

The Impact of Culture in Teaching English:Case study of Superior School of Applied Sciences, Tlemcen

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Abstract

The aim of this investigation is to evaluate the role of culture while teaching the English language to the students of the superior school of applied sciences and determine if it has either a positive impact or a negative one. We have taken the example of the English language as it is considered as the second foreign language in Algeria after the French language. This study tries to understand students' attitudes towards learning English for specific purposes and the impact of culture on Algerian students. The investigation is conducted at the Superior School of Applied Sciences, Tlemcen, Algeria where thirty-two students participated in this research work. Therefore, two steps are followed; the first one is to collect data from students who are studying in this school of Engineering under the form of a questionnaire to get effective and precise results. The second step is to analyze these data taking into consideration the diversity of the learners within this institution as they came from different regions of Algeria such as Algiers, Setif, Kabylie and many other Wilayas. The reasons behind learning the English language are different and various, therefore, in all cases students have to deal with the culture of this language while learning ESP. Therefore, an important factor should be taken into consideration is the social distance between the culture of the Algerian learner and the culture of the English people. The results obtained show that learners' attitudes towards the English culture are mixed and it may influence their curiosity and attention to learn in some cases, however, according to the findings, there are some students who demonstrate their reluctance towards English culture as it is considered as a non-Muslims language.

Keywords: Algerian context- culture- diversity- ESP- learners' attitudes- teaching English.

Bio Data

Nouzha Yasmina Soulimane-Benhabib is a teacher of English at the Superior School of Applied Sciences at Tlemcen, Algeria. She got her PhD in TEFL and Applied Linguistics. Her current major research topic includes the teaching of English in ESP classrooms, learner autonomy and motivation.

1. Introduction

The English language has an indisputable status as the international language all over the world, being not only the language of technology and science but of politics and economy as well; English has imposed itself in every domain. Subsequently, the emergence of English language learning will acknowledge that the global economy and the explosion of information are changing the future for organizations of all kinds throughout the world, and the English language is the key element in this transformation. Therefore, the mastery of English is very beneficial for students. Through the knowledge of English, students can achieve some goals such as getting a good job, a promotion, or a trip to foreign countries without barriers in communication. In addition, they can know more about the science and technology of English-speaking countries. Due to the increasing need for learning English, different studies have been fulfilled to understand students' expectations towards English.

According to Goodenough (1964)

the culture of a society is made of all what we have to know or to believe, to behave acceptably in the eyes of its people [...] it is the form of thing people have in mind, their models of perceptions, relations and interpretations. (Goodenough, 1964 :113).

That is to say, each learner in the same institution has its own thoughts and believes about culture.

2. Historial Background

After more than fifty years of French colonialism, the Algerian society was affected by the French culture and language; therefore, the French language is rooted in the Algerian dialects. It can be seen that in the educational field; French is widely used by the Algerian people as the second language of the country as it is

cited in the following points; firstly, the French language is introduced in the 3rd AP in the primary school; however, English is introduced in the 1st AM. Secondly, despite its rank as a foreign language, French exists in daily life such as in our daily conversation, on TV and newspapers. Majority of studies at university are taught in French whereas English is taught only as a module. Finally, unlike French which is considered as a first foreign language, English is considered as the second foreign language (Barka, 2003).

It is clear that language is not only a means by which people express their ways of thinking, but it is also more than this, language is a symbol of culture and of personal identity that is why the English language in Algeria is considered as the second foreign language after the French one which is rooted. Horne and Heinemann, (2003) claim about language and culture;

Language carries culture, and culture carries language, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world...language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world (Horne &Heinemann, 2003:15).

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3- Students Attitudes towards the English Language

In order to enhance attainment value of English, it is necessary to show the importance English has all over the world. Nevertheless, and despite its importance, the English language remains and is still in perpetual competition with the French language in Algeria mainly according to the below points that we have dealt with. In addition to learner's attitude towards the English community and culture influence their curiosity and attention to learn, and attitudes are affected to large scale by the value of the English language, thus, it is necessary to enhance English-related values to students, Allport (1935)states in this sense; "attitudes is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual responses to all objects and situations with which it is related".(p.810) It is well known that English now is an international language. It is widely used in science, technology, business, and other important fields.

Learning English is considered important primary because it provides exposure to other people and different cultures, it may lead to a great awareness about these cultures and understand people's ways of thinking and behaviors, in addition, the use of foreign languages as a means of communication to promote cultural exchanges, especially the English language which is considered as a world language. Thus, people have to learn it for different reasons as for a job, cultural exchanges, and studies. As Graddol (2006) notes:

We are entering a phase of global English which is less glamorous, less news-worthy, and further from the leading edge of exciting ideas. It is the 'implementation stage' which will shape future identities, economies, and cultures. The way this stage is managed could determine the futures of several generations.(Graddol, 2006:109)

From this point of view, we can see that language and culture cannot be analyzed in isolation because culture constitutes an integral part of language teaching. Language learning is an intercultural experience as far as it allows us to interact with other persons from different cultures.

It is necessary to know the problems relating in a general sense to attitudes, motivation and proficiency achievements of the students and the teachers of English has to take into consideration social and institutional context while teaching a given language.

Algeria is aware of the importance English has in the world, that is why young people want to learn it but the teaching of English is not sufficient, and teachers generally have no academic background. In the 1990s, there was a real lack of materials and textbooks, but now, the schools and universities are equipped with computers, books and magazines are more and more available in the libraries and at universities, internet exist in nearly each home and institution; an important number of people are learning English, students who enter the university should learn this language.

It is essential to know this language nowadays, but in our society the attitudes towards the English language is divided into two categories, the first category is composed of students who want to learn English for integrative and instrumental reasons such as to get a job, to meet other people, know different cultures, whereas the other category has a negative attitude towards English because

of the political problems that happened in the world.

The role of attitude on the language process should be taken into consideration because attitudes of students' towards language are closely associated with the success or failure in language learning. The studies of Gardner and Lambert (1972) emphasize "the importance of attitude in foreign and second language learning". Chambers (1999) clarifies by stating that; "Pupils do not come to the foreign languages classroom as tabulae rasae. They bring with them some attitude born of conversations shared with family, friends, the media and personal experience of the target language community". (p.25)

In other words, attitudes towards a language develop right from childhood; it is spoken at home by parents, later on, used by some peers. Thus, an investigation into learner's attitudes is a means by which language teachers, education planners, and researchers can gain greater insight into the language learning process. This is why the young Algerian people are interested in learning the English language. Therefore, there are divergence ideas and opinions between the old generation and the new one about the usefulness of the foreign languages in Algeria.

4. Methodology

Our research work attempts to examine the Algerian culture in learning English in the context of Algerian society; we have taken as a relevant example the Superior school of Applied sciences, Tlemcen as its students came from different regions of the country. It is important to mention that this School is considered as an important institution in the country which has been introduced in Algeria in 2010; it is a new system introduced in Tlemcen in order to teach students the basis of scientific and technical modules as physics, mathematics and many other modules. Therefore, English is introduced because of its importance over the world; unfortunately, many students failed in learning the English language.

This paper discusses some of the reasons which make the students fail to learn English. The author of this study has remarked students' attitudes towards learning English; therefore, he decided to make an investigation in this field by administrating a questionnaire to the students in order to collect necessary data.

4. 1. Teaching English at the Superior School

The research study took place at the Superior School of Applied sciences of Tlemcen; The teaching of the English language is not an easy task; the teacher should take into consideration many factors that may influence student's learning of the English module (Soulimane,2015:117) ; therefore, some students showdisinterest to learn English, despite its importance in the world as well as in Algeria as mentioned by Backer (2003); “English has become firmly established as the international language of the present time” (p.3).

The teacher finds many difficulties to teach English; and this is due to many reasons as negative attitudes towards the language, demotivation due to lacks in grammar and vocabulary and restricted use of the language only in classrooms.

4.2. Participants

Concerning students, thirty-two participated in this research work second-year level. Students' age is from eighteen to twenty. The questionnaire was addressed to the students during the English session; otherwise, the students wouldn't give back the questionnaire. The questions were formulated in English, but the students were free to answer either in English, French or Arabic, the most important is to obtain their answers. It is important to mention that students of this school came from different regions of Algeria; such as Sahara, Kabylie, Algiers, and Tlemcen; therefore, we can obtain fruitful results.

The data collection instruments used in this survey is a questionnaire administered to the students in order to collect necessary information for the needs of the research work; however, during the investigation; a questionnaire is not sufficient to get some important information as participants attitudes towards English, this kind of information is obtained from classroom observation, where the investigator could remark students behavior and add necessary data to the survey and thus; to complete the research work.

5. Findings and Results

Like any country, Algeria is willing to promote the teaching of foreign languages especially the English language in important institutions as the Superior school of Applied sciences Tlemcen, particularly in the field of science and technology.

Our present research is particularly significant because it raises a crucial point in learning English which is attitudes toward the language. Even if the language is important, it is difficult for students to learn it if they have a negative attitude towards this language. The purpose of our study is to collect significant data; the information gathered will be studied and analyzed to determine the impact of English on Algerian culture.

Question 1. Your attitudes toward learning English?

Possibilities	Number	Percentage
Learning English is important	14	43.75%
I like learning English	09	28.12%
I don't like learning English	06	18.75%
English class is obligatory	03	9.37%
Total	32	100%

Table 1. Students' attitudes towards English

In the table above, 43.75% of the students find learning English important followed by 28.12% who like learning this language. However, 18.75% don't like it and 9.37% who are obliged to study it because it is introduced in the programme.

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Question 2. How important do you think is the English language?

Possibilities	Number	Percentage
Very important	18	56.25%
Important	13	40.62%
Not important	01	3.12%
Not important at all	0	0%
Total	32	100%

Table 2. The importance of English

Despite the reluctance showed by some students towards this language but they admit that English is a very important language with 56.25% followed by 40.62% who think that it is important. However, 3.12% of the students do not agree with

the other respondents. It can be seen that approximately all the students agree on the importance of English.

Question 3. As students of the superior school, do you prefer to learn English or another foreign language?

Students' answers	Number	Percentage
I prefer studying English	17	84.34%
I prefer studying French	15	46.87%
Total	32	100%

Table 3. *Students' language choice*

The answers are mixed between English and French, 84.34% prefer to study English because it is the language used all over the world, in parallel the other 46.87% prefer studying French because they are accustomed with it since many years. There is a difference between the two answers.

Question N 4: Which of the following reasons make you learn English?

Students' answers	Percentage
Meet other people from different countries	15.62%
Know the English culture and civilization	9.37%
To get a good job in the future	21.87%
Help me in my studies	21.87%
Travel to other countries	31.25%
I like the English language	3.12%
Other reasons	3.12%
Total	100%

Table 4. *Students' motivation to learn English.*

English is considered as a universal language, it means that it is used everywhere such as companies, universities, and societies, students are aware of its importance in their studies or future job, therefore, 31.25% respond that they learn English for their studies behind 21.87% who think that it can be useful for getting a job in the

future. However, 15.62% of the students want to learn it in order to meet other people from different countries followed by 3.12% who need it for traveling and, 3.12% who learn English for the simple reason because they like it and finally 3.12% for other unknown reasons.

Question N 5: Do you think that culture is an obstacle to teach the English language?

Answers	percentage
Yes	21.84%
No	65.62%
No answer	12.5%
Total	100%

Table 5.*Impact of culture in teaching English*

As far as the English language is concerned, the English culture is not seen as an obstacle for the students of the superior school with 65.52%. However 21.84% which is a considerable amount stated that it is the case and make it difficult for them to learn it. In addition, 12.5% didn't give any answer.

Question N6 : Is English language seen as language of non -muslims by Algerian people

Answers	percentage
Yes	18.75
No	46.87
Sometimes	18.75
No Answer	15.62
Total	100%

Table 6.*The status of English language in the Superior School*

According to the results, the majority of students preferred not to include religious opinions in learning the English language with 18.75% however 46.87% though that it is really a language of non -muslims. In addition, 18.75% found that in some cases, Algerians make no distinction between language and religion and 15.62% preferred not to give an opinion on this subject.

6. Data Analysis

Before revealing the results of the analysis of the questionnaire, we have to mention that classroom observation method helps a lot in getting additional information; therefore, students' questionnaires have enabled us to collect considerable data concerning the impact of culture in teaching English at the Superior School of Tlemcen. The analysis of the data allows us to determine the reasons behind the impact of English language on the Algerian culture while learning.

The results obtained show that learners' attitudes towards the English community and culture are mixed and it may influence their curiosity and attention to learn. Despite big difference between Algerian and European cultures, some of the students focused mainly on the advantages of the English language since they need it in their studies, research and a future career, however, the others manifest their reluctance towards this language and this is mainly due to the profound impact of the English culture which is different from the Algerian one. In other words, as the Algerian people are in majority conservative and Muslims, therefore, there is a significant split between Algerian culture and the British or American one which is seen by the Algerian society as far from their traditions, this why, some of them do not give interest in learning this language.

7. Conclusion

To conclude our research paper, it can be stressed that the Superior school of Applied sciences is considered as ideal context for this kind of investigation since the students came from different regions of Algeria, therefore, there is a mixture of Algerian culture and language, and we can deduce the disparity between the Algerian culture and the European one; first through religion of these countries then of different mentalities as Algerian people are very attached to their traditions which

are very different from the European ones. These kinds of differences make the Algerian people reluctant towards other civilization as the English one except some of them. In addition to the French language which is rooted in the Algerian society and culture after many years of colonialism. It can be concluded that the majority of the students are aware of the importance and usefulness of the English language.

8. Limitation of the study

Further research is needed in this kind of investigation, it should be underlined that culture is an important factor while teaching a foreign language, however, our research paper results is based mainly on students questionnaire and teacher observation. It is beneficial to learn other languages especially English which is a worldwide and useful language, this why, we should make learners aware of the importance to learn other languages. And as culture is a part of language, it is essential to deal with it in English lectures in order to make learners aware of the importance of other civilisations and cultures.

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Appendix

Students' Questionnaire

1- Gender of the participants

Male female

2- Do you enjoy learning a foreign language?

Yes No sometimes

3- Motivation for learning English?

- I am interested in the language
- I am interested in the culture
- I need it for my future career
- I am required to take a language as part of my course
- I need it to travel
- I will need it to study abroad

4-Do you find that learning ESP difficult?

Yes No sometimes

5-When learning a foreign language, what do you prefer to use?

- Books

- Textbooks
- Magazines/ newspapers
- Audiotapes
- Videotapes
- Computer programs
- Internet

6-Which skill is the most important for you? Indicate by order of priorities.

- Reading
- Speaking
- Listening
- Writing

7-According to you, do some students succeed better than others in learning a foreign language:

A- Effort made by some students.

B- Learning strategies.

C-Motivation

D-Attitudes towards the foreign language

E-Interest showed by certain students to the language

8- What are the factors that affect your learning?

A-Limited times of learning (1h/week)

B-Absence of a textbook

C-Focus is only on reading and writing skills

D-Almost all the students show disinterest to learn a foreign language

E-Many deficiencies in the learning of the English language

F- Lack of motivation

G- The culture of the language

9- How do you see the culture of the foreign language?

Positif impact

Negative impact

No answer