

Incorporating Cultural Dimensions in Yemeni English Classrooms: From Instructors' Perspective

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Abstract: This study investigated the integration of target culture in English language education in Yemen, emphasizing its significance in enhancing effective communication in diverse global contexts. It aimed to illuminate the necessity of incorporating target culture into foreign language teaching and learning. The study involved 43 EFL teachers from three Yemeni universities - Lahj, Aden, and Abyan - who provided insights through questionnaires, reflecting their diverse experiences in language teaching. From this same group, 12 teachers were selected for interviews to gain deeper qualitative data on integrating cultural elements into EFL instruction.

The findings revealed that while Yemeni EFL teachers value integrating target culture into their teaching and demonstrate a strong commitment to interactive, culturally relevant practices, they encounter challenges like inadequate training, limited resources, and infrastructural barriers. The study recommended improving cultural education through enhanced teacher training, better resource accessibility, and collaborative practices.

Keywords: Cultural integration - English language education - Intercultural competence - Teacher training.

Introduction: This study examined the integration of target culture in English language education, highlighting its importance in fostering effective communication within various global contexts. Learning a language involves grasping its cultural aspects, as language conveys cultural beliefs and values. Recent research underscored the significance of incorporating culture into language education. In Yemen, where English is increasingly vital for higher education and employment, understanding the cultural dimensions of the language is essential for overcoming communication barriers.

Statement of Problem: Cultural awareness is essential for effective communication across cultural boundaries, prompting the need to integrate cultural elements into EFL curricula. Over the past three decades, scholars like Samovar, Porter, and Jain (1981) emphasized that language and culture are intertwined, asserting that understanding the culture associated with a target language fosters proficient language use (cited in Purba, 2011, p.45). Similarly, Peck (1984) argued that foreign language learning is incomplete without a study of culture (cited in Kavakli (2021- p.96) . Despite these insights, many student teachers, as observed by the researcher during practical teaching experiences, tend to neglect cultural integration, focusing primarily on grammatical rules in a teacher-centered approach. While recent research explored the role of culture in EFL instruction, there is a significant gap regarding the Yemeni context. This study aimed to illuminate the current status of cultural teaching within university EFL programs in Yemen.

Objectives of the Study: The primary aim of this study was to examine the extent to which English culture is incorporated into EFL classes in Yemen. To accomplish this goal, the study had the following specific objectives:

- 1- Explore teachers' conceptions about culture in FLT.
- 2- Investigate teachers' attitudes towards incorporating culture into their teaching.
- 3- Explore the extent to which EFL teachers integrate culture in their classes.
- 4- Investigate the challenges EFL Yemeni teachers face in teaching culture.
- 5- Identify the teachers' availability of chances to raise their awareness of teaching culture.

Limitations of the Study: This study concentrated on evaluating the cultural aspects of teaching English as a foreign language within the bachelor's programs at the universities of Lahj, Aden, and Abyan in the academic

year 2023-2024. The study's sample presented a limitation, as it is confined solely to university instructors who teach the English language. This restriction may affect the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts or levels.

Literature Review

Definition of culture: Culture is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses the shared beliefs, values, customs, traditions, behaviors, and artifacts of a particular group or society. Scholars like Peterson (2004) emphasized the difficulty in defining culture, suggesting it includes both elements that can be experienced through the five senses, such as food and music, and intangible aspects, such as beliefs and values (pp.19-22). Gomez (2018- p.188) and Brown (2007- p.188) further elaborated that culture characterizes societies and is shaped by social and national identities. Hammer (1985) described culture as a way of life that includes customs and values, highlighting its role in distinguishing one society from another (cited in Belli, 2018, p. 104). Sasani (2018) noted that culture influences all aspects of human life, and understanding these cultural differences is essential to avoid misunderstandings in interactions between people from diverse backgrounds (p.21).

Relationship between Language and Culture: The relationship between language and culture has been a significant area of research, particularly within the field of Foreign Language Teaching (FLT). Scholars such as Thu (2010- p.12) and Brown (2007-p.177) argued that language and culture are inherently interrelated, with Yeganeha and Raeesi (2015) emphasized that they are inseparable entities that cannot be fully understood in isolation (p.535). Gallison (1991) coined the term "langue-culture" to illustrate this connection, asserting that separating the two is an "artificial" construct (cited in Tran and Dang, 2014, p.208). Choudhury (2013) further supported this notion, stating that a language is a reflection of its associated culture (p.21), while Scarcella (1992) identified language and culture as synonymous (cited in Hsin,2008, p.2). The interplay of language and culture is critical, Gene and Bada (2005) highlighted that effective language teaching inherently includes cultural education (cited in Gorjian and Aghvami, 2017, p.71). Further, Belli (2018) underscored the deep relationship between language and culture, noting that both reflect shared societal properties such as values and behaviors. He argued that proficiency in a foreign language does not guarantee effective communication with native speakers if one lacks the necessary cultural knowledge (p.21). Given their close linkage, many scholars, including Brown (2007), advocated for the integration of cultural understanding in language teaching. Brown (2007) suggested that learning a second language is also acquiring a second culture and identity, thereby reiterating the importance of cultural context in the language learning process (p.194). This perspective reinforces the idea that cultural competence is essential for successful communication and interaction in a foreign language.

Communicative Competence, Intercultural Competence, Intercultural Communicative Competence: The concept of competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has evolved through the contributions of various scholars. Chomsky (1965) initially distinguished between "competence," which refers to a speaker's implicit knowledge of language, and "performance," the observable use of language in real-world contexts (p.4). His framework primarily focused on grammatical aspects, positing that competence encompasses the inherent rules of language that enable the generation of grammatically correct sentences. However, this approach was critiqued for neglecting the social and cultural dimensions of language use, which led to the emergence of the concept of communicative competence (CC) introduced by Hymes (1972). Hymes expanded the definition to include both linguistic and sociolinguistic competence, emphasizing the importance of context and social interactions in understanding language (pp.270-288). Widdowson (1978) further developed the notion of communicative competence, stressing the need for language to be used meaningfully and appropriately in various social and cultural contexts. These perspectives paved the way for communicative language teaching approaches that prioritize real-world language use. Among the notable advancements was Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), which sought to refine previous theories by incorporating the complexities of intercultural communication. Byram (1997) critiqued earlier models for their insufficient focus on foreign language teaching and cross-cultural interchange, proposing a comprehensive framework that enhances effectiveness in diverse communication situations. Overall, the debate surrounding communicative and intercultural competence highlights the

dynamic nature of language learning and the integral role of cultural awareness in effective communication across languages.

Methodology

Research Design: The design of this study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. This method aims to enhance the validity, reliability, and depth of the findings, providing a more refined perspective on the issue being investigated.

Participants of the Study: The study involved 43 EFL teachers from the mentioned universities who voluntarily completed questionnaires, providing insights into their teaching experiences. Additionally, 12 teachers were selected for interviews to offer in-depth qualitative data on integrating cultural elements in EFL instruction.

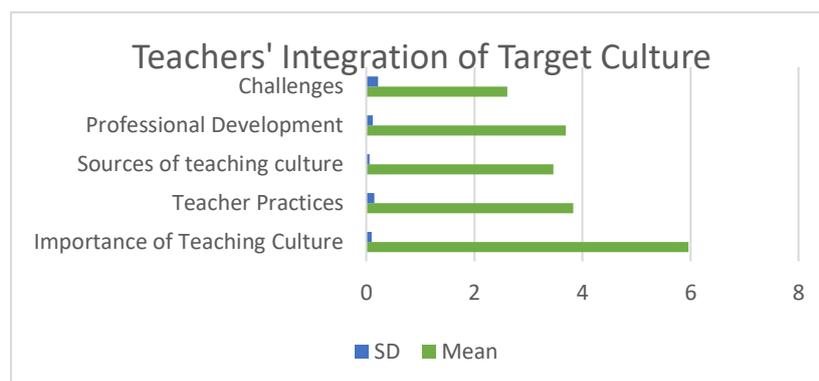
Results

Results of Questionnaire

Table 1: Teachers' integration of target culture

	Topics	Mean	St. D
1	Importance of Teaching Culture	5.96	0.099
2	Teacher Practices	3.83	0.147
3	Sources of teaching culture	3.46	0.059
4	Professional Development	3.69	0.118
5	Challenges	2.61	0.217

The findings indicated that Yemeni EFL teachers hold a positive attitude towards integrating target culture in their teaching, recognizing its importance and employing interactive practices to enhance student engagement. Despite this commitment, they face challenges such as inadequate cultural knowledge, insufficient training, and limited resources, emphasizing the need for ongoing professional development and better access to workshops and support in cultural education.



Results of interview: The interview revealed that Yemeni EFL teachers view culture as customs and traditions, emphasizing the link between language and intercultural competence. However, significant gaps in their training hinder effective cultural instruction, with many citing inadequate coverages in university programs and a lack of qualified trainers. This results in insufficient understanding of the target culture, affecting their teaching and leading to variable student attitudes toward English culture. Factors like prior exposure and teaching methods influence motivation, highlighting the need to foster cultural curiosity. Despite efforts to incorporate cultural elements, systemic constraints and resource shortages, including unreliable internet, complicate integration in language education.

Discussion of Results: The researcher noted that both the questionnaire and interview findings indicated that Yemeni EFL teachers have a solid understanding of culture, which is vital for effective language instruction. Their positive attitudes towards integrating target culture reflect a commitment to a culturally rich learning environment. However, challenges such as inadequate training, limited resources, and infrastructural barriers hinder this integration. Varied student attitudes towards cultural learning highlight the need for engagement to enhance the curriculum. These findings align with Rampen's (2017) study, which emphasizes the interrelation

of time constraints, curriculum design, and the need for professional development in addressing cultural teaching challenges in ELT (p.12).

Recommendation Based: on the study's findings, the researcher recommended the following strategic initiatives to enhance cultural education in Yemeni EFL teaching:

- Teacher training programs should include cultural education in curricula, while universities improve access to resources and invest in technology for effective cultural engagement.
- Institutions should promote collaborative approaches, such as team-teaching, where experienced educators mentor peers on cultural instruction.
- Teachers should use technology to connect students with native speakers and enrich their understanding of cultural contexts.
- Creating a classroom environment that values cultural diversity and encourages self-expression can boost student motivation and engagement in language learning.

Conclusion: In conclusion, enhancing cultural education in EFL instruction is essential for fostering intercultural competence among students. Integrating cultural elements enriches language understanding and prepares students for diverse contexts. Targeted professional development programs are needed to equip teachers with skills for cultural integration, alongside improved access to resources like authentic materials and technology. Addressing challenges such as limited training is crucial for elevating language education quality in Yemen. Ultimately, prioritizing cultural education will enhance teaching practices and empower students to become culturally aware global citizen.

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إدماج الأبعاد الثقافية في فصول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في اليمن: من منظور المعلمين

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الملخص: تناولت هذه الدراسة إدماج الثقافة المستهدفة في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في اليمن، مع التركيز على أهميتها في تعزيز التواصل الفعال في سياقات عالمية متنوعة. فهدفت إلى تسليط الضوء على ضرورة إدماج الثقافة المستهدفة في تعليم وتعلم اللغات الأجنبية. وتكونت عينة الدراسة من 43 معلمًا للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من ثلاث جامعات يمنية - لحج، وعدن، وأبين - الذين قدموا رؤى من خلال استبيانات، تعكس تجاربهم المتنوعة في تدريس اللغة. من بين هذه المجموعة، تم اختيار 12 معلمًا لإجراء مقابلات للحصول على بيانات نوعية أعمق حول إدماج العناصر الثقافية في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

أشارت النتائج أنه على الرغم من أن المعلمين اليمنيين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يعترفون بأهمية إدماج الثقافة المستهدفة في تعليمهم ويظهرون التزامًا قويًا بالممارسات التفاعلية ذات الصلة ثقافيًا، إلا أنهم يواجهون تحديات كبيرة، بما في ذلك التدريب غير الكافي، والموارد المحدودة، والحوازج الهيكلية. اختتمت الدراسة بتوصيات لتحسين التعليم الثقافي في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مع التأكيد على الحاجة إلى تعزيز تدريب المعلمين، وتوفير الموارد، وممارسات التدريس التعاونية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التكامل الثقافي - تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية - الكفاءة الثقافية بين الثقافات - تدريب المعلمين.