



## **Integrating Indigenous Culture into English Language Teaching and Learning in Nigeria**

**\*Agbo, David Oklo; \*\*Baba, Lydia; and \*\*\*Ibrahim, Salihu Khadijat**

*\*Federal University of Kashere, Faculty of Education, Department Arts and Social Science Education, Gombe State. \*\*Niger State College of Education, Minna, Niger State \*\*\*University of Abuja, Faculty of Education, Department of Arts Education, Abuja, FCT.*

### ***Abstract***

*The study aimed at integrating Indigenous culture in English language teaching and learning in Nigeria. The design was descriptive survey design. The population of the study consists of thirty eight (38) students offering English Education in the Department of Arts and Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, Federal University of Kashere in Gombe state. A purposeful random sampling technique was used to select one Department out of the various Departments in the University. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of thirty eight (38) students offering English Education (male 10 and female 28). Two research questions guided the study. A structured questionnaire; Students perception was the instruments for data collection, and instruments were validated by two English Language experts in the Faculty of Education of Federal University of Kashere, Gombe. Reliability index of 0.75 was obtained by using Pearson's product moment correlation. The data was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. As a result of this research work, it was discovered that integrating culture in language teaching has great impacts on students learning and teaching of languages. Some recommendations were made, which include: language planning and language policy should be built around culture, curriculum planners should integrate culture to form contents of language lessons.*

**Keyword:** *Integrating, Indigenous, culture, Language, Teaching and Learning.*

## Introduction

### Background to the Study

According to Olaoye 2007, Scholar in the field of Sociology, Sociolinguistics, Anthropology, Ethnology etc have argued that there is a very close relationship between language and culture. Some hold the view that Language influences culture and people's perception of the universe. Some even believe that culture is a vehicle for transmitting culture. One may say without any fear of contradiction that language enables man to relate to his environment, to describe, identify natural and cultural objects, and to organize and co-ordinate man's activities. (Adeyanju 1988 ) in (Olaoye 2007). People however disagree about whether language determines culture, influences it or even transmits it. On the view about the relationship between language and culture, it is generally agreed that the two are interrelated in some respects and especially in the area of communication.

The dialectical connection between language and culture has always been a concern of second language (L2)

teachers and educators. Whether culture of the target language is to be incorporated into L2 teaching has been a subject of rapid change throughout language teaching history. In the course of time, the pendulum of Language Teaching (LT) practitioners' opinion has swung against or for teaching culture in context of language teaching. For example, during the first decades of the 20th century researchers discussed the importance and possibilities of including cultural components into L2 curriculum (Sysoyev & Donelson, 2002); the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the late 70s marks a critical shift for teaching culture, for the paradigm shift from an approach based largely on form and structure to a plurality of approaches causing an unintended side effect; the negligence of culture (Pulverness, 2003). Recent studies focus on the seamless relationship between L2 teaching and target culture teaching, especially over the last decade with the writings of scholars such as (Byram, 1997) and (Kramsch, 2001). People involved in language teaching

have again begun to understand the intertwined relation between culture and language (Pulverness, 2003). 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 State 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), “the needs for cultural literacy in language teaching arises mainly from the fact that most language learners are not exposed to cultural elements of the society in question, they seem to encounter significant hardship in communicating meaning to native speakers.” (P.101). In addition, the L2 culture is presented as an interdisciplinary core in many L2 curricula designs and textbooks (Sysoyev & Donelson, 2002). There is no such a thing as human nature independent of culture; studying an L2, in a sense, is trying to figure out the nature of another people (McDevitt, 2004). McDevitt, holds human nature is seamlessly related to the culture, and then studying L2 involves the study of L2 culture. Actually, the conditionality of the previous sentence could be proved inappropriate. The mutual relation between language and culture, i.e. the interaction of language and culture has long been a settled issue, thanks to the writings of prominent philosophers such as Wittgenstein (1980; 1999), Saussure (1966), Foucault (1994), Dilthey (1989), Von Humboldt (1876), Adorno (1993), Davidson (1999), Quine (1980) and Chomsky (1968). These are the names that first to come to mind when the issue is the relation between language and culture. Yet, the most striking linguists dealing with the issue of language and culture are Sapir (1962) and Whorf (1956). They are the scholars whose names are often used synonymously with the term “Linguistic Relativity” (Richards et al, 1992).

**The core of their theory is that:**

- a) The world is perceived in terms of categories and distinctions found in our native language and
- b) What is found in one language may not be found in another language due to cultural differences.

Although the ground of discussion on integrating language and culture has been cleared for ages, it is not until the 80s that the need of teaching culture in language classes is indicated, reaching its climax in the 90s thanks to the efforts

of Byram and Kramersch as mentioned previously. For instance in the case of language teaching, Pulverness (2003) asserts that due to the undeniable growth of English as an international language, indigenous cultural content as anything other than contextual background was to be included in language teaching programs. Although by mid 80s, various advantages of teaching culture in L2 classes were virtually universally accepted, and culture was widely taught in language classes, there were still problems about what should be taught and how indigenous culture could be taught most beneficially. These questions were faced more and more in the 1990s (Kitao, 2000). If we turn to the relationship between culture and language, we see some remarkable comments; for example, Sapir (1921) argued that “language, race, and culture are not necessarily correlated”, adding the remark ‘language and our thought-grooves are inextricably interrelated, are, in a sense, one and the same’. Yet this single remark does not supply a satisfactory reply to the question of why culture teaching should be involved in language teaching. Kitao (2000) giving reference to several authors that lists some of the benefits of teaching culture as follows:

- Integrating indigenous culture gives students a reason to study the target language as well as rendering the study of L2 meaningful (Stainer, 1971).
- From the perspective of learners, one of the major problems in language teaching is to conceive of the native speakers of target language as real person. Although grammar books give so called genuine examples from real life, without background knowledge, those real situations may be considered fictive by the learners. In addition, providing access into cultural aspect of language, learning culture would help learners relate the abstract sounds and forms of a language to real people and places (Chastain, 1971).
- The effect of motivation in the study of L2 has been proved by experts like Gardner and Lambert (1972). In achieving high motivation, Nigeria people and culture classes does have a great role because learners like culturally based activities such as singing, dancing, role playing, doing research on states and peoples, etc. The study of Nigeria people and culture increases learners’ not only curiosity about and interest in target states but also their motivation. For example, when some teachers introduced the cultures of the L2s they taught, the learners’ interests in those classes increased and the classes based on culture became the

preferred more highly than traditional classes. In an age of post-modernism, in an age of tolerance towards different ideologies, religions, sub-cultures, we need to understand not only the other culture but also our own culture. Most people espouse ethnocentric views due to being culture bound, which leads to major problems when they confront a different culture. Being culture bound, they just try to reject or ignore the new culture. As if it is possible to make a hierarchy of cultures they begin to talk about the supremacy of their culture. This is because they have difficulty understanding or accepting people with points of view based on other views of the world. This point is also highlighted by Kramsch (2001) "People who identify themselves as members of a social group (family, neighborhood, professional or ethnic affiliation, nation) acquire common ways of viewing the world through their interactions with other members of the same group. These views are reinforced through institutions like the family, the school, the workplace, the place of worship, the government, and other sites of socialization through their lives. Common attitudes, beliefs and values are reflected in the way members of the group use language—for example, what they choose to say or not to say and how they say it" (p.6).

- Besides these benefits, studying culture gives learners a liking for the native speakers of the target language. Studying culture also plays a useful role in general education; studying culture, they could also learn about the geography, history, etc. of the target culture (Cooke, 1970).

McKay (2003) contends 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 indigenous cultural content of the language materials and the cultural basis of the teaching methodology are to be taken into consideration while deciding upon the language materials. For example, while some textbooks provide examples from the target culture, some others use source culture materials. Previously, we argued that ethnocentricity limits the self, hence individuals have to look at themselves from a different perspective to surmount such limitation; thus, culture classes are vital in enabling individuals to see themselves from a different point of view. Similarly, Pulverness (2004) stresses this point by stating that just as literature ostracizes

the familiar object to the self. Culture class ostracizes the learner to him, which helps the learner to see himself from a different perspective. As argued above, most people are so ethnocentric that when they begin to study another language their restrictedness in their own culture prevents them from seeing the world via different ways of looking. Overcoming the limits of mono-cultural perspective and reaching the realm of different perspective could be facilitated by studying another culture. To sum up, culture classes have a humanizing and a motivating effect on the language learner and the learning process. They help learners observe similarities and differences among various cultural groups. Today, most of L2 students around the world live in a monolingual and mono-cultural environment. Consequently, they become culture-bound individuals who tend to make premature and inappropriate value judgments about their as well as others' cultural characteristics. This can lead them to consider others whose language they may be trying to learn as very peculiar and even ill-mannered, which, in turn, plays a de-motivating role in their language learning process. Some experts, however, approach the issue of teaching culture with some kind of reservation. Bada (2000) reminds us that awareness of cultural values and societal characteristics does not necessarily invite the learner to conform to such values, since they are there to "refine the self so that it can take a more universal and less egoistic form" (p.100). Besides, we are reminded of the fact that English language is the most studied language all over the world, whereby the language has gained a lingua franca status (Alptekin, 2002). In his article, favoring an intercultural communicative competence rather than a native-like competence, asserts that since English is used by much of the world for instrumental reasons such as professional contacts, academic studies, and commercial pursuits, the conventions of the British politeness or American informality proves irrelevant. Quite in the same manner, Smith (1976) highlighting the international status of English language and lists why culture is not needed in teaching of English language:

- There is no necessity for L2 speakers to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers of that language.
- An international language becomes de-nationalized.
- The purpose of teaching an international language is to facilitate the communication of learners' ideas and culture in an English medium (qtd. in McKay, 2003).

### ***Research Design***

The study is a descriptive survey design. This research design was considered appropriate because it is one of the best available research design for the purpose of describing conditions as they exist, considering the overpopulation of schools these days. Again, it was designed in such a way as to obtain relevant information through questionnaire.

### ***Area of the Study***

The area of study is Federal University of Kashere in Gombe State, Nigeria. The reasons for making this choice is that, the researchers are conversant with the area. It will also afford the researchers chance of getting respondents and easy collection of information necessary for carrying out this research.

### ***Population of the Study***

The population of the study consists of 38 students (28 females and 10 males ranging between 20- 25 years of age); second year Education English Students of Department of Arts and Social Science Education, Federal University of Kashere. They are graduates of either private or Government secondary schools from all over Nigeria. Therefore, they share common cultural characteristics. All of them plan to be teachers of English Language after their graduation.

### ***Research Questions***

Research questions were raised to guide the study

- I. To what extent is Nigerian People and Culture course contributing to any of the language skills of its participants?
- II. To what extent does Nigerian People and Culture classes able to raise awareness of English language learners about their target language?
- III. Nigerian People and Culture classes could be considered as a means to transforming the English language learner.

### ***Instrument for Data Collection***

In this study, the instrument used for data collection was a structured items questionnaire. The questionnaire titled “Integrating Culture into English Language Teaching and Learning”.

### ***Method of data collection***

The data for this study was collected after the completion of the Nigeria people and culture course taken during the first semester of 2018-2019 academic year. During this course lecture sessions, as well as research project presentations were held. Students taking this lecture made an assessment of the course, responding to a five-item questionnaire. The researchers personally administered the questionnaires to all the respondents by visiting the concerned department of Arts and Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe, Gombe State.

### **Data Analysis**

The responses of the participants were analyzed through the SPSS statistical package, observing frequencies of values and their chi-square dependence significance. Results and their interpretations were presented in tabular form, referring to each item included in the questionnaire. In the analyses a value smaller than  $p \geq 0.05$  will be considered statistically significant.

### ***Data Presentation and Analysis of Results***

**Table 1 Language Skills**

Item	Item	Responses	Frequency	%	Chi-square
1	Which of the skill did the course, Nigerian People and Culture contribute most	Reading	10	26.3	0.015
		Writing	2	5.3	
		Listening	10	26.3	
		Speaking	16	42.6	

Regarding the skill improved most, the participants, by 42.6% expressed views suggesting that their speaking skill was significantly improved. Reading and listening skills came next by 26.3% each, and writing by 5.3%. Since the course was mainly presentation based, the participants spent a lot of time conducting seminars and presentation projects. Therefore, both the presenters and the rest of the class practiced speaking since they discussed cultural topics in their target language.

**Table 2 Cultural Awareness**

Item	Item	Responses	Frequency	%	Chi-square
2	Is this course, Nigerian People and Culture, awareness about your own target language and indigenous culture are stressed	yes no	26 12	68.4 31.6	0.023

One of the main objectives of the culture class was to raise awareness of language learners about their indigenous culture. This objective was also mentioned as a benefit of learning culture in the introduction. In Table 2 above, the participants expressed views regarding awareness raising of their indigenous culture as well as others. The chi-square result for this item suggests that the course achieved one of its goals to a great extent. Nearly 70% of the students felt such an awareness.

**Table 4: Attitude towards the Indigenous Culture**

Item	Item	Responses	Frequency	%	Chi-square
3	Did your attitude towards indigenous Culture change at the end of Nigerian People and Culture course?	yes No	28 10	73.3 26.3	0.004

Education is sometimes compared with evolution; it is essentially an evolutionary process at the end of which the individual transforms greatly. Such

transformation, mostly intellectual, could be observed in the change of the individuals' attitudes towards life in general. Culture classes could be considered as a means to transform the language learners.

The fourth item of the questionnaire investigated if the participants were able to observe such a transformation in their attitudes towards indigenous culture in the Societies.

Having a look at Table 3 above, we can see that nearly 75% of the participants expressed positive thoughts regarding the item. The culture course seems to have succeeded in accomplishing a task with some humanizing effect.

### **Major Findings and Discussion of the Findings:**

Below, we will point out the major findings and discussion:

#### **Learning language is also learning indigenous culture**

I will be able to learn not only the language but also the culture. Could you think of any language without culture? After the introduction of the Direct Method into the Language teaching, cultural elements began to be considered as an important aspect of learning the language, and in our age, indigenous cultural background knowledge is accepted as a must in learning language. As Thanasoulas (2001) points out, it should be reiterated that language teaching is culture teaching, and someone involved in teaching language is also involved in teaching culture at the same time. Language does not exist in a vacuum, so language learners should be aware of the context in which the target language is used i.e., they should also learn about the target culture. In this respect, Crystal (1997) well supports this statement: "Language has no independent existence: it exists only in the brains and mouths and ears and hands and eyes of its user." The participants in this study, aware of the inevitability of learning indigenous culture in a language course, believe that they would be well equipped to learn English language course due to the culture class they attended.

#### **Familiarization with the target society**

As a second finding from the culture class, was also mentioned that however course books provide real life situations, learners, lacking insights about the indigenous culture, have difficulty in associating these situations with real people (Kitao, 2000). Therefore, learners may think that they are studying the language of fictive people. However, learners learn concrete facts more easily

than abstract ones; if they know that they are dealing with a genuine and not virtual reality, that they are studying a language spoken by real people, then, studying the language will become much easier. Language students attending culture classes will easily provide background information for their prospective students thereby rendering the grammar or other language related classes more enjoyable, interesting, and attractive. Moreover, when learners' needs and curiosity in their field are satisfied by the teacher, learners will thus respect the authority and the competence of the teacher, which can be viewed as rather conducive to their language learning.

### **Assistance in learning grammar**

I will be able to learn grammar more efficiently. While learning grammar I will be able to provide genuine examples from the lives of the native culture. Some participants believe that besides other benefits, a culture class would help them in learning and teaching grammar. That, while teaching grammatical structures and other grammatical items they would provide their prospective students with examples taken from real life. Teaching grammar, as well known, may sometimes become problematic because one cannot make a one-to-one translation of one language into another. Furthermore, Sapir-Whorf hypothesis implies that there are certain thoughts of an individual in one language that cannot be understood by those who use another language (Chandler, 1994). Therefore, dealing with grammar problems, teachers' ability to explain the new grammatical items referring to life of the target language society will help the students overcome comprehension problems regarding grammatical structures.

### **Enhancing communicative competence in English language**

Communicative competence will be improved. I had the opportunity to use the L2 a lot; thus I feel more confident in speaking the target language. While discussing the language proficiency, linguists often make a distinction between linguistic competence and linguistic performance. Chomsky (1965) defines linguistic competence as what one knows about the language while linguistic performance is one's actual language use. Communicative competence, on the other hand, is a concept introduced by Hymes (1972), and discussed widely in the field of language learning and teaching. According to Hymes (1972) the speakers of a language need more than grammatical competence in order to be able to communicate effectively in a language. They also need to know how language is used by members of a speech community to accomplish their

purposes. Communicative competence has mainly two aspects: linguistic and pragmatic. Cultural competence falls in the category of pragmatic aspect of communicative competence. It could be described as the ability to understand behavior from the perspective of the members of a culture, and thus behave in a way that would be understood by members of the culture in the intended way. It, therefore, involves understanding of all aspects of a culture, but particularly the social structure, the values and beliefs of the people, and the way things are assumed to be done. Lado (1957) argued that lack of cultural competence in the target language would surely lead to transfer from the native language to the target language. Consequently, L2 students would express idiosyncratic utterances leading to inappropriate utterances even though the grammatical structures may be appropriate. The participants here were well aware of the fact that by attending culture classes their communicative competence would be improved and that they would become not only efficient readers and listeners but also efficient speakers and writers.

### **Expanding vocabulary**

Cultural knowledge will play a facilitator role in teaching and learning new lexical items. My vocabulary was expanded significantly due to the culture class. Vocabulary learning has often been one of the major issues in the study of L2. No matter how well learners learn grammar, no matter how successfully sounds of L2 are mastered, without words, expressing a wide range of meanings during communication in an L2 cannot take place in any meaningful way. Therefore, L2 learners need to know as much vocabulary as possible and be able to use it appropriately. Culture classes do not only help learners enrich vocabulary repertoire but also aid them in using the newly acquired words. Studying culture, a learner becomes familiarized with specific words used in a given context. Without paying due attention to Nigerian politics, for instance, comprehending terms such as The Senate, The House of Representatives, The Civil Service, and The Applicants may be rather difficult. Furthermore, one of the techniques in teaching and learning is to make use of the mnemonics. Most of the cultural issues being concrete in nature will be the pegs with which the new vocabulary is associated. Using the peg technique (Thompson, 2003), learners associate a newly encountered word with an already acquired one leading to minimization of fossilization of potential misuse of such a new word.

## CONCLUSION

The classes on culture aim at improving one understanding of the language and the people who speak it. Trained to be prospective teachers of any language, for students of LT, studying native speaker culture is not an arbitrary but a necessary activity.

The findings of the study suggest that a culture class is significantly beneficial in terms of language skills, raising cultural awareness, changing attitudes towards indigenous Culture, and contribution to the teaching profession. The participants in this study emphasized some kind of transformation in their thinking and listed five points as potential contribution of a culture class they received. This study has implications for a culture class in the curriculum of language Education departments. Incorporated in the curriculum, a culture class would prove to be a vital component of language learning and teaching, since as this study illustrates, it has a great deal to offer to the development of communicative competence as well as other skills in the instruction of any language.

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