

Chapter 30

Integrating Culture in Language Classrooms: The Effects in Teaching and Learning

Aslı Akyüz

Istanbul Medeniyet University, Turkey

Ayfer Tanış

Kırklareli University, Turkey

Eftima Khalil

Bahcesehir University, Turkey

Özdenur Ardıç

Bahcesehir University, Turkey

Enisa Mede

Bahcesehir University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Language and culture go hand in hand. Naturally, they are intertwined and inseparable from one another. Therefore, language teachers who are teaching the language itself also need to recognize the importance of integrating culture in their teaching practices and raise the awareness of the learners about the culture that the target language belongs to. In light of these observations, the present chapter aims to find out whether technology is an effective tool to integrate culture in language classrooms as well as identify the perceptions of teachers and students about learning and teaching the target language through culture. The participants were 153 students and 26 teachers enrolled in a language preparatory program at a public university in Turkey. While the quantitative data were collected through the Target Culture Knowledge Test, the qualitative data were collected by means of in-depth interviews in semi-structured design. The results of the study revealed that technology (i.e., videos) is an effective tool to provide students with background information about the target culture. The findings also reported positive perceptions towards learning and teaching the target language through culture. Based on the findings, this study can contribute to the program developers and teacher educators for the development of quality in teaching and learning in language preparatory programs.

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INTRODUCTION

Language and culture go hand in hand. Naturally, they are intertwined and inseparable from one another. Jiang (2000) illustrated the relationship between language and culture as “a living organism; language is flesh, and culture is blood. Without culture, language would be dead; without language, culture would have no shape” (p. 328). Several studies on culture (Brown, 2007; Kuang, 2007; Knutson, 2006) have revealed that language is considered as a part of culture and culture as a part of a language; the both are elaborately interlocking, so it is difficult to separate one from the other (Brown, 1994).

Studying culture does not only play a role in general education, but also give the learners chance to learn about the geography, history, etc. of the target culture (Cooke, 1970). Thus, culture can be considered as the whole way of life of a foreign country and it is necessary to understand how people act and react in different ways under different situations. In order to gain an understanding towards the target language society, it is crucial to learn their language. Therefore, culture and language can be accepted as the two sides of the same coin.

The reason for learning a foreign language is to know how to communicate in the target language, to know whether the customs and traditions of the speech community, and to develop one's study and work (Sun, 2013). Therefore, teaching culture should be involved in language teaching for many reasons: firstly, studying the target culture encourages students to study the target language as well as providing the study of L2 meaningful (Stainer, 1971). Also, culture classes play a great role in achieving high motivation because learners are more interested in activities such as singing, dancing, role playing, doing research on countries and people, etc. (Genc & Bada, 2005). Genc and Bada's (2005) findings indicated that attending the culture class has extended cultural awareness of ELT students concerning both native and target societies.

Furthermore, McKay (2003) claims that culture has a significant influence on teaching the language in two important ways: linguistically and pedagogically. Linguistically, culture is important in the linguistic dimension of the language itself, having impacts on the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels of the language. Pedagogically, it affects the choice of language materials because cultural content of the language materials and the cultural basis of teaching methodology are to be taken into consideration while deciding upon the language materials. Therefore, McKay (2003) argues that students have to learn not only the linguistic but also the culture norms of language in order to acquire a language effectively.

In this context, English language learners should be aware of the fact that there is a strong relationship between language and culture. Therefore, teachers should integrate cultural components into their classroom instruction in English language classrooms not just for its validity in the language awareness itself but also for increasing students' desire to learn the target language. According to Niederhauser (1997, p. 11), “Bringing cultural content into the language classroom is one of the best ways of increasing motivation. In a society in which the conflict between globalization and nationalism remains unsolved, many members of younger generation greatly appreciate the opportunity to learn about life in other countries and exchange ideas with teachers who are sensitive to both the cultures.” In the light of this information, this paper examines an attempt to integrate the target culture into the English language classrooms and investigate students' perceptions toward learning the target culture as well as examining teachers' perceptions toward teaching the target culture.

This chapter will highlight the following objectives:

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