

Divulging the Seamy Side of an Extolled Algerian Educational System: Spotting the intercultural Cracks Within the LMD System

MUSTAPHA BOUDJELAL⁽¹⁾

Introduction:

In a world characterised by diversity in terms of identity, belongings and upbringings, developing some skills that beef up understanding others' perspectives, approaches and relent some maverick appraisals to reality are badly needed. Interculturality as a term covers these salient competencies that allow their user to communicate successfully in educational settings or face-to face contacts with natives, as it decreases students' miscreant behaviour and reconciles different cultures.

Review of Literature

Some Understandings of the concept Culture

Among the concepts that polarized scholars' views and arguments is the notion of culture. The latter, because of its complex and intricate nature, led to the emergence of manifold conceptual streams that treated culture as a common scope of research, yet using divergent approaches to the its empirical study. For such a reason, we will be restricted to the briny approaches to culture.

Culture used to be narrowed down to geographical locations. In a way, that is unworkable in today's understandings of culture, persons' culture can be deduced from where they live. In this respect, a person from the countryside, according to this introverted

understanding, will dispose some cultural features not found, if not, different from the ones a person from the city will presumably have (Brook, 2004:16). However, this understanding discards other variables that are even more substantial than geographical locations such as behaviour, attitudes and personality.

It is true that one can describe another person's culture from their behaviour. We tend to say that a person who respects others, who tolerates other opinions, who has a knowledge about others, represents a culture that can be distinguished from another one's culture exemplified in a behaviour that runs counter to the previous one. The understanding of culture from a human behaviour perspective matches the holistic view expressed by E.B. Tylor as he notes: *culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.* (in White, 1959:227).

Indeed, culture is exhibited in human behaviour, yet culture and behaviour are two dissimilar entities. This view, penned by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), had been a turning point as far as the history of culture was concerned. Culture is not a human behaviour, however a mere abstraction from

behaviour. Their backed argument implies that culture, if it is taken as behaviour itself, it would be the concern of psychologists and not anthropologists. As we demarcate between the two entities, we will systematically lead to manifold subjects belonging to sundry disciplines (in White, *ibid.*).

We may draw a brief conclusion from the above definitions. Culture puzzled scholars in a past time that we cannot describe as short. Even at present, researchers, dealing with some aspects of culture, especially in the field of humanities and sociology, encumber miscellaneous obstacles, not for a lack of reading about what culture represents, but because, until now, no scholar is able to provide a single suitable-for- all contexts definition. In this way, delimiting the concept of culture will remain a futuristic challenge.

Interculturality :

Interculturality delineates the process of mediation between person's cultural identity and other cultures. In this regard, it designates coexistence between *self and Otherness*. Interculturality is believed to be *ubiquitous* as it occurs in motley communicative situations and progressive since it reflects reality with its continuous alterations. Interculturality can be identified within communicative situations whereby interactants commute ideas, knowledge and views about divergent cultures. It should be noted that any communicative event is bound to certain communicative strategies and technique that interactants employ to engage in any give-

and-take processe (Bernaus, Andrade, Murkwosta, and Saez ,2007:12). However, as Lusebrink (2008:33) claims, interculturality does not always represent communication as such. On the contrary, interculturality epitomizes the outcomes of communicative events whereby diverse cultural elements coalesce in one common stream of tolerance, forgiveness and understanding (in Sembdner, 2011:40).

Intercultural Competence:

Intercultural communicative competence typifies the development of one's cognitive capacity motivated by the appreciation of diversity, recognition of critical awareness, and analysis as a means of communication in a complex society (Oliveras, 2000). Other salient characteristics of such a competence are clearly identified in Meinert Meyer's statement:

Intercultural competence, as part of a broader foreign speaking competence, identifies the ability of a person to behave adequately and in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of other cultures. Adequacy and flexibility imply awareness of the cultural differences between one's own and the foreign culture and the ability to handle cross-cultural problems which result from the differences. Intercultural competence includes the capacity of establishing one's self-identity in the process of cross-cultural mediation, and helping others

stabilize their identity. (In Grossman, 1998:17)

Intercultural Speaker

Despite the fact that Dell Hymes' communicative competence proved to be inherent for foreign language learning and teaching, some authoritative elements related to the main process had been discarded along its theoretical foundation. According to Paulston (1992) communicative competence was solely based on the idea of the native speaker as the standard and therefore a perplexing aim to consummate (in Robert, 2001:30) . Consequently, there was a compelling need for a concept that disregards such an unrivaled view of Otherness and accounts for divergent parameters which may magnify the scope of communication. "*Intercultural speaker*", Byram and Zarate (1994); Byram (1997); Kramersch (1998) and Doye (1991) conceive, is the seemingly term that describes the person who develops the requisite cultural knowledge for the purpose of mediating between different cultures (in Robert, 2001:30).

Byram (1997) avers that the intercultural speaker does not belong to any particular culture, they rather occupy a space between manifold cultures (in Alred, Byram and Fleming, 2006:122). This is what Kramersch calls "*the sphere of interculturality*". She emphasizes the fact that intercultural speaker should be aware of the meaning being conventional. That is, persons who engage themselves in any given intercultural

communication should not consider their point of view as the only right one. (in Robert,2001:30).

Intercultural Facet in LMD¹ System:

The LMD system has been introduced to the Algerian higher education as an endeavour to adjust some instructional aspects so as to meet international educational parameters. Nevertheless, as Idri (2005) alleges, the Algerian educational reform is an illustration of how the Algerian government unscrupulously tries to apply identical systems of most developed countries to unexplored Algerian educational settings. Hence, the success of such a system lies in the match that can be made between what the system requires and what the Algerian educational environment can afford.

The integration of the LMD system in higher education in Algeria is considered as a move towards globalization, simply because this system proved its utility and it has, more or less, been adopted by most European countries. This system has been applied in neighboring countries like Morocco and Tunisia before its application in Algeria. (Idri, *ibid.*)⁽²⁾

Prior to 2007, students in the Department of English at the University of Mostaganem used to study four years to graduate. This system, known as the classical system, had been censured by diverse commissions such as Commission National de Réforme du Systeme since the 1980's. Among the

shortcomings of the classical system are the following:

- **Nonexistent relationship with the socio-economic environment;**
- **The increase of joblessness among the graduate students;**
- **The inefficiency of training programmes (in Mazzella, 14:2009).**

The Aims of the Reform:

The Ministry of Higher Education appointed a given number of commissions whose preoccupation was designing a framework for the LMD system within the Algerian context. Commission National de Réforme du Systeme (2001) indicates the following reasons for the implementation of the new system in Algerian higher education:

- **Have a clearer presentation of the degree courses by field of study, organized as study paths, leading to degrees that are recognized throughout the world,**
- **Increase national and international mobility,**
- **create greater flexibility forms of both each student in terms of both content and time taken to complete the degree courses,**
- **Improve access to further education at any age. (in Mazzella, 14: 2009)**

The Goals of Teaching about Culture:

Cakir (2006:156-157) suggests that the tight link between language and culture makes any language learning attempt developing learners' cultural knowledge by means of :

- Developing communicative skills;

- Understanding the linguistic and behavioural patterns both of the target and the native culture at a more conscious level;
- Developing intercultural and international understanding;
- Adopting a wider perspective in the perception of reality;
- Making teaching sessions more enjoyable to develop the awareness of the potential mistakes that might come up in comprehensions, interpretation, translation and communication.

The Study

The exploration of the intercultural facet of the LMD system in higher education has been the prime stimulus for such a purposive paper. As to the methodology, the syllabi of English which constitute our corpus had been put under rigorous analysis (syllabi of English are attached to the appendices).

Indeed, the aims of the reform look promising as it focuses on acting on a global scale, giving students the chance to study abroad, and most importantly impart students' degrees an international legitimacy. These objectives are in tune with the targets of teaching about cultures in EFL classes. However, the implementation of these objectives necessitates to be investigated in genuine educational contexts for the sake of evaluating the achievements of the reform so far. So, does the LMD system truly foment students' developing intercultural skills? Do syllabi of English introduced to students of

English picture and inform about today's world.

Syllabi of English in LMD System

In first year syllabus, the focus is on the speaking and writing skills. This is clear in the time allocated to the subjects which support the skills. This is quite equitable since via the subjects of oral and written expression which are vouchsafed prominence in the syllabus, learners will be able to express themselves in English orally and in writing (see appendix one, table one). Yet, as pointed earlier, the aim of the reform is help learners act at a global scale. This objective may not be supported in this kind of syllabus where the shortest time is allotted to the instruction of the subject of "Cultural Studies. A closer look at the content of the subject in question is more than required.

In the first semester, first year learners are introduced to the concept of culture. This topic, teachers of English, suggest, maps out the various definitions of culture. Indeed, this introduction is crucial as it paves the way for more labyrinthine aspects to be dealt with in due time. After such an introduction, learners are taught ancient civilizations such the Greek and the Roman's (see appendix one, table two).

Beyond the interest these topics may bear, the focus on ancient civilizations may yet be quite controvertible, given the necessity to familiarize learners with more topical issues. This raises the following interrogation: do learners need to know about the Greek Trojan

Horse story or even the achievements of Alexander the Great to communicate interculturality in wheeler-dealer 21st century world? On the contrary, though these historical data are informative and momentous, learners need to deal with topics that make them accustomed to Otherness. What is more, it is important for learners to be introduced to the cultures both native speakers of English (like English and Americans) and non-native speakers such as Indians and others so as to overcome the native speaker as the ultimate possible cultural model.

As it comes to the second year syllabus, many subjects cease to exist while others are added. At this level, students deal with the subject of literature, which most of scholars believe, is substantial in the teaching about other cultures. Parallel to this, the oral and the writing skills are emphasized. Nevertheless, the subject of "Cultural Studies" is no longer part of the syllabus (see appendix one, table two). So, have learners already developed the requisite knowledge about other cultures in the bygone year? In both cases, teaching about other cultures should be more accentuated given the fact learners are linguistically more ready to read about other cultures.

In the third year, the subjects of oral and written expression are omitted. Part of the reason for such an alteration is the fact that third year students are expected to have already developed the required linguistic

skills. Here, too, culture as an autonomous subject is not available in the syllabus. It is taught within other subjects such as civilization and literature (see appendix one, table three).

If we compare between the three syllabi of English, we will easily notice how marginalized the teaching about other cultures within the LMD system is. This system emphasizes the oral and the writing skills at the expense of other skills which serve the needs of an intercultural world. In this section, we may say that, in terms of what the new system affords to Algerian educational settings, it does not fulfill the professed aims it was based on.

Literature as a threshold to Interculturality

Literature, Collies and Slater (1990:3) aver, is indispensable in the teaching about other cultures. First, it provides bona fide materials as it depicts real contexts. Second, it enriches learners' cultural backgrounds. Learners who are not enough affluent to pay a visit to other countries are likely to read literary texts to know about others' traditions, norms, and customs. Third, it upholds students' linguistic competence as it provides manifold expressions and words in the target language. Finally, reading literary texts involve learners in a communicative process. Thus, literatures turn to be crucial in any intercultural instruction because of "literature's ability to represent the voice of a particular writer among the many voices of his or

her community and thus appeal to the particular reader". (Kramsch, 1993:130-131). Here, too, one may ask the following question: do the literary texts within the LMD system are conscientiously planned to develop learners' intercultural skills in the 21ST century?

LMD Syllabi of Literature

At the first year, learners are introduced to the subject of "*Literary Genres*". This subject provides miscellaneous literary concepts. As it comes to the first semester, learners deal with poetry and drama, whilst the second one is consecrated to prose with its various genres. Since the subject of literary genre affords manifold literary concepts to learners, they will be able to recognize the different types of literary texts. Nonetheless, learners would not be able to communicate interculturally using a set of decontextualized concepts as they deal with real situations (see appendix two, figure one)

Second year programme of literature is composed of a set of novels and novellas. In the first semester, students study the following novels: "*Robinson Crusoe* (1919) by Daniel Defoe, the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1985) by Mark Twain. In the second semester, they deal with "*Hard Times*" (1984) by Charles Dickens, "*The American*" (1977) by Henry James, *The Lesson of the Master* (1977) by Henry James, and finally, *Pride and Prejudice* (1913) by Jane Austin (see appendix two, table four)

Through reading such kind of literary texts, learners will develop a given knowledge

about the target cultures. However; most of the novels are published within the last century (20th century). Is it possible that our learners would be able to act at a global scale having knowledge about what societies used to look like in the bygone century? Of course not, past literature cannot be used to interpret contemporary societies (Steelye, 1993; Hammerly, 1982). An instantiation can be derived from the novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen. The latter portrays the significance of marriage of in the Victorian era that is utterly different from the way it is looked at in nowadays' British societies.

In the third year, literature is given more significance as learners deal with two distinct literary traditions: American and British literatures. Whilst the first semester is dedicated to the study of novels such as "*The Great Gatsby* (S. Fitzgerald) and "*Of Mice and Men*' by John Steinbeck', the second one deals with literary works such as *The Old Man And The Sea* (Ernest Hemingway and the *Zoo story* by Edward Albee (see appendix two, table five).

As far as the subject of British Literature is concerned, learners deal with the novellas of "*The Virgin And The Gypsy*" and "*the Animal Farm*" in the first semester. In the second semester, however, learners are introduced to the play "*The Room*" and the novel "*The Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man*". The common aspect of both the subjects of American and British Literature is their description of the literary movement

"Modernism", which in a way, depicts the characteristics of "modern men" (see appendix two, table five).

Conclusion:

Admittedly, the teaching about other cultures does not in any way possible match the professed aims of the reform. As a matter of fact, the teaching about other cultures is considered irrelevant in the second year syllabus, or taught to inform learner about what our fellow men used to do centuries ago. We are none the wiser about whether to put the blame on the reform which needs scrupulous revision, or the environment that does not help much supporting the new system. This remains the challenge of futuristic researches. What we believe to be true is the fact that the status quo of leaning about other cultures with Algerian universities do not foment our students to become "*intercultural speakers*"

Reference:

1) Maitre of Department of Philosophy, University of Abdelahmid Ibn Badis, Mostaganem, Al

2) LMD : An educational system which mainly consists of three briny qualifications: Licence, Master and Doctorate . Licence: a three-year degree, Master: two-year degree, and Doctorate: three -year degree.

Bibliography:

- Alred, G., Byram, M. and Fleming, P. (eds) (2006). *Education for Intercultural Citizenship: Concepts and Comparisons*. London: Library of Congress Cataloguing.
- Bernaus, M., Andrade, A., Kervan, M., Murkwoska, A. and Saez, T. (eds) (2007). *Plurilingual and Pluricultural Awareness in Language Teacher Education, Volume 253*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Brooks, P. (2004). *Cultural Intelligence: A Guide to Working with People from Other Cultures*. New jersey. Intercultural Press.
- Cakir, I. (2006). *Developing Cultural Awareness in Foreign Language Teaching*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Collie, J. and Slater, S.(1990). *Literature in the Language Classroom: A Resource Book of Ideas and Activities*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Grosman, M. (1998). *Language Policy and Language Education in Emerging Nations*. New York : Ablex Publishing Company.
- Hammerly, H. (ed.) (1982). *Synthesis in Second Language Teaching*. Burnby: Second Language Publications.
- Idri, N. (2005).The LMD System Experience as a Struggle Between the Educational Development and Reform: An Analytical Study of the Endeavour of the Academic Year 2004/2005 in Bejaia. *Rencontres Internationales sur le Dispositif LMD-Problèmes et Perspectives*, 4-5 December, 2005, University of Bejaia
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mazzella, S. (2009). *La Mondialisation Etudiante. Le Maghreb Entre Nord et Sud*. Paris : Karthala, ISBN.
- Oliveras, A. (2000). *Hacia la Competencia Intercultural en el Aprendizaje de Una Lengua Extranjera*. Madrid : Edinumen.
- Robert, C. (2001). *Language Learners as Ethnographers* . New York :Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data.
- Seelye, H. (1993). *Teaching Culture: Strategies for Inter-cultural Communication*, 3rd edition. Lincolnwood, IL : National Textbook Company.
- Sembdner, S. (2011). *Success Factors of Virtual Teams in the Conflict of Cross-Cultural Team Structures*. Humburg : Diplomica Verlag.
- White, L. A. (1959). "The concept of culture". *American Anthropologist*, 61, 227-230.

Appendix One: (LMD Syllabi of English)

Table One : First Year Syllabus

Subjects	Time Dedicated
Linguistics	One and a half hours a week
Methodology	Three hours a week
Written expression	Three hours a week
Grammar	One and a half hours a week
Oral expression	Three hours a week
Epistemology	One and a half hours a week
Cultural studies	One and a half hours a week
Origins of languages	One and a half hours a week
Computing	One and a half hours a week
Phonetics	One and a half hours a week
Morphosyntax	One and a half hours a week
Literary genre	One and a half hours a week

Table two: The Content of the Subject of Cultural Studies

The Topics
Definitions of culture
Ancient Greece
Greek Myths and Heroes
Classical Greek
Roman civilization
The History of Christianity
The Ten Commandments
The Middle Ages
The Renaissance
The Reformation

Table Three : Second Year Syllabus:

Subjects	Time Dedicated
Literature	One and a half hours a week
Morphosyntax	One and a half hours a week
Linguistics	One and a half hours a week
Phonology	One and a half hours a week
Lexicosemantics	One and a half hours a week
French	One and a half hours a week
Oral Expression	Three hours a week
Written Expression	Three hours a week
Psychology	One and a half hours a week
Computing	One and a half hours a week

Table Four: Third Year Syllabus

Subjects	Time Dedicated
Methodology	One and a half hours a week
Discourse analysis	Three hours a week
Sociolinguistics	Three hours a week
T.E.F.L	One and a half hours a week
French	One and a half hours a week
British Literature	One and a half hours a week
American literature	One and a half hours a week
British civilization	One and a half hours a week
American civilization	One and a half hours a week
Computing	One and a half hours a week

Appendix Two: Literature Syllabi

Figure One: The subject of Literary Genres

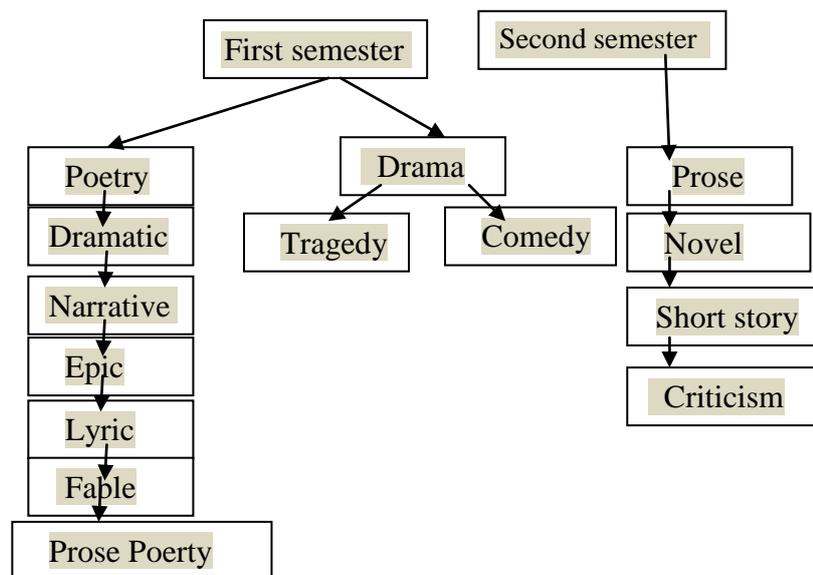


Table Five: Second Year Subject of Literature

Literary Works	
Robinson Crusoe (1719)	Daniel Defoe
The Adventures of Huckleberry (1985)	Mark Twain
Hard Times (1984)	Charles Dickens
The American (1977)	Henry James
The Lesson of The Master (1888)	Henry James
Pride And Prejudice (1913)	Jane Austin

Table Six: Third Year Subject of Literature: (American and British)

American Literature	
The Great Gatsby (1925)	S. Fitzgerald
Of Mice And Men (1937)	John Steinbeck
The Old Man And The Sea (1932)	Ernest Hemingway
The Zoo Story (1959)	Edward Albee
British Literature	
The Virgin And The Gypsy (1930)	DH. Lawrence
Animal Farm (1945)	George Orwell
The Room (1957)	Harold Pinter
The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916)	James Joyce