Interactive Strategies for Raising EFL Students' Cultural Awareness

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Abstract: Currently, there is a tendency towards *intercultural education* as a major goal in foreign language teaching and learning. The importance of developing learners' intercultural communicative competence has derived from the need to preparing foreign language learners, in general, and English learners in particular, for potential cross-cultural communication, in which they may encounter linguistic and cultural barriers. However, in our specific context- the English Department at the University of Tiaret and certainly in other academic contexts in Algeria, it is found that this goal is far from being reached. To bridge the gap, our main goal in this paper is to share some specific teaching practices, and showing concrete teaching models of intercultural education at the EFL department.
Keywords: EFL, Interactive Strategies, Video Clips, Cultural Awareness, Intercultural Communication

INTRODUCTION

In the light of today globalised world associated with needs for communicating across boundaries and the easy access to information, the role of language teaching and learning has been changed. The goal of language teaching is no longer defined in terms of the acquisition of communicative competence in a foreign language, but it is, instead, defined in terms of intercultural competence. The reason is to help learners *'to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts'* [1-3].

This new tendency aims for a teaching approach that does not treat culture as set of factual information nor as meanings to be interpreted but *as 'a place of struggle between the learners' meanings and those of native speakers'* [4]. To state it differently, a teaching approach that enable learners to be mediators between two languages and cultures. In this vein, this new tendency does not only strengthen the importance of integrating culture in the language classes, but it also stresses the importance of recognising other dimension of culture teaching and learning.

As far as the teaching and the learning of English is concerned, within the spread of English and its role as a global language, the English language learners' contact becomes not limited to native speakers, but largely with other people of different languages and cultures. This led to the reality that English today should become inevitably a means of communication without necessarily being a language of identification of its people.

This means that English language educators should provide an informed insight to the nature of the problem and try to look for models of successful communicators in ELT that emphasise strategies of multilingual communicators.

Statement of the Problem

The English Department offers its students several programmes that intend to develop their skills in the English language. These modules vary between the four language skills modules (grammar, written expression, reading, and listening); cultural modules (literature and civilization), language study modules (linguistics, sociolinguistics, and others related to TEFL). These are the major modules to be found in the Algerian EFL departments; others modules may differ from department to department.

In the light of the intercultural teaching and learning goal, these programmes should help the EFL learners to get insights on the main cultural aspects of English people. This is necessary for them as long as they cannot learn English language without knowing some knowledge about the country that gave birth to this language. However, in our specific context- the English Department at the University of Tiaret and certainly in other academic contexts in Algeria, it is found that the main goal of these programmes is far from being reached. The focus has always on the language structure, and at the most extent, as with some programmes such as civilisation and literature, on covering some factual culture information rather than trying to explore the cultural dimension of the English people in order to develop learners' intercultural communication and meet the teaching and learning goals.

Based on this problem, we allow ourselves, in the following section, to show the role of a very simple interactive technique that can be used either as introductory course to teach culture studies or as a comprehension course to teach listening or oral skills while raising the students' cultural awareness and developing their intercultural communication.

Research Question

Our study was guided by the following research question *"Will first year EFL students'*

cultural awareness be raised after watching video segments of interactional cross cultural situations?"

Significance of the Study

The major aim of this study is to share some specific teaching practices, and showing concrete teaching models of intercultural education at the EFL department. Practically, we want to measure the role of very simple teaching material like a video segment, as introductory course, in raising the students' cultural awareness and developing a positive attitude towards other cultures.

The Research Method

Twenty (20) first year students at the University of Tiaret took part in this study. 13 were female and 07 were males.

As an experiment design, we use the *Randomized Posttest-Only Control Group Design,* which involves 20 EFL students of two groups, 10 students for each group. One group receives an experimental treatment, and the other group, which used as a control group, does not receive the treatment. Then both groups were a subject of post-test on the dependent variable. The design of this experiment is summarised as follow:
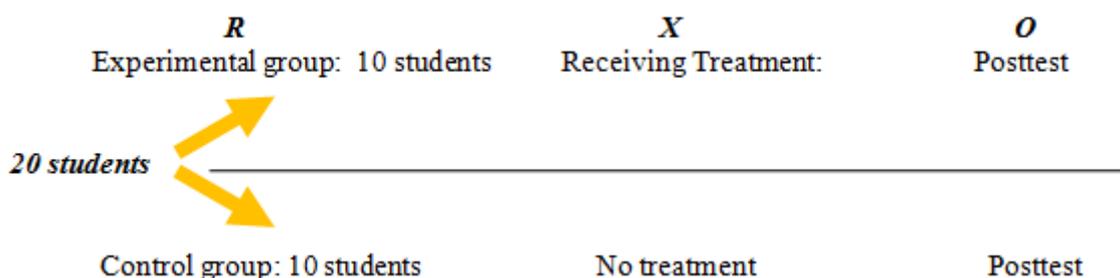

Fig-1: The Design of the Randomized Posttest-Only Control Group Design

Data Collection and Procedure

Step 1: As a first step*,* while the control group was excluded from the experiment treatment, students of the experimental group were exposed to a video segment consisting of four (4) different situations of communication failure between English natives speakers and non-native speakers. The video clips, *Taken from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4b-ACqKkAMO,,* shows pragmatics failure in intercultural communication between two people from different cultures.

Step 2: After one session of instruction, a post-test was administered for both groups, in which they were required to respond to 10 close-ended questions *(yes/no and I agree/disagree)* questions that aimed to assess the degree of the experiment group's awareness about the role of culture for successful communication **(see the appendix).** The correct questions *(yes and I agree)* were graded **1** point and the wrong questions *(no, I disagree and ambivalent)* were graded **0** point.

Data Analysis and Results

In order to examine the main differences between the control group and experimental group, different statistical way of analysis were used such as means, students' errors of means, variance, and students' deviation.

Table-1: post-test comparative results between the control and the experimental groups

Groups	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean
Experimental	10	7,00	10,00	85,00	8,5000
Control	10	3,00	7,00	46,00	4,6000
Valid N (listwise)	20				

As the statistics in table shows, the use of video clips to raise the learners' cultural awareness was very successful. The difference between the control and the experimental groups is noticeably high. While the control group showed ignorance about the importance of culture as part of their successful language proficiency, the experimental group's cultural awareness was raised after exposing them to the video segments, which is seen from their higher scores in the pre-test.

As one can notice the experimental group was able to reach a higher score of 10 points in some questions with a minimum of 7 points, giving them 85 points as a total score. The control group, on the other hand, reaches 7 points as a maximum with inability to answer some questions by reaching 3 points as minimum, giving them only 46 points as a score. This means less than the half of the total score.

The significant differences resulted from the experiment disclose that the benefit of video clips as

instructional strategy in raising learners' cultural awareness.

CONCLUSION

Learners should understand that once they are learning the foreign language, they are riding the train of its culture. Therefore, culture in foreign language classes should not be treated as an additional skill, but as a main skill. As far as for teachers, they should be reminded that the major goal nowadays of teaching foreign languages is to develop learners' intercultural understanding and communication (Mehdaoui, 2015). Their role is then to promote this aim by trying to create a tradeoff between theories and practices. They should design interactive teaching and learning strategies that can establish well the sphere of intercultural learning g in their classes.

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Appendix
Questions 1: What do you think the most important language skills required for successful language learning?
  a)   **Grammar and Vocabularies**
  b)   **Writing**
  c)   **Listening**
  d)   **speaking**
  e)   **Culture**
  f)   **All of them**

Question 2: Does your ability in listening, reading, writing and speaking in English is enough to make you competent?

  a)   **Yes**
  b)   **No**

Question 3: Your competence in English is useless if you do not know enough information about the culture of its people such us their history, customs, traditions, beliefs, ways of life, and nonverbal.
  a)   **I agree**
  b)   **I disagree**
  c)   **Ambivalent**

Question 4: It is not important for me to know how British people shake hand or use time and space in order to communicate well with them.
  a) I agree
  b) I do not agree
  c) Ambivalent

Question 5: Being an English learner, do think you are required to know the English culture so that you fully master the English language?
  a)   **Yes**
  b)   **No**
Question 6: My communication in English is still poor, if I do not know something about the English culture.
  a)   **I agree**
  a)   **I disagree**
  b)   **Ambivalent**

Question 7: It is enough for me to be able to speak English fluently to communicate with English speakers without necessary knowing their ways of life.
  b)   **I agree**
  c)   **I disagree**
  d)   **Ambivalent**

Question 8: If I do not know the differences between my own culture and the English culture, there will be communication failure.
- a) **I agree**
- b) **I disagree agree**
- c) **Ambivalent**

Question 9: It is not important for me to know how British people shake hand or use time and space in order to communicate well with them.
- a) **I agree**
- b) **I disagree**
- c) **Ambivalent**

Question 10: Do you think understanding the cultural differences between people of the target language and your own language is necessity for successful communication?
- a) **Yes**
- b) **No**