Electronic concepts and Intercultural Dimensions
to Promote EFL Learners' Creative Skills.
Case of: Master Two ESP Students, Department of English,
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Résumé:

Le présent article explore les points de vue des participants concernant l'intégration des activités pédagogiques via Internet et de l'éducation interculturelle dans les méthodes de l'apprentissage de l'anglais pour promouvoir une profonde compréhension et l'acceptation de différence des autres, aussi, pour développer des méthodes alternatives afin de permettre à nos apprenants d'acquérir de nouvelles techniques pour progresser dans leurs compétences dans l'écrit et la créativité et ainsi être exposer à des environnements d'apprentissage multiculturels, multilingues et multimédia. Par consequent, notre but se focalise sur l'importance imperative à donner pour que nos apprenants puissent écrire dans un registre interculturel, exprimant leurs idées, communiquant des informations d'une façon cohérente.

L'intégration de l'outil Internet et des activités pédagogiques insérées ainsi que les dimensions interculturelles dans le domaine de l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère telle que l'anglais est une technique qui permettra aussi à nos apprenants de relever les points de force et de faiblesse dans leurs productions écrites et dans leur compétences créatives. Ainsi, ce travail répond à la question suivante: 1) - De quelle façon cette technique peut-elle contribuer à rendre nos apprenants de bons écrivains et de bons constructeurs de projets dans la langue ciblée?

Mots Clet: Concepts électroniques comme nouveaux matériels pédagogiques, Dimensions Interculturelles, Compétences dans l'écrit, compétences créatives.

Introduction

The globalization of the economic markets and the world population growth largely contribute in rendering the intercultural dimensions a very fashionable phenomenon within the educational institutions mainly in higher education. Nevertheless, these statements of problems are actually analyzed by scholars who devote great efforts to understand the cultural mechanisms which govern and rule exchanges, most importantly in learning situations.

As a matter of fact, the intercultural challenge, most EFL teachers are faced with, is not only to teach this foreign language and its culture, but to show to a very deep extent how this culture enables EFL learners interact with the culture of an English speaking individual or even with a native speaker as well. This presupposes to the EFL teacher to fully accept to be trained and thus train at the knowledge and the practice of his/her owns culture and the culture of the other. An endeavor based on "Intercultural Researches and Practices". Furthermore, this is a pedagogical

"Kit" which will provide EFL practitioners with ideas, resources, teaching and learning methods and activities meant to widen the teaching/ learning processes' references and demonstrate how the intercultural approaches reinforce the EFL teaching and learning skills.

There are indeed, great subject that should be discussed and which have a great interest in developing individual potential and abilities to communicate with others: the learning of foreign languages. Therefore, knowledge of English as a foreign language in Algeria is, these very recent years, at the heart of important and constructive discussions and investigations, as the major objectives of such scientific actions are directed towards successful steps to more communication and understanding which are, according to us, the key elements in inspiring the Algerian learners and the elite communities to get in contact with diverse cultural aspects and to work hand in hand towards common goals.

Moreover, in a world of total globalization where the cultural and the linguistic potential is actually used as a means to integrate the world societies, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Algeria is of central importance too. Therefore, we, as researchers and language practitioners, have to understand that the foreign language teaching and learning process does not only rest on the linguistic features but on the language entirety embedded in its culture and history; a process that enables the language users to convey and comprehend correctly and coherently target messages considering thus the language stylistic principles, whether these are oral or written. In class for instance, the teacher can help the learners to progressively reflect on the meaning of culture through cultural and observable implicates as working on architecture, clothes, and symbols, then can introduce some cultural implicates which condition individual behaviors.

As a matter of fact, this paper explores participants' views regarding the integration of Internet tools and intercultural dimensions in language learning classroom activities. It is also meant to contribute to the development of quality education shedding light on the main factors that hinder a good and meaningful learning embodied in EFL writing and creative skills; a project that encourages new aspects to support and supplement EFL learning actions and practices.

1- Considerations in Intercultural Language Learning in Developing the EFL learners' writing Skills.

In language teaching and learning activities, the learner has now become a subject at the centre of the educational process, a subject who is taught to be responsible for his / her learning, able to interact, and able to be, at same time, an analyser and a performer of the language in use. Thanks to the emergence of intercultural perceptions and dimensions, these changes are likely to occur. Therefore, and according to language educationalists, there is significantly an expressed need to build facts about the language target culture, to integrate methods based on participants' observation, role plays, and simulations to allow the learners under study to develop intercultural competence. Moreover, we do believe that these activities will provide our learners with opportunities to develop reflexive and critical skills mainly in writing. In so doing, we are moving towards the direction of understanding and researching that intercultural language learning and teaching is an approach and a tool which we, as researchers, practitioners and educationalists must take into consideration in order to render the language writing skills more effective. We also have to bear in mind that when teaching our learners English as a foreign language, we not only teach the language as a means to convey messages, whether these are oral or written, but we are, in a way or another, teaching its culture as well, because as mentioned by Goodenough (1964: 36):

Culture is not a material phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people, behaviour, or emotions. It is rather an organisation of these things. It is the form of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them.

In this sense, we are making our participants become conscious of the importance of context and how they can manipulate contextual frames through language.

According to the various literature reviewed, we can say that most of the authors read focus on culture. Archer (1986: 170), for instance, defines it as a "culture bump" mentioning that:

When an individual from one culture finds himself or herself in a different, strange, or, uncomfortable situation when interacting with persons of a different culture, it is then, a bump of culture.

While Penny Cook (1994: 62), identifies a number of different meanings incorporating various elements in a reasonable and acceptable way. The author therefore, adds that culture is a set of higher aesthetic principles embodied in works of art. At this stage, we agree that writing as a language skill is a work of art indeed. The writer goes through different steps of drafting, revising, reviewing, adjusting, adding, deleting, reading, then editing; a task which is not easy to accomplish if this writer is not fully acquainted with both, the language mechanisms and its culture. As a matter of fact, placing and integrating culture in language learning communication means to encounter an intercultural dimension within this process. We would thus, say that in so doing, we have to take into account some factors which are as follows:

- Language: a variable that develops in the context of a particular culture, and therefore, reflects that culture;
- Non-verbal communication: a variable that can be spontaneous, ambiguous, carrying a great number of significance; but still closely related to language;
- World position: this is to determine the cultural group; either we are speaking about the language learner group, or the language provider group (generally defined as natives.);
- Cultural values and attitudes: considering the different cultures, races, and generations;
- Group identity: this deals more with the identity the individual wishes to be placed in.

Bearing these factors in mind, it is then worth to set up intercultural communication within the field of EFL teaching/learning process, mainly within the writing skill. Additionally, by applying the cultural variables embedded in intercultural communication, it will be then possible to focalize on the language mechanisms we want our learners to achieve while producing their writings as they will probably discover models as:

- The language enjoyment which enables them to basically extend their knowledge about the language itself and its culture;
- The language skills because culture is an adjunct to these skills;
- Survival models which provide information about the close relationship between the language system and culture;
- Academic model which is in fact examination- oriented meant to assess linguistic competence, and language presentation.

2-1- Emerging Development in EFL Learning through Intercultural Dimensions.

As aforementioned, basic to intercultural language learning, an invaluable link between language and culture is acknowledged. As put by Liddicoat (2002: 5):

> *Culture shapes what we say, when we say it, and how we say it from the simplest language we use to the most complex. It is fundamental to the way we speak, write, listen, and read.*

In this dimension, we believe that language has a major role in the transmission of cultural codes and constructions because this will likely impact on how teachers teach and how learners learn. In order to identify ways of appropriately integrating culture into language learning and language into culture learning, teachers have to consider some broad approaches to culture in language teaching. These approaches have been categorized as follows by Crozet, Liddicoat, Lo Bianco (1999:120):

- Traditional approaches: links between language and culture are done with texts being the object of study, rather than the expression of cultural positions being explored through text's language choices;
- Cultural study approaches: treat cultural competence as knowledge about a target country through history or geography;
- Cultural as societal norms: identifies cultural competence as knowing what members of a particular cultural group are expected to do. This is obviously based upon known ways of acting or beliefs;
- Intercultural language learning: identifies culture as lived experience of individuals. Learners engage in developing cultural competence from the beginning of their language learning, engage in understanding their own language and culture in relation to the additional language and culture they are to learn.

2- 2- Principles to Develop Intercultural Language Learning.

The principles which guide curriculum design and inform classroom pedagogy are as follows:

- Active construction: explores language and culture through active engagement, developing a broad intercultural space;
- Making connections: this can be achieved when relevant bridges are built between home language/culture and target language/culture;
- Social interaction: this involves communicating across linguistic and cultural boundaries;
- Reflection: involves engaging in critical, constructive analysis of linguistic and cultural similarity and difference;
- Responsibility: encourages learners to contribute to successful communication across languages and cultures, and to develop intercultural perspectives including self-monitoring.

These are, according to us, important insights gained, an endeavour made to shed light on intercultural dimensions and their role in foreign language learning; a fundamental component which contributes to the growth of EFL learning in general and EFL writing skill learning in particular. Moreover, since these dimensions are based on principles as social interaction, reflection, responsibility which all encourage communication, we cannot but involve a new

variable, a tool which, according to our belief, will reinforce and develop the target objective: implementing Internet-based activities to meet both poles: language and culture because as a purely pedagogical support, this technique:

- Shows that language learning is given a real purpose, relevant to the learners' attitudes and interests;
- Integrates knowledge about language and culture, and facilitates apprenticeship;
- Makes the uniqueness of each encountered situation appreciated, and the integrity of each learner respected.

2- Considerations into Internet-based Activities in Developing EFL Writing Skills.

With the development of computer technology, foreign language (FL) learners and teachers are increasingly using Internet information and communication tools in their respective process in order to support intercultural interactions and target language development, because internet-based activities enable mostly learners to move from classroom-based contexts towards real interaction with expert speakers of the language they are actually learning. Moreover, these tools can provide both learners and teachers with various opportunities and configurations as for:

- Implementing Visio-collaboration between educational institutions;
- Encouraging learners' autonomy;
- Making use of intra/ and/ inter-community resources;
- Encouraging learners' participation in and out-door school oriented Internet communities.

As aforementioned, the advent of the generally available information and communication technology (ICT) tools such as e-mail, Internet relay chat and more recently instant Audio and Visio-conferencing has added new trends and attributes as ease and speed of access, new quantities of information availability on the World Wide Web (www.), and of course endless opportunities to access to native speakers and cultural informants virtually across the globe.

3-1- The Internet as a Classroom tool.

An Internet classroom is like an ordinary classroom with the exception that the learners can use the Internet to complete the activities and tasks set by the teacher. The role may alternate and vary between being a classroom and a self-access centre or an Internet Café for the whole school, bearing in mind that the layout and set up of the room itself reinforce rather than dictate the teacher's approach to language teaching.

3-2- Internet Classroom –Based Distinct Phases.

In order to successfully put this tool into action, we should follow the phases as:

- Planning: budgeting, finding the right location, finding out equipment needs and layout, contracting technical experts;
- Set- up: physical assembly of the room, installation and configuration of all the necessary hardware and software, testing, piloting, co-ordinating schedules, initial staff training, introducing learners to the technology;

- Maintenance: reconfiguration, repositioning of equipment, further staff training, updating, upgrading of installations, system maintenance, back-up and repair;
- Lay out: there should be a basic consideration when setting up an Internet classroom: space, because the teacher needs to: move around, interact with learners easily, and enable learners to work collaboratively, mingle, discuss, or work on other tasks.

3- 4- Equipment Considerations:

The feasibility of different types of activities in Internet classroom will depend on:

a- Speed and capacity of the Internet
b- Multimedia computers to manipulate texts, view pictures, play sound and video files.

Having mentioned that the changes to communication and interaction among learners via computer enable to move from the cognitive approach to learning, to an integrative socio-cognitive approach linking traditional language skills as listening, speaking, reading, and writing with electronic literacy skills in order to learn to interact and communicate with others through the variety of technological tools as a full part of language teaching and learning. Shield; Hauck; and Hewers (2001: 1) emphasize that:

> *Information technology may provide us with the means of overstepping the boundaries between classroom and real life, making experiential learning a possibility... That is why we need teachers who can adapt or modify their students' language acquisition devices when necessary.*

3-5- Criteria to Design Internet-Based Activities

One point of departure to design tasks via Internet is to take the criteria into serious and constructive consideration: deciding on the objectives to achieve. Therefore, the teacher, rather call him/her the tutor, has to set a route map to avoid any disagreements. The route map should consider:

- What the tutor hopes and expects from the learners to get out of the activity;
- The reason why such an activity should be done on the Internet rather than through other media;
- The activity timing;
- Who the learners are going to communicate with, and
- Whether the activity is planned to be used with only one class and/or level.

3-6- Internet-Based Activities to Improve the Learners' Writing Skills;

Once the learners are introduced to the technology in the classroom and familiarized with the different materials, many activities are then possible to set. As far as the target skill is concerned, the tutor may ask the learners to write short personal notes, welcome, fan letters, giving them the opportunity to focus on language checking on online dictionaries for instance. Some other activities can be furthered as to defining problems, sharing opinions, or asking for advice. One very interesting and instructional Internet-based activity to improve the writing creative skills is to create "key-pals", or "e-mail pen pals". This kind of correspondence gives the learners a real audience for their writing. For the success of this activity, there should be:

- Partners: found by the learners adding messages/ or/ by the tutor;
- Logistics: writing and sending messages regarding timing and accounts;
- Response time: learners should be patient as not all messages are responded to immediately;
- Content: the tutor plays an important role in supervising and checking the content of the messages sent and received.

Having given important considerations on the value of Internet-based activities and intercultural dimensions in reinforcing the EFL learners' writing skills, and having focalized on the way these two pedagogical means can be made together as complementary elements to the language learning process, we believe that developing an analysis and an interpretation of the participants needs is a necessary phase to validate the idea of suggesting this technique in the teaching/learning process. Therefore, the next point to discuss refers to this objective.

2- Research Methodology and Research Design.

In order to establish a good understanding of the proposed technique whose target objective is to improve EFL learning embodied in improving the learners' writing creative skills, it is therefore important to implement a descriptive methodology in order to explore the participants' views regarding the integration of Internet tools and Intercultural dimensions in language learning activities. This will be the starting point which will pave the way to other research methodologies; a situation which is left to future research undertaking. We also opted to design a group project to learners as part of the credit taught "English for Tourism". We however, encountered some problems in completing this part of the work as for the participants' presence, and time shortage; a difficult situation but we could more or less do with this.

Significance of the Research

We strongly believe that the dimensions of Interculturality and the concept of implementing Internet-based activities technique in EFL learning classrooms are really very difficult to teach and learn, and mainly to adopt, since this may be the first attempt at the University of Bejaia. This suggested technique seeks to analyse the learners' concept and views in order to develop appropriate and reliable ways to do so; not only to offer this population opportunities to gradually and collaboratively construct knowledge in a concrete and dynamic manner, but to develop a strategy that will be mutually beneficial to different partners; whether these are at home or in any foreign country, as well as to allow more comprehension of different cultures.

3- Participants.

The key element to the implementation of the suggested technique is to involve some students' representatives who compose our population sample: five participants (05) Master Two ESP (English for Specific Purposes).

4- Procedures

When we decided to conduct this work, we planned two directions to be discussed:

- Evaluating the students' Mastery of language (the use of Slogans), mastery of English tenses while narrating and describing, and the students' historical potential knowledge of their country in order to localize areas of strength and weakness;

- Finding out whether the host institution uses the different existing Internet-mediated tools and e-learning platforms to integrate in the EFL learning and teaching process.

In the light of the aforementioned points, we believe that there should be an e-learning program of a linguistic and intercultural introduction based on some kind of simulation which introduces the learners into professional life; "Tourist Agency" group project, exploiting thus an authentic video document which shows the group organization, identifies their behaviors while creating the Brochure since the latter will shoot some places of historical interests and write a short paragraph about "Yemma Gouraya" story. The Brochure and the video will be sent to a foreign students group at a selected university (steps already produced) via Internet (face book, for instance) to:

- Construct a basic knowledge and the practice of his/her owns culture and the culture of the other,
- Have some cultural and observable implicates as architecture, the different civilizations and crusades Algeria witnessed, the local ways of being dressed, and the local traditional dishes,
- Reveal the secret of the most worldwide known historical monument "Yemma Gouraya" and the local inhabitants' beliefs and behaviors.
- Be able to exchange touristic Brochures with the target correspondents for more understanding of otherness and comparison between two different cultural dimensions, and
- Draw a link between aspects of agreement.

Recommendations

Since the dimension of the present paper needs more than a few pages and a few questions to be correctly covered and investigated, we cannot but give some recommendations which will hopefully serve as directions to both educationalists and learners in order to put the suggested technique into action. Moreover, in the light of the different steps the project went through, standing as learners' needs, we could understand that in addition to observational descriptive methodology, there should be an experimental phase with an eye to validate the tools effectiveness, reliability, and profitability. So much so, and because of shortness of time, we believe that stating some recommendations is only the starting point to enable the target audience reflect critically about the project. Therefore, we modestly recommend and suggest that these revolutionary tools and pedagogical dimensions; apart from their backwards, had better be gradually implemented in the Algerian educational institutions where English is being taught and learnt because:

- They have a great pedagogical significance;
- They offer research importance where International partnerships between Algeria and English speaking countries are being established;
- They forge a synergy which stimulates research creativity and apprenticeship,
- They reinforce teachers' and learners' productive potential, contact and confidence.
- They provide activities and exercises to reflect on the different cultures' exclusion, games to fight against racist stereotypes and which encourage the integration of multiple cultures in the teaching / learning process through videos prepared by the students to engage in constructive classroom discussions

- Then, they are the most appropriate tools to initiate the students to intercultural communications. Therefore, an intercultural comparative approach to enable the students of both different cultures observe, analyze, compare similar materials of their respective cultures, explore the different meanings through mutual points of view sharing via network to which different world educational institutions are connected, whose objective is to encourage autonomy and intercultural learning of the languages in tandem.

5- Conclusion

In the present paper, an attempt has been made to underline the important insights gained through an analysis and interpretation of the target population's needs in regard to the suggestions of introducing and implementing Internet-based activities and Intercultural Dimensions in EFL learning to evolve and reinforce the learners' writing creative skills in English for Tourism. Indeed, it is an extensive value to establish effective and beneficial educational and language learning principles. We are very conscious that the project itself requires more than one year experiential phases since this needs to intensively and extensively research the effects of the different existing Internet-based activities and Intercultural EFL projects in Algeria, exchanging ideas, establishing continuous communications, and draw technological supports and advice for the suggestion. In this sense, an endeavour has to be made to foster awareness of EFL language and Interculturality. Therefore, appropriate technology training and a profound understanding of culture and Interculturality in the realm of education are essential to making this project work.

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