INTEGRATION OF CULTURE IN THE TEACHING OF FRENCH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA: A CASE FOR TEACHERS' TRAINING

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ABSTRACT
A recent shift has been noticeable in foreign language education theory and teaching. Previously, foreign languages were taught as linguistic codes. More recently, teaching has reflected on language and culture in an integrated way with a view to preparing learners to use the foreign language in intercultural contact situations. However, many foreign language teachers in different parts of the world including Nigeria still ignore the importance of teaching culture as a part of language study. The paper examines the concept of culture and language. It also highlights the need to integrate culture in French language teaching in Nigerian classrooms. It further explains the problems of teaching culture in a foreign language classroom by examining teachers’ perspectives. The paper presents some French cultural activities and cultural French lesson plans which the teacher can use to motivate his learners and enhance their communicative and cultural competencies in the language. Furthermore, the paper recommends, among others, that cultural elements should be integrated into the French language methodology syllabus and that French classrooms should be well equipped for language and cultural practices.

Keywords: Culture, Language teaching, French language learning, Foreign language education

INTRODUCTION
Recent studies focus on the seamless relationship between second language (L2) teaching and target culture teaching, especially over the last decade with the writings of scholars such as Byram (1989; 1994a; 1994b; 1997a; 1997b) and Kramsch (1988; 1993; 1996; 2001) and as reported by Genc and Bada (2005). Similarly, Pulverness in Genc and Bada (2005) agrees with the later that people involved in language teaching have again begun to understand the intertwined relation between culture and language. It has been emphasized that without the study of culture, teaching L2 is inaccurate and incomplete. For L2 students,
language study seems senseless if they know nothing about the people who speak the target language or the country in which the target language is spoken.

Acquiring a new language means a lot more than the manipulation of syntax and lexicon. According to Bada (2000, p.101), “the need for cultural literacy in language teaching arises mainly from the fact that most language learners not exposed to cultural elements of the society in question, seem to encounter significant hardship in communicating meaning to native speakers.” The result of the study by Dema and Moeller (2012) shows that language teachers recognized the need to incorporate more cultural activities in order to promote students’ cultural and intercultural understanding and help combat the ethnocentrism that often dominates the thinking of the young people. However, Dema and Moeller (2012)’s utmost concern is on how such cultural teaching should most effectively occur at the classroom level. They stress that learning a new language does not only involve learning its alphabet, the word arrangement and the rules of grammar but also learning about the specific society's customs and behavior.

When learning or teaching a language, it is important that the culture where the language belongs be referenced, because language is very much ingrained in the culture (Day Translations, Inc. 2018). To this effect, Simire (1999) (in French language) added that in one way or another, such a method leads to the re-evaluation of the explicit teaching of socio-cultural facts. Therefore, it is imperative that the learner be well informed about the inhabitants of the country whose language he / she learns. For example, how they conceive their time and organize their daily life (habits and rituals), their ideas, their attitudes and their beliefs. On the same note, Simire (1999) maintains that all this information will help the learner to have introspect of his own country so as to see the similarities and the differences between the two cultures. Subsequently, Simire (1999) explains, that this will help learners to better deal with misunderstandings, blockages.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE INTEGRATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING
Many researchers have stated numerous reasons for the inevitability of culture integration in foreign language teaching. These include the fact that culture:

1. Influences language teaching: McKay in Genc and Bada (2005) stresses that culture influences language teaching in two ways: linguistic and pedagogical. Linguistically, it affects the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels of the language. Pedagogically, it influences the choice of the language materials because cultural content of the language and the cultural basis of the teaching methodology are to be taken into consideration while deciding upon the language materials.
2. Is used for intercultural communication: Merrouche (2010) contends that one’s effectiveness as an intercultural communicator is no doubt, a function of one’s knowledge of other peoples and their cultures. One needs to adopt a culturally appropriate style to meet the expectations of foreign interlocutors. For instance, to speak up or in a low tone, to make or not eye contact, to be more or less confident, to state one’s opinions, to act dependently or independently from others. Lack of cultural knowledge can result to inappropriate language use, misunderstanding, and breakdowns in communication. Additionally, Merrouche (2010) states that it seems imperative to design a teaching curriculum that would meet these needs and give learners insights into what communicating in a new culture might be like.

CULTURE AND LEARNING MOTIVATION

Research in the field of language learning and motivation has shown that among the most important variables that affect learners’ motivation, positive perceptions of the target language, people and culture play a major role. In agreement with this, Cooke in Merrouche (2010) explains that the use of cultural based activities in language education increases learners’ not only curiosity about and interest in target countries but also their motivation. In the same vein, Kitao in Merrouche (2010) reporting the outcomes of a culture training programme, notes that the trained learners demonstrated a more international outlook with greater understanding of the target culture and that they understood themselves better, showed more self-confidence, and had increased motivation for foreign language study.

Furthermore, activities based on culture as singing, dancing and role playing are generally entertaining and enjoyable. Valdes in Merrouche (2010) recognised and highlighted that cultural component in a language lesson promotes and completes learning. He believes that it is more effective for the learner if the teacher is aware of the cultural dimension of what he is teaching, and adds elucidation of underlying views and values, along with grammar and pronunciation. According to him, attention to the cultural component increases the usefulness of the lesson, not only in enlarging its scope, but also in making it more engaging and hence easier to learn.

Culture also leads to understanding of oneself. One can better understand one’s thoughts and behaviours when comparing and contrasting them with others’. For Tavares and Cavalcanti in Merrouche (2010), when people develop cultural awareness, they develop at the same time critical understanding of themselves and other communities. They stated that as we learn more about other people from various cultures, we also discover more about ourselves. Furthermore, elements of our own culture we may not be actually aware of would be brought out when others’ models are studied.
In addition, culture helps learners to avoid some embarrassing mistakes in using the second language. Without the integration of culture in the teaching of French language, the students will lack the ability of using the language properly. According to Sun (2013), when such students communicate with foreign people, they may make a lot of mistakes. For example, there exist some discrepancies between African culture (which is similar across the continent) and French culture. Whereas in Africa, according to ethnic groups, people bow, prostrate, kneel down to greet an elder, or lie flat on the ground to greet a chief, the French follow a different greeting pattern altogether and breaking its unspoken rules is guaranteed to land the stranger into the “rude tourist” category as remarked by Sun (2013).

**CONCEPT OF CULTURE AND LANGUAGE**

Understanding of the close relationship between language and culture will help the French language teacher appreciate the need to integrate culture in his/her lessons. Literature has shown that language and culture are the same coin with two faces and therefore are inseparable. Language is regarded as a system of verbal and nonverbal signs used to express meanings. These meanings refer to people’s culture. One of the well-known definitions of culture is Goodenoughs in Tran-Hoang-Thu (2010). For Goodenoughs, a society’s culture consists of whatever one has to know, believe or do in order to operate in a manner acceptable to his or her community. Similarly, Brown in Abbaspour, Nia and Zare (2012), defines culture as a way of life, as the context within which people exist, think, feel, and relate to others, and as the “glue” (p.188) that binds groups of people together. Moreover, Brown suggested that culture can also be defined as the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools that characterize a certain group of people in a given period of time.

Many linguists have established the fact that language and culture are inseparable. According to Thanasoulas in Genc and Bada (2005), culture is the ability to use language to achieve empathy and respect towards different cultures as well as to promote objectivity and cultural insight. It also includes the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, including language, religion, cooking, social habits, music and the arts. It consists of shared patterns of behaviour and interactions, cognitive constructs and understanding that are acquired through socialization. Thus, it can be seen as the growth of a group identity, favoured by unique social models for the group. All the fore-mentioned are expressed through the first or the second languages of the people. As further explained by Genc and Bada (2005), learning a new language, should not only involve learning its alphabet, the word arrangement and the rules of grammar, but also learning about the specific society's customs and behaviour.
The challenges of teaching culture in foreign language classroom: Teachers’ perspectives

It is important to know how teachers feel about the integration of culture and the challenges they may be having in their efforts to integrate culture in their lessons as this will help the trainers, the school, curriculum developers, and text book authors to work towards promoting the teaching of culture in a language classroom. In their study on the challenges of teaching culture in foreign language classroom, Gonen and Saglam (2012) discovered that although preparing culturally responsive teachers is seen as a part of foreign language teacher training, teachers have their own reasons for not implementing the teaching of culture in foreign language classrooms. According to them, many teachers fail to recognize the interface between language and culture. In the light of this, Sercu in Gonen and Saglam (2012) explains that literature shows that teachers experience certain problems while teaching, which results in either not dealing extensively with culture or ignoring it completely. Gonen and Saglam (2012) contributing to the discussion, remarked that one of the problems that teachers may face is the overcrowded curriculum. They explained that the study of culture requires time; therefore, many teachers feel they cannot spare time for teaching foreign language culture in an already overcrowded curriculum. According to Gonen and Saglam (2012), teachers think that students will be exposed to cultural material later after they have mastered the basic grammar and vocabulary of the target language. However, this ‘later’ never seems to come for most students.

Another problem Gonen and Saglam (2012) observed is that teachers may fear not having sufficient knowledge of the target culture. That is, teachers may be afraid to teach culture because they think that they do not know enough about it, and that their role is limited to exposing students to facts only.

Students’ negative attitude is another envisaged deterrent to the teaching of culture in a foreign language classroom. As noted earlier, students often assume target culture phenomena consisting of new patterns of behaviour; thus, they try to understand the target culture within only their own framework of native culture. Işık in Gonen and Saglam (2012) pinpoints a similar concern for foreign language teaching as students may put barriers between their own culture and the target culture by rejecting all the values associated with the target culture. When cultural phenomena differ from what students expect, they may react negatively, characterizing the target culture as “strange”. Teachers’ lack of adequate training can also have a negative effect on the integration of culture in a French lesson.

Teachers may not have been adequately trained in the teaching of culture and may not have suitable strategies and clear goals that would help them to create a framework for organizing instructions around cultural themes. As it is also proposed in the literature, the
development of such framework depends on teachers’ own definitions of culture from which much of the difficulty arises. In addition to the problems, teachers may not know how to measure cross cultural competence and changes in students’ attitudes as a result of culture teaching.

Furthermore, Byram and Kramsch in Gonen and Saglam (2012) stated that most language classrooms are not culture-friendly. It will be difficult to practice culture in a small and compacted classroom. Turkan and Celik (2007) regret that certain aspects of the target culture, such as oral and written history, literature, music, drama, dance, visual arts, celebrations and the lifestyle of native speakers are not always represented in these resources, nor are the intercultural phenomena. In its stead, it is the students’ local cultural elements that are mirrored. Generally, teachers’ knowledge of the target language culture, the content of the curriculum, time allotted for the teaching of French language, class size, availability of instructional materials, teachers’ training on cultural skill acquisition and on approach to teaching culture in foreign language classroom have an important role in determining how and to what extent foreign language culture should be integrated into language teaching.

Problems of teaching culture in Nigeria secondary school French language classrooms

Observation and interview show that many French language teachers are yet to understand the need to integrate culture into the teaching of French language and the countless effects on the learner’s communicative and cultural competences and how this contributes to national development and good international relationship. Some of the problems affecting the effective integration of culture in the teaching of French language in Nigeria include: teachers’ unawareness of cultural activities to teach; overcrowded curriculum; large and congested classrooms; insufficient time allotted to the teaching of French language; unavailability of authentic materials; and lack of functional French clubs where cultural activities can be practiced as extracurricular activities.

How to integrate culture into French language teaching

It is expected that textbooks which are the most used in Nigerian French language classrooms should contain variety of both communicative and cultural activities. However, this is not always the case. This can be attributed to author’s lack of knowledge on how to develop cultural activities or for the problem of space and additional cost. Nevertheless, this should not prevent the integration of culture in the teaching of French language. Teachers should take up the responsibility of developing and utilising cultural activities in their lessons. There are many French cultural activities and culture lesson plans a teacher can integrate into French language teaching.
French Cultural Activities

For a teacher to know how to integrate culture into his language class, he should be conversant with the learners’ culture as well as the target language culture. CEF as cited in Saluveer in Abbaspour, Nia and Zare (2012) offer a list of seven categories of cultural activities. These include everyday living (for instance, food and drink, holidays and working practices); living conditions (like housing conditions); interpersonal relations (such as class structure, family structures and relations between generations); values, beliefs and attitudes (for example, social class, wealth, regional cultures, minorities and arts), body language, social conventions (punctuality, dress and behavioural and conversational conventions), and ritual behaviours (for instance, birthdays, marriage and death customs).

Other fun activities that can motivate and increase students’ interest in the learning of French language which can be done as extracurricular activities as proposed by Neuman (2016) include: 1) French Music Playlist: The teacher should have each student add two to three of their favourite French songs to the list. Listening to French music will familiarize students with both French culture and language. 2) Set up a bake sale during a school event which students make and sell. Or traditional French desserts, such as crème brulée, soufflé au chocolat, and crêpe suzette. The proceeds will go toward funding the French club. 3) Visit a French Museum/French cultural centre: This can also be watched in a video. 4) Set up a fun scavenger hunt around the school or town. At each destination, students will have to read a clue (in French) to move onto the next destination. At the end, the students are rewarded with a treat. 5) Have students make French-themed arts and crafts to give to their loved ones around the holiday for example, greeting cards, decorations or ornaments. The students are taught how to do them in French and after, they are asked to follow the teacher’s instruction to produce theirs. Students should be taught how to ask questions to understand what to do in French. 6) At the start of every month, choose a French book that students will read and discuss. The book doesn’t necessarily have to be written in French. For example, you can choose a book that’s about French culture or history. 7) Celebrate French holidays, such as Bastille Day and Easter, throughout the year. Celebrate by making fun crafts or taking part in holiday traditions. 8) Invite a guest speaker to chat with the group about French culture, travel, or language. For example, invite a French translator, author, or artist to talk to the group about what it is like to be in their profession. 9) Write up a monthly newsletter to be included in your school’s newspaper. In the newsletter you can include updates on events you are hosting, a “French Word of the Month, or a series of French Quotes. 10) Host a taste of French dinner. As a group, research traditional French recipes and create an authentic dinner menu. In this activity, every
student is responsible for cooking a different part of the meal and presenting it in French to the
group. 11) Monthly presentations: every month, choose a student who will give a presentation
on a region or city in France that he/she would like to someday visit. The presentation will
include cultural and historical facts about the region.

plan”

Class project may include:

Create a new Restaurant

This is a great wrap-up project for a French unit on food. Students will use the food
vocabulary that they have learned and create a new restaurant. Students will write a press
release in French announcing their new theme ‘restaurant’ and create the menu.

French project on Food

Teacher can give/share a photocopied paper containing pictures of foods/fruits without
names and another paper containing vegetables without names to the students and asks them
to label and read. The teacher provides the list of the names of the fruits and vegetables below
the drawings.

Fruits and vegetables sketch Projects

The teacher can also ask the students to sketch the food items (fruits and vegetables and other
food items like yam, rice, oil, meat, fish, etc. To add some creative fun to the food unit, students
sketch and label a person, monster, or creature using a minimum of 15 fruits and vegetables.
This example will give them inspiration to get started.

Using verbs to describe how to prepare, cook and eat food items. The teacher can ask the
students to use the phrase ‘Je me demande si--- ‘(I am wondering if/I am asking ---) for
example: Je me demande si on le cuit (if it is cooked); si on le bouille (if it is boiled) si on le
frit (if it is fried); si on le mâche (if is it chewed); si on le lèche (if is licked); si on le rôti (if it
is roasted); si on mange aussi la semence (if the seed is also eaten); si on le mange cru (if it is
eaten raw).

Shopping Project. After teaching the students names of fruits, vegetables and some other food
items, students play the role of a seller and a buyer asking questions like:

-C’est combien les oranges? (How much are the oranges?) – C’est N100 pour les
trois (it is N100 for 3)

- Vous avez des mangues? (Do you have some mangoes?); des papayes? (some
pawpaw?); des bananes? (some bananas, etc – Oui, il yen a (Yes, there are); Non,
il n’y en a pas (No, there is none).
Ordering food in the restaurant (Commander au restaurant)

The waiter takes the order:


The customer(s) order(s) for food (Les client(s) commande(nt))

Je voudrais/Nous voudrions--- (I would want/We would want---)

J’aimerais--- (I would love); Je vais prendre--- (I am taking); Nous prendrons--- (We are taking); Pour moi,--- (For me---) s’il vous plait (Please); Pour moi ça sera--- ; Alors, deux melons en entrée.

The waiter recommends a dish (Le Serveur recommande un plat)

C’est une spécialité de la maison, je vous le/la recommande (It is a traditional dish, I recommend it for you) ; Prenez --- (Take---) ; Il y a du riz, d’haricots (There is rice, there is beans)

Asking for explanation (Demander une explication)

- Quel est le plat du jour? What is the dish of the day? - Qu’est-ce que vous avez comme boissons? Comme desserts? Qu’est-ce qu’il y a dans ce plat? Qu’est-ce que c’est? Pouvez-vous m’expliquer ce qu’est ce plat? (a more polite way of asking the question)

Asking for advice (Demander Conseil)

Qu’est-ce que vous me conseillez? Quel vin irait avec ce plat?

Small vocabularies (Petit lexique)

L’entrée; Le plat principal; Le plat du jour; Le dessert; Le menu; Les formules; Faire une réservation; Le serveur; Le serveuse; commander; Demander l’addition; Laisser un pourboire; les modes de paiement; payer par carte; payer en espèces (to pay with cash); payer par cheque; La serviette; Les couverts; La (petite) cuillère; le couteau; la fourchette; un verre; une coupe; les toilettes; l’eau; plate; gazeuse; A emporter (Take away); Plat à emporter; Je voudrais une entrecôte bien cuite, s’il vous plait.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Culture teaching should be included in French language methodology syllabus.
2. French teachers should in addition to their acquisition of communicative competence, be conversant with the students’ culture and the target language culture to be able to teach their students cultural values.

3. Teachers should be taught strategies of teaching culture in a French classroom.

4. French language classrooms should be equipped with visual and audio-visual aids for real French cultural learning. The room should be spacious enough for practicing cultural activities.

5. The learning objectives, contents and evaluation methods in curriculum and in the text books should be culturally oriented.

6. A lot of time is required for the acquisition of communicative and cultural competencies in the learning of a foreign language. Therefore, enough time should be allotted for the teaching of French language.

7. French club and Le Cercle Français should be used as avenues for practicing cultural activities in French language in secondary schools and tertiary institutions. Such activities should include debates, panel discussion, letter writing, symposia, etc.

CONCLUSION

This paper exposes the importance of the integration of culture in a second or a foreign language teaching and learning. Integration of culture in a foreign language classroom is inevitable as culture and language are intertwined. Culture brings the real world into the classroom. It enhances students’ communicative competence and makes learning fun. Students are motivated when learning is made real. Integration of culture helps students to have a better understanding of themselves, others, their environment and the international world. Lack of cultural knowledge can result to inappropriate language use, misunderstanding, and breakdowns in communication with native speakers. The afore-mentioned facts have implications to French teachers’ training. French teachers should be trained to formulate concrete objectives regarding the cultural content of the curriculum and develop specific cultural activities according to their objectives. However, they cannot be expected to design all their teaching materials themselves. Therefore, they must develop a critical approach to available, recommended, and accredited textbooks which offer the best materials not only for the development of the four “traditional” skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking) but also of the “fifth” skill, culture. Teachers may also be helped to develop critical thinking and make responsible choices through projects and activities aiming for the analysis, discussion, and comparative study of the cultural content.
REFERENCES


