



Teaching Culture Strategies in EFL Classroom

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Abstract

'Culture is a theory about the world, the people in it, and the ways in which goods are ought to be distributed among them. It is the complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, costumes, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Awareness of FL culture should be viewed as an important component of EFL learning/teaching. It involves a gradually inner sense of the equality of cultures and an increased understanding of one's native and target cultures. Therefore, it is a necessity for teachers to include cultural components in EFL teaching to maximize students' learning. Teaching culture is considered the fifth control skill in language teaching/learning. So , certain cultural awareness strategies can be effected on teaching other language skills'.

المستخلص

الثقافة هي النظرية حول العالم والناس واساليب توزيع خبراته عليهم . انها الكل المعقد والتي تشمل المعرفة والمعتقدات والفن والاخلاق والقوانين والعادات واية امكانيات وعادات يكتسبها الانسان كونه احد اعضاء المجتمع . ان ادراك ثقافة اللغة الاجنبية ينبغي ان يُنظر لها كمكون مهم في عملية تعليم / تعلم اللغة الانكليزية بوصفها لغة اجنبية وتتضمن الثقافة فهم داخلي وتدرجي للمساواة بين الثقافات ، ومنهن متزايد لثقافة الفرد الام والثقافات المعنية الاخرى . لذا فمن الضروري بالنسبة للمدرسين ان يُضمنوا مكونات الثقافة في تدريسهم للغة الانكليزية لتوسيع تعلم المتعلمين .

ان تدريس الثقافة يعتبر المهارة الخامسة ذات السيطرة في تعليم / تعلم اللغة. لذا فإنه يمكن لستراتيجيات الادراك الثقافي ان تؤثر في تدريس مهارات اللغة الاخرى

1-Definition

'Culture can be defined as the reflection of a language. Students can increase their knowledge and understanding of the culture through conveying the linguistic aspects. That increases their ways of thinking, their contemporary activities, and their contributions to many fields and intellectual endeavour' (Rivers, 1981: 260).

'Culture is a theory about the world, the people in it, and the ways in which goods are ought to be distributed among them. In any academic community, each learner has a moral obligation to reflect consciously on these theories, and ethics of culture .It is a moral matter and can change the world' (Gee, 1996:191).

Strategies 'refer to learners ' techniques for capitalizing on the principles of successful learning' (Brown, 2001: 208).

Herrell (2008:5) 'defines strategies as approaches that support students' learning'.

2 The History of Teaching Culture

'The history of teaching culture in the FL classroom has been the concern of many teachers, scholars, and sparked considerable controversy'.

'A language is, therefore, part of culture, and a culture is a part of language. The two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture' (Brown, 2001:164).

Byram (1994 : 23) 'makes learners aware that culture resides more in the very fabric of their lives-their beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes-than in a preoccupation with aesthetic reflections'.

As LessardClouston(1997 :27) 'notes , in the past, people learnt a FL to study its literature, and this was the main medium of culture. He claims that "it was through reading that students learnt of the civilization associated with the target language'.

3 Cultural Dimensions

'Culture is seen as a dynamic system of symbols and meanings related to dimensions' (Robinson, 1988: 11).

Adaskou et al.(1990:3-4) 'outline four cultural dimensions. The first is their aesthetic dimension. It includes cinema, literature, music, and media. The second is their sociological one. It refers to the organization and nature of family, interpersonal relations, customs, material conditions, and so on. The third is their semantic dimension. It encompasses the whole conceptualization system which includes conditions, perceptions and thought processes. The final dimension is their pragmatic or

sociolinguistic one. It contains the background knowledge, social, paralinguistic skills, and language teaching code which are necessary for successful communication'.

4 The Visible and the Invisible Aspects of Culture

'In teaching a second language the term culture has been employed to refer to distinctly different aspects of people's lives. It can be used to refer to the literature, arts, architecture, and the history of a particular people. EFL teachers describe the history or geography aspect of their country because these represent a popular understanding of the term culture' (Murcia, 2001:444).

Condon (1973:180) 'has concluded that both teachers and learners need to understand different cultural aspects, to recognize openly that people are not all the same beneath the skin. There are real differences between groups and cultures. To perceive those differences are the first steps to enter the world of culture awareness. Awareness in teaching enables learners to use language skillfully. That leads to the acquisition of a second culture'.

5-Goals for Teaching of Culture

There are more than one goalfor teaching culture, these are:

'According to Tomalin and Stempleski (1993:7) the goals of teaching culture are to help students to':

- 1- 'develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviours',
- 2- 'develop an understanding that social variables such as age , social class , and place of residence influence the ways in which people behave' ,

- 3- 'become more aware of the conventional behaviour in common situations in the target culture' ,
- 4- 'increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language' ,
- 5- 'develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture' ,
- 6- 'develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture' , and .
- 7- 'stimulate students ' intellectual curiosity about the target culture'

Seelye (1993: 29) 'formulates what he himself calls a super goal for the teaching of culture. He claims that all students will develop the cultural understanding, attitudes, and performance skills needed to function appropriately within a segment of another society and to communicate with people socialized in that culture' .

Chastain (1988: 299-300) 'adds that, in language classes where intercultural understanding is one of the goals, students become more aware of their own culture and more knowledgeable about the foreign culture. In such classes, students learn to recognize cultural patterns of behaviour and communication and function within the parameters with those new expectations'.

Seelye (1993: 30) 'goes on to say that large goals should be described in more detail to be useful. He suggests six instructional goals, which he summarizes as follows: the teachers should help the students to develop interest in who in the target culture do what, where, when and why (the first five goals) and some sophistication in evaluating statements about the culture and finding out more about it' (the sixth goal).

6-Role of Culture in Language Classrooms

'When should teachers teach culture? How should culture be taught? Why is it necessary for students to learn about the target culture at all?' (Fleet, 2006:5). How can teachers incorporate culture into foreign language classrooms in terms of fostering learners' cultural awareness and communicating insights into the target culture; how to teach culture for effective language learning?' (Wang, 2008:3)

'Issues of interaction and culture are integral elements of language teaching. Learners must not only be aware of language, but they must be taught how language is actually used in everyday interaction and what is characteristic in a given culture' (Dufva, 1994:19).

'Pragmatic awareness (i.e. knowledge about language use in the target culture (ibid:21) is very important from the point of view of social interaction. It is often claimed that pragmatic features of a language can be taught only 'after the students have learned the basic grammar', however pragmatic awareness ensures that "the first attempts to communicate in a foreign language are likely to be successful'.

'According to Wolfson (1981:123), 'speech acts differ cross-culturally not only in the way they are realised but also in their distribution, their frequency of occurrence, and in the functions they serve'.

'One of the implications of doing contrastive pragmatics in language teaching is to make learners aware of pragmatic aspects of language use by analysing their own language use and by looking for aspects of conducting speech acts that are in common

or contrast between the first and target languages (Kondo, 2004:51)'.

6- Principles for Culture Teaching

'How to secure culture a ' rightful place ' in language teaching has been another ongoing concern for scholars. There seems to be a consensus among them that students' active involvement is paramount. Byram and Morgan (1994: 50) stress that learners need to engage actively in the interpretations of the world and compare and contrast the shared meaning of both their own and foreign cultures'.

'Kramersch (1993: 205-6) warns against a simple transmission of information about the foreign culture and its members' worldviews. She highlights what she calls new ways of looking at the teaching of language and culture .These include the following principles':

A-'Setting up a sphere of inter-culturality to relate first culture to foreign culture and to reflect on conceptions of first culture and foreign culture'.

B-'Teaching culture as an interpersonal process to present not only cultural facts in a structural way, but to present understanding processes, values, beliefs or attitudes'.

C-'Teaching culture as difference is not only national traits, but also race, gender, social class, etc'.

D-'Crossing disciplinary boundaries: In order to carry out this approach, teachers need to have wider knowledge on subjects related to culture such as ethnography, psychology, sociology, or sociolinguistics'.

7-Defining a Cultural Syllabus

'Once the aims and principles of teaching culture have been determined, the issue of what the syllabus should contain has clarified. The cultural syllabus can be defined and classified using different categories such as topic areas, cultural categories, and elements of culture and so on' .

A- Topics for Teaching Culture

'The easiest way to design a cultural syllabus is to compile a list of topics that are important for or of interest to students. As there is no exhaustive list, the decision to include certain topics is always arbitrary'.

'What a huge task trying to list the topics for teaching culture is seen from the list of 62 topics compiled by Brooks (1968:124). His list includes, for example , greeting , patterns of politeness, verbal taboos, festivals, folklore, music, medicine, hobbies, meals, However, he claims that such a list is in no way exhaustive and stresses that the learners' ages and needs should be considered'.

'Chastain (1988:303–4) has been compiled his list using an anthropological perspective. Similar to Brooks, he claims that students can add topics with which they decide to become familiar'.

'In his list, there are 37 topics, including family, home, money, religion, holidays, clothes, non– verbal communication, ... He considers the latter especially important to teach when students anticipate having direct

contacts with speakers of the other culture. What he also emphasizes is that the discussion of these topics should be based on comparing similarities and differences of students' own and the target culture (ibid : 304)' .

B-From Topics to Larger Categories

'Although lists of topics may be the easiest way to design a cultural syllabus, this may lead to an unsystematic provision of information, Therefore, chosen topics can be grouped into areas or categories'.

'Hasselgreen (2003:7) suggests a list of categories these categories have been regrouped and supplemented on the basis of students' essays and writings, therefore, he considers their interests and suggestions. The topics are centered around learners' intercultural abilities. These are: the ability of coping with daily life activities , traditions and living conditions (e.g . in home , school and at festivals) , the ability to deal with social conventions (e.g. good manners, dressing and meeting people), confidence with the values , beliefs and attitudes of the FL users (e.g . what they are proud of, worry about and find funny) , the ability to use verbal communication means (e.g. greetings , apologizing, expressing gratitude, embarrassment and love) and lastly, the ability to use non-verbal language (e.g . body language and facial expressions)'

C- Elements of Culture

'There has been several attempts to present three- way elements of culture. Hammerly (1982:210) distinguishes

among information culture, behaviour culture and achievement culture'.

The first,' information or factual culture, includes the information and facts an average native learner would know about his / her culture and a second language learner should be familiar with in order to understand how native learners view their country (ibid : 211)' .

Moran (2001:24)'argues that although a threefold distinction is easy to apply, there is an important element missing from it, namely people. Therefore, he has added two elements: communities and people as shown' in Fig. 1-1

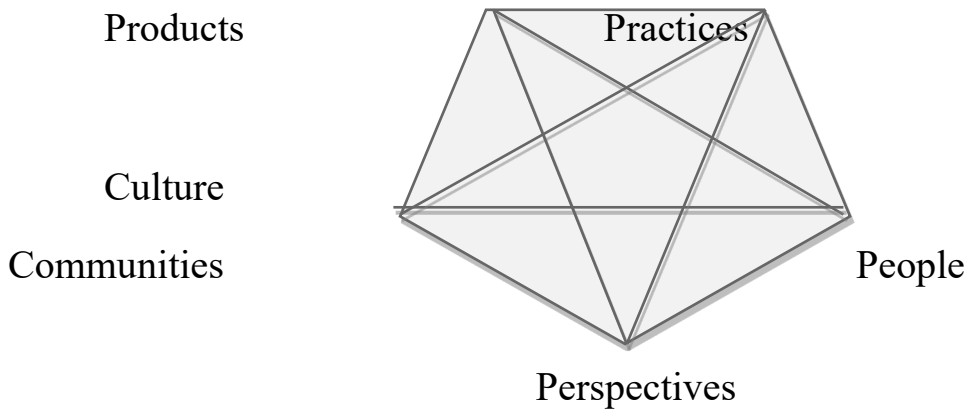


Fig. 1-1 Five Elements of Culture (Moran , 2001:24)

8- Strategies for Teaching Culture

'There is a great variety of strategies developed for integrating culture into language teaching'

A- Creating an Authentic Environment Strategy

'Although listed under strategies by Chastain (1988:313) and Stern (1992:224), this may rather be called a setting for more memorable learning. Displays, posters, bulletin boards, maps and realia can create a visual and tangible presence of the target culture, especially in the situation where language and culture are taught far away from the target country. Students can also make culture wall charts. Hughes (1986:168) calls this strategy the culture island'.

B- The Slice-of-Life Strategy

'The slice-of-life strategy is suggested by Taylor (1972:2) and Chastain (1988:309-10). It is the strategy when the teacher chooses a small segment of life from the other culture and usually presents it to learners at the beginning of the class. This short input can be, for example, a song related to the topic or a recording of writing topic. The advantage of the strategy is that it both catches learners' attention and arouses their interest. It does not take up much of a valuable class time. Chastain claims that the point is made with a minimum of comment and maximum of dispatch'.

C- Culture Capsule Strategy

'Culture Capsule strategy is first suggested by Taylor and Sorensen (1961:6). Culture capsule strategy is a brief description

of one aspect of the target culture followed by a discussion of the contrasts between the learner's and the other culture. In this strategy, the teacher presents the information orally. It is also possible that students prepare a culture capsule at home and present it during class time. The oral presentation is often combined with realia and visuals, as well as with a set of questions to stimulate discussion. One capsule should not take up more than 10 minutes. The main advantage of using culture capsule is its compactness' 'and practical manageable quality (Stern, 1992: 240). Another advantage is that learners become involved in the discussion and can consider the basic characteristics of their own culture and target culture (Chastain, 1988: 310)'

D- Culture Clusters Strategy

'The Culture clusters strategy was first suggested by Meade and Morrain in 1973. Clusters are combinations of conceptually related culture capsules. Two or more capsules which belong together can form a cluster. A cluster should be concluded by some sort of activity, for example a group work and a role-play. Parts of culture clusters can be presented in succeeding lessons. Meade and Morain (1973:17) give an example of a French country wedding, which is divided into 4 capsules (1) the civil ceremony, (2) the religious ceremony, (3) the wedding banquet, (4) acting out a country wedding. Teachers can develop culture clusters themselves'.

E- Audio- Motor Unit Strategy

'The audio-motor strategy (Chastain, 1988: 311), is considered to be an extension of the Total Physical Response Method. It was first developed to provide practical listening comprehension and

to enliven the learning situation with humour. The teacher gives students a set of commands to which students respond by acting them out. The commands are arranged in an order that will cause students to learn a new cultural experience by performing it. Audio-motor unit strategy gives knowledge and practices with correct behaviour but according to Henrichsen(1998:22), they do not necessarily promote understanding nor empathy'.

F- Self- Awareness Strategy

'The self-awareness strategy serves an aim to raise students' consciousness of basic beliefs that govern their values, attitudes, and actions. Teachers may use sensitivity exercises, self-assessment questionnaires, problem-solving and checklists of value orientations. Chastain (1988:311) claims that the way people use the second language to express themselves reflects the way they organize reality and teachers can explore the language and culture connections that occur in class'.

G- Quiz Strategy

'The quiz can be used to test material that the teacher has previously taught, but it is also useful in teaching new information. Cullen (2000:7) stresses that it is not important whether students get the right answer or not but, by predicting, they will become more interested in finding it out. The right answers can be given by the teacher, through reading, listening, or a video, after which extra information can be provided. Quizzes are a high- interest technique that keeps students involved in class work'.

H- Drama (Dramatization) Strategy

'The drama has been widely used in teaching culture and is considered useful for clarifying cross-cultural misunderstandings (Stern, 1992:227).'

'Byram and Fleming (1998:143) claim that when drama is taught properly, it is an ideal context for exploration the cultural values, both one's own and other people's. Drama involves learners in a role-play and simulation as well as encourages them to position themselves in the role of a member of the other culture. Dramatization makes cultural differences vivid and memorable as drama mirrors reality'.

'According to Fleming (1998:152), one important ingredient for successful drama is the tension. Therefore, he suggests that for dramatization such situations should be chosen when the tension derives from the different interpretations of the situation. On the other hand, drama takes quite a lot of time to prepare and requires great willingness from the students to participate'.

I-Minidrama / Miniskit Strategy

'The minidrama was first developed by social scientists for cross- cultural education (Chastain, 1998:310). Minidrama is a series of skits or scenes of everyday life that illustrates culturally significant behaviour. Often the scenes contain examples of miscommunication. The skit is read, viewed on a video or acted out. Each skit is followed by a discussion'.

'Seelye (1993: 71) stresses that the teacher has to establish a non-judgmental atmosphere during the discussion. It is also important for the teacher to use the right questions. Open-ended questions

should rather be used than yes/no questions. For example, the question 'what are your impressions of the scene?' should be preferred to the question . 'Is there a conflict in this scene?' Teachers can lead the discussion further using neutral probes like " I see, "Very interesting", and "Go on" (ibid). The main aim of a minidrama is to present a problem-situation as well as to promote knowledge and understanding. Minidramas work best if teachers deal with highly emotional issues'.

J- Critical Incidents / Problem Solving Strategy

'Critical incidents / problem solving are sometimes identified with culture assimilators but, according to Henrichsen, (1998:37) there are couple of differences between the two methods. Critical incidents are the 'descriptions of incidents or situations which demand that a participant makes some kind of decision. Most of the situations happen to any individual and they do not require intercultural interaction as culture assimilators do. Students usually read the incident independently and make individual decisions. Then, they are put into groups to discuss their findings. Next, a classroom discussion follows where students try to give reasons behind the decisions. Finally, students are given the opportunity to see how their decisions and reasoning compare /contrastwith the decisions and reasoning of native members of the target culture. As individual critical incidents do not require much time, Henrichsen (ibid) suggests the teacher presents more than one critical incident at a time. Teachers find critical incidents or problems from advice columns in newspapers or magazines together with information about what native speakers would do and why'.

'When solving critical incidents, students will get emotionally involved in the cultural issues. Discussions about what native English speakers will also promote intellectual understanding of the issues and give learners basic knowledge about the target culture (ibid:38)'.

K-Web Quest Strategy

'The web quest is an inquiry-oriented strategy which most or all of the information used by learners is drawn from the internet (Brabbs, 2002:39). According to March (1998 : internet), web quests are designed to use learners' time well, to focus on using information rather than looking for it, and to support learners' thinking at the levels of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The strategy was developed in 1995 by Bernie Dodge from San Diego State University to help teachers integrate the power of the World Wide Web with student learning'. Brabbs (ibid: 41) lists nine advantages of using the web quest. The most important is that it saves the teachers' time and that it helps learners to find material from the huge range of topics'.

L- Culture Quest Strategy

'Culture quest strategy is another web-based strategy. It was created at the Center for School Development of the School of Education at The City College of the City University of New York. The culture quest involves students in inquiry-based classroom projects. The aim is to explore other people and cultures. It seeks to promote better understanding and appreciation of the other cultures, strengthen inquiry, research and literacy skills and provide students with technology skills. The result of a completed culture quest is a website'.

'The culture quest focuses on helping students to develop a better understanding of the diversity in the world as well as to recognize and appreciate the commonalities among cultures. Students will cultivate an understanding of the role that culture plays in their lives by examining their own culture as well as cultures around the world (Scully, 2006:2).'

9- Conclusion

'Understanding a language involves not only knowledge of grammar, phonology, and lexis but also certain features and characteristics of the culture. Culture is a continuous overflow of behaviours, attitudes, ethics,..etc of a group of people. The use of language in general is related to social and cultural values. Therefore, language is considered to be social and cultural phenomena. Consequently, communication problems may arise among speakers who do not know or share the norms of other culture. Teaching culture is considered the fifth control skill in language teaching. So certain cultural awareness strategies (e.g. cultural capsule, cultural clusters, the self-awareness strategy, the culture-quest,...etc) can be effected on teaching EFL'.

'EFL teaching should lead to a better understanding of and an insight into one's native culture. Students must be provided with the necessary linguistic, communicative and intercultural skills to reflect upon and portray their own society, to express themselves, and to present their own culture in the target language. Besides, discussion can be initiated for the students to compare the underlying values and beliefs in students' native culture with the target culture so that students can not only know the difference but also better appreciate both cultures'.



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