

**LÍNGUA & CULTURA NO ENSINO DE INGLÊS COMO LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA:
UMA EXPERIÊNCIA SOCIOCULTURAL DE ALGUNS ESTUDANTES DE
INTERCÂMBIO DO INSTITUTO FEDERAL DO PIAUÍ**

**LENGUA Y CULTURA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA
EXTRANJERA: UNA EXPERIENCIA SOCIOCULTURAL DE ALGUNOS
ESTUDIANTES DE INTERCAMBIO DEL INSTITUTO FEDERAL DE PIAUÍ**

**LANGUAGE & CULTURE IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
TEACHING: A SOCIO-CULTURAL EXPERIENCE OF SOME EXCHANGE
STUDENTS FROM PIAUÍ FEDERAL INSTITUTE**

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RESUMO: *A internacionalização do ensino superior se intensificou dramaticamente nos últimos quinze anos no Brasil, criando oportunidades de grande alcance, mas também ameaças e limitações em relação às práticas de ensino de línguas estrangeiras e o ensino de cultura. Muitos linguistas e antropólogos (BYRAM, 1997; KRAMSCH, 1993; MCKAY, 2003; JENKINS, 2005) afirmaram que para a comunicação ser bem-sucedida, o uso da linguagem deve ser associado a outro comportamento culturalmente apropriado, não apenas regras linguísticas em sentido estrito. Neste artigo, discutem-se os problemas relacionados à internacionalização, mais especificamente, a discussão gira em torno dos desafios socioculturais enfrentados por alguns alunos do Instituto Federal do Piauí (IFPI) em suas experiências no programa Ciência sem Fronteiras em cinco países. Através de entrevistas qualitativas, os resultados revelaram que estudantes lidaram com problemas socioculturais, os quais poderiam ser evitados se tivesse sido trabalhado em sala de línguas antes do intercâmbio.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Internacionalização. Ensino de cultura. Inglês como língua estrangeira. Adaptação sociocultural. Formação de Professor.*

RESUMEN: *La internacionalización de la enseñanza superior se ha intensificado dramáticamente en los últimos quince años en Brasil, creando oportunidades de gran alcance, pero también amenazas y limitaciones en relación a las prácticas de enseñanza de lengua extranjera y la enseñanza de la cultura. En el caso de los lenguajes y antropólogos, los lingüistas y los antropólogos (BYRAM, 1997, KRAMSCH, 1993, MCKAY, 2003, JENKINS, 2005), afirmaron que para la comunicación tiene éxito, el uso del lenguaje debe asociarse a otro comportamiento culturalmente apropiado, no sólo reglas lingüísticas en sentido estricto. En este artículo, se discuten los problemas relacionados a la internacionalización, más específicamente, la discusión gira en torno a los desafíos socioculturales enfrentados por algunos alumnos del Instituto Federal de Piauí (IFPI) en sus experiencias en el programa Ciencia sin Fronteras en cinco países. A*

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PALAVRAS CLAVE: *Internacionalización. Enseñanza de la cultura. Inglés como lengua extranjera. Adaptación sociocultural. Formación de Profesor.*

ABSTRACT: *The internationalization of higher education has been dramatically intensified over the last fifteen years in Brazil, creating wide-ranging opportunities as well as threats and limitations in relation to foreign language teaching practices and the teaching of culture. Many linguists and anthropologists (BYRAM, 1997; KRAMSCH, 1993; MCKAY, 2003; JENKINS, 2005) have stated that for communication to be successful the use of language must be associated with other culturally appropriated behavior, not just linguistic rules in the strict sense. In this article, we discuss the problems related to internationalization, more specifically, the discussion revolves around the sociocultural challenges faced by some students of the Federal Institute of Piau  (IFPI) regarding their experiences in the Science without Borders program spread through five countries. By using qualitative interviews, the results revealed that students had sociocultural problems which could be avoided if English teachers had worked in the language classroom before the execution of the exchange program.*

KEYWORDS: *Internationalization. Education of culture. English as a foreign language (EFL). Sociocultural adaptation. Teacher Training.*

Introduction

Internationalization is an important instrument that can have an impact on teaching and research. Cooperation agreements, as well as initiatives to participate in national and international networks, are increasing. For this reason, the Brazilian government created the Science without Borders program on July 26th, 2011 with the objective of promoting the consolidation and expansion of science, technology and innovation in Brazil through international exchange and mobility. According to Sallivieri (2015), the program supported 92,816 students between 2011 and 2015, from undergraduate to doctoral students, as well as postdoctoral fellows and researchers in the fields of science, engineering and health to obtain training and education in 43 partner countries. However, under increasing economic pressure the program ended on September 22nd, 2015.

This Brazilian mobility program also highlighted many problems, particularly the issue of appropriate language proficiency in the host country. Brazilian students have taken proficiency tests in the language required by the host university. However, many students fail to take the minimum required; for these students, the program offered a grant of up to

six months to study the language of the destination country before the school year. Since then, the government has created conditions for universities to offer foreign language courses and language centers to prepare students for internationalization. Many Federal Institutes are trying to create classroom-based language centers to prepare teachers and students to participate in international exchanges.

Not only language competence limits the ability of students to become fully involved in learning and socializing. The challenges of exchange students are also sociocultural which should be dealt within the classroom environment. Language and culture in the foreign language classroom have been the focus of many scholarly research (KRAMSCH, 1993; BYRAM, 1989; LIDDICOAT; SCARDINO, 2013). With increasing globalization, internationalization, migration and immigration there has been a growing recognition for the need for an intercultural focus on language teaching.

Some studies have reported negative educational outcomes associated with the inability of the language teacher to create an environment that incorporates cultural sensitivity (FERENCE; BELL, 2004). It is not just the language that is used for communication. We have body language, facial gestures and even the pitch level. Thus, lack of cultural knowledge can affect teaching practices. For these reasons, this qualitative study will explore the following research question: what was the greatest communication challenge of seven students from the Federal Institute of Piauí, who participated in the Science without Borders exchange program in five countries?

For our study, the concept of culture means knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, actions, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, relationships, universe concepts and artifacts acquired by a group of people during the generations through individual and group struggle. This is a descriptive definition by Samovar et al (2009) who sought to cover everything about culture. Including the aspect of non-verbal communication.

Literature review

The matter of culture teaching in a foreign language classroom has been discussed by some scholars in the fields of Applied Linguistics and Sociolinguistics for more than two decades (BYRAM, 1997; MCKAY, 2003; JENKINS, 2005). Among the various debates, researchers consider that learning a language does not only imply grammar rules

knowledge and the denotative meanings of words but it involves the way of life, habits and practices, history, and all that is contained in culture. Learning vocabulary, when paying attention to cultural factors, is vital and crucial. Byram (1997) states that teachers should bear in mind the importance of culture and must have prior knowledge of the cultural knowledge that they will teach students.

It is certainly not easy to teach culture. According to literature in the field, we find several studies with this theme, for example, Sercu (2002), compared the concepts and teaching practice of teachers of English, French and German related to an intercultural foreign language teacher profile and compared the findings with respect to Danish and British teachers to an earlier study. The result was that teachers' teaching practices still can not be characterized as an achievement of intercultural communicative competence.

Atay et al (2009), of the University of Marmara, Istanbul, Faculty of Education, concluded a study which objective was to investigate the opinions and attitudes of Turkish teachers of English about interculturality. He observed how and to what extent these opinions and attitudes are reflected in his classroom applications. Data were collected from 503 foreign language teachers through a questionnaire. The findings revealed that language teachers are aware of the role of culture in a foreign language classroom, although they generally do not integrate culture into their teachings

Kriauciūnienė and Šiugždinienė's case study (2013), of the University of Vilnius, Lithuania, presented an analysis of the views on the development of intercultural competence in the English language classroom. The research was carried out in primary schools with ten teachers trying to answer the following problem: how intercultural competence is developed in the schools during English classes and what are the preconditions for their improvement. Participants' responses indicated that current practices for the development of intercultural competence in the English language classroom are not enough. It is concluded that the English language teaching/learning process should be more purposely designed to develop all the dimensions of students' intercultural competence.

Qin (2014) conducted a study at the University of South Florida exploring the use of misunderstanding in intercultural communication in foreign language teaching. By investigating cases of misunderstanding experienced by twenty Chinese students in the United States, this study found that the misunderstanding experience can really benefit foreign language learners in three ways: 1) reveals hidden communicative problems, 2)

helps to improve students' cultural awareness, and 3) establishes long-term memory for students in their future intercultural communications.

The literature in the field mentioned different examples of intercultural competence approaches for teaching English as a foreign language and its consequences for teacher training. They underscore the importance of preparing students to engage and collaborate in a global society, discovering appropriate ways to interact with people from other cultures.

Methodology

Types of study

Regarding the general treatment of the data, the study had a descriptive nature, since it sought to depict in detail the corpora in order to analyze them interpretatively, exploring the information. Concerning the form of data collection, the qualitative research fits the profile of this study, because it comprises a set of different interpretative techniques that aim to describe and decode the components of a complex system of meanings. It aims to translate and express the meaning of the phenomena of the social world, a dynamic relationship between the subject and the real world, creating an inseparable link between the real world of objectivity and subjectivity (CHIZZOTTI, 2003).

Data collection

Data for this study were collected through an e-mail questionnaire, eight months after the completion of the exchange programme, in which seven students travelled to five countries during the period 2014-2015. The questions in the questionnaire are related to the students' socio-cultural experiences when adapting to the studies and their new lives abroad. Thus, the following items and sub-items were addressed as categories: students (name, course, country and length of exchange, level of English language, culture awareness before travelling) and sociocultural competence (opinion about the country's culture, constraints and knowledge of non-verbal language).

Context and participants

The participants were represented by seven students from the Federal Institute of Piauí selected to travel to five countries with the Science without Borders program of the Brazilian Federal Government in 2014, residing for less than two years in the foreign

country. There were five students at the undergraduate and one at graduate level (see table 01). The choice of this institution was due to the status as English language teacher, which facilitated the implementation of the research in all its phases.

Table 1: Participantes information

Participant	Country	Course	Program	Level of English	Culture in language classroom
Student 1	USA	Civil Eng	Graduation	Intermediate	No
Student 2	Spain	Civil Eng.	Graduation	Basic	No
Student 3	USA	Computing	Graduation	Intermediate	No
Student 4	Canada	Computing	Graduation	Intermediate	No
Student 5	Italy	Architecture	Graduation	Advanced	Yes
Student 6	USA	Production Eng.	Graduation	Basic	No
Student 7	France	Administration	PhD	Basic	No

Source: author

Results and discussions

Our research provides insight into some of the experiences and perceptions of seven exchange students from the IFPI cohort with the Science Without Borders program. The results revealed that students faced serious problems related to socio-cultural adaptation, such as comprehension, interpretation, body language, translation and language production. Students also realized that to use the language they should be aware of the cultural norms for the conversation and that these norms differ from one culture to another. Some of these norms can be completely different and conflict with the norms of other cultures. The participants answered that the greatest communication challenge was the socio-cultural adaptation during the exchange programme. They emphasized that many misunderstandings could be avoided had they had cultural awareness in the language classes before the trip.

Sociocultural adaption

Language teaching can no longer be primarily a linguistic task, that is, emphasizing structure practice, pronunciation and vocabulary. To become a competent speaker of a

language, students must also acquire the sociocultural skills necessary to be able to successfully communicate in situations of international contact.

Based on the questionnaire data, we found that 100% of the students considered it important to know some cultural rules in the language classroom before the trip, as some participants pointed out:

Once the purpose of the English course is to travel to another country, information related to cultural rules in addition to making teaching more interesting can save students from feeling embarrassed. (Participant 5).

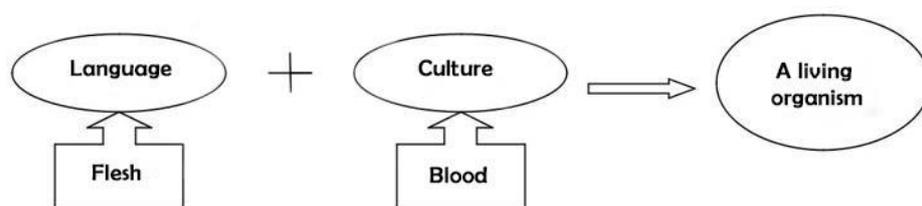
Tips about cultural aspects make all the difference as they are important and necessary for cultural insertion. (Participant 2).

I believe it is essential to know about how people from other cultures behave, even to avoid embarrassment and misunderstanding. (Participant 6).

Based on the participants' discourses, we can see that language is embedded in society and culture and, in this sense, learning a foreign language involves learning their culture. Jiang (2000) has constructed three metaphors for a new understanding on this theme. The first with a philosophical vision, the second with a communicative vision and the third and last, with a pragmatic vision.

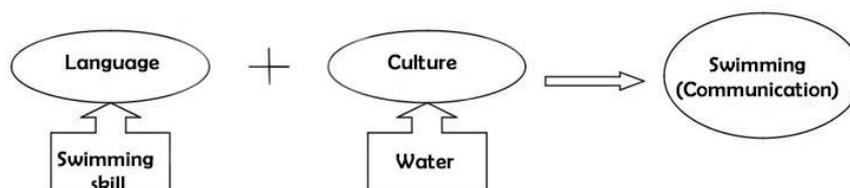
The philosophical view sees language and culture as a living organism; language is body and culture is blood. Without culture, language would be dead; without language, culture would have no form.

Figure 1: Philosophical view



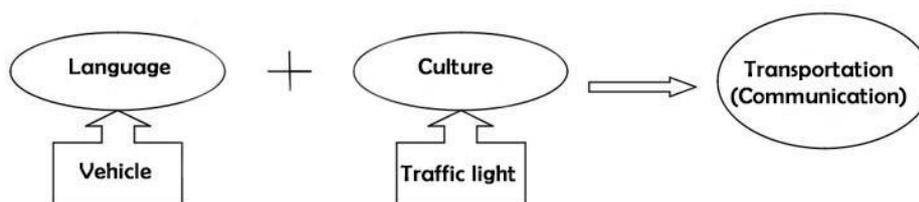
Source: Zu; Kong (2009)

The communicative view is considered like swimming. Language is the ability to swim and culture is the water. Without language, communication would remain limited (in very shallow waters); without culture, there would be no communication.

Figure 2:Communicative Vision

Source: Zu; Kong (2009)

As for the last metaphor, the Pragmatic view, communication is the transportation, language is the vehicle and culture is the traffic light. Language makes communication easier and faster; culture regulates, sometimes promotes and sometimes hinders communication.

Figure 3: Pragmatic ViewFigure

Source: Zu; Kong (2009)

When we asked the participants if non-verbal communication (gestures, facial expression and pitch level) is very important to be taught in a language classroom, the seven participants involved in the research confirmed positively, as we can see in the excerpts below:

Speech gestures and intonation are important because they aid communication. I have had embarrassing moments because I was not aware that this type of communication is perhaps more important than speaking fluently. (Participant 4).

They are elements of understanding that often communicate with us much more than our own speech. (Participant 7).

They help us avoid embarrassment. English teachers need to bring culture into their teaching methodologies. (Participant 2).

Brown (2001) states that a language is part of a culture and a culture is part of a language; the two are intricately intertwined so that one can not be separated from the other. Thus, an interculturalally competent speaker of a foreign language has both communicative competence in that language, as well as specific skills, attitudes, values, and knowledge about culture. According to Byram (1997), when language skills and intercultural competence are approached in the language classroom, students become prepared for the global world. It is correct to say that we need something much more complex than the linguistic competence to communicate with others. We need to know when to speak, when not to speak, what to say, what should not be said, with whom, in which ways and so on. We can not ignore the fact that when we speak to people from a different society and culture, whether in the mother tongue or in the foreign language, the nature of the interaction is different, and the answers to same questions may be very different and we are inclined to interpret behaviors based on our own cultural experiences.

On the question whether the participants had already witnessed offensive, insulting and aggressive gestures that in Brazil have different meanings, most of the students (80%) answered positively. The following statements were observed:

Even though I know that I speak English very well, one day I asked a question a police officer at the subway station in New York. He was offended and called me rude, since I had not greeted with "good evening", I had not asked if he could give information and third, I spoke very close to him. (Participant 6).

I made the V-sign with the wrong fingers in the wrong way to a colleague in the classroom. I had to apologize after the teacher explained the meaning of my gesture in Canada. (Participant 5).

I remember very well when I went to church in Spain, they all looked at me like in a weird way and a certain contempt or discomfort. I thought this was due to the fact that I was a young man, something that was not so common in the parish I attended. Talking to some Spanish friends I realized that this was due to the way I was dressed. They have a strong liturgy on how to dress to go to church, they always wear elegant clothes and that time, I went as I did in Brazil (casual clothes). I bought some suits and everything was fine. (Participant 2).

The testimonies of the participants 02, 05 and 06 are examples that the speech is very influenced by the culture. The ability to speak is not just a question of pronunciation or intonation. Students need to use appropriate sentences in an appropriate context. Otherwise, even though they were well trained in the linguistic aspect, they misunderstood the lack of cultural knowledge. In oral communication, speakers should pay close attention to the context, that is, what you are communicating, who you are talking to, when and

where you are saying, and so on. The interaction of students with native speakers required them to construct their own meanings. Kramersch (1993) refers to this as the establishment of a sphere of interculturality.

These testimonies invoke the studies of Vygotsky (1999) when he distinguished with significance 'sense' of 'meaning'. As we know, the meaning of words is relatively stable and meaning is fluid and complex. The 'meaning' refers to the public sphere and represents a value of social use. The 'sense' refers to the sphere in which the sense of the word relates to the experiences, associations and personal connotations. It is good to say that when English is used by different people in different countries of English language, does not necessarily imply that words or expressions with the same spelling and pronunciation will mean the same thing. Culturally, they can have different meanings.

According to Roux (2001), students should be aware of cultural traditions and beliefs that are different from their own. This intercultural understanding promotes cooperation, tolerance and peace and helps to minimize hatred, tribalism, racism and violence, which inevitably lead to war.

Conclusion

The results of the study suggest that teaching culture is significantly beneficial in terms of language skills, cultural awareness, changing attitudes towards the behaviors and beliefs of people from another community. The participants of this study emphasized constraints in their university exchange experiences and understood that acquiring a new language means much more than the manipulation of syntax and lexicon. Language and culture can not be separated, we believe that it is necessary to incorporate culture into the process of teaching languages, as this study illustrates, and it has much to offer to the development of communicative competence as well as other skills in the instruction of any language.

This study also has implications for teacher education. As we can see, many researches have reported negative educational outcomes associated with the teacher's inability to create an environment that incorporates cultural sensitivity. However, many language teachers can not convey impressions of another culture if they have never taken part in an internationalization program outside Brazil. In our view, a better experience for developing cultural skills is to provide an international practice experience for teachers. It

is very difficult for the teacher to have a cultural awareness if he/she has never lived abroad.

We believe that through courses abroad, teachers can become familiar with theories and issues related to diversity, globalism, culture, intercultural sensitivity and communication and the impact of all of them on the educational process. During the experience of international practice, teachers can apply theories and understandings to make sense of them and reflect on the challenges and opportunities of intercultural teaching, creating competent and sensitive mindsets that bring new ideas to the classrooms of Brazilian schools.

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