, practices, beliefs, values, costumes, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting and roles, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic religious or social group and the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations .( 2000, p. 1). The above definition highlights almost all the components of culture, for the latter is represented as both big "C" culture and lower case "c" culture which seems to fit the purpose of currant study.

Since the development of communicative language teaching, the definition of the profession of teaching took another dimension, surpassing the traditional meaning of instruction. Hence "learners need not just knowledge and skill in grammar of a language but need also the ability to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways" (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 1997, p. 4). As a result culture and language can not be separated in a language classroom. In a similar fashion Kramsch claims that,"...once we recognize that language use is is indissociable [sic] from the creation and the transmission of culture, we have to deal with a variety of cultures, some more international than others, some more conventionalized than others" (1993, p. 9). In a likewise manner, many scholars claim that the study of language is incomplete and inaccurate if taught in a culture- free context and "language teaching with an intercultural dimension continues to help learners acquire the linguistic competence needed to communicate in speaking or writing" (ibid, 1997, p. 5).

Many educational theorists and scholars agree that target culture integration may be important for foreign language development, yet they may believe that it is not an easy task to integrate culture in classrooms,

for many problems face foreign language teachers when integrating culture. In addition this, many foreign language teachers seem to find some challenges concerning having the appropriate background knowledge of the target culture, especially when it comes to the values, attitudes and perceptions. Besides, "teachers themselves may lack the opportunity to experience the culture they teach" thus they may "fear they do not know enough about the target culture and this make them afraid to teach it" (Laiveniece, 2016, p. 25).

Target culture integration may require teachers to be competent in both; the foreign language and the foreign culture, yet what might seem a problem for many language teachers is the lack of adequate training, as such Rivers (1981) put forward" foreign language teachers were not trained to teach culture". To clarify, teachers need not only to be presenters of mere language components of the subject matter, still they have to accompany them-language components- with their appropriate context in which they are used and most educators generally agree that" effective teaching requires mastery of content knowledge and and pedagogical skills" (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

However, if teachers are not equipped with such cultural knowledge and content; they cannot actually create a culturally integrated classroom, and even if they are culturally knowledgeable and are not trained how to integrate it, they might fail as well as to achieve their task. Therefore, Howard (2006, p. 6) put forward" we can't teach what we don't know, and we can't lead where we don't go". Hence, teachers may need to be trained to teach and integrate target culture in their lesson plans and their teaching activities. This may be achieved by exposing teachers – to be or even teachers to programs, trainings and granting scholarships for teachers to be trained abroad; in the same respect Allport (1954) argues that "the development of intercultural competence does not unfortunately" just happen" through learning about another culture…".

To this end, Darla Deardorff (2009, pp. 68-72) suggests possible solutions to this issue. To start, service learning may be an important mechanism that helps teachers to integrate culture in their classrooms, it involves" students in relationship across human differences, e.g. gender, race, age ...." (Slimbach ,1996 ,p. 106) . In the same respect, Allport (1954) refers to the same idea with the concept of 'the contact hypothesis theory' and explains that, "it constitutes a helpful foundation on which

to implement intercultural experiences successfully". Second, 'education abroad' may therefore help teachers to live in the target culture and bring the authentic context later on in their own classrooms, as highlighted by Deardorff (2009, pp. 68-72). Moreover, the term 'on campus' has been suggested again for the purpose of teacher target culture integration training, it actually refers to a type of program that groups and brings both local and international students all together in international ways (ibid, 2009, pp. 68-72), the same has been put forward by Bok (2006, p. 248) when he said that "the best way for undergraduates to understand to learn from one another is not by taking classes but in dorm rooms discussions, mealtime conversations, and other group activities". All in all, foreign language teachers may need training on how to treat and present cultural materials.

In addition to all the above, teacher may face problems of "ethnocentrism" which can be defined respectively as, "the tendency of people to judge others from their own culture's perspective, believing theirs to be the only "right" or "correct" way to perceive the world" (Cushner & Brislin, 1996, p. 5). This problem may be treated sensitively, and the teacher should be patient and try to explain cultural diversity, with time students will be trained to accept the others. Consequently, people's acceptance of their culture's values can vary at certain times. It is widely expected, for instance, that adolescents will change authority and go to endless means to create identities unique to their group. Such behavior, however, does not preclude them from being considered members of a given culture, as it is widely understood that most will eventually adopt the majority of mainstream values and practices. (ibid, 1996, p. 8).

## 4. Methodology:

The current study adopts a mixed method approach to research. Therefore, the quantitative method is used to collect and analyze data obtained from questionnaire about the techniques and the strategies used to integrate culture in EFL classrooms, whereas the qualitative research method is used to detect the teacher's perceptions towards target culture integration via a semi-structured interview. The population of this study is 60 teachers at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University whereas the sample is 20 oral expression teachers. Specifically, a semi-structured interview and a questionnaire are administrated to the sample to reveal their perceptions towards target culture integration and what advantages

they think target culture integration may bring to foreign language classrooms classes, in addition to the possible problems they may face when integrating the target culture.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

## Teacher's Perceptions towards Target Culture Integration

When the instructors where asked about what do they think about target culture integration in EFL classrooms, and state whether they think it is important in foreign language context; all the interviewees argued for the target culture integration, and that even in foreign language context, target culture integration becomes necessary and important. Besides, the participants made statements about the interrelation of language and culture, and that the foreign language cannot be thought without reference to its culture; In relation to this item, one of the participants made the following comment:

"I think that language and culture are the two faces of the same coin, I agree, I cannot imagine the language without culture, we cannot teach language without including the culture".

To relate these results with what have been already stated by scholars, statements can be made as to classify second year oral teachers at Mohamed Lmine Debaghine University, Setif 2 with the ones who think that target culture should be integrated within foreign language teaching as put forward by Byram (1997) and Kramsch (1993) among many others, opposing the opinion of Alpatkin (2002) and Seidlhofer (2005) who think that the aim of every foreign language learner is to convey meaningful messages and communicate rather than wasting the instruction time on presenting the target culture.

Although all teachers argued that language and culture are interwoven, and that foreign language cannot be taught in isolation; they rejected the fact that they should expose foreign language students to the target culture in an extensive manner, opposing the target culture-only approach; stating that equal importance should be given to both the native and target language and culture. This rejection could be due to the fact that all the interviewed teachers are Algerian and both teachers and students when coming to the classroom they bring with them there socio-cultural background creating a Foreign language context which makes target culture-only approach almost impossible, as reported below:

"I think it is good to compare between the mother tongue and the culture of the student with the target culture or the culture of the target language, because how will the student know the difference, how could they know that there is a difference between their own culture and the English culture "

Likewise, Kramsch (1993) stated that teachers need to apply the comparative approach and give equal importance to the student's local culture in order to help them perceive themselves as being different and generate comprehensive comparisons between cultures and ultimately choose what fits their values and tolerate what does not.

Even though all the teachers clearly insisted on the importance of target culture integration to foreign language classrooms; surprisingly when they were asked about their priorities when designing lesson plans, they stated fluency and accuracy as being much prioritized rather than cultural objectives. Therefore, giving target culture integration a secondary status makes it in most of the cases as reported, "Occasional, implicit and even superficial". This in fact does not mean that teachers are incompetent, yet it may be attributed to many factors such as, the level of the student, they type of the curriculum used or even to a number of problems that face teachers such as, time constraints, the lack of readymade materials and lack of sufficient trainings, in addition to students reactions to list few. Thus, all these factors may make teachers focus on fluency and accuracy and integrate the target culture only were needed, one of the teachers can be quoted;

"I consider that the aspects of fluency and accuracy are more important, culture is a matter of enriching the knowledge of the student"

From another perspective, many scholars such as, Byram (1997), Kaschru (1985), and Deardorff (2009) state that foreign language teacher should be aware that target culture integration can be helpful to the student's fluency and accuracy i.e. designing culture-specific lesson plans help students use the language leant in its right communicative and social context leading to excellence in both linguistic and communicative competences.

Since all teachers expressed the fact that target culture integration is beneficial to foreign language learners in many ways, thus they were asked to provide concrete examples of how they think it can be helpful to the four language skills and vocabulary. Therefore, only few examples where put forward and explained. To exemplify,

"in the oral skill for example, if you want to teach the students idioms, slangs or what so ever, it is part of their culture and you want to reach fluency, for example in written expression, we should not ... I mean in academic writing, language should be objective so regardless of any cultural norms, we should write something which is academic and focus on the fact that idioms are not really welcomed in academic writing"

For instance, it has been already explained by many scholars that target culture integration can be important to all the language skills and vocabulary, for it leads the students to speak the foreign language "effectively and appropriately" (Deardorff, 2009, p. 67). Therefore, appropriate and carefully designed culture-specific lesson plans may help them use the language to carry out successful oral and written conversations, not only by having the right vocabulary, but by knowing the social and cultural context of every particular piece of language including who talks, to whom, what, when, where and how to use them using the correct form (appropriately) with the right speaking pace (effectively) (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 1997).

## 6. The Problems that Face EFL Teachers when Integrating the Target Culture

EFL instructors at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University, Setif 2 agreed on the importance and the necessity of integrating the target culture when teaching foreign language classrooms. They stated that culture and language are interwoven and cannot be separated. Yet, they paid attention only to the grammatical and the communicative aspects of the language, making target culture integration an occasional event, or integrating it implicitly. This may be attributed to a set of problems EFL teachers may face when trying to integrate culture. As a result when teachers were asked about the problems they face when integrating culture, many reasons were stated to be challenging in their oral classrooms.

The problems differed from one teacher to another depending on the methodology they follow. However, all teachers agreed on the fact that most of them lack both training and knowledge about the target culture, which was already mentioned by many scholars, e.g. Rivers (1981) put forward" foreign language teachers were not trained to teach culture". One of the interviewees commented as follow: "As I told you

factors like culture shock can be problematic, and lack of training and knowledge for teachers"

To explain more, generally novice foreign language teachers receive either short or long term trainings about classroom management before engaging in the real practice of instruction, yet it seems that they do not receive trainings of how to design, present and test culturespecific lessons. In the same vein, Kitao (2000, p. 13) clarified that "foreign language teachers recognize the necessity of teaching culture... However they were not adequately trained to do so ", for target culture integrations requires the teacher to consider a number of elements such as, the level of the students, the time table available, the language and skills objectives i.e. fluency and accuracy, the availability of the materials and the list of techniques which permits them to present the target cultural information in both an enjoyable and tolerated mold. Besides, the "contact hypothesis" (Allport, 1954) may become a necessity for foreign language teachers, as it allows them to liveliterally- the target culture and sense it in a concrete manner instead of just learning about it, which may not-unfortunately- be available for all the teachers. In a similar fashion, Bok (2006, p. 248) stated that "the best way for undergraduates to understand to learn from one another is not by taking classes but in dorm rooms discussions, mealtime conversations, and other group activities".

Furthermore, teachers argued that target culture integration becomes problematic when appropriate materials cannot be found to account for cultural objectives. Thus, Deardorff (2009, p. 69) supports the use of culturally- based curricula to integrate culture by saying that the latter can be done "through curriculum and co-curricular activities", yet teachers claimed that they could not find such ready-made materials for cultural purposes, as reported by one of the teachers; "Usually if a teacher ...an EFL teacher thinks of integrating culture when teaching especially oral skills, he or she would think first of, or she will think of... materials, the supporting materials and media are so let's say so helpful and without ... maybe will find difficulties, serious difficulties to teach"

Therefore, ready-made materials can be found, yet they may not be effectively used in the Algerian context i.e. they may communicate culturally offensive information. Besides, they may not be appropriate to the student's level of language the thing that obliges teachers to adapt them to fit in their classrooms as explained by Gay (1954, p. 106)

"culturally responsive teachers know how to determine the multicultural strengths and weaknesses of curriculum designs and instructional materials and make the changes necessary to improve their overall quality". Furthermore, the ready-made material which is in most of the cases either a course book or a curriculum should have what Harmer (2001, p. 333) referred to as "thematic strand" i.e. every lesson should have its own, language and skills aims, a variety of activities and a subject or a content, yet it must have a "theme" that at least reappears though out the entire material with the visually attractive and representative media, which may be difficult to find as desired.

"I think in most of my sessions I focus more on getting my students to communicate, thus I do not have time for culture, even if I introduce culture; it is just done implicitly". This statement was put forward by a teacher who thinks that time constitutes a major problem, and that the focal point of every EFL teacher is to get students use the foreign language fluently and accurately. In a same manner, Moore (1996) explained that the lack of time may be problematic for many teachers when they think of integrating the target culture in their objectives. Hence, foreign language teachers generally and second year oral teachers specifically may be required to cover a large number of objectives regarding language, skills, activities that gives the students enough time to experiment the language in an enjoyable atmosphere. Consequently, all these factors leave no choice for teachers and oblige them just to hint" to simple basic facts about the culture" (Moore, 1996, p. 281).

## 7. The Techniques and the Strategies of Target Culture Integration

Finally, all teachers stated that they have never integrated culture in an explicit manner .i.e. they do not use culture-specific activities such as, "cultural islands", "capsules" and "assimilations", rather they tend to drive their student's attention to cultural information whenever it occurs implicitly. Moreover, they mentioned the techniques and strategies that they tended to use to teach both the foreign language and hint to cultural content such as, authentic materials, audio/visual materials, simulations, role plays, idioms, proverbs and comparisons: "The best technique is the use of authentic materials, videos, the comparison between the target and the native culture", "most of time it is done via a comparisons, I give an example of this culture and they find another from their culture;

sometimes we use visual aids and audio visual aids, in addition to idioms and proverbs"

Teachers do not use culture-specific activities simply because neither do they integrate culture in an explicit manner nor do they attribute much time to discuss cultural issues, rather they hint to cultural information only to help students use the language in its right social and cultural context i.e. when presenting idioms and proverbs. The latter can be very useful in many ways as they highlight" human qualities of a culture and a society" (Sohn, 2006, p. 74). Thus, it seems that a limited list of techniques and strategies are used including; the use of authentic materials, audio and/or visual materials and other language-based activities e.g. role plays and simulations.

Moreover, most of the teachers used comparisons to show differences in language use and to highlight the different forms and meanings of language bits such as proverbs and idioms. As a result, even though all the participants agreed on the importance of the target culture integration; the fact remains that a limited consideration of the target culture leads to the use of a limited number of techniques and strategies due to a number of problems. First, the curriculum is already crowded and many teachers feel they cannot devote enough time to studying culture. Secondly, many teachers feel they do not know enough about the target culture and this make them afraid to teach it. Teaching culture involves dealing with student's attitudes, "a threatening and unquantifiable area", and this is the third reason some teachers neglect it. (Laiveniece, 2016, p. 25).

## 8. Conclusion:

Although the majority of the teachers explained the need for target culture instruction in their classrooms; they refused the target culture-only approach, suggesting that student's native culture cannot be denied, supporting the use of "the comparative approach". However, a number of participants seem to reject the idea of integrating the target culture in their classrooms, holding the belief that their role is restricted to foster the communicative skills i.e. English as a lingua franca; those teachers seem to reject the target culture instruction, arguing that foreign language learners may need the English language for instrumental purposes such as; when communicating, traveling or applying for a job, as a result integrating the target culture may waste the instructional time.

Although all teachers argued that target culture integration can bring many positive outcomes to foreign language teaching; they were not sure of how it can be important to a number of specific skills such as reading, writing and vocabulary.

Furthermore, all the teachers agree generally on the importance of integrating the target culture in the foreign classrooms, yet just a number of them integrate it practically in their oral classes. The limited integration may be related mainly to the teacher's perceptions i.e. believe on the communicative language teaching, in addition to a set of possible problems that may face them when they plan or present target cultural information

While all the teachers argued that target culture integration can bring many positive outcomes to foreign language teaching; they were not sure of how it can be important to a number of specific skills such as reading, writing and vocabulary. Furthermore, all the teachers agree generally on the importance of integrating the target culture in the foreign classrooms, yet just a number of them integrate it practically in their oral classes. The limited integration may be related mainly to the teacher's perceptions i.e. believe on the communicative language teaching, in addition to a set of possible problems that may face them when they plan or present target cultural information.

## 9. Implications:

Having the findings at hand, many implications can be made as to allow the present research to produce positive change at Mohamed Limne Debaghin University Setif 2. Hence, teachers are probably urged to be aware of target culture integration, and start attributing much time and effort to practically integrate it in their classrooms using culture-specific techniques as to explore the wide possibilities target culture integration offers to the language study in terms of the linguistic and the communicative competences.

Creating culturally integrated classrooms is important not only to the student's language i.e. linguistic and communicative competences, yet it may equip the students with the appropriate knowledge if they ever came to direct contact with the target culture in the future. Hence, they may be tolerant enough as to avoid cultural misunderstandings. In addition to having multicultural way of operation, it may therefore help them solve problems outside the classrooms walls on many levels to

account for survival purposes e.g. study or work abroad. Ultimately, knowing the target culture may stimulate the student's curiosity to know more about their own culture and build a solid identity based on the questions that may rise when trying to compare between cultures, thus students can accommodate to what they like in the target culture and tolerate what they do not.

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