Promoting Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence through English Literary Texts: Students' Attitudes and Teachers' Challenges

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Abstract
The focal aim of the current paper is to take an in-depth look at the effect of the English culture on foreign language learners. In this regard, the researchers inquire about how intercultural communication affects English as a foreign language (EFL) students during the process of learning English literary texts carrying aspects of the target culture. This study, thus, endeavours at shedding light on students' attitudes towards some aspects of the English culture when studying literary texts. It also intends at scrutinizing teachers' strategies in teaching culture through literature; referring to their active roles in fostering intercultural awareness and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) among their learners. To do so, the researchers collected data through a questionnaire addressed to forty first-year Master students of Literature and Civilization in the department of English at Tlemcen University supported by an interview with teachers of literature. The findings revealed that most students exhibit negative attitudes towards some aspects of the English culture when studying literature. Their responses demonstrate that they are unaware and ignore the differences between cultures i.e., they are not culturally competent enough to avoid intercultural clash within various lectures of literature. The results also showed that teachers peacefully attempt to provide the appropriate teaching techniques and strategies to integrate teaching culture through literary texts to foster tolerance and empathy with speakers' target language, identity, and culture.
Keywords: Literary Texts, English culture, Communicative Competence, Foreign language students, Attitudes.

1. Introduction

Monocultural individuals are almost limited in number, with the rapid and accelerating emergence of multicultural societies, mainly due to interpersonal and, thus, intercultural communication. Hence, language and culture, as two primordial key-concepts, can no more be subject to one particular discipline; a person's belief and vision is more and more getting larger under the notion of "global community." This has, indeed, led to the emergence of multicultural individuals and communities as well. This matter peacefully invites teachers of EFL learners to diagnose the possibility of a systematic and careful conciliation between the English culture and different languages within an interdisciplinary approach, which may narrow the scope of divergences and help in promoting students' Intercultural Communicative Competence.

This approach aims at shedding light on students' attitudes towards some aspects of the target culture when studying literary texts and on teachers' strategies in teaching culture through literature, referring to their useful roles in fostering intercultural awareness and ICC among EFL students. In this vein, two significant research sub-questions have been formulated:

1. When teaching English literature, what attitudes do students display towards aspects of the target culture?
2. What possible solutions can students be supplied with to avoid such an intercultural clash?

In an attempt to find answers to the raised research questions, the following hypotheses have been put forward:

1. Students may display negative attitudes towards some aspects of the English culture when studying literature due to their low level of ICC and non-awareness and ignorance of the differences between cultures.
2. Literature teachers can play a vital role in ICC teaching to both spread tolerance and empathy through adopting adequate strategies to peacefully integrate teaching culture through literature.

In this investigation, the researchers relied on both quantitative and qualitative research instruments, in addition to a brief overview of the similar key concepts, which are thought to be helpful in the data analysis and interpretation.

2. Related Literature Overview

a. Cultural Awareness and Communication

Culture, from an anthropological standpoint, refers to the full range of learned human behavior patterns, including knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, customs, and habits acquired by speakers in a society (Tylor, 1871). Getting insight into others' cultures within this globalized world needs that one should be tolerant and empathetic so that a successful cross-cultural communication would occur. Foreign language students are not, unfortunately, bicultural as they spend years learning the target language far from the members of its society and without living actually in that culture. They are, then, incapable of communicating effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations (Deardorff, 2006; Chen & Starosta, 1999).This fact is obviously

embodied in the negative attitudes they display towards the others' aspects of culture because they are not culturally competent enough to avoid the intercultural clash.

For the previously stated disaccord, ICC, thus, has been endorsed by many prominent educational organizations worldwide (ACTFL, 2006; Council of Europe, 2001; UNESCO, 2009). Moreover, due to the abundant use of English as a global language to communicate with other people coming from various cultural backgrounds, the necessity of integrating culture in language teaching in general, and teaching English in particular, gained much interest around the world. Consequently, ICC and cultural awareness have been widely recommended to "help learners to interact with speakers of other languages on equal terms, and to be aware of their own identities and those of their interlocutors." (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002, p.7). This implies that developing cultural awareness aids in effective communication. In this respect, many educators and scholars, such as Agar (1994) and Kramcsh (2000), emphasized on the fact that ICC has become an integral component in EFL classroom, and that culture is conceived as "the very core of language teaching". (p. 8)

b. ICC and EFL Teaching

It is widely recognized in the language teaching profession that learners need not just knowledge and mastery in the grammar of a language, but also the capacity to use that language in socially and culturally appropriate ways Byram, *et al.* (2002, P. 7). This was the chief innovation of 'communicative language teaching'. In this essence, language instructors have always been mediators between cultures as the culture of the users of the target language has not to be eliminated or denied in the EFL teaching and learning processes. As a reaction to previous approaches, Communicative Language Teaching, as stated in Hymes' theory in 1972, aims at developing learners' capacities at using the target language effectively and fluently (Hymes, 1972, p. 60; Brown, D. 2000, p. 246). This approach emphasizes on enhancing communicative competence as the prime goal of language teaching and, thus, introduces the 'Intercultural Dimension' into the aims of language teaching.

The 'intercultural dimension' in language teaching aims to develop learners as intercultural speakers or mediators who can engage with complexity and multiple identities, and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity. Intercultural communication must be built based on the respect of others' identities. Therefore, language teaching following an intercultural dimension promotes learners to acquire the linguistic competence needed to communicate in speaking in front of interlocutors and writing in appropriate ways. It also ensures a mutual understanding among people of different languages and social identities, values, beliefs, and behaviors.

3. Research Design and Methodology
a. Sampling

The data come from a sample of forty students of first-year Master level from the English department at Tlemcen University, Algeria. The students' specialty was English Literature, of course, as the last is the researchers' primary fieldwork. The students' age ranges from 21 to 24 years old mixed in terms of gender. Moreover, twelve English language teachers of literature have been selected from the same university and department.

b. Research Instruments

The current research work relies mostly on quantitative and qualitative research tools for data collection. The data needed in this fieldwork are collected utilizing questionnaires and interviews, which are used to elicit data explicitly from the informants. Two research tools are used to yield more valid and authentic data. In this investigation, questionnaires are addressed to students to test the first hypothesis. It consists of six questions that are mixed. Both close-ended and open-ended questions are used. It is outlined to evoke the students' attitudes towards some aspects of the English culture on the one hand. The interview, on the other hand, is conducted with teachers. It is devoted to checking the second hypothesis. Its primary purpose is to examine the possible solutions and strategies used by teachers for avoiding such an intercultural clash in EFL classrooms. It consists of two main parts. The first part contributes to providing teacher's personal information, particularly; their gender, degree, as well as period of their teaching experience. The second part, however, attempts to explore affluent details about how EFL learners can develop ICC, taking into account teachers' strategies to promote ICC among learners.

c. Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, the results are systematically exposed. They are treated both quantitatively and qualitatively to validate our research hypotheses

- *Questionnaire: Students' Attitudes towards the English culture*

Q1: How many years have you been studying English? And how do you evaluate your level in English?

When the students were asked about how many years they have been studying English, their responses ranged from ten to thirteen years. Whereas when asked to evaluate their level in this language, the following results have been gathered**:**

Table1. *English Language Students' Level in English*

Good	Average	Bad
65%	35%	00%

Q2: Why did you choose English to be studied at university?
The central answers turn around the following statements:
- English is the world gate.
- I love English literature.
- It is my favorite foreign language.
- I was excellent at it at school.
- I need it for work or when traveling abroad.

Q3: Is it essential to learn the English culture? Why?
When the informants were asked whether it is essential to learn English or not, the following answers are given:

Table2. *Importance Degree of Learning the English Language*

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
57.5%	42.5%	00%	00%

All the answers ranged between 'strongly agree' or 'agree.' When they were asked why, they presented these justifications:

- It is something good to learn about others' cultures and customs.
- It helps to learn more about the language and how to use it according to specific situations.
- It is vital to have an overview about international culture.
- Living in a globalized world, language becomes a weapon to stand in front of the wonders and to keep up with the world's civilization. Nowadays, it is crucial to learn English.
- Because language and culture are correlated, one cannot fully understand the English idioms without knowing the English literature. I believe that language and culture are complementary.

Q4: Do you have a module within your studies that helps you get the English culture?
The majority of the students (88%) said 'yes,' whereas only 12% answered 'no.' The modules cited by them are as follows: civilization, literature, oral expression, American studies, in addition to cultural studies.

Q5: To what extent do literary texts help you to develop your cultural awareness?
This question has been answered by only 63% of the informants. The other informants, however, proposed no answer. The suggested responses can appear below:

- Literary texts help us to know more about the cultural background of each era we deal with and for me, it is the vivid representation of culture.
- They really provide a strong basis for various ideologies for different cultures.
- They help a lot because they represent a specific vision and image about specific areas and specific group of people.
- To understand cultural boundaries within a literary text, one must be aware of the different disciplines in literature. However, while reading, we capture some cultural nuances that widen your way of thinking.

Q6: Have you ever had any negative attitudes about certain aspects of culture in lectures of literature? If yes, cite about what?

When the informants were asked about having any negative attitudes towards certain aspects of culture in literature lectures, 20% of the students dit not answer. They said neither 'yes' nor 'no.' 28.5% of the respondents said 'no' while 51.5% of them stated 'yes.' Those who said 'yes', they were asked to cite about what. Redundantly their answers can appear in the statements below:

- Some cultures are known for racism and discrimination towards a specific group of people.

- In some lectures that we have dealt with, we have noticed some harmful aspects like rationalism in the European culture as well as the difference between social classes and customs in society.
- Sometimes, I disagree with some messages and themes conveyed by some literary works. I usually embrace what makes sense to me.
- Sometimes it is negative when we study a specific period or literary period that contains many rules and aspects that should be followed to give a particular shape to a culture based on the literary period.

- **Interview: Teachers' Strategies to avoid the intercultural clash**

Q1: To what extent do you support integrating English culture in ELT classrooms?

Answering these questions, the teachers proposed the following responses:
- Indeed, integrating the English culture helps understand the context of the poem, for example. It also clarifies better the interpretation of the text as meant by the author.
- I fully support including Anglo-Saxon culture and even English-Speaking African and Asian cultures for students of English language.
- Culture and language are two sides of the same coin. They are intertwined. I do actively support teaching the cultural load of language.
- Insist the maximum to integrate English culture in EFL classrooms because to master any language, you should learn it in its real context.

Q2: While teaching some aspects of culture, how do you find your students' reactions?
- Students are interested and eager to know about them.
- It depends on their knowledge about it; sometimes, they react usually. Other times, they are astonished and ask questions.
- They react positively, especially when we tackle love stories as Shakespearian's sonnet. Whereas, I feel them lost when tackling religious ones as Milton's Paradise Most and Regained.
- EFL students enjoy uncovering the different aspects of the target culture.
- Students nowadays are widely aware of differences in culture and quite familiar with Western cultures.

Q3: While teaching some literary texts, have you ever encountered an intercultural clash?
When the participants were asked if they ever encountered an intercultural clash while teaching some literary texts, all teachers (100%) said 'Yes.' When they were asked to explain about what and why, the following responses have been found:

- Just recently, I am confronted with alien texts about the LGBT community, and this causes aggravated annoyance.
- Students are shocked about women's position in the dark ages in Britain because Muslim women lived a better life at that time. Things about witchcraft also shock them.

- When it concerns questions of faith and religion, especially when dealing with sexual topics. This is because some students assume that getting insight into the target culture may threaten their identity.
- Texts like Shakespeare's plays, Othello, Antony, and Cleopatra give a negative aspect to non-European characters.

Q4: Do you give your learners the right to talk about their cross-cultural viewpoints?
Yes   No
All the teachers stated 'yes'.

Q5: Do you think that your students are intercultural competent enough to avoid cross-cultural clash?   Yes   No

In this question, 58,33% of the teachers said 'Yes', 33,33% said 'No.' While the rest of them (8.34%) confirmed that it depends on the students' preferences and background.
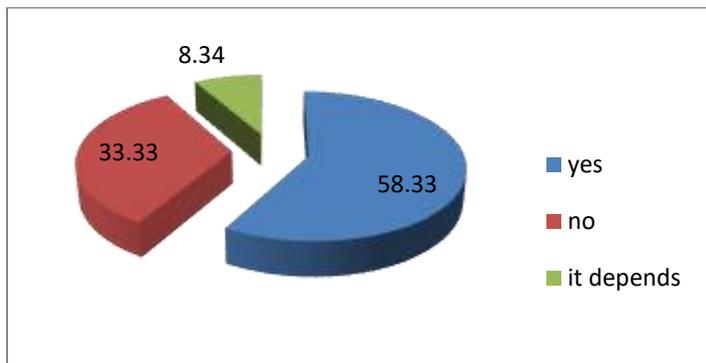

Figure1. Level of informants' intercultural competence

Q6: What level of cross-cultural awareness is needed for an EFL learner to develop Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)?
- Students should be encouraged to develop critical thinking and not take stereotypes for granted.
- Students need advanced levels of intercultural communicative competence to avoid and handle culture shock.
- At least, a basic one will help them to avoid cultural clashes.

Q7: What materials/techniques do you opt for to teach ICC?
The primary materials and techniques cited by the teachers are films, videos, virtual seminars with native students, literary texts, songs, excerpts and quotes from cultural criticism or history books as well as online documents.

Q8: What guidelines should be taken into account to promote ICC among your learners?
- Open-mindedness.
- To expose more to the target culture.

- To Bridge relationships with members of the target community at least via the net.
- To develop a sense of understanding and tolerance.
- To emphasize the fact that cultures are not to be ranked but to be discovered to learn more about the other.
- Teaching the importance of cultural diversity in the world and showing them the significance of accepting and tolerating others' cultures. It is crucial for the teacher to assist his/her student to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices about the different cultures.
- To motivate students to read and to get exposed to the target culture.
- Be aware of the differences. Diversity is the gate of global understanding.

4. Discussion of the Main Results

The present paper provided us a closer picture about the effect of the target culture on foreign language students. The findings revealed that the majority of first-year master students have negative attitudes towards some aspects of the English culture when studying literature. Their responses explain clearly that they are unaware of and ignore the differences between cultures. They are, in fact, not culturally competent enough to avoid intercultural clash within various sessions of literature.

Meanwhile, teachers usually attempt to look for the appropriate solutions and strategies to avoid such intercultural clash. Teachers are, indeed, a very active component in the classroom. They should adopt suitable peaceful techniques and procedures to integrate teaching culture through literature. They should teach their learners to be more tolerant and empathetic when interacting directly or indirectly with speakers of other languages, identities, or cultures. Thus, it can be said that enhancing cultural awareness helps the process of teaching the English language effectively and promotes students' ICC deeply.

5.Conclusion

The intercultural dimension in teaching foreign languages has become a primordial concern for both teachers and students to communicate appropriately and effectively in intercultural contact contexts. This dimension puts much emphasis on effective cross-cultural communication that is based on the acquisition of ICC. To wrap this study up, the issue of acquiring ICC among EFL learners remains a sensitive topic that needs further future research. As the researchers suggested, students must develop a sense of tolerance and acceptance of others' cultures, so their attitudes have to be changed so that they can avoid the intercultural clash. Teachers in general, and Literature Teachers, in particular, are required to play an active role in promoting and fostering their learners' ICC through the adoption of suitable techniques, guidelines, and strategies to integrate culture in language teaching.

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