

# Role Of Culture In Efl Teaching In Libya- A Comparative Study On Perceptions Of Teachers And Students

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## Abstract

In psycho-analytical parlance, perception is defined as the general way people view a certain aspect, either positively or negatively that influences his behaviour towards it. In the recent times, English has emerged as the most popular foreign EFL prevalent in every modern education system in the Arab peninsular region, with Libya as a shining example in terms of its extent of popularity and acceptance. The EFL experiment in Libya is so remarkable given its geo-political, ethno-cultural challenges, offers us a wonderful context to examine the bearing that the perceptions of the EFL teachers and students may have had on the teaching outcomes and experiences of the target culture. In this article, the researcher seeks to analyze the Libyan EFL teachers' and students' perceptions about the teaching culture and study their possible effects on the outcome in terms of learner proficiency in the target EFL. Furthermore, the study sought to examine the possible extent to which teachers' perceptions on teaching culture differed from that of the students, especially with respect to classroom behaviour and peer engagement. The participants of the study included 20 EFL teachers and 60 students from the English EFL Department, Faculty of Arts and Education, University of Sabratha, Libya. The respondents, both from the EFL Teaching and learner communities were quizzed about their perceptions about teaching target culture in EFL classes through the questionnaire method as well as interview. The data analysis results showed both EFL teachers and students sharing a largely positive opinion about the prevailing teaching culture at the selected institution, though the statistical results indicated some variations in the perceptions between EFL teachers and students related to perceptions towards teaching culture in EFL classrooms. Moreover, students are shown to prefer dialogue-based learning of culture rather than using other channels such as reading about culture.

**Keywords:** Culture, Perceptions, EFL, Teaching Culture, Target Culture.

## Introduction

The integration of EFL into various native education systems has spurred a lot of attention and debate since the advent of contemporary education systems in many regions of the world. The interplay between EFLs, the ethnic sensibilities, and cultural values of native countries, which sometimes borders on direct and unpleasant clashes between states and their people, is substantially reflected in post-colonial times. The introduction of the English EFL into the educational systems of Arabian nations in the Middle East is fraught with worrisome precedents, historical significance, and distinctive legacies. Since its emergence as a EFL of global trade, business, and frequently referred to be a EFL of prosperity, aspiration, and modernity, it has sparked a slew of contradictory concerns because of its dominance over native EFLs and disruption of national cultures. As a result, societal disruptions, cultural disputes, and political difficulties have resulted from the teaching of English in schools and universities in nations like Libya, which are profoundly anchored in Arab cultural identity. More than structural manipulation and lexicon enrichment are involved in learning a new EFL". The necessity for cultural literacy in ELT derives primarily from the fact that most EFL students, who have not been exposed to cultural characteristics of the community in issue, appear to have major difficulty articulating meaning to native speakers," writes Bada[1]. Furthermore, many foreign and second EFL courses and textbooks now regard second EFL culture to be an interdisciplinary subject [2]. Today, English is the most often taught second EFL in many nations, as it is now considered an international EFL. The English EFL contains several cultural standards that may be easily imposed on students from many countries and cultures.

However, because EFL and culture are inextricably linked, EFL training programmes must incorporate culture into their curriculum. Some academics argue that a EFL learning programme devoid of culture will not result in adequate competency. For example, Kramersch (1993) writes in her book *Context and Culture in EFL Teaching* that cultural awareness and the acquisition of a second culture can only help with the acquisition of second EFL competency[3]. She also claims that the teaching of culture pervades the teaching of social interaction, as well as the spoken and written EFLs, whether implicitly or openly. The perception of culture by EFL teachers, as well as its incorporation into EFL education, is a critical issue.

Some Libyan EFL teachers argue that culture cannot be taught in the classroom. According to Kramersch (1993), cultural education should focus on the discovery and development of a "third place." [4] The typical situation in a classroom that allows for polyphonic communication is the best way to define the notion of a 'third place'. Every student in the class must get the opportunity to reflect on culture. An option that a student have is to experience cultural norms of the second EFL through the teacher's perspective on culture teaching. The present study seeks to examine perceptions among Libyan EFL teachers and students about culture teaching and its impact on productive EFL proficiency among students.

### **Literature Review**

According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), culture is a tool through which one may examine one's own everyday life and determine the relevance of numerous life events[5]. Given the preceding definitions, culture may be defined as a set of ideas and information that individuals have about a certain group of people or civilization. What is the link between EFL and culture? This is a subject that all EFL students and students are interested in. Historically, teachers and

practitioners thought of teaching as a means of converting one EFL into the other. In the earlier part of this century, second EFL learning took place for students to gain “access to the great literary masterpieces of civilization”. Some also believed that a second EFL study was needed in the early colonial period so as to making students to acquire "access to the great literary works of civilization”, which was, however, quickly rebutted by others who believed that it would impede inclusiveness of one EFL and cultural uniqueness.[6] "This is because culture is constantly open to updates and diversity, and when two cultures come into touch with one another, it is likely to be a source of conflict" [7]. It is thought that simply teaching a EFL would automatically impart culture as well. In a similar vein, Kramersch (1993) claims that the teaching of culture pervades the education of social interaction, as well as the spoken and written EFLs. Stern (1983) proposed inclusion of cultural elements of second EFL and foreign EFL in his three-level framework comprising anthropology, educational sociology, and linguistics and sociolinguistics theories, ethnographic or cultural description of the target EFL and socio-cultural component of the second EFL as its highlight element [8].According to Kramersch (1993), culture cannot be added as a fifth EFL ability to the previous four: speaking, conversing, writing, and reading and remains present from the onset of learning a new EFL. According to Gagnestam (2003), learning about one's own culture is essential before studying other cultures. The capacity to reflect on similarities and contrasts across cultures is built on a foundation of understanding of one's own culture and ancestry[9].

While reviewing the literature on teachers' perception of the integration of culture in EFL classrooms, it becomes clear that little study has been done on this topic. According to Kramersch (2004), almost every EFL teacher today is regarded an expert in both linguistics and culture, since they are aware of the interactions that occur between EFL and culture and can provide both effectively. The research demonstrates that various factors impact instructors' perceptions of target EFL culture, the most important of which are social, educational, cultural, and socio-economic aspects. Teachers' expectations about cultures are formed early in life, under the influence of parents and peers[10].

Pedagogical influences also have a significant impact on instructors' perceptions about target EFL culture and culture instruction. Akl (2007) and Seelye (1984) demonstrate that many instructors believe EFL and culture are inextricably linked [11]. That is, EFL learning, and identity formation are always in conversation[12]. The influence of socio-economic factors on instructors' expectations of target culture has received little attention in the literature and research. "It has also been proven that social status, housing, and access to resources have a significant influence on acquisition of value systems as much as academic accomplishment," writes Arikan [13].Students must understand that learning a EFL is more than simply paying attention to how something is written, translated, or spoken. "Competencies that enable individuals to mediate/interpret the values, beliefs, and behaviours (the "cultures") of themselves and others, and to "stand on the bridge" or even "be the bridge" between people of various EFLs and cultures" are what they should acquire [14].

Because the study includes qualitative components, a study done by Chavez (2002) on the views of German students about the integration of culture in foreign and second EFL

lessons might give further insights [15]. Students may be more interested in learning about items and techniques than in learning about viewpoints. Some participants saw the relationship between EFL and culture as intertwined, while others demanded that it be completely separated, as evidenced by the phrase "this is a EFL course, not a cultural course" (p. 136). Norrizan (1993) did research in Malaysia to look at the impact of various cultural elements in ESL books [16]. She concluded that the textbooks were geared toward middle-class ideals and lifestyles, and that the students in these courses had meaningful connections. She advocated for instructors to be more discriminating in their selection of relevant materials, considering the culture of the students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study is intended to explore Libyan EFL teachers' and Students' perceptions of teaching culture in English classes. EFL remains the most used foreign EFL and the perception towards the target culture must be gauged to understand its effectiveness on the ground. We formulated set research questions as follows:

Q1: How do Libyan EFL teachers perceive the teaching culture?

Q2: How do Libyan EFL students perceive the teaching culture?

Q3: Is there a link between the perceptions of Libyan EFL teachers and students about teaching culture?

Q4: Do Libyan EFL teachers and students see the need for major changes in teaching culture?

### **Methodology**

The present study is focused on examining the attitudes and perceptions about the teaching culture among EFL teachers and students at the University of Sabratha, Libya. The participants of the study included 20 EFL teachers and 60 students from the English EFL Department, Faculty of Arts and Education, the University of Sabratha, Libya. The respondents, both from the EFL Teaching and learner communities were quizzed about their perceptions about teaching target culture in EFL classes through the questionnaire method as well as a semi-structured interview. Questionnaires were designed in two different versions which made them suitable for both EFL teachers and students. The respondents among EFL teachers with a minimum experience of 4 years were selected while the maximum experience was found 10 years of teaching English. The participating students were selected from amongst female students with intermediate level of EFL proficiency with age ranging from 16 to 20.

### **Limitations:**

The respondents were selected only based on their present academic profile at the institution under study. It does not include other factors like the socio-economic status and previous educational background of the EFL teachers and students. The gender profile of the teachers is both male and female, whereas there are only female students as participants.

### **Questionnaire**

With a view to understanding EFL teachers' perceptions about culture, an attitude questionnaire was devised consisting of three parts, each dealing with different aspects of teaching culture in the EFL classroom. The EFL teachers were asked to state their responses about the role of

culture in the learning and teaching EFL, their focus on defining objectives of culture teaching, various activities performed to target EFL culture in classroom, their familiarity with different cultural aspects in the foreign EFL classroom. The perceptions of culture among students were gauged through a questionnaire based on Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2007) that includes questions on their academic details, their responses about the teaching of different aspects of target culture in EFL classrooms such as cultural beliefs, customs, social organizations, speech acts, gestures, notions of personal space and arts [17]. A panel comprising a few PhD holders in the field of applied linguistics validated the relevance of the questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested through internal consistency test estimated through Cronbach's Alpha. Table 1 shows the statistics of the attitude questionnaire.

**Table 1** Results of Cronbach's Attitude Questionnaire

Respondent Type	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	No. of items
EFL Teacher	.789	.765	20
Students	.978	.945	60

### Semi-structured interview

A set of semi-structured interview questions comprising 6 open-ended questions aimed at eliciting instructors' opinions on teaching culture and its impact on EFL acquisition. Was prepared. Each respondent was interviewed online with 10 minutes on an average spent on each session, after which data was analysed and reported using the exploratory content analysis technique[18]. To maintain consistency in terms of topic areas so that minimum convergence between information gained through questionnaires and interviews is maintained, the interview questions were carefully crafted to target the same components found in attitude surveys.

### Data Collection

The study makes an attempt to understand the real time scenario concerning Libyan English teachers' and students' perceptions of teaching culture, including the possible differences between the teachers' and students' perceptions. The necessary data was collected both from the interviews with teachers and students as well as from the questionnaires served to them through email. Each teacher was contacted, and arrangement was made for an online session for taking part in an interview and completing an attitude questionnaire. At the predetermined time, teachers were interviewed through zoom call and each session lasted approximately 7-10 minutes. They were assured that interview was just for mere research purposes and all the names and private information would remain confidential. The same online procedure was adopted for the students in view of covid situation.

### Results analysis

**Table 2:** Percentage of Teachers' responses to Each item of the Attitude Questionnaire toward Teaching Culture

Sl. No	Question	Agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagree (%)

1	It is impossible to merge the teaching of a foreign EFL with a foreign culture.	15	35	50
2	Teaching culture is just as essential as teaching EFL in an EFL classroom.	66.5	37.5	0
3	The more students understand about other cultures, the more they accept	47.5	27.5	25
4	When people who speak different EFLs meet, misunderstandings occur due to linguistic and cultural differences.	23.5	37.5	38.0
5	Students' awareness of their own cultural identity should be enhanced through EFL instruction.	55	32.5	12.5
6	In EFL teaching, the cultural component should be enhanced.	50	25	25
7	The study of culture in EFL schools has the potential to impede linguistic development.	25	37.5	37.5
8	Learning about a different culture might influence a student's perception of her or his own culture.	50	25	25
9	Students are motivated by teaching culture.	62.5	37.5	0
10	Students can improve their EFL abilities by combining EFL and culture.	37.5	37.5	25

### Teachers' perceptions

Teachers' replies to each item on the attitude questionnaire suggested that, overall, they had a belief that teaching culture through EFL lessons was a good idea. Item #2 and #5 specifically addressed instructors' reactions to the incorporation of culture in EFL programmes, among the other topics asking teachers' perspectives on teaching culture. It was discovered that 66.5 percent of instructors agreed with item #2, "Teaching culture is equally important in a FL classroom as teaching EFL," and 55 percent agreed with item #5, "The cultural components in EFL lessons should acquire more significance. The highest levels of agreement were given to items #2, #5, and #9 by the instructors. All these comments show that teachers are enthusiastic about teaching culture in foreign EFL lessons.

Teachers did not completely agree with things that were against teaching culture in EFL classrooms, as seen in Table 3. For example, 25% of instructors believed that studying

culture in EFL lessons might impede linguistic accuracy improvement, whereas 37.5 percent disagreed, and 37.5 percent were uncertain. Similarly, 37.5 percent of instructors believed that mixing EFL and culture may help students enhance their EFL skills, while 37.50 percent were hesitant and 25% disagreed.

While analysing teachers' responses to interview questions, two main themes regarding teaching culture in EFL classes emerged viz., Significance of culture in EFL teaching, and need to preserve cultural heritage of native students. Almost all the teachers agreed that culture is an element of EFL, and that speaking effectively in a foreign EFL necessitates adhering to the cultural norms of the speakers. For example, they noted that in an English-speaking nation like Libya, even a simple greeting like saying hi to a female acquaintance is considerably different. In Libya, it may even be acceptable or even preferable to ignore a female friend, but in the United States, this may produce misunderstanding or bad attitudes. Teachers' concern for maintaining Libyan cultural legacy, on the other hand, was palpable. It was shown that they favour descriptive rather than prescriptive accounts of English culture. This was reflected in their replies to questionnaire item #8, which said that learning about a new culture may alter a student's opinion of her or his own culture. This remark was met with 25% disagreement, 50% agreement, and 25% undecided responses from teachers.

**Table 3** Percentage of students' responses to Questionnaire on Teaching Culture

Sl.no	Statements	Agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagree (%)
1	EFL and culture have a strong relationship.	62.36	12.66	23.33
2	I try to study about artworks made by artists from target culture.	53.33	23.33	12.33
3	Cultural aspects attract the interest of my classmates.	56.66	18.66	21.33
4	Some elements of culture are hard to understand.	66.66	25.66	11.33
5	In my opinion social manners are vital.	59.66	32.33	9.33
6	We should be aware of all facets of the target culture.	69.33	14.33	11.33
7	In my opinion, cultural component forms an unavoidable feature of EFL teaching.	49.66	20.33	29.33
8	A lot of time is spent on studying the target culture.	9.66	12%	61.32
9	Culture classes are tedious and irrelevant to my classmates.	11.33	23.33	66.66
10	I regularly update myself with latest advancements in the target culture.	16.66	52.66	33.33
12	Beyond the classroom, I motivate my classmates to learn about the target culture.	58.33	13.33	25.66

13	My teacher and classmates always encourage me.	66.66	23.33	11.33
14	I freely share my concerns about culture with my university leaders	83.33	10.0	6.60
15	My university leaders support us with cultural materials	73.50	20.0	9.99

### Perceptions among Students

Students' impressions of the teaching culture in EFL classrooms were also investigated by looking at their answers to questionnaire as well as interview questions. Students were largely okay with teaching culture in EFL classes. They recognised, for example, that there is a strong relationship between EFL and culture (62.36 percent agreement) or that cultural component is an inseparable aspect of EFL classes (49.66 percent agreement; 20.33 percent undecided; 29.33 percent disagree). Items #1, #3, #5, #7, and #11 that have direct correlation to attitude toward culture have managed to get positive answers. However, while dealing with item #10 which stated that A lot of time is spent on studying the target culture, 61.32% disagreed as compared to 9.66% agreement. Also, items like #2, #10, #12, and #14. dealing with students' active steps to learn culture failed to generate good amounts of positive responses, though overall, there is positive response among students about teaching culture in EFL classes.

The items of the attitude questionnaire (students' version) are included in Table 3 along with the percentages of students who responded to each item. Each student was questioned to learn more about their attitudes regarding teaching culture in EFL lessons. Their comments backed up their good sentiments regarding teaching culture, which were mirrored in the survey. This time, they are putting much more effort into promoting culture education. They indicated a desire to learn more about other cultures, their values, people and their way of life.

Based on their responses to interview questions, students were seen to be primarily focused on four main issues viz., significance of culture in EFL teaching, role of interaction to understand culture, university's low focus on culture and motivation among peers. The first theme (importance of culture in EFL teaching) is quite in line with their responses to questionnaire item #1, #3, #5, #7, and #11 supporting teaching of culture, which is also supported by their enthusiasm in interviews. In the second theme that dealt with role of interaction to understand culture, a sizable percentage responded negatively (33.32% of students disagreed, and 52.66% were undecided in responding to the statement I keep myself updated new developments of target culture. Similarly, with statement i.e. A lot of time is spent on studying the target culture, 61.32% showed disagreement and 12% undecided and only 9.66% agreement. The third theme i.e. university's low focus on culture is dealt with in responses to item #17 and #19 in the questionnaire. In response to the statement, I freely share my concerns about culture with my university leaders (item #17) 83.33 % of students disagreed, 10% were undecided and only 6.66 % agreed, while to the statement My university leaders support us with cultural materials, around 73. 50% had disagreement, 20 % were undecided and only 9.99 % agreed. On the theme i.e. motivation among peers, statement I keep myself updated new developments of target culture shows 66.66 % agreeing, while just 13.33



disagreeing and 10 % remaining undecided. In response to the statement i.e. I encourage my classmates to explore target culture outside of the classroom, 58.33 % agreed, 13.33 % remained undecided and 25.66% disagreed.

### Difference between Teachers' and Students' Perceptions

In reply to the third and fourth questions relating to the research, the responses revealed some statistical differences in perceptions of teaching culture in EFL classes between teachers and students. To this end, it was determined that the teachers' scores needed to be adjusted so that the teachers' and students' scores could be compared. Because the questions provided to both target respondents were different, it was determined to alter the instructors' scores because the students' questionnaire had a higher maximum score. The attitude scores sounded like this when the teachers' scores were adjusted.

**Table 4** Descriptive Statistics of the Teachers' and Students' Perception Scores

No. of Groups (2)	n	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error of mean
Teachers	20	85.0345	14.342	3.2069
Students	60	74.65	16.567	2.1388

Students' responses had a mean score of 74.65 (SD=16.567) while EFL teacher's responses had a mean score of 85.0345 (SD=14.342), as shown in Table 4. To evaluate the difference in attitude scores between teachers and students, statistically, the normality of the scores was first assessed, and then an independent samples t-test was done.

Tables 5 and 6 show the results of the normality test and the independent samples t test, respectively.

**Table 5** Normality test results on Teachers' and Students' Perception Scores.

Groups	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Df	Sig	statistic	df	Sig	statistic
Teachers	20	0.294	0.325	20	0.358	0.721
Students	60	0.175	0.193	60	0.656	0.923

Both the Kolmogorov-Smirnova and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality for teachers' and students' scores revealed significant values greater than the confidence interval of 0.05, as shown in Table 5. As a result, the scores of instructors and students were found to be regularly distributed, and a parametric test of independent samples t test was adopted to find any statistical differences between teachers and students.

**Table 6** Independent Samples T-test results on Teachers' and Students' Perception Scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means

	F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Equal variances assumed	0.236	0.748	1.675	54	0.158	0.563
Equal variances not assumed			1.236	18.50	0.196	0.438

Based on the results of the t test for independent samples (table 6).The two groups (teachers and students) had identical variances according to Levene's test ( $F=0.23$ ,  $p>0.74$ ), hence the t value was 1.67 with a significant value of 0.13 ( $P>0.05$ ). As a result, it was discovered that in terms of perceptions (attitude) toward teaching culture, teachers and students were not substantially different from one another. The results prove that the EFL teachers and students share slightly different but somewhat common interests and values towards the same topics.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The study has sought to explore the way Libyan EFL teachers and students perceive of teaching the target culture in EFL classrooms. To put it another way, the researcher was concerned about how EFL teachers and students perceive teaching culture in EFL classrooms. Two attitude surveys (one for students and one for instructors) were created for this purpose, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate Libyan EFL teachers and students' perspectives of teaching culture. The results of the attitude questionnaire indicated that teachers and students had favourable views regarding teaching culture in EFL classes. Teachers' replies revealed that while culture is important to EFL teachers, they are equally concerned about the preservation of Libyan culture. Students, on the other hand, said that culture is a crucial factor in teaching EFL, but that they prefer to learn about target culture through discussion and communication rather than through other means such as reading about it. Furthermore, they stated that managers and academic leaders are perceived promoting or participating in the teaching of the desired culture. In terms of opinions regarding teaching culture in EFL classrooms, statistical research found that professors and students were not substantially different from one another.

Earlier studies undertaken in the Libyan setting (e.g. Pishghadam & Sabouri, 2011) as well as elsewhere show a favourable attitude toward teaching target culture (e.g Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002)[19]. There seems to be some ambiguity, as in other reported cases with some participants confirming the relationship between EFL and native culture while others maintaining that the two are totally independent [20].On the basis of comparative analysis involving earlier studies and the present findings in this paper, it may be easily understood that Libyans are now showing better inclination towards EFL learning as well as western culture.

Frederics (2007) studied her Tajik learners and found that when the educational material offered to them was closer to local culture, they were more motivated and had favourable views about foreign language acquisition. According to Ariza (2007), losing culture is akin to forgetting one's own self. As a result, EFL instruction will be insufficient if it focuses solely on the target culture while ignoring the learners' own cultural background. Clearly, proponents of learner culture are becoming more vocal. Many respondents expressed liking for better accent and pronunciation as hallmarks of an EFL teacher and though that western culture has some good things to learn from. However, they wished to stay focused on learning the native culture as well as they believed that one's cultural aspects play an important role in their social, academic and professional lives. The results of the study prove that there is an unmistakable resonance with the keenness with which students and teachers approve of EFL in classrooms as a language of immense academic and professional opportunities and the need to preserve the sanctity of the native Libyan culture and its values and practices.

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